

Christmas in America in Legends and Art from the Time of Golgotha to the Present

This essay wants to highlight some of the many aspects that the Christ impulse takes in North America, in particular the legendary and artistic expressions around the Christmas story. It will start with the event that marked the equivalent of Christmas in Mesoamerica. From there it will move to Christmas' artistic expressions at the time of the Consciousness Soul and in the present.

At the time of Golgotha we know from the record of the legends of the *Popol Vuh*—the most important Mayan esoteric document—of a remarkable birth that marked the life of the individual whom we can call the “initiate of the Americas.”¹ He lived a life all in all parallel to that of Jesus Christ in Palestine, between the years 1 and 33 A.D. At the onset of the time of the Consciousness Soul Mexican culture has preserved the tradition of Shepherds Plays that are called *Pastorelas*. From these transpires a certain mood surrounding Christmas, one that we can contrast with the European Shepherd Plays, particularly the well-known one of Oberufer. Finally in modern times we will look at a story first published in book format but now much more well-known as a movie classic.

A felicitous set of circumstances allows us to gather impressions from three different cultural backgrounds over a span of two millennia: the Native American, particularly Maya, the Hispanic tradition and modern US culture. Even from such diverse sources a certain convergence emerges.

The First American Christmas: The Virgin Birth of the Twins

The Americas, like old Hibernia in the early centuries of our era, did not know directly about the historical event of Golgotha. Even so, something of its power and impact was felt, just as the initiate priests of Hibernia could tell that the Earth aura had changed at the completion of the Mystery of Golgotha.

For Maya civilization, which accomplished the major cultural revolution in the Americas at the time of Golgotha, December 21st, the winter solstice, besides being the festival of harvest, was and is the festival celebrating the birth of Hunahpu, the Solar God, and the initiate of the Americas. This is also confirmed by the fact that the civil calendar, which commemorates historic events, corresponds to his regency during the wintertime of the year. The solar God Hunahpu, operating in concert with Yax Balam, or Lord Jaguar, are known collectively as the “Twins.” The first was the divine

¹ The *Popol Vuh* portrays the central events of Mesoamerican pre-history and history. Four other Maya documents include parts common to the *Popol Vuh*, but none of these nor any other one span such a vast timeline.

being, the second the human counterpart, corresponding to the one we may call "the initiate of the Americas." It is his birth that corresponds to a Christmas event in the Americas, as we will see further on.

The winter solstice was a time to celebrate the new historical consciousness as the gift of the deity who had transformed Earth existence. Even for the Aztecs the day of the winter solstice, was the most important day of their cosmology, commemorating the birth of Huitzilopochtli, harkening back to his virgin birth at the time of Golgotha. Rudolf Steiner called the initiate of the Americas Vitzliputzli, rather than the Twins, obviously referring to Aztec terminology.² Over fifteen centuries, however, the Aztecs had completely obliterated the nature and reality of this being.

Spiritual Scientific Background to the Mexican Mysteries

Native American consciousness makes reference to the Atlantean Tau, or Great Spirit, the consciousness of the undivided working of the seven Elohim, or Exusiai/Spirits of Form, which held sway during Atlantean times. In Mayan terminology the Ahpus are the beings that form the Great Spirit. Maya esotericism represents this Great Spirit as the duality of Hun (1) Hunahpu and Vucub (7) Hunahpu. The sevenfold nature of the whole, represented by the numerals, is subsumed in two beings. The seven Ahpus are the spiritual leaders of the Age of the Olmecs, the so-called "Third Age," preceding the Fourth Age of the Maya.

Steiner revealed in 1917 that, previous to the turning point of time, in the West arose one who was an opponent of the Great Spirit, but nevertheless connected to him. Borrowing Aztec terminology his name sounded something like Taotl. Here we recognize a distortion of the Great Spirit, a being who lives in the reality of Xibalba, the Mayan underworld. It is quite indicative that the Camé of the *Popol Vuh* bear the same numerals of the Ahpus: Hun (1) Camé and Vucub (7) Camé. In their name as in their deeds, the perverted nature of these beings is revealed. In the Camé we find in effect the equivalent of the Taotl being.

