

NOVEMBER 2005 – *Caution: Christmas Ahead*

The danger is well-known to us all: being swept up in the materialistic feeding frenzy that increasingly is turning Christmas in America into a pagan holiday. Fifty years ago, this same secularizing drift was afoot in English society. We see evidence of it in Lewis's correspondence. Writing to a friend in 1953, Lewis said, "I feel exactly as you do about the horrid commercial racket they have made out of Christmas."¹ Two years later, he said, "I'm afraid I hate the weeks just before Christmas, and so much of the (very commercialized and vulgarized) fuss has nothing to do with the Nativity at all."² In 1958, Lewis wrote, "Just a hurried line...to tell a story which puts the contrast between *our* feast of the Nativity and all this ghastly 'Xmas' racket at its lowest. My brother heard a woman on a bus say, as the bus passed a church with a crib outside it, 'Oh Lor'! They bring religion into everything. Look – they're dragging it even into Christmas now!'"³ Lewis described the commercialism of Christmas as one of his "pet abominations."

American culture today is rapidly secularizing, and if present trends continue, we may well see Christmas stripped of all religious meaning and symbolism in only a few years time. But that doesn't mean that believers must be inevitably squeezed into the world's mold. Certainly C.S. Lewis wasn't. And we see in the quotes above a clue about how Lewis avoided such a fate. His focus was not on sentimental religious ritual or the giving and receiving of presents. (Indeed, he said, "I send no cards and give no presents except to children.") Rather, he focused on the Nativity – the incarnation of the Son of God. And because his mind and heart were focused on God's grace and love toward us in Jesus Christ, he was able to escape the gravitational pull of the world's obsession with the material side of life.

You and I can do the same thing this Christmas season. We can choose to limit the time and attention we devote to shopping and the endless round of parties. We can make a principled decision to slow down rather than speed up. With the time saved we can then devote ourselves to reading and meditating on the biblical stories and spending unhurried time in the warmth and comfort of our homes, discussing these holy mysteries with those we love. Perhaps with the money we will save, we can also, individually or as families, reach out to someone poor and give them the gift of love, kindness, and a helping hand. That is, after all, what God has done for us.

*Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this:
to look after orphans and widows in their distress and
to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.*

JAMES 1:27 NIV

¹ C.S. Lewis (ed. Clyde S. Kilby), *Letters to an American Lady* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1971), p. 23.

² *Ibid.*, p. 50.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 80.