

RELIGIOUS CHANGE IN HAITI

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Most Haitians were ecstatic with the ouster of Jean-Claude. The Duvalier dynasty had controlled the country for twenty-nine years and, since it was a presidency “for life,” there was no end in sight.

The tee-shirts were everywhere, so popular that they gave the impression of being a uniform. In front, they were decorated with the Haitian flag and the words, “*Libération D’Haïti 7 Février 1986*” and, in back, big red letters spelled out “*Opération déshouké réussi.*”¹ In Creole, the language of most Haitians, these words meant that Haiti had been liberated and evil uprooted. Walls too proclaimed the liberation. There was graffiti everywhere, thanking the Catholic Church and the Catholic radio station, *Radio Soleil*, (literally Sun Radio) for their part in getting rid of the dictator.²

This gratitude toward the Church produced several effects. One was an increase in Church attendance. There was a heightened interest in the priesthood and growth in some of the religious orders, particularly those which had worked

¹ *Opération Déshoukaj* means literally “Operation to Uproot Evil.”

² See Anne Greene, *The Catholic Church in Haiti: Political and Social Change*, (East Lansing, Michigan State University Press, 1993), 191-210 for an analysis of the role of a sector of the Catholic Church in Haiti in the overthrow of Jean-Claude Duvalier.

with the poor. One was The Holy Cross order in Pilate, where Father Pollux Byas.³ helped Haitian peasants improve their economic situation. An overlapping effect was a surge in Church-initiated and-inspired programs.⁴

Following the expulsion of Jean-Claude Duvalier, the activist sector of the Church was ready for continued involvement and filled with a sense of empowerment. It was eager to start educational and social programs, to rid the country of residual effects of Duvalierism, such as the *tontons macoutes*, the security police force established by François Duvalier. Some wanted to work with the provisional government (CNG), to help it prepare for a real democracy.

On 7 February 1986, the day former President Duvalier fled Haiti, there were indications that the major priority for the bishops was different. They issued a pastoral message urging Haitians to pardon those who had oppressed them.⁵ Then the Archbishop of Port-au-Prince, François Wolff Ligondé, exhorted Haitians not to turn to violence and hate. On 9 February, then Bishop François Gayot of Cap Haitien, now an archbishop, offered a mass in which he spoke about his fear that

³ Bob Maguire, Haiti and Caribbean development specialist. Interview by the author, Inter-American Foundation, Balston, Virginia, 5 February 1997. According to Dr. Maguire, Father Byas used the Paolo Freire approach to teaching and had been to Brazil to meet Freire and see it in practice.

⁴ Ibid. Bob Maguire recalls that when the Inter-American Foundation wanted to support development projects in Haiti in the 1970s, it worked mainly with Catholic Church groups. After 1986, that changed. Groups wanted to work on their own, which Bob viewed as appropriate. It was a sign that they were growing up and moving away.

⁵ Conference of Haitian Bishops, *Message Pastoral des Evêques d'Haïti* (Port-au-Prince: CHB, 7 February 1986.)

Many Haitians had been victimized by the Duvalier regime so the temptation for revenge was understandable.

communism could emerge in Haiti.⁶ “This is the hour of reconciliation. From now on, the danger we have to watch out for is communism.”

Shortly thereafter, on 12 February 1986, the Pope himself said to an audience in Rome, “I endorse the words of the Bishops of Haiti and I send a warm greeting to the dear people of Haiti asking the Lord to guide them on a road to peace, prosperity, and national accord.”⁷ In March, Bishops Wolff Ligondé and Constant were called to Rome⁸ where they were counseled that the Church should get more involved with its pastoral work and withdraw from the political debate. Church people who acted on this advice, such as Bishop Gayot, were promoted, while activists in the Popular Church and Christian base communities known as *Ti-légliz*, were chastised.

On 27 June 1986, the Haitian bishops produced a document entitled *The Fundamental Charter for the Transition to a Democratic Society*, that described

⁶ Jean-Bertrand Aristide, *Jean Bertrand Aristide: An Autobiography*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1993, 65.

According to Father Hanssens, then Bishop Gayot warned against communism, but communism wasn't the problem, the problem was the *macoutes*. In the same declaration, Bishop Gayot took up the popular Church and condemned the *Ti-légliz*. Jan Hanssens, a Belgian priest, Secretary General of the Conference of Haitian Religious. Interview by the author on 6 November 1996 at Villa Manres, Port-au-Prince, Haiti.

The Cold War was played out in Haiti by the State and Church. François Duvalier was particularly adroit at portraying himself as an anti-Communist who required U.S. support and foreign assistance to counter Communism. The Church hierarchy, influenced by the anti-Communist Vatican of Pope Jean-Paul II and Cardinal Joseph Ratziger, and the events in Nicaragua and El Salvador, used the threat of communism to discourage political leadership from the Haitian Church.

