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HEADLINE: Time to attack **world poverty** once and for all

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BODY:

The horrific human toll wrought by the recent tsunami sent believers back to the Scriptures in search of some explanation for the tragedy.

A few censorious Christians regarded the horror to be an expression of God's wrath, but most saw the devastation as nature following its unconscious laws, which are not benign. Fire both warms and destroys, water slakes thirst but can drown, and wind can bring both relief and terror. God is not the Wizard of Oz, pretending to micromanage the universe.

The generous outpouring of aid for the tsunami victims reflects the accepted wisdom that the victims were innocents, not at all responsible for their losses. Our generosity was prompted by the saturation of coverage by television. None of us could escape being witnesses to others' misery.

It was an exception. At most times we are insulated in our homes and neighborhoods from others' miseries. Out of sight, out of mind. That is why our awakening to the plight of people half a **world** away may be the impetus to attacking the problem of **world poverty** once and for all.

When Mary accepted her role as mother of the Christ, she said of God: "He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away." (Luke 1:53). The Scriptures routinely hallow the poor and censor the rich, but there is every indication that wealthy nations are now acting on that judgment.

We live in a **world** in which a child dies every three seconds from extreme **poverty**. Many more continue to live abbreviated lives with their parents in misery, ignorance, disease, and want through no fault of their own. In the past critics have blamed **poverty** on high birth rates and on corrupt governments in Third **World** countries. But since then, the rich nations have so embraced birth prevention that we can no longer maintain our own populations. And aid agencies have learned how to direct aid to the needy without sending cash to be siphoned by their rulers.

World leaders will gather in September to consider the report of Columbia University economist Jeffrey Sachs to halve **world poverty** in the next decade. The United Nations, to which Sachs reports, already calls for rich nations to increase their foreign aid to 0.7 percent of Gross Domestic Product by 2015.

President Bush has already promised to "make concrete efforts" to reach that goal, which Denmark, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden have already reached. But, so far, the U.S. government lags behind the pack, devoting only 15 hundredths of 1 percent to the **world's** poor.

Sachs' proposal is practical, not utopian, including mosquito nets for children vulnerable to malaria, eliminating public school fees, providing fertilizer to poor farmers, targeting money directly to clinics and schools to purchase generators, medicine, and food, and making government aid contingent on guaranteeing women's rights to property and inheritance.

More than 150,000 children die of malaria every month in Africa alone for want of a medicine that costs only a dollar a dose. There is already a way; all we need is the will.

(David Yount's ninth book, "Celebrating the Rest of Your Life: A Baby Boomer's Guide to Spirituality," will be published this spring. He answers readers at P.O. Box 2758, Woodbridge, VA 22193 and dyount(at)erols.com.)??

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