Acts of God vs Acts of al-Qaida
Hurricane Katrina as a message to Bible Belt America?

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Introduction
This is an exploration of the possibility that Hurricane Katrina was a direct consequence of God's anger at the presumption of the Reverend Pat Robertson in calling for the assassination of the duly elected president of a neighbouring country. The question is whether God is happy with the evangelical presumption of a uniquely privileged understanding of the Will of God -- or whether God considers that ever more damaging hurricanes are the only way to help evangelicals in the Bible Belt reach an understanding they so persistently avoid.

Coincidental timing?
Hurricane Katrina formed over the Bahamas on 24 August 2005; the U.S. National Hurricane Center (NHC) had issued a statement on 23 August saying that Tropical Depression Twelve had formed over the southeastern Bahamas -- presumably in process of formation on 22 August. Katrina made several distinct landfalls in Bible Belt USA:

- **first landfall**: 25 August 2005, Miami, Florida as a Category 1 hurricane on the Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Scale, causing major flooding. Maximum sustained windspeeds reached 175 mph as it moved offshore; however, the system subsequently regained strength becoming a Category 5 hurricane, the fourth most intense storm ever recorded in the Atlantic Basin,
- **second landfall**: 29 August 2005, near Grand Isle, Louisiana, as a Category 4 hurricane with winds of 150 mph.
- **third landfall**: south of Buras-Triumph, Louisiana at approximately 6:10 a.m, with maximum sustained winds of 140 mph.
- **fourth landfall**: A final landfall was made at the Louisiana-Mississippi border at 10 a.m.

Evangelical call for assassination: On the same day as the formation of Katrina, Reverend Pat Robertson, speaking to 7 million viewers of the evangelical Christian Broadcasting Network on 23 August 2005 [more] called for the assassination of the president of Venezuela, Hugo Chavez:

"We have the ability to take him out, and I think the time has come to exercise that ability... It's a whole lot easier to have some of the covert operatives do the job and then get it over with."

Reverend Robertson, a former US Presidential candidate, is founder of the Christian Coalition of America -- a prime supporter of George Bush. They reportedly describe each other as "good friends". Neither George Bush nor the US Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, condemned such incitement with any vigour -- they called the comment "inappropriate". Robertson subsequently attempted vainly to deny that he called for the assassination [more]. But, most intriguing was the extremely muted media "outcry" in comparison with what would be the reaction to such a statement by an Islamic cleric. On 24 August, for example, CNN endeavoured -- most inappropriately --
There is however an interesting twist that might be used by policy-holders of natural catastrophe because contracts state that "acts of God" may be a basis for delay or failure to fulfill a policy obligation. Many insurance policies exempt coverage for damage caused by acts of God. It may become clear what proportion of commitments associated with Katrina are avoided through recourse to such interpretations -- the godless dimensions of Katrina -- and therefore fall on other parties.

The insurance industry has a vested interest in recognizing the divine origin of natural catastrophe because contracts state that "acts of God" may be a basis for delay or failure to fulfill a policy obligation. Many insurance policies exempt coverage for damage caused by acts of God. It may become clear what proportion of commitments associated with Katrina are avoided through recourse to such interpretations -- the godless dimensions of Katrina -- and therefore fall on other parties.

There is however an interesting twist that might be used by policy-holders against the "Acts of God" disclaimer. As noted by Sidney...
Blumenthal (Katrina comes home to roost, The Guardian, 2 September 2005): "... the damage wrought by Hurricane Katrina may not entirely be the result of an act of nature". Despite the claim by George Bush, in defending the delayed federal response, that "no one anticipated the breach of the levees" [more], it was precisely because the consequences had been long predicted by flood specialists that the evacuation of New Orleans had in fact been ordered (Financial Times, 3 September 2005).

A five-day simulation (of "Hurricane Pam"), involving 40 federal, state and local organizations, was undertaken in July 2004 to assess capacity to deal with destruction of half a million buildings in the New Orleans area and evacuation of a million residents (Why did help take so long to arrive?, 3 September 2005). The Louisiana Corps of Engineers had indicated a need for US$18 billion to shore up the levees and improve flood control in New Orleans. But federal funds to address the possibility had been withdrawn or withheld by 2003 (a reduction of 50% since 2001), with a further 20% reduction proposed for 2006 -- giving priority to Iraq and homeland security. Flood-controlling wetlands had also been opened to developers -- dangerously increasing vulnerability to flooding.

For Paul Soglin, former mayor of Madison, Wisconsin, and past chair of the committee on urban economics for the National Conference of Mayors: "A rightwing government that strangles public expenditures for public works is largely responsible for what happened in New Orleans."

