Divine Intervention

On Thursday afternoon's show, Rush Limbaugh joked about Hurricane Frances bearing down on Palm Beach County, Florida, where he lives. He said, paraphrasing, "Since Palm Beach County has voting irregularities like a Third World nation, maybe God decided Palm Beach County should be devastated to be, in fact, Third World."

Many in his audience probably laughed and promptly forgot about it. His observation, however, has a serious side that modern, sophisticated, and predominantly secular Americans never consider—at least seriously. They snicker at insurance policies that refer to hurricanes, floods, tornadoes, and other natural disasters as "acts of God," when they, in their scientific arrogance, prefer to call them "acts of nature" or "weather events." Even those who are moderately religious, like the Deists of the Enlightenment, do not believe that God is active in earth's events, whether natural or human. To them, He may be watching, but He certainly is not involved in human affairs.

This points out how utterly blind to God most people are, even Christians. For starters, because they are not looking for God's hand of intervention in their lives, they are certainly not going to see it. Having become so secular and scientific in their outlook, the miraculous is totally off their radar. They consider those who report of miracles to be medieval in their thinking and the miracles themselves to be mere coincidences of natural phenomena or overstatements of what actually occurred. To them, miracles are impossible because, by definition, they are unverifiable by scientific methods and therefore do not and never have happened.
Today's thoroughly modern Christian does not derive this negative view of God's intervention from His Book. In the Bible, divine involvement in human affairs occurs from cover to cover; in fact, it is the central fact of human existence, which the Bible takes great pains to reveal. At every critical point in man's history, God has been involved. At Creation, before and after the Flood, at the dispersal of the nations from Babel, in the history of Israel, among the great empires of ancient history from Egypt to Rome God was instrumental. God Himself, in the person of Jesus Christ, came to this earth and lived among us, bringing us the good news of His Kingdom and dying for our salvation. Then He sent His apostles to the four corners of the globe to spread the word among those He would call.

That sounds as if God is active and involved in human affairs.

As Creator, He certainly has power over the various elements of His creation. Manipulating the weather is like child's play to Him. He can send rain or drought anywhere, anytime. He flooded the entire earth to a depth greater than the height of the tallest mountain, so flashfloods, coastal floods, and river floods are easy. Spinning tornadoes is like breathing to Him, and earthquakes rumble and tumble at His command. The Bible makes many claims about His power over the elements (Job 26:7-12; Psalm 147:15-18; Nahum 1:3-6; etc.). Jesus Himself calmed the storm with a word (Matthew 8:24-26).

In the book of Amos, God shows that He uses "natural" disasters to teach people lessons, to bring them to repentance, to correct their ways. In this passage, He also admits that most people fail to make the connection between the disaster and their sins. Notice Amos 4:6-13:

"Also I gave you cleanness of teeth [famine] in all your cities, and lack of bread in all your places; yet you have not returned to Me," says the LORD. "I also withheld rain from you [drought], when there were still three months to the harvest. I made it rain on one city, I withheld rain from another city. One part was rained upon, and where it did not rain the part withered. So two or three cities wandered to another city to drink water, but they were not satisfied; yet you have not returned to Me," says the LORD. "I blasted you with blight and mildew. When your gardens increased, your vineyards, your fig trees, and your olive trees, the locust devoured them; yet you have not returned to Me," says the LORD. "I overthrew some of you, as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, . . . yet you have not returned to Me," says the LORD. "I sent among you a plague after the manner of Egypt; your young men I killed with a sword, . . . yet you have not returned to Me," says the LORD.
"Therefore thus will I do to you, O Israel; because I will do this to you, prepare to meet your God, O Israel!" For behold, He who forms mountains, and creates the wind, who declares to man what his thought is, and makes the morning darkness, who treads the high places of the earth— the LORD God of hosts is His name.

He also says He will continue to do this in His Millennial Kingdom: He will send drought on areas that refuse to keep His feasts (Zechariah 14:16-19). Are we to assume that, for some reason, He does not punish for sin now?

Maybe Rush was right.

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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