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CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION



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HELP!

The Future Has Arrived

by Greg Albrecht

Omnia mutantur, nos et mutamur in illis (Latin)—***all things change, and we change with them.***

Fifty-two years ago, in his bestselling book *Future Shock*, Alvin Toffler depicted and defined the anxiety produced by too much turbulence and disruption in too short a period of time. For Toffler, *Future Shock* is the *premature arrival of the future* before humans are ready for it. His assessment is now becoming a disconcerting reality, a trauma our world at large is currently enduring.

In his remarkably accurate descriptions of life in this second decade of the 21st century, Toffler described a culture produced by a post-industrial machine-age society in which the old, traditional world would be uncoupled from a new, “progressive” and enlightened era. Many of his prognostications were right on target—we are indeed discovering that human beings are ill equipped to adjust to tsunami-like change.

In the wake of tidal waves of societal change, some respond by emotionally withdrawing, suffering stress and depression. Other reactions include anger and fear which fuel resentment-laden aggressive behavior. When humans are unable to cope with and adapt to increasingly profound and seemingly endless innovations, upheaval begets more upheaval.

In so many ways, our world today is adrift, as accelerating streams of social change have undermined and unhinged historic foundational building blocks. Traditional values embedded by church and family are being swept away by a volcanic eruption of progressive enlightenment. Whether fully known and realized or not, all of us, at one level, are struggling with the pace at which

our world seems to be revolving—so fast that some report they feel emotionally dizzy and disoriented.

OUTDATED DEFINITIONS OF IDENTITY?

One byproduct of disconcerting and bewildering hyper-change is a loss of identity. At sea in an ocean of instability, people cling to life preservers that offer some promise of survival given the impact of the flash flood that threatens to engulf them. Grappling with challenges and questions to the fundamental nature of their existence many, in particular the younger generation, are finding new ways to be anchored and tethered to reality.

Many now speak of how they “identify” as a way of letting others know their sexual preference differs from their biology. Some even adopt a new name that differs from their given name on their birth certificate.

In the torrent and trauma of foundational upheaval many no longer find meaning and recognition in their work and career. Work, as a fundamental value, is under siege, increasingly perceived as a necessary evil to be endured in order that other goals might be achieved. North Americans are now less inclined to value work while assigning greater esteem to consumption. Work is perceived as tasks to be discarded as quickly as other means of support can be found—such as family, state and other resources. The pandemic of the past few years has hastened the practice of working from home—in so doing blurring the boundaries between work and home.

The ability to read and write was once valued as an essential skill imparting social status. Today, electronic skills and dexterity with devices are seen as a priority and standard of literacy. A work force

largely unskilled in this new wave of electronic proficiency and the digital culture is now finding itself disenfranchised and if not literally homeless, constantly on the move to find sources of income, housing and survival. Responding to this deluge of alienation, governments both small and large find themselves under the gun to find ways to take care of geographical nomads and how to describe them—*homeless, impoverished, nomads and vagabonds, under-employed?* Who are these left behind people, and how might they be identified? Are such people virtually obsolete?

THE INFORMATION & DIGITAL REVOLUTION

The world of personal and mass communication has undergone a massive revolution, producing a wide variety of new ways by which we are informed and how we know, connect, relate and respond. Communications technology itself has presented a dizzying array of interactive

media, understood and mastered by the very young (are they its masters or its slaves?) with the aged left behind. Disposability of clothing, products, devices and even people are giving new definitions to what is meant by “built-in obsolescence.”

This is not the first, nor will it be the last culture or generation to endure warp-speed change. In his book *The Pendulum Years: Britain and the Sixties*, Bernard Levin described the changes experienced in the United Kingdom during the decade of the 1960s: *“Fashions changed, changed again, changed faster and still faster: fashions in politics, political style, in causes, in music, in popular culture, in myths, in education, in beauty, in heroes and idols, in attitudes, in response, in work, in love and friendship, in food, in newspapers, in entertainment ... What had lasted a generation now lasted a year, what had lasted a year lasted a month, a week, a day.”*

In such a culture of frustrating instability the young are beyond ill at ease—they yearn for a place

to hang their hat, an attainable goal on the horizon towards which they may study, prepare and work. The young wonder—do “older people” even care?

