

in a
WordTM

A Publication of The Society of the Divine Word, Southern Province

Volume 29, No. 1, January 2011

Page 2 - Is the Church evolving with society?

Page 3 - Haiti one year later

Photos by Father James Pawlicki, SVD

IS THE CHURCH EVOLVING WITH SOCIETY?

by
Father Jerome Ledoux, SVD

“The indefectibility of the Church is a gift from Christ to the Church by which she is preserved to the end of the age as the ‘institution of salvation’. She can neither perish from the world nor depart from ‘her teaching, her constitution and her liturgy.’”

So this teaching about the Church means that the Church does not make blunders. Right? Wrong. The Church is the beacon of faith and morals. So the Church always presents itself to society as the bastion of what is true and virtuous. Right? Wrong. We wish. We cannot count the times the Church has shown up with egg on its face.

As with its flat-earth beliefs, the Church has fallen flat on its face and flat of its back many times in the course of history. Galileo Galilei dragged the Church kicking and screaming into the era of science because the Church, as the whole world, was mired in ignorance, until we all found we were flat-out wrong about the far-flung universe.

Not until 1835, 193 years after Galileo’s death, did all traces of official opposition to heliocentrism by the church disappear when his works were finally dropped from the Index of forbidden books. Thus was the father of modern astronomy, physics and science treated by the Church and by many astronomers, physicists and philosophers.

The trouble is, as a pendulum swings from one extreme to the other, we tend to expect too much of the Church as a divine institution, while we expect too little of it as a human institution. Not unlike a pendulum, we have huge problems finding the middle ground.

We would like to believe that the Church responds chiefly to movement of the Holy Spirit, not to the crises and traumas of life. Unfortunately, history does not bear this out. We would also like to believe that the Church, a divine institution, would be proactive, not reactive. Again, history does not bear this out in the majority of watershed cases.

Take the gross evil of slavery, for instance. Theologian Avery Cardinal Dulles makes the most damning statement of all:
- For many centuries the Church was part of a slave-holding society.
- The popes themselves held slaves, including at times hundreds of Muslim captives to man their galleys.

It was only after centuries of brutality and trauma that society woke up and the Church with it. Historically, the Church has responded grudgingly to trauma in society. Society even got ahead of the Church in some issues. Shamefully, where the Church’s forte should have put it far out front, it has not responded well to faith and morals issues.

Thus it was in the 1950s and 1960s when Aaron Henry, state leader of the Mississippi NAACP, complained that the Church

was a taillight in black Americans’ bloody quest for civil rights and justice, whereas it should have been a headlight. With rare exceptions, black Baptist churches were far ahead of the Catholic Church in that epic struggle.

To its shame, not only, but especially in the South, when society challenged our faith and fortitude with tough choices, the Church went along with the prejudiced mores of racist southerners. In regard to racist and ethnic views, Catholic clergy and religious were indistinguishable from the laypersons whom they served as purveyors of religion.

Addressing the 2010 Assembly of the Conference of Major Superiors of Men (CMSM), Father Donald Senior, CP of the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago hinted at Church leadership in faith and morals when he broached the issue of who sets agendas.

“Simply put,” he said, **“it is this: it is the world and not simply the church that sets the agenda for our mission and moves us into God’s future. Time and again the biblical drama shows that what we might call secular events, even wrenching and apparently destructive ones, move history forward and provide the setting for God’s revelation.”**

Yet, although God works in history, turning adverse history into positives for us believers, we must never forget that we create monsters of our own making when we presume upon God’s goodness and forgiveness by compromising faith and morals.

It should not take a Church-rending pedophile crisis to make us realize that crimes must be reported whether committed by the mob or by a cleric.

Pummeled by our own ineptitude and lack of fortitude as a Church, we may be inclined to quote Hebrews 8:28 to give ourselves some dignity and hope in the ongoing struggles of our lives: “We know that all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.” But this text refers to those who make hard choices.

What we do not want to have is the sinking feeling that faith, morals and the Good News mission are constantly moved forward, too often not because of but in spite of the Church’s presence and efforts in the world. How can it be that a divinely-instituted font of religion can sometimes be more of a liability than an asset to the world?

