

# A PREZ RELEASE from AGTS

*(Monthly commentary from the President of the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary)*

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## **The Agony of Evil and the Response of the Resurrection**

Americans now know what the majority world has known for years. Real evil is alive and well! Mort Zuckerman, in a recent U.S. News and World Report editorial, referred to the Old Testament character Amalek and his attack on the Israelites as they crossed the Red Sea. (Duet. 25:17-18) Zuckerman queried, "Why Amalek did this in the face of God's preserving hand is no great mystery. Understanding it requires only simple acknowledgment there is, in our world, such a thing as simple evil. The Amalek massacre confounds the notion that everyone is motivated by self-interest. **Evil cannot be explained by reason. It can only be confronted!**"

Evil is more than an action that threatens to inconvenience Americans' comfort level. Frustration with a long line at an airport security checkpoint is a blip on the Richter scale of a post 9-11 world. Where evil intrudes its ugly face innocent people are truly destroyed. The weak are routinely exploited and no champions emerge on the scene because in an evil world those with the power are out to completely destroy their opponents. This destructive motivation is not just for personal gain economically, but for the obvious addiction "the powers" have for controlling the very destiny/future of another human being's life at any cost.

How do we respond to evil? The self-absorption of American culture has a difficult time accepting evil as a reality. We may be addicted to suing anyone who dares to be "insensitive" to our cause or personal life-style, we may vilify tobacco companies and we may castigate multi-national corporations for their exploitation of workers. But real evil!!! That's simply not a concept deemed worthy for consideration in this day of sophistication and image as truth.

The current American response to evil vacillates between the rhetoric of destroying the "evil axis" and another stirring rendition of Lee Greenwood singing "God Bless the USA!" Our cry for consolation in the face of evil is summarized in the soothing words of Oprah Winfrey recorded at Yankee Stadium for the September 23, 2001 memorial service honoring those who died at the World Trade Center. Ms. Winfrey attempted to console attendees by saying "hope lives, prayer lives, love lives.... May we all leave this place and not let one single life have passed in vain. May we leave this place determined to now use every moment we yet live to turn up the volume in our own lives, to create deeper meaning, to know what really matters."

The call for meaningful reflection by this emerging leader of American "spirituality" can be evaluated from a variety of vantagepoints. Astute critics of the relationship between American pop culture and spirituality have much to offer, but I do know this: **The evil**

**that exhibits itself in this world will not be confronted by creating deeper personal meaning and having good thoughts for people.** The image of a roaring lion in I Peter 5:8 only begins to capture the true nature of Evil that continues to destroy nations, cultures, families and innocent human beings in increasingly perverse ways.

I can't accept Oprah Winfrey's formula for living in the 21st century. Nebulous good thoughts coupled with equitably calculated contributions from the world's major religions only pleases those in charge of public events and media moguls concerned about what will get ratings. I have observed too much tragedy, looked helplessly at the results of evil and seen the unwillingness of the Evil One to discuss a truce!

Accuse me of being a fundamentalist! Label me a fanatic! Use me as an example to confirm that Christians are bigoted unthinking thugs who refuse to accept the pluralism that must be part of 21<sup>st</sup> century sophistication! I confess that I believe Evil must be confronted, not placated. Looking for a truce or a mere renegotiating of terms by which people may get along on earth begs the question at the high cost of human pain and suffering. I believe that a permanent solution to the reality of Evil is necessary. That solution only comes as an intervention by an eternal redemptive God who is not willing that evil be given the last word, but that it is redeemed!

The greatest tragedy in human history simply did not occur on September 11, 2001. It occurred when Jesus was crucified on the Cross. But through that event Jesus defeated all challengers and in so doing redefined what Life, having defeated Evil, can mean. (Col. 2:13-15) The defeat of Evil flowing from the Cross and Resurrection gives every human being the possibility of living beyond our humanly defined limits. **Real evil can ultimately only be confronted by a real God who alone has the power to confront challenges to His eternal design for all humanity.**

Oprah's "pastoral leadership" at Yankee Stadium is to be lauded if what we want to do is temporarily feel good after a tragic event. But we are dealing with a force that is motivated to permit no survivors and destroys for the sheer joy of the kill. At the Cross Jesus looked that Evil in the eye, called it for what it was, and defeated it on the spot! Why would we rely on any human effort to assuage, console or confront evil in this world when our God has defeated Evil and allowed us to triumph, rather than cower or even gloat?

**The glory of Easter comes as we realize Evil and Death have been forever defeated and the eternal benefits of that Victory cannot be earned or bought...only received!**

Articles referenced in this commentary include:

Christianity Today. April 1, 2002 Articles by Craig Barnes and LaTonya Taylor  
US News and World Report March 25, 2002 Zuckerman editorial