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December 3, 2001

Merry Christmas? Not for Many Americans, Who Believe the Holiday Has Lost Its Focus

Americans say Christmas has become too commercialized, with not enough emphasis on religion

Religion and Social Trends

by Mark Gillespie

GALLUP NEWS SERVICE

PRINCETON, NJ -- Feeling a little green this Christmas? Did you cringe at the holiday displays at your local department store -- in October? Did you ever tell your loved ones "let's not worry about gifts this year," then rush madly to the malls on Christmas Eve -- when they didn't take you seriously and you found something under the tree with your name on it?

There is a reason why Americans are flocking to see "How the Grinch Stole Christmas" this holiday season, and it's not because the Dr. Seuss classic brings back warm, fuzzy memories of Christmases past. In some small way, many Americans may be wishing the Grinch could actually pull it off this year without giving in to the people of Whoville.

A new Gallup poll conducted Dec. 2-4 finds the public growing disillusioned with the way Americans celebrate Christmas. Ninety-six percent of Americans celebrate the holiday, but the percentage of those who say they would enjoy it more if people did not exchange gifts is growing. In 1994, 28% said they would enjoy a "gift-less" holiday more, and that percentage has grown to 42% in the current Gallup poll.

Men Dislike Christmas Shopping, Yet Would Prefer Not to Give Up Gifts

Nearly six out of 10 Americans (57%) say they do not enjoy Christmas shopping. However, when it comes to a "gift-less" Christmas, Gallup finds a clear gender gap.

66% of men do not enjoy shopping for Christmas gifts, compared to 48% of women.

On the other hand, 47% of men say they would enjoy the holiday less if people did not exchange gifts, compared to just 36% of women.

Having children in the household makes gift giving more fun for many parents. Nearly half of parents with children under 18 (46%) say they would enjoy the holiday less if gifts were not exchanged, compared to 39% of adults with no young children. However, 84% of adults surveyed say too much emphasis is placed on presents, while 9% say the emphasis is about right and 7% say not enough. Interestingly, there is a large difference on the last of these responses by income levels -- 18% of adults who earn less than \$20,000 annually say not enough emphasis is placed on gift giving, compared to just 2% of those who earn \$50,000 or more annually.

Religious Reasons for Christmas Lost in the Commercial Glitz

The Gallup poll found 90% of Americans know the real reason for celebrating Christmas -- the Christian faith's commemoration of the birth of Jesus Christ. However, three out of four Americans (75%) say there is not enough emphasis on the religious basis for the holiday these days. Sixteen percent say the religious basis gets the right amount of emphasis and 8% say there is too much emphasis on the religious reasons for the holiday. Not surprisingly, those who attend church on a weekly basis are even more likely to say there is not enough emphasis on the religious basis for Christmas -- 86% say this, compared to 67% of those who attend church less often.

The number of Americans who think Christmas is too commercialized also appears to be growing.

GALLUP WORLD POLL



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Eighty-five percent said "yes" to this question in the current poll, compared to 79% when Gallup asked the same question in December 1990. This sentiment increases with age -- 71% of those aged 18-29 said "yes" in the current poll, compared to 85% of those 30-49, 89% of those 50-64, and 92% of those 65 and over.

Survey Methods

The results below are based on telephone interviews with a randomly selected national sample of 1,026 adults, 18 years and older, conducted Dec. 2-4, 2000. For results based on this sample, one can say with 95 percent confidence that the maximum error attributable to sampling and other random effects is plus or minus 3 percentage points. In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of public opinion polls.

Do you celebrate Christmas?

	Yes	No	No opinion
2000 Dec 2-4	96%	4	*
1994 Dec 16-18	96%	4	*

Would you happen to know why Christmas is celebrated? [Open-ended]

	2000 Dec 2-4
Birth of Jesus Christ, correct response	90%
Other/Incorrect response	8
No opinion	2

Would you enjoy Christmas more, or enjoy it less, if people did not exchange gifts as part of the holiday?

BASED ON -- 524 -- NATIONAL ADULTS IN FORM A; ±5 PCT. PTS.

	Enjoy more	Enjoy less	NO EFFECT (vol.)	No opinion
2000 Dec 2-4	42%	41	15	2
1994 Dec 16-18	28%	52	18	2

In your opinion, is Christmas too commercialized, or not?

BASED ON -- 502 -- NATIONAL ADULTS IN FORM B; ±3 PCT. PTS.

	Yes, too commercialized	No, not too commercialized	No opinion
2000 Dec 2-4	85%	15	*
1990 Nov 29-Dec 2	79%	20	1

Is there too much, not enough, or the right amount of emphasis on gifts and presents at Christmas these days?

BASED ON -- 524 -- NATIONAL ADULTS IN FORM A; ±4 PCT. PTS.

	Too much	Not enough	Right amount	No opinion
2000 Dec 2-4	84%	7	9	*

Is there too much, not enough, or the right amount of emphasis on the religious basis of Christmas these days?

BASED ON -- 502 -- NATIONAL ADULTS IN FORM B; ±4 PCT. PTS.

	Too much	Not enough	Right amount	No opinion
2000 Dec 2-4	8%	75	16	1

Do you enjoy Christmas shopping, or not?

	Yes	No	No opinion
2000 Dec 2-4	42%	57	1

* Less than 0.5%
(vol.) Volunteered response

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