

RUSSELL'S RUMINATIONS
A LETTER OF ANALYSIS AND COMMENTS ON ISSUES
OF INTEREST TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

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Dear Friends:

Hey! I'm doing it! "It"... is the commencement of a No. 3 in this Volume... which also means that this is the third Ruminations during this year, and I have not accomplished this in the history of this publication. The Spirit has said that eventually I shall do four a year, so three is "on the way." An achievement, nonetheless.

Those of you who have read some, most, or all of the eight issues that have preceded this one know that my continuing affirmation is that, with some regularity, I go into a meditative state and receive what are called Teachings, given by the Holy Spirit, the teaching-guiding-inspiring "aspect" of the Triune God. I write these as I "hear" them, and the originals (mostly three pages each, handwritten) now measure nearly a foot in depth in a file drawer.

The Spirit either suggests or approves a theme for each of these Ruminations, and then I research the files of Teachings for those that shall give substance to exposition of the theme. Now some folks do note, in the spirit of criticism, that these Teachings sound much like my writing, suggesting that I am just "making them up." So I shall just attest again that the writing of these Teachings is quite a different "process" than, say, writing this. In writing this page I am searching for words and deciding on ideas and how to express them; in the meditative process I just write what I hear, and that usually flows right along at my writing speed. Further... I had no initial desire or motivation to do this kind of thing. I still don't wish to be or perceived to be weird in spiritual/religious terms, but I have to admit that the Teachings are so good and so helpful to me and to others that I continue to receive and to share them. And... in response to the original critique... if anyone can tell me, with authority, just how the Holy Spirit does sound, if it is different from what I present, I'd be glad to harken.

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I've known for some time that eventually I would compose a Ruminations on this theme, and though part of me wants to do it, I also am reluctant and a bit anxious. For it concerns something that I believe and know and for which I have positive "documentation" from these Teachings, BUT which is not affirmed directly in the Bible and is suggested only in very oblique ways. So, knowing that I am in trouble with those of you who affirm that all Truth, about God, certainly, is in the Holy Scriptures, I smile and proceed... to a Rumination on God's sense of humor and fun.

I'm not really sure when I started to consider this idea. I know it was spurred by Bill Cosby's classic early routine called "Noah" (on which the Spirit has commented twice... favorably), which Lenore and I saw and heard "live" at the Hungry i in San Francisco in the early 60's. I know that the idea was given some scholarly status by Elton Trueblood's 1964 book, The Humor of Christ, Which I read in the middle 60's. And it was given form and substance in a little book by the Rev. David Steele, a

Presbyterian minister who was the Chaplain at Punahou School in Hawaii (after we left), a book called God must have a sense of humor He made Aardvarks and Orangutans... and Me!, published in 1983.

My logical development of the proposition goes like this. Humans are created in the image of God, and what we exhibit, always imperfectly, is some reflection of God's likeness. Then there's sin and humans' sinful nature - - those aspects that are not like God. (All was created by God, however, and is not beyond his control, so I'm not too strong on the dichotomous view of human life.) As we consider and enumerate the positive attributes of any human person, particularly one we admire and like, a "sense of humor" is usually near the top of the list. (In an interview in Possibilities (Robert Schuller Ministries) Steve Allen asserted that "no one has ever said, 'I personally have no sense of humor.' Everyone seems convinced that he or she not only has a sense of humor, but has one superior to most people.") Ergo, if a sense of humor in persons is considered a positive asset, then this must be yet a faint reflection of this characteristic of God. God must have a marvelous sense of humor and fun. The other conclusion, that I reject, is that because the Bible does not picture God, Jesus Christ, or the Holy Spirit as having any fun, the sense of humor must be "of the devil" and doesn't belong in any consideration of spirituality.

Some twenty years ago I did a small study of the Emotions of Christ, as recorded in Luke, and found the recorded ones to be all serious. He had compassion, He wept, He rebuked, He charged and commanded, He drove out money changers, and He experienced agony in the garden. Not a portrayal that shows forth much fun in life!

