

## **Interview with G. Danroc, OP about Haiti**

### **Interview of La Croix with Gilles Danroc January the 14th**

**Fr. Danroc Gilles has spent 20 years in Haiti. He participated in the panel discussion on the Franco Haitian relations in the end of 2003 chaired by writer Régis Debray, whose report was published by Editions de La Table Ronde.**

**Martine De Sauto: In misfortune Haitians turn to God to implore. Is it a deep piety, or something else?**

Brother Gilles Danroc: In advance, it seems essential not to compare, the way we live and react to the Haitians that we do not understand today that in the event they remain in the street, singing and pray. This nation was born by forceps in misfortune. It was taken from Africa, slavery, colonization. It had to reconstruct a language, a religion - voodoo. They are a people accustomed to misfortune, which lives in a time broken by disasters. Before the deadly earthquake, it had 3 hurricanes and a tropical storm towards the end of 2008. They sing and pray that God does not abandon them. They unite their strength to that of God who will never abandon them. We oppose the activism of the civilized to the religious fatalism of the poor when they know how to create incredible solidarity!

**MDS: Can we say that their faith is steeped in voodoo?**

GD: In the absence of reliable statistics, we consider that there are 80% Catholic, 40% of Protestants and ... 90% of followers of the voodoo religion. These figures are taken more seriously than it seems. Haitians use the word "Sou chans" to express what our eyes can not understand, what does not fit into our categories. Sou chans which means in other words, I take here, and there, and there too. I have nothing, but I take everything, even conceived as irreconcilable elements that I incorporate in my own way. I collect the spiritual or invisible energies because I have no concrete solutions. Haitians do not have the same representation of the world. Their world vision is to be linked with the absence of state and organized support structures which function. When we have a hardship similar to live, we turn to the state, utilities and support facilities. Haitians believe that the visible reality is the trace and the double of an invisible reality. They have the idea that somewhere, life is so important that it has a double spirituality, the invisible and the lively.

**MDS: Which place do they give to Christian faith?**

GD: The Catholic Church has had for a long time the official monopoly, visible in broad daylight, of religion in Haiti. But the balance of the colonial church is thin and ambiguous. After the collapse of the colony, the vacuum left by the church allowed the creation of voodoo, a religion of night that integrates various forms of traditional West-African religions. The voodoo is intrinsically involved in the formation of the rural Haitian culture. It is designed as a complement of Catholicism, although the converse is not formally true. This "Catho-Voodooism" explains why voodoo priests do not look at a

child unless it is baptized. The Catholic Church remains yet one to which they turn when they need help or dignity because it compensates for a state that can meet the social demand. While the Catholic Church came to organize, Protestantism, present in Haiti since 1816, has brought the image of a God who visits and comforts. It claims to break with Voodoo but reproduced it even in the most current forms of Pentecostalism of religious visions of voodoo. One of the founders of Pentecostalism, WJ Seymour was particularly impressed and influenced by the meeting in New Orleans with a voodoo priestess who had left the island after the revolt of 1791. Trances, common in voodoo and Pentecostalism, are typical of religions in the rural milieu. What explains the success of Pentecostal churches that give the possibility of immediate adhesion and fusion in a group of faith.

### **MDS: How are Haitians going to replay these events in the coming weeks?**

GD: Three symbols collapsed. The National Palace, the UN, and the cathedral. In the Haitian mentality, when they will reinterpret their misfortune, it means that God did not protect these three places, God is in anger against the political power, foreigners and the Catholic Church. The Haitians are going to live it as a final stage of the world, like the Pentecostals. Or God abandons the large institutions. Or God finds himself closer to the people. Once the emergency passed, the churches will have an important role to play in that it is finally put in place a coherent policy of solidarity that is based on listening to what the poor have to say and not on our models, and provide cohesion within society. In short one will need to connect a church near the people and a visible and international church, in short Catholic, which will really manage to organize charity as a mutual and fraternal life. Beyond filth and domination. Of course that requires in-depth analysis that urgency does not allow, then I have too much trouble. But nothing lasting can be done in Haiti if we do not change attitudes, if we do not listen, if we do not like this people where I have my best friends! In short if you do not choose Haiti as a true partner which with us will find real solutions ... But it's so hard today!

