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PAPERS (3014)**

BOX 6

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WINTER SOLSTICE:

REBIRTH OF LIGHT

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Next Saturday the Christian world will celebrate Christmas, and any child will tell you that Christmas is the birthday of Jesus - but having said that, he will very quickly change the subject to a more vivid interest in Santa Claus.

relevant

Anyone can tell the Christmas story - of shepherds and wise men, or Mary and Joseph and the Inn that had no room - we remember it well because of the little Christmas creches that we assemble in our homes or feature in display windows.

And ^{in a way} ~~yet~~ this creche is symbolic of ^{the} whole paste-on piety of the holiday season, which is so soon packed away with ornaments and tinsel after the perfunctory practice is dutifully fulfilled.

What is Christmas?

To the orthodox, devout Christian, it is a sacred season, another in the long line of ecclesiastical observances, which is accepted as a mystery which is not understood, but accepted without question.

To the nominal Christian, it represents a welcome break in routine, a time for family gatherings, a time for exchanging gifts and cards with a goodly amount of pressure and resistance, and a season for good food and convivial gatherings - and often the license for irrational behavior - and as Jim Bishop puts it, "for kissing the wrong person under the mistletoe."

To the non-believer the whole thing appears rather ridiculous, a puzzling superstition built around folk-lore and legend, strongly perpetuated by the self-interest of shopkeepers and the holiday of workers.

I don't want to be too hard on Christmas customs. But I do want us to take this time to see how prevalent in society and in the consciousness of humankind is the tendency to lose the real meaning of a profound experience by settling into ritual and habitual practice. This is the whole history of religion, where the Spirit is buried in form and the Truth is undiscovered through perpetuation of the old.

So let's take another look at Christmas, probing deeply into its background and roots. The first thing that becomes obvious is that Jesus birth had implications far beyond the dramatic beginning of a religion. This has been our problem -- we have started with the religion and then have moved backward to attempt to prove its validity.

Reason for "Nativity" gives "authenticity" without historicity

The Universe is too grand and intelligent to be encompassed by one religious concept, and limited to one "Birthday of a King." From earliest days man has sensed the Universal order, has intuitively known the meaning of and the need for transcendent light.

In the most pagan cultures there has been this emphasis on light, and an annual celebration of the rebirth of light - strangely coming at the Winter Solstice, the time when the sun is at its greatest distance from the celestial equator - which is about December 22nd.

It is no assurance
So it is no accidental thing that the birth of Jesus took place at this time. For it would seem to indicate that Jesus birth was not a separate event, or even the fulfilling of Biblical prophesy -- but that it was symbolic of the rebirth of light, an actual re-infusion of the Planet with an energy force, the demonstration of an annual purification process which brought vibratory rhythms to lift the earth to the kind of "peace on earth good will to men" sung by the heavenly hosts.

The startling thing - to those who are willing to face facts -- is that there are no records that tell definitely when Jesus was born. Not even the year is sure - though most careful scholars say that there is an error of four or five years, and Jesus birth was probably four or five years earlier.

But the fact is that long before the birth of Jesus there had been festivals of winter solstice in all cultures. The Romans observed it as Saturnalia.

Saturn was the old man who lives at the north pold, who came to the children ^{with} a sprig of evergreen (the Christmas Tree), and who obviously is the pagan figure that led to Santa Claus.

During the Roman Saturnalia there was a festive and even orgiastic celebration -- which began on solstice and lasted seven days. Houses were decorated with laurels and evergreens, presents were exchanged and all sorts of games were played.

Work was suspended, schools were closed, no punishments were inflicted and no wars were fought. Doll fairs were held and toys were given to children. And these dolls were probably symbols of more ancient times when human sacrifices were made to Saturn.

Thus when the Christian world and the Roman world were united, the customs of both were dovetailed together -- the beautiful idea of the rebirth of light, portrayed so vividly by the Nativity story, was soon enmeshed in the various traditions and customs and materialistic involvement.

