

12-16-1946

Notes: Christmas Vesper: A Course in Christmas, 1946

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Memorandum

For Chapel - Dec. 16, 1946

1. All of us - our own memories of Christmas - perhaps the first song - the hushed church - the kindness of parables - the joy of coming home after war - my own most vivid - a dam, rainy afternoon in Baltimore 14 years ago - beginning of Christmas recess - classroom empty - library dark & silent - only a few seats before fire in the Corona room waiting for our train to leave - talk - long silences - a great U. had closed its doors because 200 yrs. earlier & 6000 miles away a Child had been born - finally: "Perhaps there ought to be a course in Christmas at this place" ^{what we try each year}
2. A course in Christmas - perhaps we ought to try that this year - in music & song - in a few brief words - in our program - a course in Christmas - no credit - no examinations - except a final one - still a long way off - but an inevitable examination - one that all of us will surely have to take - xxx
3. Live all subjects - context and background are important - carols coming around these nights - sing the songs of Christmas in the night & the darkness - a picture of all of Christmas - ^{today} hear much of its joy & happiness - but we shall never understand it as we should unless we also see its tragedy - the shadows beyond the light of the Manger - the deep, dark irony of "Silent Night" on a winter evening in 1946 - the tragedy of Christmas in the world we have made for ourselves -
4. The tragedy of our distance from the true spirit & meaning of Christmas - no chapel speaker necessary - Millay - in days after a day watching the preparations for Christmas in a

Dec. 16, '46
Fall was simple & easy

Commenced in days after a day watching the preparations for Christmas in a

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great city - the bitter lines of a sailor-girl:

" For this your mother skinned in the cold
 For this you bled upon the bitter tree
 A yard of tinsel ribbon bought & sold
 A paper wreath; a day at home for me -
 O Promise of Peace! O Sharon Dewy Rose!
 How much you lie within your manger bed -
 The stone the angel rolled away with tears
 We've laid upon your mouth these thousand years:
 our greatest hardships & sufferings

5. And then there is Martha Turner: "Well, shall we mock at this -
 This Xmas time - And sing of peace when we have only
 fighting? - No, let's at least be honest in our weariness -
 God, we have failed again - We don't seem very apt at being
 children - And some of us are sorry - But why try again -
 After so many failures - To think we can do better?
 The stars come out so slowly - And in the quiet, Surely
 there is the hush of angel wings - "God, let us go -
 We've made a ghostly Christmas - O Son of God,
 How can you love us so?"

6. And that's the first part of any course in Christmas -
 to see it as a candle in a dark room - as only a
 moment of eternity in a forgetful world - as the sudden
 & saddening glimpse of the open door of a warm &
 lighted home on a winter night - the bitter realization
 that with Christmas in the world & in our hearts we could do
 fine a Xmas so much better than we have -

O God -
 while there
 is still

7. When we have seen that we can begin to study Christmas - Roman
 origin as Xmas night - a dark, dark place - a waxy place - a child
 was born who opened the windows toward heaven - from every
 our darkness - answered our prayer - "Then we do what we must be