

# ΤΩ ΧΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

## “In the Nick of Time”

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Occasional Essays  
and Other Stuff  
for Christian Students

Presented by the  
President of

Central Baptist  
Theological Seminary  
of Minneapolis

American Christianity needs leaders. American Christianity needs *Christian* leaders. Christian leaders explain the Scriptures, bringing them to bear upon life's urgent questions. Christian leaders exemplify the life of faith, finding their ultimate satisfaction in God alone. They unite intellectual discipline with ordinate affection, turning their entire being toward the love of God. These essays are dedicated to the task of inviting today's Christian students to become tomorrow's Christian leaders.

—Kevin T. Bauder

“...Be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.”

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September 2, 2005  
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We Interrupt This Broadcast. . .

### Thoughts on Hurricane Katrina

We thought we'd missed the worst of it. At the last moment, hurricane Katrina downgraded from a Category 5 to a Category 4. Then the center of impact shifted from New Orleans to less populated parts of the Gulf Coast. One broadcaster called it something like, “the best possible outcome of the worst possible scenario.”

Those words now mock us. We did not yet know all of the evil that Katrina had done. As I write this essay, we still have not counted the toll in human lives and loss of property. This looks to be by far a worse disaster than 9-11 turned out to be, one of the worst ever to strike the continental United States. It would have taken a nuclear device to produce man-made destruction on this scale.

But Katrina was not man-made (whatever those who would like to blame George Bush may say). It was what is sometimes called an “act of God.” Some object to that expression. They would prefer to call Katrina an “act of nature,” implying that it was somehow outside of God's purpose and control.

This way of thinking leads into uncharted and dangerous territory. The only way to take God out of the picture is either to limit His knowledge so that He wasn't aware of the destruction ahead of time, or else to limit His power so that He was unable to stop it. In other words, the only way to alleviate God from any involvement in the disaster is through Open Theism.

If God knew that the disaster was coming (and He did), and if He could have prevented it

(and He could), then how can we possibly salvage any bit of His love? The problem of evil has come home to roost. When we get this close to it, we can begin to understand why some people find Open Theism appealing. We cannot vindicate God's love, however, by making Him either too ignorant or too weak to help. Such a God is no God at all.

What, then, is the answer? Some are already opining that Katrina is God's judgment upon America, or at least upon the wicked city of New Orleans. One woman phoned our church to say that Katrina was God's way of getting even with the United States for invading Iraq. One prophetic writer links Katrina's destructive fury to the homosexual concentration in southern Florida, the voodoo and sexual license in New Orleans, and the evacuation of Israel from the Gaza (he does not explain how the hurricane could have missed the headquarters of Mahmoud Abbas).

This kind of thinking is called *historicism*, and the Bible denounces it no less than it denounces Open Theism. The entire book of Job is a refutation of the notion that calamity is any sure indicator of God's displeasure. Habakkuk learns to his astonishment that when God punishes the wicked, He may use people who are even more wicked. Jesus Himself corrected the historicist error in the case of the man born blind (Jn 9:1-3), and He denounced it when reviewing Pilate's butchery of the Galileans and the collapse of the tower in Siloam (Lk 13:1-5).

In a larger sense, however, Katrina is a part of God's judgment, not specifically upon the United States or the people of the Gulf Coast, but upon all humanity. Paul observes, "Through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, for all sinned" (Rom 5:12). Human sin and human death are coextensive. Wherever death occurs, it is because sin has been there first.

This does not mean that the people who suffer a tragedy such as Katrina are greater sinners than most. It means that they simply share in the choice that we all made in Adam, the choice to which Paul refers when he says that "all sinned." By this choice we humans (the "many") were constituted sinners (Rom 5:19). In the eyes of God, no humans are innocent. We all participated in the Adamic rebellion and are all culpable for Adamic guilt. If we were not, then we would not die.

