

**ET INCARNATUS EST:  
THE TIME CYCLE OF HISTORIC EVENTS**

**BY**

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*Rembrandt van Rijn: "Adoration by the shepherds" after St. Luke*

The duration of the life of Christ became a rhythmic cycle for humankind itself. In our lives it begins with Christmas each year and completes itself at Easter 33 years later. Steiner explores these cycles of historic events, showing how seeds planted during the twelve nights of Christmas bear their fruit lawfully.

# **Et Incarnatus Est:**

## **The Time Cycle of Historic Events**

*Held in Basel, Switzerland, in the Christmas Season of 1917*

A truth, intimately united with human aspiration and for centuries closely associated in the human heart with the festival whose modern symbol is the Christmas tree, is expressed in the words that have resounded ever since the time of the Mystery of Golgotha and that must be impressed still more deeply into the evolution of the earth. This truth, which has shone down through the ages, is associated with the words, “*et incarnatus est de spiritu sancto ex Maria virgine*” (“and is born of the Holy Spirit from the Virgin Mary”).

Most of the people of today seem to attach just as little significance to these words as they do to the Easter mystery of the Resurrection. We might even say that the central mystery of Christianity, the resurrection from the dead, appears to modern thought, which is no longer directed to the truths of the spiritual world, just as incredible as the Christmas mystery, the mystery of the Word becoming flesh, the mystery of the virgin birth. The greater part of modern humanity is much more in sympathy with the scientist who described the virgin birth as “an impertinent mockery of human reason” than with those who desire to take this mystery in a spiritual sense.

Nevertheless, my dear friends, the mystery of the incarnation by the Holy Spirit through the Virgin begins to exert its influence from the time of the Mystery of Golgotha; in another sense it had made itself felt before this event.

Those who brought the symbolic gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh to the babe lying in the manger knew of the Christmas mystery of the virgin birth through the ancient science of the stars. The magi who brought the gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh were, in the sense of the ancient wisdom, astrologers they had knowledge of those spiritual processes that work in the cosmos when certain signs appear in the starry heavens. One such sign they recognized when, in the night between December 24 and 25, in the year that we today regard as that of the birth of Jesus, the sun, the cosmic symbol of the Redeemer, shone toward the earth from the constellation of Virgo. They said, “When the constellation of the heavens is such that the sun stands in Virgo in the night between December 24 and 25, then an important change will take place in the earth. Then the time will have come for us to bring gold, the symbol of our knowledge of divine guidance, which hitherto we have sought only in the stars, to that impulse which now becomes part of the earthly evolution of mankind. Then the time will have come for us to offer frankincense, the emblem of sacrifice, the symbol of the highest human virtue. This virtue must be offered in such a way that it is united with the power proceeding from the Christ Who is to be incarnated in that human being to whom we bring the frankincense.

“And the third gift, the myrrh, is the symbol of the eternal in man, which we have felt for thousands of years to be connected with the powers that speak to us from starry constellations; we seek it further by bringing it as a gift to him who is to be a new impulse for humanity; through this we seek our own immortality, in that we unite our own souls with the impulse of the Christ. When the cosmic symbol of world power, the sun, shines in the constellation of Virgo, then a new time begins for the earth.”

This was the belief held for thousands of years, and as the magi felt compelled to lay at the feet of the Holy Child the wisdom of the gods, the virtues of man, and the realization of human immortality, symbolically expressed in the gold,

frankincense, and myrrh, something was repeated as a historical event that had been expressed symbolically in innumerable mysteries and in countless sacrificial rituals for thousands of years. There had been presented in these mysteries and rituals a prophetic indication of the event that would take place when the sun stood at midnight between December 24 and 25 in the sign of the Virgin, for gold, frankincense, and myrrh were also offered on this holy night, to the symbol of the divine child preserved in ancient temples as the representation of the sun.

Thus, my dear friends, for nearly two thousand years the Christian words, “*incarnatus de spiritu sancto ex Maria virgine*” have resounded in the world, and so it has been ever since human thought has existed on the earth. In our times we can now present the question, “Do human beings really know to what they should aspire when they celebrate Christmas?” Does there exist today a real consciousness of the fact that, out of cosmic heights, under a cosmic sign, a cosmic power appeared through a virgin birth — spiritually understood — and that the blazing candles on the Christmas tree should light up in our hearts an understanding of the fact that the human soul is most intimately and inwardly united with an event that is not merely an earthly but a cosmic earthly event? The times are grave, and it is necessary in such serious times to give serious answers to solemn questions, such as the one raised here. With this in mind we will take a glance at the thoughts of the leading people of the nineteenth century to see whether the idea of Christ Jesus has lived in modern humanity in such a way as to give rise to the thought: the Christmas mystery has its significance in the fact that man wills to celebrate something eternal in the light of the Christmas candles.

