



Is God Involved in Natural Disasters?

by the Rev. Archimandrite Fr. Eusebius Stephanou, Th.D.

Where is God in such tragic natural disasters that have recently devastated several areas of our country? Our secular world tells us these tragedies cause the good, noble and generous character of the American people to become more prominent

– the milk of human kindness, the widespread compassion they demonstrate in trying to reach the victims – the homeless and destitute with urgently needed help.

Doesn't that sound unselfish and impressive? Why, of course, especially people who call themselves "Christians" feel that their primary response to distant natural disasters should be to do their utmost to alleviate the suffering wherever they may be located. Many have lost possibly all they ever owned and don't even have a roof over their heads. After all, doesn't the Lord Jesus Christ make "loving thy neighbor as thyself" as the greatest of all of God's commandments? Is there anything more humane than to come to the help of the destitute?

Too many Christians, however, forget what our Lord explicitly declared regarding the response of those who have been spared natural disasters. Lately, at the announcement of the terrifying disasters that have hit our country, neither Christian evangelists nor the public media nor any Church leader or preacher has made any reference to the words of our Lord Jesus Christ found in the Gospel of Luke, chapter 13. The revealed word of God tells us distinctly how God is involved in Natural Disasters and for some mysterious reason it has remained a secret. Now it's time to celebrate with the angels in Heaven that the full truth is finally uncovered

especially in this last hour.

“There were present at that time some who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answered by saying to them, do you suppose that these Galileans were sinners above other men because they suffered such things? I tell you no: but unless you repent, you shall all likewise perish.”

So how does God's word resolve this issue? It's crystal clear in the word of God. Listen, when the tower of Siloam fell and killed 18 people, Jesus spoke: *“Do you think they were sinners above all men that lived in Jerusalem? I tell you no. But unless you repent, you shall likewise perish”* (Luke 13: 4-5). **Huge disasters may be distant from where you live, dear friend, but you might do well to stand in line. Repent, because your turn may be coming up soon.** You may be next in your own local disaster: “Unless you repent you shall likewise perish!” We need to be reminded who is the Creator and sustainer of our physical universe. *“He looks on the earth and it trembles. He touches the hills, and they smoke”* (Ps. 104: 32). God's power is infinite and awesome. *“Let sinners be consumed out of the earth, and let the wicked be no more”* (v. 35). *The Psalmist confirms beyond a shadow of a doubt that God is involved in any situation where a cosmic disorder is a result of the*

Creator's sovereign will. “Thou has made the earth to tremble. Thou has broken it. Heal the breaches thereof, for it shaketh” (Ps. 60: 2).

God's Sovereign Intervention?

At this stage, I would like to make mention of an incident that took place locally in my own area that painfully and dramatically demonstrates the message with which God is trying to reach His chosen people. The pastor of the local Church here in Destin, Florida area sponsored a memorial service commemorating the first anniversary of the Twin Towers Disaster in New York City that, as we remember, shocked the world.

At the gathering he had invited me as well as other clergymen to address a few words appropriate for the occasion. They all primarily dwelt on what marvelous courage the firefighters had displayed, as they bravely searched for any possible survivors buried under the rubble.

They extolled their bravery and the risks they took to rescue as many of the victims as possible. When I arose to speak, instinctively I declared with much emotion that God was trying to get the attention of our nation by allowing the Twin Towers to totally crumble and collapse to the ground with all the tragic consequences that followed.

It was His way of calling our nation to repentance from our national sins of banning prayer from schools and other public assemblies, banning Bible readings, banning Nativity scenes at Christmas, banning the public display of the Ten Commandments, and the legalizing of abortion and same-sex marriages.

I hardly had a chance to com-

plete my message, which I barely started, when the local host pastor of the church arose and interrupted me and instructed me to sit down without uttering a word of explanation for his strange action. I sat down without showing any visible reaction on my part.

Are you ready for what followed, dear reader? I mention this with no malice or bitterness. A few days later, as he was walking in front of his church along the curb of the road (because of some sidewalk construction), a passing vehicle struck him dead on the spot. I was speechless the moment the news reached me. Signs and more signs – unbelievable! I can say no more!