The whole Christian experience was poured into the Roman vessels, the church in its simple, stark, sincerely spiritual dedication, was thrust into the Roman temples of statues and candles and ceremony. And thus the consciousness and experience of Jesus and the movement he touched off was buried and frustrated -- to be discovered and kept alive only by mystics in isolated monasteries down through the years.

➔ Thus, today, when the world stands in such desperate need of light, there is a need for a renaissance, a revival of the early Christian experience, a return to first Century Christianity, to meanings within form, to commitment beyond doctrine.

The great idea that Christmas should symbolize, is the rebirth of light into the world, and the awakening in many to the dynamic potential of his God-self -- with its inherent promise that as men act in love and good will, there can be peace on earth.

There is a fundamental unity of life -- man is intended to live in harmony with all nature. This harmony has been broken. So man lives in a fallen state as a result of his violation of the law of love. To realize the true spirit of Christmas, a true state of reawakened light in persons - - we must be willing to contemplate the total elimination of war and things that make for war.

Consider the A.F. King up at 4-
the Boston nature of man
It is no good continuing with the old and singing, "Merry
Christmas and pass the ammunition."
Stars - taken from "Blue Bird"

This is the theme of Josephine Preston Peabody's drama,
"THE WOLF OF GUBBIO". The play deals with man's ability
to overcome the antagonism now existing between him and
the animal kingdom through the power of love. By impli-
cation, this restoration can only take place when man has
mastered the bestial elements in his own nature.

The play is medieval in setting, based upon a legend
relating to the life of Saint Francis. In the title role
the wolf portrays man's dual nature, the nature from above
and the nature from below, the two contending powers in
human life which constitute man's peculiar problem.

On the morning of a bright cold winter day, on the bleak
refrain of the wind comes the voice of the wolf, deep and
sorrowful:

"The world is cold.

The snows are round us, fold on fold.

This old unhappy heart

Does naught to keep me warm.

...I hide from storm to storm

Watching the little lights below

Lights for the men of Gubbio."

→ This is life at its lower level, becoming conscious of
limitation and want, but dreaming of warmth and light.
All of life mounts upward through such deepening reali-
zation of darkness, loneliness, and struggle.

→ So it is with the wolf. After bewailing his sorrow and
longing that "no one would believe," he hears a bell in
the distance. It sounds to him like divine speech,
quickenning him to wonder:

"....wondering how't would feel

To sit with men and to share their meal;"

→ Because of his pray upon the folk of Gubbio the wolf lived
in deadly fear of them, as they did of him. The drama
continues to unfold the picture of a discordant fear-ridden
world in which all living creatures are consciously or
unconsciously longing, as did the wolf, for deliverance.

→ That aspiration eventually draws unto itself the light it
merits. The picture changes with the appearance of Francis
singing praises to the Sun: "O brother Sun, All-folding
Light!" - words voicing the joy and gratitude that fills
the illumined soul.

In the meeting between the two, the wolf confesses his shame and guilt together with his longing to be a man, while Francis confesses his own wolfish sins. At the same time he points the way:

"Wilt thou earn

A man's own peace? Then work and learn!

Back to the world: and there make good

All thou hast dreamed of brotherhood.

"Hope and lose and hope again,

And remember and forget

With us all; for men are men,

But not brothers, no not yet."

Don't want to be a man

In the climax of the play which takes place on Christmas Eve around the creche erected by Saint Francis, the Wolf of Gubbio, in an act of heartbroken contrition, dissolves fear and antagonism and earns his place in the ranks of love and brotherhood. Francis sings:

"Oh, and the very stars shall sing

For the joy of this glad thing.

Thou we crown Him yet with thorn,

Thou we laugh Him all to scorn,

Love, - Love is born."

He concludes:

"And if there be out yonder any wolfe,

Or great or small, behold, -

Come little brother wolves, come hither

Out of the cold."

This in this symbolic way, the author deals with the rebirth of light -- the lifting up of the bestial nature of man to the awareness of the inherent divinity.

