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## **The Breaking News English.com Resource Book**

"1,000 Ideas & Activities For Language Teachers"

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## **Pope: Christmas polluted by consumerism**

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**12 December, 2005**

## **THE ARTICLE**

### **Pope: Christmas polluted by consumerism**

Pope Benedict XVI has warned that commercialization is polluting the true, religious meaning of Christmas. He said in his regular Sunday speech at the Vatican: "It is unfortunate that in today's society of consumerism, the Christmas season suffers from...commercial pollution. This risks [changing] its spiritual authenticity, which is characterized by meditation...and by a joy that is not exterior but intimate." The Pope told Christians worldwide to celebrate Christmas by setting up scenes in their homes showing the birth of Christ.

It is easy to agree with Pope Benedict when we look at the madness of Christmas shopping and the stress it causes. It is becoming more and more rare in stores to see any connection between Christmas and the Bible. Consumers must look at thousands of ads as companies do their best to sell their non-Biblical goods. The true spirit of Christmas seems to be hidden by the special offers, non-Christmassy Christmas songs and drunken office parties. The season is even big business in Japan, where less than one percent of the population is Christian. Families there celebrate with special Kentucky Fried Chicken Xmas meals.

## WARM-UPS

**1. NATIVITY:** Talk to as many other students as you can to find out what they know about the nativity (how Jesus was born). After you have talked to lots of students, sit down with your partner(s) and share your information. Tell each other what you thought was interesting or surprising. What do you think of the story of the nativity?

**2. XMAS THINGS:** What do you do for Christmas (or other religious celebrations)? Talk with your partner(s) about the following Christmassy things. Do you think any of them have become over-commercialized?

- Presents
- Cards
- Food
- Parties
- Decorations
- Movies, TV and songs
- Santa Claus
- The Christmas message

**3. CHAT:** In pairs / groups, decide which of these topics or words are most interesting and which are most boring.

*Christmas / Pope Benedict XVI / commercialization / pollution / joy / the story of the nativity / the love of God / Xmas shopping / Christmas songs / KFC / Xmas Eve*

Have a chat about the topics you liked. For more conversation, change topics and partners frequently.

**4. WORLD XMAS:** How do you think people around the world celebrate Christmas? In which country would you like to be on Xmas Day? Talk with your partner about your image of what happens at Christmas in these countries:

- Canada
- Australia
- Japan
- Kenya
- Brazil
- Finland
- Egypt
- Israel

**5. CHRISTMAS OPINIONS:** Discuss these opinions with your partner(s). Do you agree with them?

- a. Christmas today is more about shopping than spirituality.
- b. Santa Claus is now more important than Jesus Christ for many people.
- c. The commercialization of Christmas should be made illegal.
- d. Christians are forgetting about what makes them Christian.
- e. The true meaning of Christmas will one day be only in history books.
- f. Christmas is the greatest time of the year.
- g. People who try to make money from Christmas are no good.
- h. Christmas today is a non-stop process of cheap goods and messages.

**6. CHRISTMAS:** Spend one minute writing down all of the different words you associate with Christmas. Share your words with your partner(s) and talk about them. Together, put the words into different categories.

## BEFORE READING / LISTENING

**1. TRUE / FALSE:** Look at the article's headline and guess whether these sentences are true (T) or false (F):

- |                                                                         |       |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| a. The Pope has warned that commercialization is harming Xmas.          | T / F |
| b. The Pope spoke to a group of business leaders at the WTO.            | T / F |
| c. He said Xmas is characterized by medication and toys.                | T / F |
| d. He told Christians to refocus on the story of the nativity.          | T / F |
| e. The Pope said he finds Christmas shopping to be very stressful.      | T / F |
| f. Consumers face a blitz of ads for non-Biblical products.             | T / F |
| g. People drink spirits and get lost at non-Christmassy office parties. | T / F |
| h. Japanese people celebrate Xmas with Kentucky Fried Sushi.            | T / F |

**2. SYNONYM MATCH:** Match the following synonyms from the article:

- |                  |           |
|------------------|-----------|
| a. polluting     | insanity  |
| b. religious     | products  |
| c. unfortunate   | spiritual |
| d. characterized | creates   |
| e. intimate      | dirtied   |
| f. madness       | huge      |
| g. causes        | marked    |
| h. connection    | personal  |
| i. goods         | sad       |
| j. big           | link      |

