

DTS JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES

Vol. 3. No.1, 2023

DYNAMIC THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
AFFILIATED TO HARVEST BIBLE
UNIVERSITY, USA

Published by Dynamic Theological Seminary, Kwale,
Delta State, Nigeria

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EVALUATION OF THE CONCEPT OF CHRISTMAS THEOLOGY CONTROVERSY WITH EMPHASIS ON THE ENDTIME CHURCHES

By
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Abstract

This paper examines the theological controversies surrounding the Christmas celebration. The work traced the origin of Christmas to paganism in all Schools of thought.. It is the position of the paper that the Roman Catholic Church smuggled the feast into Christendom as neither the scriptures nor the early apostles celebrated the birth of Jesus as a Feast. The paper however employed historical methods to prove the emphasis on the the Christmas celebration. It is however the conclusion of the paper that academically there is no scriptural basis for the celebration of Christmas as a feast of the birth of Jesus Christ. However, theologians should evolve ways for

Christmas to survive as a religious festival as it is hijacked by capitalism. And thus; however since there is biblical proof of the wise men from the east who saw the star and wisely interpreted it as a great king being born to earth and thereby celebrated Him, and since God choose to announce the birth of Jesus Christ through angels to the shepherds in which both the angels and the shepherds celebrated the birth of Jesus Christ. The paper recommends that since the Bible did not condemn celebration and festival in the name of God Almighty, there is no crime in celebrating Jesus Christ's birth.

Keywords: Christmas, Celebration, Shepherd, King

Introduction

Christmas enjoys such a prominent place among modern believers that only with difficulty can we picture an age when Christians did not celebrate it. Joseph Killy (2011,11) takes us back to an age when Christians did not celebrate Christmas or even pay much attention to the feast's scriptural foundations, the “Matthean and Lukan infancy narratives”. He traced how the great religious festival of Christmas emerged by the sixth century-setting on the date of December 25, filling out biblical figures with details from Hebrew prophecy and early Christian sources, and charting the celebration's in

relation to Epiphany. The early Christian, he shows “took Scripture very seriously, showed respect for Jewish customs and ... also showed respect for the different cultures within their faith (Kelly, 2011).

In *Christmas and Clash of Civilizations* (P.19) Donald Heinz observes that “Christmas magnifies a clash of civilizations between Christianity and consumer capitalism -each making religious claims about the meaning of life. In the consumer Christmas, the incarnation is reversed. Human attention drifts to the materials that claim to be good instead of the Good that claims to be material”. Heinz appreciates the good elements of secular Christmas celebrations, but urges Christians to recover the riches of the theological traditions “Getting Christmas right means getting ourselves right and ultimately getting God right” (Heinz, 2011), notes “A religiously robust Christmas enables the church to re-gift the incarnation to the modern world”

An important facet of the theological tradition of Christmas is the iconography in a painting of the Nativity. In *the Shepherd's Adoration* (P.34), Heidi Hornik and Mikeal Parsons compare Ghirlandaio's Adoration of the Shepherds, painted in Florence, with the famous altarpiece of that name that had been created by the Flemish artist Hugo van der Goes and brought to Florence a few years earlier. Both artists drew from a

common store of visual symbolism to Interpret Christ's birth in light of his Passion. In *the magic Adoration* (P.32). Hornik notes how Gentile's adoration of the magic had introduced the use of narrative scenes in church altarpieces earlier. She explains, "This image works well iconographically in its location in the sacristy (where the clergy robe themselves and prepare for the mass) for Christ becomes manifest in the Eucharist on the altar during the mass; He is revealed to the faithful in the congregation as happened to the Magic".

The carol is another art form that bears the theological tradition of Christmas. "A carol is like an Anaphot: it gives us a glimpse of one aspect of the incarnation", David Music writes in *Caroling* (P.27). He traces the development of carols from medieval dancing to monastic "Spiritual entertainment", their banishment by Puritans and the re-emergence of the nativity themes in modern hymnody and popular tunes.

To guide our adoration of the Christ Child, David Music gives us a beautiful new Carol, "A Lamb is Born among the sheep" (P.41). His text, which is both a theological meditation and birthday celebration, frames the worship service (P.44) that follows. The liturgy can be used for a Christmas Eve carol singing and candlelight vigil in honour of the Nativity of Christ, "the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the World".

