

Touch Not the Unclean Thing

The Origins of Christ-Mass

*"What communion hath light with darkness? What agreement hath the Temple of God with idols?
Come out, be separate, touch not the unclean"—2 Cor. 6:14*

PAUL'S WHOLE teaching is directed toward developing in his hearers an intense desire for that which is *better, more powerful, stronger, closer* to divine principle and standard. He labors toward the arousing of godly yearnings that find their satisfaction and peace only in a constant upward effort toward conformity with the perfect example.

The struggle of life must not be viewed as an unhappy, stoical battle against desire—the secret is rather a gradual, joyful education and training of the inclinations toward BETTER things—

"Yet show I unto you a MORE EXCELLENT WAY."

"Overcome evil WITH GOOD."

"Here is a BETTER, a more excellent way." The life in the Truth is a GROWTH, a movement ever forward and upward, the progressive advancement toward greater light and fuller understanding.

Baptism is only the first step, a bare beginning—to STOP at that point is *suicide*. We can all call to mind passages which illustrate this essential divine principle—

"Be ye TRANSFORMED by the RENEWING of your mind."

"GROW in grace and knowledge."

"Put on the new man which is renewed in KNOWLEDGE."

"GROW UP unto him in all things."

"Every man that has this hope in him PURIFIETH himself."

And so the man of God, through constant application to the enlightening Word, is gradually molded from weakness and ignorance to greater and greater strength of purpose, character and perception.

Let us approach this subject from this point of view—to ascertain the true FACTS, and to consider the spiritual principles which bear upon them, that we may in all things better pursue the good, acceptable, perfect will of our holy God.

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ONE THING immediately strikes us forcibly which perhaps we have never noticed before. That is that *most of the present historic anniversaries are ghostly hangovers from the time when the Mother of Harlots held undisputed sway over "times and seasons" and the "bodies and souls of men."*

Many, of course, are now only unfamiliar names to most of us—Candlemas, Epiphany, St. Stephen's, Michaelmas, All Saints, Whitsuntide, Shrove Tuesday, Ash Wednesday, Plough Monday, Twelfth Night, and scores of others. But some still linger on as grim relics of an age of gross and incredible superstition.

"*Saint*" *Valentine*, for instance, was a romantically-minded bishop of the third century martyred for performing "Christian" marriages against the laws of the emperor.

"*Saint*" *Patrick* converted Ireland to Catholicism and immortalized the shamrock by using it to demonstrate the superstition of the triple unity of the "Trinity."

Easter is named, apparently, from a Saxon goddess of spring. Many ancient heathen nations revered the egg as the symbol of the beginning of life, and it is from Teuton mythology that rabbit-laid eggs appear among Easter superstitions.

Halloween was once a fairly dignified autumn thanksgiving, but became hopelessly corrupted with a strong mixture of heathen witchcraft (more appealing to public taste).

Christmas, too, we find is fundamentally of religious origin, but FAR from exclusively "Christian." To it we find attached innumerable traditions and superstitions. Most are of pagan origin but the mystery-working of the Catholic church has greatly complicated them by addition of priests and madonnas and holy water and signs of the cross.

WE FIND ABOVE ALL THINGS THAT CHRISTMAS IS BASICALLY AND PRIMARILY A ROMAN CATHOLIC INSTITUTION. To this great system of iniquity it owes its establishment, permanence and popularity.

For the *period of the year* in which it is held, it is mostly indebted to pagan sources. It appears that this time of the year, following the harvest and centering about the winter solstice when the days again began to lengthen, has almost universally been a period of festivity and religious significance long before the spread of Christianity.

Regarding the *date*, most commentators agree that from many points of view NO DATE could be more UNLIKELY as that of Christ's birth, and it is a matter of record that there is no month of the year in which respectable ecclesiastical authorities have not confidently placed the birth of Jesus.

The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* declares—

"CHRISTMAS (the Mass of Christ) . . . Clement of Alexandria (about 200 AD) mentions several speculations on the date of Christ's birth and condemns them as superstitious . . .

"The exact day and year of Christ's birth have never been satisfactorily settled, but when the fathers of the church in A.D. 340 decided upon a date to celebrate the event, they wisely (!) chose the day of the winter solstice which was firmly fixed in the minds of the people and which was their most important festival."

The *Encyclopaedia Americana* says the same—

"Among the German and Celtic tribes the winter solstice was considered an important point of the year, and they held their chief festival of Yule to commemorate the return of the burning-wheel (the sun)."

And *Everyman's Encyclopaedia* says—

"CHRISTMAS (the Mass of Christ) . . . It is certain that the time now fixed could not by any possibility have been the period of Jesus' birth. The choice of this season was probably due to the general recognition that the winter solstice was the turning point of the year."

