

From *Monk In The Cellar*, a novel

Purpose

Brother Jesse Ponders the Imponderable

Yesterday I went to the small library in a nearby village five miles to the north of us. I dropped off my donation of bookmarks I had printed in the monastery's cellar print shop.

The library this month is festooned with Christmas wreaths and even a Manger scene. The organization is funded by interested citizens and donations, not by a municipal authority. The library board, who I'm told has at least one atheist and one Jew as members, decided to follow their own inclinations about the recognition of Christmas, whether their personal thoughts were spiritual or simply traditional. And they didn't think they needed help from groups who often don't believe in anything.

I visited with the librarian, a nice young lady who gives me web browsing tips whenever I ask her a question about the Internet. She's full of information that I'd never come across in my limited reading and browsing.

She told me there are 2 billion souls who regularly use the Internet. Although it's fashionable to throw around large numbers ... billions, trillions, quadrillions ... 2 billion is not a number I or any human can truly appreciate. Two billion people just slaps me silly. We may say the number and give examples we've read about, but probably no one can fathom a clear picture of 2 billion of anything.

The librarian's name is Melody and when I remarked that was an unusual name in the Northeast she said her mother had been convinced her new little baby girl was one of God's songs.

"One of?" I said. "Do you have brothers and sisters?"

She looked up from the card catalog she was thumbing through. "Only seven billion of them," she said, referring to the world's population.

"And you feel each is a song?" I said. "That's really beautiful. I agree."

Melody smiled and looked up from her work. "And don't forget the 100 billion who came before us."

She wasn't just throwing the odd billion around. Anthropologists estimate that so far 107 billion humans have walked the earth ... each a child of God, I would add. He must have a purpose for all of us. And I'm convinced He places a tiny part of his plan in each one of us. As his song, I'm supposed to sing my part.

Not everyone has believed that God crowns Himself in the souls of mere mortals, of course. The early founders of my religion may have been overly reverent. They formed a very cold conception of God and made Him unapproachable, as if He lived in a far off castle. As a youngster I pictured Him as an early scientist from the Old Testament, a calculating wizard who sat on His throne with a slide rule working out creation. Doing the math, so to speak.

I imagined He planned a universe that would get bigger and bigger. He was not to be bothered by silly humans, and certainly not by those who would invoke his help finding a parking space or ordering Nature to cure Little Jimmy's sick puppy. He was instead absorbed in those critical first few trillionths of the very first second of time with thoughts like: $(a+x)^n = a^n + na^{n-1}x + n^{(n-1)} \cdot 1/2 a^{n-x} x^n + \&c.$

When He succeeded in balancing the formula, He slammed his fist down in elation and produced the Big Bang. Honest.

When I wrote that formula on the black board in high school, Sister Majestyria rushed up and asked what I was doing.

"That's God talking to me, Sister," I said with a smirk.

Instead of swatting me, the tall lady leaned past me and muttering to herself clicked her fingernail on the board as she walked through the equation.

"This equation doesn't balance," she said. "You're talking to a false god."

I was never very good at math, so I happily left God to His endeavors to run off and tilt at windmills, where I planned to discover the fame and fortune I most certainly deserved. God or His Physics could take care of the day to day operation of the universe, the sun coming up each morning and the moon wobbling along its path home at night. The Cosmos

seemed to me a fitting backdrop against which I would perform my feats of glory ... if I managed to get out of bed on time in the morning.

God's purpose appeared no more profound than to author the wonderful and precise clockwork of atoms and molecules and DNA sequences doing their jobs. My purpose was to get what I could out of life.

In no time I was stumbling through one colossal failure after another, surprised to eventually realize I was not here on earth for my own amusement. I began to wonder if what the world needed to be saved from was me. This process was called growing up and coming to my senses. It took longer than I wanted. In truth it never ended.

I don't know God's plans or purpose. Perhaps they are less concrete than we imagine. It's possible He lives one day at a time. To me, there is some degree of evidence to show a power greater than me appears to change its mind. It may choose to live for today and let tomorrow worry about itself. Jesus told Nicodemus that like the wind we don't know where the spirit came from or where it's going. So maybe God is not an old guy with a slide rule slogging through the formulas to produce a mechanical world that is uniform and predictable. Maybe a Holy Spirit who wears his cloak loosely is in charge of the world's day to day operations. Maybe He's an impromptu kind of guy. Or girl.

Still, even if plans can change, my bet is that His purpose for us does not. But purpose may not be something we understand, only sense. For example, the birth and death of everything, from the earth's continents to our long gone grandparents, tells us a powerful puzzle of a story, an eternity consisting of endings, but also beginnings. The simple expedient of attraction between the sexes tells us more than how we got here. It is also a love poem that describes a lifetime of longing between a man and a woman, and is probably a mirror of our desire for our Creator. What Newton saw as simply gravitational force does indeed form the stars I stared up at as I lay in the grass one summer night when I was thirteen years old. But it was purpose that all but pulled my heart from my chest while I gazed at the firmament. A dog or soulless person would have seen nothing more than pin pricks of light across the vast canopy of a black sky. But like a blind man standing in front of a huge mountain, my soul sensed there was a being with a purpose far beyond what my eyes could see.

I've never received a clear message from the Almighty about His intentions for me. I have instead had to content myself with only a vague tickling of some fiber of truth deep inside me when I performed a task that evidently furthered His purposes in ways I could not imagine. Often these actions were not what I had planned for myself. Sometimes I first saw them as my mistakes. And sometimes my actions surprised me, as though they were not truly mine. It's no wonder I can't always understand the forces that move me and shape my life.

I've come to believe that God's purpose was stamped into my being the day He formed me. I am a human vessel into which He poured a tiny piece of His plan. His desires are at the root of my soul. I may sometimes think my life is mine, but it isn't. How right was Bouncer's Novice Master when he advised the young monk not to seek who he might become but who he already was. My task is to uncover the builder's plan left in me when He formed me in my mother's womb. When I accomplish my tiny piece of God's plan and purpose, I am singing the song He wrote for me.

I can think of no reason why that would not be true for every other human being who has walked the earth, whether they realized it or not ... and many have not. They're part of a grand piece of music that has 107 billion parts. I don't have to understand why to get a sense of purpose from such a large choir. I just need to be discovering my own song.

David Griffin

copyright 2014

The Windswept Press
Murrells Inlet, South Carolina

www.windsweptpress.com