In *the History of Christmas*, (P.84), Sujiin Pak reviews four books that explain how the festival of Christmas began in the early church and developed as a secular and religious observance over the centuries. Three of the books- *The Origins of Christmas* and *the Feast of Christmas* by Joseph F. Kelly, and '*Christmas; a festival of Incarnation*' by Donald Heinz- highlight the religious history and practice of Christmas. The fourth book, Bruce Forbee's *Christmas; A Candid History*, is a briefer look at the season's secular and religious elements. These authors “underscore that Christmas has had secular features from its origins and encourage readers to appreciate both the religious and secular facets of Christmas and not assume an inherent conflict between them.

This paper examines the birth of Christmas and considers what element of the feast the end-time churches might draw upon. The paper looks at the history of Christmas and why December 25 is celebrated by many Christians Worldwide. Finally, the paper explores the various controversies surrounding the feast of Christmas as a Christian religious holiday.

The Origin/Birth of Christmas through Constantine and the Source of the Word Christmas

This is where Christmas originated. He became the sole Emperor of the West in 312-326 AD and he was a mitral

worshiper (Mc Gowan, 2012). There was a man called Maxentius who ruled over Italy and North Africa but he wanted to become emperor over the entire western part of the Roman Empire, because of this ambition he played hostility towards Constantine which finally resulted in war. The army and war equipment of Maxetius was three times larger than that of Constantine. He found himself in an extremely dangerous situation and he decided to seek the assistance of idol worshipers. His parent were worshiping the imperial sun god which was instituted in the memorial of Nimrod (Muhammad, 2019).

Constantine sought the assistance of these gods when wartime came. He was disappointed that this idol could not help him. On his way home with grief and sadness, he saw a cross above the sun as it was set in the west with a voice On the symbol was a written word and voice “**HOC SIGNO VINCES**” meaning “in this sign conquer”. His narration and his experiences with his followers to Christianity led to Christmas. From ancient times crosses in various forms were regarded in superstitious ways as an image that was outwardly honoured and adopted, especially by the ritual of mass. But the idea of the cross concept of ancient times became obscure and silent of the popular message of the cross and acknowledgement of the Gospel persecutions of the truly finished sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary which is associated

mostly with the cross of Jesus Christ made Christians of the old to have privilege over others (Clark, 2009).

He was advised to search for Christians in their hidden places, because they are in a better position to interpret what the sign means, for they are the relevant cross-bearer. After a few hours, Constantine's messenger reached some Christians in faraway places where they were in sorrow and fear for the purpose and intention of Jesus's name. The Christians thought at the initial stage that maybe Constantine wanted to find another means of killing them, but they were made to realize the main purpose of visiting them and change their notion. Constantine explains to them what he saw, and he was told that the sign signifies to him to give his life to Jesus who died on the cross, that Jesus is more powerful than any sun god. He was highlighted to go with faith and victory shall be sure of him. By faith, Constantine proceeded to fight with an army three times larger than his army after receiving Jesus to his life. He won the battle and Maxentius was completely defeated.

The word “Christmas” according to the Encyclopaedia means “Mass of Christ” or as it came to be shortened, “Christ-Mass” It came to non-Christians and Protestants from the Roman Catholic Church. And where it was derived from was neither in the Old Testament nor

New Testament. It wasn't from the original apostles who were personally instructed by Christ. It is believed to have gravitated in the fourth century in the Roman Church from paganism (Kelly, 2011; Carrier, 2014; Muhammad, 2019).

“Pagan customs centring around the January Calends gravitated to Christmas”, The Encyclopaedia also shows that the early Catholic father, Origin acknowledged that;... in the scriptures, no one is recorded to have kept a feast or held a great banquet on his birthday, it is only sinners (like Pharoah and Herod) who make great rejoicings over the day in which they were born into this world”, The Encyclopaedia Britannica (1946) noted that “Christmas (that is the mass of Christ) was not among the earliest festivals of the church... “it was not instituted by Christ or the Apostles or the Bible authority. It was picked up afterwards from paganism. The Encyclopaedia Americana (1944), noted; it was according to many authorities not celebrated in the first countries of the Christian church, as the Christian usage, in general, was to celebrate the death of remarkable persons rather than their birth... “(The communion”, which is instituted by New Testament Bible authority is a memorial of the death of Christ.) “... A feast was established in memory of this event (Christ's birth) in the fourth century. In the fifth century, the

Western Church ordered it to be celebrated forever on the day of the old Roman feast of the birth of Mithras, as no certain knowledge of the day of Christ's birth existed”.

