

Shouldn't We Take Back This Holiday?

By: Anthony J. Sacco, Sr. © February 2009.

PINE BLUFFS – Almost 35 years ago as a father of four, I started a family tradition or custom, of sending a Valentine to my wife and each of my girls in time for St. Valentine's Day on February 14th. Later, when my son married, I expanded the practice to include my wonderful daughter-in-law.

Recently, I've been thinking about the secularization of this holiday. No one seems to be aware anymore of its religious significance, or that the holiday was originally named after at least one and possibly three real persons. In fact, Saint Valentine's Day has moved from a time of expressing sentiments of love, affection, and friendship, to crude, vulgar expressions of sex and blatant commercialization. To see what I mean, consider some of the advertising that occurred just this year, as we approached the big day. An article by Gregory Solman, former West Coast editor of *Adweek*, described what's been happening.¹ I've included his entire piece in a footnote, below.

¹ February 14, 2009. St. Valentine's Day No Longer: How inappropriate commercials have cheapened an important holiday. By: Gregory Solman.

"When what was once called *Saint* Valentine's Day ends at midnight, it will at least mean blessed relief from a barrage of disgusting commercials.

A relentlessly airing spot for Vermont Teddy Bear — disrupting Fox News every night, every ten minutes — starts with a man wearing a T-shirt in an office cubicle (note the double-down male stereotype) who sees "Valentine's Day!!" on his calendar. Cue the *Psycho* shower-murder music (given the female behavior we are about to suffer, perhaps the date annually drives him to consider mutilating his beloved). "And you know what comes right after Valentine's Day?" a nudge-nudging announcer says, "Valentine's *night!*"

"The commercial makes clear that the outmoded "day" nonsense of tender poetic gestures and corny-but-sincere proposals is merely an annoying means to the salacious end of sexual conquest. The spot cuts to an office scene with stupid-looking men sheepishly poking heads above their carrels as they overhear insipid female coworkers — having been delivered teddy bears sporting tattoos, boxer shorts, and the name Horny Devil Bear — squealing with orgasmic *jouissance* and calling out double entendres of the sixth-grade variety: "So much *bigger* than I thought!" "Oh, I could just kiss it and kiss it!"

"It is at this point, perhaps, that any remnants of the Roosevelt family should sue. The announcer tries to convince "guys" that this toy will get "a great response." The announcer says that, unlike flowers, the Vermont Teddy Bear "keeps giving and giving." T-shirt man literally licks his lips in a close-up, the better to keep the drool from dripping on his Chia pet and Dilbert tack-ups. The spot ends with one of the gals in the office porno-pool saying, "I can't wait to give him *my* surprise!"

"A spot for Pajama Grams starts worse — with women parading around in their undies, missing nothing but the fireman's pole and hackneyed razzmatazz — but at least settles into ancient artifacts of troglodyte romance: the ol' crackling-fireplace-and-champagne-on-ice chestnut. Still, a female voiceover utters the debauchery pitch right up front: "This Valentine's Day there's only one gift *guaranteed* to get women to take their clothes off!"

"Is that what St. Valentine's Day has come to? Like the commercialization of Christmas and the candyfication of Easter, has the feast remembering a 3rd-century priest — martyred under the emperor Claudius despite his selfless prayers leading to the restored sight of his captor's daughter—been reduced to mail-order seduction by a nation of salivating Caligulas?

"Even some professional marketers don't like it much. In 2007, I noted in *Adweek's* blog, Adfreak, the airing of sexual-lubricant ads during a Saturday morning USA Network showing of *The Breakfast Club*. To exploit Disney's then-recent *Pirates of the Caribbean* release, otherwise-legitimate cable networks were accepting ads for an adult film, Digital Playground's *Pirates 2*, another new low. Responding to the blog item, a media executive commented that a so-called "scatter" media buy could mean just that — practically random airings of commercial inventory at any time of day. Thus the television industry no longer even

Because I think what the secularists have done with Saint Valentine's Day is deplorable, and because Christians have apparently, perhaps unknowingly, let it happen, I searched for and found a description of who these mysterious Saints were, when they lived and died, why we actually celebrate this holiday, and its religious significance to Christians worldwide.

Saint Valentine's Day, as we know it today, contains vestiges of both Christian and ancient Roman tradition. Who was Saint Valentine and how did he become associated with this ancient rite? Today, the Christian religions recognize at least three legends about the real Saint Valentine. Musty historical vestiges from a lost age? No. The Saint Valentine legends clearly refer to heroic men who stood on principal, and who are worthy of emulation in today's world.

