

HONOUR TO THE DEAD AND A WARNING TO THE LIVING. Coming to Terms with Tsunami

Felix Wilfred

University of Madras (Published in India in Jeevadhara, January, 2005)

"Honour to the Dead and a Warning to the Living". These are the words I found written beneath the statue of a prisoner standing in former Dachau concentration-camp. The bronze statue represents all those innocent people killed by the man-made horror and tragedy of Nazism. These words were ringing in my ears in the afternoon of 26 December as I went from village to village in the coastal areas of Kanyakumari district, Tamilnadu, to see the devastation and havoc of the tragedy. Here is a catastrophe caused by the fury of nature. It comes as well as a warning to humanity to set its home in order.

We deeply mourn the death of over 150 thousand people and honour their memory. Most of them are among the poorest of the poor in Indonesia, Thailand, Sri Lanka, India and all the way in West Africa. Thousands of people were buried without the minimum honours every culture reserves for the dead. There were no individual graves. They were buried as one among many in mass graves, often unseen and unidentified even by the closest of relatives. Not in few cases, there were really no one to honour them or identify them, because entire families were wiped out along with their homes and possessions.

The irreparable loss of the dear ones has left deep pain, anguish, desperation and trauma in the survivors. The plight of the survivors is the case of "the living envying the dead"... The magnitude of the tragedy is to be measured also in terms of the five million displaced people and families. Many of them live in cramped camps, facing the threat of epidemics, with poor sanitary conditions. Hardest hit perhaps were the Banda Aceh, the provincial capital in Indonesia, the various parts of Sri Lanka and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands of India. The highest number of loss of life has been reported from Indonesia with over one hundred thousand dead. About seventy percent of the people in Banda Aceh lost their lives. In Meulboh fifty percent of the people in the town fell victims to the killer waves.

With their dear ones gone, and their means of livelihood like the boats and catamarans shattered to pieces and swept away by the swirl of the tsunami waves, the survivors face a bleak future with little prospects. While we honour the dead and are in solidarity with the anguishing survivors, we need to take the tsunami disaster also as a serious warning. Here is an occasion to radically rethink the shape of our world and societies, its relationship to nature, its model of development, choices and priorities.

The Human Dimensions of the Calamity

The loss of so many dear ones, and in many cases the wiping out of the entire family has left the victims inconsolably grief-stricken. The dear ones have been snatched away from them within seconds, and seeing them vanishing, never to be seen again has left deep trauma in the survivors. Many fishermen and women have lost not only their boats and catamarans, but also their children - the human saplings, the insurance for their lives and for old age. According to some estimates, the number of children dead would be around 50, 000. The death of so many children means loss of future. On the other hand we have large number of children who have been orphaned, deprived of their loved fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters. In the case of children the security of the family and of their familiar setting is important for their growth, the absence of which is bound to create trauma in them. These are some of the experiences the victims are struggling to cope with, and they will need so much of love, attention, support and care before they could retrieve their bearings.

In relief and rehabilitation work this deep human reality tends to be forgotten. While people require the material things, for all of them what is more important is strength and courage to face the situation that seems to have shattered all prospects of future. The victims will need a lot of listening, consolation and people who could empathize with them and be in solidarity. Many of them are still in relief camps having lost their homes without any trace, and with nowhere to go, and none to fall back upon. We are in the face of people who were deprived of the opportunity to mourn their dear ones and bury them, and carrying deep in them a sense of guilt. Money cannot solve all the human problems. This truth is nowhere more evident today than among the tsunami victims. This is something the generous donors both in the country and abroad should realize.

Providing food, clothing and shelter is a response only to a small part of the tragedy, while the larger part will continue to haunt the victims for a long time. When a mother, as it happened in Nagapattinam, was trying to hold

together tightly her four daughters, and sees the futility of her efforts when the roaring waters snatches all of them from her embrace, the sense of loss of vacuum and deep pain of this mother, no amount of relief work could make good. Being in relief camps with large number of people may for sometime cushion them from the full human impact of this tragedy. But when they move out of these camps, the magnitude of the loss will come down on them crushing.