It is apparent then that these recognized historical authorities show that Christmas was not observed by Christians for the first two or three hundred years-a periods longer than the entire history of the United State as a nation. It got into the Western, or Roman Church ordered it to be celebrated as an official Christian festival!

It is believed that the correct feast of Christmas had its origin in Emperor Constantine (312-326 AD). He was a mitral worshipper. Constantine gave full executive support to Christians during his reign and made the following decrees among others:

- i. That Christianity should be practised or placed highly by everyone in the city.
- ii. That a full stop should be put to Christian persecution.
- iii. He legalized Christianity as a State religion giving the church a free ticket to win souls for Christ.
- iv. He gave secular power to the Roman Bishop and established the Bishop's Court for justice administration.
- v. He exempted the clergy and their churches

from payment of taxes.

- vi. All clergy should always put on a collar for identification and for recognition in the city.
- vii. Churches were allowed to own properties.
- viii. He made the church to Christianize sun gods, idol worship and practice.
- ix. Constantine order for the canonicity of the Bible and made the Bible to be canonized.

During the reign of Constantine, Christianity was made a status symbol in the Roman world. Lastly, the emblem of the Roman Empire was replaced by the cross. This victory of Constantine in 28-10-312 A.D. led to the declaration of Christmas (Abruzzi, 2019; Carrier, 2014; Duffy, 1997).

Modern exegesis stresses the Jewish background of Post-Resurrection disciples, who continued to worship in the Jerusalem temple (Acts 2:4b-4:4). Even Paul, Apostle to the Gentiles, stressed his own Jewishness (Philippians 3:5). Luke says that he continues to observe the Sabbath (Acts 13:14, 16:13), but also saw the first day of the week as a time for breaking bread (20:17). Yet, the disciples had little incentives to establish new feasts with the Parousia so imminent (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). As the year passed, however, Christians such as Luke recognized that the Parousia might be quite distant, and in Acts, he portrays the Holy

Spirit guiding the church in continuing Christ's work in the world. Modern Christians simply cannot conceive how those disciples must have struggled to accept this. The pseudonymous author of 2 Peter tried to explain the delay but Christians eventually accepted that the church would be in the world for an indeterminate time. Charisms such as prophecy and glossolalia declined as Christians established the necessary elements for an ongoing community.

The basis for Christmas appeared soon. Although Athanasius of Alexandria first listed the now accepted twenty-seven books as the New Testament in 367 AD (Kelly, 2011). By the mid-second century, all Canon lists included the four gospels, guaranteeing that Mathew and Luke's infancy narratives would be part of scripture and thus always play a role in Christian life and thought.

The Jewish feast of the Pasch (Passover) metamorphosed for Christians into the Feast of Easter (to use the early Medieval English word), but Christians could not celebrate the feast unless they knew the date of Jesus' Resurrection. This led to the scholars calling the "Paschal controversy in the mid-second century, Christian scholars ultimately concluded that they could not determine the exact date of Easter, which is why it migrates through five weeks in spring. The dating of Christmas would engender another controversy.

Contemporary with the establishment of Easter was the observance of Martyrs' feast days. Roman tradition required families to celebrate a memorial meal on the anniversary of a loved one's death. Christians similarly honoured the anniversary of martyrs' deaths but with an important twist: for them, the martyrs did not die but were born anew in a heavenly afterlife. The date of martyrdom became their "true" birthday. This is important for Christmas since some early Christians, especially Origen of Alexandria, objected to birthday celebrations because the Bible mentions only two of them: one for Pharaoh (Genesis 40:20), and one for Herod (Mark 6:21, Matthew 14:6) which both resulted in executions! However, when Christians became interested in Christ's birthday, acceptance of the martyrs' "birthdays" guaranteed that no real opposition would occur.

