

RADIO COMMENTARY

BACKGROUND: This ran at Christmastime on NPR's "All Things Considered."
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Free Christ from Christmas

by John Boykin

Every year I boycott the local store that trots out its Christmas doodads first. It starts earlier every year. This year it was October 4th.

As a Christian, I believe Jesus was God's way of walking the earth. If that's anywhere close to true, then he is really the wrong person to trivialize. So I object to having him prostituted by marketers. Hence the boycott.

But I'm not fighting the commercialization of Christmas. That fight was lost ages ago.

What I'm after is more radical: disentangling Jesus entirely from this blight on his good name. I'm out to change the bumper sticker from "Keep Christ in Christmas" to "Free Christ from Christmas."

Heresy? Well, compare Christmas with Martin Luther King's birthday. On his birthday, nobody ever pays any attention to his birth. Instead, it's "I Have a Dream" and his impact on society.

In other words, we mark Dr. King's birth by focusing on what he said and did as an adult.

Christmas, by contrast, has no time for what the adult Jesus said and did. Rather, Christmas keeps him safely shut up as a baby in the manger -- where he can't make his usual noise about people repenting and living a godly life.

So does his birth matter at all? Well, it matters to his followers today as one way of backing up his claim to be the son of God. But that's not the way Jesus himself backed up his claim. He pointed not to his birth, but to his resurrection. So I'll trade a month of Christmases for one meaningful Easter.

When Jesus denounced hypocrisy, he was not talking about saying one thing and doing something else. He was talking about using God and the things of God as a means to some other end -- like, oh, say, making a buck. This is why he drove the money changers out of the temple. We do him no honor by carting him out once a year to stand him on his head.

I'm not proposing that we cancel Christmas. I know: The economy would collapse without it. Fine. Keep the holiday. Keep the gift-giving and the jingle bells. Let's just subtract the remaining Jesus element from it -- and move that over into Easter. Call December 25 Solstice. Call it Retail Day. Call it Holiday Number Nine. I don't care. Just leave Christ out of it. He was not born to be the patron saint of fourth-quarter earnings.

John Boykin is the author of *Cursed Is the Peacemaker* [later *One Brief Miracle*] and *The Gospel of Coincidence*.