

Millennial Musings

This is being written on January 1, 2000, that is, according to man's reckoning of time in the Western world. On any other celestial body, our measurement of duration would make no sense. There the cycles of eating, sleeping, and reproduction of earth creatures would be terribly disoriented. The rules of physics are universal but the measurement of existence is not. God probably pays no attention to our calendar though many religionists make much ado about it. The end of the 6000 years of man's reckoning has been both exciting and scary for them. Throughout life I wondered if I would live to enjoy the novelty of using the date 2000.

I formerly interpreted Peter's declarations about the dissolution of our world literally and thought that God would one day "uncreate" this universe. I now grant that the universe may be billions of years old and may still be around billions more. Our recorded history covers only a brief moment of it. I have lived one day for each 25 days since Jesus was on earth. The successive overlapping of the lives of 60 persons who lived beyond 100 years would reach back through the supposed 6000 years of Bible history. What an unfathomable universe to become annihilated after only 6000 years!

Archeologists uncover the remains of cities that flourished a few hundreds or thousands of years ago. Can we expect the evidences of our civilization to be around 10,000 years from now? Even our grave markers are not likely to survive the ravages of time, neglect, and willful destruction. Who can predict how many, if any, people will have survived new viruses, radiation, starvation, genocide, earth's depletion, etc. by then? My earthly body will still be here but not in its recognizable form. Allowing that I have eaten and drunk three pounds of earthly materials per day for my 81 years, there are about 90,000 pounds of what has been my body mingling with the other elements and in living things. We have no reason to think those elements will cease to exist. Will a bodily resurrection bring all those elements back together?

Even though we humans are blessed with intelligence to use logic and to weigh evidences, we often prefer the fanciful over reality. I began my eighty-second year last November, but I will not reach 82 until next November. That is easy to understand. Logic tells us that we began the new century and millennium on January 1, 2000 but neither will be completed until the year ends. The imagination of the public has overruled logic as our celebrations last night demonstrated.

We who are otherwise intelligent people like fanciful ideas even though they may be illogical and false. We like to believe in flying saucers and visitors from space. Trust in absolutely baseless horoscope readings and zodiac signs are so popular that they are in the daily newspaper, and I fear that it is not just the pagans who have interest in them. Intelligent people know that fortune telling, card readings, witchcraft, and supposed seances are total deceptions, but they still keep the sinister characters who traffic in them in business. Medical fads and incantations of the mystics produce imaginary cures. The fascination with the mystical and fanciful keeps the greedy individuals enriched who exploit every sort of magic medical remedy. Some prefer their magical potions and treatments over scientifically proven methods. In an age of information, a paranoid imagination leads countless people to suspect conspiracies by the scientists, medical profession, and governments who are all out to get us. They become afraid to eat, drink, or breathe. In our time of the explosion of scientific data, our belief in the mystical, imaginary, and fanciful may be little ahead of those our less enlightened ancestors!

We allow the media to make us imagine we look great in the most outlandish clothing and hair styles, and fancy that we need a four-wheeled, all-terrain vehicle though we drive only on paved roads.

This human inclination of escapism from reality has led to development of superstitions and worship of pagan deities throughout man's history. The good or ill workings of nature have been attributed to those fanciful controllers. Anecdotal claims of miraculous effects, visions, apparitions, and revelations have been trusted without scientific investigation. Rituals, incantations, and mass mesmerizing manipulations reinforce the feeling of some extraordinary power or communication. Those subjective feelings then satisfy the mind that the god has responded.

True religion is based upon abstract and mystical concepts having a spiritual meaning or reality that is neither apparent to the senses nor obvious to the intelligence. Yet that does not mean that our religion is based upon intuition, insight, or similar subjective experience. True religion is based upon faith which is the acceptance of physical, historical, and Biblical evidences both internal and external that are short of literal proof. This takes it out of the realm of the fanciful, the imaginary, the anecdotal, the baseless. That faith is from a trust in the Biblical message also attested by God's working in the lives of its writers. If we trust in mystical voices,

sensations, visions, apparitions, and subjectivity, we are reverting to the same supposed guidance of the pagan religions.

While it is true that there is much figurative language in the Bible, there is a great difference in Biblical interpretation and intuition, emotional feeling, or subjective experience. We have reason to suspect that many supposed communications are due to emotional disorders like paranoia. In assemblies the emotions may be exploited by mesmerizing rituals, speakers adept at stirring imaginations, exhilarating music, and even a sort of self-hypnotism.

We in our congregations have depended more on logic (though often defective) than on subjectivity, but now we are seeing some reversal of that. In our age of the greatest scholarship upholding the veracity of the Bible and interpreting its meanings, man's inclination toward the fanciful is showing itself increasingly among believers generally.

This is no denial that God answers prayers and works in the lives of disciples. It is a questioning, however, that he gives special revelations verified by feelings today. If you claim such experiences, I cannot argue with you any more than I can contradict what you dreamed last night. You become the only authority of the subjective. When persons say that God revealed something to them or that the Spirit put something on their hearts to share with you, they, perhaps unintentionally, are endeavoring to make their messages authoritative. If God told them to share it, it becomes as authoritative as any New Testament epistle. And I have heard such expressed "revelations" which plainly contradicted the Scriptures.

You are not the only one who depends upon such questionable guidance. In the early centuries, the Catholic religion claimed special guidance – even both branches as they divided into the Greek Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches. The evangelicals and fundamentalists have been assured of their special guidance as they further fragmented. The Mormons claim authenticity through revelations to Joseph Smith and continued guidance of their apostles. Then there are the more extreme cults like the Branch Davidians who followed supposed revelations. And what of all those who have been claiming special insights concerning "end-time prophecies" who are proven wrong by time? If you want to believe such questionable guidance, that is your prerogative, but count me out.

Does this become a wee bit confusing? Has the Spirit been directing each of them? Is there anyone who thinks all these conflicting groups were produced by the direction of the Spirit?

Does God reveal to different ones of them that they are the exclusive, true church, as different groups claim? You may respond that your group has persons with the gift of discernment who verify your messages, yett other differing groups make the same claim. From whence is this confusion, disarray, and conflict? “For God is not a God of confusion but of peace” (1 Cor. 14:33). Paul urges that we be “eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3). Don’t attribute it to the Spirit, but more like the late Flip Wilson, confess, “The devil made me do it!”

If we are to establish a relationship with God in Christ and maintain that unity with him and all others who are in him, it must be based on more solid evidence than subjective feelings and mystical experiences. The Text is still our trustworthy guide. At best, Biblical interpretation is an inexact science, but at least the Scriptures are the common source of direction. Our fascination for the subjective and emotional experience must not be allowed to over-ride their authority.

In this new century and millennium, with our advanced scholarship in everything relating to the Christian religion, there is optimism that our baseless differences and the walls of separation they create will dissolve. []