

One Little Earthquake

January 1995

God made man as the highest order of created life. Endowed with God's own image, man was given dominion over all animals and was told to "*fill the earth and subdue it*" (Gn 1:28). Man finds his purpose when he manages and manipulates nature for the welfare of all.

In discharging this directive of God, man has done some pretty amazing things. The construction of dams has produced electricity and irrigation. Medical science has lessened the effects of disease and injury. The manufacturing of raw materials has produced innumerable items which have improved the quality of life. Incredibly, man's ability to control his environment has even enabled him to leave the confines of the planet and travel to the moon.

Our advancements are so profound and recent that the current generation has taken on a superior, almost omnipotent view of itself. Man no longer sees himself as the caretaker of the world but the apex of a naturalistic evolutionary process. The Ultimate Cause, God, has been replaced by an impersonal Big Bang, and man has become his own Master.

But for all our intelligence, ingenuity and technology, all nature has to do is hiccup a bit to remind us of our frailty and ineptitude. This past week, a relatively average sized earthquake struck Japan near the city of Kobe. The death toll is in the thousands and still rising; the property damage is almost incalculable; the fallout of hunger, thirst and disease has not yet even begun.

There is a lesson to be learned in this tragedy. The earthquake in Japan occurred one year to the day after the earthquake in Los Angeles. One year ago, the Japanese were arrogantly boasting that such damage would never occur in Japan because of their earthquake-proof architecture.

Pardon me, but is there an echo here? "*Lifeboats? We don't need lifeboats. This ship is unsinkable.*" Nature has a rude way of reminding us that we are not quite as brilliant and competent as we credit ourselves.

As in most cases of natural catastrophe, a Japanese woman said, "I thought it was the end of the world." That thought, along with the occasional earthquake, volcanic eruption, tornado or hurricane should humble us before the God who holds such power in the palm of His hand.