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Pope: Christmas polluted by consumerism

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12 December, 2005

THE ARTICLE

Pope: Christmas polluted by consumerism

Two weeks before Christmas, Pope Benedict XVI has warned that rampant commercialization is polluting the true, religious meaning of Christmas. He said in his regular Sunday address before thousands of worshippers at the Vatican: "It is unfortunate that in today's society of consumerism, the Christmas season suffers from various manifestations of commercial pollution. This risks contaminating its spiritual authenticity, which is characterized by meditation, sobriety and by a joy that is not exterior but intimate." The Pope urged Christians worldwide to mark Christmas by setting up nativity scenes in their homes depicting the birth of Christ. Benedict reminded people that: "The manger helps us contemplate the mystery of the love of God which revealed itself in poverty and simplicity."

It is hard not to agree with Pope Benedict as the Christmas season gets in full swing and the madness that is Christmas shopping descends on us all. It is becoming increasingly rare in stores to see anything connecting the season with the Bible. Consumers are subjected to an onslaught of aggressive ads as companies do their utmost to offload their non-Biblical merchandise onto tired and bedraggled shoppers. The true spirit of Christmas is lost amid the hype, non-Christmassy Christmas songs and drunken office parties. The season is even huge business in Japan, where less than one percent of the population is Christian. Families there celebrate with "traditional" Kentucky Fried Chicken festive meals, while hordes of young couples rush to spend a romantic Xmas Eve in a "love hotel".

WARM-UPS

1. NATIVITY: Talk to as many other students as you can to find out what they know about the nativity (how Jesus was born). After you have talked to lots of students, sit down with your partner(s) and share your information. Tell each other what you thought was interesting or surprising. What do you think of the story of the nativity?

2. TRAPPINGS: What do you do for Christmas (or other religious celebrations)? Talk with your partner(s) about the following trappings of Xmas. Do you think any of them have become over-commercialized?

- Presents
- Cards
- Food
- Parties
- Decorations
- Movies, TV and songs
- Santa Claus
- The Christmas message

3. CHAT: In pairs / groups, decide which of these topics or words are most interesting and which are most boring.

Christmas / Pope Benedict XVI / commercialization / pollution / joy / the story of the nativity / the love of God / Xmas shopping / Christmas songs / KFC / Xmas Eve

Have a chat about the topics you liked. For more conversation, change topics and partners frequently.

4. WORLD XMAS: How do you think people around the world celebrate Christmas? In which country would you like to be on Xmas Day? Talk with your partner about your image of what happens at Christmas in these countries:

- Canada
- Australia
- Japan
- Kenya
- Brazil
- Finland
- Egypt
- Israel

5. CHRISTMAS OPINIONS: Discuss these opinions with your partner(s). Do you agree with them?

- a. Christmas nowadays is more about shopping than spirituality.
- b. Santa Claus is now more important than Jesus Christ for many people.
- c. The commercialization of Christmas should be made illegal.
- d. Christians appear to be losing sight of what makes them Christian.
- e. The true meaning of Christmas will one day be confined to history books.
- f. Christmas is the greatest time of the year.
- g. People who try to profit from Christmas have no morals.
- h. Christmas today is an endless procession of tacky goods and messages.

6. CHRISTMAS: Spend one minute writing down all of the different words you associate with Christmas. Share your words with your partner(s) and talk about them. Together, put the words into different categories.

BEFORE READING / LISTENING

1. TRUE / FALSE: Look at the article's headline and guess whether these sentences are true (T) or false (F):

- | | |
|---|-------|
| a. The Pope has warned rampant commercialization is harming Xmas. | T / F |
| b. The Pope gave his address before a congregation of business leaders. | T / F |
| c. He said Xmas is characterized by mediation, notoriety and toys. | T / F |
| d. He urged Christians to refocus on the story of the nativity. | T / F |
| e. The Pope said he wanted a swing and a seesaw for Christmas. | T / F |
| f. Consumers face an onslaught of ads for non-Biblical merchandise. | T / F |
| g. People drink spirits and get lost at non-Christmassy office parties. | T / F |
| h. Japanese people celebrate Xmas with Kentucky Fried Sushi. | T / F |

