

Do Gays Cause Hurricanes?

by Janis Walworth

Do “Unnatural” Acts Cause Natural Disasters?

Repent America director Michael Marcavage, blamed Hurricane Katrina on gays and on those who tolerate us in New Orleans. Earlier, Pat Robertson, founder of the *Christian Coalition*, warned Orlando, Florida, that it was courting natural disaster by allowing gay pride flags to be flown along its streets.

“A condition like this will bring about ... earthquakes, tornadoes, and possibly a meteor,” he said, apparently referring to his belief that the presence of openly gay people incurs divine wrath and that God acts through geological and meteorological events to destroy municipalities that permit gay people the same civil liberties as others. (Robertson also warned Orlando about terrorist bombs, suggesting the possibility that God may also employ terrorists.)

Before Michael, Pat and their Christian cronies get too carried away promulgating the idea that people who displease God prompt natural disasters, they should take a hard look at the data. Take tornadoes. Every state (except Alaska) has them – some only one or two a year, dozens in others. Gay people are in every state (even Alaska). According to Pat’s hypothesis, there should be more gay people in states that have more tornadoes. But are there? Nope. In fact, there’s no correlation at all between the number of gay folks (as estimated by the number of gay political organizations, support groups, bookstores, radio programs, and circuit parties) and the annual tornado count ($r = .04$, $p = .78$ for you statisticians). So much for the “God hates gays” theory.

God seems almost neutral on the subject of sexual orientation. I say “almost” because if we look at the density of gay groups relative to the population as a whole, there is a small but statistically significant ($p < .05$) correlation with the occurrence of tornadoes. And it’s a negative correlation ($r = -.28$). For those of you who haven’t used statistics since 1973, that means that a high concentration of gay organizations actually protects against tornadoes. A state with the population of, say, Alabama could avert two tornadoes a year merely by doubling the number of gay organizations in the state. (Tough choice for Alabama’s civil defense strategists.)

Although God may not care about sexual orientation, the same cannot be said for religious affiliation. If the underlying tenet of Pat’s postulate is true – that God wipes out offensive folks via natural disasters – then perhaps we can find some evidence of who’s on God’s hit list. Jews are off the hook here: there’s no correlation between numbers of Jews and frequency of tornadoes. Ditto for Catholics. But when it comes to Protestants, there’s a highly significant correlation of .71.

This means that fully half the state-to-state variation in tornado frequency can be accounted for by the presence of Protestants. And the chance that this association is merely coincidental is only one in 10,000. Protestants, of course, come in many flavors – we were able to find statistics for Lutherans, Methodists, Baptists, and Other. Lutherans don’t seem to be a problem – no correlation with tornadoes. There’s a modest correlation ($r = .52$, $p = .0001$) between Methodists

and tornadoes. But Baptists and Others share the prize: both groups show a definite correlation with tornado frequency ($r = .68$, $p = .0001$). This means that Texas could cut its average of 139 tornadoes per year in half by sending a few hundred thousand Baptists elsewhere. (Alaska maybe?)

What, you are probably asking yourself, about gay Protestants? An examination of the numbers of gay religious groups (mostly Protestant) reveals no significant relationship with tornadoes. Perhaps even Protestants are less repugnant to God if they're gay. And that brings up another point – the futility of trying to save the world by getting gay people to accept Jesus. It looks from our numbers like the frequency of natural disasters could be more effectively reduced by encouraging Protestants to be gay.

Gay people have been falsely blamed for disasters ever since Sodom was destroyed by fire and brimstone (we have been unable to find any statistics on disasters involving brimstone). According to a reliable source (The Holy Bible, no less), the destruction of Sodom was indeed an act of God (see Genesis 19:13) and was perpetrated because the citizens thereof were, according to the same source (see Ezekiel 16:49-50), “arrogant, overfed and unconcerned [and] did not help the poor and needy” [their sins were Incivility and an absence of Charity] not because they were gay.

However, Pat [Robertson] would have us believe that gays are the cause of tornadoes (as well as earthquakes, meteors, and even terrorist bombs) in utter disregard for evidence showing that Baptists are much more likely to cause them.

I say “Kudos!” to Orlando. Despite Robertson’s warning that Orlando is “right in the way of some serious hurricanes” (hardly a revelation), note that the very destructive Hurricane Andrew did not strike it a few years ago. And amid the recent conflagrations (that’s fires) in central Florida, which occurred just after Pat sounded his alarm, Orlando was spared. Keep those [rainbow] flags waving!

As any statistician will tell you, of course, correlation doesn’t prove causation. Protestants causing tornadoes by angering God isn’t the only explanation for these data. It could be that Baptists and Other Protestants purposely flock to states that have lots of tornadoes (no, we haven’t checked for a correlation between IQ and religious affiliation). But if Michael, Pat and their Christian crews insist that people who offend God bring on natural disasters, let the data show who those people are.