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CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION®

Remembering 9-11

in the Wake of 2020

By Greg Albrecht

Remember the dark days of despair immediately following 9-11? We were shocked and demoralized. Our nation had been attacked, and the reaction was swift and unequivocal. Our nation collectively focused on the common foe. We grieved, we united, we prayed and we joined hands.

Yes, there was a military and punitive response. Yes, nationalism thrived and there were many calls for revenge but they were tempered and measured, in the main. Our united mood of grief and mourning was accompanied by resolve to rebuild, restore and move forward. Out of the smoldering ruins and lost lives of the Twin Towers the vast majority, regardless of race, culture, gender and creed unitedly

determined to move forward.

Remember how carefully our leaders and nation at large tried, rightly so, to protect the rights and well-being of peace-loving Muslims, carefully making a distinction between them and violent terrorists who co-opted and sullied their faith? Our national leaders rallied against the vicious mob mentality that can result when one segment of the population becomes a scapegoat.

As we observe the 20th anniversary of 9-11 we do so in an entirely different world than that of late 2001 and 2002. *We observe the 20th anniversary of 9-11 in the wake of 2020.* Whereas the smoldering ruins of the massive destruction in New York City gave

birth to unity, the tragic events of 2020 have rekindled fires and aggravated deep fault lines of hatred, animosity and division.

As we look back on 2020, the national unity we recall, in the wake of 9-11, is contrasted with tribalism, animosity and hatred.

9-11 brought us together, the legacy of 2020 is tearing us apart. Some are calling for the radical destruction of the American way of life (they call it “cancel culture”). Some are worried that we are already in a civil war and deeply concerned whether or not we can avoid all out war and terrible bloodshed. Many, on all (or both) sides are making accusations and

engaging in “revenge politics.”

2020 was a terribly imperfect storm of COVID-19, lockdowns, massive unemployment and economic readjustment. 2020 was apocalypse now. With so many “staying safe at home,” social interaction resulted in skyrocketing depression and anxiety, often peaking at three times that of pre-2020 rates.

Racial tensions became part of the mix. Many demonstrations for justice were peaceful, but sadly, others provided cover for opportunistic looting, rioting and open season on law enforcement. January 2021 arrived and with it the outrageous assault on the Capitol in Washington D.C.

In 2020 wildfires and hurricanes added more misery all the while

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political venom was dramatically stirred up by the media, both “sides” pointing the finger and digging a deeper pit from which the United States must struggle to emerge.

Will We Come Together or Will We Fall Apart?

Whereas the terrorism of 9-11 introduced us to the reality of the deep hatred of external terrorism fueled by religious terrorism, 2020 introduced toxic, systemic internal terrorism from so many sources.

It is time for healing. It is time for all of us to bury resentment and lay aside the oh-so-human desire to see others “get what’s coming to them.” The sweet taste of revenge is short lived and leads to an endless cycle of bigotry, malice and hostility.

It is time for us to join hands and lock arms and repent from incrimination and name-calling and resolve, together, to work toward healing and reconciliation.

It is time for grace. It is time for the peace—the shalom of God. It is

time to forgive. It is time to move forward. It is time to seek individual and national repentance. It is time for all of us to repent of anger, name-calling and resentment which will always and forever prolong and perpetuate hatred, violence and evil.

It is time for those on the right and those on the left to renounce fear-mongering voices that seek to improve their own advantage at the expense of continuing hatred and animosity. It is time for peace, not war—for love, not hatred—for mercy, not revenge.

It is time for us to beat weapons into productive tools for planting and building.

It is time for us to fill our hearts with the grace, mercy and love of God, for politics and politicians will not save us.

It is time for us to come together rather than fall apart.

It is time for a vision of hope. It is time for new life rather than the darkness of evil, hatred, racism and violence, so that we may walk toward the light—and the Light is Jesus Christ.

It is time for us to adjust to whatever a “new normal” might be, whether we like it or not. We must face reality and not run from it. We must make the best of the world as it is rather than wallowing in self-pity and remorse.

It is so easy and tempting to assume it is possible to geographically relocate to a peaceful place where none of the evils of our world confront us. But we can never “get away from it all.”

