

# A PREZ RELEASE

## from AGTS

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

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### **Blowing Smoke and Avoiding Reality**

Summer 2000 has been a case study in blowing smoke and avoiding reality.

\* Firestone/Bridgestone tires finally had to acknowledge that there might be connection between a rash of fatal accidents in Ford Explorers and the tires they were supplying for this top-selling SUV.

\* United Airlines travelers were treated to a new game show called "Who Wants to Have Their Flight Canceled?" While discussions between pilots union and management went on ad nauseum, "tarmac rage" and the cancellation of corporate travel accounts with United became an everyday occurrence.

\* The western US faced a series of fires burning millions of acres, with little hope of total containment until winter snows fly. The US Forestry Service is pointing to the downsizing of funds available to train and equip enough firefighters to combat what they had predicted was a disaster in the making.

I don't claim comprehensive knowledge on the events I've just described. But I do know that each of these events demonstrate a vital lesson to us all—**avoiding reality will not make the problem go away.**

Avoiding hard decisions is certainly something that is a common experience for everyone regardless of their place in life. We usually avoid tough decisions because there is a price to pay relationally, financially or organizationally—a price that we are unwilling to pay at the moment. So we punt the ball down the field and think "reality" will be sent packing. (It's what we might term the Jonah syndrome.)

Firestone avoided the reality of a growing number of fatal accidents in Ford Explorer. Their initial response to the growing public outcry was a cautious attempt at suggesting tires had been improperly inflated, thus causing the accidents. But a steady media barrage of shocking visuals showing blown out tires, overturned Ford Explorers and the sheer corporate clout of the Ford Corporation was something that Firestone could not withstand.

I'm sure there is a lot of jockeying going on behind the scenes between United management and the pilots union, but 13% of all flights canceled on a daily basis means missed appointments, long lines, lots of four-letter words and over-priced airport food.

Exasperated passengers are walking away from the "friendly skies." Getting those passengers back will take years. Trusting customers are in short supply in the entire airline industry and United has taken the most direct hit this summer.

The potential of a monster fire season has been predicted for some time. The Forest Service not only was aware of the fire danger, but also knew that budget decisions impacted their ability to fight the tragedy they'd been predicting was a disaster waiting to happen. The present destruction to forests, watersheds, animal habitat, let alone personal property is incomprehensible. Speculation is that this disaster will shape forest fire-fighting strategy for the next century.

In the mid-16th century an Italian philosopher, Niccolo Machiavelli, wrote a book called *The Prince*. Controversial, both then (it was banned by the Vatican in 1559) and now, Machiavelli provides the summer of 2000 with a clear insight across the centuries. Machiavelli suggests that if we abandon what is actually happening in the world in favor of a dream world that exists nowhere but in our mind, we are going to be on the receiving end of a very unwelcome wake-up call sooner or later. This son of the Enlightenment actually posited that if we want to achieve the goals that reflect our values we must take reality into account. G. K. Chesterton put it another way—he said that what we needed in life was a good dose of imagination—**the imagination to see what really is there.**

Whether it is corporate life or personal spiritual development our future growth depends on a clear picture of reality. We must avoid responding to the gap between what actually happened and what we believe ought to happen with the proverbial phrase "if only."

I am struck by the parallel between this summer's corporate tragedies and what happens when we do not pay attention to the realities of our spiritual lives. Samson refused to acknowledge his slippage in keeping the guidelines of his Nazarene vow. Imagine the horror he experienced the day he jumped up from Delilah's lap to whip the Philistines only to discover his strength was gone. Jonah thought "if only" he could distance himself from the call to Ninevah by heading to Tarshish. He even tried to avoid God by sleeping through "reality."

I've sat through scores of altar calls that suggested that our future was so tenuous that we could leave the service and get hit by a car and enter eternity. While some of those appeals were a bit melodramatic, I'd like to suggest that many of us need a good dose of the convicting reality of the Holy Spirit right between our eyes. We need to wake up and realize that our spiritual lives are in shambles and no amount of negotiation and public relations spin will impress God. Hebrews 9:27 has always served as a wake-up call for me. I memorized that verse in the King James and it is a reality gut check, "**It is appointed unto man once to die and after that the judgment.**"

While the corporate realities of the summer of 2000 have impacted millions of people, they pale in comparison to the consequences of avoiding spiritual realities in our lives. That little bit of dabbling in porno on the internet will hook you with a wallop, the avoidance of repairing a relationship can end a marriage before you realize what's happened, that lax attitude toward your involvement in your local church can turn you into just another religious person.

Don't blow smoke ø don't avoid reality—God is not impressed with a soundbite version of Christianity. Read Hebrews 12:1-3 and get a grip!

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## **Check it out. . . BOOKS**

I got my thoughts on Machiavelli from a great volume entitled *The Character of Leadership* by Michael Jinkins and Deborah Bradshaw Jinkins published by Jossey-Bass ISBN# 0-7879-4120-4.

I'd also highly recommend a new volume that the entire AGTS faculty is reading as we begin the fall semester. It is entitled *ChurchNext: Quantum Changes in How We Do Ministry* by Eddie Gibbs and published by Inter-Varsity Press ISBN# 0-8308-2261-5.