Such deliberate negligence could indeed be the basis for a massive class action suit. The federal authorities would then have to vigourously defend the divine nature of the action -- with the necessarily enthusiastic support of the insurance industry. Unfortunately for Bible Belt evangelicals anxious to ensure payment, they would have to prove that God had nothing to do with the damage from Hurricane Katrina.

Curiously, as noted below, the destruction wrought by Hurricane Katrina is celebrated by some Christian fundamentalists as a welcome "Act of God" against sinful New Orleans. This could all prove very confusing for those who believe that America is continually and specially blessed by God.

It is particularly interesting that the insurance industry fully accepts the implication that hurricanes are "Acts of God". They are not "Acts of Satan" as some might otherwise wish to call them. The Bible Belt evangelicals are therefore dealing directly with a message from God to them, not to others elsewhere. Perhaps, if they disagree, they could petition for a change in insurance legislation to reframe "Acts of God" as "Acts of Satan" -- or perhaps as "Acts of al-Qaida".

"Acts of Satan"?

There are however some difficulties with the notion of "Acts of Satan":

- According to one Bible Belt interpretation, they are understood to be "anything that is contrary to God's will. Period. It's not about motivation. It's not about the resume of the offender. It's all about the outcome and it's effect on the coming of God's Kingdom". (John Frederick Fiedler, Get Behind Me, Satan, First United Methodist Church, Dallas, September 2002)
- Many people believe that disasters are "Acts of God" from birth defects and loss of babies, handicaps, disabilities, and violent deaths, to wars, hurricanes, floods, droughts, plagues and diseases of all sorts: whereas they are frequently "Acts of Satan" [more]
- Suffering and death are natural results of sin and, therefore, are no more God's will than is sin. Instead of stating in our insurance policies that disasters are "acts of God," it would be better to say they are "acts of Satan." (Gordon Bietz, At A Time of Tragedy, 3 December 2004)
- As noted by Ralph D. Winter (U.S. Center for World Mission, January-February 1998): "Acts of Satan? Mike Huckabee, the governor of Arkansas, refused to sign a bill referring to tornados as 'acts of God'. I wonder, had he been thinking about Job 1:19 which attributes a tragically destructive 'great wind' to the 'power' (v. 12) which God allowed Satan to exercise? Would the legislature change the wording to 'acts of Satan'? Some Evangelicals oppose his refusal. They think it is better to attribute good and bad things to God".
- According to Ira Chernus (Pearl Harbor Myth Poses Dangers, 2001): "This German-Japanese foe was widely depicted as the devil incarnate. Once German and Japanese actions were transformed into acts of Satan, we had no reason to ask about the historical causes or motives of those actions. In myth and folklore, the devil does evil because it is his nature; he can do nothing else. Today, the Pearl Harbor myth encourages us to view some Muslims as agents of the devil, doing evil for evil's sake, as if their own history and the world's history had nothing to do with it".
- As the editor of a newsletter, Samuelle Bacchiocchi (God and Tsumani: What is the Lord Telling Us? Endtime Issues Newsletter #125): "...several subscribers have attempted to prove to me that natural disasters are 'acts of Satan' allowed by God. The implication seems to be that there is an agreement between God and Satan about the time, the place, and the extent in which Satan is allowed to carry out his destructive activities. As we shall see, this view poses some problems that need to be resolved".

If indeed an "Act of Satan" is "anything contrary to God's will", as suggested above, then:

- either Hurricane Katrina was instigated against God's will, and therefore is an "Act of Satan" which calls for careful interpretation by Bible Belt evangelicals as to why God allowed Satan to get the upper hand in dealing with people of God
- or Hurricane Katrina was instigated in fulfillment of God's will and then indeed the Bible Belt evangelicals need to consider very carefully what God is endeavouring to communicate to them in particular

Further difficulties are associated with "Acts of Satan" in that the actions of the evangelical-supported US military in Iraq and Afghanistan are perceived there to be "Acts of Satan" -- and not acts undertaken by the US military with the special blessing that God reserves for the American people.

I call'd the devil, and he came,
"Acts of al-Qaida"?

Much is currently made of any form of non-state-supported bombing as being necessarily in some way an "Act of al-Qaida". It is interesting to compare understandings of the existence "God" (and the nature of credible proof for God's existence), with understandings of "al-Qaida" (and the nature of credible proof for al-Qaida's existence). Both have become to a large extent acts of faith. Both are subject to special provision in insurance policies. Curiously, the similarity of these "escape clauses" could lead to an interpretation of "Acts of al-Qaida" as being equivalent to "Acts of God" and "Acts of Allah" -- at least for the insurance industry.

