

**Reflections Upon the Millennium:
Europe at the Time of Y1K
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As we prepare for the coming of the new millennium, it is interesting to reflect on what happened 1000 years ago as our ancestors crossed the threshold from the first to the second millennium.

Unlike us, they did not have to worry about their ATM machines or air traffic control systems not being Y1K compatible.

In the year 1000 when you talked about being on the cutting edge of technology, you meant you had an abacus. When you complained that your system "crashed", it meant that your abacus fell off your desk and all the little balls rolled in diverse directions.

There was in 1000 a "millennium bug" which was most annoying and widespread. We know these bugs as lice. In 1000 A.D. everybody was lousy, from simple peasants up the social ladder all the way to the king and queen or bishop and pope. Almost 200 years after the millennium, it was reported by eyewitnesses that upon the death of Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, hundreds of lice were seen leaving his dead and cold body, searching for a new home.

Why are we fascinated with the idea of a millennium? Note that the importance of millennia is only significant for those who follow the Christian calendar.

We have to ask ourselves the fundamental question: Why does the Lord of the Universe, the Creator of all that is visible and invisible, the benevolent Father of all humanity, supposedly operate according to an imperfect and flawed calendar that we, his western children, have created? Think about this.

Let us talk about calendars briefly.

The desire to create measured time is as old as civilization itself. Egyptians provided for a calendar of twelve months of thirty days each, resulting in 360 days per year with five or six days added as "gained time." Our Jewish friends just celebrated the beginning of the year 5760, calculated from the time of Creation, based on lunar cycles, but with special corrections called "intercalations." The Moslems also have a calendar based on lunar cycles, similar to the Jewish custom, but with no corrective "intercalations." They calculate their years from the "move" (hagira) of the Prophet Mohammed from Mecca to Medina, in the year 622 of our calendar. The Greeks used the first Olympiad (776 B.C.) as the start of their time measurement. Ancient Romans began their calculations from the founding of the "city" (Rome) in 753 B.C.: Ab Urbe Condita i.e. AUC. The Roman calendar became increasingly more confusing and inaccurate until Julius Caesar reformed it in 46 B.C. resulting in what is called the "Julian Calendar." This Roman form of reckoning fixed the year at 365 ¼ days, which is almost, but not quite in accord with the solar year. Our present, Western Calendar reflects the fine-tuning of the Julian system, undertaken by Pope Gregory XIII in 1582. In the Roman Calendar January 1 was designated as the beginning of the civil year.

The calendar, which the Christian world eventually adopted, had developed rather late and was based upon the 365 $\frac{1}{4}$ days of the Julian reform calculations. It was a half millennium after the birth of Jesus, when in the sixth century a Roman monk, Diongenius Exiguus or "Dennis the Little" created the system known to us as B.C./A.D. He made the birth of Jesus of Nazareth the central point of chronology and thus of history. Years are calculated from the supposed birth of Christ to our own days: A.D. (Anno Domini) and before His nativity counting backwards to the time of creation: B.C. (Before Christ).

This Christian European form of chronology has now been adopted by almost all of the inhabitants of the globe. Billions of non-Christians use this system, which has at its base the birth of a child into a humble family in obscure Galilee, roughly two thousand years ago.

There are, however two problems with the Dionysian system: 1.) Calculating backward from his own time, to an event that took place some 550 years before, poor Dennis the Little made an unfortunate mistake. He miscalculated the date of Jesus' birth by four or five years. Most modern scholars believe that the Nativity took place in 4 B.C. or more probably in 5 B.C. This date is supported by both historical evidence as well as astronomical reconstruction.

Note the oxymoron: Jesus was born before the date he was born!

What implication does this have on our calendar?

If you feel that the birth of Jesus of Nazareth is the pivotal event of human history and that all calendar calculations should begin with the Nativity, then the end of the first millennium occurred in 995 A.D., and not in the year 1000.

What happened in 995 A.D.? Nothing special.