Firstly we will take the words of a writer, Ernst Renan, who has given much study to the personality of Jesus and who has tried to give a picture of Christ Jesus out of the consciousness of the nineteenth century. We will listen to some

of the voices of leading thinkers of the nineteenth century. Ernst Renan regarded the cities of Palestine with his physical eyes in true materialistic fashion. He desired to awaken in his own soul, from a materialistic standpoint, a picture of the personality known through the centuries as the Redeemer of the world. This is what he says:

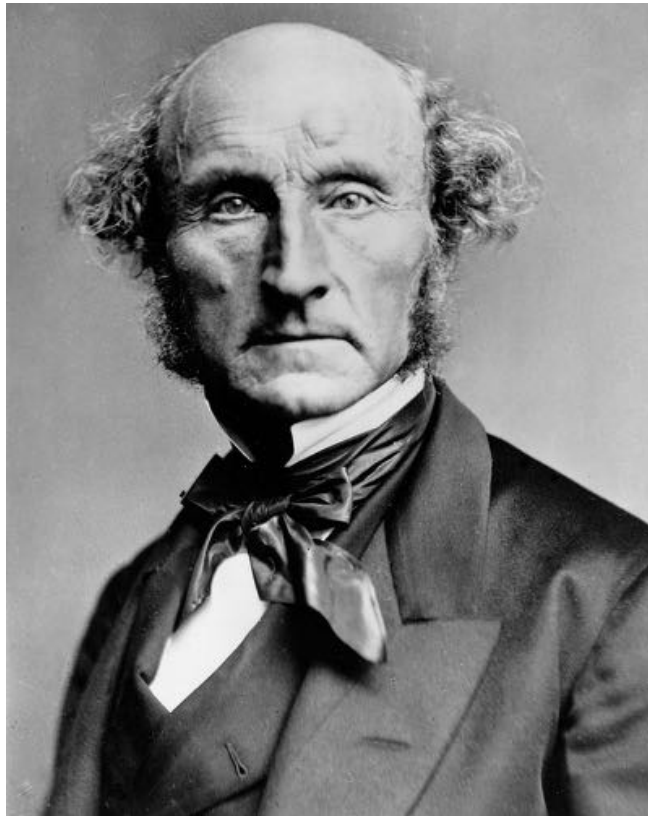
“A beautiful outer nature tended to produce a much less austere spirit — a spirit less sharply monotheistic, if I may use the expression — which imprinted a charming and idyllic character on all the dreams of Galilee. The saddest country in the world is perhaps the region round about Jerusalem. Galilee, on the other hand, was a green, shady, smiling district, the true home of the Song of Songs, and the songs of the well-beloved. During the months of March and April the country forms a carpet of flowers of an incomparable variety of colors. The animals are small and exceedingly gentle — delicate and lively turtle doves, blue birds so light that they rest on a blade of grass without bending it, crested larks that venture almost under the feet of the traveler, little river tortoises with mild, lively eyes, storks with grave and modest mien, which, laying aside all timidity, allow man to come near them, seem almost to invite his approach.”

Ernst Renan never tires of describing this idyll of Galilee, so remote from the world's historic events, so as to make it seem natural that in this idyll, in this unpretentious landscape, with its turtle doves and storks, those things could happen that humanity for centuries has associated with the life of the Savior of the world.

So, my dear friends, that truth from which the earth received its meaning, the truth toward which humanity has looked for centuries, is attractive to a thinker of the nineteenth century only as an idyll with turtle doves and storks.

Ernst Renan proceeds, “The whole history of infant Christianity has become in this manner a delightful pastorage. A Messiah at the marriage festival, the

courtesan and the good Zaccheus called to his feasts, the founders of the Kingdom of Heaven like a bridal procession — that is what Galilee has boldly offered and what the world has accepted.”



*John Stuart Mill (1806-1873). British philosopher, political economist and civil servant, influential contributor to social theory, political theory and political economy. He has been called "the most influential English-speaking philosopher of the nineteenth century." Mill's conception of liberty justified the freedom of the individual in opposition to unlimited state control*

This, my dear friends, is one of the voices of the nineteenth century. Let us listen now to another, the voice of **John Stuart Mill** (1806-1873), who also desires to find his way from the consciousness of the nineteenth century to the being whom humanity for hundreds of years, and to the prophetic mind of man for thousands of years, has recognized as the Savior of the world.

John Stuart Mill says, “Whatever the rationalist may destroy of Christianity, Christ remains, a unique figure as different from his predecessors as from his successors, and even from those who enjoyed the privilege of his personal instruction. This estimate is not diminished if we say the Christ of the Gospels is not historical, for we are not in a position to know how much of what is worthy in Him has been added by His followers, for who among His disciples, or their followers, has been able to think out the speeches ascribed to Jesus, or to imagine a life and personality such as is portrayed in the Gospels? Certainly not the fisher-folk from Galilee, nor even St. Paul, whose whole character and inclination are of quite another kind, nor the early Christian writers. The kind of words that could be added and inserted by a scholar can be seen in the mystical part of the Gospel of St. John, who borrowed words from Philo and the Platonists of Alexandria and put them into the mouth of the Savior, who said many things about Himself of which not the slightest trace appears in the other Gospels. The East was full of people who could have stolen any number of such sayings, even as the many sects of the Gnostics did in later times. The life and teachings of Jesus, however, bear the stamp and impression of such profundity and personal originality that, if we deny ourselves the expectation of finding scientific exactitude, the prophet of Nazareth is placed in the foremost rank of venerated people of whom the human race may boast, even in the estimation of those who do not believe his divine inspiration. As this extraordinary spirit was equipped with the qualities of the greatest reformers and martyrs who have ever lived on earth, we cannot say that religion has made a bad choice” (Made a choice! We even choose in the nineteenth century!) “that religion has made a bad choice in setting up this man as an ideal representative and leader of humanity; also it would not be easy, even for an unbeliever, to find a better way of giving concrete expression to the abstract laws of virtue than to accept Christ as the model for our way of living. If, finally, we admit that even for the skeptic there remains the possibility that Christ was actually the person He said He was