As argued elsewhere (Cui Bono: Groupthink vs Thinking the Unthinkable? Reframing the suffocating consensus in response to 7/7, 2005), "al-Qaida" is a name that some terrorism experts claim was imposed by Western officials on to disparate radical Islamic groups to give their amorphous enemy a degree of conventional coherence -- and by doing so blew Osama bin Laden's power and reach "out of proportion". Whilst concerned about the threat of terror, they argue that we should "debunk the myth of al-Qaeda" (cf Brendan O'Neill, Does al-Qaeda exist? Not in the way that we think, say some terrorism experts, 28 November 2003; Adam Dolnik and Kimberly A McCloud, Debunk the myth of al-Qaeda, Christian Science Monitor, 23 May 2002).

Adam Curtis presented in 2004 a series of BBC documentaries entitled The Power of Nightmares that showed how the fantasy image of the "al-Qaida organization" was created, arguing that the real threat came not from a network but from individuals and groups linked only by an idea (The making of the terror myth, The Guardian, 15 October 2004). Now he argues:

Unfortunately hundreds, if not thousands, of suspects have been systematically tortured with the tacit approval of evangelical Christians -- whether in the countries of the Coalition of the Willing or in client states willing to assist the leaders of the Coalition in their policy of torture by proxy through "rendition". The objective has been to get them to admit to their links with what amounts to a phantom organization. At a peak of pain suspects are naturally willing to say anything -- and they do indeed admit to such links -- who would not?

This "shoddy intelligence" is transferred back to western intelligence agencies [more | more]. This reinforces the outdated belief of those intelligence agencies in the existence of the "al-Qaida organization" -- and their ability to draft political statements to the media to that effect. No scrap of hard evidence is offered to authenticate pronouncements by "al-Qaida spokespersons". Is there any difference from the attitude and practices of the interrogators of the Inquisition in vainly seeking analogous links of suspects with "Satan"? This too finally reinforced the interrogators in their priestly belief in the existence of Satan -- as a result of agnosticism experience they had instigated as Christians. It is a sad irony of history that it was the Protestant founders of America that fled Europe for that reason.

God's Will?

Given the special connection of the USA with God, notably through the doctrine of Manifest Destiny, and through the special access to God claimed by George W Bush on behalf of the American people, the key question is whether God's Will is being heard by evangelical Christians. Correct interpretation of the Will of God is vital when the world's superpower shifts from "reality-based" (or "evidence-based") governance to "faith-based governance" (cf Future Challenge of Faith-based Governance, 2003). It has been a problem for priests down the ages. The question is how does God help people to understand that his Will is being misunderstood? The Bible has many examples of God's use of natural disasters to demonstrate extreme wrath.

If Hurricane Katrina is a direct message from God (and not from Satan or al-Qaida), various individuals and groups must be understood as having misunderstood God's Will:

- Reverend Pat Robertson would seem to have got it wrong in calling for the assassination of President Hugo Chavez.
- George Bush would seem to have got it wrong in so strongly justifying further sustained warfare in Iraq to the Veterans of Foreign Wars.
- Tony Blair would seem to have got it wrong in framing his new legislation -- now to be faced with a problem of how he defines as acceptable calls for assassination by Christian evangelicals (perhaps he too could define such calls from Christians as "inappropriate", and reserve the full force of the law for action against clerics of other faiths inciting people in that way)
- The Christian evangelicals, at least in the Bible Belt, would seem to have got it wrong in buying into the agenda of the Christian
Some Christian fundamentalists have however suggested an alternative interpretation of the disastrous impact on sinful New Orleans -- although it was not clear how this explanation accounted for the damage to neighboring Bible Belt states. Also it would seem to have been poorly timed by God to "take out" the maximum number of sinners, if that was the intention. The interpretation is clarified in a press release from Repent America titled Hurricane Katrina destroys New Orleans days before "Southern Decadence" -- the 34th annual week of celebration scheduled, coincidentally, from 31 August 2005:

"Southern Decadence" has a history of filling the French Quarters section of the city with drunken homosexuals engaging in sex acts in the public streets and bars.... However, Hurricane Katrina has put an end to the annual celebration of sin....[that] brought in "125,000 revelers" to New Orleans last year.... "Although the loss of lives is deeply saddening, this act of God destroyed a wicked city," stated Repent America director Michael Marcavage. 'From 'Girls Gone Wild' to 'Southern Decadence,' New Orleans was a city that had its doors wide open to the public celebration of sin. From the devastation may a city full of righteousness emerge," he continued. "May this act of God cause us all to think about what we tolerate in our city limits, and bring us trembling before the throne of Almighty God," Marcavage concluded.

The key question is whether al-Qaida has the technology to cause a hurricane to form -- perhaps some breakthrough in weather modification technology as foreseen by Nikolai Tesla (cf Weather Control: Great Floods of 1993 Caused by US/Russian Weather Control?, Weather Modification, Terrorism, Biological and Chemical Warfare). Evidence exists for its use in changing the direction of hurricanes [more].

