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**CHRISTMAS: A COSMIC
INSIGHT**

DECEMBER 20, 1981

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5, Dec 20, 1971

NEXT FRIDAY 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 CHANGE THE SUBJECT TO A MORE VIVID INTEREST IN SANTA CLAUS?

ANYONE CAN TELL THE CHRISTMAS STORY: OF SHEPHERDS AND WISE-MEN, OF MARY AND JOSEPH AND THE INN THAT HAD NO ROOM? WE REMEMBER IT WELL BECAUSE OF THE LITTLE CHRISTMAS CRECHES WE ASSEMBLE IN OUR HOMES OR SEE DISPLAYED IN SHOP WINDOWS? AND IN A WAY THIS CRECHE IS SYMBOLIC OF THE PASTE-ON PIETY OF THE SEASON, WHICH IS SO SOON PACKED AWAY WITH ORNAMENTS AND TINSEL AFTER THE PERFUNCTORY PRACTICE IS DUTIFULLY FULFILLED?

OH, IT IS A GLORIOUS TIME OF FAMILY GATHERINGS, AND THE EXCHANGE OF REMEMBRANCES, AND GOOD FOOD AND CONVIVIAL GATHERINGS -- BUT ALSO IT IS OFTEN

THE LICENSE FOR IRRATIONAL BEHAVIOR - AND AS
JIM BISHOP PUTS IT, 'FOR KISSING THE WRONG PERSON
UNDER THE MYSTLETOE'

LET ME NOT
~~DON'T WANT TO~~ BE TOO HARD ON CHRISTMAS CUSTOMS,
FOR I LOVE THEM ALL, AND I CONFESS TO BEING A
SOFT SENTIMENTALIST WHEN IT COMES TO THE CHRIS-
MAS TREE AND GIFTS ^{AND} CAROLS. BUT I DO WANT US
TO NOTE HOW PREVALENT IS THE TENDENCY TO LOSE
THE REAL MEANING OF A PROFOUND EXPERIENCE BY
SETTLING INTO RITUAL AND HABITUAL PRACTICE. AND
THIS IS THE HISTORY OF RELIGION, WHERE THE SPIRIT
IS BURIED IN FORM AND THE TRUTH LIES UNDISCOVERED
THROUGH THE PERPETUATION OF DOGMA.

SO LET US TAKE ANOTHER LOOK AT CHRISTMAS, PROBING
DEEPLY INTO ITS BACKGROUND AND ROOTS. THE FIRST
OBVIOUS THING IS THAT JESUS' BIRTH HAD IMPLICA-
TIONS FAR BEYOND THE DRAMATIC BEGINNING OF A
RELIGION.

IT SEEMS TO ME THAT

THE UNIVERSE IS TOO GRAND AND INTELLIGENT TO BE ENCOMPASSED BY ONE SECTARIAN CONCEPT, OR LIMITED TO ONE 'BIRTHDAY OF A KING'

ACTUALLY THERE ARE NO RECORDS THAT TELL WHEN JESUS WAS BORN? NOT EVEN THE YEAR ^{SEASON OR YEAR} IS CERTAIN? IN FACT CAREFUL SCHOLARS NOW SAY THERE WAS AN ERROR IN COMPUTATION, AND THAT THE BIRTH WAS PROBABLY FOUR OR FIVE YEARS EARLIER?

FROM THE EARLIEST DAYS MAN HAS SENSED THE UNIVERSAL ORDER, AND HAS INDUTIVELY KNOWN THE MEANING OF AND THE NEED FOR TRANSCENDENT LIGHT? MOST PAGAN CULTURES HAD SOME KIND OF ANNUAL CELEBRATION OF THE REBIRTH OF LIGHT AT THE WINTER SOLSTICE, THE TIME WHEN THE SUN IS AT ITS GREATEST DISTANCE FROM THE CELESTIAL EQUATOR - ABOUT DEC? 22ND?

THUS IT JUST COULD BE THAT JESUS BIRTH WAS SET AT THIS TIME ^{BY DESIGN} TO SYMBOLIZE THE RE-INFUSION OF THE PLANET WITH AN ENERGY FORCE BRINGING

VIBRATORY RHYTHMS TO LIFT THE EARTH TO THE KIND OF "PEACE ON EARTH GOOD WILL TO MEN" SUNG BY THE HEAVENLY HOSTS?

