

## Newsletter December 2012

In our *December 2011* Newsletter we discussed the birth of Christ and the importance of the Incarnation, which is commonly commemorated by Christians this time of the year. Early Christians did not have a specific day set aside to celebrate the Nativity; it first originated within the Roman church at or about 336 AD. The day that we commonly celebrate as Jesus' nativity is fraught with considerable error. In this newsletter we shall disclose the occult origins of "Christmas" as well as various pagan traditions that are directly associated with the annual celebration of that day. To do so does not in any way diminish the importance of the Incarnation itself, as our previous newsletter made very clear. The following discussion contains edited excerpts from *Comprehensively Reformed Christianity*, Book II with some text taken from Book III as well.

The word "Christmas" (*Cristes maesse*) means "Mass of Christ" and is rooted in the Roman Catholic error of transubstantiation found in the celebration of its ritualistic Mass (cf. Book II, page 450). As late as A.D. 831, a Benedictine monk by the name of Radbertus Paschasius wrote a treatise on the Eucharist wherein he stated that through a miracle the elements were transformed through spiritual means into the body and blood of Christ. That miracle occurred only for those who believed such that the body and blood of Christ became present in them when they partook of the elements — the elements themselves remained unchanged physically. However, a later Roman Pope, Innocent III, at or about 1200 A.D. decreed that Christ was **physically present** in the elements themselves. That is, during the ritual, the bread was actually transformed into the physical body of Christ, and the wine became his actual blood. That decree meant that Christ was being sacrificed repeatedly each time the liturgy was performed much in the way that animals were repeatedly offered up in Old Testament times. But as Scripture clearly tells us, Jesus Christ was the final sacrifice offered up once and for all (He.10:10) on the cross to atone for all of mankind's sin past, present, and future. Therefore, there is now no further offering of sacrifice possible or necessary (He.10:18). The sin debt has already been paid in full, and any suggestion to the contrary disparages the import and finality of the atonement of Christ.

While there is no sound biblical basis for this occult notion of transformation, it was likely improperly inferred from the text of 1Corinthians 11:24 where according to Paul Jesus' exact words were "this is my body." Placed in proper context, however, it is apparent that Jesus was saying that the bread only represented his body inasmuch as He very likely held the bread in his hand when he offered it to his apostles. Moreover, Jesus did not characterize the juice of the grape as his blood in the same way. Rather He said that the "cup" (representing his body that held his blood) was soon to be offered up in testimony of the New Covenant that was to be written in his own blood, which was subsequently spilt on the cross (cf. 1Co.11:25). In John 6:48 thru 6:58 Jesus compared his life (flesh and blood) to the manna of the Old Testament. Jesus is the true manna, the bread of life, come down from heaven that gives eternal life, not the manna of Moses' day that only sustained the flesh for a time. Thus, Jesus speaks of offering himself up on the cross in the atonement from which all who believe partake spiritually, not in his actual flesh and blood being repeatedly offered up as in the Roman Mass. "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life" (Jo. 6:63). Paraphrasing the *explanatory notes* of John Wesley, "It is through the spiritual meaning of these words, that God gives life. The bare, carnal, literal meaning, gains us nothing. The words that Jesus spoke are to be taken in a spiritual sense and, when they are so understood, they are life — that is, a means of spiritual life to the hearers."

The Roman error of transubstantiation has led some, including the early Puritans who came to our shores, to avoid any celebration of the birth of Christ at all lest in doing so they could become entangled with pagan error. Nevertheless, "Christmas" or "Christ Mass" remains deeply entrenched within the vocabulary of Protestant churches as well as the Roman Catholic Church. The occasion of Jesus' birth is being better described by many today as the celebration of the Nativity or even more biblically as the Incarnation of Christ thus avoiding any mention of the word "Christmas." Today, we also find a trend away from using the word Christmas by the secular world — not because they object

to the suffix, “mas,” but that they object to the mention of “Christ!” They prefer to refer to the entire celebration simply as “Winter Holidays” lest they miss out on all the revelry associated with it. Others may brazenly use “Xmas” in an effort to obliterate the word Christ not realizing that the “X” originally referred to Christ’s death on the cross, which is inexorably linked to his Incarnation, and that the remaining suffix “mas” still refers to the Roman Catholic Mass.

The irrefutable fact is that most of the celebration of that which we call Christmas has its origin in paganism, as we shall now discuss more specifically. The winter solstice (which occurs on December 21 or 22) is the time when the sun reaches its farthest distance to the south bringing the shortest day of the year to the northern hemisphere (cf. Book II, page 245 ff.). The winter celebration is actually a form of sun (Sol) worship. The Yule time celebration relates to the Teutonic barbarian Goth who invaded and settled in parts of the Roman Empire. The European pagans believed that the sun won a victory, aided by their building of fires to help ward off the darkness, as was evidenced by the fact that the days soon again became longer following this ritual. This is the source of what we call the Yuletide celebration. Today, stringing colored lights outside homes and businesses commonly represents this ancient tradition; though candles and bonfires are occasionally employed as well.

The Romans also worshiped one of their own gods, Saturn, at that time of the year. Beginning on December 17, there were seven days of merriment and revelry, referred to as Saturnalia, which reached its climax on December 24. The celebration consisted of the exchange of visits and gifts as well as the ceasing of all business activity for its duration. Slaves were often set free at this time. Even military campaigns and executions were stopped for this period. It was supposed to be a time of good will toward others. Saturnalia is the source of much of the rank commercialism of Christmas today as huge amounts of money are spent upon exchanging various gifts.

