

Acts of Sod

Kris King – October 31st 2011

<http://www.rantinaminor.co.uk/2011/10/acts-of-sod/>

We have a thing in Britain called Sod's Law; it's a simple axiom that states, "anything that can go wrong, will", and is often exemplified by the frustrating way that dropped toast always lands butter side down. Some people know it as Murphy's Law, particularly outside the UK where the word "sod" is not as commonly used; regardless of how you refer to it, it's still a good way of describing those situations where you can't for the life of you shake the feeling that the universe is royally taking the piss out of you. I got a little taste of that this week when I was rudely awoken on Monday morning as the torrential rain we were enjoying stubbornly refused to stay out of my bedroom. Sadly, while I was out, first at work then at a friend's funeral, the situation worsened, and I returned home to find a small paddling pool with a headboard where I normally keep my bed. On the plus side, I am at least able to claim for the damage on my insurance by taking advantage of a clause which points the finger of blame squarely at a non-existent sky pixie.

I've always been bothered by the phrase "act of god", primarily because it only ever seems to be used to describe bad things – it doesn't matter whether it's a leaky roof that wakes me up with a nice, cold, stream of dirty water on my feet, or the most horrendous of tragedies that result in death and destruction on an incalculable scale. I'm so often left wondering where this lovely, cuddly god the theists keep telling us about might be hiding, or how it is that the only "acts" he ever seems to engage in end up with a lot of miserable, hurt, or even dead, people? It's the use of the word "act" which emphasises how the celestial mischief-maker plays an active role in these events; I mean, it's not as if they're described as "*absences* of god", as though they occurred simply because his back was turned for five minutes (likely he was busy curing the bunions of some random granny, helping a screeching, entitled fame-whore teenager to win "Britain's Got Dickheads", or securing the victory touchdown of an educationally sub-normal football player).

When one of your principle character traits is omnipresence, the notion of you being absent at any point is completely off the table (this is one of the many logical contradictions that theists have foolishly created for themselves – consider, for example, the claim that hell is *separation* from god). As such, these are, by definition, *acts*, carried out intentionally by an all-powerful being who, his followers assure us, is also all-loving (despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary). To many practitioners of the monotheistic faiths, the cruel extinguishing of countless innocent lives is a conscious decision by a perfect, holy, and eternal father that must never be questioned, and a glorious demonstration of his infinite love and compassion. Or it might not be ... it depends on who you ask because, for some people, that's not the god they worship – something, or someone, else must be to blame (theists never *blame* their deity for anything – *credit*, yes, but never blame).

As the world has become increasingly more humanised by secular morality, the god of the old testament has undergone a substantial image shift; long gone are the days when he could murder a whole shit-load of people's first-born sons and still maintain either our respect, or the pretence of being a decent guy. Over the centuries people have somewhat soured on the idea that omnibenevolence and "drowning thousands of children with a tsunami" could ever go hand in hand, so now you'll find people often like to point the finger at their religion's favourite scapegoat – the horny-boned, goat-trousered devil himself. Rather than having to imagine that your god could be a negligent, or murderous, sack of festering pig shit, it's a lot easier to just pretend that he has a nemesis out there undoing all of his good work, leading mankind astray, and throwing the occasional tornado at trailer parks full of devout, yet unfortunate, christians who can't quite rationalise the situation.

Unfortunately, however, the devil idea digs both the theist's logic, and their claims regarding the goodness of the character of their god, even deeper into the hole it was intended to pull them out of. For a start, it begs the question of how anything could possibly oppose the will of an omniscient and omnipotent god. Unless there exists something, or someone, equal, or *greater*, in its power to such a deity (and we are told repeatedly by theists that this is not the case), how could his work possibly be

in any kind of jeopardy whatsoever? Even if the devil's ability to cause havoc was not limited to that which god was prepared to tolerate, and even if the devil were not a creation of god (as a former angel, according to christian theology, he most definitely is), you have to ask what kind of loving being would put up with that shit, even for a microsecond? If all the horror inflicted upon human beings could reasonably said to be the fault of one evil-minded little wank-bag with a chip on his shoulder, why would **any** god keep the annoying little fucker around?