But while scholars were debating about Jesus' birth, an anonymous Syrian made an end run (McGowan, 2012) around them. circa 150 in the region of Antioch appeared the protoevangelium of James, a "Prequel" to the Nativity because it purported to tell of events before Jesus' birth. It enjoyed enormous popularity, partly because of its vivid fictionalised account but mostly because Christians who had come to accept being in history were taking an interest in Jesus' history.

The protoevangelium tells of the birth of Jesus' mother Mary to Joachim and Anna (The first mention of those names), of Mary's being dedicated to the Temple, of the high priests choosing Joseph for her spouse because a dove flew out of his staff, of Mary's being sixteen at Jesus' birth, of Joseph's being elderly, and of the presence of a midwife at the birth. All of these details became staples of medieval and Renaissance art. Never a serious candidate for the New Testament canon, this work appealed to average believers, if not to scholars, the first but hardly the last time that popular attitudes would influence the development of an ecclesial feast (Bauer, 1934; Clark, 2009; Dulfy, 1997).

As interest in Jesus' birth grew, scholars initially hoped to determine the exact day-unmentioned in the Gospels- by determining the date of his death (Kelly, 2011). Jewish tradition taught that great figures, such as Moses, were born and died on the same calendar day. If scripture says Moses lived 120 years, it must mean exactly what do you mean 120 years. Determining the date of the crucifixion proved very difficult, partly because the Gospels do not provide enough information and partly because no one knows the year when Jesus died. Undeterred, third-century Christian scholars pushed ahead, and knowing that Jesus died near Passover, the North African Tertullian and the Roman

Hippolytus concluded that Jesus died on March 25 (Kelly, 2011), which would also mean that he was born on that date.

But allegory, a favourite interpretive tool of ancient scholars, quickly entered the discussion. According to the Julian calendar, March 25 was the spring Equinox for pagans. The anniversary of the creation of the world. The date for Jesus' birth appealed to many Christians because Paul identified Christ as the new Adam (Romans: 5:14) and Revelation 21 used images of recreation. But a different allegory soon challenged it.

Matthew says Jesus' face shone like the sun at the transfiguration (17:2), an image repeated in Revelation (1:16), Mark says that the women went to the tomb (16:2). In the synoptic Gospels when Jesus died the sun was darkened (Matthew 27:45; Mark 15:33; Luke 23:44-45), while John speaks of darkness (1:5). Supporting this solar imagery was Malachi 4:3, that on the day of reckoning would appear the sun of righteousness, an image applied to such as Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Hippolytus, and an anonymous North African Scholar who around 143 produce *De Pascha compos* (On computing, the paschal feast). The authors of *computes* objected to March 25 as the birth of Jesus insisting it was the anniversary of creation. They alluded that March 28 would have been the birthday of Jesus when God created

the sun.

Sextus, another North African introduced a theological variant on March 25 (Jenkins 2011), he based his argument on the incarnation and maintained that on March 25, Jesus had become incarnate via his conception in his mother's womb at the annunciation by Gabriel. Following the Jew's exact dating theory Sextus believed Jesus has been born precisely nine months later on December 25. This enables Sextus to keep the sun imagery effective (Jenkins, 2011). According to the Julian calendar, December 25 was the winter solstice. The shortest day of the year when the sun was at its weakened. Every day thereafter it grew stronger and stronger, just as a baby would. Amstrong (1974), noted that modern scholars rejected the thesis of a winter birth for Jesus insisting that from the scriptures (Luke 2:8; Songs of Solomon 2:11; Ezra 10:9), winter was a rainy season and it would have been impossible for the shepherds to be abiding in the field. As the shepherds usually brought their flocks from the mountainsides and fields and corralled them not later than October 15, to protect them from the cold, rainy season that followed that date. The Bible itself proves in the Songs of Solomon 2:11 and Ezra 10:9, 13, that winter was a rainy season (In the middle Easter setting of the Bible) not permitting shepherds to abide in open fields at night.

It was an ancient custom among Jews of those days to send out their sheep to the fields and deserts about the Passover (Early spring), and bring them home at the commencement of the 'first rain' says the Adam Clarke commentary, vol.5 p. 370).

