



STATEMENT DC-335

## FROM THE EDITOR

### Should Christians Observe Christmas?

by Elliot Miller

As a young Roman Catholic, Christmas was my favorite time of year — filled with magic and meaning. The birth of Christ played a role in this festal feeling, but so did Santa Claus and all the more temporal pleasures of the season. As I grew older, I not only lost faith in Santa Claus but in Christ as well. The residual sentiment I retained for Christmas was hard to justify.

After I became a born-again Christian, I welcomed the opportunity not only to recapture the spirit of the season, but also truly to appreciate, for the first time, its spiritual significance. I did enjoy a couple of meaningful Christmases. Then I started witnessing to Jehovah's Witnesses.

Time and again the Witnesses would cite the Trinity and Christmas as clear proof that "Christendom" had lapsed into paganism. The Trinity I could answer for biblically, but Christmas was harder to defend. It was certainly not a holy day instituted in the Bible. And pre-Christian, pagan Rome had indeed observed the Day of the Invincible Sun on December 25. In fact, in many ancient cultures, customs and festivities later associated with Christmas (e.g., Yule logs, mistletoe, and even the giving of gifts) were observed in honor of the sun god's resurgence at the winter solstice.

I never totally abandoned Christmas — it's not easy for a Christian to reject a holiday that celebrates the birth of his Lord. But the pagan connections troubled me, and my observance of the day became halfhearted.

Eventually, however, I came to the conclusion that just as pagans and pagan temples can be converted and sanctified to Christian service, so too can pagan holidays and even some of the traditions associated with them (those that are not inherently immoral or idolatrous). The critical issue is: What significance do we *currently* attach to previously pagan practices? (See 1 Cor. 8:4-7; 10:25-31.)

Since Christmas is not legislated in the Bible, it should not be considered essential to Christian practice. Christians do not need to defend it to Jehovah's Witnesses and other cultists with the same zeal with which they would defend the doctrines of the Trinity or eternal punishment. In fact, it would even be acceptable if a sincere Christian told a Jehovah's Witness, "If you don't want to observe Christmas, that's fine. I myself do not observe it." But that same Christian would have no business judging those Christians who do partake in the holiday.

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Christmas is a good example of what Paul had in mind when he wrote: "One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord....You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat" (Rom. 14:5-6, 10; NIV).

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