More to the point, why would he even create this situation in the first place by not only failing to get rid of Lucifer, but *inventing an entire infernal realm of torment* for the uppity, coup-staging harp-monkey to be in charge of? The fact is, he wouldn't, not unless he was either so incompetent that he started taking lessons in celestial management from Enron, or he was as equally malevolent as the very demon he ostensibly created. So, if the devil is not responsible for all the bad that happens, then who is? Who shoulders the blame for all the floods, earthquakes, disease pandemics, or the fact that the creator of "Two And A Half Man" wasn't swiftly executed by a hit-squad the moment he submitted his pitch to CBS? (honestly, America, that's your *biggest* show? Do you see why the rest of the world thinks you're retarded?) Well, according to large numbers of theists (especially the more fundamental), we do ... apparently, all these things are **our** fault.

This attempt by theists to slalom culpability down the sloped shoulders of their god so that, somehow, we are held responsible for things we cannot possibly control can, at best, be described as a treacherous, craven debasement of the human species. It could also be, more than fairly, referred to as yet another conscious effort by the guardians of religious faith to systematically dismantle the self-worth of the individual so that they become helpless cripples to the thorn-entwined crutch offered by the church (for a fee, sorry, *donation*, of course). It seems that it's not enough that the secular morality that emerged from our being an inter-dependent social species has rightly determined that we are responsible for the consequences of *our* actions – no, religion insists that we also carry the can for the geological and environmental whims of the man upstairs; a hurricane is not a natural phenomenon to these people – it's punishment for our sins.

The concept of sin is an inherently meaningless one because what it essentially describes is a crime against a non-existent entity. A crime is, after all, fairly cut and dry in its meaning in that it refers to a legally prohibited act that is considered to cause, in some way, damage or injury to an individual or the state; sin, on the other hand, only really has religious connotations – it is the breaking of a divine law and, since there's no evidence for any aspect of the divine, the crime is entirely victimless. But that one small, gaping, logical chasm in the argument doesn't stop the religious from beating people they don't like over the head with the sin stick, blaming them for anything and everything they can think of as a means to marginalise, dominate, or oppress them (while simultaneously, and dishonestly, claiming to "love" them). The current sin-du-jour for the ranting religious bigot about town is, of course, homosexuality.

Fred Phelps, and the unfortunate products of the genetic and intellectual dead-end that is his family, are the founding (and, I believe, only) members of the Westboro Baptist Church; a congregation of ultra-fundamentalist zealots based in Topeka, Kansas, who believe that homosexuality is such an abomination against god that he visits all manner of disaster and atrocity upon the sinners – not homosexuals themselves, no, that would actually make *sense* – the targets of god's retribution are those who *tolerate* homosexuality; the people who are content simply to let what two consenting adults do in the privacy of their own bedrooms remain private. Basically, everyone who isn't in the Westboro Baptist Church ... which is pretty much *everyone*. They're "fag enablers", apparently, and their refusal to drive gays into the nearest ocean or, at the very least, condemn them for their wicked lifestyle, is, according to the WBC, more than sufficient justification for being the recipients of divine punishment.

At least, that's what they *claim* they believe – the reality is a bit muddier. The WBC are actually a family of lawyers, who may or may not believe the hate they spew (it's almost irrelevant), and their modus operandi is to be as tasteless and offensive as possible (usually this involves protesting the funerals of soldiers and shouting about how the deceased was killed because he was "defending a country that supports the fag lifestyle") in the hope that they can provoke others into either a physical retaliation, or to in some way restrict their first amendment right to free speech; if they succeed, out come the lawsuits and the WBC can keep themselves in bread and bigotry for another year. Whenever there's a high-profile death, or a natural disaster, the WBC will be there, like the attention-whores they are, spouting their intolerant bullshit, like the christian bigots they are, and baiting everyone into earning a lawsuit by taking a pop at them, like the scum-sucking lawyers they are.

From a similar school of homophobic thought there is also Keith from Minnesota, a foul-hearted anti-gay bully whose abusive rhetoric not so much borders on “the lady doth protest too much”, but pretty much moves right in with it and starts sharing a room, a bed, and a bottle of lubricant so large that it’s normally only available to zoos who need a bit of extra help when one of their elephants is experiencing a difficult birth. Keith is also known as @GodsWordIsLaw on Twitter, although this could change at any moment as his seemingly endless tirades of homophobic, anti-secular, and anti-liberal abuse have resulted in a number of users reporting him for violations of the social network site’s terms of service. The same is true of his blogs; the “Anti-Sodomite Association” ended up becoming the “Anti-Sodomy Association” (a move likely prompted by Keith having his arse handed to him in the comments – the new ASA site bans all commenting) and the, as yet unlaunched, “Pink Swastika” (presumably named after a ludicrous book that promoted the completely discredited theory that most high-ranking Nazis, including Adolf Hitler himself, were gay).