2. SYNONYM MATCH: Match the following synonyms from the article:

- | | |
|------------------|----------------|
| a. rampant | buildup |
| b. address | self-restraint |
| c. sobriety | best |
| d. depicting | unrestrained |
| e. contemplate | worn-out |
| f. in full swing | mull over |
| g. utmost | illustrating |
| h. bedraggled | droves |
| i. hype | into gear |
| j. hordes | sermon |

3. PHRASE MATCH: Match the following phrases from the article (sometimes more than one combination is possible):

- | | |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| a. rampant | descends on us all |
| b. his regular Sunday address | of the love of God |
| c. suffers from various manifestations | in full swing |
| d. a joy that is not exterior | Christmas songs |
| e. contemplate the mystery | but intimate |
| f. the Christmas season gets | onslaught of aggressive ads |
| g. the madness that is Christmas shopping | before thousands of worshippers |
| h. Consumers are subjected to an | of young couples rush to spend... |
| i. non-Christmassy | commercialization |
| j. hordes | of commercial pollution |

WHILE READING / LISTENING

ODD WORD OUT: Delete the incorrect or least likely word from the groups in *italics*.

Pope: Christmas polluted by consumerism

Two weeks before Christmas, Pope Benedict XVI has warned that rampant commercialization is *tarnishing / eschewing / polluting* the true, religious meaning of Christmas. He said in his regular Sunday *street / address / sermon* before thousands of *worshippers / followers / Santas* at the Vatican: "It is unfortunate that in today's society of consumerism, the Christmas season suffers from various manifestations of commercial pollution. This risks contaminating its *religious / spatial / spiritual* authenticity, which is characterized by meditation, sobriety and by a joy that is not exterior but intimate." The Pope urged Christians worldwide to mark Christmas by setting up nativity scenes in their homes *portraying / debunking / depicting* the birth of Christ. Benedict reminded people that: "The manger helps us *reflect upon / convalesce / contemplate* the mystery of the love of God which revealed itself in poverty and simplicity."

It is hard not to agree with Pope Benedict as the Christmas season gets in full *gear / swing / seesaw* and the madness that is Christmas shopping descends on us all. It is becoming *increasingly / all the more / out and about* rare in stores to see anything connecting the season with the Bible. Consumers are subjected to an *onslaught / barrage / adage* of aggressive ads as companies do their utmost to offload their non-Biblical merchandise onto tired *and worn-out / bedraggled / drugged* shoppers. The true spirit of Christmas is lost amid the *hype / razzmatazz / hieroglyphics*, non-Christmassy Christmas songs and drunken office parties. The season is even huge business in Japan, where less than one percent of the population is Christian. Families there celebrate with "traditional" Kentucky Fried Chicken festive meals, while *droves / drivers / hordes* of young couples rush to spend a romantic Xmas Eve in a "love hotel".

LISTENING

Listen and fill in the spaces.

Pope: Christmas polluted by consumerism

Two weeks before Christmas, Pope Benedict XVI has warned that _____ commercialization is polluting the true, religious meaning of Christmas. He said in his regular Sunday address before thousands of _____ at the Vatican: "It is unfortunate that in today's society of consumerism, the Christmas season suffers from various _____ of commercial pollution. This risks contaminating its spiritual authenticity, which is characterized by meditation, _____ and by a joy that is not exterior but intimate." The Pope urged Christians worldwide to _____ Christmas by setting up nativity scenes in their homes _____ the birth of Christ. Benedict reminded people that: "The manger helps us _____ the mystery of the love of God which revealed itself in poverty and _____."

