

VAIHARAI

(The Dawn)

Vol.10 No.1

Jan - Jun 2005

Contents

	Editorial	1
1.	Tsunami: What is it? - Dr. M. Anthony Muthu	9
2.	Psychological Support for the Tsunami Survivors - Fr. H. Immanuel	24
3.	An Encounter With the Relatives of the Sea A Prophetic Presence - Bro. K. Sahayaraj	30
4.	Tsunami Relief and Rehabilitation - Fr. K. George	38
5.	Global Justice in The Post - Tsunami World - Dr. Wilfred Felix	52
6.	God and the Tsunami - Dr. M. Amaladoss, S.J.	74
	Book Review	85

VAIHARAI

(The Dawn)
A Theological Quarterly

Vol.10 No.1

Jan - Jun 2005

TSUNAMI

Psychological Support, Rehabilitation

And

Theological Reflection

The tsunami of 26th December, 2004 is one of the major natural disasters the humankind has witnessed. It is the worst tsunami in the known history which killed more than 220,000 people, mostly women and children. This tsunami was caused by a massive submarine earthquake near Sumatra in Indonesia and had its disastrous consequences in Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India, the Maldives, and East Africa. But its impact was felt all over the world, as far as Peru in South America and the Antarctica! Apart from the loss of lives, it has left tens of thousands of people injured, maimed and handicapped in several ways. Large number of people are shell shocked, traumatized and broken hearted. Hundreds of thousands of people, in all the countries affected by tsunami, have lost their houses and whatever they owned such as fishing vessels, boats, catamarans, nets and household articles of all sorts. In a matter of minutes everything changed!

The tragedy has occurred. The world of ours is no more the same. Islands have disappeared; villages were wiped away; houses collapsed; everything from trains, trucks, cars, fishing boats, catamarans, nets and all sort of fishing equipments were swept away and household articles and personal belongings including cash and jewels were washed off!

of religious nature, favoured people of their own kind. Religious Congregations helping only families of their members openly at the thick of the tsunami caused lot of resentment among others. In several villages the powerful groups pocketed most of the helps. Some of them diverted the trucks carrying relief materials to their own destinations. Groups of people were quick in action to rob and loot. Nothing could be more scandalous and barbaric than the action of some humanlike wild beasts going about in places like Vailankanni cutting the ears and wrists of the dead, since they had no time to remove the jewels from the bodies!

The victims themselves have not measured up to the magnificent manifestation of generosity which they themselves had experienced. Helps received in cash had been often squandered. Much of it went to enrich the liquor barons. There was a buying spree of luxury goods, without paying attention to the actual and urgent needs. In many cases men used the money for their personal gratification, without bothering to make their families to benefit from the financial aid. In many cases relief materials were sold out for a pittance. Of course one should not hasten to judge these actions drastically. Could they be seen as Fr. Immanuel says in his article, "normal reaction to an abnormal situation"?

These reflections would not be complete without casting a look at our Governments. The Central and State Governments and the scientific community had miserably failed to warn the people. Had a proper warning system been there many precious lives could have been saved. Elsewhere even school children had warned people of the tsunami, seeing the nature of the extra-ordinary occurrence (such as the withdrawal of the sea after the first wave hit). Elderly people in several villages had the innate wisdom to warn and save the people. In places like Kanaya Kumari they rang the church bell at the first hit of the waves and thereby no one lost his or her life. Sadly, the tourists, who either did not hear the bells or did not know the message of the bell, became victims of the killer waves. It is high time

that the State apparatus give up the ad-hoc policies and set up a permanent and reliable warning system and an efficient Crisis Management Mechanism.

The tsunami of 26th December, 2004 has been a terrible disaster. A tragedy beyond description and a rude shock. At the same it was also an occasion to bring out the 'best' in the humans, though later it became an occasion for exhibiting the worst in them. In this background we try to discuss in this Vaiharai issue on the remedies such as psychological support and rehabilitation. We also face it as believers in a good, benevolent and loving God. Many people were scandalized at the killing spree of the tsunami waves, at the shrine of Our Lady at Vailankanni. Some even came out with statements that the Christian deity is less powerful than the Hindu deity which could protect the temple towns of Thiruchendur and Rameswaram! In this context we look at the tsunami from a theological perspective.

The first article, "Tsunami : What is it?" by Dr. M. Anthony Muthu defines tsunami as an effect of a major submarine earthquake. He explains the cause of such tsunamis scientifically with particular focus on the 26th December, 2004 earthquake. He also gives a list of tsunamis in the past, worldwide and in India. To facilitate our understanding he presents a detailed description of the internal structure of the earth which is responsible for earthquakes which when occur below the sea floor cause tsunamis.

Fr. H. Immanuel in his article on Psychological support for the tsunami victims deals with the first and most important action that has to follow the tragedy. The victims need counseling and psychological support along with immediate relief. Though the preoccupation of most people and aid-giving Agencies was with relief measures, counseling is of utmost importance and the lack of which can be disastrous. Fr.