— not God; He never made the slightest claim to that; He would have seen in such a claim as great a blasphemy as would the people who judged Him — but the man expressly entrusted by God with the unique mission of leading humanity to truth and virtue, we may surely conclude that the influences of religion upon character, which would remain after the rationalistic critic had done his utmost against religion, are worthy of retention and, though they may lack direct proof as compared with other beliefs for which better evidence exists, the greater truth and correctness of their morality more than compensate for this lack.”



*Christian Johann Heinrich Heine (1797-1856), German poet, journalist, essayist, and literary critic. He is best known outside Germany for his early lyric poetry, which was set to music in the form of Lieder (art songs) by composers such as Robert Schumann and Franz Schubert. Heine's later verse and prose are distinguished by their satirical wit and irony. His radical political views led to many of his works being banned by German authorities. Heine spent the last 25 years of his life as an expatriate in Paris.*

There we have the picture that the rationalists of the nineteenth century, by denying their own spirit, have given to that being that humanity for centuries has recognized as the Savior of the world. Let us hear another voice, the voice of the international spirit, **Heinrich Heine**, and what he has to say:

“Christ is the God whom I love most, not because He is a God by inheritance, whose Father was God who had ruled the universe from time immemorial, but because He had no love for courtly, ceremonial display, although He was born the prince of heaven; I love Him because He was no aristocratic God, no panoplied knight, but a humble God of the people, a God of the town, a good citizen. Verily if Christ were not a God, I would choose Him for one and would much rather listen to Him, the God of my choice, than to a self-decreed, absolute God.”

“Only so long as religions have to struggle with each other in rivalry, and are more persecuted than followed, are they beautiful and worthy of veneration, only then do we see enthusiasm, sacrifice, martyrs, and palms. How beautiful, holy, and loveable, how heavenly sweet was the Christianity of the first centuries, as it sought to equal its divine founder in the heroism of His suffering — there still remained the beautiful legend of a heavenly God who in mild and youthful form wandered under the palms of Palestine preaching human love and revealing the teaching of freedom and equality — the sense of which was recognized by some of the greatest thinkers, and which has had its influence in our times through the French Gospel” (of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity).

Here we have this Heine Creed which regarded Him, whom humanity for centuries has recognized as the Redeemer of the world, as worthy of praise because we ourselves would have chosen Him, in our democratic fashion, even if He had not already held that exalted position, and because He preached the

same Gospel as was preached later, at the end of the eighteenth century. He was therefore good enough to be as great as those who understood this Gospel.



***Karl Robert Eduard von Hartmann** 1842-1906) was the author of: “The Philosophy of the Unconscious” (1869). The conception of the Unconscious, by which von Hartmann describes his ultimate metaphysical principle, is fundamentally not as paradoxical as it sounds, being merely a new and mysterious designation for the Absolute of German metaphysicians*

Let us take another thinker of the nineteenth century. You know that I think very highly of **Edward von Hartmann** (1842-1906). I mention only those whom I do admire in order to show the manner in which the thought of the nineteenth century about Christ Jesus expressed itself.

“We see,” says Edward von Hartmann, the philosopher, “that the spiritual faculties of Jesus could not have achieved such good results without the magic of an impressive and loveable personality. This personality was endowed with unusual oratorical power, but His quiet majesty and personal tenderness must have been extraordinarily charming to his followers, not only to the men but to the women who made up so large a part of his following, in which prostitutes

(Luke 7:37), married women of high rank (Luke 8:3), and young maidens of all classes mingled without discrimination. They were mostly eccentric persons, the epileptic, hysterical, or crazy, who believed themselves to be healed by Him. It is a well-known fact that such women are very prone to project or individualize their religious emotions and enthusiasms onto the person of an attractive male whom they proceed to make the center of a cult. Nothing is more obvious than that these women were of such a kind and that even if they did not awaken in Jesus the idea of His Messiah-ship, yet it was so nourished by their adoring homage that it struck deep roots. According to modern psychological and psychiatric opinion it is not possible for healthy religious feeling to flourish in such unhealthy soil, and today we would advise any religious reformer or prophet to shake off such elements in his following as much as possible, for they would merely end in compromising both him and his mission.”