In such a time, an aging population feels somewhat like an old farm house long since abandoned on the prairie. In earlier days the house was well kept, perhaps even a dream home for a young couple, raising their family. But now the former residents of the dream home are long gone and the house is dilapidated. Older folks wonder “do my children” care? Does anyone care?

Every generation imagines itself to be more intelligent than the one that went before it, and wiser than the one that comes after it.

—George Orwell (1903-1950)

Youthful progressives are filled with juvenile idealism, hoping for a complete reversal of the status quo so that the entire culture can be “cancelled” and “cleansed.” Older conservatives decry renewal, while defending traditional culture and the way “things have always been.”

In his book *The Go-Between*, English novelist, L.P. Hartley (1895-1972) used the oft repeated phrase *“The Past is a foreign country, they do things differently there.”*

The past, it seems, for so many today, is indeed a foreign country. It is increasingly rejected as having no worth—the past doesn’t seem relevant or meaningful to the complicated, frustrating challenges we face today.

TRUTH IS INCONVENIENT

Convenient “truth” marches into this bewildering, “brave, new



What had lasted a generation now lasted a year, what had lasted a year lasted a month, a week, a day. —Bernard Levin



**“The past is never dead. It’s not even past.”
William Faulkner**

world” blazing new trails, proclaiming a narrative that fits the reality people at large want to believe. Convenient truth accommodates itself to reality, and is anything but absolute. Convenient truth at large rejects the value of studying the past to learn from it.

When truth is fixed reality adapts to unequivocal, eternal verities. When truth is no longer truth, and every opinion is equal, then subjective decisions are more likely to be accepted and tolerated. Every generation that seeks to right all wrongs finds itself battling with the unsettling reality that others in the past differed, and the notion past generations may have had it more “right” than we do now is not only inconvenient, it is a painful and disconcerting possibility. So why not reject such notions for “convenient truth”?

Every generation, no matter how paltry its character, thinks itself much wiser than the one immediately preceding it, let alone those that are more remote.

—Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860).

Increasingly, in this not-so-brave new world, subjective and convenient truth breeds frustration which in turn produces irrational behaviors and

mental instability. Sadly, many have been convinced that the past has no value and that the old, the tried, the true and the traditional must be discarded—whether it be defunding authority symbols like the police or tearing down and removing statues, icons and art of authorities once revered.

But the evils of the past, along with its virtues, are not so easily discarded. The past can be torn down, ignored and covered with graffiti—but progressive, “woke” answers are not a panacea for yesterday’s mistakes. As William Faulkner said, *“The past is never dead. It’s not even past.”*

Make no mistake, human beings have been deceiving themselves from the very beginning of time, seeking a convenient life of ease wherein answers conform to their wishes.

ON OUR WAY TO ANOTHER PLACE

“All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. People who say such things show they are looking for a country of their own” (Hebrews 11:13-14).

Our Christ-like faith and our Christ-centered adventure is a spiritually healthy anchor in the the storms of life. The author of Hebrews advances the biblical theme that Christ followers are never completely at home in their culture, “identifying” as *aliens and strangers on earth ... looking for a country of their own* (Hebrews 11:13-14) en route to an eternal, spiritual destination. In some respects, we as Christ-followers are merely passing through to a better kingdom, a kingdom not from here—“from another place” (John 18:36).

... our Christ-centered adventure is a spiritually healthy anchor in the storms of life.

Aliens and strangers *are* passing through, on the way to another destination. Aliens and strangers often feel different from the culture in which they work, study and reside because their

citizenship is elsewhere—while they temporarily reside in a dwelling-place they know, they have not yet arrived at their real home. Christ-followers, even in the most stable and secure places, often feel like a “duck out of water.”

But on the other hand, we Christ-followers are the salt of the earth. We live to display the Light of Christ, to give evidence to his gospel and his kingdom and to serve others in his name.

We may be confused and bewildered, but we are not overcome. We may feel out of place, but we know we are in place as we follow Jesus Christ. We may feel left behind by our culture and society, but our faith informs us Christ-followers are never left behind by Jesus. No matter how great the turmoil, Christ-followers experience stability, peace and rest in him.

We take heart, filled with joy, thankful that Jesus has overcome all cultures and all adversaries, and that no innovation or device or imagination or invention can surpass Jesus.

Jesus is our Rock. He is our Hope. He is our Anchor, the Captain of our ship and the Chief Shepherd who watches over us. We may be in shock as we live out the turmoil of upheaval all around us, but we are never, as Christ lives in us, obsolete.