Perhaps Hurricane Katrina was the result of a US experiment by HAARP (High frequency Active Auroral Research Program) that went wrong. Or, conceivably, it worked just fine. For example, a member of the Ukrainian parliament, Yuri Solomatin (HAARP Poses Global Threat, January 2003) indicated that weather disasters in Europe during 2002 were caused by an advanced weapon which could trigger a global catastrophe. Maybe al-Qaida has a counterpart to HAARP?

A bill is under consideration to create a Weather Modification Board in the USA starting October 2005. This is consistent with a long-term US strategy -- in pursuit of "Full Spectrum Dominance" -- to engage in weather warfare [more]. As noted by Bob Fitrakis (Weather Warfare, 2004), this was publicly articulated in 1997 by Arnold A. Barnes, Jr. of John Hopkins University and Senior Scientist at Phillips Laboratory in an address on "The Army After Next, How Will We Test? Weather Modification." Barnes referred to a document subsequently named as Weather As A Force Multiplier: Owning the Weather in 2025 (1996). That study envisaged a program that included: precipitation enhancement (or avoidance), storm enhancement (or modification), and precipitation denial -- presumably "hurricane formation" would be one aspect.

If the 10 years of subsequent development of this technology by the USA or its opponents, resulted in the damage caused by Hurricane Katrina, there are wider questions to be asked:

- Were Castro and Chavez able to use their own breakthrough in weather technology to form and direct the hurricane towards the USA?
- Was the hurricane formed by the USA as a weather attack on Cuba, only to be successfully deflected by Castro-Chavez to the USA?
- Was the hurricane indeed the result of a failed US experiment?
- Was the hurricane damage the result of a successful initiative of the same kind as 9/11 -- as envisaged by conspiracy theorists?

But in the absence of proof regarding use of weather modification technology, it is possible that the western media could be persuaded to frame Castro and Chavez as having gathered together from 22 August in some new high power voodoo ceremony -- using powerful weather shaman to gather and focus meteorological energy -- a deliberate vehicle for an "Act of Satan" (as imaginatively explored with a dust storm in the 1999 movie The Mummy). But if this was the case, what was God doing in the meanwhile?

"Twinning" New Orleans with Fallujah

It is possible that God is extremely unhappy about the engagement policies of Coalition troops in Iraq -- of which a major example is undoubtedly the undocumented destructiveness vented upon Falluja, with uncounted numbers of dead, notably due to the use of
thermobaric weapons (cf James Dunning, *The Lessons of Fallujah*, 19 August 2005). Given the deliberate effort to avoid exposing those responsible for the slaughter in Fallujah to the effects of their actions, is God obliged to seek other ways to bring such matters to their attention? Is it possible that God considers that evangelicals have such difficulty in hearing His Word on these matters that, reluctantly, the only way to get their attention is to "bring Falluja to the Bible Belt" to assist their meditation?

There is tremendous historical irony to any perversely macabre "twinning" of New Orleans and Fallujah in the light of the disasters they respectively suffered. The population of New Orleans, according to the census of 2000, was 486,674. An estimate of the population of Fallujah in 500,000 was 2003. In each case some 80% of the population left their cities before the disaster -- but many had nowhere to go. In the case of New Orleans, presumably as with Fallujah, the poor who suffered most are likely to have the hardest task in rebuilding their lives. Curiously, in the land of the free, it was mainly blacks, the poor, the old and the sick who were obliged to stay behind in New Orleans -- and await relief and security efforts by whites.

In the light of the American attack, it has been suggested that Fallujah will be described as the new Guernica -- the Basque capital that resisted the Spanish dictator Francisco Franco in 1937. Pepe Escobar (*From Guernica to Fallujah, Asia Times*, 2 December 2004) notes:

"Fallujah in 2004 was resisting the dictator Iyad Allawi, the US-installed interim premier. Franco asked Nazi Germany - which supported him - to bomb Guernica, just as Allawi "asked" the Pentagon to bomb Fallujah. Guernica had no air force and no anti-aircraft guns to defend itself - just like Fallujah. In Guernica - as in Fallujah - there was no distinction between civilians and guerrillas: the order was to "kill them all"...Marine commanders said on the record that Fallujah was the house of Satan...."

This view would accord with that of evangelicals who, as noted above, also saw New Orleans as a wicked city of sin worthy of an "Act of God" because of the annual Southern Decadence celebration of iniquity. Escobar's description continued:

"Fallujah has been reduced to rubble, and thousands of civilians have died.... More than 15,000 refugee families may be living in sordid makeshift shelters around Fallujah - not to mention the upwards of 200,000 residents who escaped the city before it was leveled.... The defining image of Fallujah - for Iraqis, for the Arab world, for 1.3 billion Muslims - is the summary execution of a wounded, defenseless Iraqi man inside a mosque by a marine. This execution, caught on tape, suggests "special" rules of engagement were applying.

