

" I SUPPOSE CHRIST IS REALLY A KIND OF MYTH "

Just suppose for a moment that our Christmas star this year took the form of a genuine flying saucer with some cosmic visitors on board. It lands in some remote corner of the Rockies, and out of it steps a little exploring party from some distant planet. The visitors are not only what we call "intelligent creatures," but are from a civilization some thousands of years in advance of ours. They have studied our language and have acquired a method of rapid individual transportation, every man his own jet, so that they can reach our big cities quickly. Most surprising of all is that they have learned the art of invisibility at will so that they wander freely through our streets, travel our buses, enter our homes, restaurants, and clubs, experience our football games, our church services, our denominations, and our Christmas parties. They take notes everywhere and by mid-January are whizzing off to their home planet with enough material for a thousand page report on "The Habits and Beliefs of the American Section of the Natives on Planet Earth."

I want to turn to the chapter of that report labeled "Religion." And what I find myself reading is something like this: "Our expedition to America coincided with an annual celebration called Christmas. For a period of weeks culminating on the 25th of December on their calendar the natives decorate their homes and public buildings, organize social events of various kinds, especially for children, exchange gifts, and constantly wish one another happiness and merriment. We had not thought to include this celebration in our chapter on religion until we noticed the constant recurrence of certain symbols, a star, a child's cradle, a tree, and concluded that these had some religious significance. Then we found that at the climax of the festival the churches were unusually active and seemed, indeed, to claim some sort of monopoly on its meaning. Further investigation elicited the information that a 'mass' is a church celebration and 'Christ' is the name of the God who is worshipped in these churches, hence Christ-mas, Christ-mas. This Christ is a name of great power and influence with many Americans, but we found it difficult in listening to conversations to discover just who he was, or is. Some talk as though he were a great folk hero of the past whose teachings were well in advance of his time and who was brutally