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CHRISTMAS 1975

by

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"The Protestant Faith"

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## CHRISTMAS 1975

Christmas time is characterized by giving presents. The commercial world has boosted this expectation to a point where Christmas almost becomes a burden. But it still remains true that the essential feature of the Christmas season is the giving of gifts to one another. This springs, of course, from the fact that Christmas commemorates the gift of God of a Saviour for mankind and for each of us in particular. Perhaps the most famous verse of the New Testament is 'For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life'. One of my favourite verses in the Old Testament is very similar. In Isaiah 9 'For unto us a Child is born, to us a Son is given ... and His name shall be Mighty God, Everlasting Father'. In giving Himself as our Saviour God has made plain the underlying structure of reality, namely that it is giving rather than receiving which is the real thing. We should make this the principle of our life, not only at Christmas but throughout the year, to give ourselves to supply other people's need. Another way of putting this is to say that we should serve one another, because service consists of giving our attention and our energies for other people. Jesus said that He came to serve and in this way He made clear that it is service or giving that is the true way of living in accordance with God's design for life. As Jesus said 'It is happier to give than to receive'. But it is characteristic of modern life that this principle has been reversed. The great catch cry at present is the demand for rights, receiving what is our due. It is good to insist that other people should be given their rights but it is perilous to demand our own. The way we should regulate our lives is not by demanding our rights but by asking ourselves what are our obligations to other people in any situation. The opportunities of modern life are a very strong temptation to demand this or that for ourselves. In the old days young people, for example,

had a very restricted choice but nowadays their opportunities are so much greater, of enjoying, for example, an overseas trip or possessing a motor car and so on. The temptation is very strong to think that we have a right to all these pleasures and experiences but getting and enjoying is the wrong principle on which to base our lives. We ought to ask ourselves what are our obligations to others and see that we do not neglect them. We ought also to ask what are our opportunities of giving, especially giving our time and energies in service. Again this is particularly true for the business world. In the old days the business man was in more direct relation to his customers and he sought to serve them, but nowadays, perhaps by the growth in the size of companies, the concern of business men is more with the annual accounts than with the customers who become merely paper entries on the books. Even the church, in administering its properties, is more concerned to preserve its equity and get a proper return than it is in serving those with whom it has brought into relationship through these properties.

Christmas is a time to turn back to the principle of service, of giving ourselves, our time, our energies and our possessions to forward the interests of other people, because this is the true characteristic of the world as God has made it and as it is exemplified in the life of Jesus, the Son of God, of whom we read, 'though He was rich yet for our sakes He became poor that we, through His poverty, might become rich'.

He is not only our exemplar of how to live our life but He is also the ruler of this world and the judge of our life and the rewarder of all who seek Him. As the text I quoted goes on 'For to us a child is born, to us a Son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulder, and His name will be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace'.

These facts are true, they are something to rejoice in greatly and to build our lives and attitudes round, in conformity with this great principle of God's character, expressed in the way He has made human life and exemplified in Jesus whose entry as a man into the world at Bethlehem to serve we commemorate at this season.

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51/75

21.12.75

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is broadcast every Sunday at  
8:15 p.m. over Radio 2CH

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