Three different Saint Valentines, all of them martyrs, appear in martyrologies under the date February 14. One is described as a priest in Rome, another as bishop of Interamna Nahars (modern Terni, capital city of Terni Province in the Umbria region of Central Italy). These two men both suffered in the second half of the third century and were buried on the Flaminian Way but at different distances from the city. In William of Malmesbury's time, what was known to the ancients as the Flaminian Gate of Rome, and is now the Porta del Popolo, was called the Gate of Saint Valentine. The name seems to have been taken from a small church dedicated to the saint which was in the immediate neighborhood. A third Valentine apparently lived and suffered in Africa, but little is known about him.

One legend contends that Valentine was a priest who served during the third century in Rome. When Emperor Claudius II decided that single men made better soldiers than those with wives and families, he outlawed marriage for young men — his crop of potential soldiers. Valentine, realizing the injustice of the decree, defied Claudius and continued to perform marriages for young lovers in secret. When Valentine's actions were discovered, Claudius ordered that he be put to death.

wears the micro-thin prophylactic of "appropriate hours" for commercials advertising adults-only products. These commercials slither by unobstructed by content-blocking TV chips.

"KY on cartoon day, *Hostel* billboards on the way to the library,' an ad-industry blogger responded. 'If you're over thirty I'm betting this isn't the way you grew up. Why can't my kids have what we had?' A mother of 13, 12, and 5-year-old girls added that *That's So Raven* had exposed her kids to sexual-dysfunction ads. She added: 'The other day they had male friends, same ages, over, and they tried to loudly talk through a feminine hygiene commercial on the Disney Channel. But it didn't work. The girls were totally embarrassed.'" Naturally, another marketer soon thereafter accused his colleagues of prudishness and favoring censorship.

"With all due respect to Judge Bork, TV advertising is *galloping* towards Gomorrah. The advertising profession — which once considered showing people brushing their teeth vulgar — daily diminishes itself with genital-herpes ads suggesting that the fulfillment of women's liberation lies in safely servicing multiple partners, and erectile-dysfunction spots featuring men sprouting devil horns to Tex Avery-like wolf whistles. Recent spots for "male enhancement" drugs use Andy Griffith-style whistling and tawdry, rank-amateur spokeswomen.

"All the tackiness reinforces the larger malady; that those commercials are for products once only hawked in the back pages of magazines targeted toward indiscriminate youth and pitiable men with arrested development. The heart starts to ache in earnest."

Another story suggests that Valentine may have been killed for attempting to help Christians escape harsh Roman prisons where they were often beaten and tortured.

According to yet another legend, Valentine actually sent the first 'valentine' greeting himself. While in prison, it is believed that Valentine fell in love with a young girl — who may have been his jailor's daughter — who visited him during his confinement. Before his death, it is alleged that he wrote her a letter, which he signed 'From your Valentine,' an expression that is still in use today.

Although the accuracy of the Valentine legends is murky, the stories certainly emphasize their appeal as sympathetic, heroic, and romantic figures, who suffered and died for a cause. It's no surprise that by the Middle Ages, Valentine was one of the most popular saints in England and France.

I don't know about you, but I'm tired of seeing secularist efforts like this one going unchallenged. They've almost completely succeeded in removing any religious meaning from this holiday, all because of the feeling in some quarters (secular media, some publishing houses, Madison Avenue advertising, to name three) that to express any religious sentiment in the public forum might offend a few. Talk about the tyranny of the minority! Their determined attack to remove Christmas from our society almost succeeded, and would have succeeded if it weren't for groups like the Alliance Defense Fund, which mounted a counter-attack in the courts and schools to stop that effort in its tracks.

I think we should mount another counter-attack; this one to "take back" the St. Valentine's Day holiday. What about you?

If you agree, the first thing you can do is to refer all your relatives and friends to the site of this article, with instructions to read it and e-mail it to everyone on their e-mail lists.

The second action you might take is to write or e-mail the advertisers mentioned in Mr. Solman's article (those who advertise on *That's So Raven*, and that *Vermont Teddy Bear* ad might be good places to start), telling them you disapprove and urging them not to repeat their disgusting ads next year.

At least, these actions might put a small dent in the secularist's effort to turn a basically Christian religious holiday into yet another salacious, commercial non-event.

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