⁷ Papal announcement to a general audience on 12 February 1986 at the Vatican. See Greene, *The Catholic Church in Haiti: Political and Social Change*, 211-244 for an overview of the post Duvalier Church from 1986 to 1991.

their expected involvement in the transition to a democratic, civilian government and also the limitations to that involvement. They would be of service to the national community in building “a new, reconciled and fraternal society,”⁹ but the Church was not a political power and had no duty to replace the government in politics or compete with political parties. Its role was to promote and defend human rights and train followers to participate in and influence political activities. The following month, Bishop Gayot further described the mission of the Church. It would be catechistic, liturgical, and social. While the social role had increased in recent years as the Church grew closer to the people, “it is not the political situation that determines its mission.”¹⁰

The bishops began to act on these principles. In November 1987, they suspended *Misyon Alpha*, the Church literacy program, in response to charges from the CNG and other detractors that it was encouraging communism.¹¹ *Radio Soleil*, the Church radio station, also became a casualty.¹²

⁸ Marlise Simons, “Haitian Prelate is Under Attack,” *New York Times*, 3 April 1986.

⁹ Conference of Haitian Bishops, *Charte Fondamentale Pour le Passage à Une Société Démocratique Selon La Doctrine et L’Expérience de l’Eglise* (Port-au-Prince: CHB, 27 June 1986.)

¹⁰ François Gayot, Interview by the author, Episcopate, Cap-Haitian, 10 July 1986.

¹¹ Jan Hanssens, Belgian priest, Secretary General, Conference of Haitian Religious. Interview by the author on 6 November 1996 at Villa Manres, Port-au-Prince, Haiti.

According to Father Hanssens, *Misyon Alpha* was closed down for more complex reasons including infiltration, mismanagement of money, too much mobilization, and too little education. Also in 1987, the hierarchy restructured *Radio Soleil*, replaced its staff, and began to produce purely spiritual programs.

¹² Robert Maguire, Interview by the author, Inter-American Foundation, Balston, VA, 7 February 1997. Bob remembers fighting for the Inter-American Foundation grant

A rift was developing within the Church. The hierarchy was increasingly opposed to those involved with the Popular Church. While the bishops closed down programs they disliked, they were unable to completely subdue the activists. Among those who continued to make their opinions heard were the Popular Church (*Ti-légliz*), nuns, women religious, the Church social service agency (CARITAS), and liberation theologians.

In 1982 and 1983, the Haitian Church and the Vatican had both promised to be on the side of the people until the end of their quest for liberty and progress and to work to construct a completely democratic society. On his March 1983 stopover in Haiti, the Pope had said, "*Il faut que les choses changent ici:*" things have to change here. These words were becoming less intelligible.

What explains the post-1986 change in the position of the bishops? In the first half of the 1980s, they came to identify opposition to President Duvalier as both legitimate and virtuous. Subsequently, they appreciated the approval their role had brought. However, following the overthrow of the dictator, the power vacuum, civil unrest, institutional disarray, miserable economy, competition from new organizations, eager activist sector of the Church, and omnipresent fear of communism, all caused them, with Vatican encouragement, to retreat.

The most vocal activist to emerge after 1986 was Jean-Bertrand Aristide. After becoming a Salesian priest in 1975, he was sent out of the country in 1982, possibly to be groomed as a Church scholar or to prevent his preaching against

to upgrade facilities at *Radio Soleil* and then, following the bishops' intervention, to have a "bunch of awful people, *macoutes*, Duvalierist priests, and lackeys put in." The new high tech equipment was never used as intended.

President Duvalier.¹³ In either case, Father Aristide returned in 1985, to a country he described as “in a state of general mobilization for change.” He was there to help it happen.

Following the ouster of the dictator, Father Aristide continued to denounce the corruption, thuggery, and intimidation that had characterized the fallen regime. He spoke of Duvalierism without Duvalier and the need for *déshoukaj*, or uprooting of the remaining evil in Haitian society.

Father Aristide’s principal targets were the *macoutes*, the private security force begun by François Duvalier to protect himself from his own army. However, Father Aristide apparently also intended to rid the country of *Vodouisants*, supporters of Voodoo. Many were attacked and killed. The Church denied participation in a latter day ‘anti-superstition’ campaign, but it did not attempt to stop the violence.

Father Aristide was critical of what he viewed as injustices in Haitian society. His speeches were both provocative and audacious when they were directed at the major centers of power in Haiti, including the President, military, judiciary, elites, and Church hierarchy, and beyond, to the United States.¹⁴ Consequently, few

¹³ Jean Bertrand Aristide, *An Autobiography*.