**3. PHRASE MATCH:** Match the following phrases from the article (sometimes more than one combination is possible):

- |                                             |                                   |
|---------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| a. commercialization is polluting the true, | homes showing the birth of Christ |
| b. his regular Sunday                       | of Christmas shopping             |
| c. the Christmas season suffers             | but intimate                      |
| d. a joy that is not exterior               | with Pope Benedict                |
| e. setting up scenes in their               | Christmas songs                   |
| f. It is easy to agree                      | the population is Christian       |
| g. the madness                              | religious meaning of Christmas    |
| h. companies do their best                  | from...commercial pollution       |
| i. non-Christmassy                          | to sell their non-Biblical goods  |
| j. less than one percent of                 | speech at the Vatican             |

## WHILE READING / LISTENING

**ODD WORD OUT:** Delete the incorrect or least likely word from the groups in *italics*.

### **Pope: Christmas polluted by consumerism**

Pope Benedict XVI has warned that commercialization is *dirtying* / *polluting* / *cleansing* the true, religious meaning of Christmas. He said in his regular Sunday *speech* / *address* / *street* at the Vatican: "It is *fortunate* / *sad* / *unfortunate* that in today's society of consumerism, the *festive* / *Christmas* / *soccer* season suffers from...commercial pollution. This risks [changing] its spiritual authenticity, which is characterized by *meditation* / *medication* / *reflection*...and by a joy that is not exterior but intimate." The Pope told Christians worldwide to celebrate Christmas by setting up scenes in their homes *showing* / *depicting* / *snowing* the birth of Christ.

It is easy to agree with Pope Benedict when we look at the *insanity* / *madness* / *spotlessness* of Christmas shopping and the stress it causes. It is becoming more and more *rare* / *raw* / *unusual* in stores to see any connection between Christmas and the Bible. *Consumers* / *shoppers* / *shippers* must look at thousands of ads as companies do their best to sell their non-Biblical *goods* / *products* / *Bibles*. The true spirit of Christmas seems to be hidden by the special offers, non-Christmassy Christmas *songs* / *carols* / *karaoke* and drunken office parties. The season is even big business in Japan, where less than one percent of the population is Christian. Families there *observe* / *celebrate* / *separate* with special Kentucky Fried Chicken Xmas meals.

## **LISTENING**

Listen and fill in the spaces.

### **Pope: Christmas polluted by consumerism**

Pope Benedict XVI has warned that commercialization is \_\_\_\_\_ the true, religious meaning of Christmas. He said in his regular Sunday speech at the Vatican: "It is \_\_\_\_\_ that in today's society of consumerism, the Christmas season suffers from...commercial pollution. This risks [changing] its \_\_\_\_\_ authenticity, which is characterized by meditation...and by a joy that is not exterior but \_\_\_\_\_." The Pope told Christians worldwide to celebrate Christmas by setting up \_\_\_\_\_ in their homes showing the birth of Christ.

It is easy to \_\_\_\_\_ with Pope Benedict when we look at the madness of Christmas shopping and the stress it causes. It is becoming more and more rare in stores to see any \_\_\_\_\_ between Christmas and the Bible. Consumers must look at thousands of \_\_\_\_\_ as companies do their best to sell their non-Biblical goods. The true spirit of Christmas seems to be \_\_\_\_\_ by the special offers, non-Christmassy Christmas songs and \_\_\_\_\_ office parties. The season is even big business in Japan, where less than one percent of the population is Christian. Families there \_\_\_\_\_ with special Kentucky Fried Chicken Xmas meals.

## **AFTER READING / LISTENING**

**1. WORD SEARCH:** Look in your dictionaries / computer to find collocates, other meanings, information, synonyms ... for the words '**true**' and '**meaning**'.

- Share your findings with your partners.
- Make questions using the words you found.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

**2. ARTICLE QUESTIONS:** Look back at the article and write down some questions you would like to ask the class about the text.

- Share your questions with other classmates / groups.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

**3. ODD WORD OUT:** In pairs / groups, compare your answers to this exercise. Check your answers. Talk about the words from the activity. Were they new, interesting, worth learning...?

