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PAPERS (3014)**

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**CHRISTMAS IN THREE
DIMENSIONS**

DECEMBER 23, 1979

'CHRISTMAS ~~IN~~ THREE DIMENSIONS'

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THE SIGHT AND SOUNDS AND SMELL OF CHRISTMAS ARE IN THE AIR, INTRODUCING ONCE AGAIN THIS BEAUTIFULLY STRANGE AND STRANGELY BEAUTIFUL SEASON OF SUCH STRIKING CONTRASTS! IT IS A MAGIC TIME AND IT IS A TRAGIC TIME. MAGIC BECAUSE OF THE WAY IT TRANSFORMS STREETS AND STORES AND HOMES FROM THE ROUTINE AND PROSAIC INTO A LAND OF FANTASY AND DREAMS ^{AND} A SPECIAL CHRISTMAS GLOW!

IT IS A TRAGIC TIME BECAUSE THE MAGIC IS ILLUSION, AND BEHIND THE FACADE OF TINSEL AND MISTLETOE THERE IS OFTEN A WIDESPREAD ~~LONELINESS~~ AND EMPTINESS, AND ~~THE~~ CHARADE OF GIFT-
^{LOVE - CONFORMITY} EXCHANGING UNDER PRESSURE AND GUILT!

BUT THERE IS NO HOLDING BACK THE CALENDAR, AND SO ON TUESDAY MORNING WE WILL ONCE AGAIN CELEBRATE THIS LOVELY AND PUZZLING TIME WE CALL CHRISTMAS!

LET US ASK SOME QUESTIONS! WHAT DOES CHRISTMAS MEAN? THE AVERAGE PERSON, IF HE CAN BRING HIMSELF

TO SEE BEYOND THE SANTA CLAUS SYNDROME, WOULD SAY IT IS THE BIRTHDAY OF JESUS! BUT IF THERE IS ONE THING DECEMBER 25TH IS NOT, IT IS THE DAY THAT JESUS WAS BORN! THERE IS NO HISTORY OF THE EARLY LIFE OF JESUS AT ALL -- ONLY A VARIETY OF CONFLICTING LEGENDS! THE DECEMBER 25TH DATE WAS ARBITRARILY SET BY A NOW OBSCURE CHURCH HISTORIAN IN THE 6TH CENTURY AD, AND WITHOUT QUESTION IT WAS INFLUENCED BY THE ROMAN FEAST OF SATURNALIA, WHICH OCCURRED AT THIS TIME.

IT WAS NEVER INTENDED TO BE A TIME FOR FESTIVITY! OH THERE ARE SOME LOVELY CHRISTMAS TRADITIONS, BUT DID YOU KNOW THAT MOST OF THEM HAVE A PAGAN OR NON-CHRISTIAN ORIGIN, SUCH AS THE CHRISTMAS TREE, THE YULE LOG, THE MISTLETOE, THE EXCHANGING OF GIFTS, EVEN SANTA CLAUS!

DID YOU KNOW THAT THE OBSERVANCE OF CHRISTMAS AS A HOLIDAY WAS NOT ESTABLISHED IN AMERICA UNTIL

THE LAST HALF OF THE 19TH CENTURY? THE EARLY
PILGRIMS NOT ONLY FROWNED ON A SEASON OF 'MAKING
MERRY', BUT IT WAS AGAINST THE LAW. IN 1659
THE COLONY OF MASS. PASSED A LAW THAT READ:

'WHOSOEVER SHALL BE FOUND OBSERVING ANY SUCH
DAY AS CHRISTMAS, OR THE LIKE, EITHER BY FOR-
BEARING OF LABOR, FEASTING, OR IN ANY OTHER
WAY, SHALL BE FINED 5 SHILLINGS.'

FOR MANY YEARS PEOPLE WHO REFUSED TO WORK ON
CHRISTMAS EITHER WENT TO JAIL OR PAID FINES!