It is hard not to agree with Pope Benedict as the Christmas season gets _____ and the madness that is Christmas shopping descends on us all. It is becoming increasingly _____ in stores to see anything connecting the season with the Bible. Consumers are subjected to an _____ of aggressive ads as companies do their utmost to offload their non-Biblical merchandise onto tired and _____ shoppers. The true spirit of Christmas is lost amid the _____, non-Christmassy Christmas songs and drunken office parties. The season is even huge business in Japan, where less than one percent of the population is Christian. Families there celebrate with "traditional" Kentucky Fried Chicken festive meals, while _____ of young couples rush to spend a romantic Xmas Eve in a "love hotel".

AFTER READING / LISTENING

1. WORD SEARCH: Look in your dictionaries / computer to find collocates, other meanings, information, synonyms ... for the words **'true'** and **'meaning'**.

- Share your findings with your partners.
- Make questions using the words you found.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

2. ARTICLE QUESTIONS: Look back at the article and write down some questions you would like to ask the class about the text.

- Share your questions with other classmates / groups.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

3. ODD WORD OUT: In pairs / groups, compare your answers to this exercise. Check your answers. Talk about the words from the activity. Were they new, interesting, worth learning...?

4. VOCABULARY: Circle any words you do not understand. In groups, pool unknown words and use dictionaries to find their meanings.

5. STUDENT "XMAS SHOPPING" SURVEY: In pairs / groups, write down questions about Christmas shopping and the over-commercialization of Christmas (or other religious festivals and celebrations).

- Ask other classmates your questions and note down their answers.
- Go back to your original partner / group and compare your findings.
- Make mini-presentations to other groups on your findings.

6. TEST EACH OTHER: Look at the words below. With your partner, try to recall exactly how these were used in the text:

- | | |
|-------------|--------------|
| • rampant | • swing |
| • address | • connecting |
| • various | • utmost |
| • intimate | • amid |
| • depicting | • huge |
| • mystery | • hordes |

DISCUSSION

STUDENT A's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student B)

- a. Did the headline make you want to read the article?
- b. What do you think of Christmas?
- c. Do you think commercialization is "polluting" other religious festivals around the world?
- d. Do you think people are forgetting about the true meaning of Christmas and other festivals?
- e. Do you think followers of other religions take their religious festivals more seriously than Christians take Christmas?
- f. Why do you think presents and parties are becoming more important to many people than the birth of Christ?
- g. What connections can you see with a commercialized Christmas and its true meaning?
- h. What do you think the "rampant commercialization" of Christmas says about Christians?
- i. Do you think there should be laws on the nature of Christmas advertising to stop the hype?
- j. Is Christmas a joyful or stressful time for you?

STUDENT B's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student A)

- a. Did you like reading this article?
- b. What do you think about what you read?
- c. Do you think Santa Claus and not Jesus has become the main character of Christmas?
- d. Do you think the commercialization is only happening in Europe and America?
- e. Do you think we might one day forget what Christmas is all about?
- f. Do you meditate and reflect during Christmas (or any other religious celebration or festival)?
- g. Do you think we should abandon the trappings of commercialization such as cards and presents and focus instead on the nativity scene?
- h. Do you ever "contemplate the mystery of the love of God"?
- i. Why do you think Christmas is such huge business in Japan?
- j. Did you like this discussion?

AFTER DISCUSSION: Join another partner / group and tell them what you talked about.

- a. What was the most interesting thing you heard?
- b. Was there a question you didn't like?
- c. Was there something you totally disagreed with?
- d. What did you like talking about?
- e. Which was the most difficult question?

SPEAKING

BASIC XMAS: You are an executive on the “Back to Christmas Basics” organization. It is your job to create a plan to de-commercialize Christmas (or any other religious celebration) and restore its true meaning. Discuss and write your ideas on how to do this regarding the trappings in the left hand column. Write down potential problems and proposed ways around these problems.

TRAPPINGS	IDEAS	POTENTIAL PROBLEMS	YOUR SOLUTIONS
Presents			
Cards			
Food			
Parties			
Movies, TV & songs			
Decorations, trees & lights			

- Change partners. Explain your plans. Outline the potential problems and your proposed solutions. Give each other feedback to make your plan better.
- Return to your original partner(s) and compare the feedback you received. Discuss whether it is good or not.
- Role play a meeting between you (the Back to Xmas Basics executive) and someone who loves the commercial side of Xmas and hates your suggestions.
- After the role plays, discuss what was said while in your roles. Which parts do you really agree with?

