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Short communication

Theology and disaster studies: The need for dialogue

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Abstract

In hazard analysis the conventional wisdom holds that disasters are features of either human vulnerability and/or de-moralised nature. The notion of the "Act of God"™ has been almost completely replaced. Using examples of volcanic eruptions and Christian theology, it is argued that many actual and potential victims of hazards continue to explain losses in theistic terms; even in societies where individuals are aware of alternative scientific and social explanations. In Christianity attempts to reconcile God's love, justice and omnipotence on the one hand and human suffering on the other, is termed *theodicy*, and it is proposed that recent developments allow more fruitful dialogue to take place between hazard analysts and theologians than has been the case hitherto. During the *International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction* (1990–2000) a consensus emerged that, if responses to disaster are to be successfully managed, then an awareness of local culture is vitally important. This consensus has

continued, as research agendas are currently being formulated for the *International Strategy for Disaster Reduction*. In many disaster prone regions, religion is an essential element of culture and must be carefully considered in the planning process, and not simply dismissed as a symptom of ignorance, superstition and backwardness.



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Keywords

global disasters; Christianity; volcanoes; theodicy

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