

On September 11, I had the privilege of being in St. Ignatius' Church in San Francisco, for a mass in memory of the people killed by terrorism five years before, and the conferral of an honorary doctorate on Fr. Gerard Jean-Juste, a Haitian pro-democracy activist who spent nine months in prison on false charges for standing up for his convictions. One of the readings at the mass, from the Acts of the Apostles, told the story of a confrontation between the religious authorities and the apostles. An earlier section had related how the apostles had cured a cripple; in this passage, the apostles were brought before the authorities for questioning. The questions were not about the healed man: what it meant to him to have his health restored, or whether it was possible to extend the same benefits to others in need. Instead, the religious leaders asked about who the apostles were working for: under whose authority did they heal the sick?

The parallels between the reading and the controversy over The Lancet study are obvious. A report has come out documenting horrible injustices inflicted on the most vulnerable people in the hemisphere. The report calls out for a response from those of us who are less vulnerable: to provide counseling and material aid; to work for justice; to work to ensure that our tax dollars are not complicit in this human suffering. Instead, the response has been a discussion of potential conflict of interest arising from one of the author's volunteering for a center for street kids and her journalism work, and political sniping. The victims, and their plight, have fallen below the radar screen.

It is important to note that The Lancet study reported nothing new: it merely confirmed, through other techniques, what had been reported by the victims themselves and several human rights investigations since the Interim Government took power in March 2004. These reports had been dismissed by the same *ad hominem* attacks that are now leveled against The Lancet study: the victims are untrustworthy because they are part of the *Lavalas* movement; IJDH's information is dismissed because its director once worked for programs funded by Haiti's elected government; the University of Miami's Center for Human Rights Investigation, conducted by a lawyer with no connection to *Lavalas* but a decade in U.S. Government law enforcement, is untrustworthy because the Center's director, a respected law professor, once advised Haiti's elected governments. Reasons were found to dismiss reports of Harvard Law School, Amnesty International, the National Lawyers Guild and many other human rights groups, but the evidence mounted.

If The Lancet study did not report new information, it did report it in a form that made it harder to dismiss. The study's methodology- a widespread random survey- sharply reduced the potential for bias inherent to a human rights investigation approach, which necessarily focuses on particular areas or victims. The methodology and the survey results were reviewed and approved by experts independently chosen by The Lancet. The very difficulty of attacking the results of the survey may explain the ferocity of the attack on the messenger.

Of course, The Lancet study, like all studies, has its limitations. The study itself concedes some of them- that the choice of points for interviews does not take into account variations on population densities (a square mile in a slum has many more people in it than a square mile in a wealthy neighborhood, but the same number of dots for the

survey. This would under-represent people in areas like Cite Soleil, which may have a higher rate of reporting attacks by Lavalas supporters, who form a majority of the local population, and UN peacekeepers, who do most of the law enforcement activities there). The study was limited in time to the Interim Government. It would, obviously be helpful to have similar data for before the February 29 coup d'etat (those of us working in human rights have wanted that kind of comparative information for years). It was limited in geographic scope to violence in Port-au-Prince, which may not typify violence in Haiti's small towns and rural areas. The failure of one of the survey's authors to disclose her previous volunteer and journalism work in Haiti to The Lancet (it was previously disclosed to the Interim Government, who granted her authorization to conduct the survey) did unnecessarily open the door to criticism.

The study's limitations do not in any way undermine its essential conclusion of a pattern of massive violence against poor people, much of it committed by Haiti's Interim Government or its allies. Although it is important to critically evaluate all information coming out of Haiti, it is more important to help Haiti's poor, who have suffered too many patterns of massive violence, to recover from past violence and avoid future violence. The Lancet study is an excellent tool to use in this effort. Evaluation of its findings should be done in a way to sharpen the tool to make it more useful, not to blunt it to eliminate its usefulness.