

I Don't Get the Joke: My Year-End Tirade

Written by James Randi

Monday, 29 December 2008 00:00



On Xmas Day, "pastor" Rick Warren, the currently-celebrated evangelist who is on every TV screen and front page as the hand-picked preacher to deliver the invocation of divine magic at the Obama inauguration ceremony, gave an effusive, rambling account on the NBC Today Show that demonstrated his incredible naivety about rational thinking and how disconnected his brand of religion - at least - is from reality. He was gushing over a miracle that he said had "blessed" his family.

The facts: Warren said that his daughter-in-law Jaime gave birth to her first child six weeks prematurely, though he can't seem to remember whether it was five, six, or seven weeks, since he gave all three figures... The hospital, he said, performed a C-section to save the baby's life - and the mother's. In that procedure, Warren said, they discovered that it was a "breech baby," that the umbilical cord was wrapped around the baby's neck and it was not receiving oxygen.

If Jaime had tried to give birth in the normal way, at the normal time, and if she'd "pushed" during the delivery, it might have killed both her and the child. What they didn't know at the time, but then discovered, was that the mother had what Warren described as a "three-inch" brain tumor - which may be hyperbolic, since I think that such a growth might be visually evident.

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But consider: the baby was in a breech situation, a critical position arranged by God; this was remedied by medical science during the Caesarian procedure, an invention by Man to thwart natural disasters brought about by a not-uncommon imperfection of the human body - which is also God's design. And the baby's umbilical cord had shut off oxygen-rich blood, another design error, or maybe a purposeful Act of God. The mother had a sizeable brain tumor, placed there by God, who we're told creates all these things.

And the Divine solution to this problem, according to Rick Warren? God - who, remember, is the Creator of Heaven and Earth, Omnipotent and Omniscient, knows all, the One who can do anything He wishes - arranged the oxygen-deprived baby in a breech position, bringing about a crisis that medical science had to avert by performing an operation. And He thereafter allowed medical science to detect the tumor, which is still in place, being poorly placed for access by surgery. Who designed this scenario - [Rube Goldberg](#) ...?

I ask, is this God character a comedian, using humans as His marionettes for amusement? Does He get His kicks by manipulating us just for laughs? Was this near-disaster for the Warren family just a sort of Divine whim? How can Rick Warren see this as a demonstration of God's mercy - a miracle, yet! - rather than as a cruel, capricious, joke? A caring God would not have created and placed that brain tumor in the mother, would not have designed the process of gestation-and-birth so that oxygen starvation and breech delivery are possible, and would not be playing with the lives and security of humans, who He claims to have designed and created - out of dirt, yet. Doing this, putting humans in danger of death, is a purposeful act that He Himself has already declared to be a sin. Just who makes the rules in this stupid morality play...?

Since I'm dealing here with reality, let me return to the real world to close this subject of my tirade. The actual questions we have before us, are these: Does Rick Warren, personally, actually believe that the fantasy he preaches is true? Did he deliver that nonsense on NBC with the conviction that it made sense? Does he believe that this God of his is a capricious, vengeful, jealous, cruel, bored deity, who delights in threatening humans, and expects total obeisance, fear, and trembling as insurance against further bullying - or death? Or is Warren well aware of reality and of the deception he supports, riding his way to financial and influential success on the backs of the naïve?

Those are four heavy questions, of which I personally suspect the last one is answered by "yes."

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Far more politically-savvy persons than I have opined that President-elect Obama made a good move by asking Warren to fill that prominent position on January 20th. Yes, I can see the truth in that; the move will happily the California Christian Right, I'm sure. I only hope that there'll be a minimum of this sort of appeasement from the Oval Office, and that the promised return to critical thinking and common sense, along with an end to science-bashing, will become significant characteristics of Washington politics.

The NBC Today show followed this dreary plug for righteousness with another, an interview with Franklin Graham, President of "Samaritan's Purse" and the chosen successor to his father, the Rev. Billy Graham, and with Rabbi Irwin Kula - demonstrating how incomprehensive the network's representation of "real" religion can be, since some 21% of the world's population embraces the religion of Islam, 33% espouse Christianity, and only .22% Judaism. The two savants delivered, through fixed and rather forced smiles, appeals for viewers to return to traditional superstitious beliefs while of course still enjoying the gifts and pagan associations that Xmas has taken on. Giving presents, overeating, overspending, and believing in absurdities, were touted as being "okay," perhaps primarily to keep the two gentlemen employed, but to me, their appearance on the show had all the atmosphere of a desperate stand against the creeping rationality that they saw threatening their respective Ivory Towers...

There's little doubt, I think, that our species is very slowly recovering from this centuries-long Dark Age, though another three generations or so will surely suffer through the remnants of the debris... Churches will become museums... And yes, I can anticipate the amusement that will be expressed by folks in 2070 C.E. if/and/when they read these words...

But I note that there are real steps forward being made. Most of us now treat Santa Claus and flying reindeer as myths, though devils and angels, along with eternal life and Heaven, are still held by millions around the world to be attractive and probably-true delusions...

Hang in there...