

# Why Christmas should be abolished

THERE'S nothing wrong with gifts. Giving for the right motives is to be applauded and encouraged, an earnest of the better side of our humanity.

But giving when goaded by the imperatives of Christmas has no merit whatever. We should buy gifts for those we love and respect whenever we are prompted by unpresured generosity, at any time of the year. Real gifts come out of the blue. To receive a small present, a token of genuine goodwill, its price of no significance, can be one of the most delightful of all experiences. Gifts from small children, before they have mounted the treadmill of social obligation, are like this. They spend hours making and decorating a card, or a book, or something they think may be useful in the kitchen or garden shed, and present it with a huge smile.

The unexpected gifts I have received over the years are the ones I remember. Those that arrived to coincide with figures on the calendar, with a few notable exceptions, are long since forgotten. Gifts that turn up on the due date, with the price tags peeled off but with their value carefully calculated, pitched at just the right level to discharge an obligation, are travesties of the spirit of giving.

That's why Christmas should be abolished. The annual festival of excessive spending, excessive drinking, excessive eating and self-indulgence in general belongs in the trashcan along with other bad habits we've grown out of.

We delude ourselves Christmas is for the kids, for the spreading of generosity and goodwill, for unselfish communal good cheer. It isn't. Christmas is for shopkeepers.



Frank Haden

Driven by avarice, one of Christianity's Seven Deadly Sins no matter how respectable it has become, and exploiting a month-long public relations drive, the marketroids hoodwink us every year into ludicrous, largely unplanned expenditure on gifts, food and booze. Already we're seeing analysts on television rubbing their hands, grinning from ear to ear, congratulating themselves on the quantities of goods moving off the shelves.

In the lead-up to the great day, business offices are littered with cellophane and red ribbons as boxes of whiskey and chocolates are prepared for the obligatory annual ritual of grovelling to decision making executives.

When the couriers have collected the packages, there's room for preparations for the office Christmas party, with its usual heavy toll of ruined carpets, broken relationships, unwanted pregnancies and sackings of junior staff for slurred alcohol-induced jibes at the directors.

As for the main icon of Christmas spending, that gross white-bearded figure in a red suit, Santa Claus has nothing to do with the Christmas story. He was invented as a trademark to increase consumption of a fizzy drink, and has since proved a monstrous marketing success when adopted by general retailers.

The spirit of that first Christmas, if we accepted it, would cure most of humanity's ills. There would be no more killing, torturing, stealing and burning books in the name of Christ, to name a few of the religious crimes self-styled Christians commit.

"S.S.T."  
9/12/01.

I recalled an uneasy feeling there was something wrong somewhere when as a child in a department store queue on a stifling hot summer's day I waited to be lifted on to a body odour-ridden Santa's knee. He asked wearily what I wanted for Christmas.

I listed for him a few of the things I knew my impecunious parents could just about afford, because I was under no illusions why they were listening so intently to my recital. And I was under no illusions where the presents had come from when they arrived at the foot of my bed on Christmas morning.

Just think for a minute of what happens on the big day, thanks to the intense pressure put on people to conform to the free-spending, guzzling, beer-swilling stereotype.

Social distinctions are reinforced as the kids of well-off parents skite around the streets showing off their shiny new mountain bikes, sniggering at the subdued replies from the children of poorer families to the question, "Woddid YOU get"?

Later the wail of ambulance and police sirens point to ugly backyard scenes as barbecues and parties erupt in fighting. Relatives swear never to speak to one another again, and often don't. Police holding cells fill up. Women's refuges overflow with victims of the Kiwi pastime of giving the old girl a few slaps at Christmas.

There is another side to Christmas, of course. Nothing wrong with celebrating the anniversary of the birth of Jesus Christ. Organised Christianity has run right off the rails over the past 2000-odd years, committing frightful crimes in the name of its gentle founder, but that is not to say we should not honour the Nativity.

The man who chased the moneylenders out of the temple would have little patience with those who goad the gullible public into credit card debt on the anniversary of his birth.