Jesus is our guiding Light, our Living Water and our Daily Bread. Jesus is our Vine to whom we are attached, and by whom we bear fruit of service and spiritual sustenance to others. He is the Way, the Truth and the Life. □

Greg Albrecht is president of Plain Truth Ministries and Editor-in-Chief of CWRmagazine.

Today Is a Gift

Ed Dunn

Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom. —Psalm 90:12



We sat together in the cold doctor's office at County Hospital in Los Angeles, California. It had been a long two-day stretch of testing and we were both tired. I was there as a friend, and yet, I was there as far more than just a friend. I was there in that doctor's office to be her memory, and to try my best to also be her voice.

Several years earlier, things had begun to change dramatically for my friend, my ex-wife and the mother of our daughter. Her speech had become labored, garbled and often hard to understand. She'd begun to speak in incoherent sentences more often than in clear ones. On top of the speech challenges, her memory seemed to become cloudy, patchy, and she had difficulty in remembering events we both knew well. Sometimes, when her level of utter frustration with these difficulties would boil over and bring her to tears, she couldn't speak or remember at all.

Yesterday is history. Tomorrow is a mystery. Today is a gift. That's why we call it 'The Present.'

—Eleanor Roosevelt

And, so we sat, waiting for the doctor to come into the office and give us his news. As we did, I held her hand and took a moment to reflect upon our family history. We'd been married for nearly fourteen years. We had a child together, twelve years in, after believing we'd never be able to become pregnant. Sadly, due to a number of issues we just couldn't seem to resolve, we divorced not long after our daughter's arrival. Somehow though, we'd made it through the pain and heartache of it all. Somehow, we'd found a



Ed Dunn

friendship beneath the relationship, and raised our daughter from there. And so, we sat together, waiting for whatever might come.

Primary Progressive Aphasia is a type of neurological condition that impacts a person's ability to speak. As the tissue in the area of the brain impacted continues to deteriorate, speech becomes labored, garbled and often hard to understand. The fact that this was happening to someone in her early fifties was a complete shock. Unable to tell us much of why this was happening, we had little to go on as we prepared to share the news with our daughter.

The news was sure to hit our daughter hard. For years, the relationship between mother and daughter had been, well, far from easy. Appropriate to the age of the teenage years, our daughter and her mother butted heads quite frequently. The communication they could have was often sharp, impatient and followed by a series of slammed doors. As even more patience would now be required, given what we'd learned, to allow time for her mother to get her thoughts and feeling out, we knew we were in for a tough stretch in life. Although I lived in a different home than they, I'd do whatever I could to try and help them both deal with the level of frustration.

The truth was, I couldn't do all that much.

Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom, the Psalmist writes. In more modern vernacular, the often-used phrase, *hindsight is 20/20* captures some of the thought, as well. As the lyrics of an old Joni Mitchell song repeat, *you don't know what you got till it's gone*. As we never know what life may bring, many voices gently remind us that today is a gift and we are fortunate if we can appreciate what we have when we have it.

We never know what life may bring. Indeed, *tomorrow is a mystery*. My friend, my ex-wife and the mother of our daughter is now living in a full-time care facility for patients with aphasia and dementia, not far from her birthplace and the home of her sister in South Africa. She is safe, well-cared-for and surrounded by friends in a similar circumstance. Our daughter, now finishing up her undergraduate degree, lives here in California with me, when she's not away at school.

Our daughter grieves deeply for her mother and would give anything to have a conversation with her now. It's not so much the distance between South Africa and Southern California, nor the many time-zones in between, that's to blame. It's no longer, in any way, the frustration of those teenage years now long past. The truth is she can't have a conversation—her mother can't speak in coherent sentences and our daughter grieves that her mother doesn't seem to remember her. All she wants is to go back to a time when she could communicate with her mother. I grieve deeply for them both.

As much as we might want to, we can't go back in time. *Yesterday is history*. In this sense, life can be quite cruel, as we don't always recognize *the gift of the present* at the time we have it. We don't always remember to live fully in the moment we have, when we have it. Hindsight is all-too-often our best point of clarity, but that doesn't mean there's great comfort in it.

All we can do is try to make the most of today. *Today is a gift*. Today, we can try our best to live out the grace, mercy and peace we have in Christ. We can remember that he will help us, especially when life seems unfair, and even cruel. He is our comfort and we can grieve in him. □

Ed Dunn is a vice-president at PTM and an editor of CWRmagazine.