LONG BEFORE THE BIRTH OF JESUS WE FIND THESE FESTIVALS OF WINTER SOLSTICE IN ALL CULTURES? THE ROMANS OBSERVED IT AS ^{THE FEAST OF} SATURNALIA? SATURN WAS THE OLD MAN WHO LIVES AT THE NORTH POLE, 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 CELEBRATION, LASTING SEVEN DAYS? HOUSES WERE DECORATED WITH LAURELS AND EVERGREENS, PRESENTS WERE EXCHANGED AND 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? OFFICE PARTIES

SO WHEN THE CHRISTIAN AND ROMAN WORLD WERE UNITED, THE CUSTOMS OF BOTH WERE DOVETAILED TOGETHER

THE BEAUTIFUL IDEA OF THE REBIRTH OF LIGHT FOUND CONTINUITY IN THE NATIVITY STORY, WHICH WAS APPROPRIATELY EMBELLISHED.

AND IT WAS DURING THIS TIME THAT THE WHOLE CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE WAS POURED INTO ROMAN VESSELS. THE SIMPLE CHRISTIAN MOVEMENT WAS THRUST INTO ROMAN TEMPLES OF STATUES AND CANDLES AND CEREMONY. THUS THE WHOLE CHARACTER AND CONSCIOUSNESS OF JESUS AND THE MOVEMENT HE TOUCHED OFF WAS BURIED - TO BE KEPT ALIVE ONLY BY MYSTICS IN ISOLATED MONASTERIES DOWN THROUGH THE YEARS.

SO TODAY, WHEN THE WORLD STANDS IN SUCH DESPERATE NEED ~~FOR~~ ^{OF} LIGHT, THERE IS A CRYING NEED FOR A RENAISSANCE OF THE EARLY CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE - A RETURN TO MEANINGS WITHIN FORM, TO COMMITMENT BEYOND DOCTRINE.

THE GREAT IDEA THAT CHRISTMAS SHOULD SYMBOLIZE IS THE REBIRTH OF LIGHT INTO THE WORLD,

THE AWAKENING IN MAN TO THE DYNAMIC POTENTIAL OF HIS GOD-SELF -- WITH ITS INHERENT PROMISE THAT AS MEN ~~FACT~~ ACT IN LOVE AND GOOD WILL, THERE CAN BE PEACE ON EARTH.

THERE IS AN INTERESTING PLAY BY JOSEPHINE PRESTON PEABODY, 'THE WOLF OF GUBBIO'. IT DEALS WITH MAN'S ABILITY TO OVERCOME THE ANTAGONISM EXISTING BETWEEN HIM AND THE ANIMAL KINGDOM THROUGH THE POWER OF LOVE. BY IMPLICATION THIS RESTORATION CAN ONLY TAKE PLACE WHEN MAN HAS MASTERED THE BESTIAL ELEMENTS OF HIS OWN NATURE.

THE PLAY IN A MEDIEVAL SETTING, IS BASED UPON A LEGEND RELATING TO THE LIFE OF SAINT FRANCIS.

IN THE TITLE ROLE THE WOLF PORTRAYS MAN'S DUAL NATURE, THE NATURE OF THE DIVINE AND THAT OF THE HUMAN -- 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!"

THE WOLF SYMBOLIZES LIFE AT ITS LOWER LEVEL,
BECOMING CONSCIOUS OF LIMITATION AND WANT, BUT
DREAMING OF WARMTH AND LIGHT: ALL OF LIFE MOUNTS
UPWARD THROUGH SUCH A DEEPENING REALIZATION 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, QUICKENING HIM TO

// 'WONDER HOW 'TWOULD FEEL
// TO SIT WITH MEN AND SHARE THEIR MEAL'

BECAUSE HE HAD PREYED UPON THE FOLK OF GUBBIO
THE WOLF LIVED IN DEADLY FEAR OF THEM, AND THEY
OF HIM.

→ THE DRAMA CONTINUES TO UNFOLD THE PICTURE OF
A DISCORDANT FEAR-RIDDEN WORLD IN WHICH ALL
LIVING CREATURES ARE LONGING IN SOME WAY, AS
DID THE WOLF, FOR DELIVERANCE. THAT ASPIRATION
EVENTUALLY DRAWS UNTO ITSELF THE LIGHT IT
MERITS.

THE PICTURE CHANGES WITH THE APPEARANCE OF ST.
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 CON-
FESSES HIS SHAME AND GUILT, TOGETHER WITH HIS
LONGING TO BE A MAN, WHILE FRANCIS CONFESSES
HIS OWN WOLFISH SINS,,, AND 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!'

