**Christmas and Religion**

**It’s surprising to learn that many Puritans in America, and in England, actually banned gift-giving and carol-singing on Christmas, feeling it was anti-religious. *(Charles Reichblum, in Knowledge in a Nutshell, p. 228)***

**Christmas is the only religious holiday in America that is also a legal holiday, but in Puritan times Christmas celebration was once banned by law, according to researchers for Hallmark Cards. The General Court of Massachusetts in1659 levied fines on anyone feasting or observing Christmas Day. *(Associated Press)***

**The custom of ringing bells to announce the various festivals of the Christian Church is very old. Bells were first introduced during the 6th century and their use soon spread throughout Christendom. *(Torstein O. Kvamme, in The Christmas Carolers’ Book in Song and Story)***

**The Bible mentions neither day nor season of Christ’s birth. But the winter solstice, when the sun stands still before proceeding toward spring, had long been marked by frolicking, and Christians, around A.D. 330, chose this period as the setting of the birthday feast of Christ, the “Sun of Righteousness.” *(Ernest O. Hauser, in Reader’s Digest)***

**We had moved to Seattle from Texas, and each of us missed our old home. That December, when I went to pick up our first-grade-son, Madison, from school, his teacher told me about a conversation she overheard. One boy said, “We’re Catholic, and we are going to Christmas Mass.” “We’re Jewish,” said another child. “And we’re going to have a Hanukkah celebration.” Madison chimed in, “We’re Texans, and we’re going to have a barbecue.” *(Steve Moore, in Reader’s Digest)***

**Mom: “The presents are wrapped, the tree is trimmed, the halls are decked. We should be all ready for Christmas, yet it feels like we forgot something.” Child: “Church?” *(Art & Chip Sansom, in The Born Loser comic strip)***

**No matter what denomination a child may be, he still likes to be a free agent. “Do you like Christmas?” I asked one boy. “Yeah,” he said, “but I’m changing. My friend Harry’s gonna let me be Jewish.” “Is he a rabbi?” “No, he’s just a kid.” “Whaddaya mean?” “What I mean is: ‘Why are you changing from Christian to Jewish?’” “Because you get a present every night of the week for Harmonica.” *(Bill Cosby)***

**Heart: “Hot chocolate! It’s Christmas day at last! Woo-hoo! C’mon, Mom! Don’t you want to see what Santa brought you?” Mom: “If there’s a God in heaven, it’s coffee and facial surgery.” Heart: “Sheesh, Mom! You act like you’ve never been up at 4:30 before!” *(Mark Tatulli, in Heart Of The City comic strip)***

**As the child of a Judeo-Christian marriage, my son, Justin, was happy to learn that he would be celebrating all the religious holidays in December. One day, when he had forgotten his lunch money, I drove to school and stood in the doorway of his kindergarten classroom to get his attention. A little girl spied me and came running. “Mrs. Carretta,” she said excitedly. “Is it true? Justin just told us he’s half Jewish and half Christmas.” *(Stacey Carretta, in Reader’s Digest)***

**My little brother was in first grade at St. Matthew’s in South Bend, Ind., in 1945, when Sisters all wore habits. Shortly before Christmas, Mother asked what he’d like to give his teacher. “Let’s get her a new dress,” he replied. “She wears the same one every day!” *(Joann K. Schilling, in Catholic Digest)***

**Throughout history, nearly all religions have had a midwinter celebration . . . at about the same time Christians now celebrate Christmas. *(Uncle John’s Unstoppable Bathroom Reader, p. 155)***

**Throughout history, nearly all religions of the world have had a celebration that falls close to Christmas. In Judaism it is Hanukkah, the Festival of Lights. Pre-Christian Scandinavians enjoyed the Feast of the Frost King. In Rome there was the Saturnalia, in Egypt the midwinter festival in honor of the god Horus. The Druids had an annual mistletoe-cutting ceremony. Mithraists celebrated the feast of Sol Invictus, representing the victory of light over darkness. In Hinduism the feasts of Diwali and Taipongal are observed close to the Christmas season. Many other civilizations have similar festivals*. (David Louis, in Fascinating Facts, p. 144)***

**Surprisingly, Christmas was not a holiday for most Americans until the 1880s. Before that time, most people worked or went to school on Christmas Day. It’s also surprising to learn that many Puritans in America, and in England, actually banned gift-giving and carol-singing on Christmas, feeling it was anti-religious. *(Charles Reichblum, in Knowledge in a Nutshell, p. 228)***

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