Far more important for us is the fact that all the stupid Y2K hoopla, the doom and gloom predictions dredged up by the lunatic fringe, and reported by the sensationalist media, is basically worthless nonsense. Based upon the correct calculation of the birth of Jesus of Nazareth, we entered the third millennium in 1995.

What happened that year that was so remarkable or cataclysmic? Nothing! Be of good cheer my friends, for the year 2000 is the 2005th since the incarnation.

We are, therefore, free and clear of all millennial anxiety and fear until 2995 A.D.

The second problem with the calculations of Dionysius Exiguus is that he placed the birth of Jesus in the year 1 A.D. [Note: in his calendar 1 B.C. is immediately followed by 1 A.D.] It is important to consider that at the time of our birth we are zero years old and become one-year-old twelve months later. The fundamental question therefore is: How old was Jesus in 1 A.D.? Zero or one??

Should poor Dionysius be blamed for this discrepancy, which by the way is the basis of the debate raging today about when the new millennium begins, namely is it January 1, 2000, or January 1, 2001?

Dennis the Little did his best in the sixth century and the fact that he did not come up with the birth of Jesus in 0 A.D., is certainly excusable. The concept of zero had not yet been developed. It will

be almost 400 more years before this basic mathematical idea, borrowed from Hindu and Arabic sources, begins to gain acceptance in the West.

One more aspect of the Christian calendar needs to be addressed. When does the "Christian Year" begin? There was considerable diversity of practice on this point. Based on the Julian calendar, the logical date would have been January 1, but this was at first rejected because of its pagan association. Yet, ultimately this practice will win out.

The "Anno Domini" in the Mediterranean World and in Germany began on December 25th, i.e. the supposed birthday of Jesus. There is an obvious logic to this practice: the coming of the Messiah, the Redeemer, indicates a new beginning.

God had become human on the Feast of Annunciation (March 25th), and thus it is reasonable to mark the beginning of the year from that point. This system was used in England, France, parts of Germany and the Scandinavian countries.

There were also a few places where Easter, i.e. the Resurrection, was considered the appropriate first day of the year. This, however, produced a number of problems since Easter is a "moveable feast," and thus New Years day would have varied from year to year.

As time went on, the most popular New Years day was December 25th, the supposed birth of Christ. Do we know the month and day of His nativity? No! Internal evidence in the Gospels points to a spring birth. How then did December 25th emerge as the date for Christmas? The answer lies in historic circumstances in the first two centuries following the crucifixion. Early Christian communities were in heated competition with other mystery religions then prevalent in the Roman Empire. Foremost among those cults was one of Persian origin, namely Mithraism. The followers of the God Mithra celebrated the "rebirth of the Sun" (Dec. 22nd), symbolizing the triumph of Light over Darkness (Winter solstice). These Mithraistic celebrations reached their zenith on December 25th. The Christians, who competed with the Mithraist for converts, united the concept of the "Rebirth of the Sun" with the idea of celebrating the "Birth of the Son." Thus the eventual emergence of December 25th as the "Birthday" of Jesus.

Let us look at further millennarian problems.

We have to ask the question: Is there something special about dates that end in nice round numbers? It certainly could not have been a fascination with two or three zeros, simply because Roman numerals and not Arabic were used during the time we are discussing.

Did the early Christians have Millennarian expectations? Probably not! Most of them were looking forward to the end of humanity within their own generation. It was assumed that major events, such as the Second Coming of Christ, the end of the world, the last judgement, or some kind of apocalyptic event would occur soon. This expectation was supported by passages found in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, where Jesus clearly said: "For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father, with his angels, and then he shall reward every man according to his works. Verily I say unto you, there are some standing here, who shall not taste death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom." (Matthew 16:24-28; see also Mark 9:1).

Was this to be interpreted literally?

There are important prophetic statements about apocalyptic events in the Book of Daniel in the Old Testament, but most important of all, in the Book of Revelations, attributed to St. John, found in the New Testament Scriptures. The Book of Revelations, mainly chapter 20, speaks of the "end times", especially the 1000 year reign of Christ, followed by the last great battle with Satan, until finally we arrive at the Last Judgement.

