



*A Message
to Members*

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Descriptions of the terrible events in Southern Asia already have the ring of clichés. This is not because the words don't capture the horror, but because they can't. So what we hear in words and phrases like "unprecedented" or "Biblical proportions" are hollow slogans. Even the pictures themselves can't capture the reality; no lens is wide enough or deep enough. So we do what we must do; we act. And in acting we drop our bundles of balm (money, clothing, prayers) at the feet of the survivors, wishing them well, and returning to our comfortable, seemingly unaffected lives.

It is interesting to see the use of the U.S. military, now shifted from the role of destroyer to that of champion of the downtrodden. It is representative of our own inner natures. At times we wear the mask and uniform of killer, and then we shift to that of nurturer – father, mother, caretakers of various stripes and shapes.

In Iraq, the children who are "collateral damage" look very much like the victims in Indonesia and Sri Lanka and other affected countries. While in Iraq we excuse our actions through appeals to "just war" doctrines, in southern Asia we turn to God and ask, "Why?" This odd picture has theological dimensions. For if we think of this odd logic, we may think of God asking us the same question concerning the slaughter of innocents in Iraq - "Why?" Why do we respond the way we do, when we should know by now that the ways of war are so often futile? Why do we engage in self-deception about the reasons for war when so much information is available by which to educate ourselves? Why?

We see photos of the bodies in Asia – in trees, in wreckage, half-eaten by crabs and fish. What was once in them was a singular human experience – God seeking to see and understand the world in a new and unique way. Life is divine experience, and each of us a son or daughter of God bid to go and live and see and hear and be, in our own way. There is no singular and satisfactory explanation for the tragedy of death, and each faith tradition handles the puzzle in its own creative and insightful way. But that the husks of our beings – our bodies – are not that which matters ultimately, is clear. What matters is *what* the bodies are, *what* the bodies think, *what* the bodies do, *what* the bodies hope, *what* the bodies love and feel, and remember. What matters is the body understanding its world and its sublimity; it is the body learning to touch the face of God. All of these "whats" describe the soul, define the soul. And that is why the contradiction between killing for the sake of some false security and saving for the sake of love is so absurd. A child's eyes, blacked in death, are the site of a universal tragedy, whether the blackness comes by wave or "shell." The loss is incomprehensible, in the same way that our own deaths, and lives, are. And we become less human when we think that we can justify death for the sake of politics, or oil, or comfort. How naive, indeed, this sounds. How the world needs to become naive.



(January 2005) Vol. 1, No. 1 Welcome to a very special ministry, and a very special effort to, through faith and love, help to heal the wounds and divisions in our world in concert with other like-minded people of faith. The Interfaith Union's project is healing our divisions - divisions of nationalism, divisions of race, divisions of sex and sexual orientation, divisions of class, divisions of culture, divisions of faith, divisions between secular and sacred, divisions between market and family, divisions that chop up our souls, cloud our eyes and bid us to live lives of inner deformity and social distance. *Note on the image: The tree is a ubiquitous image, found in many faith traditions. It suggests life, power, spiritual growth, and insight.* WWW.IUNION.ORG (a New York not-for-profit religious corporation.)