

Insights on the Esotericism of Christmas

By Gauthier Pierozak

Introduction

This essay examines the esotericism¹ of Christmas. Today it is commonly known that Jesus's birth, a date celebrated by Christians worldwide as Christmas Day, did not actually occur on December 25. Rather than corresponding to historical fact, this date was chosen in the 4th century to correspond with important pagan feasts, in effort toward mass conversion by the young Christian church. The celebration of the Roman *Sol Invictus* (the invincible sun) and the birth of the Roman god Mithra, as well as other pagan deities, were indeed celebrated on what is today known as our Christmas. This time of year also corresponds to a very important cosmic event: winter solstice. Winter solstice is the "lowest" point in the sun's annual cycle², when the day is at its shortest and the night is at its longest. Symbolically, this day may be interpreted as the *end* of darkness's victory over light, because it is the fulcrum when the night begins to decrease and the day begins to increase; therefore, it appears the sun is resurrecting. From a religious perspective, there could not be a better time in the year to celebrate the birth of Christ than to assimilate it to the rebirth of the sun³. Therefore in 354 A.D., Pope Libere instituted the celebration of Christmas on December 25⁴.

¹ Esotericism is the inward or hidden meaning of things, often compared to the kernel inside a fruit, by opposition to exotericism which is in this case the fruit itself.

² Also called the sun's *nadir*.

³ This date is often associated to *John* 8, 12: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness..."

⁴ Just a few days close to the actual winter solstice, which technically occurs on December 21st. But symbolically these few days do not make a difference.

Non-Manifestation and Cosmic Cycles

The celebration of Christmas occurs during one of the longest nights of the year. Night being synonymous of darkness, *Darkness* has a superior meaning, just like with every symbol, when considered from the metaphysical perspective and does indeed particularly symbolize the principal state of non-manifestation⁵. Non-manifestation is characterized by the exclusion of determinations, as well as a lack of attribution and lack of activity⁶. Also referred to as Non-Being, as it is most accurately *indescribable* with human expression or thought, and is often better approached through the use of non-characteristics such as Silence, Void, or Darkness. Our manifestation is simply the determination of a possibility within an *infinite* array of non-manifested, undetermined possibilities. This understanding directly correlates to the many tradition's stories of the destruction of our world. These stories are in fact expressing the cyclic dissolution of manifestation, the return to non-manifestation, followed by manifestation again. One could reference, among other examples, the biblical flood, the destruction of Atlantis, the Hindi *Purânas*, and the Christian *Apocalypse* among many other symbolic "world ending" events, following the rise of new civilization.

Interestingly, one may also see a correlation of the cosmic cycles of life and death from the human perspective, which provide further example of manifestation's dissolution into non-manifestation. For example, the four seasons of the year begin with *spring* which symbolizes birth, followed by *summer* which symbolizes growth, followed by *fall* which symbolizes death, and ends with *winter* which particularity symbolizes lack of activity. Life activity in winter traditionally slows to a more dormant condition, and this lack of activity and presence is always associated to non-manifestation. Similarly, the four cardinal points may also be associated to comparable significations: *East* symbolizing the sun's rise or birth, *South* symbolizing the sun's strongest position in terms of light and heat, *West* symbolizing the sun's fall or death, and

⁵ The change of a point of view, from a secular standpoint to the metaphysical perspective, always results in an inversion of the symbolical meanings. In this particular case, *Darkness*, from a metaphysical point of view, has a superior meaning which represents the principal state of non-manifestation, whereas from the secular point of view, it can represent the absence or privation of light and carry negative connotations.

⁶ This is the *apopbatic* theology, often considered the best method to approach this subject, which poses great challenge to communicate accurately.

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