

Brazil News



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Editorializing

Time and Truth

Does time alter truth ?

Gary Hart was born on November 28, 1936 in Ottawa, Kansas. He was a lawyer, diplomat and senator. In 1988, he was his party's presidential candidate.

I don't know how many of you readers remember seeing his photo splashed over the front page of major US dailies. He is seen with a broad smile on his face and with a good-looking woman on his lap, also smiling. It took just a bit of journalistic investigation to discover he was having an affair with the lady.

Seeing his little secret was out, he immediately withdrew his name from the presidential nomination, which he was expected to win, and faded into oblivion, paying the price for his political peccadillo. He knew his past would preclude his political future.

That was 36 years ago.

He was by no means the first, nor only politician, to hide such an escapade. But he was the first to be so publicly exposed with his hand in the cookie jar.

Today this is a mute issue.

Now I repeat what I frequently point out in this little periodical. I believe, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that the Creator predestined North America to be the "promised land" for a chosen people who would honor His name.

Let me insert here, lest there be a misunderstanding, that I used the term "chosen people" in a broad sense, encompassing the assortment of religions who would be His standard bearers for exactly this period of time.

What distinguishes America, and more specifically the United States, from all other nations throughout history?

In a nutshell, North America is to be the evangelical "Israel," for His people.

How so?

Brazil ² News

Never in the history of mankind has a democratic nation structured its constitution, and subsequent laws, on Biblical principals as this nation. A microscopic view of American history, beginning with the Pilgrims, the Founding Fathers, and the multitudes entering under the shadow of the Statute of Liberty, leave no doubt. America was to be a God-fearing nation. And so it was, not in perfection, but within the limitations of human frailty.

As the country grew, church steeples and public schools were some of the first edifices to appear in new villages, yes, some as log cabins. They were there to educate both civically and religiously. And as the Allegiance to the Flag was modified, it read, "One nation, under God," repeated daily by hundreds of thousands of children. Religious holidays, Thanksgiving, Christmas, Good Friday and Easter were nationalized. Sunday was respected as the Day of the Lord.

Gary Hart abandoned his quest for the presidency, not simply because of public pressure, which he was sure would come, but because he realized he had crossed a disqualifying line.

Richard Nixon resigned the presidency because of an infraction, small by today's standards, with only a feeble attempt to defend himself judicially, knowing he had lost the respect of his constituents.

Does time change truth?

No, it doesn't. But it does change the concept of truth held by many citizens. And paradoxically, this mutation is increasingly evident in advanced nations, a malady that progressively afflicts educated peoples more than the less privileged.

We like to buy in establishments where the management and workers are trustworthy, and the products being sold are of good quality. It makes sense.

The course of history has occasionally been altered by the appearance of what today are known as "populists."

Populists are individuals who aspire power, usually in local or national offices. They project themselves as visionaries with novel ideas and the ability to create a better world. They loudly denounce what they consider to be unfair and harmful practices under current administrations. And of course, which is where they become "popular," by proposing changes that they claim only they are capable of implementing.

Let's take an anatomical look at populists:

- They have an uncanny ability to sway the masses. They know what to say, how to say it, to whom to say it and exactly when to say it. Amazingly, they are able to gather erstwhile antagonists under the same umbrella. Even more amazing, they have the ability to reconfigure the thinking process of men and women who were considered to be unshakable.

- Often populists have an unsavory past which they attempt to occult with a plethora of forcefully told untruths. They orientate themselves with a broken moral compass.

- For populists to be popular they must have some good ideas. In fact, often it is exactly this characteristic that makes their sale. The solutions they propose appear to be logical. They address real problems, some of which need desperately to be solved. They

Brazil ³ News

seem to have much greater insight into how to set things straight than those “on the other side”– for there is always another side. Why not let them solve today’s problems, since they seem to have all the solutions?

Populists practice a perverse evangelism. They convert their followers. (If spiritual evangelists had a similar success rate, we would truly be a holy nation.) Populists do not, and we repeat, do NOT unite nations. They unite groups within a nation, creating an “in or out” mentality. “If you are not with us, then you are against.” The inevitable result is a breach of confidence in those who don’t share their views.

Historically, Mennonites shun political involvement. Today, in most conservative circles, this is left to the individual conscience. Indeed, there are those who now encourage active participation, including office holding. The following comments are directed to those who adhere to the traditional doctrinal stance.

We don’t vote, which presupposes that God will place in power the one whom He has chosen for the office. It follows that this should be a matter of prayer, which brings us to the crux of the issue. We should not instruct the Almighty on whom He should choose, nor find fault with the one who has been empowered, even though not our choice.

In our 55 years in Brazil, we have lived under a military government, under administrations with strong left and right leanings. Several presidents have been impeached. There have been actions that have left the citizens outraged and on the streets. Yet, through all this we have prospered. Yes, there have been up and down, but far more “ups” than “downs.”

