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6-3-2015

Liberia: One Year Later

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Recommended Citation

Baart, Aaron, "Liberia: One Year Later" (2015). *Faculty Work: Comprehensive List*. Paper 237.

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Liberia: One Year Later

Abstract

"While the places of the world that get ransacked by natural disasters and crises of incomprehensible proportions—places like Liberia—cry out to their brethren of humanity for aid and assistance, what we too often forget is that we who come in the form of help have our own poverties that stand in need of healing as well. I am reminded of this every time I return to Liberia."

Posting about Liberia since the 2014 Ebola crisis from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

<http://inallthings.org/liberia-one-year-later/>

Keywords

In All Things, Liberia, disaster response, Ebola

Disciplines

Christianity

Comments

In All Things is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service](#) at Dordt College.

Liberia: One Year Later

 [all in allthings.org/liberia-one-year-later/](http://allthings.org/liberia-one-year-later/)

Aaron Baart

Liberia is a small country of 4 million people in West Africa that according to the CIA Fact Book is the second poorest nation on earth. Its median per capita annual income is \$410 US and over 60% of its population live below the poverty line. The majority of its woeful financial statistics can be attributed to the back-to-back civil wars that ransacked the country between 1989-1996 and 1999-2003. These years caused foreign investors to pull out and Liberia's own people to flee (when they could).

The wars left the capital city of Monrovia with a decimated infrastructure system, lacking so many basic life-sustaining offerings like power grids, simple health care, food security, and education. The farmland fell fallow, turning blood-soaked red instead of the verdant green it once knew. And an entire generation grew up, unable to access basic elementary education. What little scraps of wealth were left were fought over by the remaining warlords. Liberia made international news headlines for twenty straight years with terms like "child soldiers," "conflict diamonds," and "crimes against humanity."

Liberia was still (very!) slowly rebuilding when the Ebola crisis broke in 2014. But once again, most people with means, left. Those with abilities hid. Fear became the dominant cloud that hung over the people. Understandably so. The Ebola virus that ransacked West Africa in the past 15 months has now infected over 27,000 people, killing over 11,000. Liberia has been the country hardest hit with over 10,000 cases and almost 5,000 deaths. A country crippled by wars and corruption and staggering toward recovery was taken out at the knees when Ebola struck.

Thankfully, on May 9, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf appeared on the news and with corroborating evidence from the [World Health Organization](http://www.who.int), declaring Liberia Ebola-free. In other words, it had been forty-two days since the last laboratory-confirmed new infection.

While Liberia is technically Ebola-free today, it is far from free of Ebola's long-term effects. International business and humanitarian groups are slow to be willing to risk investment again and yet the need is greater now than ever before. A nation kicked while it was down will now have an even harder time finding a hand to help them up. The second stage of Ebola response like orphan care for all those who lost parents, job creation to stimulate the economy, healthcare infrastructure development, and even the simple eradication of fear from the overall culture will be slow in coming.

Despite the fact that death, disease, and discouragement abound in Liberia, praise God for his story that finds its heart in a resurrection. Of course, these aren't the types of stories that make international news headlines but they are stories that need to be told. Throughout the Ebola crisis, people I am honored to call friends in Liberia, people like Rev. Emmanuel Bimba, seized the opportunity of a captive and desperate audience to preach the Good News of Jesus Christ and to enact his love. For example, when curfews were enforced and people were confined to their homes in darkness and in fear, they hopped on the radio and preached messages of hope and new life. When the economy was shrinking and progress virtually nowhere to be found, they set up crusades and welcomed many new friends into the family of God. When schools were under mandatory closure, they built new ones with the vision of redemption and tomorrow in mind. When international NGO's fled the terror of Ebola, Liberian pastors ran into the heart of darkness and picked up the children who had entered Ebola treatment centers as part of families only to emerge days later as orphans. They planted fields and planted churches. They harvested rice and spoke of even greater crops to come. They dreamed Pentecost-sized dreams.

Hope that is found in Christ Jesus is still the most transforming power the world has ever known. It stares into death's face and proclaims a more glorious tomorrow and it is unrelenting in its ability to love, even in the face of sheer fear and terror. Our God calls us to serve the people infected with and dying from Ebola but he calls us to tell the story of the day when Ebola too will die its own last death.

While the places of the world that get ransacked by natural disasters and crises of incomprehensible proportions—places like Liberia—cry out to their brethren of humanity for aid and assistance, what we too often forget is that we who come in the form of help have our own poverties that stand in need of healing as well. I am reminded of this every time I return to Liberia. These trips started for me in 2008, and I'll be honest, they started out of charity. However, after many visits and humbling lessons, these trips have somehow now turned charity into envy. My Liberian friends want (and deserve) a truer equity of the world's resources and access to opportunity. But my friends in Liberia also have a faith and vitality of life that I rarely experience in my workaday American life. They have so much to teach us. So I've started trading my spiritual poverty for their financial kind, a sort of *reciprocal missions*, if you will. They need what I have and they have what I need. Together, interdependently, we are becoming God's new humanity on display.

I'll always remember Ebola for the lives that were lost but I'll also always remember Ebola for the lessons my Liberian friends taught me in the midst of it: everything, and I mean everything, is being redeemed by the one we call Lord.

Dig Deeper

If you'd like to learn more about Rev. Emmanuel Bimba or contribute through prayer or finances to one of his Pentecost-sized dreams, visit [One Body One Hope](#).