Now I'm quite comfortable with the fundamental Christian understanding of the Triune God - - God, the Creator and Father (and Mother, too... why not?... two parents are better than one!); Jesus, Who was and became the Christ, One with the Father, and the Holy Spirit, Who also existed "from the beginning", but Who became active after Christ's resurrection, in teaching, helping with spiritual growth, and interpreting the Scriptures. The import of this is that if the Holy Spirit tells me that He has fun and a sense of humor, then I assume the same for God and Jesus Christ. The Spirit is not the enjoying off-shoot of an eternally solemn, suffering God and His super-serious Son, say I.

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I began these meditative writings in May of 1979, one each morning for two months, and then 3-4 a week, which is my present mode. During that first 7 months there were some indications of a fun-spirit in the One communicating... in titles such as "Select the Channel", "I am a Pump", and "Catch a Falling Star", but the normative ones were still "Forgive", "Confidence", "Aging", "Spiritual Risk-Taking", "Romans and Forgiveness", and "Baptism". I truly was taken aback, then, on December 4, 1979, when the title was "Fun", and the message was that the Spirit does enjoy life. From the first sentence to the closing phrase the spirit was one of fun and joy. See for yourself as I present this first "break-through." (The paragraphs are numbered so that I can refer back in my ruminative comments.)

DECEMBER 4, 1979

FUN

5:38 AM

1. Hear the Word of the Lord's Spirit this day! Now isn't that a serious, pontifical commencement to some teaching on fun? It fascinates Me... even, ironically, saddens Me... that so many of My creatures, even My servants, have trouble with the notion of My having fun. I must be supreme seriousness. I must lament and sorrow. I can be angry and vengeful. You all can be happy and have fun... but not the Lord? It's true that the Scriptures have helped develop this picture. But I'll put it straight to you this day. I, the Spirit can and do have fun.

2. Creation is fun. Even though the world is all set up to function naturally and I let this happen most of the time I can't help intervening now and then, just for fun. It is fun to answer a prayer for a weather change that brings a beautiful day for a picnic or game in the midst of miserable. It is also fun to shift the weather suddenly so that people must scurry, adapt, be together in unexpected ways, and remember it long after beautiful, uneventful times are forgotten. Remember that Columbia River caper back long ago? And it was fun, in another way, to prolong the beautiful days until Peter's body was buried. You shall remember that forever (a long time).

3. My greatest pleasure is in bringing people together who would otherwise never touch in this life. It was fun bringing you together with Ben Loring and with some of those other fine Baptists of Mine. It was a surprising and good day for you... and a pleasure for Me. It is fun to bring people together who aren't going to get along, but who will profit from the exposure, even though it may seem distasteful, even grim.

4. It is fun to help develop certain people who shall be unique in this world. "Giants" of various kinds, "characters" of many sorts, eccentrics... these give variety and spice to a world, and I often am partly responsible.

5. It is fun to lead some people who are ultra serious (I really did say "super serious"... remember I can use any language or form of language) into research and study that truly is non-productive, deadend. Oh, it is a little perverse, but often necessary to stimulate a bit of humility, one of the qualities I value.

6. Language is a fascinating issue. You are more advanced than most Christians in accepting My use of "non-Biblical" language. Most truly want to restrict Me in many ways. "The Lord wouldn't say that!" Why wouldn't He? I can have fun with language.

7. It is fun to exacerbate the controversies about male and female, particularly with relation to Me. I smile at the seriousness of protest at My being He... as well as at the apparent blasphemy (well, almost!) in referring to Me as She. I'm sorry some women are so "put off" by this whole issue, but it also is pretty amusing.

8. I knew sexual differences would cause problems in this world, but I also knew they were necessary. And they are fun. Of course I am all of what any of you can and could be. I am fully male and fully female, and every combination possible, all at once. Now that is hard to express in language, isn't it?

9. So, My Word today is that I get much pleasure from this world. Some of My fun comes from just the way the world functions naturally. Other fun comes from manipulating things and people just a bit... and enjoying the consequences.