¹⁴ Press Release, *Lafanmi Selavi*, May 1990. This press release states that Jean Bertrand Aristide was going to New York to talk about street children. In addition, he was quoted as blaming the Trouillot Government for “little progress in curing violence or improving conditions for Haiti’s impoverished people and anticipated more violence with the upcoming elections. The press release concluded with some background notes about Aristide that said that he was ousted from Haiti in 1982 due to criticism of the Duvalier Government. He returned to Haiti in 1985 as the personification of the *Ti Légliz* movement. The news release credits Aristide with helping to oust Duvalier. Subsequently, his “political activism and popularity incurred the new Junta’s’ wrath and

observers were surprised that Father Aristide was target for retaliation. During those years, he was the intended victim of numerous attacks. He was shot at, ambushed, and stoned. What was surprising is that he survived.

The hierarchy and the Vatican were unsympathetic to Father Aristide.¹⁵ After an attack by military and *macoutes* on his Church, St. Jean Bosco, a Salesian superior arrived to chastise Father Aristide for its destruction.¹⁶ Several weeks later, the bishops published a letter accusing the Popular Church of inciting violence and class struggle.¹⁷ The Popular Church was “against the Pope and the bishops.” The Vatican demanded that the Church stop trying to accompany the people in its efforts for change.

Within a month of the attack on St. Jean Bosco, Father Aristide learned that he was again in danger, this time of being removed from the country, the Church, his order, or perhaps all three. These threats prompted an outpouring of support for Father Aristide from individual priests, Church groups and organizations. On 26 October 1988, eight priests¹⁸ wrote to the Conference of Haitian Bishops (CHB)

made the hierarchy and U.S. State Department uncomfortable.” In 1987, his Church was burned, his life was threatened, and then he was ousted from the Salesian order due to his political activism. But he is still a hero to Haitian youth and masses due to his very Christian vision of struggle and change. The news release concluded saying that Jean Bertrand Aristide’s work with street children was less known, and that he dedicates full time to this program.

¹⁵ William Smarthe, *Rencontre* # 8. “The Catholic hierarchy and Democratic Occupation in Haiti (1980-1993).” August-September 1993.

¹⁶ Jean-Bertrand Aristide, 97.

¹⁷ William Smarthe, *Rencontre* # 8.

¹⁸ Fathers William Smarthe, Antoine Adrien, Renald Clerisme, Miguel Jean-Baptiste, Joseph Louis, Jean-Pierre Louis, Emile Jacquot, Godfroy Midy. Open Letter to the Bishops’ Conference of Haiti. Port-au-Prince, Haiti, 26 October 1988.

asking that it speak with the General Superiors of the Salesians in Rome to demand that Father Aristide be allowed to continue his work in Haiti. Another letter, signed by 120 Haitian priests, requested he not be transferred.

Again Father Aristide chose not to avoid a dangerous situation. On 22 November 1988, he made a radio address¹⁹ summarizing peoples' objections to the situation in Haiti. Among them, the bishops:

You who have plotted against me,²⁰
You who have plotted against the Haitian people:
Bishop Paolo Romeo, Bishop Gayot, Bishop Ligondé.
Bishop Kébreau and the rest,
Please, don't be ashamed.
Look me in the eye.
I have come to tell you: I love you, too.
Because I love you, I must tell you the truth.
Truth and love are the same.
Truth and love are Jesus in the midst of the poor.

What luck for the Haitian Church,
Rich, thanks to the poor,
In a country that is poor because of the rich.
The Church is rich, thanks to us, the poor,
Who ceaselessly demand the truth
From every corner....

In the opinion of the authors, the question of Father Aristide's future was a concern of the Salesian Superiors, but goes beyond into the domain of the whole Church, to the people of Haiti, to the country. They denied the rumors about Father Aristide as the work of people who were cynically exploiting the crisis for their own ends. They didn't believe Father Aristide had repeatedly disobeyed his superiors, gotten too involved in politics or preached violence. If these stories were a problem, Father Aristide was willing explain himself. They concluded by asking the CHB to help them make sure he could stay with them among the poor

¹⁹ Jean-Bertrand Aristide, Jean Bertrand Aristide: An Autobiography, 99-105.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 100-101.

The Church is rich, thanks to us, the poor,
Who have stopped certain bishops
(Hidden behind the sins they commit)
When they try to tell lies,
To conspire together
And to create silence....

Three weeks later, on 8 December 1988, the Vatican, the Salesian Order, the Papal Nuncio (the representative from the Vatican to the State of Haiti), and the CHB did what they had threatened to do two years before when they gave him a written warning not to take part in politics;²¹ they expelled Father Aristide from the Salesian order without appeal and forbade him to preach in public in Haiti.