Ordinarily, as we see on TV the detailed account of some natural disasters, we usually take the attitude of something like this: *“Thank God, that it didn’t happen to me and didn’t happen here in my town or country. I can’t thank the Lord enough for sparing my area of those terrifying disasters that have taken the lives of so many men, women and children”.*

Does God Target Certain Areas?

Even the thought may enter the mind of some that the particular state and area in which a disaster took place was singled out by God in order to unleash punishment upon those people for their sins that were abominable in His sight. Perhaps, should we try to figure out what sins they persisted in that we should avoid? Does any good come from getting anymore analytical?

The Evangelist Luke warned that *“at that season when Jesus was conducting His earthly ministry in Galilee, He was told by the local Jews of the time when Pontus Pilate, the Roman governor, had slain some Galileans at the time they were offer-*

ing sacrifices to God”. There were no details given of the circumstances under which this deed was carried out by the Roman authorities. We can only conjecture they could have been retaliatory actions in reaction to some possible rebellious acts of the local overzealous Jews who were intolerant of Roman rule. They were possibly killed in the courts of the Temple for some real or suspected sedition while they were offering up their sacrifices. Indeed, a contemporary writer refers to Pilate’s repeated massacres of innocent persons and his unbelievable ferocity he unleashed against them.

In response Jesus declared *“Do you suppose that those Galileans were worse sinners above all Galileans that they suffered such things?” “I tell you, no. But unless you repent, you shall likewise perish.”* Then Jesus moved beyond the local specific event the Jews brought up to Jesus. He drew their attention to another disaster with which very likely they were familiar: *“How about those eighteen upon whom the Tower of Siloam fell, and killed them. Do you think that they were sinners above all men that lived there? I tell you, No. But unless you repent, you shall likewise perish.”*

The Evangelist Luke’s account of the Great Commission, and unlike the other Evangelists (Mark 16: 14, Matthew 10), makes the elements of *“repentance and remission of sins”* as the principal element of the salvation message. *“These are the words which I spoke unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and in the prophets and in the Psalms concerning me.” “Then He opened their understanding that they might understand the scriptures (Luke 24: 44-45). “And He said unto them, thus it is written and thus it behooved Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead on the*

third day.” “And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.” “And you are witnesses of these things.” “And behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you; but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high” (Luke 24: 46-49).

Where Do Our Freedoms Come From?

Many of the recent fourth of July festivities that appeared almost daily on public media, especially on TV, were dramatic, historic and heart-warming. I for one was stirred and felt deeply proud and Thanked God for living in the USA, and that it is my native country. Prominent evangelists and church leaders delivered messages emphasizing what a privilege it was to live in such a unique country as the USA.

With one voice they proclaimed that this nation was the greatest nation in the world, holding to moral and noble social and political values as no other nation, with godly ideals no other nation upholds.

What I sensed, however, was an extreme sense of arrogance and a lack of humility and awareness that the prosperity that singled out our country was the recognition that our Creator is the Source of all the blessings we enjoy.

Our founding Fathers were God-fearing and proclaimed God as our one true Provider and Supply. **But as we now begin to turn our back to God by banning prayer in public places, the reading of the Bible in public schools, and the placing of the 10 Commandments in our public buildings, we are inviting God’s displeasure and withdrawal of His blessings. Wake up America! The Lord is calling on us to repent.** The word of God warns us: *“the wicked shall be turned to Hell and the nations that forget God” (Ps. 9: 17).*

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Seeking God's Wisdom for Our Times

by Joseph Abbate / President

We cannot miss all of the upheaval taking place today. We are truly living in volatile times. This nation is facing unrest and hatred, moral issues and evil resurface which we once thought had been dead and buried for many years. This is not just an American problem, but a world-wide phenomenon. More than the Wisdom of Solomon is needed to make heads or tails of these days.

The first issue I wish to address is that of immigration. Let's face the fact that it has become a very controversial matter. It has now become a very hot political topic. Some in political parties seem to want unlimited immigration for future voter blocks, while some others like the idea of cheap labor for economic reasons. Either way you slice it, it is at times very polarizing. But what is the Biblical view on immigration? You may ask, is there Biblical view?