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IT WAS during the period of the ascendancy of the Roman Empire that Christmas originated. Consequently, we find that Roman customs played the major part in fixing its date and characteristics. Its general season, however, was later found to coincide with important religious superstitions of the north European barbarians, and this too played a large part in its development. One writer says—

"The roots of Christmas observance go deeply into the folklore of Druids, Scandinavians, Egyptians and Romans."

Chambers Encyclopaedia records—

"Many of the beliefs and usages of the Old Germans, and also of the Romans, relating to this period passed over from heathenism to Christianity."

R. J. Campbell, in *The Story of Christmas*, * declares—

"As we have seen, there are not a few popular observances associated with the Christmas season which have NOTHING TO DO WITH the Christian religion and the birth of Jesus. Most of these observances are older than Christianity, and some of them—it must be confessed—are NOT OF VERY ELEVATED ORIGIN"

William Auld, in *Christmas Traditions*,* notes—

"There are the green garlands, the marvellous trees, the mystic fire and lights . . . and custom many . . . still clustering about the great midwinter feast—all of which descend to us from the PAGAN CHILDHOOD of the race."

T. G. Crippen, in *Christmas and Christmas Lore** confesses—

"The Feast of the Nativity rather INCORPORATED than supplanted various HEATHEN festivals. It was therefore only natural that RELICS OF HEATHEN PRACTICE should survive as traditional customs."

The *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics** confirms this—

"MOST of the Christian customs now prevailing in Europe, or recorded from former times, are HEATHEN customs which have been absorbed or tolerated by the Church. The Christian feast has inherited these customs from 2 sources— Roman and Teutonic PAGANISM "

And the *Catholic Encyclopaedia** (note the source) admits—

"There is NO DOUBT that the original Christian nuclei attracted PAGAN accretion."

*These books obtained from the Public Library.

(All these authorities are "friends" of Christmas. Most of them seem to regard its heathen-Catholic origin as a delightful and intriguing asset). We find exactly the same picture when we consult standard, independent reference books. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* says—

"Many current customs date back to these pre-Christian origins, among them Christmas decorations. The Romans ornamented their temples and homes with green boughs and flowers for the Saturnalia . . . the Druids gathered mistletoe and hung it in their homes; the Saxons used holly, ivy and bay.

And *Everyman's Encyclopaedia* declares—

"The practice of decorating churches is pagan in its origin."

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THIS PERIOD of the year was one of great festivities for the early Romans. First came the celebrated *Saturnalia*, commencing Dec. 17. *This feast (of the god Saturn) finds much mention in all commentaries on Christmas.* One says—

"The Roman Saturnalia was characterized by processions, singing, lighting candles, adorning the house with laurels and green trees, giving presents."

Again from the *Religious Encyclopaedia*—

"The Saturnalia in Rome provided the MODEL for MOST of the merry customs of Christmas. The time was one of the general mirth. All classes exchanged gifts, the commonest being wax candles and clay dolls. Christmas inherited the general merriment . . . games, giving of gifts, abundance of sweetmeats and—as to the more ceremonious elements—the burning of candles."

The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* relates similarly—

"Christmas customs are an evolution from times that long antedated the Christian period — a descent from seasonal, pagan, religious and national practices . . .

And from the *Encyclopaedia Americana*—

"The holly, the mistletoe, the Yule log, and the wassail bowl are relics of pre-Christmas times."

Campbell further says—

"The Romans adopted from earlier folk-customs the rituals which appear in their Saturnalia and have been CARRIED OVER INTO THE OBSERVANCE OF MODERN CHRISTMAS TIMES. There was feasting, drinking and decorating with evergreens."

Auld declares—

"Much of the spirit of this old Roman festival passed into Christmas celebration. The early Puritans, witnessing the jolly antics of grotesque fools, the "Lords of Merry Disport," never had any doubt in the matter. That transient feeling which blossoms at Christmastime OWES AS MUCH TO THE kind GOD SATURN AS TO THE LOVING SON OF MAN.

"This is the Christmas, which, mixed with a little SENTIMENTAL Christianity, lies so pleasantly in the genial pages of Dickens."

One outstanding feature of the Saturnalia festival was the reversion of all order and dignities. This was carried to great lengths at Christmastime in the Middle Ages. In England it was customary to appoint a "Lord of Misrule" or "Abbot of Unreason" who presided over the blasphemous foolery. We read with great surprise that at one time it was quite customary for EVEN THE CLERGY themselves to let down all barriers of restraint within the church itself at the Christmas season. Crippen relates (which seems almost unbelievable)—

"At Vespers, at the end of the Magnificat, the whole service was turned into BURLESQUE. Dice were cast and black puddings were EATEN ON THE ALTAR, ludicrous songs were sung and old leather was burned as mock incense. In some places an ass was led into the church in whose honour a MOCK HYMN was chanted with a bray for a refrain."

