

*Sightings 9/29/05*

Weather of Mass Destruction

-- Robert McElvaine

Is God a terrorist? Many self-professed Christians seem to think so. The devastation of New Orleans by Hurricane Katrina provided a sodden, gruesome opportunity for some who call themselves Christians to vent their distortions of the religion of Jesus. They did so by extending the old idea that a deadly storm like Katrina is an "act of God."

"In my belief, God judged New Orleans for the sin of shedding innocent blood through abortion," proclaimed South Carolina anti-abortion activist Steve Lefemine. "Greater divine judgment is coming upon America unless we repent of the national sin of abortion."

"The day Bourbon Street and the French Quarter was flooded was the day that 125,000 homosexuals were going to be celebrating sin in the streets," noted Michael Marcavage, head of a group called Repent America. "We're calling it an act of God."

In a similar vein, following the December 2004 tsunami, Pastor Ted Haggard of the New Life Church in Colorado Springs pointed out to his mega-congregation that the waves hit the "number-one exporter of radical Islam," Indonesia. "That's not a judgment," he declared. "It's an opportunity." One of Haggard's congregants said he was "psyched" about what God was "doing with His ocean."

These people -- and there are countless similar examples -- view God as a brutal killer of the innocent -- the equivalent of a national leader who orders the use of weapons of mass destruction against cities filled with civilians.

"God did create a perfect world," Rev. Alex McFarland of James Dobson's Focus on the Family said after Katrina struck. "But we humans introduced moral evil, sin, rebellion and disobedience. And after God judged human sin in Noah's flood, the weather patterns that we know today developed."

So apparently all those heathen liberals, scientists, and foreigners who think that it's global warming that's changing our weather are wrong. God changed the weather patterns at the time of Noah's Flood. And Katrina was another in a series of instances of God's utilization of WMD -- Weather of Mass Destruction -- to wreak death and destruction on sinful humans.

Mayor Brent Warr of Gulfport, Mississippi, provided another interpretation of God's motives for flattening the Gulf Coast. "We have an opportunity now to make it an absolutely unique place," he said. "God has come in and wiped the slate clean for us."

God the Violent Urban Renewal Advocate? A God who considers killing hundreds of His people a reasonable price to pay to get rid of undesirable buildings and make a prettier town?

But if some on the Religious Right want to argue that the Katrina catastrophe was an act of God

intended to send a message to America, how can they be so sure that the message is about abortion or homosexuality?

Why not think that God sent the tremendous storm with its horrible surge smashing into Mississippi (one of the reddest of states) as a way of slapping George W. Bush, his administration, and many Republicans upside the head for denying that global warming is a problem? "Don't believe in global warming, you fools? Look at what I can do with my Gulf through global warming!"

It is telling that many of the "Christian" faithful see God's hand in drowning radical Muslims. Yet when a similar wave hits America, including areas with high concentrations of adherents to a religion that calls itself Christian but has inverted the teachings of Jesus to be pro-rich, pro-war, and "what you do doesn't matter if you say you accept Jesus," there is no thought that God might be drowning radical Christians who warp the religion of Jesus.

Similarly, another possible interpretation is suggested by a headline in the September 15 issue of the *Wall Street Journal*: "Katrina Erodes Support in U.S. for Iraq War." Why, then, do none of those who see the hand of God behind the storm consider that maybe the Prince of Peace sent the terrible storm crashing into America in order to get the United States out of Iraq?

To my mind, all such interpretations are absurd. Killing innocent people to stop the killing of innocent people: That is the *modus operandi* of a terrorist, not of the God Jesus tells of in the Gospels.

Claiming that God sends some sort of message -- regardless of whether the message is said to be anti-abortion, anti-gay, or anti-war -- through a lethal storm is only possible for those who think that God acts as a terrorist. And that, I believe, is a monumental perversion of Christianity that must be rejected.

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