[Note: Revelations is a problematic book. In the hands of people with an agenda it can be outright dangerous. Revelations can be used to prove or disprove anything. Example: Take the number of chapters in Revelations, add the number of verses in the New Testament, multiply by seven, divide by the number of Gospels, add to this the distance in kilometers from New York to Rome and divide by the bra size of Marilyn Monroe. The resulting number, properly applied, will clearly indicate that the antichrist is Bill Clinton.]

When will the reign of Christ begin? This is an uncertain event, the time of which has been left to various interpretations through the centuries. As early as 156 A.D. a certain Montanus, fell into trances and predicted that the Second Coming of Christ will occur on a plain in Asia Minor, (modern Turkey). Inspired by Montanus and his two virgin companions, people flocked in large numbers to the designated spot and waited. They waited in vain!

Several medieval groups, especially around 1200 A.D. had a keen expectation of some cataclysmic event. Joachim of Fiore told his followers that the "age of God the Father" lasted from creation to the birth of Christ, "the age of the Son", from Jesus' birth to about 1200 and the "age of the Holy Spirit" will soon begin, as preparation for the Second Coming.

In the 1520's Thomas Münzer, a radical Reformation figure, preached the coming of the "end times." Even in America we find Millenarian expectations in the 19th century. William Miller predicted that the world would come to an end between March 21, 1843 and October 22, 1844. When nothing happened, his followers referred to this non-event as "The Great Disappointment." Both the Seventh Day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses are spiritual descendents of the millenarianism of William Miller. Almost invariably we have indication that millenarian expectations have a special appeal to the long suffering lower classes: Jesus stated that the last shall be first, the first last. Those who were the lowliest will be exalted and sit at the right hand of God.

How do we know if the Second Coming is upon us? A popular calculation which has been used extensively is as follows: God created the world in six days, and rested on the seventh. Six days equals six thousand years and represents the history of humanity from Creation to the Second Coming, followed by the reign of Jesus in peace and glory for another 1000 years. (Seventh day) After the completion of 7000 years, the world would end, and we then face the Last Judgement. To calculate the Second Coming we obviously have to know when Creation took place.

Most authorities, such as Venerable Bede (8th) placed the creation of the world around 4000 B.C. One scholar, Bishop Usher is more exact: 4004 B.C. on October 23, at 12 o'clock noon is when God

supposedly uttered the words "Let there be Light." Thus if we use this calculation, roughly 4000 years passed from the beginning of the world to the birth of Jesus, to which we have to add two thousand years to get the six-thousand, which would signal the Second Coming and the beginning of the 1000 year reign of Christ. Theoretically the year 2000 A.D. is when the Second Coming is going to take place. The Last Judgement will occur in 3000 A.D., when Satan will be defeated and the righteous shall rise in glory.

Others argued that it is impossible to determine when the 1000 years reign of Jesus will begin. There were predictions that it would be in 500 A.D., but nothing happened, the year 800 was chosen, but there was no Second Coming. The years 999 and 1000 A.D. were also viewed with interest. Both passed without a major cataclysmic event. In 1300 there were, once more, heightened religious feelings. Capitalizing on these, Pope Boniface VIII proclaimed a Holy Year, encouraged all Christians to make a pilgrimage to Rome, to repent their sins, gain absolution, and renew their faith. The Holy Year or Jubilee Year was a great success. Hundreds of thousands of pious men and women visited the Eternal City. At the grave of St. Peter, two priests with rakes collected the coins thrown by the pilgrims upon the tomb of the Fisherman who became the first Bishop of Rome. Although Holy Years were to be every 50 years, by 1475 this was shortened to 25. As you know, 2000 A.D. is a Holy Year and millions are expected to make the trip to Rome during the course of the year.

How did our European ancestors spend their year 1000 A.D.?