The Lords of Xibalba revere the seven Camé, whom they call their "Supreme Judges". In time the Twins will suppress this cult to reinstate the seven Ahpus, the Great Spirit in a new form. The initiate, Lord Jaguar, is subordinated to Hunahpu, the Solar Spirit of the Christ.

The highest priest of the cult of the Camé performed the ritual of human sacrifice through excision of the stomach from a live individual. Steiner, the only western initiate to talk about him, reveals that the magician could follow the victim's soul at the moment of dying into the realm that was to be founded beyond earth. Through human sacrifice the victims would relinquish the desire to incarnate and bear a human ego. And the conclusion of

² That Steiner referred to Aztec terminology is understandable because of the little progress on Maya archeology at the time.

this process is expressed by Steiner thus: "The Earth would gradually have become desolate, having upon it only the force of death, whereas any living souls would have departed to found another planet under the leadership of Lucifer and Ahriman."³ The highest black magician of the land mastered the forces of death over everything living. The creation of an illusory world beyond Earth was therefore the ultimate goal of the Mexican Mysteries.

The Descent of the Great Spirit to the Underworld

The Popol Vuh portrays an episode that sets the stage for the strengthening of the Taotl forces in the event of the first descent of the Ahpus to the underworld. In it we see the Great Spirit—the Seven Ahpus—descending to Xibalba, the underworld.

To forestall the dangers awaiting the end of the Third Age the Ahpus have to confront the Supreme Judges in the realm of death, the underworld of Xibalba. The Supreme Judges have sent messengers inviting the Ahpus to play ball in their realm and a request that the Ahpus bring their gear. The confrontation of the Ahpus with the Supreme Judges of Taotl is short lived. After being twice derided for their naivete, the Supreme Judges submit the Ahpus to the first of many tests: the Cave of Darkness. The Ahpus are each given a lit pine torch and a lit cigar. Their task is to keep the place lit and return the two objects whole the next day. The following day, when torches and cigars have been consumed, the Ahpus are condemned to being sacrificed without the need of further tests. After the sacrifice the head of Hun Hunahpu is hung on a tree. At the same moment the tree bears fruit for the first time. However, the original head can no longer be distinguished from the rest of the fruits.

At the end of their trials the Ahpus are told, "This very day you shall disappear and your memory will be obliterated." They are induced to believe that there is nothing after death, no resurrection.

The Ahpus lack wisdom, cunning, and knowledge of the laws of the underworld. Their adventure in the realm of Xibalba looks like a naïve rout. However, when the head of Hun Hunahpu is placed on the fork of a tree, the first seeds of resurrection are planted in the realm of Xibalba. The text of the Popol Vuh says: "And having put the head in the tree, instantly the tree, which had never borne fruit before the head of Hun Hunahpu was placed among its branches, was covered with fruit." Moreover the Ahpus did not bring their gear to the ballgame, meaning the Supreme Judges could not get hold of their attributes and powers.

The Virgin Birth and Childhood of the Twins

We will now confine our gaze to the time of Christ, and to the initiate

³ Rudolf Steiner, *Inner Impulses of Evolution, the Mexican Mysteries, the Knights Templar* (GA 171), lecture of September 24, 1916.

Vitzliputzli, whom we are told was born in the year 1 AD. Maya tradition, as recorded in the Popol Vuh speaks of a virgin birth. According to tradition, it is a "feathered being," an etheric entity, who has impregnated the mother. In parallel to this Steiner defines Vitzliputzli both as an initiate and as a "supersensible being in a human form."



Stela 10 of Izapa: Ixquic and the Birth of the Twins

The Popol Vuh equates its major turning point with the abolition of human sacrifice brought about by the being of the Twins, who are born of the virgin Ixquic and of the Great Spirit. Vitzliputzli lived between the years AD 1 and 33, replicating Jesus Christ's life span. The year AD 30—inaugurating Christ's ministry—sees the beginning of the initiate's three-year confrontation with the individual whom Steiner calls the "super-magician" and the Popol Vuh Hun (1) Camé. The battle ends with the crucifixion of the magician. With this death it is not only the dark priest who is obliterated, but also the knowledge he possesses. It is remarkable once again to follow this parallel in the Popol Vuh, where it is portrayed in the overcoming of the powers of the Supreme Judges, the Camé.

