

# The Philosophical Research Society, Inc.

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## DAY OF DEDICATION



Dear Friends:

According to recent statistics there are more than one billion Christians in the world. If we add to these the members of other recognized religious groups, approximately two and one-half billion persons are spiritually oriented, worshipping the Divine Power at the source of life and proclaiming themselves as affiliated with organizations which teach high moral and ethical codes. In spite of the inroads of materialism, atheistic doctrines have never been able to completely dominate the inner lives of private citizens, even in countries which have sought to prohibit public and private worship.

The commercialization of Christmas has become a heavy burden upon the human spirit. We are inclined to feel that the birthday of Christ is now a merchant's holiday. We must realize, however, that we have all contributed to the dilemma. In the "good old days," few could afford lavish spending, but now an opulent society demands markets filled with expensive trivia and over-indulgence is a status symbol. A century ago, children were satisfied with homemade candies and a few useful gifts. Today they think in terms of television sets, motorcycles or volkswagons. Parents trying to satisfy the demands of aggressive adolescents find themselves heavily in debt and but slightly appreciated. Unfortunately, we cannot restore the Christmas spirit of our forefathers, and even the memory of it fades away with the elder generation. We must build new foundations under our faiths. This is possible, though it may appear difficult.

From remote times the season of the Winter Solstice was celebrated by the exchanging of gifts, messages of felicitation, banquets, pageantries, largess and sacred rites. The nobles entertained their fiefs; masters bestowed temporary freedom upon their slaves; and Miracle Plays were performed on the porches of churches and cathedrals. In Egypt special consideration was given to children, and the philosophical schools of Greece honored in various ways the annual birth of the Sun God.

In ancient Rome the Saturnalia was the most important of the annual festivals. It began on December 17, and lasted for three (later seven) days. Originally an agrarian celebration, it corresponded to the Winter sowing season, and included the propitiation of the gods for a good harvest. Saturn was the patron god of the Winter Solstice rites. Images of him, standing with feet bound, were publicly displayed, and in the course of the festivities, his feet were untied. It is a well established fact that the Saturnalia influenced both Christmas and New Year celebrations, during the early Christian centuries and down to the present time. "Father Time," bearing the scythe, which was a distinguishing symbol of Saturn, is still featured as a personification of the year that is closing, and also the harvesting of new grain. All the boistrousness



now associated with New Year's Eve marked the Roman rites and included a Mardi gras and athletic events as in many modern communities. Even lighted candles were placed on altars and carried in processions as offerings to Saturn and his Olympian retinue. It is believed that the early Roman Christians celebrated a High Mass during the Saturnalia because the prevailing pandemonium made it unlikely that their religious observances would be noticed.

The status of New Year's Day is rather confused and so are most of the celebrants by the time it is over. We owe this holiday to Julius Caesar and the introduction of the Julian calendar. Originally the New Year was ushered in on December 25, but Caesar moved it forward to January 1. The early Greeks celebrated New Year's Day on December 21, and the early Anglo-Saxons preferred to ignore Caesar's reformation, remaining true to December 25.

It is interesting and possibly significant that we now have two festivals; Christmas and the New Year, of which the first is religious and the second, secular. Actually, both are associated with the Winter Solstice, and in many Oriental countries the New Year observances take precedence. In Some European countries Christmas Eve and Christmas Day have not been secularized, and the exchanging of gifts takes place on the Eve of St. Nicholas Day. This seems to have special advantage and does not detract from our gratitude for the blessings bestowed by Heaven upon all its creatures. The dignity of one day each year being set aside to honor the Universe, remember the ways of truth and wisdom and love, and refresh the spirit, might help to restore our respect for this Holy Season. For those of our brethren who belong to other faiths, or even those who proclaim themselves agnostics or atheists, this could be the Day of Dedication, or, a Day of Aspiration. This would provide us all with an opportunity to evaluate our ways of life, whether spiritual, ethical or moral. We can remember the integrity which preserves all the phases of our mortal existence. We can renew our allegiances to good laws and the cause of human welfare. Actually, the basic convictions of mankind transcend all sectarian differences. We unite in recognition of the Golden Rule, and whether by revelation or legislation, we respect the Ten Commandments. Without dedication to principles, our culture cannot survive. If it is appropriate to celebrate our independence on the Fourth of July, is it not even more appropriate to celebrate our interdependence on a day set aside to sober thoughtfulness?