The decree stated, in part, that “his attitude has had a negative effect on his *confrères*...his selfishness demonstrates a lack of sincerity and of a religious and priestly consciousness.” The judgment indicates “the impossibility of a sincere and fruitful dialogue,...incitement to hatred and violence, and a glorifying of class struggle,.. the profanation of the liturgy.”²² In the estimation of Father Aristide,²³ the cause for the ouster was “preaching politics,” or as he called it “preaching food for all the people.”

Then, as threatened in August 1987,²⁴ Father Aristide was relocated to a Church outside Port-au-Prince. The bishops maintained that the order came from

²¹ Ibid., 71.

²² Ibid., 1993, 105.

²³ Jean-Bertrand Aristide, In the Parish of the Poor: Writings from Haiti. Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY, 1990.

²⁴ Ibid., 1993,81.

Rome, but friends of the priest pointed out that the bishops must have informed the Vatican.

During the four years between 1986 and 1990, presidential elections had been delayed, canceled, rigged, and usurped. In the Fall of 1990, when potential candidates from the major political parties withdrew from the upcoming presidential elections to protest the recent Congressional elections, prospects for the 1990 presidential elections also began to look grim.²⁵

The pre-election atmosphere was tense. There were attacks, particularly on those with ties to the Church. Father Aristide warned that the climate was wrong for the elections and criticized the lack of security. He was right. At a 5 December rally in Pétionville, someone threw a grenade into the crowd in which he was speaking.

The atmosphere took a turn for the worse on 16 October when Roger Lafontant, the former Interior Minister in the Jean-Claude Duvalier Government, became a candidate.²⁶ His presence was controversial for two reasons: he had been accused of terrible human rights abuses during the Duvalier years,²⁷ and by running,

²⁵ Radio Haiti-Inter, "Father Aristide Urges Unity During Elections," FL11102011590, Port-au-Prince in Creole 2000 GMT 9 October 1990. Aristide called for Haitians to unite, "alone we are weak; together we are strong." "The fork of division cannot be used to drink the soup of elections." He went on to remind Haitians that to accomplish goals, such as the ouster of President Duvalier and General Avril "an avalanche was launched." The same would have to happen to lower the cost of living, and get rid of criminals.

²⁶ J.P. Slavin, "Haitian Priest's Bid For Presidency Raises Fears." *National Catholic Reporter*, 2 November 1990.

²⁷ See Anne Greene, The Catholic Church in Haiti: Political and Social Change, 156-157. See also Edwige Balutansky, "Score of Candidates Seek Haitian Presidency." Reuters, 22 October 1990.

he was challenging a law that prohibited architects of the Duvalier dictatorship from holding elected office for a decade. Jean-Claude Bajeux, a former priest and head of a human rights organization in Haiti, spelled out the immediate implications:²⁸ if the Electoral Council decides to let Lafontant run, they lose credibility. If they decide not to let him, they will lose their lives.

Father Aristide entered the race two days later, on 18 October, moments before the filing deadline. Friends, such as René Préval and Antoine Isméry, had been urging him to run for some time. Apparently, the Joseph Lafontant candidacy helped him decide.²⁹

Despite the sudden appearance of Joseph Lafontant, the two front-runners in the 1990 elections were Marc Bazin and Jean-Bertrand Aristide, a study in contrast.

Tall and handsome, Marc Bazin had been an economist with the World Bank for many years and was described in the international press as an able international economist. Jean-Bertrand Aristide was a small, slight Catholic priest who was frequently portrayed as a cross between Khomeini and Castro, and referred to as “a radical priest.”³⁰

In Haiti, Dr. Bazin was known as the “American candidate.” Rumors circulated that he had received substantial financial support from a U.S. organization, The National Endowment for Democracy. Father Aristide was critical

²⁸ J.P. Slavin, “Haitian Priest’s Bid For Presidency Raises Fears.”

²⁹ Jean-Bertrand Aristide, Jean Bertrand Aristide: An Autobiography. Aristide maintained that he had no personal political ambition; that he was only responding to his followers.

³⁰ J.P. Slavin, “Haitian Priest’s Bid For Presidency Raises Fears.”

of the United States, as reflected clearly in his campaign record, “Capitalism is a Mortal Sin.”

A further difference that influenced voters was that Marc Bazin had briefly served in the Jean-Claude Duvalier Government but had been out of the country during much of that period, whereas Father Aristide had been in Haiti until 1982 and again after 1985, and had worked to overthrow the dictator.

When Aristide entered the presidential elections, the CHB issued a statement urging Haitians to register and vote but was otherwise silent.³¹ Such obvious lack of support was interpreted by some observers as a prologue for the coup that followed,³² and gave the military permission to do it.