HOMEWORK

1. VOCABULARY EXTENSION: Choose several of the words from the text. Use a dictionary or Google's search field (or another search engine) to build up more associations / collocations of each word.

2. INTERNET: Search the Internet and find more information on Christmas in Japan. Share your findings with your class in the next lesson. Did you all find out similar things?

3. CONSUMERISM: Make a poster explaining how consumerism and our "buy, buy, buy" lifestyles are changing our culture. Will the world be a giant store one day? Show your posters to your classmates in your next lesson. Did you all think of similar things?

4. MY CELEBRATION: Write an essay about the meaning of Christmas (or any other religious celebration) to you. Explain your feelings about the festival being commercialized. Show what you wrote to your classmates in the next lesson. Do they have similar feelings?

ANSWERS

TRUE / FALSE:

- a. T b. F c. F d. T e. F f. T g. F h. F

SYNONYM MATCH:

- | | |
|------------------|----------------|
| a. rampant | unrestrained |
| b. address | sermon |
| c. sobriety | self-restraint |
| d. depicting | illustrating |
| e. contemplate | mull over |
| f. in full swing | into gear |
| g. utmost | best |
| h. bedraggled | worn-out |
| i. hype | buildup |
| j. hordes | droves |

PHRASE MATCH:

- | | |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| a. rampant | commercialization |
| b. his regular Sunday address | before thousands of worshippers |
| c. suffers from various manifestations | of commercial pollution |
| d. a joy that is not exterior | but intimate |
| e. contemplate the mystery | of the love of God |
| f. the Christmas season gets | in full swing |
| g. the madness that is Christmas shopping | descends on us all |
| h. Consumers are subjected to an | onslaught of aggressive ads |
| i. non-Christmassy | Christmas songs |
| j. hordes | of young couples rush to spend... |

ODD WORD OUT:

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Two weeks before Christmas, Pope Benedict XVI has warned that rampant commercialization is *tarnishing* / ~~eschewing~~ / *polluting* the true, religious meaning of Christmas. He said in his regular Sunday ~~street~~ / *address* / *sermon* before thousands of *worshippers* / *followers* / ~~Santas~~ at the Vatican: "It is unfortunate that in today's society of consumerism, the Christmas season suffers from various manifestations of commercial pollution. This risks contaminating its *religious* / ~~spatial~~ / *spiritual* authenticity, which is characterized by meditation, sobriety and by a joy that is not exterior but intimate." The Pope urged Christians worldwide to mark Christmas by setting up nativity scenes in their homes *portraying* / ~~debunking~~ / *depicting* the birth of Christ. Benedict reminded people that: "The manger helps us *reflect upon* / ~~convalesce~~ / *contemplate* the mystery of the love of God which revealed itself in poverty and simplicity."

It is hard not to agree with Pope Benedict as the Christmas season gets in full *gear* / *swing* / ~~seesaw~~ and the madness that is Christmas shopping descends on us all. It is becoming *increasingly* / *all the more* ~~out-and-about~~ rare in stores to see anything connecting the season with the Bible. Consumers are subjected to an *onslaught* / *barrage* / ~~adage~~ of aggressive ads as companies do their utmost to offload their non-Biblical merchandise onto tired and *worn-out* / *bedraggled* / ~~drugged~~ shoppers. The true spirit of Christmas is lost amid the *hype* / *razzmatazz* / ~~hieroglyphics~~, non-Christmassy Christmas songs and drunken office parties. The season is even huge business in Japan, where less than one percent of the population is Christian. Families there celebrate with "traditional" Kentucky Fried Chicken festive meals, while *droves* / ~~drivers~~ / *hordes* of young couples rush to spend a romantic Xmas Eve in a "love hotel".