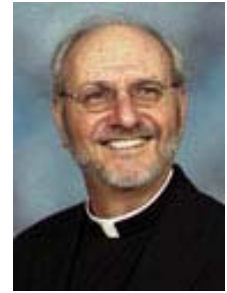


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New Orleans Holds Up a Mirror

When Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans, it tore open the levees and parted the curtain on inequality. Images of poor and black people lined up for shelter at the Superdome, while bumper to bumper SUVs and other traffic crawled out of the city.

A quick sampling of voices raised after the disaster reveals the submerged attitudes of the privileged and the desperate swimming of the underclass:

"So many of the people in the arena here...were underprivileged anyway, so this is working very well for them"-words of former first lady Barbara Bush after visiting hurricane refugees at Houston's Astrodome.

"No one knew the levees would break"-words of President Bush deflecting criticism of a feckless federal response.

"Our own government betrayed us"-words of a hurricane survivor speaking on National Public Radio.

The aftermath of the hurricane produced scores of heroes while awakening the deep generosity of the American people. Yet the enormity of the disaster graphically demonstrated the limitations of volunteer efforts as the government sat vigilant against terrorism but underfunded for natural disasters and social programs. With this tragedy, New Orleans holds up

a mirror reflecting the gaping holes in our social fabric based on race and inequality and a government overcome by an uncritical spirit of individualism at the expense of the common good.

The press and media surfaced the subtlety of race and class with their images and reporting. Two published news photos graphically caught the undertone of racial bias. In the first photo the caption described a white couple wading through chest-deep water "after *finding* bread and soda from a local grocery store." The second described a black youth wading through chest-deep water "after *looting* a grocery store." Internet sites juxtaposed the two photos for a "gotsha."

Reports using the phrase, "those who chose to stay behind," amounted to blaming the victims. Agreed, some few people of means might have freely chosen to stay. The elderly, the sick, the handicapped and the poor, however, with no cars, credit cards, or hotel reservations had few options and were forced to face the storm. In New Orleans, 35 percent of black households owned no car, compared with 15 percent of white households. The city's poverty rate in 2000 measured 27.4 percent. Poverty is not simply having no money - it's really about lack of voice and choice, opportunity and mo-

The Catholic Conference of KY (CCK) is an agency of the Catholic Bishops, established in 1983. It speaks for the Church in matters of public policy, serves as liaison to government and the legislature, and coordinates communications and activities between the church and secular agencies. There are 388,000 Catholics in the Commonwealth. The Bishops of the four dioceses of KY constitute CCK's Board of Directors.

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Coupled with race and class, Hurricane Katrina pointed out the consequences of an ideology of overly limited government. For more than two decades, anti-tax advocates and small government proponents have trumpeted an ideology of privatization by gutting public sector programs, shrinking public functions and undermining the common good. The Bush Administration accelerated that trend. It signaled its lower priority for domestic projects by cutting the budget of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for flood protection by \$71.2 million despite widely reported studies demonstrating the critical need for upgrading the levees.

In addition, one-third of the National

Guard from Louisiana and Mississippi--over 7,000 troops combined with their equipment and skills--are serving Iraq rather than their home states. The consequences of a morally questionable war coupled with a laissez-faire domestic ideology suddenly leap large in front of anyone surveying the property damage and loss of life from Hurricane Katrina.

New Orleans holds up the mirror. Social involvement and creative non-violent action become the agenda for a renewed society. People of faith know this. Appropriate government and the elimination of poverty now become the direction to replace the reflected images of death with hope of new life.

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