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Prez Release



An eNewsletter to AGTS Friends

May 2008

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Reaping the Whirlwind

Three recent events have demonstrated the growing reality that our nation continues to act as if we can leave our basic human values at the door and not suffer the consequences.

For starters, the unfolding of tragedy in Texas with 400 children taken by authorities from the FLDS community juxtapositions polarized opinions. To name just a few of the confusing dimensions of this tragic story; we might talk about the limits of separation of church and state, the definition of family, parental responsibility and governmental authority.

Additionally, the inevitable train wreck of 15-year-old Miley Cyrus (aka Hannah Montana) plays itself out among the "tween" population of America who adores Hannah and screams at even the film version of one of her concerts. I wonder what impact this will have on my own granddaughter, who is a big Hannah Montana fan. Suggestive poses of a 15-year-old captured by such a renowned photographer as Annie Leibovitz cannot be passed off as a mistake. The perfunctory apology that followed surely elicits justifiable cynicism that this was just the first of many attempts to cash in on the stardom of another Disney product.

Finally, the 4 to 3 decision by the California Supreme Court that could lead to legalizing gay marriages in that state,

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adds fuel to the already vitriolic nature of politicizing the definition of marriage. The principled and biblical response of church leaders across that state and around the nation will be summarily trashed by the “chattering elites” as bigotry and another example of the intolerance of organized religion. But I also cringe at the shrill tone of presumption that many of my fellow Christians will exhibit in this current battle, clearly revealing rhetoric of persons who have rarely, if ever, personally interacted with a person whose sexual orientation differs from their own.

The gathering whirl wind that is given energy by the three events I have briefly described, demonstrates the inescapable conundrum we find ourselves in. I grieve over the alleged abuse that occurred in this religious community in Texas. I also know that in the dominant secular culture of our nation, all persons of faith can be painted as fundamentalists whose beliefs and practices must be reigned in by the government for the “common good.” Any person who is aware of the unevenness present in most state foster care systems, will wonder which horror may be greater for the 400 children removed from their homes: the alleged abusive situation they lived in or the new worlds these kids are being asked to helplessly navigate at present. Truth be told, the emotional maturing of these 400 children as human beings will be damaged irreparably. They are being sentenced to lives that at best may be dominated by a lesser version of tragedy.

USA Today columnist Mary Zeiss Stange has provided a painful look at this continuing saga as she says, “Before one applauds the round up at the ‘FLDS Corral’ we should first look at what’s taking place in the nation outside the Eldorado compound—where anti-cult stereotypes can cause government to forget about some religions’ pesky First Amendment protections.” Her own identity as an avowed feminist has left her in a perplexing dilemma. Most telling are her final remarks in her commentary that observe a duplicitous complexity in our nation: “Maybe, rather than focusing on the family arrangements of an isolated Texas religious sect, we should be asking ourselves what was wrong with this picture: Even as CPS was herding the last of the FLDS girls off to distant foster care facilities late last month, American Internet users were so eager to see Annie Liebovitz’ revealing *Vanity Fair* photos of 15-year-old Miley Cyrus that the magazine’s website crashed.”

The California Supreme Court decision demonstrates clearly what is at stake in our nation. The shrillest voices on all sides of this battle will get the media attention. Left off the radar screen will be the unseen faces of good people of faith who affirm the civil rights of all American citizens, regardless of sexual orientation, whose principled disagreement with the court decision is based on an understanding of how Creation has imbedded certain assumptions into social order. As followers of Jesus who believe in the authoritative nature of revealed Truth found in the Bible, we will be marginalized as hopelessly out of touch with our society's assigned role for religion: namely it is a private matter that should never enter the public square. This battle will have multiple fronts, some much more public than others. The majority of this dilemma will be played out in the neighborhoods and businesses of our nation. It will boil down to all of us, who name Jesus as Lord, living out St. Paul's directive that we must be Christ's ambassadors, as if God were making His appeal through us directly to a world that is clueless about who Jesus is (II Cor. 5:20). That appeal needs to demonstrate both justice as a kingdom value and courageous affirmation of Truth. This is not going to appeal to the political activists, but it will need to be the backbone of how we live in the current and continuing cultural whirlwind.



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