

Please Stop Demonizing Christmas

During a recent trip to El Salvador, a pastor and I were talking about how much we both love Christmas music. We shared some of the songs on our personal playlists, and then he told me that his wife is especially fond of songs like “It’s the Most Wonderful Time of the Year” and “Let It Snow” because the church she grew up in discouraged members from celebrating Christmas or hanging any type of holiday decorations.

Her story reminded me that several *Charisma* readers jumped on me a few years ago after I wrote a column about Christmas. They were angry because they consider Christmas a pagan holiday that is luring gift-giving revelers into hell itself. One person who identified himself as “Albert” wrote in our online forum that he “isn’t comfortable celebrating Christmas” because of its “demonic origins.”

You probably know there are many Christians who boycott Christmas for various reasons—some factual and some quite debatable. These people insist:

- The holiday has become too commercialized and promotes greed. (I can’t really argue with that.)
- No one knows when Jesus was born. (True—and the Bible is silent about the date.) However, “Albert” and other anti-Christmas purists insist Jesus was born on Sept. 11, in 3 B.C., during Rosh Hoshana.
- The Dec. 25 date was chosen to “Christianize” the pagan celebration of Saturnalia, an ancient winter solstice festival. (Probably true—but is there anything wrong with Christianizing something? I’m glad a pagan celebration was replaced.)
- Christmas trees are a pagan tradition, since druids believed evergreen boughs were magical and had the power

to scare away demons. ("Thursday" is also named for the Norse god Thor, but that doesn't mean I worship him when I use the word.)

- Dec. 25 is the birthday of Nimrod, who later became known as the pagan god Baal, who later became known as Nicolas, who later became known as Santa Claus. For this reason, we can be sure that demons lurk behind all wreaths, candles, ornaments, fruitcakes, sleighs or anyone dressed in red and green.
- "Santa" is just a jumbled misspelling of "Satan"! (Seriously?)

In all fairness to these Christmas critics, I will admit I never encouraged my children to believe in Santa Claus. This was not because I was afraid he was Baal, Nimrod or an ancient Turkish bishop in disguise, but because 1) I felt I would be lying to my kids if I told them Santa brought them gifts; 2) I hate standing in lines at department stores; and 3) the prospect of inviting a strange old man into my house so he can "check" on my sleeping daughters is downright creepy.

But I unashamedly love Christmas. I love the trees, the ornaments, the lights, the smells, the eggnog, the music, the gifts and the family and friends who share the celebration with me. All the decorations point me to Jesus—from the bells on the front porch to the angel on top of the tree to the plastic manger scene that shows some wear (mainly because our dachshund, Flapjack, chewed a shepherd's head off in 1996.)

For me, Christmas is a wondrous time of year when I ponder the miracle of Christ's birth and, hopefully, get lots of chances to share his generous love with people who are less fortunate than I am.

People have been fighting about Christmas for a long time. Christmas gift-giving was condemned by the Catholic Church during the Middle Ages because of the "pagan origins" of the holiday. Then, anti-Catholic Puritans declared war on

Christmas in England and banned it from 1647 to 1660, calling it “a popish festival with no justification.” In the United States, Puritans outlawed Christmas in Massachusetts from 1659 to 1681, and it was an unpopular holiday after the Revolutionary War because Americans associated it with England.

Christmas became a federal holiday in 1870. Yet today, in spite of the fact that Christmas has morphed into a meaningless mush of secularized snowflakes, reindeer, penguins, gift cards and year-end sales, the Scrooges of our day want to suck all the remaining Christian spirituality out of it.

I expect atheists to hate Christmas. I know they will try to ban nativity scenes from public parks or remove Christmas carols from classrooms. But it is downright tragic when Christians—who should welcome every opportunity to bring the miracle of Jesus’ incarnation into public life—start bah-humbugging (or even demonizing) the holiday.

Keep Christmas in your own way, by all means. If it’s offensive to you to hang mistletoe from your mantle or to send a Christmas card to friends, then don’t. I won’t judge you for that. But please don’t judge other believers simply because they want to celebrate all that is pure and decent and meaningful this special time of year.

P.S. Merry Christmas!