

The Spirit of Christmas Past (with apologies to Charles Dickens)

Most businesses conduct a follow-up analysis of past events in what some tend to call a post mortem. It seems that the event or life has ended and is dead. Thus it can now be viewed objectively to determine helpful data in making the next event even more meaningful.

Can this be done with Christmas Past? Should it? Or would we prefer to wait a few more months and then rehearse an annual ritual controlled more by secular society than the Church that began at Christmas.

John Wanamaker, the merchant prince of an earlier generation said, "Success is never a haphazard affair." Neither is spiritual progress. It must be designed and purposefully developed. It just doesn't happen automatically. So too, is a proper observance of Christmas.

Though there are many facets of the Christmas celebration that need a spiritual review, let me cite only the practices that center upon the sending of Christmas cards and greetings.

For many years I have deplored the encroachment of non-Christian concepts and images found on Christmas cards used by Christians. Not that I am opposed to evergreen trees, snow, sleighs, country scenes, trains, covered bridges or even Santa Claus. Even Mickey Mouse or Snoopy can still hold my attention. But why not also include something that specifically declares the Biblical message such as, "I bring you good news of great joy which shall be for all the people, for unto you is born a Savior who is Christ the Lord."

Are we Christians so accustomed to this transforming truth that we think that everyone else has experienced God's saving grace through His Son, Jesus? Are we not commanded to witness to this message - this reality?

Each Christmas night, after all the children and grandchildren have left me to my solitude, I customarily gather together all the Christmas cards that have arrived during the preceding weeks and that have been hurriedly opened merely to determine the name of the sender. Then, slowly and deliberately, I read each card again and think about those who sent them.

In most instances, it is a delightful, thrilling time and I am stirred, challenged and often moved with emotion by past memories and the added messages of friends and family. But then, there are those cards, fortunately not too numerous, totally devoid of any resemblance to "The Good News." There are bunny rabbits in the snow, holiday lanterns, birds in the trees, and the annual up-dated family photographs with new spouses or new children. And then there are those expressions of "Holiday Greetings," and "Best Wishes for an Old Fashioned Christmas," "Christmas Wishes," and "Seasons Greetings." But what does all that have to do with Christ, the Incarnate Deity?

When such cards are sent from secular businesses, or non-Christian neighbors, that's understandable, and quite acceptable. They simply want to keep up a contact with the recipient. But unfortunately, some come from devout believers who undoubtedly, in other times have said, "Let's keep Christ in Christmas." And what about the one sent from a minister featuring a teddy bear on the front and a verse declaring that "Good Bears

are Love Made Visible.” Now really, is that the best message we Christians can give? Is that at the root of our faith?

So let us learn from the Spirit of Christmas Past, and vow that this coming Christmas we will respond to the call,

“O Come All Ye Faithful, Joyful and Triumphant,
O Come Let Us Adore Him, Christ the Lord!”

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