Speaking of the human dimension, I should mention also the general sense of fear that has gripped the victims. For centuries and millennia the fishermen have braved the seas and knew how to negotiate it when it turned rough. They were out of wits on 26 December in the face of tsunami, and became helpless like others when the fury of the waves overturned even heavy trucks and cars on the shore and tossed them around as little toys. I live hardly three hundreds yards from the sea, and I see the fishermen in these days sitting on the shore gazing at the sea that let them down, and at times mending the tangled nets they managed to salvage. For the first time in living memory, the fishermen are afraid of the sea - the sea they looked at as the source of their livelihood and as the defining element of themselves. The disaster has led them to view the sea in a different light now.

United in Disaster

The national borders do not seem to have anything to do for tsunami that hit the victims without any distinction. But as in almost all natural calamities, the poor have been the worst affected, and in large numbers too. We are in the face of a tragedy that has unveiled how the destiny of human beings is bound together. Waves of discussions and debates were generated by globalisation as the epicentre. How and to what extent our world is one is no longer a matter of debate. Everything was dwarfed by the giant tsunami waves that hit the countries around the Indian Ocean. India has known the Bhopal tragedy, Gujarat earthquake and Orissa floods. Here is a disaster it shares with other countries of the rim of Indian Ocean. The scene of havoc is the same whether it is Indonesia, Thailand, Sri Lanka or India; the problems faced are similar. Yes, the earth is one; the humanity is the same wherever it suffers. The global character of this tragedy is seen in the thousands of deaths among foreign tourists hailing from different countries, with Sweden, Germany, Italy counting most numerous victims and missing people.

The bondedness of human beings is so deep that religious distinctions cannot stand in the way. This was proved in innumerable stories of assistance to the victims starting from the very moment of the disaster. The victims were the first ones to help other victims with no consideration of caste or creed. Though organizations may be religious (Hindu, Christian, Muslim, etc) , they all went beyond religious affiliation to help out anyone in need. The well-known dharga of Nagur near Nagapattinam in existence for the past 480 years permitted for the first time corpses of Hindus to be buried in its cemetery - so also those of Christians, without any distinction. Christian schools and institutions became the haven of protection for people of all religious traditions at the time of crisis. In Kanyamkumari district a Hindu leader opened his Kalyanamandapam for the Catholics who fled fearing the tsunami waves. The same kind of experience was there in other affected countries. In east of Sri Lanka, for example, the traditional ethnic and religious divide between Muslims and Tamils were set aside. The Muslims fed the Tamil victims and offered them protection.

The manifestation of this solidarity is a sign of hope. We would only wish that this does not become an ad hoc expression at times of catastrophes, but remains as an abiding culture and way of life. Religions need not be woken up to this basic humanity in all of us only with rude shocks and disasters. When corpses started rotting there was no difference between the high and the low caste. The stench was the same. The absurdity of man-made purity-pollution could not be anywhere more in evidence. Is it not a lesson also for the religions to get out of dehumanising caste distinctions based on purity and pollution?

Tsunami - The Curtain-Raiser of Contradictions

The ugly face of our society and the world which were hidden behind the curtain are now exposed by the tsunami. To begin with, tsunami disaster has exposed the contradictions of the present Indian economy, and the global economy at large. In the past few years, the critique of the poor and the marginalized on the economy that deprived them of the basic necessities of life were countered by the pontiffs of neoliberalism saying that they knew better how to steer the country to true development and prosperity. The tsunami tragedy has shown that the country has plenty of financial resources. Things were certainly different some fifteen years ago. Money seems to be readily available, if we note how rich individuals and corporations vie with each other to donate for the relief of the victims.

This picture of a financially strong side manifested at the time of crisis is in stark contradiction to the situation of daily life in which the poor find themselves deprived of basic health care, food, employment, etc., which are all so very necessary for a dignified human life. As Amartya Sen has noted in a recent interview, the chronic malnutrition especially of children in India is very high - to the level of 40 - 60 percent. In terms of comparison it is higher than even Sub

Saharan Africa where malnutrition of children is 20 - 40 percent. What kind of economy is it that allows millions of children to starve and claim at the same time that the economy is strong? Whose economy is it any way, and for whose benefit, and how is the strength of an economy is measured?

Another area of contradictions is in the field of technology. Tall claims are made about the technological developments in India, and Asia at large. Biotechnology is projected as the most important innovation in the decades to come with a lot of prospects. Millions are being spent in Asia for research and adoption of technology. With all that India and other affected countries like Thailand, Sri Lanka and Indonesia have not been able to protect the poor from falling prey to the waves. The high level of technology adopted for industrial purpose contradicts the lack of minimum technological involvement in protecting the poor. This is true as much of India and Asia, as the rest of the world.

