

American Decency Association

PO Box 202, Fremont, MI 49412 231-924-4050 www.americandecency.org
Encouraging Christians to guard their hearts December 2017

Don't Be a Scrooge This Christmas

By: R.C. Sproul



“Bah! Humbug!” These two words are instantly associated with Charles Dickens’ immortal fictional anti-hero, Ebenezer Scrooge. Scrooge was the prototype of the Grinch who stole Christmas, the paradigm of all men cynical.

We all recognize that Ebenezer Scrooge was a mean person - stingy, insensitive, selfish, and unkind. What we often miss in our understanding of his character is that he was preeminently profane. “Bah! Humbug!” was his Victorian use of profanity.

Not that any modern editor would feel the need to delete Scrooge’s exple-

tives. His language is not the standard currency of cursing. But it was profane in that Scrooge demeaned what was holy. He trampled on the sanctity of Christmas. He despised the sacred. He was cynical toward the sublime.

Christmas is a holiday, indeed the world’s most joyous holiday. It is called a “holiday” because the day is holy. It is a day when

businesses close, when families gather, when churches are filled, and when soldiers put down their guns for a 24-hour truce. It is a day that differs from every other day.

Every generation has its abundance of Scrooges. The church is full of them.

We hear endless complaints of commercialism. We are constantly told to put Christ back into Christmas. We hear that the tradition of Santa Claus is a sacrilege. We listen to those acquainted with history murmur that Christmas isn’t biblical. The Church invented Christmas to compete with the ancient Roman festival honoring the bull-god

Mithras, the nay-sayers complain. Christmas? A mere capitulation to paganism.

And so we rain on Jesus’ parade and assume an Olympian detachment from the joyous holiday. All this carping is but a modern dose of Scroogeism, our own sanctimonious profanation of the holy.

Sure, Christmas is a time of commerce. The department stores are decorated to the hilt, the ad pages of the newspapers swell in size, and we tick off the number of shopping days left until Christmas. But why all the commerce? The high degree of commerce at Christmas is driven by one thing: the buying of gifts for others. To present our friends and families with gifts is not an ugly, ignoble vice. It incarnates the amorphous “spirit of Christmas.” The tradition rests ultimately on the supreme gift God has given the world. God so loved the world, the Bible says, that He gave His only begotten Son. The giving of gifts is a

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marvelous response to the receiving of such a gift. For one day a year at least, we taste the sweetness inherent in the truth that it is more blessed to give than to receive.

What about putting Christ back into Christmas? It is simply not necessary. Christ has never left Christmas. "Jingle Bells" will never replace "Silent Night." Our holiday once known as Thanksgiving is rapidly becoming known simply as "Turkey Day." But Christmas is still called Christmas. It is not called "Gift Day." Christ is still in Christmas, and for one brief season the secular world broadcasts the message of Christ over every radio station and television channel in the land. Never does the church get as much free air time as during the Christmas season.

Not only music but the visual arts are present in abundance, bearing testimony to the historic significance of the birth of

Jesus. Christmas displays all remind the world of the sacred Incarnation.

Doesn't Santa Claus paganize or at least trivialize Christmas? He's a myth, and his very mythology casts a shadow over the sober historical reality of Jesus. Not at all. Myths are not necessarily bad or harmful. Every society creates myths. They are a peculiar art form invented usually to convey a message that is deemed important by the people. When a myth is passed off as real history, that is fraud. But when it serves a different purpose it can be healthy and virtuous. Kris Kringle is a mythical hero, not a villain. He is pure fiction — but a fiction used to illustrate a glorious truth.

What about the historical origins of Christmas as a substitute for a pagan festival? I can only say, good for the early Christians who had the wisdom to flee from Mithras and direct their zeal to the celebration of the birth of Christ. Who associates Christmas today with Mithras? No one calls it "Mithrasmus."

We celebrate Christmas because we cannot eradicate from our consciousness

our profound awareness of the difference between the sacred and the profane. Man, in the generic sense, has an incurable propensity for marking sacred space and sacred time. When God appeared to Moses in the burning bush, the ground that was previously common suddenly became uncommon. It was now holy ground - sacred space. When Jacob awoke from his midnight vision of the presence of God, he anointed with oil the rock upon which he had rested his head. It was sacred space.

When God touches earth, the place is holy. When God appears in history, the time is holy. There was never a more holy place than the city of Bethlehem, where the Word became flesh. There was never a more holy time than Christmas morning when Emmanuel was born. Christmas is a holiday. It is the holiest of holy days. We must heed the warning of Jacob Marley: "Don't be a Scrooge" at Christmas.

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