10. I don't ask you to spread this message far and wide. Just know it yourself and share it with the few who are able to see Me and communicate with Me as you do. Be aware of this aspect of Me in your life. Appreciate My playfulness... on occasion.

11. There often is a "twinkle in the Lord's eye". Watch out!

Over and out.

6:45 AM

I'll comment first on #10. For nearly 5 years I've been not spreading this message far and wide. I have come to be aware of this in my own life, and so I'm finally comfortable with the reality of this aspect of Holiness. I appreciate His playfulness, even in the midst of serious happenings.

Now, back to #1. The selection of descriptors is marvelous... "supreme seriousness"... "lament and sorrow." We can be happy and have fun, but the Lord can't. Isn't that the picture most of us have? But He "put it to me straight"... He does have fun. In #2 He talks about changing weather as a form of fun, and how many prayers do you suppose He has heard asking for some change in the weather?... some for rain in the Sahel, some for a tropical storm to veer away... and...

The Columbia River caper was an overnight camp in that river basin in August, of 1947... a "gulley washer" came in the early morning, and we (two fraternity brothers and I) frantically tore our camp apart and threw it, wet, soggy, and dirty, into the car, and then two of us had to push the car up the muddy road out of the river bed as the other drove wildly. We finally made it, covered with mud and thoroughly soaked, but appreciative of the bizarre adventure. The other example: our son Peter was killed on a Tuesday evening (in Dec., 1976) and buried in a hand-dug grave on our Farm late Thursday afternoon. The Wednesday and Thursday were cold but beautifully clear as the grave was dug, the burial completed, and the grave filled in. The next day it began to rain, and it rained for nearly a week. Coincidence? Or... how about the Spirit having fun?

He has fun, as indicated in #3 and #4, in bringing people together, even those who clash, and in helping to develop unique people, "characters" and eccentrics. In these categories I think of old friend Henri Petraki, of my colleague Jack Osman, and old friend the Rev. David Works, a recovering alcoholic Episcopal priest whom the Lord must certainly enjoy... Who do you think of as a God-created character?

In #7 He says that these male-female arguments are fun... even "pretty amusing." When He says He (God, presumably) is "fully male and fully female" is this a serious statement or another example of fun? Some of each, I'd say. "Androgynous" is the probable descriptive word, but it seems, well, amusing to talk about Dear Androgynous God. In #9... does it bother you to think of God as manipulating things and people "just a bit"? I have to smile when I trace the meeting with my wife, Lenore, and hence the lives of our children and our grandchildren, my sister's marriage and their children, and my parents' present home... all back to a decision to take a job in Hawaii, which I made in about an hour. And I certainly have no trouble with the notion of God manipulating that, with a smile.

As #11 proclaims, "There often is a 'twinkle in the Lord's eye'". Just consider this as a possibility as you think back on life events... and as life goes ahead. Remember that God's fun is of the best sort... not hurtful, though perhaps humility-producing. And don't overdo it... don't envision God laughing at every tragedy... Just give Him a balance of response comparable at least to the best of human response.

Up until this Teaching the final words had been mostly "Shalom", "Amen", "So be it", and "So let it be", so, though it was appropriate, given the spirit of "Fun", I still was surprised at "Over and out." "The Lord wouldn't say that!" "Why wouldn't He?" If not, why not. Are you enjoying this?

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Almost a year later the early morning title was "A Sense of Humor", and it began:

You do not feel the least inclined toward fun and humor this early morning, o son, so that shall be Our theme. For the rhythm of life, of the properly spiritual life, is one in which, amongst the serious and rational, there is time for humor and for the comic. You remember well the teaching I called FUN. That was almost a year ago. Do you remember the titles of those before and after? That should say something important.

I don't remember how I was feeling that morning, but the Spirit obviously was quite willing to change My mood, reminding me that even in the "serious business" of learning from Him there could be a time for humor. Of course I did remember "Fun", and, no, I couldn't remember the titles of the ones before and after. He got my attention.

One of my major questions, still, was why the Scriptures don't reflect some of this joy, and I guess this is the best answer so far.

