

COMMUNITY CHURCH OF THE MIDLANDS

Unapologetically Christian, Unapologetically Progressive

Pastor's Paragraph

SCIENCE OR RELIGION: ON WHICH WILL YOU DEPEND IN 2017?

One of my friends in North Carolina who, when I was living there, never discussed spirituality with me, called recently, as he put it, to "make up for lost time." Always, he has been a thoughtful person; but, until now, anything related to spiritual development seemed not to be on his radar screen. The reason is that he prided himself on his dependence upon science alone, although his knowledge of science actually is somewhat limited. Now, however, after a heart attack and over fifty years of living apart from concern about the sacred, he was feeling a need to explore the possibility of living the rest of his life on a deeper level during 2017.

The fulfillment of that possibility was delayed by his clinging tenaciously to the assumption that all of us would be better off if we simply followed whatever insights we might be able to understand from scientific research. If we were to do that, he wondered, would we even need to be concerned about spiritual development? So he called to get my perspective.

The issue of choosing to follow science rather than religion or religion rather than science is not a new one. But that is a completely unnecessary dilemma; and I tried to explain to my friend why I believe that is true.

Numerous scholars and philosophers have negated the claim that science is the only way to obtain valid information and have decimated the erroneous assumption that science has the ability to encompass all reality. Today, the conflict between science and religion exists only between pseudo religion with its untestable, dogmatic claims, and pseudoscience: the belief that science is the only way to acquire valid knowledge. One needs only to reply to a pseudoscientific person with a single, fair request: "Please show me your scientific proof that science is the only means by which we can acquire valid knowledge." As every scientist knows, there is no such proof!

That which my North Carolina friend needed to know is that there is no conflict between mature spirituality, with its emphasis on testing claims and practices for ourselves, and mature science, with its identical emphasis on direct observation and testing. Indeed, the science of transpersonal psychology is dedicated to integrating the deepest insights of a mature religion with mature science.

My friend did not realize that the New Testament itself teaches that persons who want to grow spiritually need to "test all things" and then "hold fast to that which is good." So the Apostle Paul enunciated that guiding principle of science in the first century, long before the development of science!

Therefore, as we, together with my friend, begin a new year, let us do so with the saving awareness that both mature science and mature religion are dedicated to searching for and embracing truth. Indeed, it was Jesus himself who repeatedly attempted to help us separate "the wheat from the chaff," that which is true from that which is false. Unfortunately, there are numerous Christians who have not engaged in that vital spiritual process and have a lot of growing to do. Generally, they are commendably sincere, but they may be heavily invested in untenable teachings that they received in the past. Since they seem never to question them, they never grow beyond them. They have never allowed themselves to follow the important biblical mandate to be transformed by the renewing of their mind-the most basic principle for development toward a more mature spirituality. They think they are being true to the gospel; but, because they may have had loving but not well-informed teachers, they could be missing the essence of the gospel's actual message.

Consequently, during 2017, we at CCM will continue to offer persons who are open to genuine spiritual growth an opportunity to engage in that process. The goal will be to guide us into the "narrow road" referred to by Jesus-one which he said the masses will never travel. Instead, they choose to follow "blind leaders of the blind" down a more popular "broad road" where great crowds congregate--a path that Jesus said would lead them, without their realizing it, into an immature religion-a path that Jesus referred to as a form of spiritual destruction.

As we enter this new year, we can do so with confidence that we do not have to choose between mature science and mature religion. The option does not have to be an either/or, but a more appropriate both/and! So let us rededicate ourselves to a spiritual and a scientifically based allegiance to truth. Let us dare to "ask," "seek," and "knock," (that is, actively demonstrate our openness) so that the fullness of the marvelous but rarely experienced depths of spiritual reality can be opened to us.

Isn't it time to experience life in all its fullness? If we do, 2017 will be our best year yet!

Yours for a truly new year,
Your pastor and friend,
John

IT'S HAPPENING AT CCM

JANUARY, 2017

Sunday, January 8th (2nd Sunday of the Month) 10:00 a.m. NEW YEAR'S WORSHIP

Are you anticipating the arrival of 2017 with enthusiasm? If not, why not? What if all of us could be excited about the opportunity to experience a fuller, more abundant life during the new year? In our first worship service of 2017, we'll look at that possibility as well as how we might go about making it a probability. Our pastor's message, entitled "MOVING TO THE NEXT LEVEL," may offer the compelling information we need to live into the new year with a heightened sense of expectancy and the priceless gift of genuine enthusiasm.

Following worship, we'll have our usual informal discussion on the theme for the day; and, afterward, those who wish to do so will go to a nearby restaurant for some meaningful fellowship and a tasty bite to eat. We plan to go to the eatery at about 12 noon, and visitors are welcome. Always!

Sunday, January 22th (4th Sunday of the Month) 10:00 a.m. DIALOG WITH OUR PASTOR

In years past, at the suggestion of one of our members, we scheduled occasional opportunities-usually 3 to 4 a year for our congregation to "ask the minister" any question about beliefs, an ethical issue, how to apply Christian principles to a particular situation, or any other concern related to living an authentic Christian life. It provided time, in a warm, relaxed atmosphere, to ask a question about which you may have wondered or something about a life of faith you may not yet understand but never had an opportunity to ask about it. Or, perhaps you have no pressing question but would be interested in hearing the questions of others and John's response.

In the past, our vibrant sessions seemed to be deeply appreciated by our members and actually became "a CCM distinctive." However, as a result of an already full schedule, we did not have any of those special opportunities in 2016. So, today we'll "play catch-up."

Our pastor's viewpoint during our engaging, informal talks is that any comment he makes, though based upon rather extensive training and experience, is not the only word or the last word! It is, as he always puts it, the response of a fallible human being who is dependent upon his understanding of the will and purpose of God at this particular juncture in his own spiritual journey, and God may have more wisdom to impart to all of

us in the future. But, as always, John will share his response to our questions gladly and will encourage comments from others in the group, as well.

We look forward to this overdue time together and value your questions, comments, listening and reflection.

Welcome to our first "CCM distinctive" in 2017!

ANNOUNCEMENTS THANK YOU ... From Our Musicians

Over the holidays, we received lovely cards from Evelyn and Mary Ann Clary expressing their hope that we would have a meaningful Christmas. Also, there was a note requesting that we share with the congregation their appreciation for your Christmas remembrances and for your valuable support throughout the year.

From Our Pastor

I was deeply humbled by your generous expression of love and caring during the Christmas season. The munificent gift from the congregation, the beautiful cards, notes, thoughtful telephone calls and expressions of appreciation made me realize again the profound value of the qualitative fellowship we have at CCM. From the bottom of my heart, thank you for the privilege and joy of our life giving time together.

You are irreplaceable.

With abiding love and appreciation,
John

From the Congregation

We are so very fortunate to have Mark Fox as a part of our fellowship. Not only has he created a spectacular website for us that he updates continually, he thoughtfully finds new and better ways to digitize our Sunday sermons in order to make them available to a wider audience on the internet. All of us at CCM are grateful to you, Mark, and deeply appreciative of your enviable expertise. Thanks so much for your immensely valuable ministry.

JANUARY BIRTHDAY CELEBRATIONS

Gary Davis (1/1)

Marti Fritz (1/12)

Bill Ingbreisen (1/5)

Mary Ann Clary (1/28)

Our best wishes to each of you!