The *Encyclopaedia Americana* says—

"On St. Nicholas' Day a "Boy Bishop" was elected, who exercised a BURLESQUE episcopal jurisdiction, and PARODIED the various ecclesiastical functions and ceremonies."

Such is the height and stability of a religion grounded on sentiment and superstition. Auld adds—

"All through the Middle Ages the two rivers of RIOT and RELIGION flowed together."

Following the *Saturnalia* in Rome was the *Sigallaria*, or "Doll Festival," another obvious link with the modern Christmas. Then on Dec. 25 came the great *Brumalia*, the religious observance of the sun-worshippers. This was known also as *Natalis Solus Invicti*—the "Birth of the Unconquerable Sun"—the date when the days again began to lengthen. It is significant that the *Catholic Encyclopaedia* itself says—

"The well-known solar feast of Natalis Invicti, celebrated on Dec. 25, has a strong claim for the responsibility of our Christmas date."

On this point the *Encyclopaedia Americana* says—

be "CHRISTMAS (the Mass of Christ) . . . In the 5th century the Western Church ordered it to be celebrated forever on the day of the old Roman feast of the birth of Sol."

Everyman's Encyclopaedia declares—

"The one which especially influenced the Christian Church was probably the Roman festival of the winter solstice, celebrated on Dec. 25 ("The Day of the Birth of the Unconquerable Sun.").

Then came the *Kalends of January*, and finally the *Juvenalia*, both of which have contributed their share to the modern Christmas. With very odd logic, Crippen remarks—

"Surely it was WELL (!) that all these should be COMBINED IN ONE GREAT CHRISTIAN FEAST, and their ancient significance transferred in the light of the Gospel. Many customs obtained a new lease of life.

"In Egypt, as in Rome, the new festival would coincide with the birthday of the Sun-god. The northern barbarians would find it practically coincident with their own Yule. It seems to have been the special festival of the god Thor."

Again from Auld—

"After the barbarians were Christianized, all the customs and SUPERSTITIONS which had belonged from time immemorable to their own Yuletide BEGAN TO CLUSTER ABOUT CHRISTMAS.

"When the season calls up in the mind crackling fires on the hearth, lighted candles, rooms adorned with evergreens, bright berries and flowers, wholesome feast and frolic—these are the GENUINE PAGAN ELEMENTS."

Regarding the period when Christmas originated, the *Catholic Encyclopaedia* says it was NOT AMONG THE EARLY FESTIVALS OF THE CHURCH because Irenaeus and Tertullian, at the end of the 2nd century omit it from their lists of feasts.

The first evidence of any observance of the birth of Christ, says this same authority, appears about the year 200 A.D. in Egypt. It was not earlier than 330 A.D. that Dec. 25 was chosen by the Pope, and it was not universally accepted until long after (the position and authority of the "Pope" was then still far from conceded in "Christendom"). Regarding the attitude of early Christians toward such things, Auld says:

"As for the FIRST believers, THEY had not the SLIGHTEST INTEREST in ANYTHING OF THE KIND. Hope in the Lord's imminent return from heaven in great power and glory was the flame that fired THEIR devotion."

In the book, "*The Customs of Mankind*," we read—

"Christmas was originally a festival of the winter solstice. It was customary to hold great feasts in honour of the HEATHEN GODS, to dance and make merry. The EARLY teachers of Christianity PROHIBITED THESE FESTIVALS as unsuited to the character of Christ."

Tertullian, who wrote, says the *Ency. Britannica*, "in a period when a LAX SPIRIT OF CONFORMITY to the world had seized the churches"—about 200 A.D.) says regarding decorating with evergreens and ceremonial candles—

"Let those who have no Light light their lamps, let THEM affix to their posts laurels: YOU are the light of the world, a tree ever green; IF you have renounced temples, make not your OWN GATE a temple" (by heathen decorations).

And it is recorded that at the time of persecution, *Christians were detected by NOT decorating their houses* at the Saturnalia. Some, it is said, conformed to avoid suspicion. The practice was *strongly condemned by the early church*. And Campbell relates—

"There can be no doubt that the early Christians also frequently shared in the FROLICS of their HEATHEN neighbours, and the fathers of the Church had considerable difficulty in prevailing on their members to refrain from such UNEDIFYING PASTIMES."

"The early Christians discouraged the use of evergreen decorations in Christian homes and assemblies because their display had long been associated with heathen festivals. Bishop Martin of Braga (575 A.D.) forbade the use of all greenery and 'other dangerous Kalend customs'."

Crippen remarks—

"So long as heathenism was in full vigor the ancient Christians were puritanically jealous of anything that might seem like coquetting with idolatry, but when heathenism was declining there was a disposition to ADOPT ITS CUSTOMS."