According to some sensationalistic authors, especially in the 19th century, the first millennium brought about universal terror and widespread panic as people prepared for an apocalyptic event.

We hear about the usual reports of wars, plagues, natural disasters, the appearance of comets, famines, floods, pestilence, i.e. all the usual signs of impending doom.

If we critically examine the written records of the period, we find reference to the possible end of time only in about half-dozen documents, from among thousands. The view of older historians, whose imaginations ran wild and who described a society paralyzed by fear, is absolutely untenable. Nothing much happened in 1000 that would herald the end of civilization. The most famous source of terror stories is a French monk, Raoul Glaber, who in a five-volume history talks of millennium expectations in the year 1000 and again in 1033, namely the 1000th anniversary of the crucifixion and resurrection. Most of Glaber's stories are obviously based upon rumors of rumors of rumors. He is not a credible source. Expelled from five monasteries for a variety of misdeeds, he had a conversation with the devil who stood at the foot of his bed. Not exactly a reliable historian.

Let us look at the European Christian world of the year 1000 A.D.

Physical features: huge forests cover the continent, population density is very low. It is a dark and somber world, a world lit only by firelight. Stone structures are rare, especially outside of Italy, and are confined to royal palaces, churches and monasteries. Nobility built fortifications, mainly earthen works with wooden palisades, resembling western U.S. forts seen in Ronald Reagan Cavalry and Indians movies. Most of the peasantry lived in primitive, small and crowded houses with several generations under one roof. North of the Alps most animals were slaughtered in the fall, those which were left, were

usually brought into the house for two reasons: 1. To protect them against the intense cold, 2. Provide heat for the family. From November to March people and animals usually lived together. By spring time it was hard to determine who smelled worse: your goat or your grandmother.

Not only was Europe dark, uncouth and primitive as the millennium approached, it was a civilization under siege. During the course of the 10th century the continent was subject to vicious attack from all sides. From the south came the Saracens, North African Moslem pirates, who gained control of the islands of the western Mediterranean, raided extensively into southern France, and kept Italy in turmoil for over a century. Vikings or Norsemen used their Scandinavian homes as a base of operations. They sailed their shallow drafted war ships up the main rivers of Western Europe and by using the great waterways of Russia, reached the Black Sea and even threatened Constantinople. No place was safe from their marauding forces. The pagan Vikings showed a special predilection for killing members of the Christian clergy. The 10th century church incorporated the following petition into the litany: "De furore Normanorum, delibera nos Domine." [From the furor of the Normans, deliver us, O Lord]. On the ill-defined eastern border of Christian Europe, we see an increased pressure on Germany by Slavic peoples, especially the Poles. Even more dangerous was the arrival in Central Europe of a semi-nomadic Asiatic group called the Magyars or Hungarians. They settled in what is now Hungary and using brilliantly executed hit-and-run tactics, they devastated Germany, France and Italy. In sheer bravado they even crossed the Pyrennees and attacked cities in Spain.

The century before the millennium was indeed a "Dark Age".

Yet when we look at the Continent in the year 1000, conditions had improved in a remarkable manner.

A few words about the political landscape of Christian Europe at the time of the millennium.

Iberian Peninsula: Spain and Portugal. Most of this southwestern part of Europe was in the hands of Moslems, who had overrun the area in 711 A.D. Only in the Northwestern section of the peninsula did Christians find refuge. For 250 years the followers of Mohammed controlled Spain. The last of the Great Moslem rulers was Al Mansor of Cordova who carried on war with the Christian states in the North, burned the holiest shrine of the Catholics in Spain, the cathedral of Campostela, where the body of St. James was supposed to be preserved. But the spirit of the Christian Spaniards was not broken. In 1002 Al Mansor was defeated and died of his battle wounds. On his sepulcher the following Arabic words were inscribed: "Such as he we shall not see again through all the coming ages." A Christian chronicle remarked: "Al Mansor died in 1002. He was buried in Hell." This event marks a shift of balance. Soon Moslem power on the peninsula was on the decline, Christian power on the rise. The "Reconquista" was taking shape.