Let us take, for example, the case of communication technology. Our world is today characterized as "global village" primarily because of the swiftness of communication that binds its different parts. Computer jargons and communication buzz words fill the air. And yet, when it was a question of protecting the lives of the poor victims who lost their lives in tsunami, the communication miserably failed. There was no proper communication infrastructure or contingency plans to evacuate the people in times of emergency. More than two hours elapsed after the waves struck Nagapattinam and Chennai at the Bengal coast, before the killer waves reached Kanyakumari. In this district in which almost one thousand people were killed - many of whom are children - lives could have been saved with a lot more alertness, and if things were communicated and emergency plans were put in place. Some survivors told me that at the coastal villages people were in fact watching on TV about the havoc in Nagapattinam and Chennai. Where was technology and communication at that moment? Where were the experts? Their ineffectiveness at the moment to foresee the effects and warn the people did not happen with such disastrous consequences.

We need to think about the contradictions in the matter at the global level. Technology has become a means to protect exclusively the lives of only those who can afford, and not of the poor men, women and children. I am referring to Pacific Ocean's Tsunami Warning Centre in which 26 countries of the Pacific Rim, including North America and South America form part. These countries exchange among themselves informations about tsunami. There seems to be sufficient evidence to the report that the tsunami would hit the countries around Indian Ocean was known, and yet this information was not passed on, since these countries do not form part of the "club" of countries having the tsunami warning system. If such is the case - as seems to be with more and more evidence coming to light - this poses serious questions about the moral culpability. That they could risk the lives of thousands of poor fishermen and women by withholding vital information of safety turns them into heinous murderers of no lesser grade than war criminals. Even assuming that there were efforts to communicate the imminent danger, the communication networks simply failed. What an irony that this should happen in a world that boasts of "communication revolution"! Whatever communication and warning there was, it was "too little, too late, for too many".

What we find is that technology could be killing for its nefarious effects. There is also the other aspect of its killing by monopolizing it and turning it into an instrument of the privileged. Racism, purity-pollution, hierarchy are some of the traditional forms of discrimination. Technology has joined this infamous list. It is made to serve differently the high and the low, the rich and the poor. The tsunami has raised the curtain for all of us to see this ugly aspect of a pro-rich oriented technology in the global world, and its atomised high specialization with none in charge. It is reported that one of those who from the warning system picked up the signals of what was happening beneath the ocean, did not pass it on simply because, as he said, it was not his job!

Tsunami and the Environment

Something should be learnt out of this horror on our relationship to environment Tsunami is a wake-up call to things even worse that could befall our earth through global warming. This is not a danger that we could comfortably postpone to think of later. It is already in the process, and the results could be catastrophic and apocalyptic in nature. Flooding of the earth by the seas like in the Biblical narration of the flood by rain in Noah's time, is something that the consumer world is creating. Today's unbridled consumerism is tomorrow's flooding, if what the experts are telling about the global warming is true - as seems to be the case more and more. "The greatest polluter of the earth", the US does not seem to be concerned about it seriously as it may affect its present affluent life-style. How strange that this imperial power is refusing to sign the Kyoto protocol limiting carbon emission. The poor of tomorrow will be paying for this senseless disregard for the future. It is reported, for example, the Swiss Insurance firm Swiss Re has paid about hundred billion dollars as claims connected with natural disasters in the year 2004 alone. If we take into account the millions of people who are not covered by any insurance in the developing world, and the damages they have suffered, the picture of the extent of natural calamities affecting us is simply staggering.

One thing that tsunami made clear is that it is not effective where there existed ways and means of protection. It is said that Andhra Pradesh in India was not affected by the tsunami because of the mangroves which serve as a buffer and protective device against the onslaught of the waves. Similar measures taken in Vietnam has served as protection for the people of Mekong delta. Such measures need to be intensified in areas prone to natural calamities, and thus ensure most effective ways of minimizing casualties at the time of crisis.

Tsunami is a rare phenomenon, and we do not expect it to happen every other year. But what the vulnerable poor fishermen and women require is protection in daily life from the continuous erosion that is taking place. In many villages, the sea has eroded slowly but steadily washing off huts and shanties of the poor. The erosion could be prevented by immediate measures of placing large stones into the sea-front. It has been noted that those few villages, and the town of Pondicherry were saved because of these measures. But most of the coastal area - specially the vulnerable low lying ones - lack any such protection. The tragedy that has happened should serve as a warning to the states to give priority to save the lives of the poor than to protect the wealth of the rich. If only the states show up one tenth of the care they take for the security of the privileged, things would be different.

