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PAPERS (3014)**

**BOX 22
FOLDER 5**

**THE CHRISTMAS
PRESENCE**

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THE CHRISTMAS PRESENCE 5. Dec 22, 75

THE SIGHT/AND SOUNDS/AND SMELL/OF CHR\$STMAS ARE
IN THE AIR,/HERALDING ONCE AGAIN/THIS BEAUTIFULLY
STRANGE/AND STRANGELY BEAUTIFUL SEASON/OF SUCH
STRIKING CONTRASTS./ IT IS A MAGIC TIME..^{PERHAPS} AND IT
IS A TRAGIC TIME.

► MAGIC BECAUSE OF THE WAY IT TRANSFORMS/STREETS
AND STORES AND HOMES/FROM THE ROUTINE AND PRO-
SAIC/INTO A LAND OF FANTASY/AND DREAMS/AND
A SPECIAL CHRISTMAS GLOW.

► IT IS A TRAGIC TIME ^{FOR SOME} BECAUSE THE MMAGIC IS XXXX
ILLUSION,/AND BEHIND THE FACADE OF TINSEL AND
MISTLETOE/THERE IS OFTEN A WIDESPREAD LONELINESS
AND EMP^{TY}TINESS...AND ^{FOR OTHERS GRIM} THE CHARADE OF GIFT-GIVING
/UNDER UNBELIEVABLE PRESSURES/OF CONFORMITY/AND
OBLIGATION/AND GUILT. PHILIP WYLIE SOUNDS A
DISTINCTLY 'BAH HUMBUG' TONE/WHEN HE REFERS TO
THE 'HOPPED-UP,/PRESSURE-LADEN,/STATUS-SEEKING,
COMPETITIVE DEGRADATION OF CHRISTMAS.'

WHAT IS IT ALL ABOUT, ANYWAY? / WHAT IS THE MEAN-
ING OF CHRISTMAS? / A COLLEGE PROFESSOR WAS GIVING
A WORD-ASSOCIATION TEST, / AND AS IT WAS IN THE
HOLIDAY SEASON, ^{ON A WHIM} HE INCLUDED ~~ONE~~ THE WORD CHRISTMAS
~~ON A WHIM~~. THE STUDENTS WERE BEING ASKED / TO WRITE
DOWN THE VERY FIRST WORD / THAT CAME TO THEM - IN
THIS CASE, / ~~WITH~~ ^{WORD WAS} THE ~~THOUGHT~~ ~~OF~~ CHRISTMAS. LATER,
ON GOING OVER THE TEST, / THE PROFESSOR DISCOVERED
THAT / NOT ONE PERSON HAD MENTIONED JESUS. THERE
WERE SUCH WORDS AS SANTA CLAUS, / CHRISTMAS TREE, /
CAROLS, / GIFTS, / CANDLES, / HOLLY, / MISTLETOE. NO JESUS

I AM SURE WE COULD ASK MANY PERSONS, "WHAT DOES
CHRISTMAS MEAN?" AND AFTER THE PERSON FOCUSES HIS
ATTENTION BEYOND THE 'SANTA CLAUS SYNDROME', HE
MIGHT SAY, 'IT IS THE BIRTHDAY OF JESUS.'

BUT, YOU KNOW, / IF THERE IS ONE THING DECEMBER 25
IS NOT, / IT IS THE DAY JESUS WAS BORN, / THERE IS
NO HISTORICAL RECORD OF ANY OF THE EARLY LIFE

1944

1945

1946

1947

OF JESUS.. ONLY A VARIETY OF CONFLICTING LEGENDS
/WE REALLY DON'T KNOW/WHEN JESUS WAS BORN.. NOR DO
WE KNOW MUCH ABOUT THE CIRCUMSTANCES. /~~WE DO~~ NOT
EVEN ~~KNOW~~ THE SEASON OF THE YEAR, IS CERTAIN. / IN
FACT SCHOLARS NOW SAY /THERE WAS AN ERROR IN COM-
PUTATION, /AND THAT THE BIRTH WAS PROBABLY /FOUR OR
FIVE YEARS EARLIER. SO IF ANNO DOMINI, "THE YEAR
OF OUR LORD," /FIXES THE CALENDAR TO BEGIN WITH THE
BIRTH OF JESUS, /WE ~~MAY~~ NOW BE COMING TO THE CLOSE
OF ¹⁹⁸⁵ ~~1984~~, /WITH THE NEW YEAR USHERING IN 1990. /
IT POINTS UP THE RELATIVITY OF TIME.

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.