I realize that I continually urge you back to the Scriptures, o son, and that, for these purposes, you come away unenlightened, for there is little humor expressed in that Library of Books. It is hard to explain to you why the principle I just gave you is not embodied in those wonderful Writings. The story of Me, as Jesus, and the woman of Cana who came to have her daughter healed comes pretty close to humor. In the midst of asking for that most serious of acts, healing, she caught My attention by the way she whimsically responded to Me. I picked that up and loved her for it, and from that love came healing. It could have been told that way.

My servant Edgar gave a reading that described us at the Last Supper, in which it told that I smiled, laughed, and sang. That is true. It could have been told that way.

The best explanation seems to be that the Scriptures had to be written to bring the message of salvation and newness of life... of what life in relation to God is like... to those "outside"... and We couldn't risk presenting the rhythm that those who Know Me actually feel. I know it seems inconsistent with the principle presented before. So just smile and accept that that's the way it should have been.

The story referred to is in Matthew 15:22-28, and when it is taken absolutely seriously it has Jesus sounding very harsh and sarcastic, but when, even in the midst of an anguished cry for healing He gives the Canaanite woman a chance to banter with Him, and she "accepts", He loves her for this evidence of spirit, and the loves does the healing. (And I like this better than a healing that comes from touching His garment... but maybe that's a "funny", too.) (Trueblood also commented on this story as one of possible ironic humor.)

The second paragraph refers to a reading by Edgar Cayce, who was an American "mystic" but also a devout Christian and, as indicated here, a servant of the Lord. As presented here, Jesus laughed, smiles, and played the lyre for the singing of hymns, which seems much more like a Messiah who knows He shall return to His Father and send forth the Spirit to be in His stead than one exhibiting scared sadness.

The last paragraph, as I said, gives as good an explanation as any. Join me in smiling and accepting, please.

The next affirmation, below, is that the Spirit does have these positive feelings and encourages us to remember what we have rather than what we've lost. I still do the smiling more in retrospect than while something painful is happening, but I'm betting closer.

I smile and feel warm about the happenings in the earth, here in the earth, fully as often as I agonize and sorrow. I can smile broadly and laugh loudly and joyously. The next time some tragedy befalls you, which shall certainly be one of small rather than great magnitude, manage a smile in the midst of your pain and suffering. Know that I smile when you do, for the smile reflects the joy for what you still have, a move away from complete focus upon what you have lost.

Some of My tests of you, and of others in My fold, involve your capacity to see the humor in a serious, even tragic, situation. A smile or a laugh doesn't deny or negate the seriousness of tragedy, but just puts it in proper focus.

The important perspective, above, is that the smile in tragedy doesn't negate the seriousness, but merely affirms that God still has given much and is "still in charge."

And the Teaching ended with a strong affirmation and then a final evidence of that spirit of fun.

A sense of humor is one of My good gifts to you... and to each. It is a gift to be used... to be shared. Hear again My affirmation that I have a sense of humor, for if you, who have such a sense, are made in My Image, how could it be otherwise? I cannot give you something I do not have. And you cannot really know how to utilize it lovingly without some exemplary guidance from Me.

An important aspect of spirit is an appropriate sense of fun and humor. Be sure to ring those chimes when you finally write. A good Mawrnin' to ya!

Aa men

(The preceding quotes are from "A Sense of Humor," November 5, 1980)

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About another year later I received again a Teaching relevant to this concept, with the title "Spirit As Humorist", and it said, early on, "You have two teachings on this already, and eventually and in the future, you shall do a Ruminations on this theme." That was just three years ago, so I haven't exactly rushed into print.

I shall make the prime affirmation first: a sense of humor is part of your God-given nature. (It is not just humanly developed or an "affliction of the devil".) This means, of course, that I have shared some of My nature with you... that I, the Spirit of the Lord God, do have fun and do generate a basic sense of humor. Therefore this positive capacity in humans to see the funny side of a situation, even when it is visibly grim, is a thing of spirit. Why? Because often to laugh at something is an acceptance of human weakness, which you, personally, may share, and to admit human weakness is to be open to relationship with Me. If there is no human weakness, there is no need for God, some would say. And you can now see why some would not attribute humor to Me, for the Triune God has no weakness and therefore no need for a sense of humor.