On the eve of the 1990 elections, Jean-Claude Bajeux summed up “the blind adhesion of a large part of the people to the priest-preacher, authority on the liturgy.”³³ Looking back over the previous four years, only Aristide had spoken out, “condemning *macoutism* constantly and courageously.” Consequently, people were counting on him to do what the politicians didn’t do, to neutralize the evil doers.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Guy Vandecandelaere, Belgian priest. Interview by the author on 6 November 1996 at Villa Manres, Port-au-Prince, Haiti. According to Father Vandecandelaere, without the support of the bishops there would not have been a coup. He concludes that it is hard to imagine that the bishops were not in touch with the military.

³³ Jean-Claude Bajeux, “Aristide? Pourquoi Aristide?” *Le Nouvelliste*, 14 décembre 1990. In a talk on *Race and Class in Haiti* at the Ralph Bunche International Affairs Center at Howard University on 12 November 1996, Ambassador Lyonel Paquin referred to Jean Bertrand Aristide as a prophet. According to him, every generation in Haiti has had its prophet. Others included Sylvain Salnave, Charlamagne Masséna Péralté, and Daniel Fignolé.

A Belgian priest, Guy Vandecandelaere,³⁴ who has lived in Haiti for many years, added that Father Aristide had the ability to talk, to express what people are thinking, and to bring it to public attention. That appeal did not stop with the poor but extended to intellectuals, although not necessarily rich ones. Aristide was the motor against poverty and other problems; he played a prophetic role in Haiti. The Belgian priest concluded by mentioning the impact that Aristide had had on him. Father Aristide made him a better priest, more conscious of the poor. So, through his love for people, particularly the young, his defense of the poor and support for human rights, Aristide was seen as a leader who could fight the traditional politicians against the status quo.

The elections were singularly smooth and honest and the results were also surprising. The winner was the civilian and a controversial Catholic priest. The transfer of power miraculously also went without a hitch. Jean Bertrand Aristide became the first democratically elected president in Haitian history. At the inauguration, Jacques Gaillot, a French bishop, told President Aristide,³⁵ “no one can halt the destiny of the people. I think that the bishops and Rome will rejoice with me.” These remarks turned out to be more optimistic than prophetic.

The election of President Aristide in 1990, was a triumph for the candidate and for the Popular Church. The *Ti-légliz* found itself in an unprecedented and powerful position *vis à vis* the state and the Church hierarchy. Devotees of liberation theology had called for a new, egalitarian relationship within the Church

³⁴ Guy Vandecandelaere, Belgian priest in Haiti. Interview by the author on 6 November 1996 at Villa Manres, Port-au-Prince, Haiti.

³⁵ Jean-Bertrand Aristide, Jean Bertrand Aristide: An Autobiography, 10.

but the hierarchy had been unwilling to concede power. Suddenly, in Haiti, it had occurred.

The election of President Aristide, was a defeat for the hierarchy.³⁶ Historically, it had made decisions for the Church in Haiti. Father St. Hillien Simon,³⁷ a Church historian and assistant to Bishop Lafontant, characterized the situation as terrible for the Church as a whole, but that they had to accept what they couldn't change. Some could not. One of them was the Archbishop of Port-au-Prince.

On New Year's Day 1991, following the elections, Archbishop Ligondé made a speech at the Cathedral in Port-au-Prince expressing his opposition to the President elect.³⁸ The Archbishop said, "Fear is sending a chill down the spines of many fathers and mothers of families." He added, we are heading toward "an authoritarian police regime," with the installation of a "political police" and "a

³⁶ William Smarthe, *Rencontre* # 8. According to Father Smarthe, neither the bishops nor the Vatican could accept that a priest they had rejected had so rapidly become one of the leading figures in the nation. Resorting to Canon Law, the law of the Church, they denied him the right to be a political leader despite all the exceptions the Church had the habit of making. In Smarthe's estimation, the vision of justice, participation, and transparency of Father Jean-Bertrand Aristide frightened most of the bishops. Smarthe mentions one reason given by the bishops why Aristide should not be President. "It is unacceptable that the bishops say 'Excellency' to Jean-Bertrand Aristide who is a simple priest."

³⁷ Father St. Hillien Simon, an assistant to Bishop Lafontant. Interview by the author, 5 November 1996, Port-au-Prince, Haiti.

³⁸ Jean-Bertrand Aristide, *Jean Bertrand Aristide: An Autobiography*, 131.

In response to this speech by Archbishop Ligondé, people torched the Cathedral and then marched to the Nunciature, which they trashed, then paraded the Zairian Nuncio in his underwear and attacked his first Secretary with a machete. There is some controversy around who led this rampage. Some claim that it was done by President-elect Aristide's supporters. Others say that people with cellular phones were in the crowd, suggesting *agents provocateurs*.

campaign of denunciation.” He asked, “Is a socialist Bolshevism going to triumph?”