There is a correlation between the condition in ordinary circumstances and in situations of emergency and crisis. Experience has repeatedly proved that wherever there has been better conditions in terms of infrastructure, it has been less difficult to handle extraordinary situation of crisis and emergency. That applies to the tsunami disaster as well. A state that does not provide the people in normal life the necessary infrastructure facilities will not be in a position to protect them in times of crisis. The tsunami trial has made it clear how poor the infrastructure conditions are. In several places, the civil administration and state machinery were conspicuously absent in the most crucial two days following the disaster. The survivors felt let down by the state in the time of their worst crisis, because it was not prepared to handle the situation.

The Phases of Relief and Rehabilitation

A doctor was heard saying how he could tell someone who has lost all her dear ones and her home that she should boil her drinking water. That is an inkling into the problems and difficulties of relief and rehabilitation work in the aftermath of tsunami. The response to the tsunami began with a swing into action to save lives, though more lives could have been saved if the state and its machinery have been alert. It involved also a tentative survey of the extent of damage caused in each country, region and village. Close on the heels came the response in terms of providing protection and shelter to those who were uprooted, and supplying clothes, primary medical care, etc. There is the most difficult and challenging phase yet to come which calls for greater endurance. It is the matter of rehabilitating the affected victims and making them stand on their own legs by providing the means for employment. We could only wish that the initial heroic responses will continue, and see through that the victims are really settled with a home of their own and with the possibility of livelihood for the future. This work of rehabilitation is of a longer duration. To adopt a Biblical phrase, "blessed are those who endure" in this challenging task of accompanying the victims in their resettlement.

We should be careful not to make the relief and rehabilitation as the work of outside forces and agencies. Most important for a lasting solution is the participation of the community. This is required at all levels. That makes the rehabilitation work even more challenging. Experiences in different parts of tsunami hit areas are telling us that rehabilitation is a community project and cannot be executed by any organization or agency, however much they may be in possession of material resources. Most important is the enlisting of the community cooperation. Not in few localities the work of voluntary agencies is causing a lot of confusion in the relief and rehabilitation work, for failing to enlist the active participation of the local people. .

Lopsided Priorities

We cannot fail to note how at the global level billions of dollars are invested in researches and technological applications that benefit those who could have the money and the means. One may argue that in the course of time these technological and scientific researches will percolate and benefit the poor. This prospect need not be contested. But the failure is that of an approach that starts from above and not from below. Science and technology need to be closer to the public, and especially the poor. I mean to say, that technology should concentrate on the life and safety of the poor here and now, whether it be protection from the ravages of nature, or areas of health that affect the poor most. Tsunami is a powerful reminder to set our priorities right. This applies to the scientific community as well as to the states, policy makers and planners.

Those means and measures that involve the people themselves for their security have the prospect of greater

success. A very telling example is what has come about in Bangladesh. Ravaged by the fury of the cyclones and floods year after year, Bangladesh learnt to create a community-system of self-protection. With the help of the local people about 2000 cyclone shelters have been built which protect the people of the low-lying and vulnerable coastal areas. Bangladesh has also created an army of volunteers numbering over three thousand who are trained for disaster management, and they are perpetually vigilant, discussing periodically among themselves, and they are equipped with such simple and effective means of communication as local radios and megaphones to alert the people of the impending natural disaster.

The tardiness of the state to which I referred could be explained in the light of the lopsided global political and economic developments. Since 1989, we are in a period of unbridled capitalism and neoliberalism in Asia. The period of healthy mixed economy is gone. The ideal of welfare state that was projected as an important institution to hold in check the ruthless and exploitative prowess of late capitalism has vanished into thin air. The result is the abandonment of the poor by the state whose heart is with the rich and which does not fail to dole out favours to the corporations. The situation in this respect is identical, whether it is Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Thailand or India.