France: The French had elected a new dynasty in 987 called the Capetian. The Capetian kings claimed sovereignty over all of France but barely controlled the region around Paris, the royal domain called Ile-de-France. At the time of the millennium the king of France was Robert the Pious, a most unspectacular ruler. He offended the Church when he married his cousin Bertha in 998, for which he was

excommunicated. Some called Bertha a witch. Finally separated from her, he married another woman and lived unhappily ever after. Because he could not stand the constant complaints of his second wife, Robert frequently left her to seek the peace and quiet of monasteries and religious shrines. While escaping his wife, he earned for himself the title of "Pious".

England: The ruler of the Anglo-Saxon state in 1000 A.D. was king Ethelred, surnamed the "Unready". In the years around the millennium England was under attack from Danish Vikings and Ethelred's leadership left a great deal to be desired. The Danes defeated his armies and extorted huge payments from the hapless English king. He was "Unready". To illustrate the magnitude of the ransoms that the Vikings imposed upon the English, let me give you some numbers. In 991, the Vikings extorted 10,000 pounds of silver from England. In 994 16,000, in 1002 it was up to 24,000 pounds. By 1007 this rose to 36,000lbs and the last payment made in 1011, was a staggering 48,000lbs.

Ethelred would undoubtedly have welcomed some apocalyptic event in 1000 A.D. to deliver him from the furor and extortion of the Danes, but no such luck! England was poised to become part of a huge Scandinavian empire.

Scandinavia: The Danes were already Christianized by mid 10th century. Norway, Sweden, and Iceland were still pagan. At the time of the millennium, the towering figure of Scandinavian history was Olaf Trügväson. A convert to the faith, he conquered Norway in 995 and undertook its conversion to Christianity. He sent a bishop to Iceland with instructions to eradicate paganism in two years. Those who resisted the gentle religion of Jesus were to be exterminated or driven from the land. - If persuasion did not work, persecution was to be imposed. Olaf's reign also coincided with Viking exploration of the coast of the North American continent by Leif Erikson in 1000 A.D. Except for founding a football team in Minnesota, Leif Erikson's presence on our shores left no tangible benefit. Sweden's conversion took place a few years later. While doing research I came upon the following interesting Scandinavian names: Swein Forkbeard, Eric Bloodaxe, Harold Fairhair, Halfdan Longlegs, Thornfinn the Skull-splitter, Eyeslein the Noisy, Grim the Hairychecked, Hallbjorn Half Troll, Thorstein the Cod-Biter, Olaf the Lap-King, Gunnlang the Worm Tongue, and naturally Hagar the Horrible. We also find among Scandinavian women Sigrud the Haughty also known as Sigrud the Strong Minded as well as a Nordic beauty named Thorgima Witch Face.

Poland: Poland's entry into the Western Christian family of nations was formalized in 1000 when the German ruler Otto III recognized the independence of the Polish Catholic church from the German church. The Polish ruler Boleslaus the Brave chose Gniezno as the seat of the Archbishop Primate. Poland was no longer a German missionary area but an independent Christian state with its own ecclesiastical and political structure.

Hungary: The situation was very similar to Poland. First inroads of Christianity took place in the second half of the 10th century, mainly during the reign of Duke Géza. Well disposed toward Christians, he had his son baptized but was not ready to renounce the pagan faith of his ancestors. He supposedly proclaimed: "I am so rich and powerful that I can afford to worship any kind of God I choose".

Géza died in 997 and was succeeded by his son Stephen. In the year 1000, Stephen petitioned the pope in Rome to send him a royal crown and he promised to lead his people into the family of Christian Nations. In August of 1000 Stephen received the crown and became the "Apostle" of his nation. Almost, but not all, of Steven's subjects followed him in the practice of the new religion. Those who remained pagan or following conversion returned to their heathen ways, felt the iron hand of St. Stephen.