THERE IS AN INTERESTING /-AND TO SOME /DISTURBING-
LINK IN HISTORY /~~WHEN~~ ^{Rome} ~~BEGAN~~ TO SEE THE FUTILITY OF
MARTYRING CHRISTIANS /TO ~~PUT~~ DOWN THE SPREAD OF

THE CHRISTIAN MOVEMENT, / WHICH THEY SAW TO BE A
THREAT TO THE EMPIRE. / ^{so} THEY ADOPTED CHRISTIANITY AS
THE STATE RELIGION / AS A MEANS OF CONTROLLING IT. /
DURING THE PERIOD OF THE ROMANIZATION OF CHRIS-
TIANITY, / THEY EFFECTIVELY EMASCULATED THE SIMPLE
TRUTHS OF JESUS / AND INSTITUTIONALIZED THE UN-
STRUCTURED MOVEMENT OF JESUS' FOLLOWERS. / THE
^{CHRISTIAN} ~~STATE~~ MOVEMENT WAS THRUST / INTO ROMAN TEMPLES OF
STATUARY AND POMP AND CEREMONY. / JESUS WAS MADE
TO ^{EXCHANGE} ~~WORE~~ HIS PLAIN COURSE GARMENTS, / FOR THE IMPERIAL
PURPLE AND A JEWELLED CROWN. / A GRADUATED PRIEST-
HOOD WAS FORMED. / THE NUNS TOOK THE PLACE OF THE
VESTAL VIRGINS, / AND THE EMPEROR BECAME THE POPE. /
THE ROMAN SENATE / BECAME THE COLLEGE OF CARDINALS.
THE ROMAN EMPIRE BECAME / THE HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE. /
AND THERE WERE INTRODUCED BELLS / AND / CANDLES / AND
VESTMENTS / AND CEREMONIALS / AND INCANTATIONS. / IT
BECAME 'ACCESS TO GOD THROUGH MEDIUMSHIP OF THE
CHURCH'.

IT WAS A LONG ~~ROAD~~^{WAY} FROM GALILEE. / I MENTION ALL THIS BECAUSE / THIS IS WHERE THE BULK / OF THE CHRIS-
MAS TRADITIONS ORIGINATED. / THE FEAST OF SATURNALIA
WAS A SEVEN DAY PERIOD OF CELEBRATION. / HOUSES
WERE DECORATED / WITH LAURELS AND EVERGREENS. / WORK
WAS SUSPENDED, / SCHOOLS WERE CLOSED, / NO PUNISHMENTS
WERE INFLICTED, / AND NO WARS WERE FOUGHT. / AND...
FATHER SATURN~~S~~ / CAME DOWN FROM THE NORTH POLE / WITH
TOYS FOR THE CHILDREN. / SOUND FAMILIAR?

HOWEVER IN THE ROMANIZATION OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH
/ THE CELEBRATION OF CHRISTMAS / WAS NEVER QUITE ~~THE~~^{AS}
~~SAME~~^{FESTIVE} AS ^{6TH} SATURNALIA. / ..UNTIL RECENT TIMES IN AMERICA
// 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 MASSACHUSETTS 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./ AND LOOK AT US NOW!

EVERY YEAR WE HEAR THE VOICE OF CONCERN/THAT CHRISTMAS HAS BECOME TOO MATERIALISTIC./.. 'LET'S PUT CHRIST BACK INTO CH~~R~~ISTMAS' THEY CRY./ IT IS LIKELY TH~~A~~T BACK IN ROMAN TIMES/ THERE WAS A SIMILAR CRY,/ 'LET'S PUT SATURN BACK INTO SATURNALIA./ THERE IS ALWAYS ~~T~~HE INTI~~M~~ATION/ THAT THE MERCHANT IS A KIND OF S~~C~~ROOGE/ WHO IS WRINGING HIS HANDS IN DELIGHT/ AS JOHN Q. PUBLIC DANCES TO HIS TUNE. // A MUCH BETTER SLOGAN WOULD BE TO PUT OURSELVES BACK INTO CHRISTMAS'. THE PROBLEM IS NOT THE BUYING/OF GIFTS,/ AND CERTAINLY ~~W~~WE CAN'T OVER-LOOK THE FACT/ THAT AS BUSINESS PROSPERS,/ THE

ECONOMY IMPROVES, AND WE ALL BENEFIT. / OF COURSE /
THERE IS COMMERCIALISM INVOLVED, / BUT IT IS STILL
COMMERCE / WHETHER IT IS THE / MANUFACTURE AND ~~SALE~~
OF BIBLES OR BAUBLES.

CHRISTMAS

THE PROBLEM IS NOT THAT ~~IT~~ IS OVER-MATERIALIS-
TIC, / BUT THAT PEOPLE TEND TO ~~FORGET~~ ^{ABANDON} THE SPIRITUA
IDEALS / OF THE HOLY DAY / FOR A SUPERFICIAL RELI-
GIOUS INVOLVEMENT ON WHAT BECOMES A HOLLOW DAY.
^{PUTTING UP THE CRECHE.}

AGAIN THE NEED IS TO / PUT OURSELVES BACK INTO
CHRISTMAS. / TO SEE IT AS A ^{BEAUTIFUL} ~~SEASON~~ SEASON / OF LOVE
AND SHARING, / OF PULLING OUT ALL THE BEST STOPS
OF OUR NATURE, / AND PRACTICING THE PRESENCE OF
CHRISTMAS. / AND THAT IS THE KEY. / THE CHRISTMAS
PRESENCE. / FOR THE ESSENCE THAT IS CHRISTMAS / IS
NOT LIMITED TO A DAY OR A ~~SEASON~~ SEASON. / CHRISTMAS AND
ALL ITS TRADITIONS / AND LEGENDS / AND ITS JOY AND
PEACE / IS BUT THE ACTIVITY OF GOD / MOVING THROUGH
THE MINDS AND HEARTS OF PEOPLE / IN A BEAUTIFULLY