Associated with Saturnalia was the death of the Greek god Bacchus (or Dionysus) who was the god of wine. He was supposed to have died each winter and to be born again each spring when the grape vines were renewed. The five-day spring festivals resulted in much licentiousness and drunken orgies. Soon, drunken orgies became more closely associated with Christmas than celebrations connected with spring.

The day or time of the year in which Jesus was born is unknown and cannot be established from Scripture or from secular history. December 25<sup>th</sup> is a manufactured date that was arbitrarily set in about 336 AD to coincide with the pagan celebrations that we have just discussed. The days of pagan celebration preceding the 25<sup>th</sup> were incorporated into an expanded period that is now commonly referred to as Advent (cf. Book II, Chapter 13.4, page 243). While most Protestants and Roman Catholics still observe December 25 as the day of the incarnation, that date is far from universal. Eastern Orthodox churches celebrate January 6, and the Armenian churches celebrate January 19. No celebration commemorating the birth of Christ is found recorded at all prior to the time of Constantine at or about A.D. 325 (cf. Book III, page 134). The mix of paganism with Christianity, that was so prevalent in that age, induced the Roman church to place the day just after the winter solstice and at the conclusion of Saturnalia.

The concession of the Roman church to both the Yule celebration and Saturnalia was most probably an attempt to make them over into Christian religious festivals. However, the Roman church in agreeing to allow both pagan celebrations to continue much as they had always been conducted completely negated that possibility. The consequence was that the day that had been designated for the celebration of the incarnation of Jesus Christ was immediately infused with pagan traditions. That continued influx resulted in a complete syncretism of Christian tradition and paganism such that they can no longer be easily separated from each other.

It was Dutch immigrants that brought the fourth century tradition of Sinterklass or Sint Nikolaas to the United States. The celebration was originally held on the eve of December 6 (St. Nicholas’ Day) wherein the patron saint (of Roman Catholic tradition) presented gifts to children under cover of night. It was not originally connected with Christmas, but as English settlers took over the tradition, the name

became Santa Claus and the tradition was moved forward to Christmas Eve. Through this tradition, many children are indoctrinated into the paganism of Christmas at an early age. They tend to see Santa Claus as God (or a god) who is omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent. When that occult fantasy necessarily ends, it can prove to be a stumbling block for belief in the one true God for some as well.

The Christmas tree, which is decorated with ornaments and lights, likely had its origin in the Germanic mystery plays as the “paradise tree” which most probably was supposed to represent the tree of life in the Garden of Eden. Germanic mysteries stem from various Scandinavian legends regarding the god of war, Odin, as well as Thor, god of thunder, and other supposed deities. Very little is known about the details of their worship because later Christian historians tended to characterize customs and beliefs associated with them in Christian thought and practice. This was another instance of attempting to blend paganism with Christianity. It is difficult to know if the “paradise tree” came from that blending or from the ancient legends themselves. The paradise tree only began to be used as a Christmas tree in Strasbourg France in the early seventeenth century. From there, it spread through Germany to the remainder of Europe and eventually made its way with immigrants into the United States in the mid nineteenth century. Although the Christmas tree is a relatively modern innovation, its roots date back into paganism. It is indeed strange to see the paradise tree standing in many church sanctuaries today giving credence to the paganism of the Christmas celebration.

From those early pagan traditions come much of the modern customs and revelry associated with Christmas. A large part of this modern tradition is the exchange of visits between friends and relatives, often bearing gifts, the burning of a giant Yule log, bonfires in some places, or just the stringing of lights. The traditions of Holly and mistletoe come from ancient Druidism, a pre-Christian religion of the early inhabitants of the British Isles (cf. Book III, page 302) who believed in the mysterious power of various plants including the oak and mistletoe. Wassail (punch) bowls also stem from pagan traditions of the British Isles. We find in those early traditions the source of the revelry and drunkenness associated with today’s infamous office Christmas parties.

False tradition is hard to quash even when everything else falls away. In Revelation 11:9–11 we are told of the grotesque action of the inhabitants of the earth in the end times (cf. Book III, Chapter 20.6 *The Day of God’s Wrath*, page 635). The two bodies of God’s final witnesses will be laid in the street of Jerusalem in order to intimidate the Jewish inhabitants and to allow the rest of the world to shake their fists at God who had sent them (Re.11:8,9). The inhabitants of earth will gloat over their dead bodies for more than “three days and three nights” to assure themselves and the rest of the world that they are truly dead. Following that evil vigil, they will rejoice over their deaths because they falsely believe that they have cut off the source of the terrible wrath that they have been suffering. In a mocking parody of what seems very much like the present-day Christmas celebration, they will send each other gifts and make merry (Re.11:10). Just as many today ignorantly make the annual celebration of the birth of Christ a drunken orgy and dishonor Him, the partying at that time will be even more blatant — but it will be the very last time just prior to the blowing of the final trumpet judgment that initiates the pouring out of the seven bowls (vials) of wrath (Re.15:7, 16:1; Book III, page 637 ff.).

Although Scripture does not mandate that one day a year be set aside to celebrate the birth of Christ, it does not expressly prohibit such a commemoration. However, all the error, paganism, and commercialism associated with Christmas at the very least should cause us to reflect upon what we truly commemorate this time of the year and what and how we go about celebrating. Whether we choose to remember one day a year as the birth date of Jesus or not, God taking on human flesh (the Incarnation) was a very significant historical event. Hidden deep underneath today’s pagan ritual, mindless merry making, and rank commercialism is an astonishing event in human history, an event that Satan has largely clouded over in paganism. God, Himself, took on the form of sinful flesh in order to execute his plan for the redemption of mankind. *Arthur J. Smith, December 2012*