

If you are looking for a way to help the people of Haiti, you may want to consider the following appeal from a friend of mine.

By now you have heard about the devastating earthquake, which hit Haiti yesterday afternoon. I was concerned about a Passionist priest, Fr. Rick Frechette, who works there. Fr. Rick was so taken by his missionary work in Haiti that he came to the US many years ago to become a doctor in order to heal body and soul.

I have now been informed that the hospital, which Fr. Rick built, was severely damaged by the earthquake. The Passionists are going to need a great deal of help to fix things up. I have just put a check in the mail and I am asking any of you who can spare a few dollars - even \$25 dollars - to aid the cause to please log on to the donation website: <https://www.chi-cash-advance.com/sforms/appeal953/contribute.asp>, or do as I did and write a check to The Passionist Missionaries and mail it to the following address:

The Passionists - St. Paul of the Cross Province
526 Monastery Place
Union City, NJ 07087-3398

And, another option:

Dear ICCC Members,

If you would like to respond to the relief efforts in Haiti, the International Council of Community Churches will be forwarding donations to Church World Service, of which the ICCC is a member.

Your donations can be sent to the Council office, made payable to the ICCC or Church World Service, and we will forward them accordingly.

International Council of Community Churches
21116 Washington Parkway
Frankfort, IL 60423

But, whatever you do, try to do something positive to respond to this human tragedy.

Lisa Fabrizio , from Connecticut, posted the following, which is excerpted here, on January 13. It is entitled *The Catholic Case for Immigration Reform*, and can be found in its entirety at <http://spectator.org/>

Servant of God, Bishop Fulton Sheen, once said, "There are not more than 100 people in the world who truly hate the Catholic Church, but there are millions who hate what they perceive to be the Catholic Church." Sadly, Bishop Sheen's statement applies not only to those outside the Church, but to millions who are baptized Catholics. A case in point is the response to an initiative by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops calling for a "humane and comprehensive solution to the problems which beset our immigration system."

Go to any website and read the comments which follow postings of stories like the above. The misunderstanding of the Church's motives has spewed such hatred, that some sane folks seem to have lost their powers of reasoning. Consider this from fallen-away Catholic, Tom Tancredo: "I suspect the pope's immigration comments may have less to do with spreading the gospel than they do about recruiting new members of the church," Tancredo said. "This isn't preaching; it is faith-based marketing."

The notion that the only reason the Church is in favor of immigration reform is to enrich her own coffers would be laughable were it not so sad. If you are, as am I, a member of a parish where there are lots of poor immigrants, you know that it is the Church that aids them, and not the other way around. However, it matters not to faithful Catholics whether or not these folks can contribute financially; they know that the whole Body of Christ is enriched by their worship.

Those who are Catholics should remember the Lord's command to St. Peter to feed his sheep and tend his lambs. Do you really think the race or nationality of the sheep matters to the Church? If you do, then you'd better do some research into the millions of poor and sick around the world who are tended by her. Indeed, go to the Mother House of Blessed Teresa of Calcutta and you will everywhere see the words, "As you did it to one of the least of my brethren, you did it to me."

... Consider that under the 2006 Republican bill that failed to pass, priests and religious would have faced mandatory five-year prison sentences simply for giving aid and comfort to members of their flocks who were here illegally. If you can find a priest who would ask for a green card before giving food or shelter to someone in need, then he's in the wrong line of work. Again, at the basis of her desire for immigration reform, the Church seeks humane treatment for all peoples, regardless of their national origin. Don't forget that the parable of the Good Samaritan was given in answer to the question: who is my neighbor?

Sometimes, it's the small, positive things that can make your day.

http://www.mediacollege.com/downloads/sound-effects/movie/lordoftherings/fellowship/galariel_small.wav

A simultaneous celebration and castigation of religious leadership can be found at <http://www.commonwealmagazine.org/preaching-bishops>

What we do right and what we do poorly.

I would not dare to summarize the following article by Nicholas D. Kristof, an Op-ed columnist for *The New York Times*.

Religion and Women
January 10, 2010

Religions derive their power and popularity in part from the ethical compass they offer. So why do so many faiths help perpetuate something that most of us regard as profoundly unethical: the oppression of women?

