

# No, Virginia, There Isn't A Santa Claus!

by David E. Moss

Christmas is the most paradoxical holiday in our society. It is a most sacred remembrance of the Incarnation of our blessed Saviour. It is as Christian as anything can be. Yet it excites our secular society more than any other annual event on the National calendar. I realized recently how secularized Christmas had become when I heard of a radio talk show on which a woman complained, "I wish they would keep religion out of Christmas."

Nothing epitomizes the secularization of Christmas more than Santa Claus. "Jolly old Saint Nick" is Christ's competitor for the faith of children, for the source of joy throughout the holiday season and for media exposure. At a time when the Church has a tremendous opportunity to communicate to the world concerning the coming of the Saviour, the world is counting down the days until Santa descends the chimneys of expectant boys and girls. And in these days of extremists' views on the separation of church and state, Santa Claus has more legal rights than Jesus Christ.

The myth of Santa Claus has become nearly as sacrosanct among Christians as it is in our secular society. There seems to be an unspoken agreement that in the Church we will not expose the truth about Santa out of respect for those families who choose to teach their children

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to believe in him. I am convinced that leading children to believe in Santa is dangerous. It may not be universally fatal to real faith, but dangerous none the less. It is typical for adults to teach children that Santa Claus is characterized by certain divine attributes. Consider the following:

- 1. Santa is Holy.** No one actually uses the word "holy" in reference to Santa, but the impression is that he is flawless and this suggests a special aura surrounds this unique person. Though he goes by many different names around the world, he is the same person to all and no one else is like him.
- 2. Santa is Eternal.** He has no parents. No one ever speaks of his being born, or young, or that he ever will die.
- 3. Santa is Unchangeable.** He has not aged a day since any of us were children. He has been exactly the same for generations. It is assumed that he will continue to be as he is.
- 4. Santa is Omniscient.** "He sees you when you're sleeping, He knows when you're awake, He knows if you've been bad or good...."
- 5. Santa is Omnipotent.** It is expected that Santa can provide anything you ask for. And no matter that your chimney is too small for him, or that you have no chimney at all, he can overcome all those obstacles. His ability to deliver presents to every home in the world in one night is phenomenal.
- 6. Santa is Omnipresent.** Is there a street corner or Department Store without the presence of Santa during the Christmas shopping days?
- 7. Santa is Sovereign.** There is no one to whom Santa is responsible. He reigns in his own

"kingdom" at the North Pole.

**8. Santa is Good.** His whole purpose is to give gifts unto men.

**9. Santa is Just.** "You better watch out, you better not cry, better not pout, I'm telling you why, Santa Claus is coming to town." Santa Claus is the judge of children's lives. If they are good they will get gifts. If they are not, they will lose out. The justification for Santa not bringing what the children asked for is that they were not good enough.

**10. Santa is Righteous.** There are no moral imperfections in Santa Claus. He has absolutely no negative characterization. (Footnote 1)

Children are led to believe in this "divine character." To a multitude of innocent little hearts, Santa Claus is as real as anything can possibly be. Then one day they hear the rumor, Santa doesn't really exist. We as adults write this off as part of the "rite of passage" from childhood to adulthood. In the process we justify the fantasy as representing the "spirit of Christmas" as though Christmas requires some spirit other than that of Jesus Christ.

I object.

True, there was a Saint Nicholas. "He was born about 280 A.D. and had been a bishop for many years at the time of his death on December 6, 352. He is said to have been born of wealthy parents, to a life that would have assured him comfort and ease. He embraced the new Christian faith, however, and spent his life in the service of the Church of Jesus Christ, suffering imprisonment at the hands of its enemies during the persecutions launched by the Roman Emperor, Diocletian, but subsequently being released after the Emperor Constantine allowed Christianity to become a recognized religion in the Empire."

That's about all we know of him for sure. Everything else is tradition, for the earliest biography of his life was not written until the year 847, nearly 500 years after his death, by the Greek monk, St. Methodius, and by that time it was hard to separate truth from fiction....

