

# It's time to end Christmas con

**T**HE time has come to abolish Christmas. Jolly old Santa Claus is for the shove, with his mechanical profit-driven Ho! Ho! Ho! silenced at its tape-recorded source. Then we will all get some peace and quiet at the end of the year.

Christmas isn't a Christian festival, anyway. It started off as a pagan mid-winter festival long before Christ was born. The two celebrations got mixed together because the dates approximately coincided.

Everything went along reasonably smoothly for a couple of millennia until the arrival of Commercial Christmas. Now, we have a dreadful annual festival of greed, orchestrated by cunning minds for weeks before Christmas Day, building up stresses, unfulfillable hopes, peer pressure and competing with the Joneses.

Over all presides Father Christmas, a great roaring creation of a soft-drink company's commercial imagination, designed to make people spend more than they can afford on gifts.

Children are told lies about this inflated red-suited icon, whose bulging red cheeks flag a perpetually imminent heart attack through over-indulgence. They are assured they will be rewarded if they stop being nasty to their brothers and sisters.

If they toe the line, Father Christmas will leave gifts during the night as a reward. Then they, too, can stuff themselves with turkey and Christmas cake until they burst at the seams like the man in the red suit.

When they find there is no such person as Father Christmas and decide never to believe their parents again, they reach a significant milestone in their progress to cynical adulthood.

Meanwhile, their parents have exhausted their bank accounts and available lines of credit buying things that are for the most part useless and would stay on the shop shelves until Doomsday were it not for weeks of mass media pressure to buy, buy, buy.

But where does it all get us, in this time of mass rejection of Christianity and the nuclear family? Christmas Day, for most, causes enormous stress. Fights break out on a scale unseen the rest of the year. Headlines record the sorry catalogue when the fights turn

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into violence. In Auckland, a baby girl was beaten to death, another was taken to hospital and a third was found abandoned. These were the most outrageous incidents on a day when the city's police were called out to hundreds of cases of family bashings.

The explanation is in the change in meaning of the word "family". Christmas cheer is based on the now old-fashioned nuclear family. There was mum and there was dad, with several kids in whom they had joint proprietorship. There were a couple of recognisable grandmas and two grandpas. Everyone was related to everyone else.

Now, however, dad is away somewhere else, with a new brood of kids, and the bloke in charge of the beer isn't their dad. He's there just for the midday meal and in the afternoon, he'll disappear to take a carefully concealed carton of presents over to his other family. And so on.

All this hypocrisy over what is billed as a family occasion leads to enormous stress and recrimination, liable to burst out at the drop of a cracker or mince pie, spoiling things for everyone even when there is no actual violence. Children torn between their parents on this emotion-charged day burst into tears and run to their bedrooms. And so on.

As for the city itself on Christmas Day, anything less festive would be hard to imagine. With the orgy of unnatural spending over, the streets are deserted, a wilderness of old decorations blowing about like tumbleweeds in a Wild West ghost town.

Away with the lot of it. Let's give each other presents by all means. The more the merrier. But let's give them on birthdays, or when we feel generous, not at the supercharged instructions of the Beast in the Red Suit.