

Christmas: A Lost Opportunity

Christmas is a worship invention (worship added to what was given to us by God in Scripture) born in the fourth century. It has gone through a considerable evolution to reach its present glory. As a worship innovation, the Reformers and their Puritan successors considered it a blatant violation of the second commandment.

America identified with its Puritan roots for nearly 100 years before we began to succumb once again to the siren call of old saint Nick. Now we are 'all in'.

Let's consider one of the rationales given by some Christians for inviting Father Christmas into our homes: It presents a witnessing opportunity. Christmas means the story of Christ and His birth. Most people don't come this close to Christian history, terminology, symbolism, or meaning any other time of the year. It seems like a witnessing occasion we should not pass up.

First though, let's distinguish two things. Are we mainly saying Christmas DOES witness just because it contains Christian elements, or are we saying that Christmas presents US with witnessing opportunities *via* the Christian symbols of Christmas?

If Christmas DOES witness, then why didn't the Puritans accept it? For the same reason they said that Roman Catholicism doesn't witness to the truth, even though it proclaims all the same basic Gospel facts we do: because it is, in the end, a perversion of the Gospel.

Would the Puritans say, "Oh, you 21st-century Americans have bloated Christmas with so much crass covetousness that you can barely see its massive, imperial Catholic roots! Well done!" No.

Christmas HAS a message. It isn't waiting to be imbued with one. Christmas' own message doesn't witness better than any cult's, when it comes down to it. Whatever Christian symbols it contains are perversions, not proclamations of Christian truth. Trying to recover the Gospel from Christmas is like trying to peel back Jehovah's Witness to an orthodox core. If you manage that, it's no longer Jehovah's Witness. And why would you do that if you could already have orthodoxy without it?

No, if we're counting on Christmas itself to witness, we're in deep trouble.

Alright, let's try the other route: We should keep Christmas because it gives US opportunities to witness.

Well, let's first ask: How is *participating* in Christmas witnessing to our non-Christian neighbors?

Is it when our neighbor can come into our home and look at our Christmas decorations and see that we have attached Christian words and figures to them, even, perhaps, a cross? In whatever way we've tried to make the real Gospel message prominent, has Christmas really facilitated us, or is our neighbor simply left wide-eyed at the bewildering array of symbols added to all the glitz and invention he's come to expect everywhere at this time of year?

Even if we've kept it simple. Even if we've said, "We don't care about decorations and presents; we try to make it about Jesus." He may admire you, but when he sees Christmas there, isn't he automatically translating it into his own terms? Can we in fact transform it for him by agreeing with him first?

Who really witnesses via Christmas? When we visit a neighbor, are we brazen enough to walk up to their glittery "Peace on earth" letter banner and say, "Please hear the only way man can have peace with God"? Doesn't that break an unwritten rule of Christmas, that we can each enjoy it our own way?

To witness via Christmas, we must ultimately break into its hypnotic spell somehow: really not essentially different than trying to break sin's spell any time of the year- saying, "This is **not** what Christmas is supposed to be about." But who are *we* to say that? We took *their* holiday, are enjoying it, and now will we justify our participation with a token attempt at evangelism?

Religiously, Christmas is a time for unbelievers to think that they have as good an understanding of things Divine as the average guy: not essentially different than any other time of year.

The person who'll witness to anyone, anytime, anywhere will do fine with or without Christmas. At Christmas, he'll just have to be a bit more blunt with: "You think you're OK with God? You're not"- something he'd say anytime. If he waters this message down because of Christmas, then we see the real winner between witness and Christmas.

It's the true evangelistic soul who witnesses. Christmas doesn't help him, but participating in it can certainly hurt him.