As a modern holiday, January 1 has no claim to fame except that it is the first day of the calendar year. It is the occasion on which we celebrate the death of the old year with its problems and herald in a new year with its problems. Under prevailing conditions the future is decidedly uncertain, and even the most optimistic person views the future with profound concern. Everything associated with the modern New Year is secular, and becomes more so every year. Why then, would it not be a good idea to shift the economic aspects of the Christmas festival to New Year's Day--and thus make a logical division between the spiritual and the material celebrations of the Winter Solstice. This would cause no loss to the merchants, and bestow greater significance upon the New Year holiday, as well as giving children (young and old) ample opportunity to extravert. It would help us all to recognize that we live in a two-fold world in which we first pay tribute to the providence of Deity, and also share in the pleasures of the mortal world. By the two closely related holidays we can render unto God the things that are God's, and unto Caesar that which is Caesar's. In the New Testament Caesar becomes the personification of temporal authority and rules over such modern institutions as sustain our physical needs and contribute to our financial security. By lifting the stigma of worldly vanity from the Christmas festival, we will please the thoughtful and do nothing that will actually displease the thoughtless. In fact, both festivals will gain in stature.



In Japan, New Year celebrations have strong ethical and moral overtones. It is considered mandatory that all debts be paid before the close of the old year. Many families sell family treasures rather than carry old bills into the New Year. Dissensions are a moral liability, and accounts of this kind must also be settled--enemies must shake hands or the equivalent, all family disputes must be arbitrated, perpetual subscribers to various shrines and temples attend their places of worship, and residents of the various neighborhoods make ceremonial visits to each other. Special foods are served and houses appropriately decorated. Theoretically at least, such decorations are improper unless the families have balanced their budgets. The Japanese are opposed to the idea of time payment plans, and when they wish to make an expensive purchase, save the money first. Such a practice is worthy of emulation in the West.

New Year's Day is virtually meaningless unless it enriches our mortal condition. It should be an occasion in which we all work together toward making "a happy new year" for the entire human family. It is an appropriate occasion to ponder the steps that must be taken to correct mistakes of the past and lay down proper footings for the future. No celebration is meaningful if there is nothing to celebrate. Strengthened by the mystic rite of Christmas, we will have new insights with which to shape the destiny of the year to come. Prayerfulness must be fulfilled through works and today we are in desperate need of the good fellowship of earnest people resolved to labor together to bring our cultural system out of the doldrums.

We can never meet the emergencies of the hour unless we have given our hearts to truth and bowed in humility before the sacred symbols of our salvation. There is a vast reservoir of good will in this world--the cleansing of Christmas would have a far wider area of influence than we realize. It would be a simple and direct answer to the challenge of disbelief. It might remind the sceptics and cynics that humankind believes in God and cannot be moved by either ridicule or persecution. The inter-racial, inter-cultural, inter-denominational commonwealth of religion is potentially about the most powerful world force in the world today. It breaks through the artificial boundaries of self-interest and political corruption. It restores the dignity of man as a conscious being with ideals and dreams for which he is willing to give the full measure of his devotion. Christmas could and should stand as a monument to a faith that will not die. Man is an immortal soul, clothed in a mortal vestment of clay. The soul is greater than the body and the aspirations of the soul are greater than the ambitions of the world.

As the architect of Solomon's Temple retired into the Holy Place each day to receive divine instruction for the labors at hand, we also can make our pilgrimage on Christmas Day and in silence listen to the instructions of the Most High. Having received the true design of the work to be done, we can wait eagerly for the day of fulfillment. After New Year's Day we return to our several tasks resolved to perform them with all earnestness. The labor will go on until the temple is finished. It will then stand on the Rock Moriah as the earthly replica of that other temple built without the voice of workmen or the sound of hammers, and forever in the heavens.

May we take this opportunity to wish all of you the blessings of the Christmas Season and a happy and useful New Year. Regardless of prevailing practices, it is always our privilege to dedicate our thoughts, words and actions to the improvement of our world and the glory of our God.

Very sincerely yours,

*Marilyn P. Hall*





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| <u>TITLE</u>  | <u>AUTHOR</u>         | <u>PRICE</u> |
|---|-----------------------|--------------|
| Basic Writings of C. G. Jung                        | Violet DeLazlo (Ed.)  | \$ 2.95      |
| Beyond Good and Evil                                | Nietzsche (p)         | 1.95         |
| Bhagavad Gita                                       | Annie Besant (p)      | 1.95         |
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BOOKS BY MANLY P. HALL

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|------------------------|---------|-----------------------------|----------|
| The Guru               | \$ 5.50 | Most Holy Trinosophia       |          |
| Pathways of Philosophy | 6.50    | (St. Germain)               | \$ 10.00 |
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