SPONTANEOUS WAY. / OF COURSE IT IS A FACADE, / OF COURSE THE MISTLETOE / IS PLASTIC AND THE CRECHE FIGURES / ARE PLASTER AND PAPIER-MACHE, / ^{OF COURSE} ~~AND~~ THE SANTA CLAUSE ^{AND} / WITH THE SUIT AND MANNER THAT DO NOT FIT, ^{AND} WILL SOON BE BACK AGAIN IN LINE / AT THE UNEMPLOYMENT COMPENSATION OFFICE. / YES, AND ^{OF COURSE} ~~THE~~ DAY AFTER CHRISTMAS / ~~THE~~ TREES ~~AND~~ GARLANDS WILL COME DOWN / AND THE CHRISTMAS PARAPHERNALIA WILL BE PACKED AWAY / IN ATTICS AND STORE-ROOMS / FOR ANOTHER YEAR. / AND THE STORES WILL MAKE / A QUICK TRANSITION TO JANUARY WHITE SALES. / THEN WHAT IS THE POINT? THE POINT IS... WE HAVE ANOTHER OPPORTUNITY TO LIVE FOR A BRIEF SEASON / IN WHICH THE TRANSCENDENT LEVEL OF MANKIND / IS AT ITS ZENITH. ^{CHRISTMAS} ~~THIS TIME EACH YEAR~~ MAY BE AN IMPORTANT OUTLET / FOR THE SPIRITUAL FLOW INTO THE WORLD, / SO THAT THE BALANCE IS TIPPED / AWAY FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT. / AS SOMEONE SAID, / 'IF THERE WERE NO CHRISTMAS / WE WOULD HAVE TO INVENT ON

CHRISTMAS IS LIKE AN OASIS / IN A HECTIC, STRIFE-
TORN WORLD, ^{WHEN WE HEAR} AND THE DARK CRY, / 'WHAT IS THE WORLD
COMING TO? .. / ~~AND WHEN~~ ^{WE SHOULD} WE LOOK UP IN CHILD-LIKE
WONDER ^{AND SAY} ~~IN THE SPIRIT OF~~ / 'LOOK WHAT IS COMING INTO
THE WORLD.'

IT IS OFTEN SAID, / 'CHRISTMAS IS FOR CHILDREN.' /
YES, AND FOR THE LITTLE CHILD / ~~WITHIN~~ IN THE HEART
OF EACH OF US. ELIZ. AKERS ALLEN SINGS, / 'BACKWARD
TURN BACKWARD, / O TIME IN YOUR FLIGHT. / MAKE ME A
CHILD AGAIN / JUST FOR TONITE.' / I CAN ASSURE YOU
THAT AT ~~THE~~ BUTTERWORTH HOUSE / - OLGA AND I ~~BECOME~~
CHILDREN AGAIN FOR A FORTNIGHT. / WE LOVE CHRISTMAS
AND ALL ITS / SYMBOLS AND TRADITIONS. / .. AND WE MANAGE
TO ADD A FEW TRADITIONS OF OUR OWN. / WE HAVE FUN
ERECTING THE FACADE. / WE PUT ^{UP} OUR TREE ~~UP~~ / RIGHT
AFTER THANKSGIVING / AND IT WILL STAY THROUGH ~~ALL~~ ALL
OF JANUARY. / .. FOR AFTER THE ~~C~~HRISTMAS PRESENTS
HAVE BEEN OPENED ... THE ~~C~~HRISTMAS PRESENCE ^{REMAINS.}

IF WE TAKE A LONG 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. /JESUS DID NOT INTEND /TO SET UP A NEW
RELIGION. /HE SAID, 'I CAME NOT TO DESTROY THE LAW/
BUT TO FULFILL IT.' /AND HE CERTAINLY HAD NO
~~XXXXXXXX~~ INTENTION OF BECOMING /THE OBJECT OF WORSHIP
/HE SAID, 'WHY CALLEST THOU ME GOOD, /NONE IS GOOD
SAVE GOD.' / HE DID NOT COME TO TELL MAN OF HIS
DIVINITY. /. MAKING HIM ^{SELF} THE GREAT EXCEPTION. /. BUT TO
TELL US OF OUR DIVINITY, /AND ~~TO~~ SHOW US IN HIS
OVERCOMING, /THE GREAT EXAMPLE OF THE 'I AM' /IN ITS
FULL PERSONAL EXPRESSION IN MAN.

▶THE GREAT EVENT IN THE LIFE OF JESUS/WAS NOT HIS BIRTH,/BUT THE GREAT BREAKTHROUGH IN CONSCIOUSNESS /THAT TOOK PLACE WITHIN HIM/DURING THE YEARS OF HIS GROWTH../POSSIBLY AS A YOUNG LAD/WALKING THE HILLS OF GALILEE,/SEARCHING THE HEAVENS AND HIS INNER ~~XXXXXXXX~~ DEPTHS../.SUDDENLY D~~I~~SCOVERING THE INDWELLING CHRIST,/AND KNOWING IT TO BE THE DIVINE DIMENSION WITHIN EVERY PERSON./'THE SAME LIGHT THAT LIGHTETH/EVERY PERSON/COMING INTO THE WORLD.'

