



Sinkholes and other 'acts of God'

Do we have exclusion clauses for God's radical actions?

Down here in Florida we have an interesting underground geological formation which causes "sinkholes."

During the dry season some of the cells in the giant honeycomb strata beneath our state—which are ordinarily filled with water—often go dry. When that happens, the earth above settles. Rapidly.

Last year, just a few blocks from the *Charisma* office in downtown Winter Park, the earth opened up and swallowed a house, a business, and several expensive cars. All in a few hours.

Immediately, a lot of us began to check our insurance policies. We discovered that most policies written in Florida have a "sinkhole exclusion" clause.

Sinkholes are radical "acts of God" and cannot be covered.

Other "acts of God," things which are not as likely to happen—hurricanes, tornadoes, even lightning strikes—are covered. But sinkholes, which are more and more likely as we waste our rapidly diminishing water supply, are excluded.

In case you wonder what an "act of God" is, you can find a definition in many insurance policies.

One definition reads something like this: "Any event, act, or circumstance . . . whose event could NOT be prevented by man."

According to the legal description, acts of God are (1) rare, (2) undesirable, (3) things to be prevented if possible. In short, acts of God are things we would prefer didn't happen—and would prevent if we could.

Now I understand why most Christians are so afraid of the supernatural, the mystical, the charismatic aspect of our faith. We have been conditioned to believe that any act of God which has not been voted on, budgeted for, which has not been approved by the long-range planning committee, and which is likely to startle us, or interrupt our lifestyle, is to be avoided at all cost.

Acts of God are reminiscent of the story of the little boy whose mother tucked him into bed, turned out the light, and went down the hall to her room to read. In a few minutes the little boy, dragging his teddy bear, was at his mother's door.

"Mommy, it's dark in my room. I'm afraid."
"Don't be scared, son," she said reassuringly. "God is in your room. Go back to bed."

The little kid trudged back down the hall and stood at the door of his bedroom, peering into the darkness. Finally he got up enough nerve to stick his head into the room.

"God?" he whispered.

No answer.

"God," he said again more boldly. "If you're in there, don't move! You'll scare me to death."

We Christians, we understand, don't we? Most heathens, I've discovered, expect

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God to act. Those in the Far East are constantly leaving food in their spirit houses, consulting the shamans, trying to appease the volcanoes. Back in the States the average guy at the ballgame or in the bar, even though he never sticks his head in the door of a church, is still aware God is a God of action.

But when it comes to the average church member, well, we want God all figured out. We want to organize Him, tell Him when He can move and when He can't, and then we do everything we can to prevent Him from acting—especially if it might inconvenience us.

Deep inside, all Christians know acts of God are not limited to volcano eruptions, tidal waves, or sinkholes. We know God acts personally. He invades our lives, gives direction, chastises us when we need correcting, and blesses us simply because He loves us. We sense in our deepest spirit that He will act to conform us to the image of His Son if we only cooperate, that He will

heal our bodies if we submit to His touch, that He will use us in a mighty way if we yield to Him.

But that's where we falter. We're afraid He might scare us. He might ask us to change. He might uproot us and send us to Africa or, even worse, put us on a street corner Saturday afternoon and tell us to preach to "the masses."

So we invent elaborate schemes in our lives and our churches to prevent God from acting.

Last year I was in a conference where the woman leader was conducting one of those little "imagination exercises." She was on the platform speaking softly to the congregation.

"Imagine you are in a quiet garden. You are walking down a grassy path beside a bubbling brook. Birds are chirping. Now Jesus appears beside you. He has something to say to you. Listen. . . ."

She paused. When she did, an old man in the back of the auditorium began to speak in a quivering voice.

"I, the Lord, have something to say to you. . . ."

The woman leader immediately interrupted. "Sir! Sir! Please sit down. Be quiet. You're interrupting. . . ."

The old man continued to prophesy. "I am not pleased with your programs and sacrifices. I desire. . . ."

At the leader's direction two ushers took the man by the arms and convinced him to sit down and be quiet.

After the meeting I made my way to the old man. I discovered he was quite deaf. He had not heard a thing the woman had said before he stood to prophesy. He had been sitting in the meeting with his daughter when he felt a great urge. He felt God wanted him to stand and speak. He had never done anything like that, but as an old, obedient servant, he complied.

Unfortunately, there was no place in the order of service for God to speak—much less act.

So we shuffle on, writing our own exclusion clauses, relegating acts of God to volcanoes and sinkholes. And we wonder why we never seem to hear—to really hear—what God is saying. . . .