

PAIN & SUFFERING

It always saddens me to hear the cry of despair of the bereaved asking "why has God allowed this?". My sadness is not only for the person suffering loss, but also that it shows they have a vision of God that traps them like children in a world in which they are not responsible. It seems to me that we have been given free will and find ourselves in a universe governed by physical laws which are not varied in order to test, reward or punish us. We have been given free will so that we can choose good or evil, or apathy, the chance to turn our back if the right course looks like too much trouble or too dangerous. A sort of secret evil very much in tune with our times.

The world is not like the reverse of Oscar Wilde's definition, "the good ended happily, the bad unhappily, that is what fiction means." The world seems to me to give us an opportunity to live in a spirit of love, to believe that there is a Light in everyone, even when they are not following its leadings. It does not matter if you are a Christian, a Muslim, a Buddhist, a Jew as long as your face is turned to the Light as you understand it. As one brought up as a Christian, I see the teachings and example of Jesus as my signpost. For those brought up in different traditions, I accept that their way is not mine. I believe that the very hazy and partial understanding we have of the world and of our place in it, should not allow any of us to claim that our beliefs embody the whole of Truth, still less to try and convince others with threats of some form of celestial punishment if they fail to be convinced.

All religions address the problems of suffering and pain in different ways and though the way signposted by Jesus seems to me to be the right one, I have friends who profess other faiths and whom I respect. The Christian response to suffering is compassion and care and loving support, and if there is a personal God, he or she will look down with compassion and love on disaster and suffering, but will not suspend the laws of nature. That is not how a loving parent helps children to grow up, which is what I believe we are here to do.