There is however a strange inversion. Little of what occurred in Fallujah was made known to the world through the media (cf Rahul Mahajan, *Report from Fallujah -- Destroying a Town in Order to Save It*, CommonDreams.org, 12 April 2004; *Fallujah families reveal horror in the city*, *Al Jazeera Magazine*, 16 November 2004). The American population had no comprehension of it. The perpetrators had every justification for being deeply ashamed and systematically prohibiting any such media coverage.

The disaster faced by the citizens of New Orleans has however been widely and extensively communicated. It finally gives Americans some real sense of what was experienced in Fallujah at the hands of their evangelical-supported military: rotting dead bodies in the street, families forced to live like animals, no water, no electricity, no food, no sanitation, exposure to disease, no medical services, no shelter, no public assistance -- plus extensive looting, violence, rape, sniper fire, and the psychological trauma of broken lives and missing relatives.

Commentators repeatedly describe the situation as "mind-boggling". Those left behind were forced to endure appalling degradation and gang violence in official shelters that military authorities feared to enter. The scale of the refugee problem, as with many as half a million homeless, also overwhelmed authorities -- who seemed to have considered that the refugee problem was not a part of emergency management, until the media persuaded them to the contrary.

A CNN commentator described it as like a "lawless deadly war zone". It is useful to remember that that is also how it was in Fallujah -- a reason for the subsequent high levels of psychological trauma amongst those who perpetrated it. There is no mention of the scale of the refugee problem relating to Fallujah.

The irony in New Orleans was the similar paucity of official assistance, whether in the form of security, emergency supplies, shelter, or evacuation -- and the incomprehensible delay in making them available. In a further irony, there was probably far more government "air support" in Fallujah than was initially made available in New Orleans. But, as in Fallujah, snipers fired on military helicopters in New Orleans -- making it clear that amongst the civilians present there were "insurgents" exploiting the situation -- presumably "foreign agents" of al-Qaida, fomenting civil unrest. Such a situation in New Orleans called for "zero tolerance" -- a "shoot-to-kill" response -- by security forces when their ground forces finally arrived in armoured cars.

The rules of engagement seem to have been similar to those in Fallujah. For commentators, and those in distress, the fearfulness of the military was strange to observe -- echoes of Fallujah? When American forces entered downtown New Orleans in armoured vehicles, their standard rules of engagement had to be specifically countermanded to point their weapons down, rather than at the American refugees in distress (at least while the camera was tracking them). The posture of whites with rifles "overseeing" disadvantaged blacks is of course iconic in the Bible Belt states (cf Gary Younge, *Left to sink or swim*, The Guardian, 5 September 2005).

History may note the parallel between:

- Condolezza Rice's affirmation (4 September 2005) that "Nobody, especially the president, would have left people unattended on the basis of race." [more], and
- Colin Powell's affirmations, with the aid of an anthrax vial at the UN Security Council (5 February 2003), regarding the justification for intervention in Iraq [more]
The racial issue so evident to TV audiences around the world, was reportedly aggravated on the ground by white guardsmen observing with indifference the condition of those in need of help or protection -- and even laughing at them. Reuters, for example, reported that during the visit of Vice President Dick Cheney to the disaster area, he greeted the guardsmen and ignored the blacks in distress nearby. Allegedly whites were evacuated from major hotels, leaving blacks. When elite army forces finally arrived to occupy a city virtually emptied of its inhabitants, the parallel with the military priority in Iraq of guarding property was also striking -- even though it was real estate rather than oil facilities.

Unfortunately the major political lesson for the American administration, as with Fallujah, will be to ensure the exclusion of the media from future disaster areas to avoid disseminating politically damaging images. The excuse, rather than "national security", will be "impeding the rescue operation" -- but, as in Fallujah, it will be framed as for the journalists' own security.

Comprehending the delayed response

The flooding tragedy, due to lack of maintenance of the levees, was a direct the result of the earlier transfer of the necessary funding to George Bush's budget for homeland security and the war in Iraq (Why city's defences were down, The Guardian, 1 September 2005). Ironically the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), whose budget has been reduced since 9/11 to deal with terrorists, is directed by a close Bush friend, Michael Brown -- previously a rule enforcer for the International Arabian Horse Association. FEMA is overseen by the newly created Department of Homeland Security, headed by Michael Chertoff. Despite the delays and the dead, Chertoff stated: "We are extremely pleased with the response of every element of the federal government, all of our federal partners, to this terrible tragedy." (cf Why did help take so long to arrive?, 3 September 2005). How is this attitude to be reconciled with "homeland security"?

The day after Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast, George Bush was playing golf. He waited three days to make a TV appearance and five days before visiting the disaster site.

