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THE FIVE HUNDRED YEAR EARTHQUAKE: NATURAL AND SOCIAL HAZARD IN
THE DEVELOPING WORLD (PERU)

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Starting about fifteen years ago, a perspective emerged in the social scientific study of disasters in which an overall reconsideration of disasters as "extreme events" was undertaken. That is, disasters began to be interpreted less as the result of geophysical extremes such as storms, earthquakes, avalanches, droughts, etc, and much more as functions of an on-going social order, its structure of human environment relations, and the larger framework of historical processes that have shaped these phenomenon (Hewitt 1983: 25). This alternative view constitutes a serious questioning of the entire set of human-environment relations in which disasters are seen as unhappy accidents which occur in otherwise "normal" everyday existence. Hewitt, for example, posits that most natural disasters are more explainable in terms of the "normal" order of things than the accidental geophysical features of a place. Disasters are seen to be far more characteristic of societies than they are of simple physical environments. The risks that people run in their natural environments are in themselves "manageable," but are accentuated and resulting physical impact of