If you were God
(Rev. Dr. John Bartol)

"God has made it a rule for Himself that He will never, never alter people's character by force." C.S. Lewis

I feel sure we can agree that this world of ours is in bad shape. Perhaps you even ask, "Where is God and why isn't he doing more to straighten things out?"

So, let's suppose that you are God, and it is your responsibility to solve the problems of our world that are caused by human misbehaviour. You might want to start by destroying all the bad people. This would eliminate the villains, but it would also end the human race. If God were to judge every person with perfect justice and decree that all sin be removed from the universe, who of us would be left standing?

Well then, why not force everyone to be good? Make us all behave ourselves and love one another like robots, with no freedom of choice! As a father of four children there were times when I wished that I could program them to behave exactly as I wished. But, even if possible, I would never recommend such action. Why? A Robot cannot express love; I could never communicate with a Puppet. Also, without freedom of choice, my children could never develop strong moral character. Real freedom comes only when we can make wrong choices as well as good ones. The same freedom that permits us to be compassionate and trustworthy also allows us to be greedy and hateful.

By giving humans the freedom to make real choices, God faced the grave danger of permitting evil as well, and all for the sake of love. Philosophers call this the Free Will Defence and it supports the affirmation that God is both good and all-powerful and yet grants humanity the awesome dignity of making choices that lead to consequences. God would rather have a world of free beings, with all of its risks, then a world of people who did right, like puppets, because they couldn't do anything else.

So, if you are God, how could you improve matters without nullifying human freedom; without forcing us to act against our wills? Rather than blaming the tragedies of this world on the will of God, perhaps we should talk more about human will and freedom of choice. For example, after the unfortunate death of Princess Diana, Philip Yancey was asked to explain how God could allow such a terrible accident. His response: "Could it have something to do with a drunk driver going 90 miles an hour in a narrow tunnel? How exactly was God involved?"

When rightly understood so many of the tragedies of this world were never willed by God. Rather they have come as consequences of man selfish pride and wilful disobedience.

Do you ever find yourself angry with God for allowing horrible things to happen around the world? And then at the same time, you want to be a free moral agent and always have the right to make your own choices regarding how to live. Sorry – you can't have it both ways.

Personally, I thank God for his gift of freedom of choice. Because, *"Free will, though it makes evil possible, is also the only factor that makes possible any true love, integrity or goodness."*