Possibly more American lives were lost in New Orleans, than in Iraq, as a result of transferring Louisiana troops to Iraq to protect American lives and homes -- in pursuit of George Bush's deep understanding of God's Will and the priorities of homeland security, for which he was elected with the notable support of the Christian Coalition of Reverend Robertson.

"I've tried to turn away from the TV because it's too hard to watch... Bush doesn't care about black people. It's been five days [waiting for help] because most of the people are black. America is set up to help the poor, the black people, the less well-off, as slow as possible."
Rapper Kanye West, on a live NBC television special to raise funds for the victims

As noted by the former editor of the New York Times, Howard Raines (I'm just glad I saw it, The Guardian, 1 September 2005):

The performance of George Bush during this past week has been outrageous. Almost as unbelievable as Katrina itself is the fact that the leader of the free world has been outshone by the elected leaders of a region renowned for governmental inpetitude. Louisiana's anguished governor... climbed into a helicopter at the first possible moment to survey what may become the worst weather-related disaster in American history. She might even have been able to stop the looting in New Orleans if the 141st Field Artillery of the Louisiana Army National Guard had not been in Iraq for the past 11 months. They are among thousands of Southern guardsmen who could have been federalised by the stroke of a pen had they not been deployed in a phony war.

In the case of Guernica, Franco denied there had been any massacre and blamed the local population -- just as Allawi and the Pentagon have denied any responsibility for civilian deaths in Fallujah and insist that it was the "insurgents" that were guilty. Had any civilians been killed -- God forbid -- their deaths would have been framed as "collateral damage", unfortunate but acceptable, as military chaplains would have explained. In the case of those innocent in the eyes of God in New Orleans, one might ask what was God's policy on "collateral damage" in the course of his "Act of God" intervention through Hurricane Katrina. As with Guernica and Fallujah, the Bush administration has been quick to defend itself -- by blaming the locals (Julian Borger, Bush team tries to pin blame on local officials, 5 September 2005).

As the response to the disastrous situation in New Orleans progressed, it became clear that "news management" policies were increasingly framing the media realness to conceal the chaotic disaster response and the federal incompetence associated with the delays. All issues were "being addressed" -- "help was on its way" -- whether or not there was any truth to the announcements. Priority had to be given to the protection of reputations rather than to the saving of lives. When George Bush finally arrived on site, his staged walkabout -- hugging a child -- recalled images of tyrants in the past, rated scandalously cynical at the time. It had qualities similar to his visit to troops in Baghdad in 2003 on Thanksgiving -- bearing a plastic turkey for a photo-opportunity (cf Politicization of Evidence in the Plastic Turkey Era, 2003)

Security forces focused on protection of property from those seeking food and water for the dying, framing them as looters meriting a "shoot-to-kill" policy. Media coverage was criticized for creating a sympathetic image of white people fleeing, and black people caught up in a shoplifting orgy. There were moments of total contradiction between the images on CNN and the voice-over from official declarations, notably responses with respect to security, looting and the arrival of long-promised vital assistance (cf Dan Froomkin, The Gulf Between Rhetoric and Reality, The Washington Post, 2 September 2005). As might be expected, the Republican governors of Alabama and Mississippi rated the federal government's relief efforts as "great".

It would however be no surprise to learn that, like in Fallujah, there would be strong resistance to "counting bodies" of the locals --
however carefully the health of the heroic rescuers is documented. The true total number might of course be classified for reasons of national security. There was of course no question that resources had been inappropriately allocated to Iraq, thus reducing the effectiveness of the response in New Orleans.

Local rage was best articulated by the Mayor of New Orleans, Ray Nagin, who called for a moratorium on disaster press conferences and photo opportunities -- delayed until there was some evidence that the long-promised assistance was finally arriving -- when it was "too doggone late". He declared:

"You mean to tell me that a place where you probably have thousands of people that have died and thousands more that are dying every day, that we can't figure out a way to authorize the resources we need? Come on, man!"

For Nagin, in a desperate SOS: "God is looking down on this... and they are going to pay". To Bush he said: "Fix this goddam crisis" (as headlined in the Financial Times, 3 September 2005). Ironically, Christian faith-based organizations, like the PICO network, encouraged by the Bush administration to take over community support as federal support was progressively reduced, noted: "We are watching catastrophic failure by public officials to respond to those most vulnerable".

Many commentators have subsequently asked why Cuba is so much better prepared for Gulf hurricane strikes? It would be a great irony if, as a consequence, the black population of the USA converted massively to the Nation of Islam in order to obtain better protection from future "Acts of God" than is available under evangelical Christians. Cynics have suggested that, under free market principles, emergency preparedness might be fruitfully outsourced by Louisiana to Cubans.