The Imported "Saviours"

There is a myth handed down and now sanctimoniously routinized in which the developed countries of the West are the saviours from any disaster befalling poor countries. The tsunami presented the large screen to project such an image in an unprecedented manner. There is no need to teach the media on how to blow up things. I can imagine how the western media might show the rushing of the western chivalrous knights with goods and money to save the weak in the affected regions. These images need to be confronted with actual facts and reality. What is concealed in the image of a saviour West is the fact that the overwhelming amount of human and material resources are generated locally, and the most difficult part of saving operations are done by the local people themselves. This is true in great measure of all the affected countries, and especially of India. When India declined foreign help, this was no pretension. The country has so much of human and material resources that it could manage such calamities by itself. The same attitude was taken also by Thailand. This may hurt many westerners who would like to see India and other countries carry begging bowls appealing to the West, to its largesse and its moral sentiments. They may feel as having been deprived of the opportunity of playing the good Samaritan.

There is no doubt about the deep human compassion and solidarity that move individuals in the western countries to reach out to those in distress, in ways possible to them. We appreciate this humaneness and sense of solidarity. The problem is when states and institutions make a politics out of the help they give, and mislead their people with distorted picture of the extent of this help. It may be interesting to note that the 100 crore rupees (approximately 20 million U.S. dollars) donated by Mata Amirtandamayi, a woman from the Indian state of Kerala, donated for the tsunami victims of the country is a little more than the 15 million the president of the richest nation of the world, George W. Bush promised initially for all the tsunami victims of Asia! What the New York Times noted about the image of an average American has about the aid his or her country gives could be very similar in other western nations. "According to a poll more Americans believe that United States spends 24 percent of its budget as aid to poor countries; it actually spends well under a quarter of 1 percent" . Eric Schwartz, former National Security Council's senior director for multilateral and humanitarian affairs in the Clinton administration, observes that, "even with the president's proposal in 2002 to increase substantially the U.S. commitment to development assistance, the United States was still spending less than 0.2 percent of its gross national income on development aid in 2003, putting us at the bottom of the 20 or so industrialized countries" .

Probably very little is talked in the West about the bulk of the resources , financial and otherwise raised locally, and this is true in varying degrees of all the countries affected by tsunami. The other aspect of the whole relief work is that most of the help both local and from abroad may cease once the shock of the tragedy is over.. The victims will be forgotten at a juncture when more substantial and lasting assistance would be needed - in rebuilding their homes, in acquiring the tools for their fishing, or creating opportunities for employment. This part of the response is not an easy one. Probably few will be left in the field to support the victims. Could a change come about in this ? We could only hope so.

"Good Samaritans" Meet in Jakarta

Imperialism is clever, and it knows to instantaneously don the Samaritan's robe. We only hope that the much trumpeted Jakarta Summit which brought some of the imperial powers as donors of aid does not turn out to be yet another exercise in hypocrisy with perfunctory and predictable expressions of sorrow and solidarity. The proof of the pudding is in the eating. If it does not become a mere summit of promises, the aid proclaimed should actually be given

and indeed without delay. A stitch in time saves nine. The aid that comes forth just now can save many lives. The fear is that, as in the past, only a fraction of the promised aid actually will be given. Moreover, there is also fear that the aid already promised for some other emergency be transferred to tsunami victims. This is not an unfounded fear, and it came forth from the mouth of the secretary general of the UN, Koffi Annan himself, when he cautioned the donors that one should not "rob Peter to pay Paul".

The callous indifference and apathy manifested in the first days of the disaster by some of the imperial powers, so evident in the derisory pittance they promised in aid, was somehow made good by the Jakarta summit - at least they may believe so. Certainly the display of solidarity in Jakarta was an opportunity for these powers to affirm certain control over the countries at the rim of Indian ocean. We would wish that the imperial leaders who expressed so much shock over the destruction by the tsunami waves by flying over the affected areas would do well to do the same exercise in Iraq and see the devastation effected, and the innocent people killed, the homes shattered and lives crushed, for which they have, not the tsunami but themselves and their war-mongering and predatory economic interests to blame. When there is no real contrition for the devastation in Iraq and Afghanistan, the apparent solidarity by the ruling powers could be interpreted as no more than a show on the world-theatre. I am reminded of a proverb in my mother-tongue, Tamil, which says that the "wolf was shedding tears because the lamb was getting wet in the rain!".

Tsunami and Third World Tourism

There were large number of western tourists who were killed in the different countries affected by tsunami, especially in Phuket in Thailand. While we mourn the loss of their lives, tsunami is also a warning regarding the present state of tourism, especially as it is being promoted in the developing countries. For past several years I have been associated with the Ecumenical Coalition on Third World Tourism in which already two decades ago we took up critical involvement and reflection regarding the exploitation rampant in this kind of tourism, specially involving women and children, not to speak of other aspects of this entertainment industry.