LATER THERE IS A POIGNANT SCENE IN WHICH THE
WOLF PULLS BACK, SAYING, 'I DON'T WANT TO BE A
MAN UNTIL MEN STOP ACTING LIKE WOLVES.'

▶THE CLIMAX OF THE PLAY 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 BROTHER-
HOOD. FRANCIS SINGS:

// 'OH, AND THE VERY STARS SHALL SING
FOR THE JOY OF THIS GLAD THING!
THO WE CROWN HIM YET WITH THORN,
THO WE LAUGH HIM ALL TO SCORN,
LOVE, - LOVE IS BORN.'

AND ST. FRANCIS CONCLUDES:

// 'AND IF THERE BE OUT YONDER ANY WOLF,
OR GREAT OR SMALL, BEHOLD, -
COME LITTLE BROTHER WOLVES, COME HITHER
OUT OF THE COLD.'

SO, 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.

UNFORTUNATELY WE HAVE SIMPLY ADAPTED CHRISTMAS
TO THE WAY THINGS ARE - IN THE PASTE-ON CELE-
BRATION OF NOSTALGIA AND FUN -- INSTEAD OF LETTING
CHRISTMAS TURN US AWAY FROM THINGS AS THEY ARE,
TO HELP US SERIOUSLY VIEW HOW THEY ^{BE} CAN AND SHOULD
BE... TO LEAD US INTO DEEPER LEVELS OF UNDERSTAND-
ING 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 CHRISTMASS, OR WORLD RITUAL, INVOLVED. THERE
IS A PROFOUND TRUTH ^{CONCEALED} IN THE LEGEND THAT TELLS OF
^{OF THE MANNER OF BETWEEN}

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! * CAN YOU ACCEPT THIS COSMIC INSIGHT?
CAN YOU BELIEVE THAT ON CHRISTMAS EVEN A BURST
OF TRANSCENDENT LIGHT WILL DAWN IN YOUR CONSCIOUS-
NESS?

PUTTING IT INTO THE CHRISTMAS SYMBOLOLOGY, IS
THERE ROOM IN THE MANGER OF YOUR HEART? CAN
YOU LET THE LIGHT BE REBORN?

AS THE MEDIEVAL POET PUTS IT: 'THOUGH CHRIST
A THOUSAND TIMES IN BETHLEHEM BE BORN, IF HE'S
NOT BORN ON THEE, THY SOUL IS ALL FORLORN.'

JOHN WAS SINGING OF THIS EXPERIENCE WHEN HE SAYS:

6 '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.'

FOR SO LONG MAN HAS BEEN FIGHTING HIS WAY THROUGH
THE DARKNESS, SOMETIMES AS UNCHRISTLIKE AS THE

LOWLIEST OF CREATURES? BUT THE MIND OF MAN HAS
DREAMED OF HIS POTENTIAL FOR GOOD, LIKE THE URGE
OF THE WOLF OF GUBBIO?

➤ PERHAPS THE TRUE TEST OF WHETHER CHRISTMAS IS
REALLY HAPPENING IN YOU - IS IF YOU CAN LOOK
AT THE DOWNTRODDEN, THE DISEASED, THE IGNORANT,
EVEN THE MISGUIDED CRIMINAL -- AND SAY - NOT
'I HATE YOU FOR YOUR SQUALOR AND YOUR IGNORANCE,
I HATE YOU FOR WHAT YOU ARE!: -- BUT RATHER,
'I HATE YOUR SQUALOR AND IGNORANCE, BUT I
SALUTE THE DIVINITY WITHIN YOU! AND I AM
WILLING TO WORK WITH YOU TO HELP YOU TO RELEASE
YOUR DIVINE POTENTIAL!'

IN OTHER WORDS, IF WE REALLY TAKE SERIOUSLY ~~THE~~ THE
SPARK OF LIGHT IN ALL ~~PERSONS~~ PERSONS AND COMMIT OUR-
SELVES TO THE DEMONSTRATION OF THE REBIRTH OF
LIGHT -- WE WOULD REALIZE THAT A MEETING SUCH AS
THIS IS NOT AN END, BUT A PREPARATION FOR WORK
TO BE DONE WHICH COMES NEXT!

I LOVE THE STORY OF THE MAN WHO WENT TO A QUAKER
MEETINGHOUSE, NOT KNOWING ANYTHING ABOUT IT. THE
CONGREGATION SAT IN SILENCE FOR A LONG TIME.
THE MAN WAS PUZZLED, AND WHISPERED TO THE MAN
NEXT TO HIM: 'WHEN DOES THE SERVICE BEGIN?'
THE REPLY: 'WHEN THE MEETING IS OVER.'

