

A New Orleans Response

McCain supporter and San Antonio Pastor John Hagee launched his attacks on New Orleanians shortly after Hurricane Katrina struck. His assertion that God punished New Orleans to stop a scheduled annual Gay Pride event is so inconceivable that many here are left nearly speechless and speculating what, exactly, the tsunami victims, or those who died on 9/11, or the children crushed in this week's earthquake might have been planning to deserve their tragic fates.

In the past two and a half years, we have begun to return home. Until now, we have been too busy rebuilding our community to pay much attention to the malicious pronouncements of John Hagee, who has said on several occasions that Hurricane Katrina was God's judgment on our City because "New Orleans had a level of sin that was offensive to God."

Now that Hagee is elevated to national prominence as one of John McCain's sought-after allies and spiritual advisers, it seems appropriate for McCain to publicly and emphatically state his disavowal of Hagee's hateful speech. All New Orleans has gotten from McCain was one word: "Nonsense."

It is certainly nonsense that a candidate for the highest office in the land stands blithely by while one of his biggest supporters spews vitriol, aimed at the victims of one of our greatest national tragedies.

When called upon by the American community to retract his statements, Hagee did so only by saying: "ultimately neither I nor any other person can know the mind of God concerning Hurricane Katrina."

Further insulting, during a recent conference call with his supporters, Hagee retracted his apology: "When a woman on the call asked why he seemed to have backed away from his Katrina comments in face of criticism, Hagee said he hadn't. As for Katrina he said: 'God controls hurricanes and God always punishes unconfessed sin'" (as reported in the Dallas News).

New Orleanians are easy-going and tolerant by nature, but John McCain's statement that he is still "proud" to have received the endorsement of John Hagee will not be forgotten here.

For the record, the flooding in New Orleans after Katrina was caused, not by a Gay Pride Parade, but by separations in three canal levees that failed because they were built "on the cheap" with sheet pilings that were shorter than original designs proposed.

Like other cities, New Orleans faces many challenges. The promises that make America what it is, of life, liberty, and equal protection for all citizens, represent a great and worthy and difficult goal. Here in New Orleans, we are working hard and we are hopeful. In returning home, we have professed a belief that we can rebuild what was lost, better than it was, in hope of leaving our part of the world a little better than we found it. There is no room here for the hateful words of a bigoted few.

Hate-mongers like John Hagee cheapen and insult our national discourse in an historic election year. As for Senator McCain, his inability to obtain an honest apology for the citizens of New Orleans and the victims of Hurricane Katrina speaks for itself.

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