What the Ahpus have left unfinished will be continued by their descendants, the Twins, who in Mayan legends represent the initiate of the Americas. If his life was a chronological parallel to that of Jesus Christ, then his birth is a Christmas event for the Americas. Interestingly, in this regard there is a virgin birth in the record of the Popol Vuh.

After the death of the Ahpus, the Xibalbans place a ban on the fruit of the

new tree of life and forbid anyone to approach it. However, Ixquic, daughter of Cuchumaquic, lord of Xibalba, decides to go see the tree. Seeing the maiden the fruit/head of Hun Hunahpu asks her whether she desires of the fruit of the tree. Since this is her wish, he asks her to extend her arm toward the head. Hun Hunahpu spits on her hand, and where the saliva falls it is immediately absorbed. The head declares that through the spit the god has impregnated the maiden and he foretells that he would have spiritual heirs through her. This is how the Twins Hunahpu and Ixbalamqué are conceived.

After six months of pregnancy Ixquic's father perceives her state and believes that she has been dishonored. Upon being interrogated Ixquic denies having met any man. The answer reinforces the initial suspicion and Ixquic is condemned to being sacrificed by having her heart removed. Four messengers are sent to do the deed. To them Ixquic reveals the truth about her pregnancy. The messengers agree to save her and, in order to deceive the lords, the maiden conceives the idea of substituting the heart, required as a proof of sacrifice, with the coagulated red sap of the blood tree. Ixquic admonishes the magicians to cease the practice of human sacrifice. She prophesies that in the future sacrifice would only require the blood of animals. Upon returning to their lords the messengers set the false heart over a fire and succeed in deceiving the Camé. Afterward they leave the service of the lords and join Ixquic.

When she is about to give birth, Ixquic joins the Grandmother Ixmucané and her grandsons, Hun Batz and Hun Chouen (One Artisan and One Monkey), the spiritual guides of the Third Age. She is also the mother of the Ahpus. To the Grandmother Ixquic reveals that she carries the seed of her son, Hun Hunahpu. Ixmucané does not believe her message. Instead she sends her granddaughter on an impossible errand of filling a large net with grains of corn. Arriving on the field the young woman discovers one lone single plant of corn. Filled with sorrow she addresses the deities of corn and of nature, admitting her sins and invoking their help. She then takes the silks of the corn and lays them down on the net as if they were maize cobs. Suddenly the net fills up with grain. The animals of the field help Ixquic carry back the harvest. The Grandmother, disbelieving the maiden's claim, goes to the field and finds out that Ixquic has spoken the truth. She then realizes that only her son could have made such a miracle possible and finally accepts her daughter in law.

Soon after Ixquic gives birth to the Twins Hunahpu and Ixbalamqué. The two cannot sleep and they keep the Grandmother awake. Hun Batz and Hun Chouen place them on an anthill and later over thorny bushes. Their envy and jealousy cause them to desire the Twins' death. They know in their hearts of the importance of the Twins, but cannot reconcile themselves to the idea that others would carry their message further. The Twins grow up accustomed to the Grandmother's neglect and the brothers' spitefulness. They faithfully bring back the fruit of their hunting but receive little food in exchange. Even though the Twins are aware of all of this they suffer

with equanimity.

In Mesamerica, the fate of the individual was intimately linked with the tribe or ethnic group. Nevertheless, the *Popol Vuh* points to the beginning of individual choice. Ixquic, a Xibalban, has chosen to transgress her father's wishes and has rebelled against the necessity of human sacrifice. She has borne the Twins who will later bring the end of the rule of the Lords of Xibalba, her people. This will happen in the year 33 A. D.

Fifteen centuries later another important cultural change took place among the Five Nations of the Haudenosaunee in the American North-East. The initiate Deganawidah who ushered in a new culture was the son of a virgin, an echo of the importance of the event at the turning point of time.

The next Christmas imagination comes from the same part of North America, but another culture: colonial Mexico at the beginning of the Age of the Consciousness Soul.

A Mexican Shepherds' Play

Within Mexican culture, the tradition of the Pastorelas has survived orally from one generation to the next, a little like the Oberufer plays in central Europe. It is a remarkable legacy, whose exact origin is lost in time. We can trace similar traditions that were written down already in the 15th century. Such is Gomez Manrique's "Representacion del nacimiento de nuestro señor," (Representation of the Birth of Our Lord) written around 1476.⁴ From this time forward the model of these representations included three tableaux: the Annunciation of the Angel to the shepherds, the march of these to the birth, the adoration and offering of the presents. And in effect our Pastorela has these three parts. However, what is different about it in relation to the Representacion is that the former was not written down, but preserved orally. Moreover, esoteric knowledge was displayed in the Pastorela that was not known in other sacred plays.

