

The War on Christmas: Taking Christ Out Of Christmas  
Matthew 2:10-11

As one might imagine with Wedgewood being Wedgewood, with you being you and me being me-----it would not be a surprise to find out the church answering machine gets some interesting messages left on it by people who think we are agents of the devil, Lucifer lovers, degenerates, apostates, infidels, one of those bad churches listed near the beginning of the book of Revelation, some version of the dark side, reprobates, rascals, heretics, the dregs of society, unfit to call ourselves church or Christian, and headed straight for the fiery furnace. Did I leave anything off the list?

The only saving grace is you can limit the length of the loving message a person is allowed to leave on the answering machine. Thank God for that feature.

A few years ago three days before Christmas we got one such message on our holy answering machine. There's nothing quite like the Christmas spirit. How sweet and thoughtful of said Christian to take time out of their holiday preparations to tell us how evil and wrong we were. What was the catalyst for the holiday vitriolic verbiage?

Back before Jesus had inspired me to put "Yes, A Liberal Church! (with an exclamation point)" on our marquee, back when I didn't use a home office, prior to having church volunteers to staff the church office during the morning hours of Monday thru Thursday, a little old lady who, by the way, is no longer a Wedgewoodian----a little old lady who had taken on the responsibility of changing the message on the marquee every Wednesday, well, she refused to hear my decision to forego changing the message. On this particular winter day it was right cold, even frigid, and Chicago windy to boot. So being the nice guy I am, and I hope you've noticed that, being the nice guy I am and trying to be considerate, attempting to be Christ-like, in the spirit of Christmas I insisted she not do her weekly task. Well, being a Baptist, she was stubborn and evidently she had some U.S. Postal genes in her genetic makeup: "Neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night stays these couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds." "Well, if you insist," I gave in. But I did decide to do this: I decided to shorten the marquee message. Instead of getting a lady in her senior years to go out into a Charlotte version of a winter blizzard and put up Merry Christmas I got her to put up Merry Xmas.

You would have thought I had committed the unpardonable sin, just nailed Jesus to the cross, at least according to the fuming, fussing female who gave me/gave us a piece of her mind on the answering machine. I can't remember everything she said, but I do remember her tone and I recall her beef had something to do with us taking Christ out of Christmas because we had used Xmas instead of the full blown Christmas.

Now that's something to get riled up about when we have people dying of starvation and diarrhea in Africa, limited funds for cancer and AIDS research, global warming, destruction of rain forests, pollution, homelessness, crime, poverty, wars, not to mention the shortage we had at that time of coated paper with extra gilt/gold leaf edges with Italian cameo binding that I use to preserve and to distribute my in high demand sermons.-----Do you have any idea how long

it took me to come up with that line?----We've got all that seriously wrong with the world and this person calls 704-523-6108 and leaves a message on the answering machine focusing on my use of Xmas instead of Christmas.

Unfortunately, the lady didn't leave her name or phone number. I fantasized, though, about calling her and informing her, educating her, on the fact that if she was going to send me to hell for abbreviating Christmas, she, to be consistent, would have to send to the fiery furnace many early Christian scribes and other Christians throughout the ages since they, God forbid, abbreviated the name of Jesus along with several other special names and words. I wanted to tell her about the scribal practice of writing certain words as contractions, usually with a horizontal line above them. The contractions were called *nomina sacra*, as in sacred names, abbreviating sacred names. It was O.K. to do that! And I wanted to tell her Chi Rho (☩) are the first two letters in the Greek spelling of the word Christ (Χριστός) and that sometimes Chi Rho was used instead of spelling out Christ and that was O.K.! Furthermore, I wanted to inform her about the *staurogram*, which refers to the tendency of Christian scribes to combine the Greek letters tau and rho in abbreviations of the Greek word for "cross" into a pictogram that presumably depicts Jesus crucified. Finally, I wanted to tell her that if anybody was taking Christ out of Christmas it was her with her stupidity and---and her ignorance and her small-mindedness. And one more finally, I wanted to ask if her she would be willing to come up to the church next Christmas and spell out Christmas on the sign just in case we had a freezing winter day and I didn't want a little old lady to catch pneumonia.