As with Fallujah, only occasional commentators ventured to refer to the racial/ethnic dimensions of the response to the crisis and the effective framing of those who suffered most. Some 63% of the population of New Orleans was black -- and it had been such people who had not had the resources or transportation to leave the city, let alone having anywhere to go. Of the city's residents 20% had no access to a car. Those in the National Guard who might have responded with earlier assistance were primarily white -- reflecting the historical polarization and prejudices of Bible Belt society. As noted by CNN, there was the possibility that "people may be dying because of the colour of their skin". As a description of the USA, The Financial Times (3 September 2005) noted that "the disaster has starkly exposed exposed its racial divisions and economic inequality". A representative of the Congressional Black Caucus, Carolyn Cheeks Karpatick, expressed her "outrage" at the response of the Republican authorities -- who exemplified such attitudes.

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\text{"We cannot sow the wind of economic exploitation without reaping the whirlwind of social and political chaos. Our economic choices have consequences, as Israel's elites learned belatedly through the experience of exile. Those consequences, however, are not simply social and political; they are also spiritual. The decisions we make as employers, workers, consumers, investors, and voters reflect either faithfulness or betrayal of God. They either enhance or inhibit our capacity to receive the true riches that are our inheritance as children of God."} \\
\text{John Kirkley, Faithful in a Little, 1996}
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Despite an ability to respond with pinpoint accuracy to incoming missile threats within minutes, how then to understand the critical three-day delay required for the world's superpower to respond to a disaster for its people, or even to decide on the nature of the appropriate response. A variety of reasons could therefore be envisaged:

- many, who would normally have been swiftly mobilized to help in evacuation, were on duty in Iraq.
- helicopters to lift people to safety and bring in security forces and vital supplies were not available -- they were in Iraq -- or "misplaced", as queried by Michael Moore (Vacation is Over... an open letter from Michael Moore to George W. Bush, 2 September 2005).
- much of the relevant heavy equipment of the Louisiana National Guard, including generators, high-water and other vehicles was in Iraq.
- presumably satellites capable of providing detailed imagery to assist the evolving crisis were targetted on the Middle East
- those capable of ensuring effective "command and control" on the ground were also in Iraq.
- individuals in the chain of command may have been encouraged to delay or withhold vital relief for as long as possible to complete the destruction:
  - due to perceptions framed by ubiquitous racist, supremacist beliefs and traditional southern attitudes to "black trash", possibly associated with Christian fundamentalism [more]
  - due to perceptions by fundamentalist Christians that sinful New Orleans merited complete cleaning out, thus assisting God in the righteous anger delivered through Katrina
  - due to perceived need to test viability of emergency and homeland security plans in anticipation of future crises -- on a segment of the population rated as expendable

The style of response, despite years of emergency scenario planning, suggests the existence of a deliberate, large-scale policy of population "triage" reminiscent of crimes against humanity in other countries. The deliberate major reduction in funding for levee reinforcement suggests a deliberate policy to increase the vulnerability of New Orleans to such destruction in pursuit of undeclared agendas.

Is this some curious exercise in anticipating evangelical rapture? The whites fleeing in their SUVs to safe havens echoes the fantasies of "beaming up" to heaven, whilst the blacks are cast in the sinful role of the "left behind", as in the end times novels of Jerry Jenkins and Tim Lahaye [more].

The Jesus is God Ministries celebrated the justice of the divine retribution on Louisiana with a poem entitled "The Perfect Storm" (3
Extremism is also evident in the leadership failure relating to Hurriance Katrina. The obsession of such a worldview with the sinfulness of homosexuality contrasts strangely with the indifference of that mindset to the extent to which male-dominated institutions are engaged in "inappropriate" relationships, to the point of being illegitimately "in bed with one another": the "military-industry complex", church and state, academia and defence research, etc. One might query the coincidental similarities between:

- the focus on terrorism by government as a justification for restriction of civil rights, despite the consequent severe defects in the ability of "homeland security" to respond to disasters
- the use of the Katrina disaster as a justification and cover for controversial directives of considerable benefit to the oil industry, notably the Department of Homeland Security's waiver (3 September 2005) of the Jones Act of 1920 forbidding non-U.S. ships from hauling cargo between American ports
- the benefits received by Reverend Pat Robertson's Operation Blessing International Relief and Development Corporation from Hurricane Katrina, despite his call for the assassination of President Chavez; the organization is promoted as a priority donor on the websites of both FEMA and CNN

Is it similar thinking that now constrains official USA response to the suffering of peoples and the planet? How should such sympathies be distinguished from those of radical Islamic clerics, presented as the prime catalyst for terrorism?

