

Dear Friends in Christ:

This morning (St. Stephen's Day) I threw out Christmas bulletins. It is not something I am predisposed to do—throw out useless stuff—but I did it. There was no argument to be made for keeping them since it is after Christmas. Their time of value and relevance has now passed. They are no longer assets. They can only be liabilities.

One of the sustained practices of secularism is to view all things pertaining to God in the same light as I view the Christmas bulletins. The time of value and relevance for belief in God has now passed—or so secularism believes. But is it so?

January is the month in which we are most likely to reflect on the passage of time making some things more relevant and other things of little or no value. We even have rules of questionable provenance that we cite: *If you haven't used it in five years throw it out.* One of my favorite chefs insists that if you have any spices in the cabinet that are more than six months old, throw them out. I would be Mother Hubbard if I did that. How about cars—anything with over 100,000 miles, you should get rid of.

Well what if the something we are referring to is our relationship with God? There are certainly times when our relationship with God has gone into a sort of dormancy. We don't pray. We don't seek to worship, serve, obey, love, and esteem God in all that we think do or say for months at a time. We might drop back from attending worship for weeks, months, even years. Yet it remains possible that some set of events—some changed circumstance—some health scare—some setback—perhaps even the ice cold breath of death on the backs of our necks can remove the blockage and put us in a position not merely to recognize that a relationship with God is more than important, more than the most important thing, indeed it is the only thing that can do us any good—and it always was.

On January 5 we will commemorate the visit of the Magi to the Christ child and his mother. They have seen his star in its rising and have recognized the potential of this child to be not only a new King for Israel, but a new King for the whole human race. *If your relationship with God has gone into dormancy, perhaps you have misidentified who and what God is.*

On January 12 we will remember the Baptism of our Lord by John the Baptist in the River Jordan. John certainly recognizes the potential of Jesus to change and renew the relationship of Israel with God. "I baptize you with water but He will baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire." Newness for Israel will come in the person of Jesus the Messiah. *If you have not used your faith in five years, repent, and then watch and pray for the Holy Spirit.* On January 19, we will have the story of Jesus' turning the water into wine at the wedding at Cana in Galilee. He is reluctant to use his powers for this task, but his mother insists, and so he causes newness to explode onto the scene such that the steward remarks that usually a host serves the best wine first, but Jesus is become the new wine at the last. *If you have not used your faith in five years, repent, and get ready for God to initiate a cause for celebration.*

On January 26, we have what scholars (many of whom are Commies) call the Galilean Manifesto. Jesus comes to the synagogue, is invited to read and preach, and declares, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me for he has anointed me to proclaim Good News to the poor..." God is on the move. God is doing something astounding. God is repossessing the world and He is going to do it through Jesus' ministry, life, death, and resurrection. *If you have not used your faith in five years, repent, and hang on for dear life, because newness has just walked in the door, and nothing will stay the same.*

The experience of the Church over the past 2000 years since the first Christmas has been quite the opposite of what secularism asserts without evidence. God is the source of newness in the life of the Christian, in the life of the Church, and in the life of the world. Long periods of neglect on our part do not circumscribe what God is able to do and is willing to do. When Jesus in the book of Revelation declares, "Behold, I make all things new." We should view it as a wake up call to stop listening to the experts and secularists, and instead listen for the voice of the Good Shepherd.

Yours, in Christ, John S. McKenzie