Though most of the Scriptural references on the subject are found in the Old Testament, there are some New Testament ones as well. Immigrants may often be called "neighbor", "stranger" or even "outcast" at times in the Bible. During the Old Testament period it was an expected custom to take in a stranger. This was mostly due to the fact that there were no grocery stores outside the towns or cities of that day. Only some watering holes. If travelers had no shelter or supplies, it may become a life-threatening situation.

"Whoever despises his neighbor is a sinner; but blessed is he who is generous to the poor" (Prov. 14:21). As Pastor David Jeremiah had remarked on the matter: *"we are called by God to assist, accept and assimilate immigrants, but they should be willing to assimilate."* This is a role which the Church should be doing, but too often is absent to accept others in the Church. But can we honestly say this about the Church. Look at our denominational divisions? Especially we Orthodox had remained

divided into our ethnic groups until recently. Back in the day, one of the first things I was asked when I would visit another Greek Orthodox Church is *"are you Greek?"* Of course, we now see a great influx of converts into the Church from many different denominations.

There is a major difference in immigrants integrating and accustoming themselves to the laws of the country in which they are planning on staying in. As the saying goes: *"When in Rome, do as the Roman's do."* Yet, especially in Europe, we have been witnessing the exact opposite. In nations such as France and Belgium, there are "Islamic zones" in which people in those zones have their own laws and enforcement. Some of these problems have arisen in Europe because a number of those countries had colonies in which it was easier for colonial citizens to immigrate. Yet, today, we see major migrations of hundreds of thousands of people due to unrest in their homelands, and sadly, this is due to the inaction of both Europe and America to initially counter the rise of the ISIS and other terror groups which had overrun those areas with hardly any resistance. America used to be called "The Melting Pot." Can we honestly say today's immigrants are melting into American society with the nation's principles and laws at heart? This is not necessarily the fault of immigrants, but governments here in America and Europe which have not fairly and equally controlled the matter.

The situation has become aggravated by the fact that millions of people have illegally poured into the country, which has overwhelmed our streets, hospitals, law enforcement and schools. Unlike, under previous periods of time, when emergency immigration had been granted in times of persecutions or wars, when populations were at the verge of genocide, most of today's immigration is due to people's desire for economic prosperity. Many immigrants from Orthodox Christian backgrounds, literally had to

leave all of their wealth behind them, because they had to quickly flee for their lives. Stories of suffering at the hands of conquering military forces of Fascism or Communism, (Sometimes both) are not uncommon in Eastern European households, not to mention the genocides of the early 1920's of Greek and Armenian populations by the hands of the Turkish military.

We know at the same time that there can be no safety without Borders, after all, borders define the sovereignty of a nation. There can be no country without its borders. The Bible states: *"Do not remove the ancient boundary stones set up by your ancestors"* (Prov. 22:28). Yet today, there are those who complain that the west coast of the United States had been stolen. Of course, there can be no end to this argument in which these events took place almost 180 years ago.

The Spanish and Portuguese conquest of South and Central America were indeed brutal. Yet, people often forget the utter cruelty of the Inca, Maya and Aztec Empires. The Spanish conqueror Cortes could never have defeated the vast and populous Aztec Empire without the Native American tribes which had joined forces with the Spanish. When Cortes had finally besieged the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan in 1521, ninety nine percent of his army had consisted of these Native tribes which completely hated the Aztecs for the brutality they had committed against them. However, the death and destruction caused from these wars pale in comparison to the diseases which the European powers brought with them.

Several Empires were involved with conquest in the Americas, such as the Spanish, Portuguese, French, British, Dutch and Russians. The Russian settlements in Alaska and California were mainly for monetary gains and trade purposes. These territories were purchased by the U.S. The same thing regarding the

Louisiana Purchase from the French. The Spanish pullout from the western territories almost broke out into war between the U.S. and England, which held Canada at the time. The treaty of Oregon in 1846 avoided war between the two nations regarding the territories which are now known as Washington and Oregon State.

