Christmas
Dec 14, 1975
Wellesley
College

Tonight I want to talk a little bit about the joys of discovering the obvious.

Not that all the trimmings and the festivities we experience during the Christmas season are necessarily some kind of travesty. Rather, thattJS it's just plain good for our souls to remind ourselves, on a night like this, that Christmas doesn't really belong to Bing Crosby -- anymore than the New Year belongs to Guy Lombardo.

But I guess you and I can copepwitn^all the trimmings and the festivities^-gaxdst^wii, as far as understanding the underlying meaning of Christmas is concerned.

Where we may have more trouble, and where things seem to be much more complicated, is when we come to Christmas with a mind that has been influenced, not to say dominated, by certain strains of recent theology that have emphasized our responsibilities as Christians;to witness and the serve, especially in some publicly visible way.

A large segment of recent theology has been preoccupied teith the themejg_of Christian maturity and Christian discipleship, perhaps wore than we sometimes realize. It was the saintly Dietrich Bonhoeffer who set this trend in motion, with his phaase "man come of Age." Bonhoeffer himself well-exemplified what he called "the cost of discipleship," as^^x-iae-Ske—aaae—~~of Christ~~ he participated in the resistance against Ritle^», The name of Christ.

ground, just waiting to be picked up and tasted. I couldn't believe it!

There I stood, under God's good sun, basking in the aromas of the orange grove, delighting in the taste of fresh oranges, and I suddenly realized that orgpge juice comes from orange trees! Not from the Bird's Eye can in the freezer! All these years, living in my early-morning fog, stumbling down the stairs, groping for the refrigerator doojj I had never really thought that much about it. I had never really experienced organe juice in Huite that way before.

Yesterday I was baby-sitting Some friends' infant son for the afternoon. And, as I sat there giving him his bottle, cuddling him, empathetically enjoying his spaced-out ecstacy as he filled himself to the full with milk, a similar thought dawned on me; People come from babies! ...We're net like Minerva, a^s we? She who was born fully grown from the head of Zeus. People come from babies. Orgaijfe jStice comes from orates.

So you and I, all as more or less mature Christians, come from our baptisms! So the Church as a whole, the universal people of God in all times and in all places, comes from the Christ Child! It's all so obvious that we sometimes forget it.

II.

In a day when manyfe of our best theologians have been **qBKKSBBsqs&E&i:** preoccupied with the theme of Christian maturity, the humanistic psychologist, Eric Erikson, in contrast, has been talking about what he calls "regression in service of the ego."

That is to say, there are occasions in one's life when, in order to grovh one needs to return, for a time, to re-experience early stages in one's life. Not only the traumatic events either; the upbuilding ones av well. For example; the primordial experience of a—hea4rthj≤ infancy, what Erikson calls "basic trust."

In order to take a personal ris^fc^'in other words, or more generally in order to grow M overall as a person, it may be really important for you to know that you are loved, that you have been loved, that you can be loved. And to 'SS'Kat, you may want to regress inside, to re-experience your infancy in some tangible psychological way.

So Christmas can be a blessing for us, precisely because it can be a time of regression in service of our discipleship^" **afiBBSEaBerer-** a time when we let go, for awhile, of all our very important strivings for Christian maturity, and re-experience the joys of our Christian infancy, — a time when you and I can unashamedly delight in all those ~~•n<iinr1rniwgn^inin,~~ fresh oranges, a time when we can drink the sweet milk of God's love, like babies; a time when we can pause to know again that God feeds us and holds us tenderly, as God fed and held the Christ Child.

III.

That's why it was so good for us to be able to begin our Christmas celebration tonight with a baptism. For, our life as

Christians, whatever else it may twg be, always begins at the beginning, with our own Christian infancy, and, behiftd that, with the infancy of Christ, Our Lord.

So it's obvious, isn't it? Christmas belongs to the child in our midst, and to the child i§pSHf$_a$V®^{art}s, before it belongs to anyone else. So it's aJpSyof joy for us, as Christians, as we gather together around the manger and come forward to see what God has done for us, as we eat and drink the sweet nectar of God's love for usl£ this dark night.

"And this will be a sign for you: you will find a babe wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." Amen.