The expansion of Christianity, which we see in Scandinavia, Poland and Hungary, is also evident further to the East. The ruler of Kiev, a prince called Vladimir converted to the Eastern form of Christianity in 988. We are told that his conversion to Orthodoxy was a deliberate choice. He interviewed representatives of the Muslim faith, the Hebrew tradition, the Catholic and the Orthodox Churches. He found major faults with each, except for the Orthodox. (Muslim: no drinking, no pork, circumcision; Jews: God must not love them if he scattered them all over the world; Catholics: too much fasting and self-denial).

As the year 1000 approached there were two powerful individuals whose careers are intertwined in a remarkable way. They are the Emperor Otto III and the French scholar, Gerbert of Aurillac, who will become Pope Sylvester II.

Otto became the king of Germany at the age of three and he was brought up by his mother a Byzantine Princess named Theophano and his grandmother Adelaid, [whose husband Otto I tried to recreate the Empire of Charlemagne. The result was a political entity known as the Holy Roman Empire]. Otto III's mother filled his mind with stories of the former greatness of the Roman Empire and young Otto made its restoration his life's aim. He was one of the best- educated men of the age, having as his teacher the churchman, Gerbert of Aurillac. Feeling that he was the heir of both Western and Eastern imperial traditions, he moved to Rome in 998 and began the restoration of the city, which had fallen upon hard times in the previous 500 years. He was hoping to make the Eternal City the seat of a world empire that would include most of the then known Christian world. To assist him in this monumental task he elevated his former teacher Gerbert of Aurillac to pope, who took the name of Sylvester II. Together, Emperor and Pope, student and former teacher, they were going to lead Christianity toward the new millennium. The Christian World Empire envisioned by Otto never materialized. In 1001 the population of the City of Rome revolted against Otto, he crushed the uprising, executed the leader of the insurrection. But, he soon fell in love with the beautiful widow of the executed rebel, and made her his mistress. It is possible that she poisoned him in 1002. He was all of twenty- two years of age when he felt death approaching. He cried, saying that he had so much to do yet. -

The millennial pope Sylvester II had a colorful career. Born in France and educated in Spain among Muslims, he was one of the most brilliant men of his time. He wrote on subjects such as theology, mathematics and natural sciences. So impressive was his learning that in later times he was accused of selling his soul to the devil in return for carnal knowledge and intellectual brilliance. He held a number of important ecclestrical jobs, was a teacher to both Robert the Pious of France and Otto III. When the papal chair became vacant in 999, the Emperor chose Gerbert to lead the church into the

second millennium. During his pontificate, Christianity made major strides by expanding into Scandinavia, Poland, and Hungary. Sylvester encouraged Otto III's dreams of a universal Christian State, where church and state would flourish. A year after the death of his former pupil, Sylvester II, the first French pope in history, also died. He is probably the most fascinating personage of the millennium period.

What I hoped to convey to you by this sketchy overview is that there is no indication that Europe was paralyzed by fear as the calendar moved from 999 to 1000 or to 1001. Instead we see a civilization which is obviously primitive by our standards, but a civilization which is dynamic.

It is interesting to note that the area that was considered Christian Europe in 1000 A.D. is roughly the region that is now emerging as the European Economic Community or European Union. While today the bonding agent of the New Europe is no longer a common shared faith, the glue that holds Europe together in our time is a belief in parliamentary democracy. Just as the threat to Christian civilization from the Moslems in Spain, the Vikings from Scandinavia and the Hungarian raiders from Asia ended before the year 1000, in the same way the forcefully imposed ideological division of the Continent created by the rise of the Soviet Union, is no longer a factor as we head toward the beginning of the twenty-first century.

The end of the world is clearly not at hand. Yet, there is something which all of us can learn from millennial expectations. The great medieval scholar St. Augustine: (d. 430) gives us the following wise advice:

"It is not ours to know the time that God has put at our disposal. A person should always live as if the end of the world was at hand".