Well, that is the human side of the Church at work, or, more properly, not at work. Apart from disasters and catastrophes beyond our control, the world sets the agenda for our mission as it moves us into God’s future only in those cases where the Church is asleep at the wheel and thereby abrogates its charge to be the cutting edge of society.

Haiti One Year Later

What was the American Catholic Response?

It is hard to believe but it was one year ago that a catastrophic earthquake hit the island of Haiti. In this past year the Catholic Church through the efforts of Catholic Relief Services has extended helping hands to the people of this shattered country. We ought to remember that Haiti is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, with 80 percent of the nation's population living below the poverty line. Political, economic and social instability complicate struggles for survival. The literacy rate is about 53 percent, and life expectancy ranks in the bottom 20 percent worldwide.

The following timeline chronicles the efforts made by the American Catholic Church through Catholic Relief Services (CRS).

January 12, 2010

A 7.0-magnitude earthquake strikes the capital city of Port-au-Prince and kills more than 230,000 people.

January 14, 2010

CRS responds immediately to help the millions of people affected by the earthquake. Staffers in neighboring Dominican Republic prepare 10,000 packages of food and water with each package containing enough to sustain a family of five for two weeks.

January 18, 2010

CRS delivers enough medical and food supplies to allow doctors at St. Francois de Sales hospital in Port-au-Prince to perform their first operations since the earthquake destroyed about 70 percent of the hospital.

January 19, 2010

CRS helps organize aid at Petionville Golf Club as it becomes a makeshift camp for thousands of displaced Haitians. With security provided by unarmed soldiers from the U. S. Army's 82nd Airborne Division, CRS registers people at the camp and provides them with food, water and hygiene supplies.

January 22, 2010

CRS sets up a food distribution system to immediately feed more than 50,000 people.

February 17, 2010

Just more than one month after the earthquake, CRS has fed more than 500,000 people. Additionally, CRS helps keep the heavily damaged St. Francois de Sales Hospital running and distributes emergency shelter kits to more than 32,500 people.

April 5, 2010

Nearly 3 months after the earthquake CRS has fed more than 700,000 people, given 45,000 outpatients treatment, provided more than 80,000 emergency shelter kits and hired about 1,700 people in cash-for-work programs.

July 9, 2010

As Haiti reached the six month anniversary of the quake, CRS had distributed food to nearly 900,000 people, and 114,000 people received emergency shelter materials. CRS had completed 62,000 outpatient consultations and 960 emergency operations.

September 22, 2010

Just more than 8 months after the earthquake, CRS begins building transitional shelters for about 8,000 families.

October 23, 2010

Catholic Relief Services mobilizes a massive response just one day after the cholera outbreak is confirmed. CRS and partners go tent to tent in 12 camps in Port-au-Prince, distributing three bars of soap each to more than 10,000 families (more than 50,000 people) and reaching thousands more through an information campaign that promotes hand washing and personal hygiene.

November 5, 2010

Shortly after a cholera outbreak is discovered, Hurricane Tomas makes landfall on the besieged nation. Although the worst of the storm misses Port-au-Prince, many people are affected. CRS feeds about 4,000 people seeking refuge in temporary shelters during the storm.

November 8, 2010

St. Francois de Sales hospital in Port-au-Prince, which was destroyed in the earthquake, is reopened in a temporary facility. CRS worked with the hospital staff to construct the temporary quarters and move in new medical equipment and supplies.

December 12, 2010

Generosity has helped CRS and our partners feed more than one million Haitians, provide shelter to more than 250,000 people, conduct about 70,000 outpatient hospital consultations, provide more than 10,000 people with short-term employment, and offer protection and education to thousands of vulnerable children.

The first anniversary of the earthquake is a day to remember loved ones lost, homes destroyed and lives changed. It is also a day to reflect on the difference a year has made for the people in Port-au-Prince. Because of American Catholic generosity, the Haitian people have been given a chance to recover and rebuild their lives.

