

The Dallas Post

EDITORIALS

Tidings of great joy in a cynical age

Sunday is Christmas, a fitting day for the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ, whom millions, perhaps billions, believe is the Son of God and the Saviour of mankind.

Religious faith is a bedrock of our civilization, as it has been since time immemorial for all great cultures. The gods have changed, and some of the beliefs, but a fundamental faith in an ultimate outcome of goodness has somehow prevailed.

In these times of mean-spirited politics, when depriving children of minimal welfare benefits is touted as compassion, it's good to remember that acts of kindness still abound every day, performed by our friends and neighbors who won't let mass cynicism overwhelm their good instincts. People like John and Shawn Murphy, who have spent each of the last 20-some-odd Thanksgivings serving a hearty dinner to the hungry. Or like Nancy Dukes, bringing joy with her therapy dogs to disabled patients at John Heinz Institute.

"The poor will always be with us," Jesus said, but he didn't say they are to be despised or ignored. It's fashionable in some quarters to equate poverty with wickedness, while others see just the opposite. The truth — as it often does — probably lies somewhere in between; poor people aren't on the whole much different from anyone else, just poorer. Demonizing welfare mothers does as much to destroy the spirit of the critics as it does the image of poor people.

Man's inhumanity to man is still our greatest threat, whether it takes the form of greedy employers like Charles Dickens' Ebenezer Scrooge or mindless criminals who randomly shoot children. These things are the fodder of film and the evening news, because they easily stir strong emotions like rage and fear. Studies show that heavy television viewers are considerably more fearful than those who either get their news elsewhere or ignore exaggerated stories put on the air by networks intent on raising ratings at any cost.

The counterpoint to a barrage of negative images is much more subtle. Most people who do good don't draw attention to themselves, their deeds aren't broadcast on police radios and therefore aren't picked up by the media. The truth is, doing good is still ordinary and expected, while crime and misdeeds are not. From that perspective alone, goodness is winning.

Still, it's useful to highlight those who help the most needful among us, and who do so not out of a desire for publicity or congratulations, but simply because they know in their hearts that John the Baptist spoke for them when he said, "He that has two coats, let him give one to him that has none." That's exactly what students at Lake-Lehman High School did, and with donations from the community provided 124 coats and 37 blankets to an agency that works with homeless people. And it's what Dr. Mark Perlmutter and others are doing at their free clinic at St. Therese's Church in Shavertown, where the destitute can receive medical care and a hot meal at no charge.

Welfare, taxes and war may get the headlines and the attention of our political leaders, but they aren't the story of most people's lives, which are led in struggle but dignity. The best of them have learned to care for their own families, then taken a step beyond to help others less fortunate, or perhaps less able.

The day never will dawn when every person is able-bodied, industrious and responsible. Perhaps it is a basic attribute of human nature that each of us will at some time need help from another. Surely, we all can recall a time when a hand up or shoulder to cry on made a difference in our lives. It would be a shame if the impulse to help is drowned by a sea of selfishness. Judging by the people we know, that won't happen soon.

Merry Christmas.



Frank Kus found just the right spot, a crock in the window of White's Appliance store, while waiting for Santa to arrive last weekend. Photo by Charlotte Bartizek.

A Christmas classic

Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus

The New York Sun was started in 1833 by Benjamin H. Day, then just 23. The publication — which became one of the great newspapers of America — was the first New York "penny paper."

The Sun ceased publication in 1950, but every Christmas its memory is revived by an editorial printed on Sept. 21, 1897.

Virginia O'Hanlon, a New York City youngster, wrote this letter.

Dear Editor: I'm 8 years old. Some of my friends say there is no Santa Claus.

"Papa says, 'If you see it in *The Sun*, it's so. Please tell me the truth. Is there a Santa Claus?'"

Virginia O'Hanlon
115 W. 95th St.

The letter wound up on the desk of Francis Pharacellus Church, an assistant editor of *The Sun*. A more hardened person might have thrown it away, but Church felt differently.

He wrote this reply.

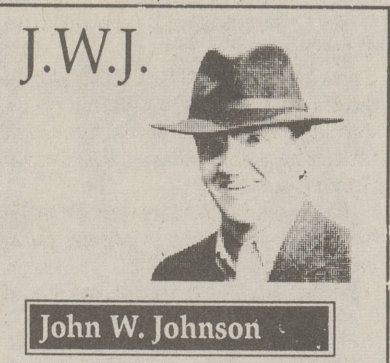
"Virginia, your little friends are wrong. They have been affected by the skepticism of a skeptical age. They do not believe except they see. They think that nothing can be which is not comprehensible by their little minds. All minds, Virginia, whether they be men's or children's, are little. In this great universe of ours, man is a mere insect, an ant, in his intellect, as compared with the boundless world about him, as measured by the intelligence capable of grasping the whole of truth and knowledge."