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

▶THUS, THOUGH THE LEGENDS AND PROPHECY OF THE O.T. /DEALT WITH THE HOPE/OF A MESSIAH TO COME,/IT WAS ERRONEOUSLY THOUGHT BY CHRISTIANS/TO HAVE BEEN FULFILLED IN JESUS../.RATHER THAN BEING REVEALED THROUGH HIM. /THE GREAT IDEA THAT HAS BEEN SADLY MISSED../.IS THAT THE TRUE HOPE WAS NOT JESUS,

BUT THE CHRIST SPIRIT / THAT HE DISCOVERED IN HIMSELF
./..AND FORETOLD AS BEING IN ALL PERSONS../ SO
CHRISTMAS BEGINS IN PROPHECY ./..AND CARRIES THROUGH
THE MANGER OF BETHLEHEM ./..BUT IT IS AN UNFINISHED
STORY / THAT MUST BE RESOLVED INTO COMPLETION / BY AN
EXPERIENCE WITHIN EVERY PERSON. / SO BEHIND ALL
THE OUTWARDISMS OF CHRISTMAS, / THE TINSEL AND
GLITTER / AND 'GOD-REST-YE-MERRY-GENTLEMEN' ~~THE~~, / THE
FLAMING YULE LOGS / AND HAPPY FAMILY GATHERINGS. /..
BEHIND ALL THIS / CHRISTMAS ^{SHOULD BE} ~~IS~~ A CELEBRATION OF YOUR
DEEPER SELF, / THE VERY HIGHEST CONSCIOUSNESS / THAT
YOU ARE CAPABLE OF REALIZING. / IT IS NOT PUTTING
ON THE FACE / ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~
~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ OF 'JOY TO THE WORLD' / AND
'PEACE ON EARTH GOOD WILL TO MEN.' / RATHER IT IS
REMOVING ~~THE~~ MASK / OF ^{THE} SCROOGE OF HUMAN CONSCIOUSNESS
// AND SPENDING A FEW DAYS / BEING YOUR UNCONFORMED
AND NON-PRESSURED SELF, / LETTING THE LOVE THAT IS
THE REALITY OF YOUR INNER SELF / FREELY EXPRESS.

AS STUDENTS OF TRUTH/WE SHOULD BE MATURE ENOUGH/
TO DEAL WITH THE FACT/THAT THE WHOLE CHRISTMAS
STORY/HAS EVOLVED OUT OF LEGENDS/THAT WERE HIGHLY
IDEALIZED AND EMBELLISHED/THROUGH THE PASSING YEARS
./..AND THAT THERE IS PROBABLY/VERY LITTLE THAT IS
HISTORICALLY ACCURATE./A CLUE TO THIS IS FOUND/IN
THE FACT THAT ONLY TWO/OF THE GOSPEL WRITERS MADE
ANY MENTION/OF THE MYSTERY OF JESUS' BIRTH/IN
BETHLEHEM ON THAT 'NIGHT OF NIGHTS', ^{MARK AND JOHN SAID NOTHING} AND EVEN ~~THEY~~
^{MATTHEW AND LUKE} WERE NOT IN AGREEMENT./ SO THEY TELL TWO STORIES,
TWO SEPARATE AND DISTINCT ACCOUNTS,/ TWO SETS OF
CHARACTERS -/ AS RECOUNTED IN MATT. AND LUKE.

LUKE TELLS A STORY OF PASTORAL SIMPLICITY./..OF
~~MARY AND~~ ^{LEADING} JOSEPH, ~~AND~~ MARY RIDING INTO BETHLEHEM ON
A DONKEY./ HE SAYS CRYPTICALLY,/ 'WHILE THEY WERE
THERE/SHE BROUGHT FORTH HER FIRST-BORN SON./..AND
LAID HIM IN A MANGER,/ BECAUSE THERE WAS NO ROOM
IN THE INN.'

HOW MANY SERMONS HAVE BEEN PREACHED/ABOUT THAT
INNKEEPER, / ^{HAS BECOME} A SYMBOL OF THE CRUEL, HARD-HEARTED,
MATERIALISTIC MERCHANT. / WHO COULD FIND NO ROOM
FOR THE 'BIRTH OF A KING'. / THE WORD 'INN' CONJURES
UP/SOMETHING LIKE AN ENGLISH PUB /OR A HIGHWAY
HOLIDAY INN MOTEL...WITH A BAR FILLED WITH LOUD-
LAUGHING HOLIDAY REVELERS. / <sup>SEEN FROM A PERSPECTIVE
OF TODAY</sup>

THE FACT IS THE BIBLICAL TERM FOR 'INN'/ IS
'KHĀN' -/WHICH WAS LITTLE MORE THAN A PROTECTIVE
ENCLAVE, /WITH FOUR WALLS, /NO ROOF. ^{SLEPT ON GROUND} THESE WERE
CARAVAN MOTELS, /BUILT AND PLACED A DAY'S JOURNEY
APART /ON THE ROADS FROM JERUSALEM TO JERICHO, /
AND TO DAMASCUS, ETC. / BY TAKING THEIR ANIMALS
INTO THE 'KHAN' /AT NIGHT THEY WERE PROTECTED
FROM WILD ANIMALS AND THEVES.

