

A Brief History of Christmas

Part Five: Latter-Day Wars on Christmas

The Real Meaning of Xmas

- In medieval manuscripts and calendars, monks (some of the only folks who could write in the middle ages) would often use the first Greek letter of *Christos* to abbreviate Christ. So Xtns were Christians, X was Christ, and Xmas was Christmas.
- The abbreviation persists into the modern era: Coleridge, for example, often uses the abbreviations Xians and Xmas.
- 1957 was the first instance wherein Christians started publishing complaints in newspapers about the use of Xmas. Such complaints were often wrapped up with anti-Semitic conspiracy theories.
- If anyone has used this abbreviation as some kind of backhanded anti-Christian slur, that person is a great fool who knows little history.

War on Christmas: The Fifties and Beyond

- In the fifties and sixties, the John Birch Society quickly picked up on department stores' attempts to be hospitable to Jewish shoppers and began to demand that department stores stop wishing people generically “happy holidays” and to use the word “Christmas” in their store decorations. Department stores yawned.
- In the late nineties the phrase first emerged, but the subject at hand was the rampant consumerism that was drowning the holidays, not any theory that any business or government operation was attempting to end it from above.
- 2004 was a banner year for Christmas controversy: Jerry Falwell and Pat Buchanan began to make regular appearances on Fox News, noting moments when schools and stores and government offices used “holidays” instead of “Christmas” and stringing those moments together to tell a story about a nation-wide attack on Christmas.
- Bill O'Reilly joined the fray on Christmas Eve 2004 with a segment on his Fox News show entitled “Christmas Under Siege.” The following year fellow Fox News personality John Gibson published the book *The War on Christmas*, and O'Reilly started using the phrase as the title for one of his show's regular bits, and the modern controversy really took off.
- Modern manifestations of the War on Christmas happen not in legislatures (as they did when the Puritans were the anti-Christmas warriors) but in lawsuits and boycotts.

Making Money from the War on Christmas

- For a season the Alliance Defense Fund sold “Christmas Defense Packages” (a public domain legal document and two lapel pins) for \$29.00. The website, as of December 13, says that said item is no longer available.
- Liberty Counsel does not sell merchandise but still solicits donations to fight War on Christmas.
- Several atheist and liberal groups have seen the goldmine and, in a bizarre and ironic twist, started marketing War on Christmas T-shirts, buttons, and other merchandise.

Implications (Before I Make myself any Sillier)

- From the fifties forward, Christmas has been a chip on the table, not the main driver, in the battles over Christmas carols, store advertisements, and other trappings of the season.
- As we discussed last week, we modern Christians came into a world that already knew Christmas, and it falls to us to bear witness to the world of the gospel, and our relationship with a national holiday (like everything else) must fall under the sovereignty of Christ.
- Always think twice before giving money to politicians—there are hungry people out there.