

Expecting and Accepting "X-mas" from the World

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John 1:10-14 "He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God-- children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." (NIV)

"Christmas has become too commercialized." "They've taken Christ out of Christmas." "It is little more than a secular event." "A Holy Day is now just another holiday."

Along with complaints about traffic and long lines at the stores, these are some of the laments we hear this time of year. Such "godly gripings" have become as traditional as exchanging gifts, caroling, watching "It's a Wonderful Life" and downing eggnog.

Seeing Jesus excluded from His own birthday celebration naturally stirs the hearts of those who love Him. But I wonder if we have a biblical expectation of the world in this matter.

Starkly stated: of course the world has secularized Christmas. But what did we really expect? How "Buddah-filled" would a Christian's life be if they lived in Japan?

Followers of Jesus need to quit expecting the world to be Christian-like in their beliefs or behavior. Bunnies at Easter and reindeer at Christmas are far more sensible and consistent from the unbelieving world than a genuine honoring of the risen Savior, whom they do not know, nor claim to know. Jesus is not their conquering Messiah so why should they hypocritically act as if He is?

Christians need to collectively mark and mourn the passing of our Christian heritage and seek to win a secular world (which is redundant) to Christ. We no longer live in a Christian nation (if we ever truly did). Let's accept that and move on to reaching out to them with His love and message of salvation.

God has not left Himself without a witness (see Acts 14:17; Psalm 19), even if that is a secularized, seemingly Christ-free Christmas. The

impact of the birth of the historical Son of God is seen even in the leaving of Him out. Our holiday madness begs the question: from whence does this gift giving, tree trimming, carol singing come? Pagan winter solstice celebrations hardly suffice as an answer. Jesus is indeed the reason for the season - historically even if not devotionally.

This is like replacing BC and AD (Before Christ and Anno Domini) with BCE and CE (Before Common Era). It stills begs the question: what marked the beginning of the "Common Era?" One may excise and "commonize" AD (the year of our Lord) but, as in life and history, Jesus' imprint is still felt. No matter how you label it, Jesus split and defined history.

You find little in the gospels of Jesus' disappointment with the world not recognizing Him. He knew what to expect. Blind people cannot see. They need sight. It was when His people did not have a clue about Him that He was stirred and grieved (see Matt. 23:37).

The world does not merely need to be Christianized or made more moral - though it does well and wise to be moral. And we are wise and good citizens to work and pray towards that end.

Nor is their greatest need to better teach or appreciate how Christian our nation's heritage was - though history done with integrity can hardly overlook this and be honest. Civil religion leaves us civil and religious. While being civil is obviously good, being religious, well, the verdict is still out. Did not Jesus say: "what would it profit a man if he gained the whole world yet lost his soul"?

Our world's greatest need is to encounter and bow before Christ Himself. Hopefully, they are enabled to do this as He is seen and heard in us year round.

For non-Christians to commercialize Christmas is on-target, in character behavior for them. Why would they - though they should - make Jesus central on Dec. 25? He is not the other 364 days. They are being consistent. Why do we not honor their lack of pretense instead of blasting their honest omissions? Do we want them to feign fellowship with Him, furthering both their and our confusion over their identity and need?

Instead of being grumbling, mumbling curmudgeons (Grinches?) who wonder why Christ-less people took Christ out of Christmas, let us seek to be caring, compassionate neighbors who realize they never had Christ to take Him out in the first place.

Anyone can use "X-mas" as a chance for cheap shots. Jesus might be most

honored by His followers making the most of this seasonal opportunity to share and show His love to others - a love that might be deepened by confessing and repenting of unbiblical expectations of the unsaved.

Instead of griping and fuming about Christ's absence from Christmas this year, let's fully insert Him in our daily lives as well as our annual natal hoopla. Away with demeaning a secular world - is there any other kind? - for trying their best to honor the "spirit of Christmas."

Let us commend their efforts to show love, share and serve others - even if it is merely seasonal sentimental piety (if it is only that). Let us understand their "tip of the hat" deference to the God-man for what it is and what it cannot be. It falls to us to display and declare year-round worship of the Babe of Bethlehem, the Creator made creature.

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