

THE MEANING OF XMAS

Every year as the Holiday Season draws near, I start dreading the coming broadcasts of the same old Xmas movies and the same old Xmas carols that become the soundtrack and muzak of all public and even family events. All five senses are to be subjected to the onslaught of cheery advertising on all conceivable media (TV, radio, cellphones, loudspeakers on shopping malls and fliers stuffed in your mailbox). Politicians walk around wearing red and white furry Santa caps; and Hollywood stars kiss under the obligatory mistletoe.

Millions of Douglas fir, pine and spruce trees are cut down and parked in people's living rooms, adorned with heavy decorations and inflammable lights; then unceremoniously trashed after only 3 weeks. Millions of boxes are giftwrapped in colorful paper and shiny ribbons that are destroyed after gifts are open –many of which are returned or re-gifted. Every major city in Europe and North America holds so-called Santa Claus parades lasting hours, burning tons of toxic fossil fuel and filling downtown streets with mountains of tickertape, tinfoil and discarded Styrofoam cups.

These festivities take place regardless of whether the times are prosperous or whether people are suffering from a crippling economic depression or a major war. The apotheosis of bourgeois life **must** be celebrated with good cheer and revelry.

One feature of the Xmas season that particularly irks me is the image of Santa Claus. The current depiction of Santa Claus is based on images drawn by cartoonist Thomas Nast for *Harper's Weekly* beginning in 1863.

The iconic image of the jolly fat Santa Claus was further cemented in the public's consciousness by the Santa Claus ads created for the *Coca-Cola* Company from 1931 by illustrator Haddon Sundblum. *



Needless to say, the real “Santa” was nothing like this obese monstrosity. Saint Nicholas of Myra (c. 270 –343 A.D.), also known as Nicholas of Bari, was a Christian bishop of Greek descent from the city of Myra during the time of the Eastern Roman Empire. In one of the most famous incidents from his biography, he is said to have rescued three girls from being forced into prostitution by dropping a sack of gold coins through the window of their house each night for three nights so their father could pay a dowry for each of them. He was cast into prison during the persecution of Diocletian, but was released after the accession of Constantine.**

What is always buried deep in the subconscious of Western culture during the Xmas holidays is the real history and mystical meaning of the birth of Joshua of Nazareth. Except for a few ancient medieval carols and some Nativity scenes, this revelation is obscured by so many layers and layers of Roman Saturnalia symbolism and Germanic Krampusnacht sadism, that we end up losing the thread of the basic story.

Whether we are faithful believers in the New Testament version, or simply struck by the universality of the story, the image of the birth of a tiny baby on a cold desert night, laid in a stable feeding trough by his poor parents –refugees from persecution in a strange land– cannot help but move us to pity.

But it is also a warning that hidden in that child’s heart may be the light and power of a god or goddess. As in ancient times only gods and goddesses had true dignity, until that miraculous birth, few understood that every human being regardless of status, creed, race or gender, has inherent **dignity**. Thus, for me, the birth of the “Son of God” is the historic birth of **human dignity**: that all human beings are created equal.

After that day, the world would never be the same.

* www.britannica.com/topic/Santa-Claus

** https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Nicholas

Written by © Pascual Delgado on December 29th 2023.