Within the setting of its old mission church built at the end of the 18th century, San Juan Batista hosts every other year a Mexican Pastorela, a traditional Shepherd's Play. The particular version that has been preserved by the Teatro Campesino, known to me, is a very dramatic journey of the shepherds to Bethlehem.

Like The Oberufer Shepherd's Play—the one we know the most through our yearly performances—it is a well-loved event for parents and children alike. Unlike the former, some of its scenes are inappropriate for the very young ones. In effect here lies an initial difference between the two shepherds' plays.

⁴ Miguel Angel Perez Priego, *Teatro medieval en Castilla*, vol. 2, 25-27.

Let's have a closer look at the Pastorela. Two characters appear there that we don't see in the familiar version: Lucifer and Satan. They take center stage, together with the Archangel Michael. The journey of the shepherds is fraught with the obstacles that each of these at turns places along the way. We could easily summarize the plot by relating the journey to the tests put forth by the two adversaries.



Pastorela performed by the Teatro Campesino in the San Juan Mission (CA)

The shepherds are on their way to Bethlehem after having received the vision, indicating the coming birth. The first to distract them from their purpose is Satan. He evokes the danger they will encounter on the road, and tempts them with the lure of riches. He successfully sows dissent and animosity and transforms some of the shepherds into sheep. Having overcome this temptation the shepherds are attacked by a Luciferic figure. This one offers them a way to ease and comfort, and a mix of escapism and lust. In the lively, folk culture humor of Hispanic California, the tempter is sometime portrayed as a New Age messiah. It is the head-strong shepherdess Gila who plays a central role in reminding the shepherds of their common intent.

The last attempt arrives at the hardest moment for the shepherds, tired from their efforts. This time Lucifer and Satan attack together. Lucifer prophesizes the fate of Jesus, his agony and death in order to discourage the pilgrims. Satan opens up a coffer and offers riches instead of the perilous journey. The thought of the resurrection is the antidote to this picture, and human faith, once again in the person of Gila, summons the Archangel Michael's help. He comes to the shepherd's rescue and enters into battle

with Lucifer. This episode points to the battle that the Luciferic spirits had before the time of Golgotha in which Michael cast them down to Earth. Christ could thus start their redemption; this is symbolized in the episode of the repentance of the good thief crucified to His right side. The battle is the epic moment of the confrontation with the adversarial forces, one anticipated with trepidation by the children in the audience. Lucifer is vanquished and the way is open for the shepherds to arrive to Bethlehem and offer the presents and adoration to the holy family.

The essence of this kind of play explains why it held so much strength in Mexico. For a continent that hasn't known the historical Christ until late in time, the journey to Christ was essentially an inner journey. In Mexico, the time of Christmas corresponded, as we saw, with the celebration of the birth of Vitzliputzli. Such a Christ impulse didn't have knowledge of the historical Jesus, but knew that the Earth had been transformed ever since the time of Golgotha; it remembered the deeds of the great initiate. Seen within this perspective the Pastorela retraces a theme that has had a long life in the continent: the confrontation between good and evil. This search for the child Jesus isn't a historical journey, but an inner one pointing to past and present, and prophetic of future times. It is no wonder that at times the Catholic Church has banned some of these plays, even minor forms as the so-called "Coloquios," which still portray traces of esoteric knowledge at variance with doctrine, the most obvious being that of the twofold nature of evil.

The Franciscans brought the Pastorela to the New World. Its origin, however, is clearly esoteric. Could it be of Rosicrucian origin? Through the Pastorelas the last traces of esoteric Johannine Christianity have been preserved within the world of exoteric Catholic religion even to the present. The above Pastorela can truly be called a St. John's play, appropriately hosted within the town and mission of the sister soul of St. John, the Baptist. It is therefore both a way for all of us to understand what lives specifically within the Mexican soul, but also to some degree within the whole of the Americas.