*Paul Johann Ludwig von Heyse (1830 -1914) was a distinguished German writer and translator. A member of two important literary societies, the “Tunnel über der Spree” in Berlin and “Die Krokodile” in Munich, he wrote novels, poetry, short stories, and sixty dramas. The sum of Heyse's many and varied productions made him a dominant figure among German men of letters. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1910. Wirsén, one of the Nobel judges, said that "Germany has not had a greater literary genius since Goethe."*

Yet another voice I wish to quote, the voice of one of the principal characters in a romance that exercised a wide and powerful influence during the latter third of the nineteenth century over the judgment of the so-called “educated” humanity. In **Paul Heyse**’s book, “Die Kinder der Welt”, the diary of Lea, one of the characters in the book, is reproduced. It contains a criticism of Christ Jesus, and those who know the world well will recognize in this judgment of Lea's one which was common to large numbers of human beings in the nineteenth century. Paul Heyse has Lea write, “The day before yesterday I stopped writing because

an impulse drove me to read the New Testament once again. I had not opened the New Testament for a long time; it had been a long time since its many threatening, damning, and incomprehensible speeches had estranged and repelled my heart. Now that I have lost that childish fear, and the voice of an infallible and all-knowing spirit can be heard, since I have seen therein the history of one of the noblest and most wonderful of human beings, I have found much that greatly refreshed and comforted me.

“But its somber mood again made me depressed. What is more liberating, gracious, and comforting than joy in the beauty, goodness, and serenity of the world, yet while we are reading this book (the New Testament) we hover in a twilight of expectation and hope, the eternal is never fulfilled, it will only dawn when we have struggled through time; the full glory of joy never shines, there is no pleantry, no laughter — the joy of this world is vanity — we are directed to a future that makes the present worthless, and the highest earthly joy of sinking ourselves deep in pure and loving thoughts is also open to suspicion, for only those can enter heaven who are poor in spirit. I am such a one, but it makes me unhappy to feel so, yet at the same time if I could break through this limitation I should no longer be what I am, thus my salvation and blessedness are not certain, for what transcends me is no longer. And then this mild, God-conscious man, in order to belong to the whole human race, departed from his own people with such strange hardness that he became a homeless one — it had to be so, but it chilled my feeling. Everything great that I had formerly loved, even when shrouded in majesty, was yet happily and comfortably linked with my being by ties of human need.”



*Martin Luther (1483-1546) was a German friar, Catholic priest, professor of theology and seminal figure of the 16th-century movement in Christianity known later as the Protestant Reformation] Initially an Augustinian friar, Luther came to reject several teachings and practices of the Roman Catholic Church.*

Here you see the New Testament represented as it had to be if it was to provide satisfaction to such a typical person of the nineteenth century. Thus she says that everything great that she had formerly loved, even when shrouded in majesty, was yet happily and comfortably linked with her being by ties of human need. Because the New Testament contains a power that cannot be described in these terms, therefore, the Gospel failed to meet the needs of a person of the nineteenth century.



*Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) was a German writer, poet, novelist, play-writer, dramaturge and states man. He also worked as an actor, administrator, scientist, geologist, botanist and philosopher. He influenced many 19th century writers and thinkers. His contributions to science include his work in botany and his Theory of Colors. Famous lines from his books are often quoted, and some of his phrases have become part of the German language. His poems were set to music by composers like Franz Schubert, Schumann, Johannes Brahms, Wolf, and Richard Strauss.*

“When I read the letters of Goethe, of the narrow home life of **Schiller** (1759-1805), of **Marten Luther** and his followers, of all the ancients back to Socrates and his scolding wife — I sense a breath of Mother Earth, from which the seed of their spirit grew, which also nourishes and uplifts mine own which is so much smaller.” Lea thus finds herself more drawn even to characters like Xanthippe



than to the people of the New Testament, and this was the opinion of thousands and thousands of people in the nineteenth century.



*Johann Christoph Friedrich von Schiller (1759-1805), one of Germany most prominent writer, poet, philosopher and historian. Many of his theatrical are still standard repertoire of German theatre. With Goethe, Wieland and Herder Schiller belongs to the most important “Weimer Tradition.”*

“But this picture of a world forlorn alarms and estranges me, and I am unable to justify it by any belief that everything is guided and ordered by God.”

It is fitting, my dear friends, to ask in these grave times what is really the attitude of soul of people today with regard to the candles they burn at Christmas? For this attitude of soul is a complex of such voices as we have just examined and that could be multiplied a hundred or thousand fold. But it is not fitting in serious times to ignore and disregard the things that have been said about the greatest mystery of earthly evolution. It is much more fitting today to ask what the official representatives of the many Christian sects are able to do to check a development that has led human beings right away from an inwardly

true and genuine belief in that which stands behind the lights of Christmas time. For can humanity make of such a festival anything but a lie, when the opinions just quoted from its best representatives are imposed upon that which should be perceived through the Christmas mystery as an impulse coming from the cosmos to unite itself with earthly evolution? What did the magi from the East desire when they brought divine gifts of wisdom, virtue, and immortality to the manger, after the event whose sign had appeared to them in the skies during the night between December 24 and 25 in the first year of our era? What was it these wise men from the East wished to do? They wanted, by this act, to furnish direct historical proof that they had grasped the fact that, from this time onward, those powers who had hitherto radiated their forces down to earth from the cosmos were no longer accessible to man in the old way — that is, by gazing into the skies, by study of the starry constellations. They wished to show that man must now begin to give attention to the events of historical evolution, to social development, to the manners and customs of humanity itself. They wished to show that Christ had descended from heavenly regions where the sun shines in the constellation of Virgo, a region from which all the varied powers of the starry constellations proceed that enable the microcosm to appear as a copy of the macrocosm. They wished to show that this spirit now enters directly into earthly evolution, that earthly evolution can henceforth be understood only by inner wisdom, in the same way as the starry constellations were formerly understood. This was what the magi wished to show, and of this fact the humanity of today must ever be aware.