We do well to remember the words of 20th century Russian dissident and author Alexander Solzhenitsyn, as he spoke of the tempting proposition that problems elsewhere will never infect our home and nation. “There is always this fallacious belief: ‘It would not be the same here; but such things are impossible.’ Alas, all the evil of the twentieth century is possible everywhere on earth.”

When the Old Testament people of God were exiled in Babylon, living in a foreign land ruled over by their captors, Jeremiah encouraged them to make the best of a difficult and strange new normal:

“Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper” (Jeremiah 29:4-7).

It is time for all of us to reflect the Light of Jesus, as he shines his Light in dark places everywhere.



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Dear Lord,

We thank you for your mercy and your grace. Empower us all, no matter how aggrieved we may feel, to set aside bitterness and rancor, and make peace.

As we observe the 20th anniversary of 9-11, we mourn the lives lost, lives that could have been, while we give thanks for the lives that have continued and the positive fruit that has been borne out of the horrors of 9-11. As we observe the 20th anniversary of 9-11 we do so with the raw and fresh wounds of 2020 still present, and amongst those who, for their own nefarious purposes, remain at war with all who love peace, mercy, grace and forgiveness.

May we seek reconciliation and make peace with all men and women, who are all, as we are, your children. May we seek forgiveness for the way we and our forefathers have treated others. May we seek forgiveness for the way we have used and abused others to further our own interests and feather our own nests.

May we also seek forgiveness for those we have scapegoated and against whom we have sought revenge and retribution.

We thank you God for your forgiveness, for all of us, in spite of all that we have done and failed to do. We thank you God for the invitation to pick up our cross and follow Jesus in a life of self-giving sacrificial love, serving others in his name—forgiving them as you have forgiven us.

We thank you our Father for not keeping score of our many failings and faults, and that you have forgiven us even as we have kept score of those who have harmed us and against whom we have retaliated and perpetuated vendettas.

Live in us Jesus so that we ask forgiveness of any who may feel that our gender, race, religion, creed or political preference may have oppressed them and caused them pain and heartache.

Live in us Jesus so that we may not seek revenge from anyone we feel represents those who have persecuted us and those who share our gender, race, religion, creed or political ideologies.

Live in us Jesus that we may lay aside the “right” to seek revenge and self-sacrificially, in your name, lay down our lives serving others, whether or not we feel they have a right to be served. May we serve others, rather than demanding that others serve us.

Live in us Jesus that we may experience and radiate your *shalom*—a shalom that is more than the absence of hostilities and violence, but a shalom of wholeness, unity, tranquility and harmony. Let this gospel of your kingdom come to fill and permeate our world just as it does in heaven.

Live in us Jesus so that we always remember you—may we always remember—long after cobwebs formed in an empty tomb and the blood dried on an empty cross, your words, our Lord and Savior, that fill our hearts and transform our lives. *By this everyone will know you are my disciples, if you love one another* (John 13:35).

Thank you for the Light of Jesus that shines in our hearts and souls, and by your grace, is reflected in and through us to others. Jesus is compassion and kindness and he overcomes violence, revenge, settling scores and opportunism.

This we pray, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. □

Imagine

If you enter your place of worship and, about to make an offering, you suddenly remember a grudge a friend has against you, abandon your offering, leave immediately, go to this friend and make things right. Then and only then, come back and work things out with God (Matthew 5:23-24, The Message).

What if every pastor, priest, rabbi and imam assigned homework to their congregations about forgiveness and reconciliation—homework that had to be completed before further attendance?

What if Jews were told not to bother to return until they attempted to befriend and listen to several Muslims? What if Muslims were given the same assignment about Jews?

What if Catholics were assigned to make friends with several Protestants and really listen to them? What if Protestants were given the same assignment about Catholics?

What if Democrats were told they must initiate and maintain friendships with several Republicans before they were allowed to vote in the next election ...and what if Republicans were given the same challenge about Democrats?

What if men and women who wear a badge were assigned to make a deliberate and intentional attempt to befriend those who are, according to statistics, more likely to be arrested than others?

What if people who harbor ill will, grudges and hatred toward all who wear a badge or wear a uniform in the armed forces went out of their way to have coffee with those they distrust, dislike and want to defund?

If we all remain trapped in our entrenched fortress of beliefs, throwing rocks at all who differ from us, what does all of our rock throwing say about the faith we hold near and dear?

What if we all loved our neighbors and prayed for our enemies? **WHAT IF...?** □