Following the victory of Constantine on 28-10-312AD, the emblem of the Roman Empire was replaced by the cross. This victory led to the declaration of Christmas. Since the cross “+” symbolizes Christ and the Sun symbolizes mass as seen by Constantine. The 25th of December, a day that people usually worship the Roman idol was declared Christmas for celebrating the birth of the Saviour, our Lord Jesus Christ in replacement, eradication and cancellation of the annual Roman Empire of idol festival (Mat: 1:21). In 325 AD the 25th of December was confirmed throughout the whole Roman Empire as Christmas meaning “Christ” and “Mass”. The Cross symbolizes Christ while the sun in the Greek Language symbolizes the mass. The combination of the two became Christmas (Muhammad, 2019). Ever since this declaration the birth of our Lord Saviour Jesus Christ is remembered on every 25th of December all over the world. It has remained the greatest celebration in the History of mankind.

In the views of Amstrong (1974), Christmas is a chief custom of the corrupt system. It started and

originated in the original Babylon of ancient Nimrod, it stems from roots whose beginning was shortly this side of the flood. Nimrod, grandson of Ham, son of Noah was the real founder of the Babylonish system that has gripped the world ever since- the system of organised competition of man-ruled governments and empires, economic system. Nimrod built the tower of Babel, original Babylon, ancient Nineveh, and many other cities. He organised the world's first kingdom. The name Nimrod in Hebrew is derived from “Marad” meaning “he rebelled”

Nimrod was said to have gotten married to his mother! Whose name was Semiramis, after Nimrod's untimely death, his mother-wife Semiramis, propagated the evil doctrine of the survival of Nimrod as a spirit being. She claimed a full-grown evergreen tree sprang overnight from a dead tree stump, which symbolized the springing forth unto new life of the death. Nimrod on each anniversary of his birth, she claimed, Nimrod visit the evergreen tree and leaves gifts upon it. December 25th was the birthday of Nimrod. This is the real origin of Christmas (Amstrong, 1974)

Through her Scheming and designing Semiramis became the Babylonian “Queen of Heaven”, and Nimrod, under various names, became the “divine son of heaven,” Through the generations in this idolatrous

worship, Nimrod also became the false Messiah, son of Baal the sun-good. In this false Baby Conish system, the “mother and Child” (Semiramis and Nimrod) became chief objects of worship. This worship of “Mother and child “Spread all over the world. The names varied in different countries and languages. In Egypt, it was Isis and Osisis. In Asia, Cybele and Deoius. In Pagan Rome, Fortuna and Supiterpurer. Even in Greece, China, and Japan, Tibet is to be found the counterpart of the Madonna, long before the birth of Christ (Armstrong, 1974).

The real origin of Christmas goes back to ancient Babylon. It is bound up in the organized apostasy which has gripped a deceived world these many centuries. December 25 is not the birthday of Jesus the true Christ. The apostle and early true church never celebrated Christ's birthday at any time. There is no command or instruction to celebrate it in the Bible rather, the celebrating of a birthday is a pagan, not a Christian custom

Christmas Celebration and the Clash of Civilizations

Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea. This is the time that eventually came for the fulfilment of the prophets God incarnated and was born by the Virgin Mary in Bethlehem. God perfectly does what He promised. God fulfilled it by giving Mary and Joseph an instrument to

obey. Joseph and Mary restrain themselves and name him Jesus. The arrival of Jesus Christ by birth inaugurated the period of the kingdom of Heaven on Earth (Duffy, 1997).

The first Christmas was celebrated by the three wise men. These wise men came from the East. They saw the star and they wisely interpreted it to be a great king being born to earth, God choose to announce the birth of Jesus Christ and his personality to Jewish as well as Gentiles as a sign that Jesus Christ is for all nations - Mal. 2:1-2, 9-11. These wise men desired to see Jesus and God ordered their footsteps. Although they were initially being carnally diverted, hoping that Jesus will be born in the king's palace. But they eventually found him in a manger. As many people were either carnally or demonically diverted, today we still have in our society those who could not seek Jesus to the rightful place, those who have the wrong concepts about Jesus and Christmas. [Heb.11:6]. Your desire to diligently seek the Lord of glory will make you see and find Christ as the wise man found Christ. The Lord is not the God of confusion. If you are willing to know God surely He will reveal Himself to you as the wise men followed the star to the manger where Jesus was. They saw Christ the messiah as a little born child with Marry and Joseph. Isiah:9:6

They fell down and worshipped and when they opened their treasures they presented Jesus gifts because they

have seen the star.