^{THE HILLS}
^{WARM COMFORTABLE} BUT MARY AND JOSEPH FOUND REFUGE /IN A CAVE ON
NEARBY, /PROBABLY LED TO IT BY THE VERY INN-
^{MANGER FEEDING TROUGH FOR CATTLE}
KEEPER WHO HAS BEEN PILLORIED AS THE SYMBOL
OF THE HARD-HEARTED BUSINESS MAN.

LUKE'S TENDER STORY/ TELLS OF SHEPHERDS KEEPING
WATCH/ BY NIGHT OVER THEIR SHEEP,/ AND OF ANGEL
VOICES ^{PROCLAIMING} ~~TELLING THEM OF~~ / THE BIRTH OF A SAVIOR IN
A MANGER. / AND OF THEIR DETERMINATION/ TO GO AND
SEE AND WORSHIP.

THE MATTHEW SCENARIO IS COLORED/ WITH GRANDEUR AND
REGAL SPLENDOR./ IT TELLS OF THREE MAGI,/ SOMETIMES
CALLED THREE WISE MEN/ OR THREE KINGS./ IT SAYS
THEY CAME FROM THE EAST TO JERUSALEM./ BUT IT ALSO
SAYS WE HAVE/ SEEN HIS STAR IN THE EAST/ AND HAVE
COME TO WORSHIP HIM./ THEY HAVE ALWAYS BEEN
DEPICTED FOLLOWING THE STAR./ BUT THEY WERE
TRAVELLING WEST,/ AND COULDN'T HAVE BEEN FOLLOWING
A STAR. ^{WHICH WAS IN THE EAST} / THIS SEEMS TO CLEARLY INDICATE THAT IN
AN ASTROLOGICAL SENSE THEY HAD PERCEIVED 'HIS
STAR', HAD PERCEIVED ^{ZODIAC} THIS MAJOR SIGN. AT ANY
RATE THEY CAME TO THE MANGER AND PRESENTED THE NEW
BORN KING WITH GIFTS OF GOLD, FRANK-INC...AND MYRR

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 CONTEMPORARY TIMES. / AND IN RELATION TO THE STATUS-SEEKING, / CONFORMITY RIDDEN CELEBRATION OF CHRISTMAS.

BUT HOW BEAUTIFULLY AND MEANINGFULLY / IT ALL COMES TOGETHER / WHEN WE PERCEIVE THE INNER MEAN-
 ING OF THE STORY. ^{THE BIRTH OF THE CHRIST TO YOU!} IT IS AN AWARENESS SO IM-
 PORTANT / THAT ^{GOSPELS PROVIDE} ~~IT HAS~~ TWO DISTINCT HANDHOLDS / BY WHICH YOU CAN LAY HOLD OF IT, / ACCORDING TO YOUR CONSCIOUSNESS / -- (1) IN FAITH AND SIMPLICITY LIKE THE SHEPHERDS - / DEALING WITH IT ON THE / LEVEL OF THE FEELING NATURE. / OR ⁽²⁾ ~~IN REASON~~ ^{OR} ~~AND~~ ^{LEVEL OF} THE INTELLECT, / LIKE THE WISE MEN. / BOTH THE SHEPHERDS AND THE WISE MEN / IN THEIR OWN WAY / SUDDENLY BECAME CONSCIOUS / OF THE CHRISTMAS PRESENCE.

YES, CHRISTMAS IS FOR CHILDREN,/FOR IT DEALS WITH
THE CHRIST CHILD WITHIN./ WHEN WE WORSHIP A CHILD
/AS WE DO AT CHRISTMAS/WE WORSHIP THE FUTURE,/WE
CELEBRATE NEW DREAMS,/NEW HOPES,/AND NEW HORIZONS.

THIS IS THE SIGNIFICANCE/OF THE SHEPHERDS AND
WISE MEN/WHO CAME TO WORSHIP THE CHILD./ THEY
WERE CAPTIVATED BY AN IDEA./ CAN YOU STILL
BECOME ENTHUSED/ABOUT THE CHRIST CHILD WITHIN?
THE GREATEST THING ABOUT LIFE IS LIVING,/AND TO
REALLY LIVE IS TO KEEP ALIVE/THE SENSE OF WONDER
^{AND} ROMANCE AND EXPECTANCY./ WHEN WE LOSE THIS ~~XXX~~
FEELING/SOMETHING IMPORTANT GOES OUT OF US./
THIS WAS NOT TRUE/OF THE SHEPHERDS OR THE MAGI
FROM THE EAST./ THEY MAY HAVE BEEN OLD MEN,/BUT
THEY HAD THE WONDER AND AWE OF THE CHILD./ THE
SHEPHERDS SAID,/ 'LET US GO AND SEE THIS THING THAT
HAS COME TO PASS' /-- AND THE WISE MEN WERE STILL
CHASING STARS AT SEVENTY.

WHATEVER MAY BE YOUR PERCEPTION/OF THE 'GREATEST STORY EVER TOLD' /- (AS FULTON OURSLEY CALLS IT) IT IS THE STORY OF THE GREATEST GIFT EVER GIVEN.