Can I complain? Never! I remember when I was able to purchase a second bicycle so that my wife and I could go to church on wheels, each carrying two children. Today we drive a Honda HR-V. We live in a nice house – not fancy, but very livable. We are not rich, but have a constant income from our chicken barns, that are the source of our income, and take care of all our needs.

If the Lord had told me to chose the government officials during this more than a half century, I really believe the country would be in shambles.

The country has prospered. From 30 thousand inhabitants, our local town has grown to 230 thousand. I could fill pages with how things have improved for those of us who moved in – and for the nation.

So, when people on the street tell me what an awful president, governor or mayor we have, I can leave this testimony. In spite of presidents and governors and mayors, we are all much better off then we were years ago.

We must exercise care not to fall under the spell of populists and believe their extremist views, be it in governance, science, health care, or whatever. God has taken care of us and will continue to do so.

So this is what I tell people I meet on the street, that in spite of everything, this country was prospered and I believe it will continue to do, for God is in power and will take care of us.

Truth continues to be truth. If you today are looking for the truth, look up.

Loose Pages From My Scratch Pad

COOK BOOKS. If all the different cookbooks in the world were piled up I believe the stack would almost reach outer space. It actually makes little sense. I have lived in the US, in Mexico and now Brazil. Absolutely the best food I have ever eaten is the non-cookbook kind. Ask the cook for the recipe and you get a blank stare. They toss in the ingredients, stir, taste, maybe a bit more of this or that, and let the stove do the rest.

BACK WHEN I WAS A YOUTH in Lone Tree Congregation, what I remember was the gum pasted under the front lip of the benches populated by the chewers. Is that a local practice that continues to this day?

ACCORDING TO THE MEDIA, the state of Goiás, where the Colony is located, has more churches than schools and hospitals in most cities.

AFTER THIS YEAR, there will be more women doctors in Brazil than male. I think that probably includes dentists. Quite a number of years back a lady dentist, with child-size hands did a root canal on me. I felt absolutely no pain, not during the procedure nor afterwards.

A SURE SIGN OF PROSPERITY is when ladies no longer want used cookware and appliances. So the stuff has to go into the trash.

THE PADLOCK CHAIN. Some 40 years ago Faith and I took a friend to see a specialist in a town near Belo Horizonte, in the State of Minas Gerais. The doctor, who was a friend of ours, took us out for a spin one afternoon. He showed us a road leading to a popular fishing hole. The gate was locked with padlocks (plural). Instead of a single padlock with each club member having a key, each used his own. He would open the padlock chain, let the new member insert his, and now he was officially one of the gang.

INITIATIVES WERE TALKED TO DEATH. Unfortunately, this happens all too often with new ideas presented to a group. They discuss all the pros and cons until everyone becomes weary and the initiative dies a whimpering death.

MORE THAN 4.4 MILLION Brazilians are living abroad. It would be interesting to know what percentage in N America.

ADMIRAL HYMAN RICKOVER, considered the father of the nuclear submarine, used to say that rules are substitutes for human reasoning. He may be partially right.

GOING TO THE CELLAR DURING THE NIGHT. I can still hear by dad calling, during the dead of the night, "Charlie, get up! We've got to go to the cellar." We would stumble out of our warm beds and head out into the driving rain, to our unattached cellar, where we were safe from tornados. Now with most houses having basements, I think this ritual is a trip to the basement. There are absolutely no fond memories attached to this miserable experience.

SOMEONE SAID: "My wife and I always get together on an argument. I admit I'm wrong and she agrees with me."

THE CALCULATOR. I grew up in the pre-calculator age. The first view I had of what

Brazil News

man-made machines can do was at the Galva Feed Mill in Galva, Kansas. Franklin Koehn was the owner and acquired an electric (not electronic) adding machine that would do some calculations. It was a big affair that must have weighed some seven or eight pounds. I remember the day my dad and I were in the office, together with a number of other curious people. Franklin told us how this new machine could convert pounds into bushels. There was a hushed silence as he almost theatrically punched some keys and then the calculate button. There was the awfullest clicking and clacking that lasted for, as I remember it, nearly a minute. And then the final CLICK/CLACK. Now Franklin with the skill of a magician detached the paper that emerged from the machine and showed us. There it was! In black and white. The amount of bushels that a truckload with X amount of corn would come to. What was this world coming it?

WHAT IS THE WORLD COMING TO? I can't begin to tell you. I only know that in the front pocket of my shirt I have a little little i-Phone that has much more computing power than the first computer used to send man to the moon. I have discarded my encyclopedia that is no longer needed. My cell tells me anything I need to know. (In fact, I don't think the paper encyclopedias, like Britannica and World are even published anymore.) All in my shirt pocket.

AND TO THINK of all the blood, sweat and spittle spent by my generation in grade school well over a half century ago doing pages and pages and pages of long division with pencil and eraser. For each wrong answer the grade would remind one of the setting sun.

