

EDITORIAL: So, how could a good God allow ... _11005

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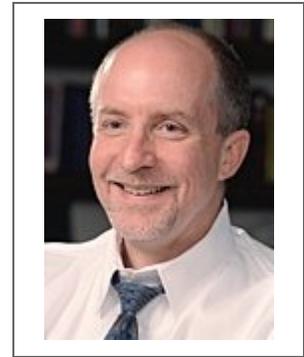
EDITORIAL: So, how could a good God allow ... ?

The question crept across sensitive minds, much like the tsunami body-count "crawl" scrolled across our TV screens: How could a good God allow such a tragedy to happen?

The first-and most honest-answer also is uncomfortable. We don't know. We understand the physics of the tsunami of '04. Tectonic plates, the foundations on which continents rest, shifted. Miles beneath the Indian Ocean's surface, the most powerful earthquake in a half-century shoved waves outward as fast as a jumbo jet can fly. When the waves met the resistance of continental shelves, they rose up, high as hotels, slammed the earth and destroyed everything for miles.

That's the easy part. Simple mechanics. But human beings want to know something more important and infinitely more complicated: Where was God in all this?

The atheist says that's a stupid question. God doesn't exist. This is all nature. Earth spins, and its continental plates inevitably move. Nature is blind to human consequence. And those poor people were unlucky to be, geologically speaking, in the wrong place at the wrong time.



At the other end of the spectrum, the extreme sovereigntist says God triggered the tsunami and orchestrated its tragedy. God decided when and where to move the continents, and God selected the victims and the survivors. God has God's reasons—maybe to demonstrate divine power, maybe to punish the wicked, maybe to warn the righteous.

Both explanations fail. The atheist ignores evidence for God's activity as recorded in Scripture, but also as seen in the intricacy of nature as well as the testimony of Christ and the experience of people. The extreme sovereigntist, while admirably attempting to give God due credit for God's infinite power and knowledge, likewise ignores one of God's defining characteristics. The Bible says clearly, “God is love” (1 John 4:8). The gospels demonstrate God loves people so much that God sent his only Son to receive the burden of our sin, so that we might live with him forever in paradise (John 3:16). That kind of love is not characteristic of a god who would capriciously slaughter several hundred thousand people, the majority of them innocent children.

So, we come back to the hard question: How could a good God—and a God whose primary description is “love” surely must be good—allow such a cataclysmic tragedy?

We cannot comprehend God's power. God created millions—some say billions—of solar systems with millions of stars each. We cannot grasp God's infinite reach and power. And yet God's love also is infinite, as

demonstrated in his wilfull sacrifice of his Son to save us from the consequences of our sin. So, let's attempt to reconcile.

The Bible-especially the Genesis account, but also the prophets, the gospels and the epistles-teaches us God created people for relationship. God didn't "need" people to respond to divine love, but God wanted to bestow that love upon creatures who could reciprocate. And as we all eventually learn, coerced love is not love at all. In order for humanity's love for God to be true and valid, we must have the opportunity not only to receive God's love but also to reject it. Free will, that human randomness, provided the gateway for sin to enter the world. But God decided that risk was worth it, because it also offered humanity the freedom to truly know and love God.

While humans are the apex of the natural order, we also are part of the natural order. So, we may surmise that the capacity for randomness present in human free will has its corollary in the rest of nature. Cells can mutate and cause cancer. Inexplicable events can change the course of history. An earthquake can trigger a tsunami that kills hundreds of thousands of people, wipes out villages and breaks the heart of every person who possesses a scintilla of humanity.

God doesn't will the waves to slaughter children and their families. But God allows horrible things to happen in a world broken by sin and its natural twin, randomness. Such is a cost of our most uniquely human heritage-the freedom to accept or reject God's love. With a pricetag so high, we dare not take it for granted.

You may not agree with this theory. In fact, I may not agree next week. But it is an honest attempt to explore the inexplicable in light of God's infinite power and unfathomable love.

As Christians created in God's image, we are compelled to reflect both that

power and that love-however faintly-by doing everything we can to meet the human and spiritual needs of the tsunami victims.

Marv Knox is editor of the Baptist Standard

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