It is not that warlords in Congo cite Scripture to justify their mass rapes (although the last warlord I met there called himself a pastor and wore a button reading “rebels for Christ”). It’s not that brides are burned in India as part of a Hindu ritual. And there’s no verse in the Koran that instructs Afghan thugs to throw acid in the faces of girls who dare to go to school.

Yet these kinds of abuses — along with more banal injustices, like slapping a girlfriend or paying women less for their work — arise out of a social context in which women are, often, second-class citizens. That’s a context that religions have helped shape, and not pushed hard to change.

“Women are prevented from playing a full and equal role in many faiths, creating an environment in which violations against women are justified,” former President Jimmy Carter noted in a speech last month to the Parliament of the World’s Religions in Australia.

“The belief that women are inferior human beings in the eyes of God,” Mr. Carter continued, “gives excuses to the brutal husband who beats his wife, the soldier who rapes a woman, the employer who has a lower pay scale for women employees, or parents who decide to abort a female embryo.”

Mr. Carter, who sees religion as one of the “basic causes of the violation of women’s rights,” is a member of The Elders, a small council of retired leaders brought together by Nelson Mandela. The Elders are focusing on the role of religion in oppressing women, and they have issued a joint statement calling on religious leaders to “change all discriminatory practices within their own religions and traditions.”

The Elders are neither irreligious nor rabble-rousers. They include Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and they begin their meetings with a moment for silent prayer.

“The Elders are not attacking religion as such,” noted Mary Robinson, the former president of Ireland and United Nations high commissioner for human rights. But she added, “We all recognized that if there’s one overarching issue for women it’s the way that religion can be manipulated to subjugate women.”

There is of course plenty of fodder, in both the Koran and the Bible, for those who seek a theology of discrimination.

The New Testament quotes St. Paul (1 Timothy 2) as saying that women “must be silent.” Deuteronomy declares that if a woman does not bleed on her wedding night, “the men of her town shall stone her to death.” An Orthodox Jewish prayer thanks God, “who hast not made me a woman.” The Koran stipulates that a woman shall inherit less than a man, and that a woman’s testimony counts for half a man’s.

In fairness, many scholars believe that Paul did not in fact write the passages calling on women to be silent. And Islam started out as socially progressive for women — banning female infanticide and limiting polygamy — but did not continue to advance.

But religious leaders sanctified existing social structures, instead of pushing for justice. In Africa, it would help enormously if religious figures spoke up for widows disenfranchised by unjust inheritance traditions — or for rape victims, or for schoolgirls facing sexual demands from their teachers. Instead, in Uganda, the influence of conservative Christians is found in a grotesque push to execute gays.

Yet paradoxically, the churches in Africa that have done the most to empower women have been conservative ones led by evangelicals and especially Pentecostals. In particular, Pentecostals encourage women to take leadership roles, and for many women this is the first time they have been trusted with authority and found their opinions respected. In rural Africa, Pentecostal churches are becoming a significant force to emancipate women.

That's a glimmer of hope that reminds us that while religion is part of the problem, it can also be part of the solution. The Dalai Lama has taken that step and calls himself a feminist.

Another excellent precedent is slavery. Each of the Abrahamic faiths accepted slavery. Muhammad owned slaves, and St. Paul seems to have condoned slavery. Yet the pioneers of the abolitionist movement were Quakers and evangelicals like William Wilberforce. People of faith ultimately worked ferociously to overthrow an oppressive institution that churches had previously condoned.

Today, when religious institutions exclude women from their hierarchies and rituals, the inevitable implication is that females are inferior. The Elders are right that religious groups should stand up for a simple ethical principle: any person's human rights should be sacred, and not depend on something as earthly as their genitals.

And now, I am off to Atlanta to participate in the Baptism of my lovely grandniece.

You may leave your comments and articles at tony@tonyercolano.com. Look forward to hearing from you. Your comments and forwarded articles make this all worthwhile.

God bless you.

Almost forgot, please check out an article written by Frida Berrigan on the Guantanamo debacle: <http://www.commondreams.org/view/2010/01/11-0>