So here's the affirmation again... that a sense of humor is a "thing of the spirit." Then comes the oft-stated truth that human weakness is the basis for much humor, and we laugh because "it could be I"... followed by the interesting notion that the admission of weakness makes one open to relationship

with the Lord... stated here as “weakness” rather than “sin”. Then... I don’t know what to say about the last statement. I’ll smile and include it anyway.

There was a parenthetical statement that I liked, for the “feel” of it as well as for the truth.

(Obviously, I have had such a quality “from the beginning”. It was not something developed hurriedly out of necessity. I was not surprised nor did I have to scurry around and develop a humorous nature. That’s a pretty funny thought in itself.)

And yet another “gem”, phrased in a spirit of fun...

Consider this. Mercy, one of My main “qualities”, has a base in My sense of humor. Justice is serious and hard. Mercy says, “You’re reprieved... you’re freed... smile, laugh, clap your hands... hug someone...” Mercy is “dispensed” best with a smile.

The final paragraphs of this Teaching comment again on the “lack” of this quality of humor in the Scriptures. There are evidences, but we have to seek and search, looking beyond our familiar interpretations.

You see, I had this bit of fun with My Holy Scriptures. There are evidences of My fun-loving nature therein, but these are hidden. Are you willing to search for them... with a smile and an appreciation of My cheery nature?

I do have to smile at good servants who feel that, for My integrity’s sake, they must limit Me to what they understand the Scriptures to say. The Scriptures reveal, but they never limit. John said it simply and well... if all the things of My nature and doings were written down, the world could not contain all the books.

(The above quotes are from “Spirit as Humorist”, November 29, 1981)

A good example of this “seeing with different eyes” was offered in a meditation the next year, where the topic was the related one of Play.

For instance it is recorded that I walked on the water. It is presumed by most that I was seriously showing forth the power of God over gravity and the normal actions of nature. Actually I was having fun with that power, just as a human might have fun doing a magic trick. It was fun to stride across the waters and fun to have Peter try it also. He failed when he didn’t have sufficient faith AND because he didn’t approach the opportunity with a spirit of fun. (“Play”, July 8, 1982)

Does it bother you to think of Jesus as having fun in walking on the water? Or in turning water into good wine (gallons if it!) at the Cana marriage feast? Or in feeding 5,000 people with 5 loaves and 2 fishes? Can’t these bring forth smiles? Sure they can!

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Now let me offer some evidences of this spirit of fun that the Spirit shares with me, oftener than not. In a Teaching called “Take Care!” (June 24, 1979) there was discussion of awareness and appreciation of pain, sickness, and misfortune as evidences of health, with a warning that some colleagues and students would not accept this idea. Then He said, **“This shall be your task - - of being heard as a**

credible professional and as an orthodox Christian rather than as an ‘Eastern freak’. (My vocabulary is as capacious as I am.) Of this you must take care.”

In “Who’s In Charge?” (April 14, 1981) there is a very serious, important statement of relationship, but the illustration of what the relationship is NOT like is rather vivid.

“If you are born again into relationship with Me, and you honestly do not deny and absolve the partnership, then what you do and say are reflections of this union. It does not flick on and off like some sensitive, temperamental light fixture. I am functioning in you, for better or worse. I can take the risk of having some behavior or words interpreted as less than Christ-like in order to build our relationship, with the Christ quality more and more evident.

At the end of a meditation on “Human/Spiritual Interaction, II” (Sept. 26, 1981) He said, **“These explanations take longer than I anticipated. (Time is not one of My ‘big things’)”**

And... have you ever said something that is truly erudite and well-phrased, but just a bit too pompous or pontifical? It doesn’t really take away from the truth when you react to your own statement, now does it? Speaking of Holy Communion, the Spirit said, “Generally, persons should come to communion only with love and gratitude for Me and feelings of love for others, accepting grace and being open to My forgiveness... ready to be energized for a more productive, selfless life. (My, My!) (“A Time to Embrace,” July 7, 1982)

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Particularly over the last two years I have been given titles that, in themselves, convey a sense of humor or fun... like... “Sky Hook”, “Teachings from an Old Friend”, “Nebraska” (the day after the Cornhusker’s defeat in the Orange Bowl last year), “Say It Again Spirit!”, “Zen Presbyterian”, “Am I Serious?”, “Am I A Methodist?”, “Sexism”, and “There is a Time to Laugh”. Don’t some of these sound intriguing? They are!