WHAT I DON'T REGRET. High school freshmen weren't supposed to take typing, but I cajoled the principal, who was also the typing instructor, that I was a worthy candidate for a break in the rule. I learned how to type on an enormous Remington Rand manual typewriter. (Much bigger than Franklin's adding machine.) To make sure we learned touch-typing, all the keys were covered with little blank caps. I dedicated my fingers and my mind to the undertaking. Thus Mr. Williams, and his wife Mrs. Williams, who was my English teacher, prepared me for what was to be a life-long activity. But, I regress. I can't forget Uncle Ed and Aunt Theda Becker's old wooden house (that burned down a few years later). We were there for Sunday dinner and somehow I made my way up into the attic. There, stuck away on a little table, was an ancient, pre-historic typewriter. It had no ribbon and was covered with dust. But that afternoon I fell in love with keyboards. I have no idea how many manual typewriters I had, then electric typewriter, and finally an adapted Olivetti typewriter to work sort of like a computer. Today I my computer has an exterior keyboard and 27" curved monitor. But, unlike the trips to the cellar, I remember those good ol' days with pleasant memories.

ARE YOU SCARED OF HEIGHTS? An astronaut recently showed how ridiculous it is to be scared of heights. Think of it like this: Someone puts a one by twelve inch board, 15 feet long, on your front lawn. Someone asks, "Are you scared to walk from one end to the other?" Probably the most ignorant question anyone has ever asked

Brazil News

you. Just watch me! And you walk the plank, and then run it. You say, “Blindfold me and I’ll do it.” You do, a bit slower, but you make it, no sweat. You got an A+ on that one. Now two 50 foot poles are erected in the same front lawn, 14 feet apart. The same board that you fearlessly crossed blindfolded, is placed between them. On top. A 50-foot ladder is attached to either pole. “Ok, now up the ladder and cross from one end of the board to the other!” You start up the ladder. At the 15-foot mark your color changes a bit. At 20-feet you shakily start back down. So, here is what I learned. We are not scared of heights. We are scared of gravity. I watched a video of a lady astronaut giving a tour of the International Space Station. In zero-gravity no one walks; everyone glides in a horizontal position. They give themselves a little boost in the direction they want to go, and there they go. When it is time to stop, they must hold out their hand to stop the forward motion. As she glided down a hall in the space station, I noticed that right in the middle was a large hole. She paid no attention. Since there was no gravity, she had nothing to fear. (Earth building inspectors would frown on open holes in the middle of a hall.) So there you have it, if there were no gravity you would walk the plank 50 feet up – blindfolded.

SOMEONE SAID, “I accidentally rubbed ketchup in my eyes. Now I have Heinzsight.”

FLOODING IN THE STATE OF RIO GRANDE DO SUL. This will have to wait for another issue. I am hoping to get written reports from the Mennonites who are helping in cleanup work, both from Brazil and N America. They have done a magnificent work.

ONE OF THE MOST PRECIOUS MOMENTS in our worship services is the silence that sometimes falls over the crowd some moments, or minutes, before the opening song. It is a time in which reverence and respect for God’s presence become palpable. And that is not all. Children are taught reverence from lap age. In a functional congregation children are conscience of a sacred atmosphere. They know there is a time to play and a time to pray. I tip my hat to parents, and especially mothers, who transmit this glimpse of heaven to their children.

STREAM WORSHIP – THEN. We believe that David often worshiped the Lord by the “still waters.” A placid stream took him into the Holy of Holies. We don’t know how many of his Psalms were inspired as he communicated with his Creator on the banks of a gurgling stream.

STREAM WORSHIP – NOW. Age, illness, distance, and other factors can make it impractical for some to attend regular worship services. While there is no perfect substitute, we, like David, are able to find inspiration and spiritual nourishment, in *electronic* streams. My wife and I are assiduous online worshipers. Aware of our propensity to occasionally forget, I have a special app on my PC to alert us of the singing five minutes before the appointed time. It is truly amazing how that the conviction and dedication of the singers is transmitted over thousands of miles of air waves. This is not only evident in the voices, but also in the type of songs sung. We all like good singing, but really that isn’t what makes the difference. Possibly some of

Brazil News

the best singing I remember was from some teenage girls who had difficulty getting the right pitch and staying on tune. But in their voices there was a heavenly vibrancy that puts them at the top of my list for unforgettable singing. I want to use this forum to extend a special thanks to those spiritual brothers and sisters who inspire our souls. They bring to our hearts what David's harp brought to his soul.

STREAM WORSHIP – THE EXCEPTION. Not all the singing comes under the canopy of what we described as inspirational. When the stream we select begins with loud talking and laughing, we know what kind of singing we will be listening to. The same incongruity is true between songs, and worse, there are times a song bogs down to laughter. What we hear is usually new-generational singing. Invariably, these groups come under a distinct classification – which we will not identify in these comments. In our midst we do not use the name of the Lord in vain. Yet, to sing hymns that invoke the name of Jesus or God, encapsulated in songs sacrilegiously sung, would arguably be taking the name of the Lord in vain.

WINTER BIBLE SCHOOL. In N America you have Summer Bible School, because it is summer. Here it occurs in our winter, so have Winter Bible School. Day temperatures are usually amenable and it coincides with our public school vacations.

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