

Nazis were first to leave Christ out of Christmas

By Joanna Bogle/MercatorNet.com

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After decades of aggressive secularism it is received wisdom in some circles that there should be no public displays of Christian symbols supported by public funds - no Nativity displays at Christmas, and preferably no use of the word "Christmas" because it involves using the name of Christ.

In recent years, despite howls of protest in some newspapers, this notion has become entrenched, and on both sides of the Atlantic, nations steeped in Christian history have been subjected to daft campaigns in both commercial companies and public officialdom insisting on the use of "happy holidays" in place of "Merry Christmas" and even references to "holiday trees" instead of "Christmas trees".

Anti-Christian censors

But none of this is new. In the 1930s and the first half of the 1940s, public authorities in a major European country launched major campaigns to ban all mention of Christ at Christmas time, and to create new non-religious pictures, decorations, slogans, and messages. Today's anti-Christian censors will not have been happy to learn, recently, exactly whose company they have been travelling in.



Song of the Angels by William-Adolphe Bouguereau (1825-1905)

For the Nazis, the Christian imagery of Christmas -- the child in the manger, Mary and Joseph, angels, shepherds, kings and star - were seen as belonging to something that modern-minded people should reject and abandon.

Provider

The Nazis put massive efforts into persuading Germans to leave Christ out of Christmas: they took pains to produce booklets and newspaper features explaining that Christ was a newcomer to the scene and that Germany's ancient pagan religions had celebrated a midwinter festival based on the solstice.

Christianity was presented as an artificial imposition, disruptive of a true sense of community and respect for conscience and individual rights. Young people were urged to take part in dawn ceremonies to mark the winter solstice - much lighting of fires, sounding of music, unfurling of banners and inauguration of feasting. Church events were marginalised, and tolerated only as a private matter, not to be associated with public life or supported in any way by holders of public office.

Non-Christian decorations

More than this, there was an emphasis on non-Christian decorations, Christmas tree trimmings, and general Christmas paraphernalia, with a deliberate attempt to sideline the traditional Christmas crib scenes. The Christian imagery of Christmas -- the child in the manger, Mary and Joseph, angels, shepherds, kings and star -were seen as belonging to something that modern-minded people should reject and abandon.

It is intriguing that the arguments used by the Nazis - that Christianity was artificially imposed on people by a takeover of older pagan festivities - are the same ones that are used by some campaigners today. They argue that the Medieval Church used the calendar with its feast-days to impose its structures, culture and norms on a reluctant populace, and that in doing so it enforced an oppressive sexual morality and made itself rich by imposing fines and tithes on people who dared not disobey or challenge an authority which claimed an invincible deity to be on its side.

The Nazis spoke this language too. Nazi booklets and propaganda, especially that aimed at the young, constantly harped on the evils of the Medieval Church, and of Christianity in general, which was presented as narrow-minded, too much concerned with sexual morality, soaked in sentimental images of Christ and his mother, and culturally inferior to long-ago pagan religions which were presented as freedom-loving, dynamic, and joyful.

Princess Tatiana Metternich, a Russian who married an anti-Nazi German aristocrat, recalled him being ordered, as an officer in the German army, to announce a celebration of a "Spring time ceremony" designed to replace Easter.

Instead, he refused and announced that it was Easter Sunday, the great Christian feast. (The Metternichs were close to the July 20th plotters who almost succeeded in toppling the Nazi regime - the Berlin Diaries of Princess Tatiana's sister, Marie, who was secretary to the leading July plotter, Adam von Trott, make fascinating reading).

Children at German schools were taught a non-religious form of "grace before meals" that specifically celebrated the earth and banned any mention of God - today's politically-correct campaigners, including those milling about the climate summit in Copenhagen, would warmly

approve of it: "Earth that did this food bestow/Sun that made it riper grow/Dearest sun and dearest earth/We will not forget your worth".

A Nazi newspaper in 1939 emphasized the importance of removing Christ from public rituals and celebrations and restoring the "original" pagan meaning to things: "Easter, the spring festival of our forebears, in spite of all attempts to falsify it, has preserved its original meaning as the feast of victory, the celebration of the resurrection of life and victory of the sun over the forces of winter".

Interesting reading today

Much of this was described by German exiles who had fled from the Nazis and who published a book in London in 1940 under the title "The Persecution of the Catholic Church in the Third Reich - facts and documents". The book was widely publicised at the time in Britain, to impress upon the British public the viciously anti-Christian nature of the enemy they were now fighting. But it makes interesting reading today.

Think about it. In 1936 the local authority in southern Germany banned the decoration of any public buildings for the traditional feast of Corpus Christi, adding that, of course, "there is no objection to civil servants taking part, as private individuals, in the religious services and the accompanying procession for the feast".

So Christianity is allowed only as something private, and must not be given any public support. Sound familiar?

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