People of today tend to regard history as though the earlier were invariably the cause of the latter, as though in order to understand the events of the years 1914 to 1917 we need simply go back to 1913, 1912, 1911, and so on; historical development is regarded in the same way as evolution in nature, in which we can proceed from effect to impulse and in the impulse find the cause. From this

method of thinking, that fable convene which we call history has arisen, with which the youth of today are being inoculated to their detriment.

True Christianity, especially a reverent and sincere insight into the mysteries of Christmas and Easter, provides a sharp protest against this natural scientific caricature of world history. Christianity has brought cosmic mysteries into association with the course of the year; on December 24 and 25 it celebrates a memory of the original constellation of the year 1, the appearance of the sun in the constellation of Virgo; this date in every year is celebrated as the Christmas festival. This is the point in time that the Christian concept has fixed for the Christmas festival. The Easter festival is also established each year by taking a certain celestial arrangement, for we know that the Sunday that follows the first full moon after the vernal equinox is the chosen day, though the materialistic outlook of the present time is responsible for recent objections to this arrangement.

To those who wish, reverently and sincerely, to tune their thoughts in harmony with the Mystery of Golgotha, the period between Christmas and Easter is seen as a picture of the thirty-three years of Christ's life on earth. Previous to the Mystery of Golgotha, with which I include the mystery of Christmas, the magi studied the heavens when they wished to investigate the secrets of human evolution or any other mysterious event. They studied the constellations, and the relative positions of the heavenly bodies revealed to them the nature of events taking place upon earth. But at that moment in which they became aware of the important event that was happening on earth, by the sign given to them through the position of the sun in Virgo on December 24 and 25, they said, "From this time onward the heavenly constellations themselves will be directly revealed in human affairs on the earth."

Can the starry constellations be perceived in human affairs? My dear friends, this perception is now demanded of us, the ability to read what is revealed through the wonderful key that is given us in the mysteries of the Christian year, which are the epitome of all the mysteries of the year of other peoples and times. The time interval between Christmas and Easter is to be understood as consisting of thirty-three years. This is the key. What does this mean? That the Christmas festival celebrated this year belongs to the Easter festival that follows thirty-three years later, while the Easter festival we celebrate this year belongs to the Christmas of 1884. In 1884 humanity celebrated a Christmas festival that really belongs to the Easter of this year (1917), and the Christmas festival we celebrate this year belongs, not to the Easter of next spring but to the one thirty-three years hence (1950). According to our reckoning, this period — thirty-three years — is the period of a human generation, thus a complete generation of humanity must elapse between Christmas festivals and the Easter festivals that are connected with them. This is the key, my dear friends, for reading the new astrology, in which attention is directed to the stars that shine within the historical evolution of humanity itself.

How can this be fulfilled? It can be fulfilled by human beings using the Christmas festival in order to realize that events happening at approximately the present time (we can only say approximately in such matters) refer back in their historical connections in such a way that we are able to perceive their birthdays or beginnings in the events of thirty-three years ago, and that events of today also provide a birthday or beginning for events that will ripen to fruition in the course of the next thirty-three years. Personal karma rules in our individual lives. In this field each one is responsible for himself; here he must endure whatever lies in his karma and must expect a direct karmic connection between past events and their subsequent consequences.

How do things stand, however, with regard to historical associations? Historical connections at the present time are of such a nature that we can neither perceive nor understand the real significance of any event that is taking place today unless we refer back to the time of its corresponding Christmas year, that is 1884 in this case. For the year 1914 we must therefore look back to 1881. All the actions of earlier generations, all the impulses with their combined activity, poured into the stream of historic evolution, have a life cycle of thirty-three year. Then comes its Easter time, the time of resurrection. When was the seed planted whose Easter time was experienced by man in 1914 and after? It was planted thirty-three years before.

Connections that reach over intervals of thirty-three years are essential for an understanding of the time rhythms of historic evolution, and a time must come when people in the holy time that begins with Christmas Eve will say to themselves, “What I do now will continue to work on, but will arise as outer fact or deed (not in a personal but in a historic sense) only after thirty-three years. Furthermore, I can understand what is happening now in the events of the outer world only by looking back across the thirty-three years of time needed for its fulfillment.”

