



HAITI: WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

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As in the case of Hurricane Katrina, thousands of articles and hundreds of books will be written outlining multiple perspectives on one of the top 10 catastrophes in the 20th and 21st centuries. Monday morning theological quarterbacking will proffer any number of answers to the perennial question in the face of such disasters, namely, why? An equally important question inviting answers is what happened in Haiti that this country was visited by such horrendous, nightmarish devastation, pain and anguish? This question may remind us of the one some inquiring minds rose with Jesus regarding why or what happened that "this man was born blind?" (John 9:1-3)

It is interesting that Jesus does not engage in theological reflection that gives one something to do to pass the time but doesn't get anyone anywhere. Instead, Jesus deals with the more important issue, what happens next. Jesus chose to focus on empowerment opportunities over sin-centered theoretical explanations.

What happened next is Jesus' intervention that results in a blind man seeing. Speculative theology has its place and time: It should never be trumped by the need for immediate intervention with an eye toward healing and wholeness.



A great deal of media attention, rightly so, has been concentrated on relief, rescue and recovery efforts. One would have to be a robot to escape the heart-deep sympathy and empathy the Haitians deserve as they heroically bear the unbearable and endure the unendurable. We rejoice to hear of the spectacular and miraculous in the midst of the ridiculous levels of death and injury. According to **Pastor Chavannes Jeune**, one of Haiti's prominent pastors who had an unsuccessful bid in the last Haiti election, what happens next are two additional "Rs", Repentance and Revival: "It is time for repentance, it is time for confession, and it is time for revival...God is calling the church to put aside its differences and to unite in solidarity so that we can speak with one voice to the country." His word "solidarity" is what might attract our attention since as a convention as we engage in team ministry under the banner, Solidarity with the Savior." One key question is how far we

want to go with our solidarity. Pastor Jeune sees the extraordinary times in Haiti as an opportunity to come together and serve the people. Coming together is not as easy as it sounds: Ask President Obama.



Having listened to **President Obama's** State of the Union Address one has to be intrigued by the request of many Republicans. In response to the capacity for bipartisanship for the good of hurting Americans, the Republican cry is for a seat at the table. Republicans feel that the Obama administration has excluded them from the table where important decisions are being made in the framing of important legislation. When the Republicans were in charge under President Bush #2, the cry from the Democrats was for a seat at the table. The truth of the matter is

when it comes to the winners of the White House, Congress and Senate, "to the victor belong the spoils." We long for a time in American politics when winners, for the good of Americans, will forego the historical political exclusionism that prohibits the losers from having a seat at the table. President Obama's decision to meet with Republicans once a month (not something new in partisan politics) is a step in the right direction. Pastor Jeune is asking for a kind of Evangelical, denominational, bipartisanship for the good of the Haitian people.

Do we not long for a time in the life of the Church when denominational particularism gives way to Solidarity with the Savior: long enough for us to come together for the sake of those that need us the most? Are we able to sit at Evangelical, ecumenical tables of profound theological diversity long enough, beyond the time needed for Revival, to determine how we can assist Haitians in their self-empower efforts? When it comes to repentance, we are challenged to move beyond the classical definition to a more holistic definition: one that includes social and economic repentance on the part of political leaders. Holistic repentance is needed for the possibility of just policies and practices that maximize self-empowerment. Spiritual empowerment comes through the Holy Spirit operating in the hearts of the revived. Social, economic and political empowerment comes through the same Holy Spirit operating in the minds of the powers that be. Pastor Jeune stated that solidarity will be needed to rebuild a city. Can we rebuild a city without first having the kind of solidarity needed to build ecumenical and evangelical solidarity in the Body of Christ?

Herode Guilomettre, a prominent Christian business leader, has seen dramatic changes in how leaders of different denominations are relating to one another since the earthquake. "We have a new solidarity that was never there before," he said. "Even among leaders from other countries. For example, there was tension between Haitian and Dominican Republic leaders. Now we are working together to help those who are suffering." According to Mr. Guilomettre, the most profound change is happening in the makeshift camps. "There's a kind of spiritual transformation unfolding," Guilomettre explained. "In the entire tent camps and shelters people are spontaneously worshipping God, they are singing, they are praying. And this has been happening almost every night since the



earthquake. It seems like this is part of a spiritual revival...The message of the church to our hurting nation is that God is able to take care of us and He is rebuilding a new Haiti."

