

A CHRISTMAS PRAYER

(Paul W. Newman)

O God, what a gift!

So great that we hardly know where to begin when we give thanks. Like a huge geodesic dome with dozens of facets each one essential to the whole. We look at one aspect of the goodness of Jesus such as his freedom and are entirely captivated by the importance and the deep goodness of it, and then our mind catches another side of the whole such as his peace and is again fully convinced of the centrality of this other. We would not like to say in the end if peace is more important than freedom or if hope could be sacrificed for truth. All are uniquely important and none could be given up any more easily than one could give away a son or daughter.

The fact is that we do not have to choose between one part of the goodness of Jesus Christ and another. Each is like one of the colours in white light: it can be refracted and seen but it cannot be permanently separated. Nor can the meaning of Jesus' goodness be isolated from any part of the world. It cannot be enclosed in only one tradition or one culture or one area or one time. Like light that fills the whole universe the meaning of Christ is always and everywhere. He is the light that lightens every man. Yet, as we see the colours of light in a rainbow we see also the components of Christ's goodness most clearly and perfectly in Jesus.

A new possibility for existence - the original and greatest of all Christmas gifts. New existence in the manner of a man who did not care about fame or money or power or any of the things that common sense tells us will protect or benefit or glorify a person. Life in the style of a man who cared only about what was right and true and loving, who staked his life on the creative possibilities of suffering, who was for others more than for himself a man who lived with joy and a sense of humour, who saw through tears of compassion the full ugly truth of human evil but who believed enough in his Father's ability to do good through men that he died for it - A man with a supremely keen sense of justice, who understood immediately a man's sin but just as quickly offered forgiveness and healing. A man gentle but passionate, committed but open to change; a man who had immense courage in the face of immense temptations.

A new possibility for existence - not saying "to hell with it" or "what does it matter" or "I couldn't care less" or "you have to take what you can get". Not hiding behind a mask, not running away, not playing one-up-manship. Not despairing, or resenting, or attacking in fear, Not being a slave to weakness or superstition or desire and not being a slave master manipulating, restricting, reducing, limiting.

Caring, trying, sharing, feeling, concerned, involved, committed, informed.

Freedom and forgiveness, hope and happiness, fulfilment and fruition, affirmation and attainment, promise and providence - not mere words but the stuff of joy. joy, joy, joy, singing, shouting, laughing, playing, smiling, loving, remembering, past, present, future, together, not alone, not alone. God is here God is here Thank You Thank You God. o God, what a gift!