

Pat Robertson Under Fire for Haiti Remarks

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✖ Christian broadcaster Pat Robertson has come under fire for remarks he made Wednesday on his *700 Club* program suggesting the earthquake that devastated Haiti Tuesday was a consequence of a pact Haitian leaders may have made with Satan 200 years ago.

"They were under the heel of the French, you know Napoleon the third and whatever, and they got together and swore a pact to the devil," said Robertson, founder of the Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN). "They said, 'We will serve you if you will get us free from the French.' True story.

"And so the devil said, 'OK, it's a deal.' And they kicked the French out. The Haitians revolted and got themselves free. But ever since they have been cursed by one thing after another."

Robertson said the Dominican Republic, which shares the island of Hispaniola with Haiti, is "prosperous, healthy, full of resorts, etc.," while Haiti is "in desperate poverty."

"They need to have and we need to pray for them a great turning to God and out of this tragedy I'm optimistic something good may come," he continued. "But right now we're helping the suffering people, and the suffering is unimaginable."

Robertson's comments have been widely circulated on the Internet and became the No. 4 topic on Twitter Wednesday, according to BBC World Service. Prominent Christian leaders Robert Jeffress of First Baptist Church of Dallas and

Samaritan's Purse founder Franklin Graham publicly condemned Robertson's statements.

"He must have misspoken," Graham said, according to ABC News. "But we need to get on the path of helping people right now. God loves the people of Haiti. He hasn't turned His back on Haiti."

In a statement posted on the CBN Web site, spokesman Chris Roslan said Robertson's comments stem from the story of a 1791 slave rebellion led by Boukman Dutty at Bois Caïman. According to the story of the "Boukman Contract," Boukman led the slaves in a Voodoo ritual, where they sacrificed a pig and drank its blood to form a pact with the devil. They allegedly agreed to serve the spirits of the island for 200 years in exchange for freedom from the French. After 13 years of conflict, the slaves won their independence.

"This history, combined with the horrible state of the country, has led countless scholars and religious figures over the centuries to believe the country is cursed," Roslan said. "Dr. Robertson never stated that the earthquake was God's wrath. If you watch the entire video segment, Dr. Robertson's compassion for the people of Haiti is clear. He called for prayer for them."

Roslan noted that CBN's humanitarian arm, Operation Blessing International, has ongoing work in Haiti and launched a major relief and recovery effort this week to help earthquake victims. He said the ministry has sent a shipment of medical supplies worth millions of dollars to Haiti, and a disaster team was expected to arrive in the nation Thursday.

Joseph L. Williams, CEO of New Directions International, a North Carolina missions organization that has been working in Haiti since the 1980s, said there has long been controversy over whether the story about the pact with Satan is true. But he said there is no denying that Voodoo has had a grip on the

nation since it became a republic in 1804. In 2003, former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide declared Voodoo the national religion, calling it "an essential part of national identity," according to news reports.

"The reality is, whether [the nation was dedicated to Satan] or not, Voodoo became the national religion, and the people had been steeped in that for two centuries," Williams said.

But during bicentennial events in 2004, Haitian Christian leaders led a national campaign to "break Voodoo's curse" on the nation, Williams said. That year, he assisted pastor Jean Chavannes Jeune, who sought the Haitian presidency in 2005, in hosting the first-ever national prayer breakfast at the national palace, as well as national prayer event in Port-au-Prince "to claim that going forward Haiti would be a Christian nation." Â

"They had quite an enthusiastic and symbolic breaking of Voodoo on the island," Williams said. "I believe by faith that [the curse was broken], and I think the Haitian Christian leadership believes that's what happened as well. No doubt."

Though Voodoo is still prevalent in the nation, Williams and Jeune believe Haiti's problems are political.

"That's why you're seeing with this earthquake just an absolute inept response from the government," Williams said. "Until the government gets their act together-and obviously we believe as Christians the only way that's going to happen is if they put the Lord first-Haiti is never going to be the nation it could be. The people, many of them are saved and many of them are on fire, but they're just oppressed people."

Despite the flap, one Christian leader publicly came to Robertson's defense Thursday morning. The Rev. Gary Cass, head of the Christian Anti-Defamation Commission, said Robertson's comments were "well within the bounds of historic Christian theology."

"Maybe that's the real problem after all," Cass said. "Man is offended by the fact that he is not God. They resent God's providence. A simple reading of the Bible shows how God uses natural disasters to further His purposes. Earthquakes, floods, famine, locusts, etc. they're all there, but man hates it.

"Rather than humbly acknowledging that God's ways are not our ways, man rails against and accuses God. The last thing they will do is cry out for His mercy in Jesus Christ."

Pointing to Robertson's work in Haiti through Operation Blessing, Cass said people should "do what Pat is doing and bless the poor people of Haiti."

Robertson is well-known for making controversial remarks. He was widely criticized for calling for the assassination of President Hugo Chavez and for saying Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon suffered a debilitating stroke in 2006 because of his role in "dividing God's land." Robertson ultimately apologized for both remarks.

He made separate claims that Hurricane Katrina and the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks were the result of God's judgment on America for immorality.