

The long wait



BY RAFAEL HERNÁNDEZ COLÓN

"We shall not cease from exploration.

And the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time"

—T.S. Eliot

Christmas is time to reflect on the meaning of human experience. The span of the seven millennia of recorded history provides a framework to the happening of Dec. 25, which allows us to understand the transcendent significance of the Nativity.

As far back as the fifth millennium before Christ, when the Egyptians drafted their calendar regulated by the sun and the moon, dividing time into 360 days, 12 months, and 30 days each, and the earliest cities in Mesopotamia were built, the human race has felt a need to unveil the mystery of its existence. Where do we come from? What is the meaning of life? Is there life after death?

By the third millennium B.C., the Sumerians, Egyptians, Phoenicians and Scandinavians responded to the mystery by worshiping the Mother Goddess Innin and her son Tammuz and similar divinities. The gods Isis and Osiris responded to the question of resurrection from death in Egypt, and the snake and the bull were religious symbols in early Minoan culture on Crete.

Arriving at the second millennium B.C., the Vedic religion in India assigned different powers to the separate deities of the heavens, the air and the earth. It is probably around this time that in what is now known as Israel, Abraham, the first of the Patriarchs in the Bible, is made aware of the existence of the one God and, believing in Him, lays down the foundation for the Jewish religion. Centuries later, but still during the second millennium B.C., Moses receives the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai.

The faith stemming from Abraham and Moses was different from the beliefs in gods so far held by the human race. It came from God to them; not from them to the gods. It was, however, dark, revelation. It was an answer to the mystery itself coming from inside the mystery. Nevertheless, the Jewish people didn't embrace the faith of Abraham and Moses in a steadfast way. They reverted many times to the worship of idols, such as the golden calf, after Moses revealed to them the Ten Commandments.

The first millennium before Christ witnessed classic paganism in full bloom in Greece, with Zeus, Apollo, Aphrodite, Athena and other deities entering the scene of worship. By the sixth century B.C., with Confucius and Lao-Tse in China, Buddha in India, Zoroaster in Persia, the

Jewish prophets, the Greek poets, artists, philosophers such as Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, human wisdom had reached a zenith of ethical and ontological speculation on the question of human behavior and existence.

However, paganism was still rampant and men and women worshipped material objects made of marble, gold, iron and wood. The bull, the bull's horns, other animals often shown with wings, and a winged sun were worshipped in most countries in the Mediterranean.

Looking to the first millennium before Christ, we see that by that time only a few individuals in recorded history, such as Socrates in Greece, rose above belief in many gods and idols to belief in one God like the Jews. Only the Jews believed in a God who created the universe out of nothing, and was the giver of the moral law, demanding moral goodness from all men and women.

Many peoples tried to unravel the mystery through their imagination (myths) or their reason (philosophy). They found glimpses of Him. The history of the Jews as told in the Bible, on the other hand, speaks to God's search for man. It tells God's deeds in history. His revelation to the human race, through the people he chose to do this: the Jews.

The Jewish prophets raved against the Israelites for turning away from God. But they did more than that, revealing the thoughts of God through words that were divinely, not just humanly, inspired.

There were and still are false prophets, who claim divine inspiration, but really speak words of human coinage. How do we tell one from the other? Moses was asked this question when he was dying and the Jews were about to enter the Promised Land. His answer was to "wait," which is the title to this column. Wait, because time will reveal the truth and will separate the false prophets from the true prophets.

The Bible contains the prophets that withstood the test of time.

Throughout the writing of the prophets, there were frequent mentions of a messiah, who would come to liberate the Jews and bring salvation unto them. Isaiah's mentions of him are the most prolific. Written about 700 years before Christ was born, it is amazing the many prophecies on the life of Christ—17 of them—that are borne out in the Gospels and letters of the Apostles.

Christ wasn't to be the type of liberator who most Jews expected. He wouldn't free them from the Roman domination that existed at the time of his birth. He was born in Bethlehem to reveal the mystery that had puzzled humanity since the beginning of recorded—and probably all of history. He came to bear witness to the truth about the origin and destiny of all men and women from all ages.

He put it this way: "You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free." Free from the bondage of darkness to the everlasting light of creation and the destiny of man. So, in that moment, in Bethlehem 2,000 years ago, we had the impossible union of the two spheres of existence: Christ.

He said he came on a mission from God. He didn't seek money, honors or power. He spoke from authority, his ethical teachings were sublime, he worked miracles. The blind saw, the lame walked, the sick were healed.

He bore his passion and crucifixion with dignity and compassion for his tormentors. He voluntarily gave up his life so we may join the Father at the end of our own lives. Through him, the Father showed his unbounded love for us. Through him, God revealed himself to all men and women. "He who has seen me has seen the Father."

His birth, which we commemorate during Christmas, brought a profound change in our understanding of the mystery of human life and existence. It is no longer solely a question of logical inquiry by employing our reasoning. Does God exist? Nor of our imagination. The incarnation has occurred. The wait has ended.

God has revealed himself through Jesus, who is a historical person. His life was a historical fact. So, after that moment in Bethlehem, we must approach the question of the meaning of our lives by believing or not believing in Jesus. We are free to decide either way. Whatever choice we make is the most important decision in our lives.

*Then came at a predetermined moment,
a moment in time and of time,*

*A moment not out of time, but in time, in what
we call history:*

*transecting, bisecting the world of time,
a moment in time, but not like a moment of
time,*

*A moment in time but time was made through
that moment:*

*for without the meaning there is no time,
and that moment in time gave the meaning.*

*Then it seemed as if men must proceed from
light to light, in the light of the Word,*

*Through the Passion and Sacrifice saved in
spite of their negative being. —T.S. Eliot ■*

Rafael Hernández Colón is a three-term (12-year) former governor of Puerto Rico (1973-76 and 1985-92). He served as Justice secretary (1965-67) and Senate president (1969-72). He was president of the Popular Democratic Party for 19 years. Comments on this article are welcome at caribbeanbusiness.pr. Go to [Sign in](#) link on the homepage. Emails also may be sent to column@caribbeanbusinesspr.com.