### **For a smart support to Haiti**

To combine the emotion very strong and incredible to the reflection always necessary to remain dignified and lucid in Haiti. Come along with all those friends who are struggling in an emergency, who should find the message and the right attitude in a precarious situation. This is also why the press in France and elsewhere may provide in support to Haiti! And first of all not to judge or imposing solutions that are too expensive and too technical to be effective over time.

Can we then speak of "smart aid"? The urgency pushes to later reflection, however, this country is facing resistance within the misfortune even if the forms of resistance confuse foreign nations. Instead of acting piecemeal, it is better to reverse the perspective and see the long-term goals like building the rule of law and establish genuine public services: education, health or the possible self sufficiency in food situation in a land of hunger. The list of long-term priorities is long, but certainly we can agree on the outline. And if democracy is also a stubborn learning of democracy in movement on the ground, the same way to achieve these objectives in a democratic way, especially with the exercise of

freedom of expression, will allow the deployment of State law lived as a common good for all people. Haiti has no underground resources and can not soon build a tower 800 meters high! But the eradication of poverty is possible in what was called a friendly and dignified poverty. The strong culture of this nation and the opening to the world of an intelligent and active Diaspora are international guarantees to hope rebuilding in this aim.

From these broad objectives in the long term, result medium-term objectives and specify the correct paths for aid from today.

Furthermore, it would be good to target the stages of assistance at a time when stops on site the search in the rubble.

In this confusing Now, we can identify some key points to work with the forces of Haiti but also reflecting on our patterns of aid and development.

1. Maximize national solidarity even quantitatively small, it is important psychologically, emotionally and symbolically to look ahead with dignity. The chaos of Port au Prince is a sign of an accelerated and uncontrolled rural depopulation, a sort of sudden break of the equilibrium capital city / province and town / countryside. In the dangerous emergency, should we not encourage a return to their provinces of all who have all to lose in Port au Prince without sanitation or water or assistance? This would help to focus the relief on the wounded and would free the ruined city from big population pressure when the revolt responds to impotence. The only activity will be survival, i.e. the expectation and dependence on food aid for several months!

No school or business activities organized! Why not distribute food aid in the towns which would be encouraged to welcome the survivors?

2. Food aid has already destroyed much of the capacity of local agricultural production, why not help farmers to produce and transport under good conditions the food closer to the capital by creating markets in smaller towns? Can we not combine emergency products and local products? Haiti can produce such rice, beans and corn and fruits that are saving the children! The same for relocation, must it not devolve places of temporary relocation to facilitate social relations?

3. To foster also up relations Haiti and Santo Domingo, and by extension, with Caricom and the entire Caribbean. Clearly, the proximity of the Antilles-Guyana or the Florida creates a favorable situation and mutual relations with Haiti. The one-way relationships do not last, others persist!

In addition, France has taken the initiative of an international conference; do we not already need to build a network of public health and national education? France, due to a long history of two sister republics born at the same time, can have a good expertise in culture, justice and governance. Or in building a road network, France has already built the road of friendship Port au Prince / Jacmel today cut. Or finally, in agriculture, the French cooperation has been a great experience of analysis and cooperation. Again in that

domain, the rural exodus has broken all sorts of initiatives that could resume in the reconstruction effort. For example, instead of concentrating schools in the capital city, what drives the families from the province to send children in Port au Prince, why not now build a network of colleges and high schools in provincial towns?

The task is immense. It requires the utmost intelligence and flexibility to allow forces to Haiti a key role in alliance with international assistance. France is an example. Why not revive Debray Committee or an equivalent committee involving a Haitian partner commission to start thinking about the future and reconstruction and thinking today how to manage emergencies. And the urgency is to loosen the jaws of the death trap that became Port au Prince and think the overall reconstruction of the country. Already avoid the trap of a massive aid that would focus solely on the capital city by destroying the Haitian solidarity so inventive and would create a permanent dependency.

**Brother Gilles Danroc OP**