"Yes, Virginia there is a Santa Claus. He exists as certainly as love and generosity and devotion exist, and you know that they abound and give to your life its highest beauty and joy."

"Alas! how dreary would be the world if there were no Santa Claus. It would be as dreary as if there were no Virginias. There would be no childlike faith, then no poetry, no romance, no push aside that curtain and view and picture the supernal beauty and glory beyond."

"Is it all real? Ah, Virginia, in all this world there is nothing else real and abiding."

"No Santa Claus! Thank God he lives and he lives forever. A thousand years from now Virginia, nay ten times ten thousand years, from now, he will continue to make glad the heart of childhood."



John W. Johnson

You no doubt have been besieged by many telling you there are only X number of shopping days left until Christmas. When was it that the number of shopping days left until Christmas took center stage in place of the holiday's namesake?

Certainly our forbears approached the holiday differently. And although at best an agnostic—someone who believes in a higher power, and not necessarily religion—Thomas Jefferson had this to say about Jesus Christ.

"It is not to be understood that I am with him in all his doctrines. I am a materialist; he takes the side of spiritualism; he preaches the efficacy of repentance toward forgiveness of sin; I require a counterpoise of good works to redeem it, etc."

"It is the innocence of his character, the purity and sublimity of his moral precepts, the eloquences of his inculcations, the beauty of apologies in which he conveys them, that I so much admire; sometimes, indeed, needing indulgence to eastern hyperbole."

"My eulogies, too, may be founded on a postulate which all may be ready to grant. Among the sayings and discourses imputed to him by his biographers, I find many passages of fine imagination, correct morality, and of the most lovely benevolence; and others, again, of so much ignorance, so much absurdity, so much untruth, charlatanism and imposture, as to pronounce it impossible that such contradictions should have proceeded from the same being."

"I separate, therefore, the good

A Christmas present from Thomas Jefferson

from the dross; restore to him the former, and leave the latter to the stupidity of some, and roguery of others of his disciples. Of this band, at dupes and imposters, Paul was the first corrupter of the doctrines of Jesus."

And while Jefferson at another point in time described the joining of the church and state as "loathsome", he most often declared his unqualified support for the moral fiber of Jesus.

As such, it is nice to think that Jefferson could have agreed to a summary of his view of the great American experiment as being an appropriate Christmas gift to the American people.

Such a summary can be found in Jefferson's first inaugural speech, made some 190 years ago on March 4, 1801. Jefferson described what he believed were the essential principles of our government using the following words:

—equal and exact justice to all men, of whatever state of persuasion, religious or political.

—peace, commerce, and honest friendship, with all nations—entangling alliances with none.

—the support of the state governments in all their rights, as the most competent administrations for our domestic concerns and the surest bulwarks against anti-republican tendencies.

—the preservation of the general government in its whole constitutional vigor, as the sheet anchor of our peace at home, and safety abroad.

—a jealous care of the right of election by the people—a mild and safe corrective of abuses which are lopped by the sword of the revolution where peaceable remedies are unprovided.

—absolute acquiescence in the decisions of the majority—the vital principle of republics, from which there is no appeal but to force, the vital principle and immediate parent of despotism.

—a well-disciplined militia—

our best reliance in peace and for the first moments of war, till regulars may relieve them; the supremacy of the civil over the military authority.

—economy in the public expense, that labor may be lightly burdened.

—the honest payment of our debts and sacred preservation of the public faith.

—encouragement of agriculture, and of commerce as its handmaiden.

—the diffusion of information and the arraignment of all abuses at the bar of public reason.

—freedom of religion.

—freedom of the press.

—freedom of person under the protection of the habeas corpus.

—and trial by jury, impartially selected."

Jefferson went on to say:

"These principles form the bright constellation which has gone before us, and guided our steps through an age of revolution and reformation. The wisdom of our sages and the blood of our heroes have been devoted to their attainment. They should be the creed of our political faith—the text of civil instruction—the touchstone by which to try the services of those we trust; and should we wander from them in moments of error or alarm, let us hasten to retrace our steps and to regain the road which alone leads to peace, liberty and safety."

Of course, even a casual glance at Jefferson's words will find that much of what he perceived as essential elements of the great American experiment are under assault, or have been so radically changed as to be unrecognizable by the man who framed them in the first place.

As well, the agrarian Jefferson, and despite his lack of ardor for things theological, would have found the commercialism of the holiday season to, at best, be crass.

Only yesterday

60 Years Ago - Dec. 28, 1934 PRICE OF OLD GOLD SKYROCKETS

Aroused by the disclosure of Dallas Water Company's intention to suggest a rate increase at a hearing to be held before Public Service Commission next Friday, taxpayers of Dallas will meet at the high school to discuss plans for blocking any water rate increase.