Immanuel deals with the physical, psychological, sociological and occupational impacts of tsunami on the victims. He then speaks of the psychological intervention wherein he suggests empathetic listening, facilitating ventilation of feelings, timely and equitable access to resources, social and community support, protection from further harm, helping to externalize interests, imparting of adoptive coping skills and referral for those who need psychological and psychiatric intervention.

The third article by Bro. K. Sahayaraj, one of the seminarians from St. Paul's Seminary, who spent nearly a month with the victims of tsunami in T. R. Pattinam, near Karaikal in the State of Pondicherry, along with a group of seminarians from St. Paul's. This group went to the victims not so much to 'give' anything to them. They went there 'to be with them', to share their feelings and hardships. They were with them, listened to them, let them pour out their feelings, ate with them, played with them and took part in their festivals and social events. In short the people realized that they were 'for them'. This brought the seminarians very close to them, though the victims were of different caste and creed. As Sahayaraj himself reports the feelings of the people: "many came and gave much. When they departed we felt grateful. You came and stayed with us..... You shared our lives. When you depart we feel painful.... If it is possible to meet you once again only when tsunami hits, we wish it comes once again"! This firsthand experience of being with the victims of tsunami made the seminarians understand the people, their social settings, economic conditions, culture, religion., love relation with the sea etc., while they gave, in their turn, love to the tsunami victims. Such presence, not mere material assistance, is salutary to the victims of tsunami!

Fr. K. George, in his article, focuses our attention on the second concern of this Vaiharai issue, namely relief and rehabilitation. He deals with the rescue and relief operations in the first part and speaks of

rehabilitation and restoration in the second. He is quite critical of the role of the rich nations such as the USA in providing relief. While he appreciates India's magnanimity in providing immediate and generous assistance to the affected neighbor countries, he finds fault with its unpreparedness and lethargy. He does not spare the church either. He finds fault with it (at least the church in the district of Kanya Kumari in which he works) for not being generous sufficiently towards the non-Christians and for not involving fully the church personnel from non-coastal background. He opines that the church behaved, during the tsunami relief works, as a parallel government! In the second part of the article, Fr. George speaks of rehabilitation in terms of immediate livelihood, ecology and agriculture. After sounding a caution on the bad religious influence (in the set-up of his operational area) and money lenders, he advocates the proper use of the Coastal Regulation Zone and proper care of the orphans.

Dr. Wilfred Felix's article, 'Global Justice in the post-Tsunami world' casts a critical look at the tsunami relief and rehabilitation programs. He takes this occasion to make a critical reflection on the social reform proposals of the noted economist, social philosopher and Nobel laureate Dr. Amartya Sen. While appreciating Dr. Sen very much for his welfare economy, the social tilt he has given to economy and his new definition of poverty as the absence of freedom in its several dimension, he finds Dr. Sen as a neo-liberal lacking the perspective of the victim and therefore proposing an analysis that does not match up to the demands of justice in the world. In the first part Dr. Felix deals with the thought of Dr. Sen in areas such as development as expansion of freedom, the process of development as creation of capabilities and social opportunities, poverty as social exclusion, democracy and development and poverty and gender issues. In the second part he labels Dr. Sen as a neo-liberal with a social program and proves his statement by explaining his individualistic approach, his neglect of the identity (of the victim) question, his pro-

empire view of globalization and the absence of proper power analysis in his views. He concludes his erudite article by saying that the overwhelming sympathy by the International community during the tsunami is to be seen as a beneficence rather than coming out of a moral obligation to do justice.

The final article by Dr. M. Amaladoss, S. J., titled 'God and the Tsunami' deals with the third concern of this Vaiharai issue, namely the theological reflection on the tragedy of tsunami. He speaks of the question that arises in the minds of many believers, namely why should the good and loving God allow such a disaster? Before attempting to answer this question, Dr. Amaladoss lists some of the presuppositions that are at the back of this question. He talks of an universe that is not perfect. The universe is of such nature that sufferings are part and parcel of it. Among sufferings some are unavoidable; there are others imposed by humans, which are avoidable. Even God can be responsible for sufferings in the lives of people. But these sufferings are not consequences of sin. Sufferings could be means purification or for the good of others. Jesus' suffering on the cross was for the sake of others that they may have life. Sufferings can also bring solidarity among humans. Besides it can be a learning and disciplining process. Hence one should see sufferings as part of human life and should not point an accusing finger on others as responsible for our sufferings. The tsunami disaster shows what kind of hypocrites we are. We who are moved so much by the tsunami are untouched and unmoved by the millions of deaths that occur everywhere due to malnutrition, exploitation, injustice, poverty, drugs, AIDS etc. He concludes the article by saying that sufferings are not mere problems; they are also a mystery beyond human understanding, as was the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Before concluding these editorial words, I would like to remind our respected readers of what I had written in the last Vaiharai issue

(December 2004), namely Vaiharai, till now a 'Theological Quarterly', is becoming from this issue a 'Theological Half-yearly'. Therefore henceforth Vaiharai will have only two issues a year i.e. January – June issue and July – December issue. May I kindly request our readers to continue to patronize Vaiharai also in the coming years.

Cruz M. Hieronymus
Editor