

Larry Saves Christmas

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I know this is a movie cliché, but I have a plan to save Christmas.

It's the only holiday that always seems to need saving. And I worry that I may be part grinch by now. Not completely sure at this point, but I am getting pretty disgusted with the way Christmas is being done.

When I was young, the appearance of Santa Claus at the tail end of the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade kicked off the Christmas season, a magical month that had its own songs, schmaltzy black and white movies that made you cry year after year. This was the only time you would hear someone utter the phrase, "glad tidings." We slipped and fell down in a "winter wonderland," never a nasty blizzard.

At some point, Christmas consciousness leapfrogged ahead of Thanksgiving. I should have seen the signs. The Christmas shopping season became ever more brazen. This year the TV ads started ahead of Halloween. Like kudzu, they suffocated the whole month of October.

Even "black Friday," the traditional day of prosperity for retailers was bent, folded and mutilated into "a week of black Fridays." We all remember the news story a couple years ago of the Walmart door greeter being trampled by a salivating pack of shopping zombies lusting after the ten available must-have flat screen televisions.

Karate-chopping one's way to pick up a gift for a loved one, is blatantly, screamingly, stupefying wrong.

Here's how wrong it is:

Biblical Scholar 1: "As our Lord said in his final commandment, 'Love ye one another.'"

Biblical Scholar 2: "Yes, except 'Ye shall love one another,' is the more correct phrasing."

Biblical Scholar 1: "I believe it is 'Love ye...' my brother."

Biblical Scholar 2: "Ye shall love..."

Biblical Scholar 1: "Love ye!"

Biblical Scholar 2: "'Ye shall love,' you moron!"

Biblical Scholar 1: < SLAP!! > "It is 'Love ye one another' you ignorant, misquoting, Bible-tard!"

Biblical Scholar 2: < pulls knife >

It's that wrong. Or wronger.

I'm homesick for Bing Crosby.



Bing Crosby, the anti-Grinch

A friend texted, “I love Christmas!!!! I love the colors, the smells, the tastes, the togetherness, the presents, the tree, the music, Santa, everything!”

Yes, yes, I do too. The problem is that the sacred part of Christmas is being held under and drowned by the money-grubbing part.

On one hand, we have the much loved carol “O Holy Night.” We have angels, and wise men. We have Christmas miracles and Tiny Tim.

On the other hand, we have bargain madness feeding frenzies on Thanksgiving Day itself, blood in the mall, and adults ripping coveted toys from the hands of children.

The togetherness, cozy food, presents, the jingle bells – these things are part of both the material and the sacred aspects of Christmas. So it's

complicated. All of this “meaning” is a lot of burden to put on the shoulders of one holiday that's not even a holi-DAY; it's a season. What other holiday is there that lasts an entire month?

Okay, Ramadan. But it's mellower. Except for the bombings.

I have a modest proposal. I hope you'll hear me out without making fists in your pockets. Can we all be calm?

Here's how we can make everyone happy.

FIRST:

Celebrate Jesus' birthday sometime in the spring.

I say this with the greatest respect. Please don't get crazy on me. Breathe.

Christmas landed on December 25 because that's nine months after the Feast of the Annunciation (March 25), when tradition says the angel told Mary she was pregnant. But March 25 is arbitrary. There was a tradition that men of God die on the same day they were conceived. Jesus' death is traceable to a March 25 because it's linked to the Jewish Passover that year. Therefore, tradition says, he must have been conceived on March 25.

There are theories of pagan origins of a mid-winter solstice Christmas, but this thinking is losing ground among historians.

All I'm saying is that it is possible to re-locate Christmas if the will is there. Make it a dignified Christian remembrance, minus the gifting orgy, the “cyber Monday” and “door-buster sale extravaganzas.” Take the songs with religious meaning with you. Have a big feast and a day of caring for others, washing the feet of the poor. Take back the meaning, by moving it out of the December party season. Make it sacred again, and beautiful with a warm welcome to anyone who wants in.

SECOND:



But also, Peace on Earth, of course.

Keep the current Holiday Season right where it is now.

Let the hype begin whenever it wants to. Let there be shopping and a whole month of “black Fridays.” It's probably not a bad thing to have a holiday season when everyone tries to be nice to each other, give gifts and shop their faces off. Such a thing can refresh the corpuscles.

We can call this holiday “ka-CHING.”

Let this be the secular, friendly, humanist season it has already become. Let there be mistletoe and eggnog, and

we'll even throw in Bing Crosby. Humanism, hopefully infused with noble values, helps make us human, so I give it a place at the table.

The result is win-win. We maintain a wintertime holiday season with all the endorphins we get from that. And we provide a dignified birthday party for the namesake of Christianity.

On a personal note, I'm really starting to love winter, which never used to be the case for me. I have begun to see amazing beauty in the dormant cold that I had always failed to notice for some reason.

Few things instill a sense of peace in my soul equal to the smell of hardwood smoke trapped in a flannel shirt. When I hold the flannel in my arms, its shape maintained by the warm body of my beloved, I am made whole in the act of tentative fingers creeping together in inchworm steps, by the accepting smile, closed eyes and barely perceptible murmur that burrows into my neck, my ears, my senses.

And so this is Christmas.