President Roosevelt's gold proclamation has made the value of old gold increase by more than 50 percent. A representative licensed by U.S. Government will hold a one day sale, open to the public at Hislop's Restaurant, Main Street, Dallas. Now you can sell your scraps of old or broken jewelry at the highest price ever paid for gold since the Civil War.

You could get - Roasting chickens, 25¢ lb.; round steak, 25¢ lb.; sugar, 10 lbs. in bulk, 49¢; Ritz Crackers, 1-lb. pkg. 19¢.

50 Years Ago - Dec. 22, 1944 HADSAL TO BUILD WARSHIPS FOR NAVY

The U.S. Government has asked florists to give preference to orders for holiday flowers sent by soldiers from overseas. As a consequence many local homes will be without cut flowers this Christmas, in the opinion of Herbert Hill, Shavertown florist.

Two days after he celebrates his 38th wedding anniversary, J. Gordon Hadsel, veteran carpenter will leave for Pearl Harbor, where he will have an active part in building ships for his country's defense. Hadsel received word that he had been accepted by the U.S. Navy as ship's joiner in civilian employ. He leaves Tuesday morning.

40 Years Ago - Dec. 23, 1954 ROTARY HOSTS KIDS' HOLIDAY PARTY

Dallas Rotary Club, with the help of members and friends, entertained 52 youngsters at its annual Christmas Party in Prince of Peace Church parlors. After the Christmas story, Santa arrived early and presents were given to each child.

Directors of Miners National Bank of Wilkes-Barre, at their meeting, declared a regular semi-annual dividend of \$3 as well as an extra dividend of \$1 a share to shareholders of record as of December 24, 1954. Dividends will be payable January 10, 1955.

You could get at Back Mountain Lumber & Coal Company, a doll carriage, \$8; Doctor Kit, \$2.98; Flexible Flyer sled, \$12.45; sewing machine, \$5.98; Monopoly \$4; Lincoln Logs, \$2.

30 Years Ago - Dec. 22, 1964 KIWANIS HONOR FRED HENNEBAUL

Fred Hennebaul, injured high school student, is to be the honored guest at the Dallas Kiwanis Club meeting Wednesday at Irem Temple Country Club. Hennebaul, whose plight since his injury has been of concern to many friends and well wishers, has been making substantial progress, according to George McCutcheon one of his tutors. Fred not only is able to move about in his powered wheelchair, he is able to feed himself and can read and type the necessary answers for his school work.

Back Mountain small game hunters will have another chance to test their skills as the 1964 small game season on grouse, rabbits and squirrels reopens December 26 and closes January 2.

20 Years Ago - Dec. 23, 1974 BORO TO DEMOLISH CHARCOAL HOUSE

Dallas Borough Council presented a temporary budget of \$162,534 for 1975 at their Dec. 17 meeting. Finance chairman Arnaud read the proposed budget and said that it is hoped no tax increase will be necessary next year.

Dallas Borough Council will take action to demolish the "Charcoal House on the hill," according to solicitor Charles Lemmond. He said he will file a petition of equity in the Court of Common Pleas for approval to remove the hazard because of its danger. It's located on Huntsville Road, Dallas.

LCTA buses will carry more than 5 million passengers during 1974, according to figures released by the Authority. Sometimes this week the 5 millionth passenger will board and ride an LCTA bus.

More Back Mountain news
The Dallas Post

Publisher's notebook

Ron Bartizek



A recent New York Times/CBS News poll reveals the difficulty of governing by the whims of the populace. Two examples demonstrate the problem.

1. Asked if they thought government spending on programs for poor children should be increased, decreased or kept the same, 47 percent supported increases and only 9 percent backed cuts. But asked if government spending on welfare should be increased, decreased or kept the same, 13 percent wanted increases and 48 percent wanted cuts. The majority of what is commonly called welfare goes to children and families, so which response do you believe?

2. Support for an amendment to the Constitution requiring a balanced federal budget was 81 percent...until people were asked how to pay for it. Told a balanced budget might require higher federal taxes, only 41 percent favored balancing the books, and that was the high point. Support fell to 30 percent when cuts in Social Security were mentioned, 27 percent with cuts in Medicare, and only 22 percent if education funding had to be decreased.

As Mario Cuomo said recently, if they govern by poll, our leaders would have to cut their salaries in half, impose strict term limits and eliminate their perks. There isn't much chance they'll listen to that bit of the voters' wisdom.

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Published Weekly by Bartsen Media, Inc.
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MEMBER OF THE NATIONAL NEWSPAPER ASSOCIATION
AND PENNSYLVANIA NEWSPAPER PUBLISHERS ASSOCIATION
VOTED 3rd BEST SMALL WEEKLY IN THE U.S., 1993