

# A PREZ RELEASE

## from AGTS

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

July 2000

John Rocker, Elian Gonzalez, and Harry Potter: Signs of the Times

I'm sure after reading the title to this month's Prez Release, I at least have your attention. You are probably saying, OK, let's see you make something out of that title. Frankly, John Rocker, Elian Gonzalez and Harry Potter have little to do with one another except that their notoriety has been created by what they offer to a society that likes to deal with issues from a distance. These three characters provide an opportunity for people to show their true values and longings. As one listens to discussions surrounding these three characters offered by people on the street or through media soundbites, it is fascinating to observe, listen and really hear what is being said.

John Rocker gives people someone to blame for the ills of society. This young Atlanta Braves relief pitcher is a household word not because of his pitching skill, but his big mouth. He is a 25-year-old professional who mouthed off in the wrong place to the wrong sportswriter. I have no doubt that he meant what he said, but his opinions are hardly the stuff out of which we can measure the ills of society. He is a baseball player who is immature, has a big mouth, gets paid big bucks and acts as if he is accountable to no one. Frankly that's more a testimony about the state of professional athletics than the ills of society as a whole. John Rocker continues/will continue to make inflammatory remarks about what he perceives to be the woes of society. The fact that his continued immaturity is still news on ESPN and CNN is testimony to a world that enjoys inflammatory rhetoric in the form of soundbites and thinks that bizarre and novel behavior of a jock actually warrants news coverage.

The saga of Elian Gonzalez revealed that, contrary to much political wisdom, the Cold War is not over. The Cold War was largely about

ideological, political and military power. Power is still a commodity that is highly valued in this world. The passion exhibited in Little Havana and Fidel's Havana testify to the deep-seated nature of the struggle for power in the future Cuba. Little Elian's incredible story of survival, as spellbinding as it was, ultimately had to give way to the struggle for power between two families and two governments. Lost in the turbulent struggle for political advantage was the reality of a little boy who survived 3 days alone in the ocean only to be rescued and subsequently transformed into a pawn in a family squabble (that we have yet to really gain any information about) and a propaganda coup for an aging revolutionary.

The Harry Potter phenomenon may actually be a contemporary proof of the existence of God. That was the evaluation of Chuck Colson on a recent BreakPoint radio broadcast. The Harry Potter book series features a full array of magic, goblins and other evil beings that face the Harry Potter in his mystery investigations. The Harry Potter phenomenon defies explanation. When children sit quietly, enthusiastically reading 700 page books, something is happening. Christians are justifiably concerned about the imagery of evil in the book series. However, in this world that has increasingly been stripped of the supernatural and a connection to something that is transcendent and enduring, could this book series actually be a sign that children and adults are hungry for the eternal . . . something beyond the everyday hype of Pokemon, Game Station, Britney Spears and MTV?

In short, John Rucker, Elian Gonzalez and Harry Potter are a microcosm revealing the present state of American reality. We long to have an object of ridicule (scapegoat) at whom we can aim our exasperation over society's ills. Unfortunately when we aim our energies at the likes of John Rucker we forfeit the opportunity to demonstrate in tangible form the realities of what it means to live in the Kingdom. True compassion is in short supply in this world and we must ask how we are fairly representing the love of Jesus Christ in our community. The fight over Elian Gonzalez is testimony to the fact that our world still believes that being #1 is worth any cost. While we may point accusatory fingers and scratch to be king/queen of the mountain, our human nature still cries out to connect with something eternal.

It is in the middle of life whose realities are revealed by the "stories" surrounding Rocker, Gonzalez and Potter that the words of the Apostle Paul ring so true. "I am not ashamed of the Gospel... for it is the power of God unto salvation!" (Romans 1:16) Frankly, I believe, (more than at any point in my life) that salvation is the only power that can bring about the necessary starting point to address the issues so crassly alluded to by John Rocker's inflammatory big mouth. Only the power resident in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ can depose our self-destructive attempts at being #1. (Even Fidel will one day acknowledge the Lordship of Christ . ) Only when we are connected to the eternal vine can we find what Harry Potter fans are clearly looking for.... a connection to a reality that lasts and will survive any contemporary fad and trend to yield meaningful life. (John 15:1-16)

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Check it out. . .

#### UPCOMING EVENT

Leadership Roundtable 2000  
Sponsored by AGTS  
St. Louis, Missouri, October 30-31, 2000  
"Emerging Church Models for 21st Century Ministry"

Hear Alton Garrison, pastor, First Assembly of God, North Little Rock, Arkansas, speak on "Renewal and the Established Church,"

Hear Doug Oss, pastor, Capital Christian Center, Salt Lake City, speak on "Renewal and Generation X,"

Hear Ray Berryhill, pastor, Evangel Assembly of God, Chicago, speak on "Renewal and the Inner-city,"

Hear Paul Grabill, pastor, Assembly of God, State College, Pennsylvania, speak on "Renewal and Impacting the Entire Community,"

Hear Ron McManus, president, Equip Ministries, Atlanta.

Space will be limited to the first 200 registered!

The Leadership Roundtable 2000 will be held at the Renaissance Hotel adjacent to the St. Louis Airport. Early registration fee is \$150 (after October 2, \$175). Fee includes all meals and computer disks of all presentations. To register or for more information contact [jeutsler@agseminary.edu](mailto:jeutsler@agseminary.edu) or call 800-467-AGTS.

Hotel reservations (\$79 per night) must be made directly with the hotel by calling 888-340-2594.