This include (Matthew 2:2):

1. FRANKINCENSE - Referring to his priesthood - leading the way to worship God.

2. GOLD - Referring to his kingship office - whose words are the law to obey.

3. MYRRH - Referring to his prophetic ministry - predictor of divine mission.

These wise men first celebrated Christmas with good motives they worshipped, loved and acknowledged the lordship of Jesus Christ.

As the only divine person, so they chose to worship Christ.

Redemption is for all but not everybody will ultimately be saved, it is only those who choose to worship and accept the lordship of Jesus Christ. GOD is impartial. The Christ atoning death must be personally received by choice and faith. John:3:16-18

And the angel said unto them, fear, not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

And suddenly there was with the Angel a multitude of the heavenly hosts praising God, and saying, Glory to God in highest, and on earth peace, goodwill towards men. And it came to pass, as the angel was gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, let us now

go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which comes to pass, which the Lord has made known to us. And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the baby lying in a manger. And when they had seen him, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying, and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them” (Luke: 2:8-20)

This is another exemplary way of celebrating Jesus' birth. The shepherds also celebrated Jesus' birth when they heard about the good news of Jesus through the ministration of an angel. So the birth of Jesus Christ is good tiding needed to be celebrated because it is of the great joy of good tiding which shall be to all nations and everybody. Everyone must celebrate it, so the shepherd decided to see and witness it according to the revelation they have received and heard. The arrival of Jesus Christ by birth inaugurated the period of the kingdom of heaven on earth.

Heinz (2011) asserted that Christmas magnifies a dash of civilization between Christianity and consumer capitalism each making religious claims about the meaning of life. In the consumer Christmas, the incarnation is reversed. Human attention drifts to the materials that claim to be material, Christmas is the celebration of Gods coming to earth, and clothing divinity in material form. Its legacy is a treasure trove of theology and worship and arts and Christian life and piety. However, the treasure of Christmas today is elusive and how much of its recoverable gold is questioned. Once, as early Christianity planted the birth of Christ in the world fields of December, end-of-the-year debaucheries threatened to engulf it. Pagan rootstock in the fields of winter proved too persistent for eradication. The church wagered that a hearty new theology could Christianise heaven heathen celebrations. So Christmas became the Christian entry in a contest over the power of the calendar and its meanings.

A holiday have long been kissing friends but as Christmas in the modest world became disconnected from its original embedding in historic and still living religious communities and traditions, a new Christmas was invented (Mc Gowan, 2012) in which secular meanings have crowded out the original reason for the season. The “commodification of culture” through

religious celebration into the buying and selling of products. Today it is easier to imagine Christmas without religion than Christmas without shopping.

Well wrapped in the modern world, the American Christmas is a sacrament of material consumption that everyone wants a piece of consumer capitalism has elbowed out religion to be first in line at the Manger scene. Indeed, some scholars now call Christmas the civil religion of capitalism. This new religion of the global market is compulsory for all citizens. While Christian faith is optional, holiday consumption is not Christmas requires a panoply of accessories on offer by urban outfitters eager to assist us in ducking out our true selves.

Under the weight of incarnational extravagance (God's or ours), a religious festival is getting buried under the landfill of materialism. The deep immersion of religious festivals in the material world made Christmas susceptible to a holistic takeover by modern capitalism. During the 20 century, capitalism had certainly far outdistanced all its rivals as a means of producing wealth. The free market become, the god that succeeded and thus the meaning of everything, just as communism was turning into the god that failed. Disconnected from covenant and community, a new kind of rapacious capitalism became the worm in the Christmas apple. Christmas became the religious expression of this new

kind of capitalism. As an all-encompassing world views the claims to put the meaning of life on offer, capitalism engaged Christianity in a contest over seasonal message control. It became a computer virus that colonizes every inbox and commences to send out rival messages, with the complicit user hardly noticing or incapable of resisting.

