

Yankee Steve's Column

for the Week of December 25, 2008

A Christmas Message

No one knows the exact birth date of Jesus. What we do know is that if Jesus had not come into the world it would be a darker place than it is now.

The Hebrew prophet was on to something when he wrote "The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light." [Isaiah 9:2a] Notice how strong the language of the prophet is. Darkness was all they knew. An apostle captured the same idea when writing to new converts. He stated boldly that before believing they "were darkness." [Ephesians 5:8a]

The trouble with the world is that not everyone has seen the light. This is why the condominium community in which I live has surrendered to political correctness. For the last two years it has displayed a sign which says "Holiday Party." I am quite certain that once upon a time this was a Christmas party, but now it is an event in which the word "Christmas" has to be whispered.

I would imagine that this did not come about because anyone complained, but because someone **might** complain, or because our contemporaries are willing to offend a thousand followers of the Prince of Peace so they can give the effete the impression that they believe that every culture is as good as every other.

Try and tell the seventh century Egyptians who witnessed Muslim Caliphs burn down the Alexandrian library, the greatest library ever assembled to that point in history, and all because it might disagree with the *Koran*, or if it did agree, the agreement rendered it superfluous.

When it comes to the way people are reluctant to walk in the light as they once comfortably sat in darkness, Dr. John Lang, a theologian from a bygone era, gives us an illustration from the Black Forest of Germany. I understand the forest is dark, so black that it resembles our contemporary scene. There should be no doubt this is the darkest period in American history.

At dawn Lang says that light began to streak across the woodland floor. He noticed that some birds that had been asleep flew into the sun to begin their day; while others flew off to some shadowy hollow of the forest so they could continue to live in darkness.

The world divides at this point. For some the light is not welcome, for others it speaks to them of something altogether new and different. Because the light has come we can now discern the difference between light and darkness. And if so, we can engaged ourselves doing things in the brightness of day.

Now if Isaiah says people have seen the light, what is that light?

Light can be known, and it is to be anticipated. Light is a lifestyle that harmonizes with the way a good and righteous God would have us do things. There is the way of darkness and the way of light.

Interestingly, some who think of themselves as en-lightened are, from the Christian perspective, en-darkened.

Darkness is rationalized in the best terms, but it is darkness nevertheless.

We should read Aristotle. He felt that the everyday man and woman were not stupid which was an improvement on Plato's view.

Aristotle tried to picture what it would be like for blind person to suddenly see his first sunrise. I would imagine that he would be too delighted to speak. I am thinking that his first sight of a sunrise could provide us with a microcosm of what happened when Jesus came into the world.

When Jesus was born, the world saw its first sunrise. Humankind knew that it had seen a "great light," a mega luminary. It should be no surprise that people began to think of time as "before and after" the appearance this light.

Not even the Greeks, who dated their history from the first Olympics in 776 B.C., and who wanted to export their culture, had thought of world history in this kind of before and after sense. The Greeks were satisfied just to speak about the founding and continuance of their own civilization. First there was the archaic period and then the modern period. On the other hand, when Jesus came into the world the Christian timetable became the standard for the western world. We have always wanted to fix the exact date of the birth of Jesus, some out of love for Jesus and others because of the impact Jesus has had on civilization.

Now it is B.C. (Before Christ) and A.D.(the Year of our Lord or *Anno Domini*).

This way of diving history has continued up to the present through the time when our American forefathers penned Article VII of the U.S. Constitution as ". . . the year of our Lord one thousand, seven hundred and eighty-seven."

I am curious, what was there about Jesus that moved men to think of the world in this before and after sense which has often been imitated but never truly duplicated?

It has been imitated - before and after Mohammed, before and after Copernicus, before and after Kant, before and after Darwin, and most importantly, before and after the communist Karl Marx whose death was within a year [1882-83] of the evolutionist Charles Darwin. (It was only fitting that they should die at about the same time and both in England since Marxism, forced collectivism and the redistribution of wealth, is linked to evolution by the way it supposedly prepared the world for Marxism. Darwin should be considered Marx's facilitator.)

