

## *REFLECTIONS*

Lawrence P. Grayson

---

### **Reclaiming Christmas**

Two thousand years ago, Rome was the center of the civilized world – economically, commercially, socially, militarily. Its material greatness, however, was accompanied by moral depravity. Prostitution, pornography, homosexuality, same-sex unions, suicide, and other lustful perversions were accepted.

Does not the permissiveness of that ancient culture appear familiar? As we in America – and indeed the West -- strive for material greatness, are we not recreating a pagan moral climate?

The Roman world changed, however. On a day now known as Christmas, the “*Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.*” God came to earth in the person of Jesus Christ. Conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin, the Second Person of God assumed a fully human nature, with all of the joys and agonies, trials and tribulations, thoughts and emotions, sufferings and death that are innate to man.

Through His teachings and the Church He left behind, a new era began for the human race. His doctrines elevated women to equality with men, asserted the role of charity and social justice, showed the debasement and immorality of slavery, established the sanctity and indissolubility of marriage, and raised the status of the family and children. The recognition of Christ’s birth with its profound implications, became a special event for His followers.

Ever since the first settlers landed in America, Christmas has been celebrated in this land. But now, with declining religious beliefs among the populace, for many Christmas has been replaced with a secular, commercial holiday, preceded by a month-long marketing blitz focused on an inordinate amount of buying and gift-giving. Today, this Christian observance is not only being deemphasized, but God Himself is being expunged from public recognition.

Nativity scenes are banned from government property; Christmas programs and traditional carols are forbidden in public schools; the greeting “Merry Christmas” is replaced with “Happy Holidays”; shopping malls are decorated with winter scenes, sleighs, trees, bells, birds, Santa Clauses, and anything other than a reminder of what occurred 2000 years ago; and there are recent efforts to place satanic displays next to crèches. The same Christ Child who could find no place in the public inn in Bethlehem is now being proscribed from receiving public acknowledgement in America.

The silencing of Christmas is more than just being concerned about the sensitivities of non-Christians. It is a step toward suppressing those moral beliefs that are rooted in Christian doctrine: the protection of the unborn, the sanctity of life at all stages, the inviolability of tradition marriage, the ability to live one’s religious beliefs in the public square. There can be no further restrictions without a total suppression of Catholic identity, a loss of religious freedom, a denigration of societal mores based on virtue and morality, and a weakened ability to develop the faith among the young.

In spite of the moral darkness of our time, things can change. But it will take a concerted effort by all Christians, Catholics included, to live their faith in public. They must create a counter-

cultural movement, and it can start by taking back Christmas and once again publically celebrating the birth of Our Savior.

Pope Pius X, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, said: “The greatest obstacle to the apostolate of the Church is the timidity or rather the cowardice of the faithful.” As harsh and as true as that observation has been, Christians today must be forthright in expressing their faith. They no longer can be hesitant to confront the secular forces that are removing God from the culture. They must express their religious beliefs and publically celebrate their traditions.

A new liturgical year begins on December 3, with Advent, the prelude to Christmas. This period of preparation, penitence and expectant waiting for the coming of the Lord, can be a period of moral strengthening. It is an opportunity to reflect on why God chose to become man and its implications for our lives. We are in this temporal life to work out our salvation so that we may merit an eternity in the kingdom of God. Jesus, through His coming taught us the way and gave us the means – grace, the Eucharist, his Church – to attain that salvation.

In the days ahead, as a sign of gratitude and fidelity to our Lord, make a public statement about Christmas. There are innumerable ways to do so, limited only by your imagination. Display a crèche in your yard as well as your home, send religious greeting cards, use stamps displaying the Madonna and Child, promote traditional songs that praise God, join a neighborhood caroling group, set up an Advent wreath, include religiously-themed ornaments on your Christmas tree, visit the Nativity scene in your church, take a card from a church’s “giving tree” and return a gift for a needy child, include religiously-themed ornaments on your Christmas tree, and tell your children or grandchildren the story of Christ’s birth.

As you prepare for Christmas, do not neglect the most important step -- strengthen yourself spiritually. Say the Rosary, spend time in Eucharistic Adoration, go to Confession, meditate on the liturgical readings, so that when you go to Mass on Christmas Day, you can be truly joyous about the arrival of our Lord.

Do not stop these activities on December 25. Continue them at least until the Epiphany -- Feast of the Three Kings, *Little Christmas* -- which will be celebrated on January 7. Then, throughout the year, pray the Rosary and meditate on its mysteries, which recount the life of Our Lord. Every time we recite the Hail Mary, we say, “Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee,” the words the Archangel Gabriel used to invite Mary to become the mother of God. Reflect on when these words were first said and of the birth that followed.

If we live everyday as a preparation for Christ’s coming, the results will be profound. If we do, the world *will* be a different place.

May you and your family have a very *Blessed and Merry Christmas!*

\* \* \*

December 2017