When the Church is in a prophetic mood, it can see these rival meaning systems. Looking closely into great “Cultural performances” like Christmas, as anthropologists methodically do, we see the dramas that run beneath life in society and the fuller proportions of the human project. The store windows of it, is apparent then that our attempts to create meaning in the world, to spin ourselves in webs of significance shows a bad picture in which the image of God is not clear. The acids of materialism have defaced the human imprint of God's incarnation.

Saint Nicholas of Myra, a Christian Bishop, was the first to dress after the order code of Constantine to offer people gifts. He helped the needy in various ways. After his death, the Legend of his gift-giving and dress code after Constantine grew. Saint Nicholas transformed into the Legendary character after the dress code of Father Christmas called Santa Claus, who brings Christmas presents to Children around the world

(Macasa, 2005).

Contemporary consumer culture is able to absorb all previous cultures as content waiting to be commodified, distributed, and consumed in highly individualistic acts quite apart from the sacred community that is the church. Early Christianity gave the word Christmas as the birth announcement of a turning point in human history public worship became the incarnation stage on which Christians could see and experience what they believed and model it for a curious world. Gradually, the people of God turned into the stories they were telling; a believable body of believers became the body of Christ. If the play of Christmas be a believable performance troupe the modern church has to be spiritually shaped by and begin to look like the Body of Christ in the World.

CHRISTMAS CONTROVERSY

Question:

“SHOULD CHRISTIANS CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS?”

Answer:

The debate about whether or not Christians should celebrate Christmas has been raging for centuries. There are equally sincere and committed Christians on both

sides of the issue, each with multiple reasons why or why not Christmas should be celebrated in Christian homes.

But what does the Bible say? Does the Bible give clear direction as to whether Christmas is a holiday to be celebrated by Christians? First, let's look at the reasons why some Christians do not celebrate Christmas.

1. One argument against Christmas is that the traditions surrounding the holiday have origins in paganism and idol worshipping. Eg December 25th was a day of celebrating the sun gods festival and many religious leaders were born on that day such as :

- i. Mithras is yet another interesting god that followers claim was born on December 25. This god, unlike Jesus and his other peers, was not born of a virgin or any human for that matter.
- ii. Amadioha is the Igbo god of thunder. He was demonized and dumped by his worshippers when they learned of Jesus and other seemingly true gods
- iii. The followers of the Egyptian solar deity, Horus, claim he suckled at the breasts of a virgin centuries before Jesus did. One major controversy surrounding his birth is that his virgin mother has a confusing gender.
- iv. In India, Krishna's soul-bank account swelled

with souls long before Adam rose from dust to eat an apple and put the world in trouble. He was famed to be incarnate of the god Vishnu and born of a virgin called Devaki.

- v. Buddha is an Indian God that once had a lot of souls in his soul-bank account. His worshippers claim Buddha's birth falls on December 25, 563 BC. They claim Buddha was born of a virgin called Maya long before Isaiah became a prophet to foresee that Jesus too will be born of another virgin called Mary. They claim their god was immaculately conceived and that the world shall be saved through him.

December 25th could as well be Horus-mas, after the Egyptian Horus, or Krishna-mas, after the Indian Krishna, or Amadioha-mas, after the Igbo Amadioha, or Any-god-mas, since many religions claim December 25th as their god's birthday. etc

2. Another argument against Christmas, especially having a Christmas tree, is that the Bible forbids bringing trees into our homes and decorating them. The passage often cited is Jeremiah 10:1-16, but this passage refers to cutting down trees, chiselling the wood to make an idol, and then decorating the idol with silver and gold for the purpose of bowing down before it to worship it (see also Isaiah 44:9-18). The passage in Jeremiah cannot be taken out of its context and used to make a legitimate argument against Christmas trees. Anyone who uses this passage is

Biblically illiterate and such needs Biblical exegesis and hermeneutics, the study of Bible interpretation

3. Christians who choose to ignore Christmas point to the fact that the Bible doesn't give us the date of Christ's birth, which is certainly true. December 25th may not be even close to the time Jesus was born, and arguments on both sides are legible that is very clear enough to read and understand, some relating to climate in Israel, the practices of shepherds in winter, and the dates of Roman census-taking. None of these points is without a certain amount of conjecture, which brings us back to the fact that the Bible doesn't tell us when Jesus was born.