JOHN 3.16 'GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD/THAT HE GAVE HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON../AND THAT WHOSOEVER BELIEVETH ON ~~HE~~ ^{HIM}/SHALL NOT DIE BUT SHALL HAVE EVERLASTING LIFE.' /HOW THIS HAS BEEN MISREPRESENTED/AS SAYING JESUS IS GOD'S ONLY SON. / THAT ONLY BY BELIEVING ON HIM CAN WE BE SAVED.

BUT YOU SEE,/THE GREAT GIFT/IS GOD/INCARNATING HIMSELF IN AND AS MAN./ SALVATION COMES BY BELIEVING/ON THIS GOD-SELF/OR CHRIST SELF WITHIN?.

MEISTER ECKHART - 'GOD NEVER BEGOT BUT ONE SON, BUT THE ETERNAL IS FOREVER BEGETTING THE ONLY-BEGOTTEN.'

THERE IS THAT IN YOU THAT IS BEGOTTEN ONLY OF GOD

GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD/THAT HE GAVE YOU../~~THAT~~ HE GAVE HIMSELF../AS A LOVING, LOVING PRESENCE.

AND AS WE SEE IT IN THE CONTEXT OF THE MANGER STORY, IT BECOMES A CHRISTMAS PRESENCE.

WE DO A LOT OF GIVING/AT CHRISTMAS./ ACTUALLY IT
IS WHAT CH~~R~~ISTMAS IS ALL ABOUT./ I DON'T MEAN THE
CONFORMITY-RIDDEN,/OBLIGATION-IMPELLED,/STATUS-
SEEKING,/AND GUILT-PROMPTED GIVING/THAT DRAINS
OUR ENERGY AS WELL AS OUR FUNDS./ LIFE IS FOR
GIVING,/NOT FOR GETTING./ FOR RELEASING OUR IMPRI-
SONED SPLENDOR,/NOT JUST FOR AMASSING THINGS/AND
RELATIONSHIPS IN THE WORLD.

WE ARE CALLED TO GIVE BIRTH/TO THE)CHRIST OF OUR
NATURE,/SYMBOLIZED BY THE NATIVITY OF JESUS/BORN
IN THE/MANGER./ ^{BUT} WE SO EASILY AND SO OFTEN/DRIFT INTO
A 'GETTING' CONSCIOUSNESS/~~AND~~ IN THE PURSUIT OF
THE THINGS OF THE WORLD.//.AND LIKE THE PRODIGAL
SON IN THE FAR COUNTRY,/WE COME TO KNOW/WANT./ SO
CHRISTMAS CALLS US TO WAKE UP,/ COME TO OURSELVES,/
AND GET BACK INTO A GIVING CONSCIOUSNESS/-- AND
THIS IS SO BEAUTIFULLY SYMBOLIZED IN CHRISTMAS
GIVING -- OR IT SHOULD BE.

THE POET SAYS, / ' THE GIFT WITHOUT THE GIVER IS
BARE. ' / WHEN YOUR MIND IS CENTERED / ON GIVING
PRESENTS, / YOU MAY WORRY AND STRAIN / IN TRYING TO
FIND THE THING / FOR UNCLE JOE / OR SISTER MARY / OR FOR
THE PERSON WHO "HAS EVERYTHING" . / AND INVARIABLY
THE WHOLE ~~SHOPPING~~ EXPERIENCE IS DEPLETING. / BUT
IF YOU STIR UP THE GIFT OF GOD IN YOU, / THE AWARE-
NESS OF YOUR INNER CHRIST CHILD, / YOU WILL BE
GIVING / OUT OF THE OVERFLOW OF THE PRESENCE WITHIN.
SO INSTEAD OF JUST GIVING ^{CHRISTMAS} ~~PRESENTS~~, / YOU ^{WILL} PROJECT
YOUR AWARENESS OF THE ^{CHRISTMAS} ~~PRESENCE~~, / WHICH ^{WILL} ENVELOPE
YOUR COLORFULLY WRAPPED PRESENT. / YOU ARE BLESSED
IN THE GIVING, / AND THE OTHER PERSON IS BLESSED IN
THE RECEIVING.

WHEN YOU CATCH THE IDEA OF THE CHRISTMAS PRESENCE,
/ THE IDEA OF THE ~~CHRIST~~ PATTERN AND POTENTIAL
WITHIN YOU, / ~~AND WHEN~~ ^{WILL} YOU ^{WILL} BEGIN TO SEE THAT YOU
ARE THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD, / AND ^{THAT} THE GOAL OF YOUR

LIFE/IS TO LET YOUR LIGHT SHINE,/TO REACH OUT AND
LET YOUR LIFE/BE AS A PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL./~~BE~~
^{WILL ACTUALLY} YOU BECOME WHAT YOU WANT TO SHARE.

IT IS ONE OF THE GREATEST IDEAS/THAT HAVE EVER
BEEN EXPRESSED../THAT THERE IS A PERSON GOD-SIZE
/WITHIN THE SOUL OF EVERY ONE OF US./ PAUL SAID
IT,/'CHRIST IN YOU YOUR HOPE OF GLORY.'

