

A PREZ RELEASE

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

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Living This Life – To Live Again

I love to listen to the Brooklyn Tabernacle Choir sing the vibrant song – *"I'm Living This Life Just To Live Again."* The ethos of Pentecostal heritage has a number of components, but at its center is a deep connection to the God of history in whom we hope and believe. Our anticipation is that one day God will link all the short-circuited wires of history into one smooth circuit that makes all things new. When I listen to the Brooklyn Tab Choir I'm not looking for escape from reality, I'm rejoicing that the tragedy of this world cannot stand up against a God who has taken on all challengers and whipped them hands-down (Col. 2:15). There is a deep sense borne in our hearts that we have solid roots in the present because our future is no longer held in the balance. The result is what the old gospel song called "a deep settled peace in my soul."

But this "deep settled peace" is not merely a feeling. . .it is what tangibly energizes a human life. This was made so clear to me recently as I conducted the memorial service for a family friend, Walter Zack. He was born in Russia in the late 1920's as Stalin was starving millions of people in his attempt to take control of this vast region. Walter's father and nine brothers and sisters died before Walter, his mother and a surviving brother could escape Russia. For 20 years this small group of refugees wandered from place to place in what is now Iraq, Iran and Syria. While in Iran, Walter's mother, whose Russian Orthodox tradition strengthened her for years, came into contact with some Russian Baptist refugees whose deep faith challenged her heart and she became a follower of Christ. In 1952 Walter, his mother and brother gained a visa to the U.S. and after only 22 days Walter was inducted into the U.S. Army because he could speak 5 languages – making him valuable in the post WWII military courts of Europe. Following his military career the faith of his mother finally held sway and Walter also became a follower of Christ.

Shortly after he married, he had an accident on the job which injured him so severely that he was disabled much of the remainder of his life. He lived with severe pain for the last 35 years of his life, yet Walter's life did not focus on the horrors of Stalinist Russia nor the frustration of living with a disability. He was a man of honor, dignity, hospitality and graciousness. When I conducted his memorial service and we allowed time for people to stand at a microphone and share their memories of Walter, it was his neighbors, mostly non-Christians who stood, with tears streaming down their faces, speaking of Walter who

was the kindest person they had ever known.

Now I enjoy waxing eloquent on theological themes near to my heart like "the eschatological identity of the people of God." (I may even write a book on that someday), however, the truth is that Walter's life was the theological statement that speaks volumes without writing one word. Walter's life was anchored firmly in the present by an eternal connection to the future. To those who would say – grab all the gusto you can because you only go around once – Walter's life clearly said **NO – Live your Life – To Live Again.**

And so as I fly across country after conducting Walter's memorial service, I'm humming that song and (wiping my teary eyes) reminded once more that eschatology is not just a big theological word – it's hope for today because tomorrow is not in doubt.

"I'm living this life – just to live again."

And with my Lord I know that I shall reign

I shall not stray with Him I'll stay
He'll welcome his children home one day –
Like a thief in the night He shall return for me
And that's the day that he'll come and I'll fly away – you'll see
Jesus will welcome me home.

Jesus welcomed my friend Walter home to a place where pain has been outlawed and not even a despot like Stalin has any power. Walter is the winner now because – He lived his life to live again – and now he's doing just that.

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Check it out. . .

BOOKS

The Essence of the Church: A Community Created by the Spirit by Craig VanGelder. (Baker Book House, ISBN #0-8010-9096-2.)

I'm always on the lookout for solid volumes about the church that take seriously both biblical foundations and contemporary church models. This is the latest volume by the editor of ***The Gospel and Our Culture*** series. Sturdy - insightful - at times very painful.