It is of added interest that the play has been preserved by a company whose primary mission was social and political, the *Teatro Campesino* of Luis Valdez, an off shoot of the United Farm Workers of Cesar Chavez. This sets the stage for another imagination of Christmas where personal and social are intimately interconnected.

A Christmas Story and the New Christ Consciousness

I was a latecomer to the classic "It's A Wonderful Life" and I had low expectations. I was all the more pleasantly surprised for we know that the movie is much more than a look at the jolly mood of Christmas. It's deeply prophetic about life in this continent and the direction of social affairs in America and worldwide. Without knowing it, or rather through deep artistic inspiration, Frank Capra and his two playwrights have brought to the screen

a deep allegory of the present, one that is all the more real as the movie almost reaches its eightieth year. At the center of this movie lies the struggle between community at its best, and what has been called "elite globalization," the confrontation between the likes of George Bailey and Henry Potter.

It was a dream that gave rise to the original story "The Greatest Gift" written by Philip Van Doren. The author dated it with precision to the morning of February 12, 1938, and he recalled "The idea came to me complete from start to finish, a most unusual occurrence, as any writer will tell you..."⁵ He never considered changing it. Still, he had to work hard at giving it a form since he was not used to writing fiction. Even though it's a very short tale it was only ready in 1943; it matured through the war years. The author felt it was a universal story that could speak beyond its religious background. He sent it out as a pamphlet with a Christmas card to friends, two hundred in total.

At the center of the story stands a spiritual experience and turning point. The film creates a preamble, a social context for the book. Whereas the book mentions Christmas from its first paragraph, the movie only does so after about one hour. In essence Frank Capra and colleagues went about finding a "wonderful life" to flesh out the story. Capra must have distilled the experience of his war days and the deepest lessons that came from looking at the larger historical perspective. The film was released in December 1946. The fact that it came so soon after the end of WWII may have played an important role. The movie pleased and pleases all possible demographics, across religions, nationalities, political and ideological boundaries.

George Bailey's life creates the pre-conditions for the spiritual experience at the bridge. He has known when to let go and do what was in the interest of his town and fellow citizens. Under extreme pressure he contemplates suicide. What follows is an artistic portrayal of what we know of a Near Death Experience (NDE) in which we have a choice whether to return to Earth or not, only slightly modified. George has a life-review, but rather than seeing what he has done, he is offered the alternative scenario of life in Bedford Falls without him. A first place to pause.

Three surveys taken in the US, Australia and Germany suggest that 4 to 15 % of the population have had NDEs.⁶ Most of the people affected come back transformed; they see the need to promote new values and create an alternative to materialism that they most often have fully embraced beforehand. So this is an aspect that is part and parcel of our culture. In 1934 Bill Wilson had the spiritual experience that led to the founding of

⁵ Philip Van Doren Stern, *The Greatest Gift*, with an Afterword by Marguerite Stern Robinson, 37-38.

⁶ See <https://www.iands.org/ndes/about-ndes/key-nde-facts21.html?start=1>

Alcoholics Anonymous in 1938, the year of the inspiration for the book. This was the spiritual experience of a reputedly lost soul, a meaningless life. And it was the life that rescued countless numbers of individuals.



James Stewart in a scene of *It's A Wonderful Life*

The power of the movie lies in the contrast between individual and social, with George being placed at the intersection. What makes it relevant is the position George occupies in the town's economy, since he runs the city's Building & Loan, which stands in opposition to Henry Potter's financial stranglehold over the local economy. Henry Potter is also a majority shareholder in the Building & Loan, one who aims at changing the direction of its efforts, such as offering financial services to the poor.

It's a Wonderful Life does more than portray a general situation. When Potter orchestrates the run on the banks, we have a hint of a precise historical event. Before George talks to Potter by phone the camera lingers on the room for three-four seconds, but just enough to show us a framed portrait of Herbert Hoover. Since this is followed by the phone conversation with Potter on a wheelchair announcing a one week bank holiday, the reference is unmistakable to the March 6, 1933 national banking holiday that kept all banks shut, the tenuous difference being a matter of days—seven here, four then.

Potter proposes all the desperate shareholders to rescue them at the rate of 50c to the dollar, a "take it or leave it" proposition. Thus we see portrayed what happened in the first years of the Great Depression, making Bedford Falls an emblem for any other town in America. The historicity is reinforced when the movie gives us footings of the years that followed, leading to

World War II. A true artistic feat to offer us such an accurate reading of the currents of history, without veering into a political tirade.