Liberation theology had been elevated to public policy. As a consequence, religion would certainly have played a central role in the Aristide Government. Many appointees and advisors had religious connections. Religious themes ran through his speeches, such as the one on 27 September 1991 at the United Nations just prior to the coup, “The Ten Commandments of Democracy in Haiti.”

Powerful forces in Haiti, including the Catholic hierarchy, the military, and the elites³⁹ were arrayed against President Aristide and his government. As a result, many people predicted that he would not be allowed to win the presidency. When he won, they expected that he would not be permitted to take office. When he took office, they said that he would not be allowed last very long.

³⁹ At the very least, Aristide did not cultivate the U.S. Embassy. He routinely referred to U.S. Ambassador Alvin Adams as “*Bourik Chaje*” and the Haitian Army as “the ‘loaded donkey’s flunky.’” See “Father Aristide Holds News Conference,” Port-au-Prince *Radio Metropole* in French, 1600 GMT, 7 September 1990, FBIS-LAT-90-176, 11 September 1990. (The source of this *sobriquet* was a comment Ambassador Adams himself made on the tarmac of the airport on arrival in Haiti. To show that he was going to be an activist Ambassador, this Creole-fluent linguist referred to himself saying, “a loaded donkey doesn’t stand still.” Subsequently, he was referred to as “Loaded Donkey.”)

In a 6 July 1990 response from London, England to Ambassador Adams, who had condemned violence in Haiti, President Aristide says how meaningful it will be if the government “that operates under orders from the U.S. Government listens.” Then goes on to call him “the boss of all the (Haitian) peoples’ big bosses who are on their knees at your feet,” then signs himself off as “Charlemagne-Péralte-ly yours.” (Charlemagne Péralte was the most famous opponent of the U.S. 1915-1934 occupation of Haiti. See “Father Aristide Responds to U.S. Ambassador,” Port-au-Prince Radio Antilles Internationales in French, 1730 GMT, 6 July 1990, FBIS-LAT-90-133, 11 July 1990 and also “Charlemagne Masséna Péralte,” by Anne Greene, *Encyclopedia of Latin American History and Culture*, Charles Scribner’s Sons, Vol. 4, 1996, 345-6.)

On 30 September 1991, the foreseen *coup d'état* occurred⁴⁰ when the military, under the command of General Raúl Cédras, deposed President Aristide. The Junta quickly consolidated its position and created an interim government. It cracked down on its critics, in particular on supporters of Aristide⁴¹- the grassroots, labor, and Church organizations.⁴² Throughout the coup years, President Aristide's associates were gunned down in the streets, driven into hiding, and forced to flee the country.⁴³ On 13 September, 1993, a close friend of President Aristide, Antoine Isméry, was assassinated, and, on 28 August 1994, another friend, Jean-Marie Vincent, a prominent Catholic priest, was murdered.

The Junta launched a propaganda attack against President Aristide, quoting statements by him that appeared to endorse “necklacing,” or killing people by putting burning tires around their necks. The propaganda had an effect. Initial

⁴⁰ Ironically, only four days earlier, President Aristide had addressed the United Nations and boasted that “democracy (in Haiti) has won out for good; the roots are growing stronger and stronger.”

⁴¹ Dominique Levanti, journalist, *Agence France Press*. Interview by the author on 7 November 1996 at *Agence France Presse* headquarters, Port-au-Prince. Levanti, who has reported from Haiti for decades, characterized the coup years in Haiti as “terrible.”

⁴² Robert Maguire, Interview by the author, Inter-American Foundation, Balston, VA, 7 February 1997. According to Bob Maguire, activist peasant groups met in evangelical Churches during this period, using them as a cover because they could not count on protection in the Catholic Churches.

⁴³ One hundred thousand Haitians fled Haiti during the coup years, 1991-1994, while few left during the seven months of the Jean Bertrand Aristide Government. One who left during the coup years was Jean-Claude Bageux, Director of the Ecumenical Center for Human Rights in Port-au-Prince. Following an attack on his house in October 1993, he went to the Dominican Republic. After the return of Aristide, he came back. For a touching article on the situation in Haiti of May 1994, see his paper, Ecumenical Center for Human Rights. “Between Promises, Dream, and Reality, Will Haiti Survive? 18 May 1994.

enthusiasm for returning the President diminished as these critical reports about him began to circulate. The Haitian bishops weighed in. The OAS was preparing to send a delegation to Haiti to meet with the de facto regime when the Haitian bishops wrote, urging that institution to give careful consideration before intervening on behalf of Aristide, whom they described as having urged his followers to murder enemies of his government.⁴⁴ They were in total agreement with its desire to establish a state of law and a democratic society in Haiti. However, they denied that restoring Jean-Bertrand Aristide would result in a return to democracy. “Is it proper to speak of a return to democracy since this principle has not been applied? Are we not fighting for an idealistic principle which does not correspond to the existing reality? Let it suffice to recall the act of ‘necklacing,’ which from the perspective of respect for life and human rights is considered horrible and disgraceful.” The CHB concluded that it wanted to avoid radicalizing Haitians and provoking confrontations. Haitian society was divided into two opposing factions, which makes them fearful. A realistic solution needed to be found that would set the reconciliation process in action.

