

February 19, 2023

## *In Such a Filthy Place*

Sometimes when I am filming, something totally unexpected happens. In Cité Soleil, I saw a little girl, perhaps five or six years old, walking through the trash. She had on rags, yet she somehow radiated a sense of beauty and innocence. I turned on the video camera and followed her as she walked. Flies and insects were swirling around her. She was not wearing shoes, yet she was walking through trash that had to contain hidden sharp objects. I had no idea where she was going, I just found her image and the gentle way she walked to be compelling, and so I kept the camera rolling as I followed her solitary journey. Suddenly, she stopped, pulled down her shorts and squatted down to urinate. As soon as I realized what was happening, I quickly panned the camera away to protect her privacy and dignity. But that little girl, walking barefoot through the trash surrounded by a host of bugs, on a journey to a quiet spot to pee really disturbed me, deeply upset me. But that is the reality. And we cannot hide from it. This is hard stuff to see, and it forces us to face hard choices as how to respond. There should be no place on earth, where an innocent, little girl should be forced to urinate in such a filthy place and in such a public manner.

## *One With All*

Christ was born in a world where there was no room for him. His first earthly home was with people who had no home, people who were regarded as weak and powerless. Christ belonged to people who did not belong.

And so, with people for whom there is no room in our world, Christ is present. Christ calls us to make our home among them, to be one with them, to love them as He does.

Not all of us literally need to make our home among the rejected, but all of us need “to be at home” with them, that is to be comfortable among them, to spend time with them, to laugh with them, to cry with them, to embrace them, to be bound in fraternity with them, to have them present within us, always mindful of their needs. To be one with God is to be one with all.

Both from my book *Hidden in the Rubble* published in 2010 by Orbis Books.

## *Sanctions, yes; military intervention, no*

Another former Haitian president has been sanctioned by Canada as the country’s prime minister, Justin Trudeau, announced Thursday that his government will deploy Royal Canadian Navy vessels to conduct surveillance, gather intelligence and maintain a maritime presence off the Haitian coast in the coming weeks to help the country’s struggling police force fight heavily armed gangs.

In a press conference in Nassau, The Bahamas, Trudeau said, “Canada has long recognized that much of the instability in Haiti comes from a small number of powerful lead families who are fomenting instability and financing violence for their own gains at terrible costs to the Haitian

people. That is why from the very beginning we have stepped up on sanctions.” Trudeau was in Nassau to attend 44th regular meeting of leaders of the Caribbean Community, CARICOM.

“Until the Haitian elites and leadership are held to account for their role in this horrific crisis in Haiti, we will not be able to deal with it,” Trudeau added. “We have to get to the root causes.” He noted that to date his government has issued “robust” targeted sanctions against 17 individuals who are accused of helping gangs in Haiti.

On Thursday, the Biden administration, which previously issued financial sanctions against four members of the Haitian Senate, also announced that it was imposing visa restrictions against five individuals and seven family members. The United States doesn’t make public the names of people subject to State Department visa bans. “This action sends a clear message of our continued commitment to root out corruption and impact the behavior of bad actors whose influence underpins the lawlessness in Haiti,” U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a statement. “Our actions today demonstrate that there are consequences for those instigating violence and unrest in the country.”

Blinken said the U.S. has issued visa restrictions against 44 Haitian nationals since October. The latest restrictions, he said, affect Haitian officials and other individuals involved in the operation of street gangs and criminal organizations that have threatened the livelihoods of the Haitian people and is related to recent deaths of 14 Haitian national police officers killed in January.

Trudeau announced that in the coming days his country will also deliver additional armored vehicles to Haiti, which the government purchased. He stressed that his country continues to “reinforce the capacities of the Haitian police to overpower armed gangs and hold those who support them accountable,” but stopped short of offering to do what the United States and the Haitian government have been asking of him: lead international troops into Haiti. Trudeau noted that “over the past 30 years, Canada has sent many, many missions to Haiti. U.N. missions, humanitarian missions, missions to build hospitals, missions to support police, missions to support prison guards. We’ve continued to step up and be there for the Haitian people and we have made commitments that we will continue to do that.”

### *Working in the Dark*

In Henry James’s story “The Middle Years,” an artist says, “We work in the dark—we do what we can—we give what we have. Our doubt is our passion and our passion is our task.” I am riddled with doubt about most of what I do and what I write. Yet, all that I brought to the table when making my poverty films was a passion to show viewers the real life of the poor and linking their fate to our faith by helping viewers see the face of Christ in the face of a homeless person, in the face of an undocumented migrate, in the face of those suffering at the hands of prejudice and rejection. Writing my books was how I expanded my consciousness and overcame doubt...and not knowing anything about grammar...and my spelling was atrocious. Everything has been fueled by my passion to learn, grow, and change...and to help those in need. In Haiti, I’m riddled with doubts but I have no doubt about my love of the kids and my passion to improve their lives.

The fact that few buy the books or the films really does not matter. I gave all I had to the task at hand.

## *Torah Study*

Yesterday, I interrupted my decluttering to make more space for my wife. I pressed the pause button in order to attend via Zoom Beyt Takkun's Shabbat celebration & Torah study led by Rabbi Michael Lerner and Rabbi Cat Zavis. When I joined the meeting, it had not yet begun. About 30 people had already joined and another 30 or so would soon join. Rabbi Cat Zavis was chatting with those present while she set up the technical side of the presentation. When she saw my name and image pop up on her screen, "Gerry, we got your book in the mail. Thanks for sending it. We are excited to get into it." We being her and her husband Rabbi Michael. I sent Rabbi Michael my book *Reading Thomas Merton and Longing for God in Haiti*, along with a note saying I sent it in honor of his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday. I noted that the book had many quotes from Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel. Rabbi Michael was once a student of the great Rabbi Heschel. The note also mentioned that I quoted from Rabbi Michael's book *The Politics of Meaning*.

The meeting began with nearly an hour of prayers and singing. It was joyous and moving. During the hour I felt all tension, stress, worry, and doubt quietly lift like the morning fog. The beautiful prayers and reflections could be uttered a devout member of any faith. I jotted down a few lines.

*Make your life into a voice of God, both in your stillness and movement.*

*Source of mercy with loving strength untie our tangles.*

*Compassionate power guard the precious who seek union with you.*

*My heart will rejoice in serving your plan.*

*My heart will sing to the One who completes it with love.*

*Those who live in harmony with higher realms,  
live sheltered by the power of the almighty.*

*Transform your peoples, bless your inheritance,  
lift us beyond our smallness of vision to that of the vast.*

*I am part of the unity of all being. A manifestation of God's love on earth.*

I love listening to the older Rabbi discuss tough passages from the "old testament." He brings a new and bright light to the text.