**Struggle against extremism**

Given the new policy of Bush and Blair, dating from late July 2005, to replace the "war on terror" by a "struggle against extremism", there is a strong case for looking at Hurricane Katrina as a prime example of the kind extremism it is hoped to eliminate (cf *Norms in the Global Struggle against Extremism: "rooting for" normalization vs. "rooting out" extremism?* 2005). Maybe there is a case for exploring whether God is indeed, by nature, an extremist -- worthy of "rooting out", to employ Tony Blair's terminology.

Some have asked whether God was indeed a terrorist -- given the terrifying effects of "Acts of God" (cf *Is God a Terrorist: Definitional game-playing by the Coalition of the Willing?* 2004). Following Hurricane Katrina, the case can surely be made that God is the prime terrorist of the planet Earth -- with a proven (as opposed to hypothetical) arsenal of weapons of mass destruction that continues to proliferate -- aided and abetted by George Bush's policy on climate change. Spokespersons for "al-Qaida" have repeatedly made the point that they are acting in the name of "Allah" (a.k.a. "God"). This is clearly somebody who consequently needs to be "taken out", in the words of the Reverend Robertson, in order to protect American interests, and ensure an uninterrupted oil supply. Furthermore a close look should clearly be taken at Bible Belt evangelicals for their continuing capacity to harbour knowingly a prime terrorist suspect who seemingly (as a kind of "double agent") also controls the whole "al-Qaida organization".

On the other hand, doing the "cross thing" for Christians, for example, should surely also be interpreted as extremism by God -- worthy of condemnation.

In physical terms, there is of course a problem in undertaking such "rooting out" in that major hurricanes tend to release destructive energy many times that released by the US at Hiroshima -- as noted by Mississippi's Governor, the former head of the Republican National Committee, Haley Barbour: "It looks like Hiroshima is what it looks like". Such extremism is beyond anything a superpower is currently capable of containing.

Concern with "climate change" may also be understood as giving inappropriate credence to a degree of extremism on the part of God, justifying every repressive measure against scientists investigating it (*Republicans accused of witch-hunt against climate change scientists, The Guardian,* 30 August 2005). There is some irony that this invasive investigation should be announced whilst Katrina was perpetrating maximal damage on the Bible Belt states. (see also *Banished Whistle-Blowers,* The New York Times, 1 September 2005). The attitude is reminiscent of that of the Thai government which forced the head of the Thai meteorological office to retire in 1998 -- accused of scaremongering and jeopardising the tourist industry -- for having warned that the coast was dangerously vulnerable to the effects of tsunami. After tens of thousands of deaths in the tsunami of 2004, he was reinstated in 2005 as minister in charge of the Thai disaster warning office.

The number of hurricanes forecast for 2005 has increased [more]. None commented on the possibility that the next might be on the same scale as Katrina -- and in the same area. Future hurricanes may be even more damaging if God's extremism in indulging in climate change continues to be denied, and sea temperatures continue to rise. The destructive power of hurricanes is now estimated to have doubled over the past 30 years (*Global Warming Making Hurricanes Stronger, 31 July 2005; Is Global Warming Causing More Devastating Hurricanes Worldwide? Democracy Now,* 29 August 2005). Katrina's real name is "global warming" -- as explained by Ross Gelbspan (*Katrina's real name, The Boston Globe,* 30 August 2005). He documents the extent to which public utilities and oil companies have paid millions to prevent American public awareness of this.

What of the extreme denial demonstrated by the evangelical-supported Republican policies that refused so evidently to strengthen dykes as recommended by numerous studies over decades? What does that imply for the other more problematic urgent issues, similarly ignored by that same extremist mindset, despite numerous reports on them. How should that extremism be "rooted out" and "struggled against"?

Extremism is also evident in the leadership failure relating to Hurricane Katrina. The leader writer, under the title *The week Bush failed America: New Orleans deserved better* (*The Observer*, London, 4 September 2005) noted:

> The conclusion that there has been a monumental failure of leadership is unavoidable. President Bush did not promptly cut short his holiday. He did not offer early reassurance and comfort to the American people, nor, when he did address the nation, did he convince anyone that he had an adequate understanding of the situation or had prepared a muscular response.
But given that the difficulties were in part based on a faith-based (and supported) strategy against terrorism epitomized by Iraq, in order to protect the homeland, the writer continued:

But in this respect, God is of course also understood to have a variety of non-physical ways of acting. These may exceed to a very high degree the capacity of the western media to reframe the challenge of Katrina in support of the Bush-Blair historical error -- and their taking the name of the Lord in vain.

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Behavior, the whirlwind of the Lord goeth forth with fury,
a continuing whirlwind: it shall fall with pain upon the head of the wicked.
Jeremiah 30:23

Thus saith the Lord of hosts,
Behold, evil shall go forth from nation to nation,
and a great whirlwind shall be raised up from the coasts of the earth.
Jeremiah 30:32

God moves in mysterious ways, His wonders to perform

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