Death is the consequence of human sin. It is not natural, and it is never dignified. It is always an outrage, an obscenity against the purpose of God in the creation of human beings. And we chose it for ourselves. We were warned not to partake of that fruit, the eating of which would effectively declare our independence from God, and make ourselves into our own measure. We were given notice that eating would bring us under sentence of death. How could it not? In eating, we alienated ourselves from the very source of life.

Death shows what happens when we cut ourselves off from God. It is also a visible demonstration of God's hatred toward injustice—and make no mistake, every sin is a violation of justice. Therefore, in the desolation of New Orleans, we do get a brief glimpse (as through a glass darkly) of what hell must be. The anguish, remorse, despair, and rising anger are the very atmosphere of perdition.

But it is only a glimpse, a bare shadow of the reality of final damnation. In truth, the survivors of Katrina are surrounded by manifestations of God's grace. The courage of the rescuers and the generosity of those who are donating money and labor are exhibitions of His common grace. Of course, God's love is not unambiguously revealed anywhere in the natural

world, least of all in calamity. But there are traces of it in even the worst disaster.

The clear and unequivocal display of the love of God occurred at the cross of Calvary. We are told that “God demonstrates His love toward us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8). God showed His love, not by exempting us from the consequences of our sins, but by entering those consequences alongside us and in our place. On the cross, Christ was charged with the guilt of our sins. He died the death that we deserved. He endured the equivalent of the hell that we should have suffered.

When the Open Theists talk about a God Who suffers with us in our sufferings, they are partly right. The God Who became human knows what it means to endure incalculable loss, immeasurable pain, and utter God-forsakenness. For Him, the sinless Son of God, the judgment could have been avoided. He endured it, not because He deserved it, but because we did. He freely offered Himself in our place and accepted the wrath that our guilt merited. He did it in order that He might open to us the way of life, the way into the Holiest, the way to Himself.

The cross is the ultimate demonstration of God’s wrath. It is where His justice was finally satisfied. It is also the ultimate demonstration of His love. It is where God’s forgiveness was provided for us.

Faced with a calamity like hurricane Katrina, we must reject the facile solutions. We dare not diminish God as the Open Theists do, and we must not demonize the victims of the disaster as the historicists do. No, we find ourselves face to face with a fearful Providence. We must acknowledge the dominion of a God Who permits evil in ways that confound and sometimes terrify us.

Yet this God deserves our trust. He does love us. Granted, His love is not instantly recognizable in the disasters that occur under His Providence. But He has displayed His love toward us clearly, openly, and unambiguously at the cross. It is beyond question. The love that God showed at the cross must become the lens through which we gaze upon the ambiguities of a sin-ridden world. ✕

This essay is by [Kevin T. Bauder](#), president of Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of Central Seminary’s professors, students, or alumni necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.

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## Song of the soul that rejoices in knowing God through faith

San Juan de la Cruz (1542-1591)

Tr. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez

For I know well the spring that flows and runs,  
although it is night.

That eternal spring is hidden,  
for I know well where it has its rise,  
although it is night.

I do not know its origin, nor has it one,  
but I know that every origin has come from it,  
although it is night.

I know that nothing else is so beautiful,  
and that the heavens and the earth drink there,  
although it is night.

I know well that it is bottomless  
and no one is able to cross it,  
although it is night.

Its clarity is never darkened,  
and I know that every light has come from it,  
although it is night.

I know that its streams are so brimming  
they water the lands of hell, the heavens, and earth,  
although it is night.

I know well the stream that flows from this spring  
is mighty in compass and power,  
although it is night.

I know the stream proceeding from these two,  
that neither of them in fact precedes it,  
although it is night.

This eternal spring is hidden  
in this living bread for our life's sake,  
although it is night.

It is here calling out to creatures;  
and they satisfy their thirst, although in darkness,  
because it is night.

This living spring that I long for,  
I see in this bread of life,

although it is night. ✕

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