

Responding to False Ideas About Christmas

Part 2: Christmas is Based on a Pagan Feast

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It has become a recent mantra of mockers of Christianity that all Christian celebrations are stolen from pagan sources. Christmas is especially attacked with such secularist fairy tales.

The common confusion is annually reported in ignorant and uninformed mass media outlets. Christmas, they say, was based on the Church trying to imitate and take over some pagan festival. But the historical details demonstrate that is not true. The Church chose the date for the Nativity feast before there was any historical celebration of any pagan festival associated with that time period, *and* even when the pagan festival of the Unconquered Sun was instituted (to compete with Nativity), the dates were still never the same days, though they did fall within the same four-week (month) period.¹ There has also been the attempt to use supposed details about other deities, including the Egyptian god Horus and the Persian Mithras, for this same purpose.

Much of this nonsense goes back to Paul Ernst Jablonski (1693-1757), who in his *De origine festi nativitatis Christi (Concerning the Origins of Christmas)* set out to destroy Roman Catholicism by claiming that the whole religion was really dressed up pagan superstition. Jablonski introduced the Mithras idea. Ernst Friedrich Wernsdorf (1718-1782) jumped on this bandwagon. He came up with that idea connecting Christmas to the *Sol Invictus festival*, disseminating it in his book *The Origins of Christmas in the Festival of the Birth of the Unconquerable Sun*.

Alexander Hislop (1807-1865) later claimed that everything Catholic was just a dressed-up form of the religion of the old Babylonian Empire. The fact that he was motivated by hatred of Roman Catholicism and misunderstood all the main facts involved in the historical record didn't prevent him convincing people and getting a

broad audience. The historically insupportable and frankly silly idea that Constantine was the creator of catholic Christianity (the same idea recirculated more recently in the sheer fantasy material of Dan Brown of *The Davinci Code* fame) comes from Hislop.

Charles William King (1818-1888) had his own riff on this, set out in his book *The Gnostics and their Remains*, where he claimed that Christianity is dressed up Mithraism and sun-worship. This fundamentally misunderstands Mithraism, but that doesn't prevent it from still being repeated.

Finally, we have Gerald Massey (1828-1907), who concocted the fantasy that Jesus is really Horus. The supposed parallels don't match or aren't found in the sources (they're simply made up, fabricated out of nothing but the author's imagination). So we have an evil comedy of errors, none of which are supportable by careful analysis of the primary source materials, with fatal flaws in methodology thrown in.

In this particular case, every single claim falls so flat that what the opponents throw out as a challenge to the Christian Faith really deserves nothing other than the mockery Lutheran Satire gives them.² God Himself mocks the mocker of truth, overthrowing his pride (Prov. 3:34). The Lord laughs at the wicked and taunts them, for He sees the Day of Judgment coming (Ps. 2:4, 37:13, 59:8). Isaiah ridicules idol-makers in their own folly and makes numerous other jibes at the expense of the Israelites who fell into idolatry (Is. 40:19-20, 44:6-20, 46:1-7, 48:1-11). Elijah taunts the Israelites in their idolatrous worship and mocks in the most blunt terms the false god Baal (1 Kings 18:16-40). Each of the plagues poured out upon Egypt through Moses mocked particular Egyptian gods, showing their powerlessness and Yahweh's ultimate authority (Ex. 7:5).

Treat the devil's lies for what they are: pathetic attempts to hide Jesus, Founder of the Feast. To God be all the glory, our praise, and our thanks! Merry Christmas! The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us; and we beheld His glory, full of grace and truth!

¹ See *Origins of the Liturgical Year* by Thomas Talley, Benedict XVI's *The Spirit of the Liturgy* (pp. 100, 108), or this brief article: <http://www.touchstonemag.com/archives/article.php?id=16-10-012-v>.

²See the delightful videos from Lutheran Satire: *Horus Ruins Christmas*, Parts 1 and 2, at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=so-EgjUhRqA> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TzkJDyJjLBg>.