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June 10, 2012: Cut Off from Blame and Punishment

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Title: Cut Off from Blame and Punishment

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6/10/2012—On Friday, I think, Accuweather reported a startling statistic about the past twelve months in the US—they were all above average to a great extent so that the average temperature was 3.6 degrees F over the long term average. The odds of something like this happening due to chance were 1/341,0000. Something like that.

It was another indicator of global warming that could have been natural. But piled on top of all the other warming stories, seemed like pretty good evidence to me.

The reaction, however, was vociferously negative and three reactions stood out to me. (By the way, I cannot today find this whole story and exchange on the site, but since the details don't matter to the point here, I'm not going to double check. If I'm wrong on the details it won't change the essence. Something of the same story is reported [here](#) with some different negative reactions).

One person wrote, remember Climategate; maybe we're being lied to by the scientists. Another wrote that man cannot change the planet's climate. Man is too puny and the planet too vast. A third actually wrote, Blah Blah Blah—get over it. (Somewhere else, the temperatures were attributed to the peak of the solar cycle, not warming gases).

In all this, the only religious reaction is the Christian remnant that man cannot change the climate. This idea in its original context was a condemnation of man's pride. It is being resorted to here, however, to prevent repentance rather than to encourage it, quite different from its original setting.

What is missing from all this is how religious people might have heard this message two generations ago. A Martin Luther King, Jr., or a Reinhold Niebuhr, or a Karl Barth might have heard a message of God's punishment for the greed of man. The rich create an economic system that serves no one but themselves, sacrificing the poor and also the middle class, and practices violence toward God's creation. God has now sent warnings of his wrath, but as usual, men intent on business as usual ignore the signs.

This account of global warming perfectly encapsulates prophetic messages from the Old Testament. It is so obviously fitting to our situation that it would discomfort the weird marriage of the religious right with capitalism.

But there is seemingly no one to deliver this message. Liberal Christianity is weakened by its felt bad faith over gay rights and its uncertainty over just what kind of God it believes in. It lacks the power of conviction.

Obviously secularists like me cannot resort to this narrative when we deny the existence of a God who rewards and punishes.

Maybe something can be thought through the view of karma. Or Emerson's Compensation. All I know is that the Old Testament promise remains true. If you misuse the poor, if you ignore creation in pursuit of wealth, the rain does not fall—and the temperature goes up and the whole human world, including the rich, the children of the rich and the grandchildren of the rich, will suffer.