Unfortunately, caught up in the current system of economics, countries like Thailand, Sri Lanka and Indonesia viewed tourism as a means to boost up their economy unmindful of the social, cultural consequences and the violation of human rights it involves. Tourism is volatile, and to rely on it by any developing country would be unwise. If tourism is good for Switzerland or Austria, it does not apply in the same way for the developing countries of Thailand and Sri Lanka. The search for tropical paradises by the tourists from affluent western countries cost the people of the land their dignity, their rights, their culture, and their environment. Governments of these lands have been conniving with an industry from which the local middle-men and foreign agencies benefit, leaving some crumbs to the poor.

The tsunami should serve as a salutary warning. The poverty of the local people and their despondency lead them to view tourists from affluent countries as demi-gods and goddesses, and this could be a very demeaning experience for the local people. It is not out of place to speak of victims of tourist industry.. The servicing of tourists in the best possible manner means for the local people deprivation of such important resources as water, energy, food, all the more so since the tourists coming to Asia continue the same consumer style of life as in their countries, overstressing their demands on the meagre available resources of the local people. Has not tourism assumed a predatory character?

Tourism cannot go on in the present fashion. It calls for a radical rethinking. It may be surprising for many to know that tourism is the biggest industry in the world today. Nowthat tourism has cost so many lives, it is the time to unmask the myths propagated both by national and international tourist industrial agencies. Tsunami is an occasion for us to think seriously about the effects of this tourist industry on the poor host countries of Asia. Issues like sex tourism, abuse of children connected with tourism must be taken up now. In Asia we need to seize this opportunity to expose these things that are concealed beneath the glamour and advertisement of the tourism industry which entice the western men and women to our parts of Asia.. But what are the real prospects? Is tsunami going to stop the rush of tourists to Asian countries? Or, perhaps, tsunami is only a temporary break, to go back again to the same old tourist practices?

Conclusion - The Silver-Linings

After the initial surge of sympathy and solidarity, the survivors and the victims are in danger of being wiped out from the public memory. There will be many trivialities with which media will need to occupy itself for its own survival. It will talk about cricket, baseball and the sport stars, and about Hollywood and bollywood celebrities. In hindsight tsunami will appear to them as only an intermezzo in their cosy way of life. The apprehension that the tsunami victims will be forgotten is then real, both at the national and at global level.

The aftermath of the tsunami tragedy has also revealed the change that has taken place in the past few years. Here we have some silver linings that augur well for the future. The relief workers and others in the field cannot but be struck in several places by the sense of dignity in the victims, which they have not lost in spite of everything. Yes, even when they lost everything, the one thing that remained unscathed is their self-respect. In fact, in most cases these were people who lived through their hard labour as fishermen and as industrious fisherwomen, or diligent workers in other professions. Their hard work was a source of their respect and dignity. The relief and rehabilitation work cannot simply ignore this fact. A clear sign of their self-respect was the refusal by the victims in several places to accept the used clothes thrown at them. "The crucified people", about whom Jon Sobrino never ceases to remind us about, have not lost their dignity and self-respect, and they need to be treated not with used clothes but new ones. The bleeding-heart Indian middle and upper class can certainly afford it. Further, the rehabilitation work has to mainly depend upon local resources and more importantly it should be done in such a way that the local community is the chief agent of its own reconstruction. The people need to be active participant in decision making regarding their future. This will correspond to their sense of self-respect.

This calamity of apocalyptic proportions that has visited our Asian countries has shown also the triumph of the human spirit. Human suffering has been either a moment of confirming and reasserting one's faith, or a moment of questioning God; a time of either shattered hope or strengthening of hope through the testing fire, or shall we say, through the testing waters. The tsunami perhaps was an event in which probably there were more people asking critical questions in their minds regarding a God who permits the innocent ones to suffer. In fact, a large number of those who perished are children. Victims who have been so brutally struck and deprived of everything could not be exhorted to resignation. If God appeared to be silent in the disaster, many are beginning to realize her speaking in the outpouring of love and solidarity with the survivors in an unprecedented way. The stories of dedication and passionate engagement of people who work for the victims is the fresh revelation of a God who seemed to be away and absent at the moment of the tsunami strike. Similarly, God seems to break her silence in the spirit of resilience we find in many victims in spite of the most tragic things that have visited them.