

The Tsunami: Making sense of the world

Some years ago I decided to restrict my access to the news media having become irritated with either the views, or the manipulation in the writings, of many of the commentators. Newspapers twice a week and the occasional TV news bulletin was enough for me. However, like many the tsunami captured my interest and concern and, using the excuse of wife's interest in the cryptic crossword, I found that, at least during holidays, I was reading the newspaper more.

I congratulate the SMH on its coverage of the tsunami, but what attracted my interest from a Christian perspective was some of the letters to the editor. The question being asked was basically, where was God in all of this? Some claimed it was God's judgement on these people, others that it was an example of God's judgement, and still others that it proved there was no God. Comments included; *When I hear that 300 Sri Lankans were swept to their deaths while praying in church I think I can be excused for being somewhat cynical about God's benevolence*, and, *Do they really want to hold God responsible for this devastation?*

While some Christian commentators were keen to use Jesus words about judgement, my thoughts were in other directions to accommodate such a natural disaster within a Christian perspective. I was first drawn to Ecclesiastes which teaches that human endeavor is *meaningless*, that there is *nothing new under the sun*, that *like the fool, the wise man too must die* and that obeying God is the meaning of life. Such passages help me to understand that all humans suffer from the effects of sin in a "fallen" world and that because *our citizenship is in heaven* (Phil 3:20) our focus needs to be on the next world, obeying God in this world and not becoming too attached to it.

Secondly, I was drawn back to that picture of a fallen world in Genesis and reminded that sin not only broke the relationship between God and humans but between God and nature. If this were not the case, then suffering at the hands of nature would not occur and there would be no need for God to create a "new heaven and a new earth" following the end times. It seems to me that all life events, whether from human action or nature, can be wakeup calls that we are mortal and that sin and death still have their power in the world. Whether a beautiful sunset or a tsunami, God's creative powers are revealed in nature. They point us to God, calling us to repent and to obey him, and that obedience is to embrace his greatest intervention into this world, that of sending Jesus to die on cross for our sins. In this world we cannot restore the relationship between God and nature, in fact the Bible paints a picture of increasing devastation as the end comes, but the relationship between humans and God can be restored as individuals in repentance as faith embrace Jesus as Lord and Saviour.

As Christians we need to keep hold of the big picture that the Bible paints so that any natural or human tragedy can be held in the perspective of an almighty God who operates in a "fallen" world to bring back to himself those that he loves. The reason the world keeps asking questions and challenging Christians about where God is in events like the tsunami, is that their concept of God is too small and unaccommodating of the realities of the world we live. Their minds are fixed on this world and judgements are made according to how their life now is affected. This perspective will only be changed by encountering Jesus and our task remains to make him known to others and not simply known about.

In schools, teaching about the tsunami and its effects should not avoid discussion of why such events occur from either a scientific or a religious perspective. To ignore either perspective is to deny students understanding about the nature of God. Reviewing some of the letters to editors could be a useful task in any English class and lead to some productive discussion about natural and religious interpretations. As always, teachers should be guided by guidelines for dealing with controversial issues which for teachers in Government schools are in the *Controversial issues in schools* policy on the Department's web site.

While many may struggle within their world view to understand the tsunami, Christians have a clear message on this matter and its all about Jesus. In knowing him, the tsunami and comments about judgement are put in perspective.

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