LOOK AT US NOW -- HOW WE ARE 'CAUGHT UP' IN ^{WHAT} ~~AN~~
~~INEXORABLE PROCESS BY CONFORMITY OR GUILT.~~ ~~AND~~
~~THOUGH WE MAY SECRETLY THINK THE THOUGHTS, FEW~~
~~DARE TO JOIN WITH SCROOGE IN HIS 'BAH, HUMBUG'!~~
A FEW YEARS AGO PHILIP WYLIE ^{CALLED} ~~OUNDED A~~ STRONG
'BAH, HUMBUG' TONE, WHEN HE WROTE:

'WHAT THE PSYCHIATRISTS HAVE NOW CLEARLY PROVED
IS THAT CHRISTMAS, AS MOST PERSONS NOW FEEL DUTY
BOUND TO OBSERVE IT, IS WITHOUT DOUBT A MAJOR
FACTOR IN THE MISERY, DISABILITY OF MANY AMERICAN
THE HOPPED UP-, PRESSURE-LADEN, STATUS-SEEKING,
COMPETITIVE DEGRADATION OF CHRISTMAS IS MORE
INTENSE IN OUR COUNTRY THAN ANYWHERE ELSE IN
THE WORLD.'

► NOW, WE CAN'T BLAME THE MERCHANTS, AS MANY ARE WONT TO DO! WHEN WE HEAR THE CRY, 'LET'S PUT CHRIST BACK INTO CHRISTMAS' IT IS ALWAYS THE INTIMATION THAT THE MERCHANT IS A KIND OF SCROOGE WHO IS WRINGING HIS HANDS IN DELIGHT AS JOHN Q. PUBLIC DANCES TO HIS TUNE!

I PREFER TO CHANGE THE SLOGAN TO: 'LET'S PUT OURSELVES BACK INTO CHRISTMAS!' THE PROBLEM IS NOT THE BUYING OF GIFTS! AND CERTAINLY WE CAN'T OVERLOOK THE FACT THAT AS BUSINESS PROSPERS, AT CHRISTMAS TIME OR ANY OTHER TIME, THE WHOLE NATION PROSPERS!

► IT SEEMS TO ME THAT THE PROBLEM IS QUITE SIMPLE: CHRISTMAS HAS THREE DIMENSIONS - AND THE AVERAGE PERSON TOUCHES IT ONLY AT THE SURFACE!

AT THE SURFACE LEVEL THE WHOLE SEASON OF CHRISTMAS AND THE LOVELY CUSTOMS OF SINGING CAROLS AND EXCHANGING GIFTS - SYMBOLIZE SOMETHINGS THAT CAN ONLY BE UNDERSTOOD ON AN

INNER LEVEL! BUT EVEN OF ITSELF THE OUTER
FESTIVITY IS A LOVELY THING! ^{Homes} WALK ON PARK AVE!
AND SEE THE CHRISTMAS TREES, WALK UP AND DOWN
5TH AVE! AND SEE THE BREATHTAKING DISPLAYS, WALK
THROUGH THE CROWDS AND CATCH THE FEELINGS OF JOY
AND EXPECTANCY -- AND THERE IS A BACKGROUND OF
BELL-RINGING SALVATION ARMY LASSIES, AND THE
VARIED ARRAY OF SANTA CLAUSES WITH THE SUIT AND
MANNER THAT DOES NOT QUITE FIT, AND THE FRAGRANCE
OF ~~ROASTED~~ CHESTNUTS BEING WARMED ON A CRUDE STOVE
AND HANDLED BY GRIMY HANDS! ALL THIS IS CHRISTMAS!

BUT THERE IS SOMETHING MORE! HOW EASILY WE CAN
PACK THE ARTIFICIAL TREES AND GARLANDS AND BELLS
BACK INTO THE ATTIC FOR ANOTHER YEAR! HOW QUICKLY
THE STORES CAN CHANGE THEIR DISPLAYS TO JANUARY
SALES! HOW SOON THE STREET SANTA CLAUS RETURNS
TO HIS PLACE/IN LINE AT THE UNEMPLOYMENT COMPENSA-
TION OFFICE!