This is what Christmas is all about. In the play the wolfe once pulls back, saying, "I don't want to be a man until men stop acting like wolves."

Christmas must deal with the idea of release from humanity's almost unending and unendurable miseries, in a kind of renunciation of greed and selfishness. And how can we do this if our whole preoccupation during the "season" is on materiality.

Certainly the spirit of giving is vital to the rebirth of light -- but how easily, in our affluent western society, this spiritual urge to give has been translated into the custom of bestowing gifts that are measured by money-cost

rather than by love value, and the urge to share and rejoice finds outlet in extravagant entertainment. Thus the seasonal flow of love is so often dissipated in a hectic wave of giving and gaiety.

And to talk of this aspect of Christmas is almost a sacrilege, or at least unpatriotic. Because everyone knows that there would be grave business repercussions if people changed their Christmas giving to simple, self-created gifts. In other words we can't change because it will hurt our economy. It is like the argument that to stop the war would create a depression because of the people in defense industries that would be laid off.

What this says is that we have simply adapted Christmas to the way things are - in a paste-on celebration of nostalgia and fun -- instead of letting Christmas turn us away from things as they are -- to help us seriously view how they can and should be. To lead us into deeper levels of understanding in our quest for light, that we may look upon what we are, what we are becoming, and what someday we shall be.

At the time of Winter Solstice, if we really open ourselves to the cosmic aspects of the event, there is a Christ Mass, or world ritual, involved. (There is a profound truth concealed in the legend that tells of even the lowly animals coming to participate in the Nativity.)

Every life wave on earth is literally filled with exaltation when this flow of divine light penetrates to the heart of the planet, because, from the lowest to the highest, each unit of life receives this inflow according to its capacity to respond.

The question is -- "Is there room in the manger of your heart"? Can you let the light be reborn? As the poet puts it, "Thou Christ a thousand times in Bethlehem be born, if He's not born in thee, thy soul is all forlorn."

John was singing of this experience when he says, "In Him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in the darkness; and the darkness apprehended it not.... There was the true light which lighteth every man coming into the world."

The true Christ Mass should lead to a new kind of commitment to those who are sincere in letting the Rebirth of Light happen in him.

How long has man been fighting his way through the darkness: ignorant, dirty, diseased, murdering, hating, petty -- un-Christlike as the most degraded creatures. But in all of this the mind of man has dreamed of his potential for good -- like the urge of the Wolf of Gubbio. He has entertained the hope that light would be kindled within him.

Perhaps the true test of whether Christmas is really happening in you -- is if we can look at the downtrodden, the diseased, the dirty, the ignorant, and even the misguided criminal -- and say -- not: "I hate you for your squalor and ignorance and filth. I hate you for what you are" -- but rather: "I hate your squalor and ignorance and filth, but I love what you can be...and I love that in you that is the Christ so much that I am willing to work with you and help you to achieve your good."

In other words, if we really take seriously the spark of light in all persons and commit ourselves to the demonstration of the Rebirth of Light -- we would be forced -- or perhaps we should use a softer word -- we would be obliged to get the other fellow's point of view in all relationships --

Thus we would come to understand people. We would have to get down under the surface and see the enemy or enemy nation as composed of persons like ourselves -- with the same longing, aspirations, instincts, the same hope for the birth of light -- as ourselves.

And on the subject of force....we must be willing to re-examine our insistence upon putting emphasis on guns and bombs and all the other idiotic paraphernalia of war -- under the guise of "maintaining a defense posture." As the playwright puts it, "If you hang a gun on the wall in the first act, you will have to use it by the third."

Is it possible to go on living in a universe of stupendous grandeur and not soon begin to suspect that there are transcendent forces infinitely more effective than warships or bombing planes or nuclear devices?

A mixture of nostalgia, patriotism, and charity is involved in the charades we love to play - such as Bob Hope carrying his Christmas show to "our boys" "over there". This is no judgment of either Bob Hope or those involved in the war -- they are doing what they have to do.

