

# The Vintage Voice

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■ January 2003

## A Taste For Uncertainty... And A Talent For Trust

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I begin by sharing with you what has become for me one of the most important passages in Scripture. These words were lodged deeply in my memory by their use in the Epistle appointed for Christmas Day in the 1928 Prayer Book. They are taken from Psalm 102 and were used by the author of the Letter to the Hebrews.

Thou, O Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of thy hands. They shall perish, but thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment, and as a vesture shalt thou fold them up and they shall be changed. But thou art the same and thy years shall not fail.

In one of the prayers suggested in the burial office, we pray that God will “make us deeply sensible of the shortness and uncertainty of human life.” You and I need that prayer. In our power and in our prosperity, we in America can forget that life is still short, still uncertain. We forget to rejoice in each day we are given, and to be grateful for each sunrise we awaken to.

“They shall perish, but thou remainest.” Begin with change: only God is unchanging. Change is not simply a part of the creation; change is the nature of the creation. Creation is a dynamic process, not a dramatic event; uncertainty is the nature of the cosmos. Peer into the powerful telescopes of contemporary astronomy and we see an unbelievable vastness and an unimaginable turmoil – structures of the most incredible scale, and processes of the most staggering velocity and force. Look at the history of our own planet and we see a long and irregular process: compression and cooling; the seeding of elements from the emissions of other bodies; the stirring of life, the emergence of species, the appearance – just fifty thousand years ago, more or less – of a creature conscious of self, conscious of other, conscious of history. And, since our emergence, our use of the natural world, our relationship with the natural world, our understanding of the natural world: all in constant flux.

Let me put some statistics to the drama of change. Can you believe that just over one hundred years ago, in the year 1902, the average life expectancy in the United States was forty-seven years? That only one in seven homes had a bathtub? That fewer than one home in ten had a telephone? That sugar cost four cents a pound, eggs fourteen cents a dozen, coffee fifteen cents a pound? That the average U.S. wage was twenty-two cents an hour, and the average U.S. worker earned between two hundred and four hundred dollars a year? That more than ninety-five percent of all births in the United States took place at home?

These figures illustrate an accelerating pace of change that continues unabated. These changes in the sociology and the commerce of the twentieth century match the profound discoveries of the subtleties and the mysteries of the cosmos itself: the billions of years of expansion, the immensity of the forces involved, the complexities of the processes unfolding, and the relative inconsequence of our sun and our planet which have spawned life and given us birth. Add to that our discovery that the sun is mortal, and that its life span and ours are finite and have been measured.

Our discovery of the new complexities in the macro-world is paralleled by the new mysteries and subtleties of the micro-world: energy fields, particle physics, wave expressions, heat exchanges, light emissions, gravitation and such. New language emerges to describe these phenomena, to trace these relationships and to give cohesion to sequences of minute and highly transient events. All this teaches us that the reality of the physical world lies beyond our descriptions of it, and that our most precise and sophisticated formulations of the physical environment are tentative approximations, subject to almost weekly refinement, if not revolutionary revision.

Uncertainty is the nature of the cosmos — and God created us neither to ignore it nor to endure it, but to thrive in it, to rejoice in it, to celebrate it. We are a part of that uncertain creation, freed by God to make of it what we will. We cannot serve this uncertain world — we cannot love this uncertain world — unless we trust the God who made it, the God who placed us in it, the God who set us free to choose how we shall relate to it. Our task is to cultivate a taste for uncertainty and a talent for trust — a zest for opportunity and a zeal for faith.

We cannot do it alone, but we are not asked to do it alone. We have God and we have one another; what more do we need? We are made in the image of the most high God, and we are brothers and sisters in the Lord Jesus Christ; what more can we ask? I cherish the recently published Tyndale Bible's translation of the Twenty-third Psalm. It opens with the words, "The Lord is my shepherd; I have everything I need." Everything I need to relish the open future and to make of it something good, something lovely, something worthy of my nature and my gifts.

Albert Camus has written: "To live as if our choices make any real difference in the long run may be the act of a fool, but to live as if they do not, that is the act of a coward." Seize the day; God has made it for you. Rejoice and be glad in it.



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