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Patrick Fitzpatrick

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We'll rise again from ashes

Pat Fitzpatrick CSSp

The photograph before me captures the good, the bad and the ugly of it all. A teenager with his head wrapped in a gauze bandage. His right eye is partially closed. His right cheek is scarred. Blood still oozes from his right temple. His shoulders are hunched and his T-shirt reveals where that temple blood had found its way down his chest. But there is a determination about those closed lips and that piercing stare from his left eye. He is a survivor.

Astride an east-west fault line, Haiti is no stranger to eruptions. But somehow or other this earthquake was really appalling. Maybe due to the ability of the media to capture and transmit the photos, nothing — ruined buildings, roads piled high with debris, terror-stricken people, the mansions of the rich, the President's Palace, cathedrals, schools, churches, statues, market places — nothing escaped this 45-second heaving in the bowels of the earth.

Spiritans mourn the loss of Collège Saint-Martial in Port-au-Prince. Confiscated in 1964 by Papa Doc Duvalier, one of the most tyrannical of Haiti's tyrants, it was returned to them in 1994 and over the past sixteen years had reestablished itself as a premier Catholic school. Now it lies virtually unusable.

Up in the mountains near Leogane, close to the quake's epicentre, Fondwa University has been totally destroyed. Its founder and current director, Fr Joseph Philippe has spoken in Toronto: "Everything in Fondwa has gone. The infrastructure we had built in 22 years: the Orphanage, the School, the Clinic, the Radio Station, the Sisters' convent, the buildings of Fondwa University — everything has gone. But apart from one seminarian, we are alive and in strong solidarity with our country. Together we will rebuild Fondwa and Haiti."

From neighbouring Dominican Republic, U.S. Spiritan Don McEachin drove overnight to Port-au-Prince in a pick-up truck with food, medicine and water. "The beauty of the

countryside was in sharp contrast to what would follow," he wrote. "There were dead bodies along the side of the roads. Some large buildings had fallen into the streets and made passage difficult. No one was sleeping indoors. There were more film crews than relief efforts.

"Next door in the Dominican Republic we are observing days of mourning. It was striking last night to be outside and not hear music from all directions. Every bar, every store, and most homes play music constantly in the evenings. But now there is absolute silence like I have never heard in my five years here, except maybe on Good Friday."

Where to now?

One of the first instincts of survivors is to pick up the pieces. Drawn back to a home now destroyed, they gaze at it, helpless and silent. In their mind's eye they reconstruct the old dwelling place: "Here's where ..." Then comes the "Where to now?" question launching them towards a God-knows-where destination.

Imagine a better Haiti, a Haiti for all its peoples: women as well as men, children as well as adults, a place at the table for rich and poor, a government for the people and not just for the rich, a truly indigenous church — all tapping into the life-giving beauty and eye-catching colour of the Haitian people.

There is more than Haiti in this issue of *Spiritans*. But Haiti claims centre stage. Already gone from the front pages of newspapers, no longer the lead-off item on nightly newscasts, repair and renewal are under way. And through our Spiritan outreach many collaborators have furthered that work by their contributions and their ongoing prayer.

May there come a Bran Nue Day (another story in our current issue) for this long-suffering, impoverished, denuded Caribbean island and its vibrant, fragile, resilient people. ■