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I actually got my final “go-ahead” for this particular letter on November 1, 1984 in a Teaching entitled “Observations on Humor.” I’ll use quotes from this marvelous meditation to finish off these pages (one and a half less than in the recent past, ‘cause 6 pages is slightly over the 1 oz. mark for postage).

Hear, o son, as I speak of that which is the major “missing element” in the Holy Scriptures... being “there”, but not directly described or identified. This, of course, is My sense of humor and fun, which shall be the theme of your next Ruminations...

You realize, of course, that this assertion that I have a sense of humor is a serious matter. It can call into question My very nature, and can lend a spirit of frivolity to Biblical situations that have always been interpreted as deadly serious. Do I call on you to become part of this tiny group of My servants who know this aspect of My nature and try to share it with others. I sure do! Since I gave you “Fun” early in our active relationship I have wanted you to be aware of and to appreciate this important facet of My personality... even this nature of Almighty God... and now you must share it, even with some who may not find it easy to accept.

And, speaking of such...

Many people do seem to like “categories”, and they want to keep Me in the one labeled “serious.” Such shall not easily approve of what We shall do in this coming issue. Just know this in advance.

That in itself is funny. A lot of serious, dedicated Christians find it necessary to feel shocked at suggestions that I am humorous and to defend My eternal seriousness. Imagine how it seems to Me, observing these attempts. But, you are right, the Scriptures do encourage this interpretation, and I am finally responsible for this Book. Isn't it rather funny that I am responsible for my own discontent? Who else can I blame it on?

I mentioned, earlier, Bill Cosby's "Noah", and the Spirit has encouraged us (yes, all of us) to see the humor in stories that also are staid and sobering. So, in this latter frame, the story is that God decides to destroy the world because of its wickedness, but to then repopulate it through one good man, Noah, and the pairs of animals he collects. On the funny side, a 600 year old man is collecting animals from all over the world (how far do you suppose he went?), two by two, and he must keep them all happy and fed (but not eating each other) for more than 40 days and nights... and must clean up their excrement. Isn't that a smile-producing scene?

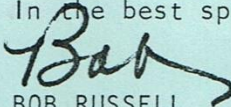
The Spirit has some that are even better...

I do urge you... yes, I do!... to see the humor in all the serious accounts of My life as Jesus. Do you think Mary was happy with a dark, smelly stable for a place to “have Me? It seems “romantic” now, but can't you imagine she questioned Joseph's negotiating ability with innkeepers? In the wonderful scene with the woman caught in adultery can't you imagine at least one old Jewish man reaching for a rock with the response, “Well, I never did anything like that!” And... perhaps I did go off to pray at times when there was physical work to do.

(This last sentence is from a book of cartoons by a minister's son, David Evans... “The Good Book”... but now out of print. In one cartoon the disciples are hauling on a boat and Jesus is over on the hillside, and one of the disciples says, “Whenever there's work to be done, guess who always needs to go off and pray?”)

The concluding statement is that which ends “Observations on Humor”, and I shall let it be the close for this fascinating spiritual journey.

Never take this to mean that life is not serious and that I am some frivolous character, always smiling and cracking jokes. Know, instead, that there is always a balance. Life is serious, wrongs must be punished, evil is a challenge, and tragedies are evident. But in the midst of this truth and fact stands the counter that life is fun, that there always is a humorous side to life events. Why? Because that's the way I made it. Any other questions. Ah Men.

In the best spirit of fun...Aloha,

BOB RUSSELL
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Writer, Songsinger, Farmer, Philosopher