Keith, like the WBC (among whom Keith might as well count himself a member given that he’s exactly like them apart from being too lazy to join them in their disgusting funeral protests), engages in the kind of abusive fearmongering that patently hopes to scare most decent Americans in to hating gays as much as he does by convincing them of the demonstrable falsehood that god is punishing them for not going on enough homo-bashing rampages. For a god so frequently described as “all-loving”, the idea that he could punish *anyone* for the crimes of another makes him quite a despicable monster; that his worshippers don’t seem to have a problem with this is an even more disturbing proposition. Imagine telling someone that their son was killed in Iraq because neither he, nor you, did enough to persecute two complete strangers of the same gender for daring to express consenting adult love for one another. I find it appalling that I, and others, could have a tsunami in the far east heaped on my shoulders because some bigot thinks that every time I fuck my boyfriend, god kills an Asian.

And, not to ask the bleeding obvious question, but, isn’t *everything* ultimately an act of god? If, as theists tell us, their god is omniscient and omnipotent (despite, as I and many others have pointed out before, these two concepts being logically incompatible with one another), then he not only knows everything that has happened, is happening, and will ever happen, but he has the absolute power to change anything and everything. Nothing can, therefore, oppose his will, nothing can happen without him allowing it to; every genocide, earthquake, storm, flood, rape, murder, hurricane, and tsunami is *his* will – he **wants** it to happen, and so it does. And if, by some cosmically perverse logic, this god character is doing all of these things as punishment for the transgressions of a sinful few, then those sins too are as commanded by god as the consequences. **Nothing** can possibly happen in contravention of the will of anyone with infinite knowledge and power.

This insurmountable contradiction is at the very heart of the idea that this god has a divine plan; every moment in the life of every living creature, every single event in the history of the universe, from its beginning right through to its eventual end, has allegedly been mapped out in advance by this pre-cognitive supernatural caretaker. Right from the dawn of time (if such a thing were conceivable, or even possible) he has known that a child will be born who is destined to be crushed to death beneath a hundred tons of concrete, torn loose from a road bridge in an earthquake – and he chooses to do nothing; likewise he knows full well that another child will grow up to show love for someone of the same sex, as dictated by his or her unconquerable biological nature, and that they will spend an eternity in perpetual agony for this “sin”. That any creature can not only be the architect of such an abominable blueprint, but actually inspire *devotion* and *praise*, is truly, unconscionably wicked and sinful.

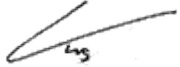
I’m sure there will be theists out there making the “free will” argument, with absolutely no concept of how it logic-rapes an idea that has already had all of the logic well and truly raped out of it. I’m sure there will also be those who contend that their god is more of an overseer who doesn’t determine the outcome of everything right down to the quantum level, but they’re just ultimately making the same flawed argument. Besides, if that were an even faintly plausible notion, we’d have to have a long and turgid discussion as to the precise extent to which god micromanages the universe; exactly *what* constitutes an “act of god”? Where do you draw the line, and how do we, as corporeal beings, make such an assessment? Is there a bit in the bible or the qu’ran which says, “any earthquake less than 5.0 on the Richter scale can be chalked up to plate tectonics, but over that and it’s because god is pissed at something” (keep looking, it must be there).

The comedian Bill Bailey once asked the same question in a routine about car insurance. In requesting the salesman to clarify what the policy meant by, “acts of god”, he was told that rain was considered to be one, but this just prompted the response, “well, how *much* rain?” Since there was

no clear delineation, he questioned at what point did precipitation stop being a natural phenomenon and suddenly "take on the mantle of the apocalyptic, water-based punishment of the lord?" It is a more than reasonable question that has failed to produce an even slightly reasonable answer, but it brings me back to the event that kicked off this post in the first place; the rain that decided it wanted to live indoors for a change (and, more specifically, the rain that wanted to live in my flat). To an insurance company it may be considered an act of god, but that's just their way of addressing the legal problem of unassignable blame.

When it comes down to it, "act of nature", would be a far more preferable term in an increasingly secular age; "act of god" is simply an anachronism, the relic of a time when people were immeasurably more ignorant of the mechanics of the natural world than they are now. These things aren't acts of god, they're simple artefacts that provide evidential support for the idea that "shit happens"; no god, no grand design, no punishment for sin, just examples of Sod's Law in action ...

Sodding rain ...

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized 'A' followed by a horizontal line and a small flourish.