

A PREZ RELEASE **from AGTS**

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

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The Trip To Whitney

Over the recent Memorial Day weekend I made my way back to the little town in western Nebraska where much of my family hails from. Whitney is a little town of less than 100 people. On those wind-swept high plains is where I spent my summers as a child dreaming I would one day take over my grandfather's farm.(which hasn't come true, yet) But as I spent time with my mom, (visiting from California) my aunts and uncles, other family and friends, I got back in touch with some wonderful childhood memories. First, I went fishing and (as always) got skunked while others were catching limits of walleye. Then, the dark clouds that appeared on the horizon one night precipitated intercessory prayer meetings to keep the inevitable hail storm off the wheat crop. I attended the Memorial Day veterans commemoration at the cemetery where my dad is buried. This is a big event in Whitney as the 21 gun salute sometimes stampedes cattle and horses. The old roads actually have been given names and my mom's family name (Daniels) now has its own street in Whitney.

Like the classic film "The Trip to Bountiful" my weekend was filled with flashbacks to warm memories and rude reminders of the ever changing landscape of rural America. I spent the weekend enjoying things dear to my family and realizing that larger than life experiences in youth have a way of morphing into something less pristine as you get older.

When you spend time in places that seem not to have changed much over the years, the perspective gained is one of anxiety over how significant the cultural shifts in our world have been. It's not that violence, lack of integrity and mistrust of organizational leadership are anything new. But the buffer zones that have kept places like Bountiful and Whitney unscathed have slowly eroded. Safe havens from the realities of a fallen world are increasingly non-existent.

The potential violence of terrorism is significant, however, societal disintegration from the inside out may be even more lethal. When basic trust in credible leadership has been mortally shaken and the self-destructive power of corporate position has fully imploded, a trip to Whitney is like a return to the fictional Mayberry. It's nothing but surreal nostalgia.

Over 30 years ago, futurist Alvin Toffler wrote a best-seller called Future Shock. His basic premise was that the rate of global change was going to be so rapid that people and structures would basically short circuit. In reality, Toffler's predictions were only partially true because he failed to realize the depth to which these changes would impact the world.

The least of our worries is the implications of Internet 2, global warming or bio-terrorism. **Here in North America cynicism has replaced trust and despair has replaced hope as dominant themes in our culture. We are reaping the whirlwind of uncritiqued power and unbridled consumerism.** Christianity that has targeted people for evangelistic efforts without ever hearing their life story is now considered bigotry and the realities of a pluralistic society are becoming increasingly lethal to even civil society.

We need not despair that somehow we are facing a challenge that is insurmountable. That would be a less than informed perspective, particularly since Christianity was planted in a culture that was certainly less than congenial. The Apostle Paul's account of ministry in Athens, recorded in Acts 17:16-34, really gives us a picture into a microcosm quite similar to North America in the 21st century. Several key elements emerge from Paul's time in Athens. Paul took the initiative in connecting face to face with Athenians, when he communicated his conversation was informed by a biblical worldview, Paul was a student of cultural realities and he never wavered from a passion to bring people to a decision about Christ.

Paul understood he was in an alien culture, he engaged that culture because to reach his goal he had to build bridges to that culture. Having built those bridges, he could communicate. Cynicism and despair do not react well to encounter with Christians detached from human relationship. To think that our faith can touch a self-destructive world through evangelistic effort by remote control is questionable indeed.

My trip to Whitney was fun because I relived a wonderful part of my life. It also convinced me, life does not remain static. There is stark contrast between Whitney and a world where cynicism and despair are rampant. It is to that challenge Christians must give themselves. ***Real people with real questions, deserve real Christians with real compassion, who are motivated by the real Gospel.***

Put on your calendar if you live on the East Coast.

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[Byron D. Klaus, President](#)
[Assemblies of God Theological Seminary](#)