We sometimes think that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. Rather than give the impression that they want to imitate Jesus certain individuals have changed B.C. and A. D. to B.C.E. (Before Common Era) and C.E. (Common Era). This they believe is an improvement on Jesus.

I would like to challenge them on this point. I want them to recognize that the Greeks were never able to sell the notion that the world's timetable should read B.T. and A.T., Before Thales and After Thales (the first philosopher and physicist of note).

Why didn't instigators of this new calendar not use Thales of Miletus as the cut-off for the ancient age? Along with his student Anaximander, Thales attributed the ascendancy of man not to the gods of mythology, but to evolution and the processes of natural laws. Religion could no longer be relied on to explain reality; therefore it had become unnecessary. Certainly Thales' theory was radical enough to make the world think that man had crossed the Rubicon River and that humankind would never be the same again. So why then do we not date according to B.T. and A.T.?

I know why. There has never been anyone like Jesus. The people who sat in darkness really did see a great light. The halt of gladiatorial contests, the hospital movement, the repudiation of pagan rites, not to mention a host of other improvements that have benefited us, have their source in the timely advent of Jesus. This explains why we divide history into before and after Christ.

So we ask - what if there had never been a Bethlehem? It's worth considering. What if Phillips Brooks could not have written the following?

*O little town of Bethlehem,
How still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
The silent stars go by.
Yet in thy dark streets shineth
The everlasting Light;
The hopes and fears of all the years
Are met in thee tonight.*

Just think if it were B.C. all over again! What would it be like if the Greek gods of Homer were our light, those gods who stood above the law and who were as arbitrary as they wished?

The gods of Homer were so inferior that one philosopher said that the poet ought to be flogged, and Socrates, who always had to have his say, declared that the gods have left us without a worthy example.

Or suppose there was no Jesus at all, and all we were left with was Mohammed [570-632 A.D.]. His God, Allah, fits the very definition of arbitrary. Allah can do as he pleases with you even when you obey him. And just like Zeus, he is above the law. Allah can be as arbitrary and cruel as he wants because he will not tolerate any covenant, for to do so would mean that his nature has been revealed. In Islam, the biblical idea of covenants is strictly taboo.

As a matter of fact you dare not call Allah, your heavenly father, because earthly fathers are pledged to care for you by a fatherly covenant.

And so I ask, can you imagine the patriarch Abraham addressing Allah in the way he addressed the Lord God in Genesis? **“Far be it from you** to do such a thing - to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?” [Gen. 18:25]

Abraham places demands on God. And all because he is certain that his deity must conform to Himself because He cannot be arbitrary. Light has to be what it is, light. That is what the phrase “far be it from you” means.

“Far be it from you” means that the light does not have the liberty that darkness has - to act as it might wish, when it wants. There are shades of darkness, but “God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.” [1 John 1:5] It is impossible for God to be what He is not.

Light cannot follow the path of the moral relativist, lying when expedient and altering the rules to fit the situation. Nor can light imitate darkness in the way darkness is forced to imitate light to gain fabricated respectability or manipulate circumstances. Far be it from light to do anything other than conform to what it has always been.

Muslims talk about Abraham, but unlike their patriarch they dare not ask Allah to conform to himself. This helps to explain why the followers of Mohammed have acted as if their prophet, like their deity, could be above the law. His crimes make you shudder.

How different from Mohammed was Jesus who never placed Himself above the law. Light must be true to itself. If you read about Mohammed, and then read about Jesus in the gospels, what will you find?

In the gospel narratives you will come away with the impression that the people who sat in darkness have not just seen another star: a Thales, a Buddha, a Confucius, a Socrates, or a Mohammed. They have seen “the true light” who John the apostle said can “cast light on any and everyone who comes into the world.” All who think themselves enlightened should look to Jesus.

There is light, and this light can be known. Its source is Jesus who is “life” and remains “the light of men.”

Now that is a “great light!” Let us then, as in the Christmas carol, see our towns and souls shining in His everlasting light.

To all my dear readers, MERRY CHRISTMAS!

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