THERE IS SOMETHING MORE!

IT IS THE NATIVITY STORY ITSELF - THE BIRTH OF JESUS IN A MANGER THOSE LONG YEARS AGO!

THIS IS AN ASPECT OF CHRISTMAS THAT SEEMS TO
→ GET LOST IN THE SHUFFLE! TWO WOMEN WERE PEER-
ING THROUGH CHRISTMAS CROWDS INTO THE STORE
WINDOWS WHEN THEY CAME TO A LOVELY CRECHE! ONE
OF THEM REMARKED: 'NOW LOOK AT THAT, WOULDN'T
YOU KNOW IT? THE CHURCH IS EVEN TRYING TO TAKE
OVER CHRISTMAS!'

BUT THIS IS THE SECOND DIMENSION OF CHRISTMAS!

IT IS A LOVELY STORY, BUT ONE THAT STRETCHES OUR CREDULITY! AND TO MAKE IT EVEN MORE DIFFICULT,

THERE ARE REALLY TWO STORIES, TWO SEPARATE AND DISTINCT ACCOUNTS, TWO SETS OF CHARACTERS, TWO ENTIRELY DIFFERENT SETTINGS TO THE BIRTH OF

JESUS - AS RECOUNTED IN THE GOSPELS OF MATT! LUKE

→ LUKE TELLS THE STORY OF PASTORAL SIMPLICITY, A STORY OF MEN OF FAITH AND VISION - SHEPHERDS

IN THE FIELD KEEPING WATCH BY NIGHT OVER THEIR FLOCK, AND OF AN ANGEL STANDING BY FILLING THEM WITH FEAR! AND OF ANGEL VOICES TELLING THEM OF THE BIRTH OF THE SAVIOUR IN A MANGER! AND OF THEIR DETERMINATION TO GO SEE AND WORSHIP!

THE MATTHEW STORY IS COLORED WITH GRANDEUR AND REGAL SPLENDOR, A STORY OF AND PERHAPS FOR PEOPLE OF WISDOM, OF INTELLECT! IT TELLS OF THREE WISE MEN, SOMETIMES CALLED THREE KINGS, WHO CAME FROM THE EAST TO JERUSALEM, FOLLOWING A STAR, WHICH WAS PROBABLY AN ASTROLOGICAL SIGN, THAT LED THEM ALSO TO THE MANGER, AND WHERE THEY PRESENTED THE NEW-BORN KING WITH GIFTS OF GOLD, FRANKINCENSE, AND MYRRH!

SO THIS IS THE STORY - OR STORIES! WHAT CHILD IS THERE WHO COULD NOT RETELL IT! AND YET WHAT ADULT IS THERE WHO UNDERSTANDS IT IN TERMS OF HIS OWN LIFE IN THIS TIME! AND IN RELATION TO THE STATUS-SEEKING, CONFORMITY RIDDEN CELEBRATION

IT IS IN THE THIRD DIMENSION THAT CHRISTMAS MAKES SENSE -- IN THE INNER MEANING OF THE STORY. IT IS AN IDEA SO IMPORTANT THAT IT HAS SEVERAL HANDHOLDS BY WHICH TO LAID HOLD OF IT ACCORDING TO OUR CONSCIOUSNESS: WHETHER IN FAITH AND SIMPLICITY LIKE THE SHEPHERDS, OR IN REASON AND INTELLECT LIKE THE WISE MEN.

BUT WHATEVER MAY BE YOUR OWN PERCEPTION OF THE GREATEST STORY, ONE THING IS SURE - IT IS THE STORY OF THE GREATEST GIFT OF ALL:

GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD THAT HE GAVE HIS ONLY-BEGOTTEN SON...

