

God doesn't cause rape

By [John W. Vest](#)

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Debates about abortion aren't typically in my wheelhouse, but reflecting on God's activity in the world is. In particular, I am consistently fascinated—and mostly perplexed—by the theological concept of providence, the notion that God somehow controls all aspects of human history.

Yesterday an Indiana Republican running for the Senate related a strong understanding of God's providence to abortion by claiming that pregnancies resulting from rape are the result of God's will. Here is what Richard Mourdock said in a debate:

I struggled with it myself for a long time, and I realized that life is a gift from God, and I think even when life begins in that horrible situation of rape, that it is something God intended to happen.

I fully believe that all life is sacred. I wouldn't argue with the theological statement that life is a gift from God. I believe that a life created through the horror of rape is just as sacred as all others—the circumstances of conception do not diminish the essential sacredness of life. But I cannot take Mourdock's next step and suggest that God ever *intends* for life to be created in such a way.

Of course, after the debate Mourdock was quick to attempt damage control.

God creates life, and that was my point. God does not want rape, and by no means was I suggesting that He does. Rape is a horrible thing, and for anyone to twist my words otherwise is absurd and sick.

But I think Mourdock's words were clear. And the thing is, given the theological assumptions behind such a statement, Mourdock's position is logically consistent. If God does in fact control everything, and all life is a gift from God, then it could be

argued that God plays an active role in creating life through rape.

His position could also be considered biblical. There are theologies in the Bible which maintain that God is responsible for both good and evil in the world. ([Isaiah 45:7](#) is the prime example.)

This is the problem with divine causality, a problem that has prompted me to explore theological understandings of God that do not assume God's providential control of human history. An intellectually sensible faith—which I do not believe is too much to ask for—has (nearly?) insurmountable difficulties reconciling human suffering with divine love and providence.

Hearing a public figure like Mourdock espouse an offensive theology that is not inconsistent with the Bible or certain orthodox theologies exposes major problems with conservative approaches to faith, scripture, and theology. And I believe that public outrage at Mourdock's words—from every corner of the political world—demonstrates that people aren't really willing to take such conservatism to its logical conclusions when articulated so clearly.

Were I to use the overtly political language of those who analyze campaigns and debates, this provides an opening for progressive Christians. Since I'm not so fond of that kind of competitive approach to faith, I'll just say that this is a perfect opportunity for progressive Christians to point out that there are alternative ways of being Christian.

*Originally posted at [Vest's blog](#)*