Of course, the lady who put me in my place is just one of many worried about Christ being taken out of Christmas or anxious about the so-called war on Christmas.

Republican presidential candidate Mike Huckabee, for example, made no apologies recently for the religious tone of a recent holiday campaign ad. He said, "You can find Santa at every mall. You can find discounts in every store. But if you mention the name of Jesus. . . it upsets the whole world. Forgive me, but I thought that was the point of the whole day." Well, maybe Huckabee has forgotten not all Americans, including voting Americans are Christians.

Huckabee was referring to an ad airing in Iowa, New Hampshire and South Carolina that shows him in a red sweater in front of a Christmas tree as he asks, "Are you about worn out by all the television commercials you've been seeing, mostly about politics? Well, I don't blame you. At this time of year sometimes it's nice to pull aside from all of that and just remember that what really matters is the celebration of the birth of Christ and being with our family and friends."

The so-called war on Christmas. A Charlottean writing a letter to the editor let off this steam. "Does the Observer front page proclaim: 'Merry Christmas'? No, it doesn't. Couldn't afford to offend a minority, so you have offended me. I'm tired of having Jesus Christ displaced from our traditions and our country. I'm proud to be a Christian. This is a country of Christians, so get used to it and become part of it. Offending the majority just doesn't make good economic sense."

And this in *The Observer* from a Christian in Newland.

"An editorial illustration (Dec. 25) depicting the symbol of Islam as a decoration on a Christmas tree? May the fleas of a thousand camels nest in your bedding."

Let's not leave out the Christian from Marshville who wrote: "All those major retailers who were afraid to mention the word "Christmas" in their ads for fear of offending seem to have no problem advertising 'After Christmas' sales!"

According to some, the evil ACLU and a lot of other people have been trying to take Christ out of Christmas for years. And nothing riles them up more than to witness something like what happened in Newport News, Va. 8,000 people show up for the town's Christmas celebration, except they are not calling it that. They're calling it Hollydazzle. And instead of lighting the 40-foot Christmas tree, Newport News officials are going to be lighting, get this, the tree of illumination. The events are also going to include, of course, Frosty the Snowman, make-your-own-snow globes, and that traditional Christmas fair, Mr. and Mrs. Mouse.

Poor Christians, some people are wishing "Happy Holidays" not "Merry Christmas".

Poor, abused, neglected, offended Christians. On their LCD and Plasma television they are seeing a TV commercial for Kay Jewellers. Husband and wife are sleeping, clock ticks over from 5:59 to 6:00, and husband awakens. He jumps out of bed and yells "Honey, get up, it's the twenty-fifth!!!" Next, the whole family is bounding downstairs and you see the tips of a few branches with lights and out comes the gift. The wife opens it and it's a beautiful diamond bracelet from where? Why, Kay's of course! She is delighted, he is excited and wishes his lovely wife a "Happy Holiday."

Poor Christians, discriminated against Christians, in public grade schools teachers and administrators are scared to death someone's going to mention the "J" word in some song. Santa Claus and Rudolph passes muster. Have a Great Yuletide passes muster. Kwazy Kwanzaa passes must but you'd better not mention the "J" word or the "C" word.

You know what I think. I'm sure you want to know what I think.-----Maybe it's not such a bad thing for Christians who don't care about the left out and the marginalized to experience themselves what it's like to be left out and marginalized themselves even if the marginalization is on a very small scale compared to how many who are left out and marginalized on a daily basis in ways that are very harmful, psychologically, spiritually, economically.

Of course Christ can never be taken out of Christmas. What can happen is for a government which purposely left God out of its constitution to stop giving Christianity privileges other religions or atheists don't enjoy. Or put another way, if Christ has been taken out of city hall and the Capitol maybe some Christians can start noticing that Christianity shouldn't be imposed, forced down the throats of others. Didn't our mamas' teach us good manners? Didn't Jesus teach us to play well with others? And isn't it time the lazy, "welfare Church"----I made that term up.----isn't it time the welfare church stopped expecting handouts from the government, stopped expecting the government to do its job or assist the Church?

The magi went to Jesus attracted by a Star in the sky. What non-Christian would ever be attracted to Jesus by the current crowd?

