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Atheists for Aid to Haiti

by Michael Sean Winters

NCR Today

We are all by now aware of the idiot remarks by Rush Limbaugh about the tragedy in Haiti. But, from Britain, via USA Today, comes a report that renowned atheist Richard Dawkins has set up a special website for non-believers to give to the relief effort. I am all for relief assistance, no matter what the source, but why did Dawkins, like Limbaugh, think that this tragedy should become a vehicle for making an unrelated ideological point?

It is especially amusing that one of the two relief agencies to which Dawkins will give whatever funds he raises is the Red Cross. Now, I understand that the Red Cross is a thoroughly secular organization these days, but its name indicates that its initial inspiration was a little bit Christian. Will Dawkins concede that Pope Benedict is on to something when he insists that if Western culture is ignorant of faith, it is ignorant of its roots? The organization could have been called the Red Parrot, or the Red Hospital, or whatever. But, it is called the Red Cross.

Dawkins and his ilk would also be easier to stomach if they would at least grant that the churches are among the best providers of aid in crises such as this. One piece of data certainly jumped off the page at me: Catholic Relief Services had 300 staff on the ground in Haiti before the earthquake. Not only do Catholic relief agencies consistently operate with the lowest overhead, and therefore deliver more of the dollars they receive in actual aid, but having 300 staff who know the landscape, the language and the people is certainly a great benefit when trying to deliver aid amidst the chaotic situation in Haiti.

There are plenty of reasons to not want to be a Catholic or a Christian. But, our proven track record of aid to Haiti is not one of them.

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