"Some say that he used to give gifts to the poor children of his town, dropping gold coins in front of their doors as he passed by at night. The townsfolk never knew the source of the gifts until Nicholas died, and then on his feast day, December 6, they annually commemorated his good deeds by continuing the practice in memory of him....As Centuries went by, the tradition of St. Nicholas (became) associated with a good deal of

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medieval superstition." The "cult of St. Nicholas" spread first to Russia, then to Germany and finally to Europe in 1087. The poem "The Night Before Christmas" was written in 1822 and the first modern drawing of Santa Claus was done by Thomas Nast in 1872.

"In our popular conception of Saint Nicholas today we are about as far from the true story of the ancient bishop as our picture of Santa Claus is from the actual appearance of the Greek Christian leader of the year 352." (Footnote 2)

In September of 1897, an eight year old girl, Virginia O'Hanlon wrote to the editor of the New York Sun to ask about the reality of Santa Claus. She had heard from some of her little

friends that there was no Santa Claus. Her own father was evasive about the subject and she had always heard him say, "If you see it in the Sun (The New York Sun Newspaper) its so." The editor that responded was Francis Pharcellus Church, who had worked as a Civil War correspondent for the New York Times. He later joined the Sun as a writer specializing in theological and controversial subjects.

Mr. Church died in 1906.

The New York Sun died in 1950.

Virginia died May 13, 1971 at the age of 81. (Footnote 3)

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isn't real, when we can believe with all our heart  
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That editorial immortalized the fantasy of Santa Claus. Every Christmas you will hear it read and recited under the title "Yes, Virginia, There Is a Santa." I close my article on Santa with this paraphrased response.

### **NO, VIRGINIA, THERE ISN'T A SANTA!**

Virginia, your little friends are correct. They have discovered the truth and the truth is the most important thing in life. Many adults think that it is better for children to pretend than for them to think hard about reality. They think that childhood is the time for fun and fantasy. Life, Virginia, is just as real for children as it is for adults. We live in a great universe and man is very little compared to the boundless things that God has made. Even though men are very small, and children even smaller, God made all of us capable of knowing Him in a very real and personal way.

No, Virginia, there isn't a Santa Claus. There is no need to believe in something that isn't real, when we can believe with all our heart in something that is real. Santa Claus is only an imaginary story that has grown out of a legend about a man that lived and died a long time ago. But Jesus lives. He lives for ever. He really does know when you are sleeping and when you are awake and whether you've been bad or good. He is the one who deserves our love and generosity and devotion. Real joy comes from having a relationship with someone you can know and talk to and trust. Children who are taught to believe in the fictitious Santa Claus eventually find out it was all pretend. That is when life becomes dreary. You find out that adults have taken advantage of your childhood. They have led you through dreams and hopes that are nothing more than games and lies. We will never be able to measure how much real faith has been extinguished because the energy of childlike faith was wasted on a fantasy and destroyed when the truth was found out.

Believe in Santa Claus? It is far better to believe in Jesus Christ. You will never see Santa Claus come down your chimney but you will see Jesus come down from heaven. As children grow up they find out that Santa Claus does not exist but Jesus becomes more real every day they believe in Him. Jesus will never be only a story. When you receive Him as your personal Saviour, He will dwell in you and teach you the truth and guide your life. A relationship with Jesus Christ is the most real thing that children and men could ever experience in this world.

No Santa Claus! Thank God, we have more to believe in than fairy tales. A thousand

years from now, Virginia, nay, ten times ten thousand years from now, Santa Claus will be unknown and forgotten, but Jesus Christ will continue to make glad the heart of children.

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Footnotes:

1. Adapted from "The God Man Has Made" by Robert McCurry of Calvary Temple Bible Church, East Point, Georgia.
2. "The Real Story of Santa Claus" by Glenn D. Everett, Washington, D>C> circa 1950.
3. The Saturday Evening Post, December, 1988.

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