



continuous conversion

JOY TO THE WORLD!

BY SARA TUSEK

There's a happy sense of expectancy evident in the traditional Christmas carol, "Joy to the World!":

JOY TO THE WORLD,

THE LORD HAS COME.

LET EARTH RECEIVE HER KING!

Clearly the author of this carol believes that Earth is aware of its lack of a proper king, and is waiting to receive Him. I also believe that this is true—even people who don't know God, know in their hearts that they need someone or something to guide them.

LET EARTH RECEIVE HER KING!

God, I believe, puts the knowledge of "goodness" in the heart of each soul He creates. Each soul is restless until it finds true goodness—that is, until it finds God.

History illustrates this principle: over and over again, people beg for a king—someone whom they can obey and worship. The Israelites persuaded Jehovah to give them a king, even though He warned them that earthly kings always cause hardships for their subjects. The people got their kings and then suffered profoundly under their frequently wicked rule.

The human impulse to worship a king can be perverted by dictators and evil-minded tyrants. These "pseudo-kings"



usually start their career as champions of the people, but end as killers of the people. Hitler, Stalin, Mao, Caligula, Castro—these grotesque "kings" are so infamous they need no first name.

Sadly, in their desperation to have a good king to watch over them, people can be fooled by a person who appears to be a king but is really an evil criminal. This ability to be fooled is a measure of how urgently people seek a true king. The carol proclaims, with great excitement, the exceedingly good news that the true king has come:

THE LORD HAS COME!

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JOY TO THE WORLD!

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HE RULES THE WORLD IN TRUTH AND GRACE!

In the second stanza of this carol, the author expresses his or her great joy that the new, long-expected king has finally come; and not only has He come, He reigns in truth and grace.

This is a truly awesome statement.

Earthly kings may reign over their subjects; they might even do some good while they're reigning; but to say that they reign in truth and grace sounds to our too-often-fooled ears like grotesque propaganda, the utmost in ridiculous hyperbole.

Would any serious historian be able to claim that there ever was a human king who ruled in truth and grace?

Human truth is too subjective to be pinned down like that; human grace is too fickle and capricious to be claimed as a human attribute, as the very idea of grace is that it's an exceptional response to an offense or crime.

Even so, the King of the carol rules the whole world using only and always truth and grace. This idea is simultaneously frightening and hopeful: few people would like to be treated according to a strictly truthful accounting of their character and deeds, but almost everyone would appreciate being treated graciously. This King does both, at the same time.

NO MORE LET SIN AND SORROW REIGN!

The King's coming is welcome (a relief, in fact) and is an occasion for unimaginable joy. The third stanza proclaims this ("No more let sin and sorrow reign!"), implying that everyone agrees that sorrow and sin have been reigning for far too long, and everyone is happy to see the new king begin to reign.

If we would take these words at face value, we'd find the answer to all of life's difficulties and tragedies. Sin and sorrow no longer reign. The new King has taken over in the "reigning" department and kicked out sin and sorrow. They are gone.

Yet how many of us continue to live as though sin and sorrow were still in the driver's seat. Our joys seem evanescent, while our sorrows seem like permanent parts of us. As we get older, we sometimes weigh the good of our lives against the bad and imagine that the bad has greater weight. The trying times of life—personal loss, lack of guidance, regrets, affronts to our pride—seem much more vivid and concrete than the fleeting moments of emotional satisfaction and contentment.

But giving sin and sorrow this much power is wrong. If we follow this King, then He reigns, at least in us. Sin and sorrow have been sent packing and have no right to bother us at all. The King said so!

REPEAT THE SOUNDING JOY!

This King brings joy! So much so that even rocks, and hills, and streams praise Him. So join with the carol and the singers—repeat after me—**JOY TO THE WORLD! THE LORD HAS COME. LET EARTH RECEIVE HER KING!**

