

05 January 2005 International YWAMer

## God and the Tsunami

Being agents through whom God brings good into every situation

By Lynn Green

Dear Friends,

Each and every day all around the world, more than one hundred thousand people die. That is a normal part of the cycle of life and death on this planet. But when that many people die from one natural disaster, people understandably ask questions about life and death and God's role in His creation. Many people have, during these last days asked, "Where was God in all this?" It is an inescapable question.

During the same week of the earthquake and tsunami, as we watched the death toll grow, one of my dear friends lost his wife of more than 50 years. They had lived a full and rich life together but she was generally in good health and her sudden death has left him as devastated as the many we have read about in our newspapers or seen on our television screens. Even though death and suffering are inevitable, we do not consider them to be normal-our expected lot. When we face death through the loss of one whom we love, or through some major public disaster, we have to grapple, individually and personally, with the reality of death. When the cause of death is as overwhelming as a 9.0 earthquake and tsunami many of us cannot reconcile it with a loving and powerful God.

Underlying the dilemma is the expectation that life should be enjoyable, especially for "good people" and the innocent children. That very assumption is a powerful illustration that God has created a good world for us to live in. Perhaps we should be shocked that so many things go so well in the course of ordinary life. For many of us, life is good and the only pain we suffer is from our own strained relationships and difficulties with other people. Even those whom we consider to be poor are often, when we take the time to hear them, quite happy as long as their families are intact and they manage to keep life and limb together.

In fact, the vast majority of the suffering experienced by people is at the hands of other people and that is a by product of our own sin (that Biblical word is still the best way to describe it). Powerful people sinning against weaker people, greedy people exploiting the poor, men seeking wealth and more power provide the primary source of suffering in this world. Such influence is possible because of our inherent significance. We are "made in the image of God", with free will and as such, have great power and freedom to do good or evil. God rarely intervenes coercively in the lives of those He created in His image. We often prefer that He would intervene, but if He did, where could he draw the line? If he stops the murderer before he does the act, should he also stop the potential drunk before he takes a drink? Of course, such intervention is incompatible with the freedom that we enjoy and cherish. To my mind, this is clear and there can be little argument. Even if that is clear, it does not address the problem of disasters. Couldn't He, shouldn't He, intervene?

When the book of Genesis recounts the beginnings of human life on this planet, it tells of the first woman and the first man disobeying God's commandment and betraying their creator. As a result their lives were blighted by the curse of sinfulness. More than that, all of creation fell from its perfection. In the Apostle

Paul's letter Rome, he writes of the "hope that creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay". It seems quite likely that the world we live in was not the one that God designed for us, but a distortion of the design. Our sin was and still is the distorting factor.

In spite of the imperfections, there is very real hope. We have the hope of final redemption of everything in Christ. In the meantime we still have God's commission to us in the first chapters of Genesis to go and take dominion (to rule) over the earth. We are commissioned to, and gifted for, ruling this earth with justice and kindness and with His help we can work toward that purpose. As we do so, we thrive together and each of us can become all that God created us to be. As we are good stewards of this world and of our relationships with one another, we are also prepared for "ruling and reigning with Him" for eternity.

Much has been written in recent days about the early warning system that has been developed to reduce the loss of life in case of a tsunami in the Pacific. That is the sort of ruling we are capable of. A natural disaster from a couple of decades ago illustrates the point more clearly. In 1988 both Armenia and Southern California suffered earthquakes with a magnitude of 6.9 on the Richter scale. In Los Angeles, where peace and prosperity had created an environment for human creativity, less than 10 lives were lost. In Armenia, which had languished under decades of communist rule, about 40,000 people perished, mostly as a result of houses and schools collapsing. There were undoubtedly many reasons for the disparity, but one stands out to me. Communism was a system of fatalism, one that robbed people of the confidence that their choices could make any difference. As a result, their building regulations and methods did not consider what might happen if an earthquake struck.

If building regulations and methods can make such a huge difference, what might we do if we decided to re-direct most or all of our spending on armaments? What if those billions were spent on helping each and every region of the world, to grow more and better food, to prepare for potential natural disasters; what if some of that money went on research and facilitation of reconciliation between tribes and nations that are hostile to one another? We know how to construct flood barriers, if we set our collective minds to us, we could protect every area that is at risk. We do have vast capacity--for good or evil. The choice is ours; God has done all He can in Christ.

Many Muslims and some Christians have the idea that God's sovereignty extends to micro-control of all events and, therefore, everything that happens is somehow His will. But if we look to the Bible for our understanding of God, we see One who grieves over suffering, One who regrets the painful and evil paths that some people take. We see a personal God who loves the powerless and poor. We see One who was willing to incarnate Himself, One who became one of us. He, Jesus, took all the pain, suffering and curses on himself and died to break the power of death.

As a result of His victory over death, God promises that he is able to work in every circumstance and bring good in it. On a recent newscast, the reporter found a pastor of an international congregation in Thailand and asked him if the disaster had shaken his faith. The pastor replied to the contrary and said that, in the midst of all the suffering, he had seen miracle after miracle each day. He told the story of a tourist who had survived but had both legs amputated and how that man found a genuine faith in God in his suffering.

Perhaps that one case illustrates another overarching truth: when we look through eyes of faith, we see the world in a radically different light than do those who look with eyes of scepticism and unbelief. For the believer, though, it is not just a matter of how we see the world. Jesus taught us to put our faith and love into practice by feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, giving a cup of cold water in his name. Because of our faith in this peerless person, Jesus Christ, in whom we see Father God and because of the Helper, Holy Spirit, we can be the agents through whom God brings good into every situation-even in the wake of this earthquake and tsunami.

Your brother in Christ Jesus,  
C. Lynn Green