I found this interesting. Host Brenda Buttner opened Fox News' annual campaign to convince its viewers that the Christmas holiday is in danger by asking this: "The War on Christmas -- Could the Left win its crusade and does that threaten our stock market, our entire economy?" ([http://www.newshounds.us/2005/12/03/is\\_fox\\_news\\_taking\\_christ\\_out\\_of\\_christmas.php](http://www.newshounds.us/2005/12/03/is_fox_news_taking_christ_out_of_christmas.php), reported by Judy)

If that isn't taking Christ out of Christmas, I don't know what is. Where are the howling Christians protesting that statement? Did the woman who left the message on Wedgwood's answering machine call Fox News to complain?

Do all these Christians worried about Christ being taken out of Christmas know that for three centuries some Christians did not even celebrate Christmas? Now that's really taking Christ out of Christmas. Puritans in England and New England actually made Christmas observances illegal.

When Oliver Cromwell took over England, he and the Puritans felt it was their mission to cleanse England of decadence. In 1644 Cromwell enforced an Act of Parliament banning Christmas celebrations. Christmas was regarded by the Puritans as a wasteful festival that threatened core Christian beliefs. Consequently, all activities relating to Christmas were forbidden, including mince pies and holly.

In the United States the Puritans who immigrated to Massachusetts to build a new life had several reasons for disliking Christmas. First of all, it reminded them of the Church of England and the old-world customs, which they were trying to escape. Second, they didn't consider the holiday a truly religious day. December 25th wasn't in the Bible and was selected as the birth date of Christ several centuries after his death. Third, the holiday celebration usually included drinking, feasting, and playing games - all things which the Puritans frowned upon.

Quakers, too, took a pass on Christmas, reasoning that, in the words of 17<sup>th</sup>-century Quaker apologist Robert Barclay, "All days are alike holy in the sight of God."

The Quakers never translated their dismissal of Christmas into legislation in their stronghold in Colonial Pennsylvania but local meetings, as the Quakers call their assemblies, urged their members to disdain Christmas and to be "zealous in their testimony against the holding up of such days."

Please don't confuse with me the Puritans. I don't mind the Quakers, but please don't confuse with me the Puritans.

Personally, I'm all for Christmas. Yes, there's the materialism and yes, it was originally a pagan holiday stolen by the Christians who----who have done a darn good job of re-paganizing it. Is Christmas what it should be? No. I'm just saying part of being Christian is learning to live with non-Christians. I'm saying we Baptists need to teach the other Christians that true religion, true faith can't be coerced. But mostly I'm saying that from what I can tell the people most responsible for taking Christ out of Christmas, ironically, are many of the same people worried about, frantic about the so-called war on Christmas, although they are taking Christ out of Christmas in a way different from the Puritans.

They take Christ out of Christmas by not caring about the poor in spite of their much beloved Bible being plastered with instruction about bending over backwards for the poor.

They take Christ out of Christmas by not being considerate of the foreigner even though their much beloved Bible instructs to be kind to foreigners because you yourself once were a foreigner in a distant land.

They take Christ out of Christmas by not welcoming the marginalized, marginalized, in part, because of verses in the Bible, even though---even though Jesus himself treated as clean those whom scripture deemed unclean.

They take Christ out of Christmas by praying for our soldiers while not praying for enemy soldiers when the Christ they so worry about being discarded taught his followers to love even enemies.

They take Christ out of Christmas-----just as you and I do, maybe not in the same ways they do, but we do it too.

Those magi traveled along way to see that baby Jesus. They weren't Jewish. They weren't Christians. Christians had not been invented yet. They were gentiles, foreigners, not one of them.

It's one of the most beautiful scenes in the Bible. Different cultures, different religions, different countries, different languages, so many differences gathered around this baby.

I think it's some of the Christians who are taking Christ out of Christmas.

There is a "Peanuts" comic strip in which Linus is listening carefully as his sister, Lucy, boasts about her religious faith and her potential as an evangelist.

She says to Linus: "I could be a terrific evangelist. Do you know that kid who sits behind me in school? I convinced him that my religion is better than his religion."

Linus asks: "How did you do that?"

Lucy replies: "I hit him with my lunch box."