

Christmas bells still ring of peace and joy

■ **OUR OPINION:** Even without religious connotations, the holiday message remains intact

Christmas has become too commercial. Americans seem to have forgotten the true meaning of ... blah, blah, blah.

Christmas is exclusionary because it marginalizes people of other faiths and ... etc., ad nauseum, infinitum.

Christmas places too much pressure on people and causes suicide rates ... and so on and so on.

The "most wonderful time of the year" has taken a bad rap in recent years. It seems the more obvious the benefits of any given event, the more inclined people are to find its faults. It's also typical of college students to examine and criticize the dominant paradigm, rolling our eyes at the banality of tradition. "Christmas is just a capitalist plot to drive the economy and empty our wallets." "Christmas symbolizes the patriarchal structure of western religion: white, oppressive and inescapable."

And yes, to a certain extent all of that is true. Year by year, this religious holiday becomes more secularized — the birth of Christ lost among the millions of bustling shoppers, crystal bowls brimming with egg nog and foil-wrapped packages that lie in wait beneath gold ornaments and twinkling lights. But while some may lament the diminishing visibility of the messenger, have we really forgotten the message?

This season of celebration — Christmas, Hanukkah, the winter solstice — is a

time of reunion. Throughout the year, we pursue our individual goals of good grades, good jobs and good times, focused, more or less, on ourselves. But something about this time of year, something not quite tangible, encourages us to lift our heads and look into the eyes of our family and friends. We are reminded of what is most important: the people who love us and the people we love.

Perhaps this is the greatest gift of Christmas. It transcends religious barriers and has become a human rather than a Christian experience. People of all faiths, atheists and agnostics can mold the holiday season into any form they wish. It can be a celebration of the life of Christ, the miracle of light, the pinnacle of winter, or the icy beauty of the world and the warm comfort of home. Yet for all of these different manifestations, the result is the same.

The world takes one moment, a brief, fragile second, to be generous and kind. Neighbors who have never met hold doors open for one another and exchange smiles. Brothers locked in some life-long competitive battle relax enough to enjoy each other's company. Strangers crunching by on slick, frozen streets glance up and exchange greetings.

And so while we can shake our heads and wonder why we don't interact with the world like this throughout the year, perhaps, just this once, it's better to leave analysis behind and drink in the beauty of the season.

Sleigh bells ring.
Are you listening?



Christmas: Love is the real message

Have a cool Yule and a groovy New Year. — Anonymous
Merry Christmas, Happy Hanukkah, 'Tis the Season, Happy New Year and all that crap. Yes, ladies and gentlemen, it is once again the time of year to find out who has been naughty and nice. Unfortunately, Santa is dead and we killed him.

The Christmas spirit has died. Peace on earth and goodwill toward man just isn't fashionable any more. In this day and age of me, me, me, we always forget about others — until the last month of the year, of course, when we try to make up for it.

We try by helping the homeless, feeding the hungry, and giving generously to charities. Why? Goodwill towards man? Yeah, right. Guilt! Guilt is the primary motivation here, not benevolence.

People look back on what schmucks they've been for the past year and then try to make up for it. They perform some paltry act of charity and then get that warm fuzzy feeling that they actually helped someone out. Of course, they hold in contempt those same people they just helped for the next eleven months, but never mind that. It's inconvenient to have to go out of your way; it is annoying to have to be nice.

I'm sure that Christ felt the same way. He must have hated having to put up with the poor and giving all he had to those who needed him. How awful it must be to have to be put out of your important little life to help a member of your own race. "Oh, the humanity!" as the biologist Stephen C. Bausch would say.

What makes us all so important that we forget about the others around us? Or that we take what we have for granted? If there is one thing that every one of us should learn at an early age, it's that nothing lasts. Cherish what you have: your family, your loved ones, a roof over your head and a full belly.

Kindness and generosity should not arise from guilt or because some book tells you to be kind and generous. They should come from within; they should be motivated by pure goodness and the joy that you find in helping others. The celebration of Christ's birthday is a celebration of the goodness within the human heart, not of the church or of the fact that he may be the son of God, but what he stood for — kindness, benevolence, selflessness and generosity.

Is it really that difficult to take these things to heart, to quit thinking about ourselves for once and to be charitable to others?

Perhaps. But is it possible to remain unselfish



Jesse Bohrer Clancy

“The celebration of Christ's birthday is a celebration of the goodness within the human heart, not of the church or of the fact that he may be the son of God.”

for the rest of the year? Given mankind these days, I doubt it. If it doesn't affect us, who cares? Apathy is the way of the world. Maybe an eighth deadly sin should have been added.

We just don't care anymore. That may be the reason that civilization is going to hell in a hand basket. We couldn't care less about the others out there.

Starvation? Sorry kid, need my caviar.
Disease? Hey pal, that's the breaks some times.

Genocide? Oh, that's too bad.
But if someone scratches my brand-new Beamer, there's going to be hell to pay. It's so comforting to know that we all have our priorities straight.

But, it's always been this way, and sadly enough, it will probably always stay this way unless change begins within each and every one of us. It's always someone else's fault, someone else's problem. I can't be bothered. Guess what? It is your fault, and it is your problem. You're not that important, and when you die no one will care just how "important" you were.

Let me ask you this: Who is the one person that history will always remember? Conquerors and presidents come and go, but there is one man who will always be remembered. Christ. His kindness, generosity, and ability to create joy in the lives of others will be remembered. That is what has made him immortal. Who cares whether or not he was the son of God? Let the Bible-thumpers waste their time screaming about who's "right."

Christ was what he stood for: goodness — the epitome of the human spirit, not something to build religions around. His birthday is a celebration of this. Try not to let yourself forget it.

So celebrate life this season. Practice random acts of kindness and senseless beauty. Do something nice for a stranger. Let your joy fill the hearts of others, then perhaps theirs will, in turn, fill the hearts of even more. There's nothing wrong with playing Kris Kringle. Be a merry little mischief maker. Remember the joy that you felt as a child, before the world took away the magic, before the world took away Santa Claus. Merry Christmas, Happy Hanukkah, and a thousand more good wishes to you all.

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