THERE ARE MANY BEAUTIFUL STORIES ABOUT CHRISTMAS.
I THINK MY FAVOURITE OF ALL/IS FULTON OURSLER'S
'A STRING OF BLUE BEADS'./ ^{MAY} YOU HAVE HEARD IT BE-
FORE/~~REMEMBER, WE GO MANY TIMES TO A PERFORMANCE~~
~~OF 'LA BOHEME' /OR OF BEETHOVEN'S NINTH SYMPHONY.~~
SO AGAIN, HERE IS 'A STRING OF BLUE BEADS.'

► PETE RICHARDS WAS THE/LONELIEST PERSON IN TOWN/
ON THE DAY JEAN GRACE/OPENED THE DOOR TO HIS
SHOP./ PETE'S SMALL BUSINESS/HAD COME DOWN TO
HIM FROM HIS GRANDFATHER./ THE LITTLE/FRONT
WINDOW/WAS STREWN WITH A DISARRAY/OF OLD FASH-
IONED THINGS../BRACELETS AND LOCKETS/WORN IN THE
DAYS BEFORE THE CIVIL WAR,/GOLD RINGS AND SILVER

BOXES, / IMAGES OF JADE AND IVORY, ^{and} PORCELAIN FIGURINES.

ON THIS WINTER'S AFTERNOON A CHILD WAS STANDING THERE, / HER FOREHEAD AGAINST THE GLASS, / ERNEST AND ENORMOUS EYES / STUDYING EACH DISCARDED TREASURE / AS IF SHE WERE LOOKING FOR SOMETHING QUITE SPECIAL. / FINALLY, SHE STRAIGHTENED UP / WITH A SATISFIED AIR / AND ENTERED THE STORE.

BEHIND THE COUNTER / STOOD PETE HIMSELF, / A MAN NOT MORE THAN 30, / BUT WITH HAIR / ALREADY TURNING GREY, / THERE WAS A BLEAK AIR ABOUT HIM / AS HE LOOKED AT THE SMALL CUSTOMER / WHO FLATTENED HER UNGLOVED HANDS ON THE COUNTER.

'MISTER', SHE BEGAN, / 'WOULD YOU PLEASE LET ME LOOK / AT THAT STRING OF BLUE BEADS / IN THE ~~BOX~~ WINDOW?' / PETE PARTED THE DRAPERIES / AND LIFTED OUT THE NECKLACE. / THE TURQUOISE STONES / GLEAMED BRIGHTLY AGAINST THE PALLOR OF HIS PALM.

'THEY'RE JUST PERFECT' / SAID THE CHILD, / 'WILL YOU WRAP THEM UP PRETTY FOR ME, / PLEASE?' / PETE STUDIED HER WITH A STONY AIR, / 'ARE YOU BUYING THESE FOR SOMEONE?'

'THEY'RE FOR MY BIG SISTER. / ..SHE TAKES CARE OF ME. / YOU SEE, THIS WILL BE / THE FIRST CHRISTMAS SINCE

MOTHER DIED./ I'VE BEEN LOOKING FOR THE/MOST
WONDERFUL CHRISTMAS PRESENT/FOR MY SISTER.'/

'HOW MUCH MONEY DO YOU HAVE?'/ASKED PETE WARILY

SHE HAD~~BE~~ BEEN BUSILY/UNTYING THE KNOT IN THE
HANDKERCHIEF,/AND NOW SHE POURED/A HANDFUL OF
PENNIES ON THE COUNTER. / 'I EMPTIED MY BANK...
SHE EXPLAINED SIMPLY.

PETE RICHARDS LOOKED AT HER THOUGHTFULLY./ THEN
HE CAREFULLY DREW BACK THE NECKLACE/-THE PRICE
TAG WAS VISIBLE TO HIM/BUT ~~NOT~~ NOT TO HER./ HOW
COULD HE TELL HER? / BUT THEN...IN A FLASH SOME-
THING HAPPENED TO HIM,/THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS
ENTERED HIS HEART/FOR THE FIRST TIME IN MANY A
YEAR./HE FELT WARMLY SUPPORTED/BY A LOVING PRE-
SENCE,/THE CHRISTMAS PRESENCE. / SO HE FOUND HIMSELF
THINKING,/'WHY SHOULD I TELL HER?'...

SO HE WRAPPED THE PACKAGE IN SCARLET PAPER/AND
TIED IT WITH A BOW OF GREEN RIBBON./ 'THERE YOU
ARE./..DON'T LOSE IT ON THE WAY HOME.'

SHE SMILED HAPPILY AT HIM OVER HER SHOULDER/AS
SHE RAN OUT THE DOOR./ SOMETHING ABOUT JEAN
GRACE/AND HER STRING OF BEADS/HAD STIRRED HIM
TO THE DEPTHS/OF A GRIEF THAT WOULD NOT STAY
BURIED./ THE CHILD'S HAIR WAS WHEAT YELLOW,/HER
EYES SEA-BLUE./ PETE HAD BEEN IN LOVE WITH A

GIRL/WITH THE HAIR OF THE SAME YELLOW/AND WITH EYES JUST AS BLUE./ AND THE TURQUOISE NECKLACE/WAS TO HAVE BEEN HERS.

