

Earthquakes, Gods and California

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Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [History](#)

"We all want to enjoy the fruits of the quakes, so we all have to prepare for the downside too." – Ross S. Stein, United States Geological Survey, Aug 24, 2014

It had to come, and it was just a relief that it did not do more damage than initially promised. Northern California's first damaging earthquake since 1989 ended up showing contempt less of people than wine and infrastructure. South Napa is facing a state of emergency, as declared by California Governor Jerry Brown. The epicentre of the quake, with a magnitude between 6 and 6.1, was identified roughly six miles south-southwest of Napa, and 51 miles west-southwest of Sacramento.

After the quake struck around 3.20 am on Sunday, aftershocks followed. About 120 people were treated at Queen of the Valley Medical Centre in Napa, with only a handful needing actual hospitalisation. A few critical cases have been noted. The Pacific Gas and Electric Company revealed that 15,000 customers in Napa, Sonoma and Santa Rosa counties were without power. Buildings in Napa took quite a beating, including a host of historic gems – notably the Napa County Courthouse and Goodman Library.

After the digestion of damage, the responses, leaving aside the usual terrified calls, started taking shape. One was the invariably economic concern about the wine industry and infrastructure. A prediction that is taking hold, one fostered by the United States Geological Survey, is that the cost will come to \$1 billion. This was California doing the sums, though Ross S. Stein of the US Geological Survey was quick to point out that, "We owe wine country in part to earthquakes."[\[1\]](#)

Then came another response, one somewhat less sensibly oriented. It did not take long for a certain smugness to bubble to the surface after the early hours of Sunday – those in California were getting their just desserts, be it for their weighty liberalism, or their homosexual, reefer loving proclivities.

Where there is natural disaster, there will be unnatural speculation. Fox Nation readers were quick off the mark, with tweets hoping that the earthquake had taken the lives of "libnutjobs". "We may be witnessing a mass reduction in the liberalnutjob population any minute!"[\[2\]](#)

A forum for the Landover Baptist Church, running one of the "Official True Christian Church Web Forums", brimmed with joy. A story from Kron was posted noting 90 hospitalisations and three critically injured. "This story got me excited this morning. Further proof that God really does hate the homers. Look for more devastation in the coming days, months, years, decades and centuries, as the Lord sees fit."[\[3\]](#)

Cultural responses to earthquakes provide a historically rich list. Some African notions locate

the cause of earthquakes to the workings of the dead inhabiting the underworld. Mythologies and religions that see the earth as borne by some deity or super being find logic in the idea that any rumblings must arise from an intentional slip on its part.

In the United States, where Christian religion beats regularly and sometimes frenetically, explanations can vary between the eschatological premises of the Book and doom of political and personal choices. Televangelist Pat Robertson spent much of his time ventriloquising God's message, or at least what he thought was His august voice. But in doing so, he also threw in the odd works of the Devil.

In 2010, with Haiti reeling from a devastating quake, Robertson suggested that the natural disasters that had plagued the country arose from a deal made between the black leaders of the 1791 revolution against French rule. "They said, 'We will serve you if you get us free from the French.' True story. And so, the devil said, 'OK, it's a deal.'"[4] Unfortunately for Robertson, such notions have been fanciful church propaganda, the sort designed to control the restless natives and keep them in their place.

The prophesy doomsayers have tended to have much work on the religious circuit. The Morningstar Advanced Prophetic Ministry Conference in February, 2013 got busy on the subject of predicting the next earthquake that would savage the West coast.

Such actions are tantamount to suggesting that the sun will rise in the morning, the sort of dulling predictability that makes such discussions more amusing than useful. But ministers such as Rick Joyner, Bob Jones and Paul Keith Davis tend to be interested in fanciful signs and sign posts. For Jones, it was dolphins coming together, communing in the anticipation of a doomsday event. "I feel that this is a warning. Nature is warning us." [5] But God does things in stages, a deity of staggered warnings. For Joyner, the Good Lord was busy showing "us the big one that is coming, but He showed us a warning quake too."

Those of greater level headedness were more concerned that many buildings did not meet the revised standards of earthquake protection. Efforts had been made, but these were insufficiently slow. There was also a sense that better early warning systems might have been in place - had they received sufficient funding.

A system devised by UC Berkeley scientists would effectively "give downtown Los Angeles 40 to 50 seconds of warning that the 'Big One' was headed from the San Andreas fault, giving time for elevators to stop at the next floor and open up, fire fighters to open up garage doors, high-speed trains to slow down to avoid derailment and surgeons to take the scalpel out of a patient." [6] Pity, then, of the retarded progress because of a lack of finance.

Whatever the disaster, the residents of California will stay put. The same holds for those whose populations have suffered at nature's hands. The argument that they should move to avoid doom is tantamount to suggesting that doom can be avoided. Do we, in fact, live in the best possible of worlds, however out of kilter? Those who believed in the theodicy of Gottfried Leibniz would have thought so, though it was Voltaire who reminded us that evil is pervasive. Best get on with life - God remains the greatest of historical absentees.

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Notes

[1]

http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/25/us/strong-earthquake-shakes-bay-area-in-california.html?_r=0

[2]http://www.newshounds.us/fox_nation_readers_celebrate_san_francisco_earthquake_wishes_it_we_re_worse_08242014#tL5g1KAtv2RbehmY.99

[3]

<http://www.landoverbaptist.net/showthread.php?s=f8dd75e3b02c710527cb69fd1823b9e&p=1107004#post1107004>

[4] <http://edition.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/americas/01/14/haiti.pat.robertson/>

[5] <http://z3news.com/w/prophetic-warning-major-west-coast-earthquake-coming/>

[6]

<http://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-lanow-ln-earthquake-earlywarning-system-gave-10second-alert-before-napa-quake-felt-20140824-story.html>

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