

**32963 Article -- by Rev. Robert Baggott and Rev. Dr. Casey Baggott
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New Year's Resolutions

Well, here it is again, that time of year when we pause for a little self-assessment. With the passage of the old year, we often take stock of ourselves and ask some tough questions. Did we spend the last 365 days in a way that does us credit? Given all the tumult of 2008, can we feel pleased, proud, or contented about how we responded to it all?

And what about last year's resolutions? The New Year rolls around each year to the chagrin of so many of us who recognize that we failed to keep the New Year's resolutions we made a year ago!

We might wonder, given the difficulty of carrying out our resolutions, whether it's worthwhile bothering to make them at all. How discouraging, after all, to make a vow (to lose weight, quit smoking, get more exercise, be more attentive to spouses, keep the house clean, or be on time, for example) only to realize in frustration, a few months hence, that our old patterns are re-emerging.

But the making (and breaking) of all those noble, lofty New Year's resolutions is a tradition worth keeping, nonetheless. I was reminded of the character-building value of making resolutions recently in reading a biography of George Washington. He apparently had a fiery temper which he worked diligently over the course of a lifetime to master and tame. He repeatedly copied 110 popular "Rules of Civility" into his writing journals to impress upon himself the more positive traits he hopes to develop. He sought to stamp his character with what were called the "virtues of humanity." In his day it was believed that people needed to *practice* behaving virtuously until they actually *became* virtuous. Washington was determined to become virtuous. And judging by the glowing reports of men and women who knew him well, through a lifetime of practice, he succeeded.

So, what does Washington have to do with us? I think his unshakeable resolution to become the best man he could be can provide a hopeful example for us. It took a lifetime of hard work to control his temper. We shouldn't be discouraged if progress on our resolutions is slow, as well.

And Washington knew that the way people govern themselves (their passions, desires, and drives) is related to how the whole society governs itself. Individuals who have succeeded in developing the "virtues of humanity" are more likely to be able to form communities which are also virtuous – caring, generous, respectful, and unselfish. So, changing our families, our town, our country and even our battered world had better start with resolving to change ourselves.

As the New Year begins, then, why not make a few new resolutions, or resolve to recommit ourselves to succeeding at the old ones? In the wise words of the Biblical Book of Proverbs; "Without a vision, the people perish." So let's not lose sight of the vision we have for ourselves and our world. Let's think hard, work hard, and pray hard about it. Let's resolve this year to move a bit closer to seeing that vision come true. And may we all have a blessed and happy New Year!