4. Some Christians say that since the world celebrates Christmas - Although it is becoming more and more politically correct to refer to it as “the holidays” - Christians should avoid it. But that is the same argument made by false religions that deny Christ altogether, as well as cults such as the Jehovah's Witnesses who deny His deity. Those Christians that celebrate Christmas often see the occasion as an opportunity to proclaim Christ as “the reason for the season” among the nations and to those trapped in false religions. As we have seen, there is no legitimate scriptural reason not to celebrate Christmas. At the same time, there is no biblical mandate to celebrate it, either. In the end, of course, whether or not to celebrate Christmas is a personal decision. Whatever Christians decide to do regarding Christmas, their views should not be used as a club with which to beat down or denigrate those with opposing views, nor should either

view be used as a badge of honour inducing pride over celebrating or not celebrating. As in all things, we seek wisdom from Him who gives it liberally to all who ask (James 1:5) and accept one another in Christian love and grace, regardless of our views on Christmas. Roman:14:5-6 Colossians:2:16

THE BALANCE OF ALL CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES ABOUT CHRISTMAS

I believe the church needs to strike the needed balance here, lest we continue to mislead people and injure the faith of babes in Christ.

Since the Bible records the Birth of Christ, though exact dates were not given, maturity says there is no crime in celebrating it.

He that regards a day, regards it to The Lord and he that regards it not, is also unto The Lord. Rome:14:5-6 and Colossians:2:16 clarify what should be our disposition.

The fact that the world recognizes that Christ the Saviour was born is enough for celebration, though it must be done with lots of introspection, heart-searching and prayers. It should be devoid of all sinful tendencies and ungodliness.

It should be a time to resound again the message of salvation reconciliation with God, good works and love. It's time to prove to the world that Christ was born to

bring man back to God through our sober, honest and sincere lifestyles. Enjoy your Christmas and holiday season.

TRUE LESSONS OF CHRISTMAS **(Matt. 2:1-11; Luke 2:4-17)**

As the controversy rages about whether Christians should celebrate Christmas or not, I believe there are profound lessons for every one of us therein. Yes, there are genuine and nominal Christians who will always see things differently. Some are babes in Christ who are myopic and those who are mature enough to see things from spiritual perspectives, willing to let go of non-essentials.

Some sees the cup half empty and those who see it half full. Whichever side you find yourself on, here are Christmas lessons for all of us:

1. Jesus is the REASON for the SEASON. His coming changed the calendar of the world.
2. Whether by pretence or sincerity, the world acknowledges the Birth of Son of God, the SAVIOUR of the world.
3. God in His Omniscience, allows the world to celebrate the Birth of His Son so that nobody will be guiltless

before Him.

4. The celebration of Christmas will always be ABUSED by those who are NOMINAL Christians and ungodly people.

5. Genuine believers will always use the season to reflect, pray, honour the Lord and demonstrate His love to others.

6. Whether we approve of it or not, the world will always celebrate Christmas religiously, so ministers of the gospel should use the occasion to win souls and build people for the kingdom of God.

7. Every Christmas is a reminder that Jesus, who came the first time as a BABE in Bethlehem will come back as a JUDGE for those who don't accept Him into their hearts and bring fruits worth of repentance in their daily lives.

8. The event that propel Christmas was a finished work of the Holy Spirit with the confirmation of **HOC SIGNO VINCES** that means in the sign you can be conquered. The fact that Constantine won the battle after receiving Jesus Christ as his personal Lord and Saviour is alone enough worthy of celebration

9. The day that was before melt for idol worship was changed to celebrating Christmas is a lesson of transformation and revival worthy of celebration.

However, this paper concludes that academically there is no scripture that suggested the date of the birth of Jesus 'Christ on December, 25th. Similarly no Scripture authorizes or commands the celebration of the birth of Christ, what the scripture authorized is the death and resurrection of Christ as a memorial feast.

Recommendation

Based on the conclusions above, it is recommended that; Theologians Should evolve ways for Christmas to survive as a religious festival, rather than as a challenge to all political and economic dominating systems.

Getting Christmas right means getting ourselves right and ultimately getting God right, a religiously robust Christmas enables the church to re-gift the incarnation to the modern world.

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