AND IN THE SAME WAY THE TRUE CHRIST/MASS BEGINS
WHEN DAY OF CELEBRATION IS OVER. THERE IS
SLEEVES-ROLLED-UP WORK TO BE DONE, THE NEW
CONSCIOUSNESS TO REVEAL, AND A NEW LIGHT TO SHINE
TOO VISIONARY? YOU MAY SAY: YET A SOCIETY THAT
CAN PUT MEN ON THE MOON AND SEND PICTURES BACK
TO EARTH OF THE RINGS OF SATURN SHOULD BE READY
TO EXPLORE NEW STEPS IN A BIRTH OF LIGHT, TO
SEED THE MENTAL ATMOSPHERE OF THE PLANET WITH
NEW THOUGHTS OF TRANSCENDENT SIGNIFICANCE?

DON'T FALL BACK ON THE AGE-OLD COP OUT THAT
YOU ARE ONLY ONE - WHAT CAN ONE PERSON DO?

you are a star

// '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.'

▶ IF WE COULD OPEN THE FROZEN GROUND TODAY AND READ THE HISTORY OF EVERY BURIED GRAIN OF WHEAT, OF EVERY SLUGGISH ROOT HIDING IN THE WARM EARTH WITH ITS NEXT YEAR'S BLOSSOMS FOLDED UP WITHIN IT: IF WE COULD KNOW THE NATURE OF THEIR LATENT FORCES, AND SEE THEIR WHOLE POTENTIAL, WE SHOULD BE ABLE TO TELL OF EACH OF THEM, WHEN ITS TIME WOULD BE FULL, AND WE COULD PROPHECY WHEN THE GROUND WOULD BREAK, AND HOW THE FLOWER WOULD BLOOM/AND AT WHAT MOMENT THE FRUIT/TE/ WOULD RIPEN? AND NEXT SPRING AND SUMMER WE WOULD SEE IT ALL COME TO PASS?

SO WITH THE OVER-ALL CONSCIOUSNESS OF HUMANKIND ON THE GLOBE, WE COULD READ THE HOPES AND FEARS THE DEEP-SEATED BELIEFS AND DOMINANT STATES OF MIND? AND WE COULD FORECAST FAIRLY ACCURATELY THE TRENDS OF MANKIND IN THE YEARS TO COME?

THIS MAY SOUND LIKE PREDESTINATION? BUT IT IS NOTHING OF THE SORT! FOR YOU SEE, THE FULLNESS OF TIME CONCERNS OUR READINESS TO EXPRESS AND NOT GOD'S READINESS TO GIVE. IT IS IN NO WAY FORE-ORDAINED, FOR THE PICTURE WE SENSE CAN CHANGE AND DOES - AS CONSCIOUSNESS CHANGES?

EVERY YEAR AT WINTER SOLSTICE IT IS THE FULLNESS OF TIME FOR THE WORLD! IT IS A DIVINE APPOINTMENT -- ASK 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?

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 COSMIC FLOW OF LIGHT THAT BOMBARDS THE PLANET EARTH -- AND ONLY

OUR INERTIAL INVOLVEMENT IN THE PASTE-ON TRAPPING OF THE ANNUAL HOLIDAY - CAN KEEP US FROM DISCOVERING AND GIVING BIRTH TO THE DEPTH OF LIGHT WITHIN US!

CHRISTMAS THEN, SHOULD NOT BE A BACKWARD ~~GLANCE~~ 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!

CHRISTMAS IS MORE THAN A DAY OR OUTER CELEBRATION! 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 - THUS EXPERIENCING THE TRUE SOLSTICE OF THE SPIRIT, THE REBIRTH OF LIGHT!

HOW OFTEN AND HOW EASILY WE SAY, 'MERRY CHRISTMAS
CERTAINLY, HAVE A MERRY TIME! BUT THIS IS NOT
ENOUGH! THE WORLD CALLS FOR LIGHT AND PEACE!
HOW MUCH BETTER TO IDENTIFY WITH THE COSMIC
PROCESS, THE 'FESTIVAL OF LIGHT' - SAYING TO
ONE ANOTHER, 'HAPPY CHRISTMAS OF LIGHT'!

FOR THIS IS THE DEEPER AND MORE CREATIVE
MEANING - THE COSMIC INSIGHT INTO CHRISTMAS!