In a later scene Potter, who has fortunately pocketed \$ 8,000 of the Building and Loan, takes advantage of the situation to smear Bailey's name and reputation. Though he owns most of the town, Potter is existentially threatened by a message contrary to his own. He is not just dominating the bottom-line; he wants to possess his fellow citizen's minds and hearts; he hopes for their ultimate resignation. When his adviser reminds Potter that people feel hope in joining Bailey Park, the Building and Loan's housing development, he also warns his boss that, barring the elimination of this dangerous rival, Potter's own housing project would be nothing else than a "potter's field." That this is a Biblical reference is quickly reinforced by the comparison of Bailey and Potter with David and Goliath in the people's minds.

Henry Potter is portrayed in the guise of a Faustian tempter. He speaks for the voice of reason, for the bottom-line, and from an all too familiar place in which people are numbers, and profit dictates social conduct. True feeling stands in the way of good business. He is present wherever we are unaware of our weak spots. George is not immune to his charm, nor unresponsive to his strength. So are we all. When Potter promises him a huge salary, and trips to Europe he has only dreamt of, it's hard to resist. When Potter steals his money, George is pushed to the brink.

Throughout the movie the political is shown through the lens of the personal that supports it. George is exposed to Potter's charm because he has accumulated some bitterness at the turn of events in his biography and dwells in the feeling of somehow having been cheated out of life. Add to it that no matter how well-meaning and genuinely honest and caring George is, he has had little desire or opportunity to turn to the spirit. He cannot believe in the "miracle" that brings the movie to its ending because he cannot trust that genuine spiritual striving could overturn dire situations. He needs to find himself at the abyss, a situation familiar to the people of the Consciousness Soul that America represents.

From the dark side the movie goes into a lighter one, with an obvious comic relief in the all-too-human angel Clarence. Here *It's a Wonderful Life* picks up the thread of *the Greatest Gift*. Clarence offers Bailey, the "great gift" of his seeing what the world would be without his contribution. George wanders through a deeply transformed town of sleazy nightclubs, bars and pawn shops. He sees its name is Pottersville. All business has a degraded character, and friends and acquaintances behave at odds from what he knows of them. When that scenario acquires full reality one cannot help being struck at how modern the black and white movie turns all of a sudden.

The briefly perceived Pottersville is a bit the equivalent of Owen Barfield's "Fun Fair" of the ruler Abdol, the realm in which Ahriman, become the

master of civilization, calls to our unrestrained lower instincts.⁷ In Barfield's vision of the future we see spelled out what in Pottersville are only images: "a spectacle of a cacophony of lights, shrieks, hooting, blares of steam-organs, voices shouting advertisements and litter strewn all over the ground" ... "grotesque inventions for allowing all sorts of sensations upon the human body" ... "stereoscopic peepshows" through which men and women can watch the most cunningly devised pornograms" ... "booths and in each one of them a 'nude automaton' of either gender, able to repeat simple endearing sentences."⁸ Abdol's Fun Fair culminates in the highest form of derision of the Christ and of the event of Golgotha. In Capra's or Barfield's visions of the Fun Fair profit and the satisfaction of the lower instincts are all that matter. All spirit has been driven out. Thus, when Clarence speaks of his experience as an angel, an irate bartender throws him and George unceremoniously out in the snow.

When George comes to terms with the realization that he has now become only a witness to his previous life, a confident Clarence can point to him "you really had a wonderful life." Only from a higher perspective and the detachment of a view from above, so to speak, can Bailey gain a true assessment of his achievements and his place in the web of karma. George has prayed once—maybe for the first time in his life—before contemplating suicide, and that called Clarence to his side. When he prays a second time the spiritual experience comes to an end because George signals that he has changed perspectives and is eager to return to his responsibilities no matter what he has to face.