BUT THERE HAD BEEN A RAINY NIGHT/-- A TRAGIC ACCIDENT/-- AND THE LIFE WAS DRAINED OUT OF HIS DREAM./ SINCE THEN PETE RICHARDS/HAD LIVED TOO MUCH WITH HIS GRIEF IN SOLITUDE./

BUT IN THAT MOMENT/AS JEAN GRACE STOOD BEFORE HIM HOPEFULLY,/SOMETHING HAPPENED,/PERHAPS A DOOR HAD OPENED,/AND A NEW SPIRIT HAD ENTERED IN.
.....

DURING THE NEXT TEN DAYS/BUSINESS WAS BRISK/-- AND WHEN ~~THE~~ LAST CUSTOMER HAD GONE,/LATE ON CHRISTMAS EVE,/HE SIGHED WITH RELIEF,/FOR IT WAS OVER FOR ANOTHER YEAR./ BUT FOR PETER RICHARDS/IT WAS NOT QUITE OVER!

THE DOOR OPENED/AND A YOUNG WOMAN HURRIED IN./ HE REALIZED THAT/SHE LOOKED FAMILIAR,/YET HE/COULD NOT REMEMBER WHERE OR WHEN HE HAD SEEN HER BEFORE. HER HAIR WAS A GOLDEN YELLOW/AND HER LARGE EYES WERE BLUE./ WITHOUT SPEAKING/SHE DREW FROM HER PURSE A PACKAGE/LOOSELY UNWRAPPED IN ITS RED PAPER AND GREEN RIBBON./ PRESENTLY THE STRING OF BLUE BEADS LAY GLEAMING BEFORE HIM.

'DID ~~THESE~~ COME FROM YOUR SHOP?'/ 'YES, THEY DID.'/ 'ARE THE STONES REAL? / 'YES. NOT THE FINEST

QUALITY; BUT REAL. / 'CAN YOU REMEMBER WHO IT WAS YOU SOLD THEM TO?'. / 'SHE WAS A SMALL GIRL. / HER NAME WAS JEAN. / SHE BOUGHT THEM FOR HER OLDER SISTER'S CHRISTMAS PRESENT.' / 'HOW MUCH ARE THEY WORTH?'. / 'THE PRICE,' / HE SAID, 'IS ALWAYS A CONFIDENTIAL MATTER / BETWEEN THE SELLER AND ~~THE~~ ~~BOOKS~~ CUSTOMER.' / 'BUT JEAN NEVER HAD MORE / THAN A FEW PENNIES OF SPENDING MONEY. / HOW COULD SHE PAY FOR THEM?'

'SHE PAID ~~THE~~ BIGGEST PRICE / ANYONE CAN EVER PAY, / SHE GAVE ALL SHE HAD.' ...

A SILENCE FILLED THE LITTLE CURIO SHOP. / IN SOME FARAWAY STEEPLE, / A BELL BEGAN TO RING. / THE SOUND OF THE DISTANT CHIMING, / ~~THE~~ LITTLE PACKAGE LYING ON THE COUNTER, / THE QUESTION IN THE EYES OF THE GIRL. / ..AND THE STRANGE FEELING / OF RENEWAL / STRUGGLING UNREASONABLY IN THE HEART OF THE MAN. / ..ALL HAD COME TO BE / BECAUSE OF THE LOVE OF A CHILD.

'BUT WHY DID YOU DO IT?'. / HE HELD OUT / THE GIFT IN HIS HAND. / 'IT'S ALREADY CHRISTMAS MORNING' / ~~HE~~ SAID, / 'AND IT IS MY MISFORTUNE THAT I HAVE NO ONE TO GIVE ANYTHING TO. / WILL YOU LET ME SEE YOU HOME, / AND WISH YOU A MERRY CHRISTMAS / AT THE DOOR?'

AND SO, / TO THE SOUND OF MANY BELLS, / AND IN THE MIDST OF HAPPY PEOPLE, / PETE RICHARDS / AND A GIRL WHOSE NAME HE HAD YET TO LEARN / WALKED OUT INTO

THE BEGINNING/OF THE GREAT DAY THAT BRINGS HOPE
INTO THE WORLD FOR US ALL.'

(FULTON OURSLER'S
'A STRING OF BLUE BEADS')

HENRY VICTOR MORGAN, IN THE CLOSING LINES OF HIS
LOVELY POEM, 'A MAN GOD-SIZE'.....

'SO WE WAIT TODAY AND DEEPLY PRAY
IN THE MIDST OF EARTH'S NOISE AND FUSS,
FOR ONE TO ARISE, IN LOVE GOD-SIZE
IN THE HEART OF EACH ONE OF 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/ BELONGS TO AN
ORDER OF LIFE/ NOT YET ATTAINED,/ A GLIMPSE OF THE
HUMAN RACE/ THAT IS YET TO BE. ^{& SEE BELOW} CHRISTMAS IS MORE
THAN A DAY OF OUTER CELEBRATION./ IT IS CHRISTMAS
WHenever/ AND WHEREVER/ THE HUMAN HEART,/ IMMERSED
IN THE AWARENESS OF THE CHRISTMAS PRESENCE,/ IS
MOVED TO THE EXPRESSION OF UNSELFISH LOVE./

MAN AT QUAKER MEETING FIRST TIME. LONG SILENCE...
'WHEN DOES SERVICE BEGIN?' 'WHEN MEETING IS, OVER.