

A PREZ RELEASE

from AGTS

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

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BATTER UP!!!!

Baseball season is upon us. I must admit that I'm still hopelessly a Chicago Cubs fan in whom hope springs eternal. Every year the memories of the "friendly confines" of Wrigley Field, the slugging of Ernie Banks, Ryne Sandberg and Sammy Sosa, the "hey hey" of Jack Brickhouse and the Holy Cow! of Harry Carey fill my life with overwhelming nostalgia.

Just as spring is synonymous with baseball, comparing the past with the present is currently in vogue. Even for those purveyors of the "late theory" concerning when the 21st century began, we are in the new century/millennium now. Don Feder, a columnist for the Boston Herald recently wrote that the **philosophers of the 19th century confidently announced God's demise and the ideologues of the 20th century showed us how ghastly existence could be with the gaping hole in our souls.** There may have been material progress in the century past, yet that progress competed with inconceivable horror. Physical terror has been matched only by a creeping sickness of the soul.

David Gergen (White House staffer in the Bush Sr. and Clinton White Houses) has written that the 21st century is already giving indications of horrors that are of apocalyptic proportions. AIDS will reshape the social structure of sub-Saharan Africa. Virulent strains of tuberculosis and other "old diseases" may unleash sickness on the developed world that is virtually untreatable. Nationalism/tribalism is already demonstrating the depth of human hatred that exists in all too many places in this world. The end of the Cold War has given way to an even more volatile era of terrorism that sees human beings as pawns in the chess game of global politics.

The expectations that progress in science or greater access to information would solve life's problems are increasingly called into question. Neil Postman (a favorite author of mine) recently said, "*if there are children starving in Somalia, or any other place... it has nothing to do with inadequate information. If crime is rampant on our streets, if children are mistreated.....indeed if we cannot get along with our own relatives, this, too has nothing to do with inadequate information.*" "What we really need," said Postman, "**is a transcendent narrative to weave the unquestioned and uncombined facts of our lives into fabric.**" In other words, the more we understand and master the physical universe, the greater our need to come to terms with the spiritual reality behind it.

Too often the Christian response to the reality described by Feder, Gergen and Postman might be to develop some new program or method, as if by technique we could reestablish the influence of the church in North American culture. Yet thoughtful Christians are suggesting that the world we live in now requires a different tact. Rodney Clapp says that Christianity is neither an ideology to be recovered nor a philosophical system to be simply remembered. **Christians are called to live the story, not merely restate it in the form of universalized propositions or novel soundbites.**

So just as the "boys of summer" are entering another season, the Church enters the new season called the 21st century. This field has a unique dimension to it and this season is unlike past seasons. If the rule of God has come present in Jesus Christ and if that ministry continues intact by the power of the Holy Spirit, then the 21st century is a playing field that can yield a most thrilling and challenging season.

We cannot see the challenge as merely a matter of audience analysis as if all we had to do was size up the thoughts, feelings and values of a target audience and market the correct product. Unlike the cinematic "Field of Dreams" we will not be able to assume an "if we build it they will come" posture. Nor can we presume that the season will be carried by the superstars whose skills are so notable and up-front. If the Day of Pentecost means anything, it stands for the empowerment of countless players of little renown that faithfully embody in their words and lives the reality of Jesus Christ.

I've traveled the world enough to know the observations of Feder, Gergen and Postman are not misstatements. Yet the community of the followers of Jesus Christ has encountered a reality that supports a sturdy intervention to the woes that beset us. The community of the King confidently enfleshs the "old, old story of Jesus and His love" because it is more than the solution to inadequate information or a diplomatic answer to political upheaval. The Apostle Paul said that the transformation of human beings by the work of Jesus Christ was his bottom line. (Rom. 1:16)

I welcome the new season/century. The opportunity for the church of Jesus Christ is to offer new communities that clearly reveal the hope of the future in the middle of present tragedy. The church has always responded most powerfully when the future seemed grim. Onesimus, Columba, Augustus Francke, Robert Rakes, Florence Steidel, Lillian Thrasher and Mother Teresa each stood on the edge of humanly created tragedy and demonstrated their belief in the power of transformative God. It is no less a challenge in this day to offer hope in the middle of abject tragedy – it is no less a possibility because not even the gates of hell can prevail against the inevitable triumph of the Gospel.

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Check it out . .

Mark your calendar!

AGTS is having a special event on campus March 23, 2001. **Seminary Day** will be a one-day, one-stop introduction to the seminary and its programs and ministry. If you are interested or know of students who may be interested in a seminary education, e-mail us for more information at jswartz@agseminary.edu

PRE-COUNCIL EVENT

August 6 & 7, 2001

Westin Crown Center Hotel

Kansas City, MO

Transforming Church Ministry for the 21st Century

"Doing Ministry in the Postmodern Matrix"

***A seminar offered in partnership between the AGTS and the Division of Home Missions Church Planting
featuring***

Brian McLaren, founding pastor,

Cedar Ridge Community Church, Washington, D.C. area

***For more information contact AGTS Continuing Education at 1435 N. Glenstone, Springfield, MO 65802 or
call (800) 467-2487, ext. 1044, Fax (417) 268-1009,
or E-mail: agts-ext.@agseminary.edu.***