The personal and the collective come together if we connect them through the year 1933 to which the movie points. The power of the Potters is exemplified in Hitler's rise and the consolidation of Stalin's iron grip over the Soviet Union. In the US, after various stages throughout the twentieth century, we come to the powers delegated to the great economic monopolies (NIRA attempt), the official recognition of the Soviet regime in 1933, the power grabs of the executive, the deepening of the Great Depression and the preparations inexorably leading to WWII.⁹ Over and against the rise of the Beast from the abyss we witness the mighty spiritual event that all external political, economic and financial impulses want to stamp out: Christ's gradual reappearance in the etheric, whose watershed date given by Steiner is 1933. And against all the spirit denying attempts mentioned above Steiner prophetically set an antidote through the cosmopolitan, spiritual and social impulse of the 1923 Christmas Meeting and the Foundation Stone Meditation.

⁷ Owen Barfield, *The Rose on the Ash-Heap*.

⁸ *Ibid*, 61-66.

⁹ These matters are treated in great detail along the lines of the methodology outlined in Rudolf Steiner's two volumes of *The Karma of Untruthfulness* in the author's *Searching for the Spirit of the West: A Hidden History of the USA and the Twentieth Century*, Chapters 4, 5 and 6. Excerpts of it are available at <https://millenniumculmination.net/spiritual-impulses.html>.

Humanity is given the opportunity to find a new conscious relationship with Christ, one that Steiner defined a "celebration of knowledge" when it was bestowed upon him. Through it he reached complete inner certainty of the Golgotha event, just like Saint Paul had in his Damascus experience. At present all modern human beings who strive can now evolve toward this momentous experience. Near-Death Experiences are scaled down manifestations of the same event, often but not always brought about on the brink of death. The recipients meet with a being of light and the expression of unconditional love without, in most instances, recognizing the Christ being. They nevertheless return to life with renewed enthusiasm and a feeling for the reality of the spiritual world. Henry Potter on one hand, George Bailey on the other, show us the two sides of the coin of the year 1933.

The epilogue of the movie celebrates the power of community to shape its own future, and the power of one to tilt the scales of the common destiny, a contrast to what has been offered in the vision of Pottersville. It is made possible by Mary and a spiritually renewed George. And Christmas stands in the equation because everything spiritual in our continent usually carries a social component, and no holiday is more social than Christmas.

Both Frank Capra and James Stewart came back from fighting in WWII shortly before the completion of the movie. Capra read Van Doren's story, got excited about it and right away wanted James Stewart to be the lead actor. He called the actor who responded in kind. For both this was the first venture after the war, one fraught with a good amount of anxiety. Capra had bought van Doren's Christmas card and paid \$ 50,000 for the rights to the story before he knew what he could do with it. He later explained "It was the story I had been looking for all my life."¹⁰

Both Capra and Stewart ranked the movie as the favorite of their artistic career. Capra commented "*It's a Wonderful Life* sums up my philosophy of filmmaking. First, to exalt the *worth* of an individual. Second, to champion *man*—plead his cause, protest any degradation of his dignity, spirit, or divinity. And the third, to dramatize the viability of the individual—as in the theme of the film itself... There is a radiance and glory in the darkness, could we but see, and to see we have only to look. I beseech you to look."¹¹

It has been said that the original inspiration of the book came from *A Christmas Carol*, and the link can't be missed if nothing else in the parallel Scrooge/Potter; Bailey becomes the equivalent of Bob Cratchit. In the story written exactly a century after Dickens' *Christmas Carol*, it is not just individuals who stand under the thumb of the Scrooges/Potters of the world, but whole public institutions, corporations, cultural enterprises and

¹⁰ Philip Van Doren Stern, *The Greatest Gift*, 42.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 45.

whole sections of society. In a sense this American Christmas Carol manages to show us the contrast between the American spirit of individualism, volunteerism and mutual help and the reverse of complete selfishness that, unfortunately, America has also a great part in promoting worldwide. No wonder the movie is considered timeless.

Three Christmas images, three cultures and three watershed moments in the evolution of consciousness have been presented above. Some themes are found across the three. The episode of the virgin birth of the Twins is woven against the background of ritual human sacrifice. It is the result of a woman's act of supreme courage and faith in the future. The idyllic path to Bethlehem is fraught with the opposition of both Lucifer and Satan. It seems to indicate the particular strength of the adversaries in this continent. Finally, the modern Christmas is both dramatic and prophetic of the growing power of Ahriman. It is the clarion call to a new Christ consciousness, a resounding warning, but most of all a message of hope and faith in humanity's future.