

**The Inscrutable Question: Christmas in the Persian Gulf; The Dark Side of Christmas: Introduction: Arianism; Socinus, Puritans, & Unitarians**

The following e-mail has been verified as authentic. It was sent by a U. S. Navy F-14 pilot aboard the USS Teddy Roosevelt, 14 December 2001. Name withheld.

The flights over Afghanistan continue. The country's landscape reminds me of northern Nevada (without the casinos). Overall, there is extremely rugged looking terrain in Afghanistan. To date, I have not seen one tree.

The rural areas are littered with villages that are filled with collections of roofless, four walled structures that appear to be abandoned. The only color I've seen in these cities besides the ever present light brown hue is the occasional red streak coming from the Taliban gunners as they open up with their anti aircraft artillery.

There is some farm land present, but it is infrequent and minimal. In a nutshell, Afghanistan is a giant pile of brown to light brown rocks that is bordered to the south and north by huge deserts and bordered to the east by an even bigger pile of rocks. The only signs of life that I have seen are moving on one of the country's three main highways, and Taliban tough guys running from their convoy of military vehicles right before multiple weapons impacts.

Somewhere in the Navy regulations it's written down that for every 45 consecutive days that you spend at sea without a port call, you rate two beers. Two weeks ago, they broke out 10,000 beers for the crew to tear into for this deployment's first of many "beer days". With beer day fast approaching, multiple discussions erupted in the Ready Room over how to best maximize the beer day allotment. Do you starve yourself for two days to increase the "buzz" potential? How about giving blood 2 hours prior to assist in decreasing the amount of blood in your alcohol system? Do you nurse your two beers over a two hour span or just chug 'em and ride the wave? Which type of beer gives you the most bang for the buck? Fosters? Yengling? MGD? All very important and crucial questions. After much mental anguish and repeated calls to the flight surgeon inquiring about blood donor opportunities, I decided on the "full fed, Fosters chug" game plan. Rumor has it that over 22,000 beers were killed. Hmm.....5,500 person crew, 2 beers per person..... hey..... someone went through the line more than once! No comment. Only 20 days until our next beer day, so I will take inputs on any improvements to my game plan!

One last thing ... Please remember in your thought and prayers every single enlisted Sailor that is slugging it out here on the USS TR. The aviator types have it easy in that we get to leave this ship for 6 fun filled hours to fly into a foreign hostile land and blow stuff up. We have variety and excitement in our days. Think of that 19 year old kid up on the flight deck 17 hours a day, fixing the same jets day in and day out while maintaining the same daily routine. Imagine doing that for over 70 days straight (only two days off in the last 6 weeks). He looks forward to 4 things: 1) getting off his feet for 5 minutes, 2) eating bland Navy chow, 3) sleeping in a cluttered space shared by 239 other Sailors and 4) port calls.

His variety and excitement comes mainly during in port visits and, to date, we have had none and oh, by the way, there isn't one in the near or even distant future. They are the real heroes of Operation Enduring Freedom because it is through their efforts that we are able to launch and ultimately defend American shores. Through it all, you rarely hear one complaint from these kids despite the fact that they are working harder than anyone on this planet in the most dangerous "office space" on Earth, the flight deck of an aircraft carrier.

Don't worry about us, we are doing great out here. I can honestly say that there is no other place in the world I'd rather be than right here, right now, sticking it to the Taliban.

- 30) Failure by American pastors to adhere to the standards of orthodox, conservative hermeneutics has led to their failure to properly interpret and in turn illuminate to their congregations the true meaning of Christmas.



- 31) Instead, there has developed in this Client Nation a definition of Christmas that is heretical and it emanates from the dark side of morality. We will now observe how improper interpretation and resultant failure to illuminate one critical doctrine of the Christian faith has led to the transformation of Christmas into a pagan ritual that demands the execution of human good and evil. We will call the study:

### The Dark Side of Christmas

#### A. Introduction:

- 1- A half century ago the Christmas season brought with it an annual chorus from those wanting to “put Christ back into Christmas.” This plea was possibly first motivated by the notion that the celebration had become over commercialized. Business establishments could hardly get past Halloween before the Christmas decorations went up and company catalogues went out.
- 2- But amidst all the hoopla there remained the core spirit of Christmas. Jesus Christ was recognized as the reason for the season. The hustle and bustle to give presents to others was a means of both illustrating and celebrating God’s gift of His Son for our salvation and it was the underlying motivation for every wish of “Merry Christmas.”
- 3- But that was in the South. I grew up in what the rest of the country referred to as the Bible Belt. Fifty years ago there was a clear understanding of the real meaning of Christmas in that swath of states that stretched from Virginia to Texas.
- 4- However, over commercialization is not the lone culprit in the removal of Christ from Christmas but an age-old heresy born out from an heretical interpretation of Scripture. Although the Puritans brought this false doctrine to New England, we will cast our first aspersions upon Arius / ah-RI-us / as the originator of this error although others were obviously involved in its early development. We get a brief summary of his identity from:

#### *Webster’s New Biographical Dictionary, s.v. “Arius”:*

**Arius.** c. 250-336 A.D. Greek ecclesiastic at Alexandria. Taught Neoplatonic doctrine that God is alone, unknowable, and separate from every created being, that Christ is a created being and not God in the fullest sense but a secondary deity, and that in the incarnation the Logos assumed a body but not a human soul. Growing dispute over his teaching led Emperor Constantine I to call the Council of Nicaea / ny-SE-ah / in 325, where Arianism was declared heresy.

- 5- Instead of resolving the problem, the Council at Nicaea only stimulated a Christological debate throughout Christendom. Arianism contended that there once was a time when Jesus did not exist, that is, before His birth. Therefore, the Son of God is a created being and of a different substance than the Father.
- 6- To counter this concept, the Council at Nicaea proclaimed in its famous creed that the “Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, (was) begotten of the Father from the substance of the Father; true God from true God, begotten not made.”
- 7- What this controversy boiled down to was how Scripture should be interpreted. The point at issue was and remains the doctrine of the incarnation of Christ.
- 8- Had Arius understood or accepted the doctrine of the hypostatic union then he would not have rationalized with Plato a strict monotheism that denied the Trinity.
- 9- What came to light during the debate is that Arianism’s restriction of deity to the Father only introduced polytheism into Christianity since Christ was worshipped by the Arians. The ultimate conclusion among the theologians was that God is one in essence but three in personalities. The doctrine of the Trinity was reconfirmed and Arianism faded from the scene.



- 10- Jesus Christ as second Person of the Trinity, without ceasing to be undiminished deity, was united with true humanity at the Virgin Birth. The result was one Person with a divine nature including all the attributes of deity, and a human nature including all the attributes of true humanity, minus genetic and imputed sin.
- 11- Thus the Virgin Birth is the central event in human history. It marks the moment God directly entered into human history and took on the essence of man. It was the moment God became incarnate.
- 12- The term “incarnation” comes from the Latin compound *incarnare: in plus caro*, and literally means “in the flesh.” Christmas Day marks the moment of the Virgin Birth when true God and true Man entered into hypostatic union in the Person of Jesus Christ. As John writes in John 1:14, “The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us.”
- 13- Therefore, December 25th should be a time when Christians celebrate this event. The focus of Christmas should be Christocentric: centered on Christ with emphasis on the Virgin Birth, the Incarnation, the hypostatic union, and impeccability. Jesus should be celebrated as the Messiah whose mission was to qualify in His true humanity to become a vicarious sacrifice for the sins of the entire world. It should be a time to communicate the gospel of salvation. Obviously, it must and has come under the duplicitous assault of the Evil One, Satan himself.
- 14- This however is not the emphasis that Christmas receives in twenty-first-century America and it shows. Christocentric decorations are banned from the public square and even public discussion. Employees are told that they may not wish fellow workers or customers the usual “Merry Christmas” but the benign “Happy Holidays” instead. Schools must censor any music that has a Christian theme. Displays may not contain any idea of the Nativity. The current Zeitgeist has replaced the celebration of the birth of Christ with hollow altruism and faux philanthropy.
- 15- The Portuguese have a saying that sums up the modern “Holiday Spirit”: *faze bem, não cates a quem*: do good, never mind to whom.
- 16- The reason that Christmas has been transformed into a time to eradicate world hunger, feed the poor, and foment world peace can be traced all the way back to Arianism. However, the American version of Christmas is actually the result of Puritanism.