But the Christ Mass, the Rebirth of Light - must at some time help us to see that Christmas on a battlefield is at least a ~~paradox~~ ^{paradox} - at most a mockery. For either there can be warfare or Christmas -- but there cannot really be both.

Certainly what I am suggesting is revolutionary, possibly naive, and impractical. How can way change directions of such magnitude? Yet a society that can put men on the moon and send rockets out to Venus and Mars can certainly contemplate and initiate fantastic adjustments.

The Universe is being practically reshaped around us by the power of ideas. Surely, then, man's approach to this Birthday Festival can be transformed into the idea of the REBIRTH OF LIGHT by the persistent seeding of the mental atmosphere with ideas of its essential significance.

How can we change the ideals and practices of the world? Don't fall into that trap, for it is so easy to rationalize one's powerlessness and then settle into procrastination and inaction.

"I am only one, but I am one,
I can't do everything, but I can do something,
what I can do I ought to do, and what I ought
to do, by the grace of God I will do."

Paul wrote to the Galatians: "When the fulness of time was come, God sent forth His son." He also says, "Because ye are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of His son into our hearts."

There is a fulness of time for all things, and for you and me. A time to awaken to our deeper selves, and give birth to the Light of Spirit.

If we could open the frozen ground today and read the history of every buried grain of wheat, of every sluggish root which is hiding in the warm earth with its next year's blossoms folded up within it; if we could know the whole nature of their latent forces, and see their possibilities entirely, then we should be

able to tell of each of those forces when its time would be full, and we could prophesy when the ground would break, and just how the color in the flower would deepend, and just at what moment the fruit would ripen. And next spring and summer we would bear witness to our prpphecies and conform them all.

In the same sense if we could peer into the consciousness of man - the over-all consciousness of human-kind on the globe, and read the hopes and fears, the deep-seated beliefs and dominant states of mind, we could forecast fairly accurately what the major trends of human-kind might be in the years to come.

This may sound like predestination or fatalism - but it is nothing of the sort. The reason is that the fullness of time concerns our readiness to express and not God's readiness to give. It is not predestined or fore-ordained, for the picture can change and does - as consciousness changes.

Every year at Winter Solstice it is the fullness of time for the world. It is like a Divine Appointment - and the question is -- will we keep the appointment? The angel voices are singing, are we listening. The light is dawning, are we seeing? There is a movement of life within us, are we responding?

As Shaw once said, "God has created a world so wonderful, only our blindness and ignorance can keep it from perfect expression." Every year at the Winter Solstice -- every season of Christmas -- there is a force of Cosmic Energy and Light that is bombarding the Planet Earth - and only our inertial involvement in the paste-on ~~xxxxx~~ trappings of the annual holiday - can keep us from discovering and giving birth to this depth of light within us.

Christmas, then should not be a backward glance, but a forward look. It is a prophetic day, or should be. The birth of the Christ, the rebirth of light belongs to an order of life not yet attained, a glimpse of a race of men yet to be.

The story begins in the legends and prophecies of the OT and finds fulfillment in that mystic night of ~~when the child was born in the manger~~ - but continued to tell of the hope of man on "let your light shine."

Christmas is more than a day or outer celebration.
The true Christmas knows no season. It is not a
creature of clock or calendar. It is not a day
that comes and goes.

It is not even the commemoration of an event of long
ago. It is Christmas whenever and wherever the
human heart, touched by Him whose ever-living Spirit
is the ever-giving Spirit, is moved to the expression
of unselfish love -- and thus experiences the true
solstice of the Spirit - the rebirth of light.

So to each and every one of you -- now that you
have delved into esoteric meanings and cosmic
processes -- I say, "Happy birthday to you" --
and may your birth of light bring a new measure
of light through you into the world -- that to
the extent that you have experienced the Winter
Solstice -- to that degree there is a rebirth of
light into the world. And thus because of what
you are and do -- there is a "fulness of time" for
the whole race of man.

Happy Birth Light Day