When, at the beginning of the 1880's, the insurrection of the Mohammedan prophet, the Mahdi, resulted in the extension of English rule in Egypt, when at about the same time a war arose through French influence between greater India and China over European spheres of control, when the Congo Conference was being held, and other events of a like nature were taking place — study everything, my dear friends, that has now reached its thirty-three years fulfillment. It was then that the seeds were sown that have ripened into the events of today. At that time the question should have been asked: what do the Christmas events of this year promise for the Easter fulfillment thirty-three years hence? For, my dear friends, all things in historic evolution arise transfigured

after thirty-three years, as from a grave, by virtue of a power connected with the holiest of all redemptions: the Mystery of Golgotha.

It does not suffice, however, to sentimentalize about the Mystery of Golgotha. An understanding of the Mystery of Golgotha demands the highest powers of wisdom of which the human being is capable. It must be experienced by the deepest forces that can stir the soul of man. When he searches its depths for the light kindled by wisdom, when he does not merely speak of love but is enflamed by it through the union of his soul with the cosmic soul that streams and pulses through this turning point of time, only then does he acquire insight and understanding into the mysteries of existence. In days of old the wise men who sought for guidance in the conduct of affairs of human beings asked knowledge of the stars, and the stars gave an answer; so, today, those who wish to act wisely in guiding the social life of humanity must give heed to the stars that rise and set in the course of historic evolution. Just as we calculate the cyclic rotations of celestial bodies, so must we learn to calculate the cyclic rotations of historic events by means of a true science of history. The time-cycles of history can be measured by the interval that extends from Christmas to the Easter thirty-three years ahead, and the spirits of these time-cycles regulate that element in which the human soul lives and weaves in so far as it is not a mere personal being but is part of the warp and woof of historic evolution.

When we meditate on the mystery of Christmas, we do so most effectively if we acquire knowledge of those secrets of life that ought to be revealed in this age in order to enrich the stream of Christian tradition concerning the Mystery of Golgotha and the inner meaning of the Christmas mystery. Christ spoke to humanity in these words, "Lo! I am with you always even to the end of the world." Those, however, who today call themselves His disciples often say that; though the revelations from spiritual worlds were certainly there when Jesus Christ was living on earth, they have now ceased, and they regard as

blasphemous anyone who declares that wonderful revelations can still come to us from the spiritual world. Thus official Christianity has become, in many respects, an actual hindrance to the further development of Christianity.

What has remained, however? The holy symbols, one of the holiest of which is portrayed in the Christmas mystery — these constitute in themselves a living protest against that suppression of true Christianity that is too often practiced by the official churches.

The spiritual science we seek to express through anthroposophy desires, among other things, to proclaim the great significance of the Mystery of Golgotha and the mystery of Christmas. It is also its task to bear witness to that which gives to earth its meaning and to human life its significance. Since the Christmas tree, which is but a few centuries old, has now become the symbol of the Christmas festival, then, my dear friends, those who stand under the Christmas tree should ask themselves this question, “Is the saying true for us that is written by the testimony of history above the Christmas tree: *Et incarnatus est de spiritu sancto ex Maria virgine?* Is this saying true for us?” To realize its truth requires spiritual knowledge. No physical scientist can give answer to the questions of the virgin birth and the resurrection; on the contrary, every scientist must needs deny both events. Such events can only be understood when viewed from a plane of existence in which neither birth nor death plays the important part they do in the physical world. Just as Christ Jesus passed through death in such a way as to make death an illusion and resurrection the reality — this is the content of the Easter mystery — so did Christ Jesus pass through birth in such a way as to render birth an illusion and “transformation of being” within the spiritual world the reality, for in the spiritual world there is neither birth nor death, only changes of condition, only metamorphoses. Not until humanity is prepared to look up to that world in which birth and death both lose their physical meaning will the Christmas and Easter festivals regain their true import and sanctity.



*Rembrandt van Rijn: "Adoration by the Three Kings" after St. Matthew*

Then, and only then, my dear friends, will our hearts and souls be filled with inner warmth of tone, fortified by which we shall be able again to speak to our little ones, to speak to them even in earliest childhood, of that Child who was laid in the manger, and of the three wise men who brought to him their gifts of wisdom, virtue, and immortality. We must be able to speak of these things to children, for what we say to the child about the Christmas mystery will be celebrated by him as an Easter festival it will reappear in his life when he has lived through thirty-three years. For in historical evolution the responsibilities of humanity are such that one generation can only express as Christmas impulse those forces that the next generation will experience as Easter impulse. If we could realize this with consciousness, my dear friends, one generation would



think of its successor in the following way: in the Christmas star I teach you to receive into your soul as truth that which will arise as the Easter star after thirty-three years. If we were conscious of this connection of the present generation and its successor, each one of us could say, “I have received an impulse for work that extends far beyond the limits of the day, for the period between Christmas and Easter is not merely the weeks that lie between these festivals but is really a period of thirty-three years; this is the true cycle of an impulse that I have implanted in the soul of a child as a Christmas impulse, and that after thirty-three years will arise again as an Easter impulse.”