Countries and individuals differed as to what to do about President Aristide, but virtually all agreed that the de facto administration was illegitimate. Only the Vatican appeared to believe otherwise. In April 1992, the Vatican sent Monsignor Lorenzo Baldisseri to Port-au-Prince, where the new Papal Nuncio presented his credentials to President Nérette, head of the de facto administration. Thus, the

⁴⁴ Conference of Haitian Bishops. Memorandum of the Haitian Bishops’ Conference to the Civil Mission of the Organization of American States. Port-au-Prince: (CHB, 12 November 1991.)

Vatican became the only state to recognize the military regime. Other ambassadors continued to present their credentials to President Aristide in Washington, DC.

The Vatican never spoke out against the dictatorship nor called for the return of President Aristide. For many, this was a cause of sorrow and outrage. In a fax on 29 September 1993 to Tim McCarthy of the *National Catholic Reporter*, Sister Mary Healey, RSM, director of the WOH wrote, “sadly” the Vatican had given no support for the democratically elected government of President Aristide nor condemned the “murderous activities of the current power holders in Port-au-Prince.” Haiti needed support, she felt that there was danger of it being purloined by the corrupt government. It was absolutely crucial to restore the legitimate government to Haiti as the basis for all international assistance. The international community needed to “show trust in the Haitian people and their right take control of their own destiny.” However, the Vatican itself failed to convey such trust when the people courageously chose Father Aristide as their President. Nevertheless, it was still possible for the Vatican to unequivocally endorse the democratic choice of Haitians.⁴⁵

Typical of the frustration of certain Church people is evident in a letter they wrote directly to Pope Jean-Paul II on 19 June 1992 concerning the role of the Vatican in the crisis.⁴⁶ Father Aristide had been democratically and overwhelmingly elected President, they said. In the seven months before his ouster, he had made

⁴⁵ Sister Mary Healey, RSM, Director, Washington Office on Haiti, fax to Tim McCarthy, *National Catholic Reporter*, 29 September 1993.

⁴⁶ People of God. *Letter to the Pope*, Jean-Paul II. Port-au-Prince: People of God, 19 June 1992.

enormous efforts to redress the catastrophic situation he'd inherited. There was justice, participation, transparency. Human rights had been respected.

The coup was terrible, they continued. Within a year, there were 2,000 victims, 38,000 boat people, and tens of thousands were forced to leave their homes. They observed that students, teachers, workers, the poor, and the press had been repressed.

Vatican recognition was wrong and Baldisseri should be recalled, they said. The de factos were taking advantage of recognition to step up persecution against the Church, mistreat Church people, and invade the Bishopric at Les Cayes and the presbytery of Pliche because they knew most of the bishops supported the coup. Many people think the Nuncio, in conjunction with the bishops, ordered the attack on the Church to counter any popular protests.

The authors accused the Church of collusion with the de factos. They had proof that pastors of Catholic Church in Haiti, assisted by some religious had worked in the shadow to bring in this new oppressive, military government, and this included the Papal Nuncio, Archbishop of Cap Haitian, and the Auxiliary bishop of Port-au-Prince. The only solution to the crisis was a return of Aristide. The people chose him as president for five years, in accordance with the 1987 Constitution.

The authors concluded that the Church has an important role to play in Haiti, like it or not. It should serve as witness to justice, truth and love. It can't be silent.

The hierarchy of the Catholic Church in Haiti was virtually silent following the coup. The only exception was Willy Roméélus of Jérémie. Not even the younger auxiliary bishops of Port-au-Prince, Lafontant and Kébreaux, appointed to

counterbalance the Duvalierist Bishop Wolff Ligondé, had raised objection to the *junta*. In any case, the silence of the hierarchy grew louder with time and the occurrence of atrocities.⁴⁷ William Smarthe reflected the general outrage when he said, “more than 2,000 deaths and not a word of protest.”

