

This position is represented in an editorial in the December 1950 issue of Eternity magazine, in which the editor wrote:

Almost all of us realize that Christ was not born late in December; there were never shepherds watching in the fields by night at that time of the year in Palestine. We also know that the word Christmas means the mass in celebration of Christ. Originally wild orgies with drunkenness and revelry were celebrated two or three days after the shortest day of the year, in honor of Dionysus, god of wine. The Romans identified him with Bacchus, and in the second century B.C., the wild feasts were introduced into Italy. They led to such excesses that they were officially banned by decree of the Senate in 186 B.C. They lingered on in the private practices of many individuals, until they became rather general again in the early centuries of the Christian era. In the north countries a similar feast was celebrated by the pagans under the name of Yule. The earliest use of the word "Christmas" that has come down to us is that found in an Old English Chronicle of 1123.

The pagans in the German forests burned a log at Yule time, and decorated a tree. This practice became common in Germany and is first mentioned in the English language in 1789. The use of Christmas trees was not a custom in England until Queen Victoria married a German prince. About the same time immigrants brought the practice to America. The first Christmas cards mentioned in history were sent in England about 1867.

The festivals were usually celebrated for twelve days, ending with the twelfth night merrymaking about the fifth of January. In the middle ages the sixth of December was dubbed St. Nicholas' Day, and this saint was the patron of scholars, especially of school-boys. On the evening before his day the boys elected a "bishop" to preside over their festivities. He was made fat with a stuffed pillow, and given false whiskers. Only in America is he known as Santa Claus, and his name was given him by Longfellow in 1828.

One major difficulty with this position is that it is based on the argument from etymology (i.e., that the meaning of words or ideas or customs is to be discovered by looking back at their origin or earlier history, rather than by looking at their current usage). Meaning is determined by current usage, not by etymology!

B. A second answer is that we should affirm the biblical elements and omit the use of the traditional elements, not because they are pagan, but because they tend to obscure the biblical elements.

In 1642 the Puritan members of the British Parliament passed a law intended to strip Christmas of all tendencies to obscure its biblical meaning. The law forbade anyone to close his shop on Christmas day, to eat special holiday foods, or to light yule candles. A town crier made the