Life for many Haitians before January 12, 2010, was one of abject poverty. CRS is committed to working with the people of Haiti to build back better than before and lead their own communities to a brighter future.

in a word or two

Welcome to the first online only edition of **IN A WORD!** Please visit our web site at www.inaword.com. We are still updating the web site so please be patient as we make important changes to content.

Congress XI is to be held July 19-22, 2012 in Indianapolis. In preparation a number of important initiatives are being put in motion. Of interest is the Congress office conducting *The First-Ever Survey of African American Catholics*.

Bishop Ricard, Chairperson of the Congress, describes our Church as hemorrhaging with exiting Catholics. The Church hasn't figured out why people leave or why others stay. Particularly for the Black Catholic community in the United States, we simply lack data. **The Gallup Poll of Catholics in 2005 (the most recent poll of Catholics available from the Association of Religion Data Archives) had only 27 African American Catholics in its sample—not enabling any statistically meaningful conclusions about our community's views, concerns, or demographics.** The Board of NBCC has decided to take the lead on this matter and find out what parishes can do to engage African Americans in parish life.

The board has approved a project to carry out an unprecedented empirical study of Black Catholics in the United States with the goal of finding out: *What do we need to do to keep folks engaged in the Catholic Church?* We want to identify the reasons people leave the Church and the reasons they stay. Our goal is to have the results of **the survey in hand by late 2011, so that the findings can guide Congress XI programming, speakers, and the pastoral plan of action.**

The Congress X Pastoral Plan of Action calls for the NBCC to create a "National Support Initiative to provide financial assistance to efforts that will produce favorable results in sustaining Catholic Education in and for the Black Community." **In June 2010, the NBCC Board approved establishment of the NBCC Catholic Education Foundation LLC and appointed a board of directors for the foundation, chaired by Kathleen A. Merritt.**

America's only Historically Black and Catholic university is now offering full tuition scholarships to top

performing students at Catholic high schools across the nation. The newly authorized Katharine Drexel Scholarships at Xavier University of Louisiana will provide **full tuition for any and all Valedictorians or Salutatorians applying for admission from a Catholic high school.**



"As far as we know, Xavier is the first university to offer such a far-reaching scholarship opportunity to Catholic high school graduates," said Dr. Loren Blanchard, senior vice president for academic affairs. "Valedictorians and salutatorians have many choices of colleges to attend, and although Xavier is already a popular choice for many of them, we want all of them to be aware that there are NO financial barriers to attend Xavier because of their outstanding academic performance," said Blanchard.

The scholarships were established to help retain and reinforce the university's historically Catholic character. The program is named in honor of the university's founder, Saint Katharine Drexel, a Philadelphia heiress who dedicated her wealth to providing education and financial support to Native American and African American communities. The Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament religious order that she founded (SBS) continues her mission today.

High school juniors or seniors who wish to learn more information about scholarships and applying to Xavier University may visit the website at www.xula.edu/admissions.

A National Prayer for Life will be held January 23-24, 2011 at the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, DC.

Sponsored by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops the opening Mass will be held at 6:30 pm on Sunday January 23, 2011 with Cardinal Daniel DiNardo as principal celebrant and homilist. For more information contact: USCCB Pro-Life office at: (202) 541-3000

IN A Word is now on Facebook.

Just go to **In a Word** and become a friend and share with others. Notices of the latest issue will be posted. Messages can be left on the page. Updates will follow as we make the transition to online viewing.



Find us on
Facebook

Divine Word Missionaries is an international missionary community of over 6,000 brothers and priests. In 1905 the SVDs began working among African Americans in the Southern United States. Today, Divine Word Missionaries work in over 35 parishes in Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas and Arkansas.

IN A WORD is a publication of The Society of the Divine Word's Media Production Center. Rev. James Pawlicki, S.V.D., Director and Editor; Cathy Green-Miner, office manager.

Correspondence to Media Production Center, 199 Seminary Drive, Bay St. Louis, MS 39520, 228-467-1097, Cell phone 504-908-6343. Electronic messages to our Internet address, editor@inaword.com.

IN A WORD is not published during July and August.

Web page can be found at <http://www.inaword.com>