And further from Auld—

"The use of evergreens is one of the happy (!) contributions which PAGANISM made to the Christian festival. At FIRST the Church frowned upon this intrusion of paganism into the sacred season, but altogether the ancient church was WISELY TOLERANT (!) in her attitude to heathen ideas and customs . . . hence the curious and interesting MIXTURES of ideas, PAGAN and CHRISTIAN, which became CHARMINGLY (!) entwisted."

After unsuccessfully trying to prevent the adoption of pagan customs, says Campbell—

"The clergy endeavoured to transform the heathen REVELS into amusements which—if not really more spiritual in character—had at least the merit of recognizing the authority of the Church."

The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* confirms this—

"As Christianity spread among the peoples of pagan lands, many of the practices of the winter solstice were blended with those of Christianity, because of the liberal ruling of Pope Gregory I, the Great, and the co-operation of the missionaries.

And such was the slow but deadly course by which the Church exchanged purity for pleasure, and the friendship of God for that of the world.

Justinian in 529 A.D. decreed that no one should work on Christmas. At the Reformation, 1,000 years later, the revulsion against the Catholic superstitions was such that laws were made against not working on Christmas. Crippen says:

"The leaders of the Reformation in Scotland thought that the Roman church was too bad to be mended. In their view it must be ended, and a new beginning made strictly on the model of the New Testament.

"Now certainly the New Testament MADE NO MENTION OF ECCLESIASTICAL FESTIVALS, so the new beginning included the sweeping of them all away. On Dec. 26, 1583, the Glasgow Kirk Session put 5 persons to public penance for keeping the 'superstitious day called YULE.' "

The early Puritan settlers in America were of the same mind. Christmas, they declared, "smelt to heaven of idolatry," and they abolished it as a "relic of Popery." In Massachusetts in 1659, a law was passed which read—

"Whosoever shall be found observing any such day as Christmas, either by forbearing of labour, feasting, or in any other way, shall be fined 5 shillings."

In their earlier, purer days, the Presbyterians and Baptists were similarly opposed to it on the same grounds. In England, at a time of revulsion against Catholicism, observance of Christmas was forbidden by an act of Parliament in 1644.

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SANTA CLAUS is of course the good Bishop "St. Nicholas," patron saint of beggars and thieves. In the Middle Ages thieves were known as "clerks of St. Nicholas." In Europe he travels about in all his bishop's regalia riding a white horse which (in the strange metamorphosis of centuries) he seems to have inherited through Scandinavian mythology from the benign god Wodin who was engaged in the same activities at that period of the year. His descent down the chimney is traced to similar habits of the Norse goddess Hertha. Auld writes about St. Nicholas—

"The names and attributes of the mysterious purveyors of gifts disclose a most CONFUSED MIXTURE OF PAGAN AND CHRISTIAN NOTIONS. All kinds of bugbears and bogies figure in the European Christmas. By their names they suggest a loose connection with St. Nicholas, but by their activities they betray an unmistakable relationship with the weird beings of ancient pagan mythology."

Of the *Christmas tree*, the origin is uncertain. Virgil, the Roman poet, speaks of decorating pine trees in honour of Bacchus, the god of revelry. Hislop, in his "Two Babylons," connects similar customs with Egyptian cults.

Mistletoe, of course, is inherited from the Druid priests of ancient Britain. For many centuries the Church forbade its use because of the superstition attached to it. It was so sacred that enemies meeting beneath it laid down their arms (the world still has a relic of this superstition.)

The *holly wreath* symbolized the crown of thorns, the red berries being drops of blood. Like all other holy articles of the Church, *it will keep away goblins*. Miscellaneous Christmas superstitions are far too numerous to mention. Campbell, in summing up, comes *surprisingly close to the truth*—

"There is really NOTHING IN COMMON between the mystery of the Word made flesh for man's salvation, and the orgies of eating and drinking and horseplay associated with the paganism of pre-Christian times and perpetuated at the Christmas season in our own as well as earlier generations. There is goodwill in both—but the ONE IS CARNAL AND THE OTHER SPIRITUAL."

Brethren and sisters, how do WE—called OUT to be "sons of God"—stand in relation to these things of the world? "What communion hath LIGHT with DARKNESS?" In the Revelation, two eternally antagonistic classes appear—

BRANDED WITH THE MARK OF THE BEAST

- (1) "ALL NATIONS have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication . . . by her sorceries were ALL NATIONS deceived."

SANCTIFIED WITH THE SEAL OF GOD.

- (2) "Lo, a Lamb stood on Mt. Sion, and with him 144,000. THESE are they which were NOT defiled with (the apostate) women. These were redeemed from among men, being: the firstfruits unto God, for they are without fault before the throne of God."

To which class will WE be found to belong?

—G.V.G.