

A PREZ RELEASE

from AGTS

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

April 2000

"Is that your final answer?" is a phrase/question that has taken on a life of its own. Popularized by Regis Philbin, it captures the suspense and essence of the wildly popular TV program, Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?

I like finality because it brings closure to pending issues. It either affirms that we have "finally" won or lets us know that (like Job) *"that which we have greatly feared has come upon us."* My *final* hope is in the clarity of the ultimate response that God has given to us in His Son Jesus Christ. Both the Apostle Paul (I Tim.2:5) and the author of Hebrews (Heb.1:3) speak to the fact that **Jesus is God's "final answer"** to human queries like: *Who is God? What is His character? What's God up to anyway?*

A very difficult task awaits honest church leaders who desire to build their ministry on eternal foundations and faithfully discern the present tense of God's activity. Just when we think that we've got our ministry "fine-tuned and relevant" the Lord of the universe demonstrates **He** truly is the builder of the Church. He blesses the most unlikely efforts in the most out of way places and in so doing poses to those (who all too often believe their own press reports about ministry success). . . . *"Are you sure that this is your final answer?"*

If there is anything we can say about the last 50 years of the 20th century, it is that there has been a global upsurge in Christianity, particularly the Pentecostal dimension of the Christian faith. God has sovereignly blessed Christian people around the world with Kingdom effectiveness that have never read a current "must-read" volume on leadership and would mistake a web-site for a spider web. When North America and western Europe are the only places in the world that Christianity is not expanding could it be that our *"final answer"* as the church in this part of the world needs to be critiqued? Have we become so thrilled with our own efforts to the point that we have become functional atheists? (Ministering as if God was not part of the equation.)

Several years ago I had an experience that shocked me into realizing that God was doing things in places (with people) that I simply had not given room for. (I guess I had given Regis my final answer!) I was in Tanzania with a group of African leaders from East Africa. Lazarus Chukwera, the General Superintendent of the Assemblies of God in Malawi, was speaking from a text found in Matthew 20 that focuses on the workers and the vineyard. That chapter's teaching must be seen in the context of the children coming to Jesus in 19:13-15 and the sick man in 19:16-26.

Both of these passages are examples of asking and answering the questions surrounding the dynamic of being last in the Kingdom of God. After explaining the context, the sermon focused on the text (in Matthew 20) and Chukwera clearly proposed that the parable of the "11th hour" purposefully used the harvest motif. He pointed out that even those societies considered "last" in the world today would be afforded a full opportunity to participate in God's eternal plan.

Chukwera continued, **"The world sees our continent (Africa) through the eyes of tragedy, war and hopelessness. But we have been liberated to participate in the Harvest. In fact, my Bible says that the very fact the world views us as the 'last' is the reason God wants us for**

this 11th hour . . . end-time harvest. We are God's chosen workers for this end-time harvest."

As I listened to my friend Lazarus speak, I realized that God's answer to the dilemma of hopelessness was not merely the purview of the most powerful or those who had access to the resources. God had again demonstrated that He was in the business of providing **decidedly final answers** and they were not constructed out of my brand of logic or reasoning. God's final answers always empower and embolden people for whom the world has little usage.

As we offer gospel communication that builds on eternal truth and negotiates that reality in a shifting world, let's remember to check our *final answer* before we offer it. If that *final answer* has barnacles of overreliance on the human enterprise let's give it a chance to be reevaluated. There's a lot more than a million dollars on the line.

Croatian Pentecostal leader Peter Kuzmic reminds us, "***never put a period where God wants to put a comma!***" God is the only One who can place a period in the proper place because God is quite sure of His **final answer!**

Byron D. Klaus

agtspres@agseminary.edu

Check it out. . .

BOOKS

The God of the Internet by Doug Brendel. This is reviewed by a consultant to the Microsoft Corporation as the single best collection of insight and advice for people in Christian ministry in the Internet age.

For more information: www.berkeybrendelsheline.com

UPCOMING EVENT

Leadership Round Table

Sponsored by AGTS

St. Louis, Missouri, October 30-31, 2000

"Emerging Church Models for 21st Century Ministry"

Further information soon! Mark your calendar now! Limited space availability!