#### **B. Socinus, Puritans, & Unitarians**

- 1- The revival of Arianism in the Christian church occurred in the sixteenth century by means of Italian theologian Faustus Socinus / sah-SY-nus /. His uncle developed an anti-Trinitarian doctrine that Faustus expanded and it gained ascendancy under the name, Socinianism / sah-SIN-e-ah-NIZ-um /.
- 2- Socinus believed the Bible should be interpreted rationally and this ultimately led to a denial of the deity of Christ. He concluded—rationally—that Christ was human and did not become Godlike until after the resurrection when God bestowed upon Christ *some* of His divine attributes.
- 3- Socinus also rationalized that the death of Christ on the cross did not result in forgiveness of sins since God was able to forgive sins without the sacrifice of Jesus. Forgiveness, he concluded, was forthcoming from God as a result of man’s repentance and good works.
- 4- In addition, Socinus rejected the doctrines of original sin and the resurrection of the body. His teaching led to the publication of the Racovian Catechism in Poland in 1605. It contained in part the following concepts noted in:

Elwell, Walter A. (ed.). *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984). 903:



**Racovian Catechism.** Salvation was attained by good works, and followers were called to live a moral life. The catechism stated that all divine knowledge came from the Bible; however, adherents believed that it should be explained and interpreted with “right reason.” The use of “right reason” meant that no miracle or quality of God should contradict human understanding.

- 5- Without realizing it at first, the Puritans, in an effort to purify the Church of any influences from Rome, considered Christmas a “diabolical” innovation of the pope from which the Church was to be purified. As a result it was a crime to celebrate Christmas in Massachusetts until 1681.
- 6- The impact of Puritanism on the America’s concept of Christmas is the subject of an excellent article that appears in the current issue of *Chronicles* magazine. We find the historical lifeline of our watered-down twenty-first-century Christmas in:

**Wolf, Aaron D. “A Tender, Unitarian Christmas.” *Chronicles*, Dec. 2001, 17-20.**

- 7- The Puritans’ desire for purification even extended to the Reformation, which they considered to be incomplete in its efforts to purge the Church of the “leaven of Rome.”
- 8- In this effort they sought to stay away from any of Rome’s concepts that promoted the miraculous in defiance of human reason.
- 9- They believed in the immediate conversion of the individual through faith alone in Christ alone but afterward they taught the Christian way of life was to be determined by interpreting the Bible from the standpoint of human reasoning.
- 10- To quote Puritan preacher, Thomas Hooker, godly men are to judge truth based on experience of “what is found and felt in the heart.”
- 11- This brought empiricism in alongside rationalism in the Puritan system of biblical interpretation and ultimately led to the rejection of the Incarnation: the Word made flesh.
- 12- Soon Puritan preachers began to teach that God becoming Man was irrational. They believed they were restoring primitive Christianity but instead they were signing on to the old Arian heresy that would show itself in America in the late eighteenth century as a reaction to the Great Awakening.
- 13- George Whitfield and the brothers John and Charles Wesley captured the attention of tens of thousands of people during a period between 1735 and 1743. It led to the salvation of thousands of people but was often accompanied by emotional outbursts. This was completely unacceptable to the austere Puritans of New England.
- 14- By the late eighteenth century the neo-Arianism promoted by Faustus Socinus was having its impact on England and Scotland. The moral asceticism practiced by the Puritans plus their rational approach to the interpretation of Scripture allowed Socinianism to take root in the established churches of New England.
- 15- The result from the pulpits is described by Wolf on page 19:
 

During the last half of the 18th century, scholarly ministers began to apply the light of pure reason to the Incarnation itself, and the suprarational notion that God became Man in the Person of Jesus Christ seemed less and less tenable. The Gospel, they determined, means the transformation of the character of the individual by following the examples set forth in the Bible. American Unitarianism—emphasizing *reason* and the moral life of believers—was born.
- 16- The Unitarian view of Christmas can be defined by the words of one of its ministers, “God does not put flesh on in the person of Jesus; God puts on my flesh. God is incarnate in my heart and acts in my life.” The Christmas myth teaches that each of us contains the spark of divinity, and that *we*—not as Christians or “little Christs,” but as little gods—are *the Incarnation*.



- 17- Today the evangelicals are known as “fundamentalists.” They have subscribed to the core principles of the Christian faith: the Virgin Birth, the Incarnation, the substitutionary sacrificial spiritual death of Christ for our sins, and His resurrection.
- 18- However, fundamental Christianity, because it has strayed from strict orthodox, conservative hermeneutics in its interpretation of Scripture, has joined with the Puritans and Unitarians in its views toward the Christian life.