Such things, my dear friends, should not encourage pride in mere theoretical knowledge; they achieve value only when they are expressed in practical deeds, when our souls become so filled with conviction concerning them that we can do nothing but to act according to their light. Only then is the soul filled with love for the great being for whom the deeds, in this light, are done; then this love becomes a concrete thing, filled with cosmic warmth, and quite distinct from that sentimental affectation that we find today on all lips but that has led, in these catastrophic times, to some of the greatest impulses of hatred among humanity. Those who for so long have talked about love have no further right to speak of it when it has turned to hate; to such persons falls rather the duty of asking themselves, “What have we neglected in our talk of love, of Christmas love, that out of it deeds of hatred have developed?” Humanity, however, must also ask, “What must we seek in the spiritual world in order to find that which is lost, that love that rules and lives warmingly in all beings but is only real love when it wells up from a vital understanding of life.”

To love another is to understand him; love does not mean filling one's heart with egotistical warmth that overflows in sentimental speeches; to love means to comprehend the being for whom we should do things, to understand not merely

with the intellect but through our innermost being, to understand with the full nature and essence of our human being.

That such a love, springing from deepest spiritual understanding, may be able to find its place in human life, that desire and will should exist to cherish such love, may still be possible in these difficult times for him who is willing to tread again the path of the magi to the manger. He may say to himself, “Just as the wise men from the East sought understanding to find the way, the way of love, to the manger so will I seek the way that will open my eyes to the light in which the true deeds of human love are performed. Just as the magi surrendered their faith in the authority of the starry heavens, added to their knowledge of the stars their sacrifice of this knowledge, and brought the union of immortality with this stellar wisdom to the Christ Child on that Christmas night, so must humanity in these later times bring its deepest impulses of soul as sacrifice to that being for whom the Christmas festival stands as the yearly symbol. Inspired by such a consciousness, the Christmas festival will again be celebrated by humanity sincerely and truly. Its celebration then will express not a denial but knowledge of that being for whom the Christmas candles are lit.”

## Notes



*Martin Luther (1483-1546)*

**Martin Luther** (1483-1546) was a German friar, Catholic priest, professor of theology and seminal figure of the 16th-century movement in Christianity known later as the Protestant Reformation. Initially an Augustinian friar, Luther came to reject several teachings and practices of the Roman Catholic Church. He strongly disputed the claim that freedom from God's punishment for sin could be purchased with money. He confronted indulgence salesman Johann Tetzel, a Dominican friar, with his Ninety-Five Theses in 1517. His refusal to retract all of his writings at the demand of Pope Leo X in 1520 and the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V at the Diet of Worms in 1521 resulted in his excommunication by the Pope and condemnation as an outlaw by the Emperor.

Luther taught that salvation and subsequently eternity in heaven is not earned by good deeds but is received only as a free gift of God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ as redeemer from sin and subsequently eternity in Hell. His theology challenged the authority of the Pope by teaching that the Bible is the only source of divinely revealed knowledge from God and opposed *sacerdotalism* by considering all baptized Christians to be a holy priesthood. Those who identify with these, and all of Luther's wider teachings, are called Lutherans even though Luther insisted on Christian as the only acceptable name for individuals who professed Christ.



*Martin Luther as an Augustinian friar*

His translation of the Bible into the vernacular (instead of Latin) made it more accessible, which had a tremendous impact on the church and on German culture. It fostered the development of a standard version of the German language, added several principles to the art of translation, and influenced the writing of an English translation, the Tyndale Bible. His hymns influenced the

development of singing in churches. His marriage to Katharina von Bora set a model for the practice of clerical marriage, allowing Protestant priests to marry.

In two of his later works, Luther expressed antagonistic views toward Jews, writing that Jewish synagogues and homes should be destroyed, their money confiscated, and liberty curtailed. These statements and their influence on antisemitism have contributed to his controversial status. Martin Luther died in 1546, still convinced of the correctness of his Reformation theology, and with his decree of excommunication by Pope Leo X still effective. On his deathbed, Luther was asked: "Are you ready to die trusting in your Lord Jesus Christ and to confess the doctrine which you have taught in his name?" He answered "Yes", before taking his final breath.

In 1516, Johann Tetzel, a Dominican friar and papal commissioner for indulgences, was sent to Germany by the Roman Catholic Church to sell indulgences to raise money to rebuild St. Peter's Basilica in Rome.[28] Roman Catholic theology stated that faith alone, whether fiduciary or dogmatic, cannot justify man;[29] justification rather depends only on such faith as is active in charity and good works (*fides caritate formata*). The benefits of good works could be obtained by donating money to the church.

On 31 October 1517, Luther wrote to his bishop, Albert of Mainz, protesting the sale of indulgences. He enclosed in his letter a copy of his "Disputation of Martin Luther on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences", which came to be known as The Ninety-Five Theses. Hans Hillerbrand writes that Luther had no intention of confronting the church, but saw his disputation as a scholarly objection to church practices, and the tone of the writing is accordingly "searching, rather than doctrinaire." Hillerbrand writes that there is nevertheless an undercurrent of challenge in several of the theses, particularly in Thesis 86, which asks: "Why does the pope, whose wealth today is greater than the wealth

of the richest Crassus, build the basilica of St. Peter with the money of poor believers rather than with his own money?"

Luther objected to a saying attributed to Johann Tetzel that "As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory [also attested as 'into heaven'] springs."