We are thrilled and chilled by the extravagant praise and prayers of the Haitians in the midst of such tragic realities. We can only pray for the expansion of this prayer and praise to the most desperate places in Haiti. However, let us be real, or keep it real as we often say. Prayer and praise, repentance and revival must be the inspiration for re-building a more just and humane Haiti, what Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. called, a beloved community grounded in genuine peace, love, freedom and equality of opportunity for one and all. What happens next must include a coming together in solidarity to map a future city built on shared insights and experience; scholarship and God-given common sense that is often ignored by those who believe in a top down, single experience and single intelligence theory.

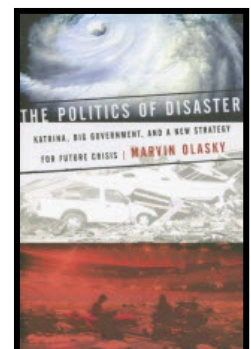


While we engage in a traditional, collective response around the most immediate needs, it is not too early to think about public policy. While the Haitians and Dominican Republicans solidify themselves and build their "makeshift camps," this is a good time for us to "camp-in" and act in Solidarity with the Savior. Our Savior was dedicated to his heavenly Father's hunger and thirst for freedom and justice.

As the Haitians enter the reconstruction phase, another essential question is how we can join them in the construction of a just vision for Haiti, one with collective integrity, accountability and responsibility. For this to happen, we must develop principles and processes that assure that what happens next is the development of "just" tables of diversity that lend themselves to multiple perspectives of what Haiti can look like in the future. Haiti cannot afford what in too many instances happened in the new, New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina.

Five years later, thousands of displaced persons cannot find affordable housing in their beloved city. Dr. Robert D. Bullard and Beverly Wright, *RACE, Place, and Environmental Justice after Hurricane Katrina*, is one of the most profound books written on the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Various scholars share insight on what happened next: various catastrophes that surpassed the damages caused by the hurricane. Bullard and Wright indicated that less than 2 years ago, 12,000 former New Orleans residents were still homeless (p. 28), double the pre-Katrina count. "Plans to rebuild the city's 77,000 lost to Katrina have largely failed," states Bullard. One of the great fears of residents displaced by demolition of public housing was whether they would be bumped when it came to the new housing.

What about the attempts to strike a major blow to poverty in Africa? Are there no lessons we have learned that can be exported to Haiti? New York University professor William Easterly noted amid concerts for African aid in 2005: "It's great that so many are finally noticing the tragedy of Africa. But sadly, historical evidence says that the solutions offered by big plans are not so easy. From 1960 to 2003, we spent \$586 Billion (in today's dollars) to end poverty in Africa. Yet these efforts still did not lift



African from misery and stagnation.” (Quoted from the Politics of Disaster by Marvin Olasky, p. 162). Professor Easterly also stated big plans don’t work because they miss the critical elements of feedback and accountability.” (ibid, p. 162)

Social justice issues such as affordable housing, environmental contamination, disease, wealth inequality, quality schools, accessible clinics, properly resourced hospitals, the road back home for survivors, poverty, and local business opportunity goals are just a few of the monumental challenges involved in what happens next. All of these issues and more require our need to raise the issue of a place at the table.



Repentance, Revival, prayer and praise are noteworthy happenings in anticipation of what can happen next through such devotion. Better to focus on these than a paralysis of theological analysis of what sin was committed in Haiti and by whom that is responsible for this catastrophe. Along with the spiritual dimension is the economic empowerment issue that necessitates diverse voices at the table solidified by one goal: the good of all Haitians as opposed

to that of self-serving visionaries who fail to honor the equality and dignity of every Haitian. We must learn from Katrina less insult leads to greater injury in the worst disaster in the 20th and 21st century.