

September 2005

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Hurricane victims need Church and State

...where is the security for prosperity, for reputation, for life, if the sense of religious obligation desert?
—President George Washington, farewell speech (1796)

Welcome to the most intriguing city in the world,” wrote New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin to organizers of *Southern Decadence*, an X-rated festival that was to begin August 31 and run through Labor Day. “Our City offers true Southern hospitality at its finest.”

According to FrenchQuarter.com, the annual gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender celebration has become famous “for the displays of naked flesh which characterize the event...” Last year’s festival drew more than 125,000 revelers to the Big Easy.

It is tempting to search for apocalyptic interpretations to explain last week’s storm and the mass destruction in New Orleans (and other Gulf Coast communities). Where better for a display of God’s wrath than a city regaled for its carnal appetite—whose inhabitants loot, steal, and abuse not only their own, but also those who are sent to their rescue?

In the Carrollton section of New Orleans, looters used a forklift to push up storm shutters and punch through glass in convenience stores. In the Lower Garden District, hoodlums cleaned out the gun section at a Wal-Mart store. Amid widespread reports of shootings, including AK47 fire directed at police stations, helicopters, emergency crews and medical personnel, authorities were forced to send for armed personnel carriers to establish marshal law in all of downtown New Orleans. Jackie Clarkson, a frustrated councilwoman, commented, “We’re using exhausted, scarce police to control when they should be used for search and rescue...”

But perhaps no place was more hazardous to life than inside the Superdome where some 8,000 people scurried to ride out the storm. Bedding down with young families and the infirm were sex-predators, drug addicts, and killers. Reports of at least seven murders, dozens of rapes, and frequent gun bursts, forced the retreat of medical teams from the dome for safety concerns. The display of such barbarism in a modern U.S. city, demonstrates the horrors of “human passions unbridled by morality and religion.”¹ It also places in question America’s moral authority to judge any Islamic or atheistic regime.

Even so, Americans are moved with compassion for the victims of Hurricane Katrina. They find no pleasure in the suffering of others—including the mockers.

President Bush has assured residents of New Orleans that their city and other Gulf Coast communities will be rebuilt. Congress has guaranteed more than \$10.5 billion toward that effort. But what the President has promised cannot be accomplished by government alone.

Complaints that the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) was too slow in responding to the emergency are a bit unfair. Bottom line—no combination of government agencies can match either the manpower or the financial resources of the CHURCH.

Jesus lives in almost every neighborhood. His members deliver humanitarian aid faster and more efficiently than any arm of government—with 2,000 years more experience! Operation Blessing, The Salvation Army, Samaritan's Purse, World Vision, Southern Baptist Disaster Relief, Convoy of Hope, and a host of other charitable organizations, were on the ground in hours following the storm, providing services at no cost to taxpayers. Unlike “government aid,” close to 90 percent of donor money (in some ministries 100 percent) reaches the targeted needy.

It is important to remember that God instituted governments among men to constrain sin. Most people willingly comport with societal laws, i.e. don't steal, don't murder. For those that don't, He has given to civil leaders, a sword of punishment (Romans 13:4)—representing His JUSTICE. The Church has been appointed to model God's MERCY and compassion.

Ideally, then, a first response to a natural disaster for these God-ordained institutions should be: government sends police and the local Guard to insure public order; Church brings food, clothing, and provides sanctuary for families without shelter; and both engage in rescue operations, emergency medical services, and cleanup.

But, Bourbon Street has needs that no government can supply.

Some historians refer to the Big Easy as a city with a “tortured past.” Passing from Indian to French to Spanish to French control again, and eventually to American possession during Jefferson's presidency, New Orleans has been under relentless spiritual siege. Soon after its founding in 1718, brawny young settlers sent word to France requesting single women to be sent to New Orleans. Much to their disappointment, French officials sent shiploads of prisoners, prostitutes, and women of low morals.

More than a century later in 1827, the city was introduced to “Carnival” by a group of students returning from school in Paris who donned strange costumes and danced their way through the streets. “Carnival,” from the Latin *Caro* or *Carnis* (flesh) and *vale* (farewell), is loosely translated “farewell to flesh.” It dates to the mid-second century when Rome syncretized many pagan and Christian practices. Carnival precedes the penitential season of Lent in which fasting replaces feasting. Early participants gave themselves up to Bacchus and Venus, considering all pleasure allowable. Today, the winter madness in New Orleans runs from January 6 (the feast of the Epiphany), to Marti Gras (Fat Tuesday), the final two weeks of February.

While New Orleans has many attractions including over 100 beautiful parks, plus world-class restaurants, museums and galleries, too many visitors are enticed by the “dark” amusements. Featured, are; Ghost Tours, Voodoo Garden Tours, Haunted Garden District Tours, Vampire Tours, Specialty Tours (with a séance), and visits to the “Cities of the Dead” (cemeteries).

Called now to an enormous undertaking are Church and State. The Body of Christ should certainly follow the example of the Good Samaritan. But it must also contend, on bended-knee, for spiritual authority over New Orleans so that eyes will see and ears will hear. Government, on the other hand, will be busy for some time repairing roads, bridges, levees and power grids.

Too busy, we hope, to offer “true Southern hospitality” to public displays of naked flesh!

Rick Forcier

Executive Director

¹ President John Adams, 1798, Excerpt from “We have no government armed with power capable of contending with...”