LECKHART: 'GOD NEVER BEGOT BUT ONE SON, BUT THE ETERNAL IS FOREVER BEGETTING THE ONLY-BEGOTTEN

GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD THAT HE GAVE YOU. GOD SO LOVED THAT HE GAVE. WE DO A LOT OF GIVING AT CHRISTMAS, BUT WHY DO WE GIVE? IT DOES HAVE A CONNECTION, BUT DO WE KNOW WHAT THE CONNECTION IS? HOW MUCH GIVING DO WE DO BECAUSE WE REALLY WANT TO GIVE? AND HOW MUCH BECAUSE WE SHOULD.

OUT OF OBLIGATION, OR CONFORMITY, OR GUILT?

THE POET SAYS: THE GIFT WITHOUT THE GIVER IS BARE. WHY? BECAUSE WHEN YOU GIVE ONLY A GIFT, IT IS SOMETHING THAT DEPLETES YOU IN THE GIVING BUT WHEN YOU GIVE IN THE SPIRIT OF LOVE AND SERVICE, YOU PUT SOMETHING INTO THE GIFT THAT TRANSCENDS ITS INTRINSIC VALUE. YOU ARE BLESSED IN THE GIVING AND THE OTHER IS BLESSED IN THE RECEIVING.

THE MATERIAL GIFT IS MERELY A VEHICLE THROUGH WHICH THIS INTERCHANGE TAKES PLACE. BOTH OF YOU ARE THE RICHER FOR THE EXPERIENCE. AND THOUGH THE MATERIAL BAUBLE IS SOON DISCARDED, THE BLESSING REMAINS AS SOUL TREASURE THAT IS NEVER LOST.

▶ HERE IS AN INSIGHT INTO A FACET OF THE UNIVERSE THAT WE SHOULD NEVER FORGET:

IF I HAD ONE DOLLAR AND YOU HAVE ONE DOLLAR, AND IF I GIVE YOU MY DOLLAR AND YOU GIVE ME YOUR

DOLLAR, WE WILL STILL EACH HAVE ONLY ONE DOLLAR! BUT IF I HAVE AN IDEA AND YOU HAVE AN IDEA AND WE EACH GIVE THE OTHER AN IDEA, WE ~~WOULD~~ NOW BOTH HAVE TWO IDEAS!

THIS IS BECAUSE WHEN WE ~~GIVE~~ SOMETHING ~~OF~~ OURSELVES WE DO NOT LOSE IT, BUT EXPAND AND INCREASE IT! IT IS DIVINE LAW THAT IS THE KEY TO HAPPINESS AND SUCCESS!

CHRISTMAS DEALS WITH GIVING OF OURSELVES WHICH ACTUALLY INVOLVES A GIVING WAY TO OUR GREATER POTENTIAL, ACTUALLY A KIND OF BIRTH OF THE CHRIST AND A COMMITMENT TO CONTINUED UNFOLDMENT OF THE GREATER POSSIBILITIES OF OUR NATURE! THIS IS CERTAINLY WHAT JESUS LIFE WAS ABOUT - AND, AS THE POET SO BEAUTIFULLY STATES IT:

'THOUGH CHRIST A THOUSAND TIMES IN BETHLEHEM BE BORN, IF HE'S NOT BORN IN THEE, THY SOUL IS ALL FORLORN.'

CHRISTMAS IS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR PERSONAL GROWTH, AND IF WE WOULD REALLY KEEP CHRISTMAS, IT CALLS FOR A COMMITMENT TO LET SOMETHING BE BORN IN US,

DICKENS 'CHRISTMAS CAROL' IS OFTEN RETOLD AT THIS SEASON, BUT NORMALLY THE EMPHASIS IS ALL WRONG. FOR IT IS NOT THE STORY OF BOB CRATCH AND TINYTIM BEING HARASSED BY A MEAN OLD MAN, EBENEZER SCROOGE. IT IS A DRAMATIC STORY OF MARVELOUS METAMORPHOSIS THROUGH THE INFLUENCE OF THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS.