The position of the bishops was implicit in a letter from Bishop Laroche,⁴⁸ a former President of the CHB, to Daniel E. Pharczyk, Archbishop of Cincinnati, President of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops in the United States, on 22 October 1991. Bishop Laroche knew that the American bishops were concerned about the situation in Haiti and wondered what they could do. After acknowledging their concern, Bishop Laroche wrote that a nine member commission from the OAS had just been to Haiti and reached the conclusion that the situation there was less black and white than they had previously thought. However, Bishop Laroche added, things were “evolving in Haiti.” The National Assembly had named a provisional president who had selected a prime minister. Life was almost normal. Knowing the American bishops wanted to help, Bishop Laroche asked them to try to prevent a commercial embargo on the country as it would hurt Haitians.

Bishop Willy Romélus of Jérémie was an anomaly. The most outspoken of the bishops during the Duvalier era, he continued to be outspoken in his opposition to the de facto regime despite the obvious danger. On 29 November 1991, two months after the military coup, Bishop Romélus marked the occasion by reminding Haitians of how people had come out in droves to choose the president they wanted

⁴⁷ William Smarthe, *Rencontre* # 8.

to lead their country, how beautiful things had taken place between 7 February and 29 September 1991, how people felt safe, money began to fill the state treasuries, corruption disappeared, journalists were free to say what they wished and political leaders could speak out. Now all of that was gone, due to the army, which illegitimately took power and had killed people by the thousands. They should get out. The bishop concluded his message by telling the people to continue their struggle.

On another occasion, when a ferry, *the Neptune*, traveling between Jérémie and Port-au-Prince sank in January 1993, drowning the vast majority of its thousand passengers, the Bishop offered a mass for the victims in the Cathedral of Port-au-Prince. During the mass, he criticized the de facto administration for contributing to the conditions that had led to the disaster because the boat was operating in a neglected condition without lifeboats or other safety mechanisms. On the street after the mass, Bishop Romélus was attacked by people with machetes and only escaped due to a cordon of parishioners.

Almost exactly three years after the coup that ousted President Aristide from power, he was able to return to Haiti. On 31 July 1994, the U.N. Security Council passed resolution (S/Res/940) approving a plan to raise a multilateral force to “use all necessary means to facilitate the departure from Haiti of the military dictatorship.” On 16 September, as a strategy for the military invasion was being finalized, a negotiating team, composed of former President Jimmy Carter, Senator

⁴⁸ Bishop Leonard P. Laroche, President, Conference of Haitian Bishops. Letter to Daniel E. Pharczyk, Archbishop of Cincinnati, President, National Conference of Catholic Bishops. 22 October 1991.

Sam Nunn and former Chair of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff Colin Powell, went to Haiti to seek a last-minute departure of the Haitian Junta. On 18 September, President Clinton announced that the mission had been successful. The Junta would step down and U.S. troops would be landing in Haiti the next day. On 19 September, U.S. forces landed unopposed in Port-au-Prince and on 15 October, President Aristide returned to Haiti.

On the eve of President Aristide's departure for Haiti, the Vatican announced⁴⁹ its plans to be of assistance to President Aristide. The Holy See said that in order to bolster the restoration of democracy, it would increase its charity and social efforts in Haiti. It added that *Cor Unum*, an umbrella charity organization, along with other international Church agencies, would be considering how to strengthen the Church's vast network of social services in Haiti. The Vatican concluded by urging the international community to ease the political transition by offering debt relief and other measures.

After President Aristide returned to Haiti, the Vatican sent an emissary, Roger Etchegaray to make an official reconciliation between the Church and State. In addition, it replaced Lorenzo Baldisserie and sent a new Nuncio, Christophe Pierre.

President Aristide's followers were ecstatic over his return to Haiti. Before long, however, a sense of disillusionment set in among many of them. "Titid" did not seem to be the same person. The champion of social justice was entertaining the

⁴⁹ John Travis, "Vatican Moves to Help Bolster Democracy in Haiti." Catholic News Service, National Catholic Reporter Publishing Company, 27 September 1993.

wealthy in the palace and contemplating privatization of state industries. His wealth, marriage, and luxurious house further strained loyalty.⁵⁰

The Church, which had historically sided with those in power, came to question its loyalties during the Duvalier dictatorship. An activist sector of the Church ultimately helped oust Jean-Claude Duvalier from office. Ironically, the Church contributed to the overthrow of a second president in 1991.

Between 1986 and 1991, a rift developed between the hierarchy and the Popular Church concerning the legitimate role of the Church in society. The election of Father Aristide was a triumph, however short-lived, of liberation theology, a movement that came late but reached rare heights in Haiti.

⁵⁰ Dominique Levanti, journalist, *Agence France Press*. Interview by the author on 7 November 1996 at *Agence France Presse* headquarters, Port-au-Prince, Haiti and Guy Vandecandelaere, a Belgian priest in Haiti. Interview by the author on 6 November 1996 at Villa Manres, Port-au-Prince, Haiti.

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