

HER VIEW: One day at a time till the end of the world

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Posted on: Tuesday, December 01, 2009



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It is hard to understand Western culture's fascination with doomsday scenarios. What brings this to mind is the current film "2012."

If one watches any TV, one has to be aware of the premise of this film before it came out. Prophecies from Nostradamus, the Mayans and who knows who else are put together to make this seem a possibility. These prophecies coincide with the galactic alignment. This alignment happens when our sun's plane is directly opposite the center of our galaxy. This rare celestial event occurs every 25,800 years. It is an interesting event that should be celebrated, not cheapened by sensational warnings of doom.

If this alignment occurs approximately every 26,000 years, why is there no fossil record of dire happenings during past alignments? The start of ice ages? Volcanoes running amok?

We know from the fossil record of major die-offs in the past. The most recent being the Cretaceous-Tertiary (K-T) boundary when the dinosaurs bit the dust. Galactic alignment? No, a huge meteor or comet hitting planet Earth near the Yucatan. A true doomsday for the large magnificent creatures then inhabiting this planet.

Did the dinos know it was going to happen? Unlikely. Since the K-T boundary, there have been 2,501 galactic alignments with no noticeable ill effects.

The West seems to be uniquely prone to this kind of apocalyptic frenzy. It is nothing new. If we think Y2K was overblown, it is nothing compared to the hysteria at the first millennium.

A prominent preacher/theologian from Paris around 960 A.D. preached about the forthcoming end of the world at 1000 A.D. Thousands of Christians believing this sold all their worldly goods and traveled to the Holy Land to await the Second Coming. These poor souls didn't speak the local languages and were either out of or near the end of their resources. They ended up as beggars in the streets of Jerusalem, where they tested the limits of Arab hospitality. Besides being poor and illiterate, they didn't wash, a clash of cultures that in part led to the Crusades.

There were later prophecies of the Second Coming around 1275 and 1500, but none with the disastrous results of 1000 AD.

We as Americans come to our fascination with "End Times" in whatever form they take naturally. Just like past predictions, these will quietly go away until some "new" possibility takes our fancy.

The date 12-21-2012 seems so meaningful. Why? All dates/calendars are constructs that were devised to help us keep track of the progression of time. We are in year 2009 on the Gregorian calendar, year 5770 in the Jewish calendar, and year 1430 A.H. in the Islamic calendar. Lastly, we are in year 4705 or 4645 depending on which Chinese calendar we use. For the convenience of trade, most countries use the Gregorian calendar dates. This was not true until sometime in the early 20th century. In fact there was no agreement on when the year started until recent times, like the past half century.

Russia had been a real holdout on adopting the Gregorian system. It was after the Revolution its calendar started to coincide with Western Europe.

Pope Gregory XIII in a papal bull reformed the Julian calendar in 1582. The first problem with adoption of the new calendar was that the monolithic Latin Christian world had fractured. What the pope said was no longer as effective as it had once been. There was a true need for a reform of the Julian system. The equinoxes and solstices stayed in the same place but not on the calendar. There was a two- to three-week discrepancy that was growing over the centuries.

The calendars are human constructs that we need to massage to fit the reality of the Earth's yearly orbit around our sun. The Chinese have a great way of dealing with this. Their New Year has several "non" days associated with it. After the celebrations are over, the year begins again and all dates are where they are suppose to be.

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