



# The Pilgrim

“All the trumpets sounded for him on the other side”

—PILGRIM’S PROGRESS

O. P. Kretzmann

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*Sonnenwende*

January, 1970

Few of us, children of the Now and urbanity, give more than passing attention to the day of the year our fathers called *Sonnenwende*... We mark the passing of time far more attentively on the night of December 31 and the morning of January 1 when we seem to be able to view it with a fusion of nostalgia, repentant or unrepentant, and a vague mounting hope that the New Year will be better than the old... This tearing nearness of nostalgia and hope makes the wassail and the shouting of New Year’s Eve necessary... We cannot bear the pain without it... We must try to outshout the whisper of the passing years. Only in defiant noise can we achieve a Trojan peace... Only with nervous laughter can we try to ignore the ultimate judgment of time: “Dust thou art, and unto dust thou returnest.”

If it were possible, we would try to tie our measuring of the years to the timelessness of the Incarnation and the Resurrection... It would be good and most instructive to measure time by the events that are both in and beyond time...

Since this is difficult in our world, I have turned lately to the charm and power of the time-measuring of our distant ancestors... The *Sonnenwende* marked the breathless moment when the sun seemed to them to be standing still, hesitating before it seemed to turn in the opposite direction... Until *Sonnenwende* (about December 21), the sun seemed to them to be moving away... The days were short and dark, and icy breath blew over the land... Then at *Sonnenwende* the sun seemed to them to be nearing again... The days grew longer, obedient to hope, and one could think of spring...

Apparently our fathers took *Sonnenwende* to mean something massive, planetary, and universal... The movement the sun seemed to them to be making involved the wrenching of their universe... The going down of the sun on *Sonnenwende*, more clearly on that day than any other day, meant their opportunity to set out on a new path, moving surely toward the longest day... It would seem that this meaning given time could fit into an

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age when our brothers walk on the moon... For ours is an age when the thought of all of us must become planetary in scope and more relevant to the destiny of a wayside planet fearfully turning around the sun...

With this meaning of time given at *Sonnenwende*, beginning a few days before the annual remembrance of the Incarnation, could we not come closer to Wordsworth's vision?...

The holy time is quiet as a nun  
Breathless with adoration, the broad sun  
Is sinking down in its tranquility;  
The gentleness of hearts broods o'er the sea.  
Listen! The mighty Being is awake  
And doth with His eternal motion make  
A sound like thunder — everlastingly.

Perhaps 1969 will be known as a year of setting out on a new path... There were riots and wars and much hate and big lies... But there were also men walking in quietness and peace on the moon... Perhaps they were taking the first step toward seeing the farther reaches of the universe as God has always seen them — vast, mysterious, beckoning men to stretch their finitude a little farther but never leaving the limitation of His creation... Man found some new ground to walk on; but it is still ground, and he must walk when and where his machines stop... Perhaps this is the greatest achievement of 1969, a turning toward a cosmic humility which may move man to kneel again, even in the dust of the moon far from earth and his old home...

For there is another and greater "*Sonnenwende*" of the soul which is not tied to time and is the essence of eternity... Another, deeper turning toward humility and hope... The words of Blake make up an epitaph for 1969 from all of us still here on earth...

I rest not from my great task!

To open the Eternal Worlds, to open the immortal Eyes  
Of Man inwards into the Worlds of Thought: into eternity...  
O Saviour pour upon me Thy Spirit of meekness and love!

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Annihilate the Selfhood in me: be Thou all my life!

Guide Thou my hand, which trembles exceedingly upon The  
Rock of Ages!

In our time—in 1970—we tremble much, and our first and final  
hope is that we tremble with at least one hand upon the Rock of  
Ages...

