

Why Charles Dickens Is to Blame for Modern-Day Christ-less Christmas

Christmas is the most popular holiday celebrated in the U.S., but rather than holiday joy and merriment, a growing number of people say, “Bah, humbug!” If you’re in the “Bah, humbug” crowd, it’s quite appropriate to bring Ebenezer Scrooge into this discussion.

If you’re wondering what in the dickens I’m talking about, you’ve got it right: Charles Dickens. Dickens’ story of *A Christmas Carol* influenced the holidays far beyond its literary mark and created a holiday with no hero. You see, this Dickensian superstar led the cast of fictional characters that unleashed a new version of Christmas on an eager public in the 1800s and forever changed it.

For those who know the story well—and most do, as it has sold more than 5 million copies since being published in 1843 and adapted into more movies and TV specials than any other Christmas story—you may be surprised to hear Charles Dickens and his fictional cast of not-so-merry men and ghosts implicated in anything so serious. In fact, his tale of Scrooge’s reformation from merciless penny-pincher to humanitarian is cemented in Western Christmas folklore as a favorite holiday tale.

Ironically, Dickens was trying to tell a tale to curb the evils of materialism and he ended up creating a vacuum in our culture that has been invaded by the very ghosts of excessive love of money that he once exorcised.

Rather than a meaningful celebration of peace, sacrifice, humility and ultimate love, families endure a rat race of frenetic shopping and preparations. While 86 percent say they

expect to buy gifts for friends or family this year, only about 4 percent say what they look forward to most is buying gifts, reports the Pew Research Center. Even more troubling is that 33 percent of people admitted they dislike the commercialism and materialism of the holidays.

So how did we get to this place, and is there a way back out of it?

Christmas prior to Dickens was much more of a religious celebration. As secularism grew in the 19th century, Dickens penned a new ideal for the holiday. He downplayed the religious aspects of the season and substituted a romanticized ideal of family gatherings, "caroling out in the snow," gift-giving and merry-making. By staging his story in the idyllic past of Victorian England, Dickens also rewrote history in his present. People seized on this romantic but Christ-less vision for Christmas, and Western culture has never looked back.

It wasn't just Dickens. Men like Clement Clarke Moore, author of *The Night Before Christmas*, wrote Christmas tales that were heavy on hope-filled ideas like Santa Claus and magical winteresque scenes and absent of one thing: Christ.

A Christmas story devoid of Jesus is a story that lacks a hero, like the disembodied head of a ghost of Christmas past. A Christ-less Christmas is like a yearly birthday party where everyone has forgotten whose birthday it is. The celebrating is fun, but celebrating for celebration's sake grows meaningless after a while. If it's only about the decorations, the parties and the presents under the tree, there is very little to stop us from overspending, overstressing and overmaterializing.

One need not be a Christian to appreciate the story of Christ's birth. The values the nativity story embodies are universally needed—especially at Christmas. Christ is more than a romantic symbol of the holiday—His values began the

holiday. The story of Jesus exudes the much-needed characteristics of humility, service to others and sacrifice. That deity would be clothed in humanity and one day give His life selflessly on a cross is the ultimate example of a selfless gift for others.

Scrooge learned this lesson from a troop of ghosts that showed him the error of his selfish ways. But if Ebenezer's holiday celebration had included Christ, he may have never needed their visit in the first place.

If you're having trouble getting into the Christmas spirit, forget Dickens' Christ-less tale and remember the original spirit of Christmas, the child born in Bethlehem who represents us all and represents hope, peace, self-sacrifice and a God who loves us enough to become one of us.

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