I HAVE LONG BEEN ON A CAMPAIGN TO RECOVER DIGNITY FOR SCROOGE. I FEEL THAT HE HAS BEEN GIVEN A 'BUM RAP'. HE HAS BECOME THE CARICATURE OF THE MEAN, SELFISH, MATERIALISTIC PERSON. AND WE RIDICULE HIM AND THOSE LIKE HIM WHO CRY OUT 'BAH, HUMBUG'.

BUT THE STORY IS THE STORY OF GROWTH, THE MIRACLE OF CHANGE, AND THE REALITY OF THE DIVINE POTENTIAL THAT IS ALWAYS PRESENT WITHIN THE MOST DEPRAVED PERSON. IN THE END SCROOGE BECAME A SENSITIVE EMPLOYER. A SECOND FATHER TO TINY-TIM, AND HE VOICED A STRONG COMMITMENT:

' I WILL HONOUR CHR^ISTMAS IN MY HEART,
AND TRY TO KEEP IT ALL THE YEAR!
I WILL LIVE IN THE PAST, THE PRESENT,
AND THE FUTURE!
THE SPIRITS OF ALL THREE SHALL SRRIVE WITHIN ME
I WILL NOT SHUT OUT THE LESSONS THAT THEY
TEACH!'

SO ACTUALLY, INSTEAD OF BEING THE VILLAIN OF
THE CHR^ISTMAS STORY, SCROOGE SHOULD BE THE HERO.
FOR UNLESS WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM, HAPPENS IN
SOMEWAY TO EACH OF US, WE CANNOT SAY THAT WE
ARE INTO CHR^ISTMAS, OR AT LEAST WE ARE NOT
LETTING IT GET INTO US!

POEM BY HENRY VICTOR MORGAN:

' FROM OUT OF THIS STATE OF STRIFE AND HATE,
FROM OUT OF EARTH'S NOISE AND FUSS,
THERE WILL YET ARISE A MAN GOD-SIZE
WHO WILL STAND FOR THE WHOLE OF US!

OUR EARS ARE SORE WITH THE NOISE AND ROAR
OF THE PARTIALIST'S RANT AND FUSS,
WHO STANDS FOR HIS CLASS AND NOT FOR THE MASS,
FOR THE GREATEST AND LEAST OF US!

IN CHILDHOOD'S DAY WE WERE TAUGHT TO PRAY
TO ONE WHO WAS FATHER TO ALL,
WHO STRENGTHENED THE WEAK, PROTECTED THE MEEK,
AND NOTICED THE SPARROW'S FALL!

WE WERE TOLD OF A MAN, A WONDERFUL MAN,
THE GREATEST THIS EARTH E'ER TROD,
WHO TOLD EACH MAN WHATEVER HIS CLÁN
TO MEASURE HIMSELF WITH GOD!

SO WE WAIT TODAY AND DEEPLY PRAY
IN THE MIDST OF EARTH'S NOISE AND FUSS,
FOR A MAN TO ARISE, IN LOVE GOD-SIZE,
IN THE HEART OF EACH ONE OF US!

AND ONE OF THE GREATEST IDEAS EVER EXPRESSED -
IS THAT THERE IS A MAN GOD-SIZE WITHIN THE HEART
OF EVERY ONE OF US! PAUL: 'CHRIST IN YOU HOUR
HOPE OF GLORY!'

AND THE INNER MEANING OF CHRISTMAS IS THAT
THIS CHRIST MAN, THE GOD MAN WITHIN YOU, CAN BE
REBORN, REAWAKENED, AND THAT YOU CAN BE THE PERSON
YOUR REALLY DESIRE TO BE!

'GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD THAT HE GAVE YOU --
THAT OF YOU THAT IS BEGOTTEN ONLY OF HIM!