He insisted that, since forgiveness was God's alone to grant, those who claimed that indulgences absolved buyers from all punishments and granted them salvation were in error. Christians, he said, must not slacken in following Christ on account of such false assurances.

However, this oft-quoted saying of Tetzel was by no means representative of contemporary Catholic teaching on indulgences, but rather a reflection of his capacity to exaggerate. Yet if Tetzel overstated the matter in regard to indulgences for the dead, his teaching on indulgences for the living was in line with Catholic dogma of the time.



*The sale of indulgences shown in "A Question to a Mintmaker," woodcut by Jörg Breu the Elder of Augsburg, ca. 1530.*

It was not until January 1518 that friends of Luther translated the 95 Theses from Latin into German and printed and widely copied them, making the

controversy one of the first in history to be aided by the printing press. Within two weeks, copies of the theses had spread throughout Germany; within two months, they had spread throughout Europe.

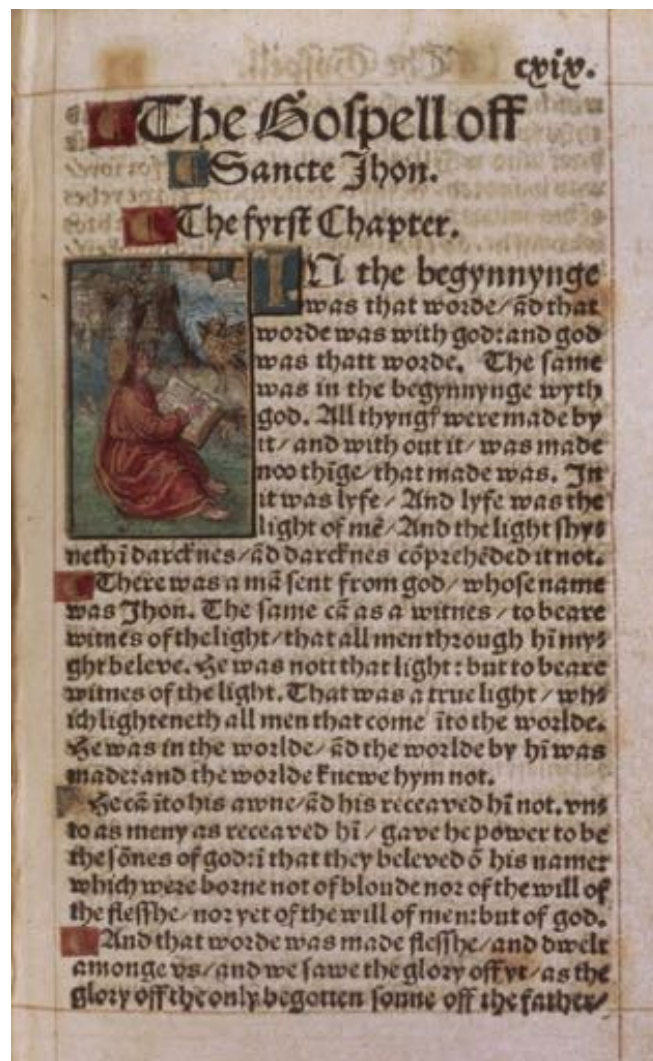


*According to one account, Luther nailed his Ninety-Five Theses to the door of All Saints' Church in Wittenberg on 31 October 1517, sparking the Reformation.*

*The Latin inscription above informs the reader that the original door was destroyed by a fire, and that in 1857, King Frederick William IV of Prussia ordered the replacement be made. Luther's theses were engraved into today's bronze gate (pictured).*

Luther's writings circulated widely, reaching France, England, and Italy as early as 1519. Students thronged to Wittenberg to hear Luther speak. He published a

short commentary on Galatians and his Work on the Psalms. This early part of Luther's career was one of his most creative and productive. Three of his best-known works were published in 1520: “To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation” and “On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church” and “On the Freedom of a Christian.”



*The beginning of the Gospel of John from a copy of the 1526 edition of William Tyndale's New Testament at the British Library.*

The legacy of Tyndale's Bible cannot be overstated. His translations laid the foundations for many of the English Bibles which followed his. His work made



up a significant portion of the Great Bible which was the first authorized version of the English Bible. The Tyndale Bible also played a key role in spreading reformation ideas to England which had been reluctant to embrace the movement. His works also allowed the people of England direct access to the words and ideas of Martin Luther whose works had been banned by the state. Tyndale achieved this by including many of Luther's commentaries in his works. The Tyndale Bible's greatest impact on society today is that it heavily influenced and contributed to the creation of the King James Version, which is one of the most popular and widely used Bibles in the world today. Scholars tell us that around 90% of the King James Version is from Tyndale's works with as much as one third of the text being word for word Tyndale. Many of the popular phrases and Bible verses that people quote today are mainly in the language of Tyndale. An example of which is Matthew 5:9 "Blessed are the peacemakers." The importance of the Tyndale Bible in shaping and influencing the English language has been mentioned. According to one writer, Tyndale is "the man who more than Shakespeare even or Bunyan has molded and enriched our language."