CWJ?madness

Christianity without JESUS?

At CWR magazine, we recognize that for many of our readers, “religion” is a toxic word loaded with ugly *-isms*. Religion in this sense freely doles out judgement and condemnation. Yes, others use the term *religion* to describe faith movements (Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, etc.) or valid faith practices (prayer, Scripture reading, worship, etc.). But at CWRm, when we write about *religion*, we’re addressing the yoke of slavery and whip of striving that religiosity uses to forever condemn its victims to “measure up or else!” In other words, we resist *Christless religion*.

We are committed in our pursuit of Christianity centered in Jesus. Yet sadly, in recent years, the world is recognizing a growing chasm between the “Christian” label and the Jesus-following life. Indeed, the overlap between the two is dramatically shrinking!

It has become popular to say, “I’m a Christian—but I’m not religious,” but today it feels increasingly common to hear people clarify, “I’m NOT a Christian—but I still love Jesus.” The reasons are quite obvious. Among them:

1. First and foremost, **Jesus continues to be utterly compelling**. For me, this is more pronounced when Jesus is set in contrast to *religion* and, now especially, to what *Christless*

Christianity has become. While MANY self-confessed Christians have surrendered their first allegiance to Jesus for other *-isms*, MANY *outside* Christianity—whether irreligious or from other religions—now follow Jesus without any intention of converting to Christianity. And MANY who were raised Christian are more devoted to Jesus than ever but can no longer identify in good conscience with the Christian brand.

But Jesus? YES! Let’s follow him!

2. Further, just as *Christless religion* was seduced by legalism, moralism, and retribution, now *Christianity itself has often been co-opted and permeated by another layer of -isms*. More and more, *Christianity* is seen as

Christianity by any label that displaces Jesus is either not actually Christian... or if it is, I guess I’m not a Christian.

synonymous with ideologies that are authoritarian, nationalistic, politicized, and militaristic (to name a few). It has been hijacked by culture wars ideology and drawn to power, to domination, and to exclusion.

A truly tragic element here is that Christian hatred gets equated with faithfulness—deadly vices are now seen as virtues that come to define Christianity rather than mark a departure from it. We end up having to say, “If that’s Christianity, I’m not that.” I find myself making that embarrassing caveat all the time, in almost every significant faith conversation.

All I know is, I’d like to be a Jesus-follower.

3. What is a *Jesus-follower*? How about our CWRm motto: “All Jesus, all the time.”

If Christianity has confused or abused you, we suggest taking a deep dive into Jesus and hearing his simple invitation, “Follow me.”

We can saturate ourselves in the words of Jesus, asking what “follow me” entails. *Jesus-followers* can start by reading his “Sermon on the Mount” (in Matthew 5-7). I’ve personally adopted its opening lines (“the Beatitudes”) as my daily prayer practice—I think of it as a shield of faith, protection from invasive ideologies. I ask Jesus for the grace to shape me according to those aspirations. I recommend Greg Albrecht’s *Beautiful Sayings: Beatitudes of Grace* as a wonderful introduction.

I’m still a product and participant in the Christian tradition. It’s better to have a home base for faith than inventing my own religion. I’m grateful that Christianity directed me to Jesus. But that feels more like an accident of birth and geography than ever before. What matters to me is Jesus, even if Christianity (conservative, liberal, or progressive) leaves him behind. If I had to choose (do I?), I’m with Jesus and all who seek to follow him. □

Brad Jersak edits for CWRm and Plain Truth magazine.

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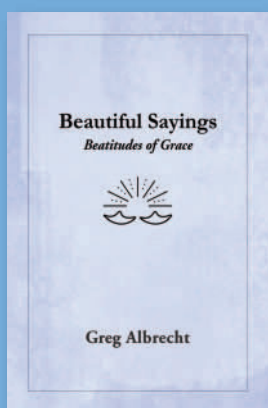
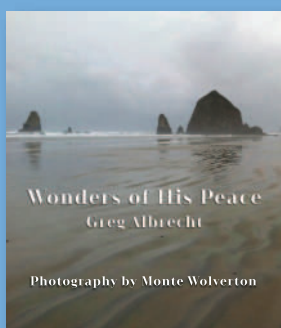
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