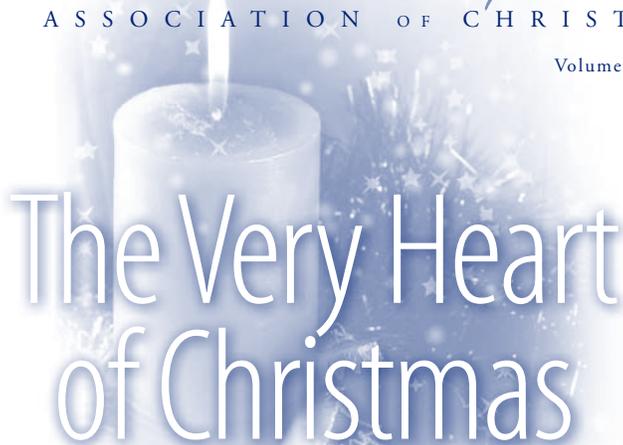


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The Very Heart of Christmas

The Christmas season has taken on disappointing characteristics in our highly secularized culture. These characteristics include removing Christ-centered displays and using verbiage that eliminates references to the namesake of the season's special day. Some businesses have removed the familiar and once prominently accepted greetings that include any reference to Christmas and instead have attempted to pretend the specially named day really is not. These businesses give it a bland moniker such as "winter holiday." My, what a threat this day must be to a secular culture.

It really is fascinating—try as secularists might to take Christ out of Christmas—that the popular and *seemingly* secular symbol of Christmas, Santa Claus, represents the work of God's Son. Santa Claus remains pretty much OK probably because the spoilers have not figured out how to explain from their vantage point, or do not know, the gradual transition of St. Nicholas to Santa Claus. The real Nicholas was born in Patara, a Greek area that is now a part of the southern coast of Turkey. His parents were wealthy and devout Christians, who died when he was quite young. Nicholas dedicated his life to serving God, and he became the bishop of Myra as a young man. He used his entire inheritance to help the sick, the needy, and others who were suffering. Because he was held in great esteem for his life and deeds, the anniversary of his death, December 6, AD 343, became known and celebrated as St. Nicholas Day (www.stnicholascenter.org).

In the 1800s, because of the work of artists and writers, St. Nicholas took on an elfish appearance and eventually a beard and a pipe. He gradually acquired a rotund appearance and a red suit. By the late 1800s, the saint's name shifted to Santa Claus, "a natural phonetic alteration from the German *Sankt Niklaus* and Dutch *Sinterklaas*" (www.stnicholascenter.org). It must be noted though, when you dig down, he is still Nicholas, who modeled true giving and faithfulness—a result of his love for Christ.

And so, may I take this opportunity during the Christmas season to remind you of the importance of your choice of Christian schooling for your students? Your school is intent on indelibly imprinting the heart of

Christmas on the heart of every one of its students—helping each student understand God's gift of a Savior, one whose life would give us a taste of the kingdom of heaven and whose sacrificial death, undeserved, would provide redemption and eternal life.

Christmas is that wonderful opportunity to reexamine the boundless love of God for us, His creation. Your school is a place where the richest and deepest meaning of Christmas is honored and celebrated, where your children are reminded that the birth of the Savior not only opened the door to the family of God for all who choose Him but also opened the door to a new way of life—life having the fullest meaning, opportunity, and responsibility. Your Christian school is intent on integrating the kingdom of heaven into every aspect of living, on providing a richer depth and level of preparation for higher education, future vocation, and fullness of life.

Even in these most challenging economic times, a good investment is still a good investment, one that will pay dividends far, far into the future. Discipling and nurturing children in the fullness of their education is

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crucial. So even as we recognize the significant role of the school, we do most importantly recognize the work of God Himself in the life of a student. Dallas Willard writes in *The Great Omission*, "Well-informed human effort is necessary, for spiritual formation is not a passive process. But Christ-likeness of the inner being is not a merely human attainment. It is, finally, a gift of grace. The resources for it are not human, but come from the interactive presence of the Holy Spirit in the lives of those who place their confidence in Christ" (2006, 105). That spiritual formation is Christian schooling's greatest desire for your children.

May this Christmas be a celebration of the gracious gift from God—His Son, Jesus Christ, the Light of the World.

Reference

Willard, Dallas. 2006. *The great omission: Reclaiming Jesus's essential teachings on discipleship*. New York: HarperCollins.



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