Another crisis developed during the American Civil War. England, which held the territory of Canada to the North, and the French invasion and occupation of Mexico to the South, were both smuggling weapons to the Confederate States to specifically weaken the U.S. This was so the European powers could expand its influence into other regions of the world without the U.S. being a rival or a stop-gap force to foreign expansion, not only in Central and South America, but also the Pacific. In 19th Century Eastern Europe, the Ottoman Caliphate which had held the region for almost five hundred years, was on the decline. The Ottoman cruelty had almost known no bounds, literally killing millions of people in its wake. Greece gained its Independence from the Turkish Ottomans by fighting a bloody and long Revolution. Italy was trying to expel foreign powers, (such as the French and Austro-Hungarian Empire) from its sphere and became a united country for the first time in its history.

Besides the fact that technically all the land on the earth has been stolen at one point or another by an empire or migrating groups of people, we need to look at these matters spiritually as well. Call it what you will. Conquest was a common greed. Let's spell it out for what it was, sin. But, just as individuals, all Nations of the world have at one point or another sinned. The difference in the Western countries is that its peoples confronted the issues of colonies and slavery with the abolition of them altogether, which was mainly due to the outcry by Christian morals of the day.

As today's younger generation in America are taught the evils of western civilization, oddly enough, the very things they complain about in the past about the west, is rampant in the

other regions of the world. The evils of slavery are still going on in Asia, Africa and the Middle-East. Women are sold into prostitution and men into labor camps. North Korea and China still has labor camps, and Thailand and India are filled with brothels. Where is the outcry from our young generation on these matters?

After the end of World War 2, when the Allies had defeated the Nazis and Imperial Japan, America had found itself as the most powerful nation on the planet. If America wished to pursue global domination, it could have done so, since it was the only country to hold a nuclear arsenal. Would other nations be so docile if they held the same power in their hands?

Nevertheless, America suddenly faced a new threat with the Soviet Union under Stalin. In order to contain the Soviet plans of domination, the U.S. had to keep alliance with its allies which together defeated fascism during World War 2. But America did not have in common the colonial heritage of its much needed Allies such as England and France.

While England had faced the Post-War era with the dismantling of its Empire, France was not so quick to follow England's example. France did not wish to relinquish its colonial gains. France fought fierce battles to retain lands in North Africa and Vietnam. Meanwhile, America became "guilty by association" for standing by its necessary Alliances to curb Communist expansion.

People are often unaware of these matters because today's educational institutions are lacking and many students are "propagandized" instead of "enlightened", and it glaringly shows in our world today!

Yet, probably the most important shift seen in the West was its de-Christianization of society. Christianity, which has been at the bedrock of this nation's laws and much of its culture has slowly been watered down, or become unfashionable. The Ten Commandments are no longer welcome in our schools and Christians are often the brunt of criticism in movies and art.

The Western populations, at times, feel an increasing demand by some political groups to relinquish their cultural identity, as foreign holidays and customs seem to replace longstanding traditions. In the meantime, many churches in Europe are closed and converted into pubs or residences every year. It is known that Civilizations begin to fall when the people no longer believe in its systems or laws. In fact, today's world is often described as being "Lawless."

Even secular people have voiced their concerns over a society which is falling apart. With the rise of the internet, video and public platforms such a YouTube or Facebook, too often are filled with people who communicate rage and mockery towards each other.

There has never been a more important and crucial time for the Gospel to reach this troubled world. Yet, we have to acknowledge the obvious. We must be aware that "*we wrestle not against flesh and blood.*" There is a spiritual battle going on. There is also a spiritual need which everyone has been born with. Those needs are too often clouded by the distractions of the world. Fr. Stephanou had once said that our generation has sometimes relegated the Lord to be seen as "an abstract figure". We need to: "*Bring Christ out of obscurity and back into prominence between Liturgies.*"

We have recently heard the call for a new "Golden Age" in our nation. There is nothing wrong with such a noble quest, as long as we don't forget "The Golden Rule." To "*love your neighbor as yourself*" is the heart of the law of God. However, it is fruitless, let alone impossible to do so unless we are a Holy and Righteous people. This can only be done by our nation turning back to the Lord. We should not relegate a Golden Age with monetary prosperity. Our age cannot be Golden if we don't earnestly try to love and assist one another. However, this cannot be achieved on human ingenuity. It will take a mighty move of God. We can begin by at least being kinder to one another. As St. Paul put it: "*And now these three remain: Faith, Hope and Love, but the greatest of these is Love*" (1 Cor. 13:13).