**4. VOCABULARY:** Circle any words you do not understand. In groups, pool unknown words and use dictionaries to find their meanings.

**5. STUDENT "XMAS SHOPPING" SURVEY:** In pairs / groups, write down questions about Christmas shopping and the commercialization of Christmas (or other religious festivals and celebrations).

- Ask other classmates your questions and note down their answers.
- Go back to your original partner / group and compare your findings.
- Make mini-presentations to other groups on your findings.

**6. TEST EACH OTHER:** Look at the words below. With your partner, try to recall exactly how these were used in the text:

- |               |           |
|---------------|-----------|
| • warned      | • madness |
| • regular     | • rare    |
| • unfortunate | • ads     |
| • intimate    | • hidden  |
| • joy         | • Japan   |
| • scenes      | • meals   |

## **DISCUSSION**

### STUDENT A's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student B)

- a. Did the headline make you want to read the article?
- b. What do you think of Christmas?
- c. Do you think commercialization is "polluting" other religious celebrations around the world?
- d. Do you think people are forgetting about the true meaning of Christmas?
- e. Do you think followers of other religions take their religious festivals more seriously?
- f. Why do you think presents and parties are becoming more important to many people than the birth of Christ?
- g. What connections can you see with Christmas today and its true meaning?
- h. What do you think the commercialization of Christmas says about Christians?
- i. Do you think there should be laws against Christmas advertising?
- j. Is Christmas a joyful or stressful time for you?

### STUDENT B's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student A)

- a. Did you like reading this article?
- b. What do you think about what you read?
- c. Do you think Santa Claus and not Jesus has become the main character of Christmas?
- d. Do you think the commercialization is only happening in Europe and America?
- e. Do you think we might forget what Christmas is all about?
- f. Do you meditate during Christmas (or any other religious celebration or festival)?
- g. Do you think we should abandon things like cards and presents and focus instead on the nativity scene?
- h. Why do you think Christmas is such huge business in Japan?
- i. Do you like Kentucky Fried Chicken?
- j. Did you like this discussion?

**AFTER DISCUSSION:** Join another partner / group and tell them what you talked about.

- a. What was the most interesting thing you heard?
- b. Was there a question you didn't like?
- c. Was there something you totally disagreed with?
- d. What did you like talking about?
- e. Which was the most difficult question?



## **SPEAKING**

**BASIC XMAS:** You are an executive on the “Back to Christmas Basics” organization. It is your job to create a plan to make Christmas (or any other religious celebration) more traditional. Discuss and write your ideas on how to do this regarding the things in the left hand column. Write down potential problems and solutions.

THINGS	IDEAS	POTENTIAL PROBLEMS	YOUR SOLUTIONS
Presents			
Cards			
Food			
Parties			
Movies, TV & songs			
Decorations, trees & lights			

- Change partners. Explain your ideas, problems and solutions. Give each other feedback to make your plan better.
- Return to your original partner(s) and compare the feedback you received. Discuss whether it is good or not.
- Role play a meeting between you (the Back to Xmas Basics executive) and someone who loves the commercial side of Xmas and hates your ideas.
- After the role plays, discuss what was said while in your roles. Which parts do you really agree with?

## **HOMEWORK**

**1. VOCABULARY EXTENSION:** Choose several of the words from the text. Use a dictionary or Google's search field (or another search engine) to build up more associations / collocations of each word.

**2. INTERNET:** Search the Internet and find more information on Christmas in Japan. Share your findings with your class in the next lesson. Did you all find out similar things?

**3. CONSUMERISM:** Make a poster explaining how consumerism and our "buy, buy, buy" lifestyles are changing our culture. Will the whole world be a giant store one day? Show your posters to your classmates in your next lesson. Did you all think of similar things?

**4. MY CELEBRATION:** Write an essay about the meaning of Christmas (or any other religious celebration) to you. Explain your feelings about the festival being commercialized. Show what you wrote to your classmates in the next lesson. Do they have similar feelings?

## ANSWERS

### TRUE / FALSE:

- a. T      b. F      c. F      d. T      e. F      f. T      g. F      h. F

### SYNONYM MATCH:

- |                  |           |
|------------------|-----------|
| a. polluting     | dirtied   |
| b. religious     | spiritual |
| c. unfortunate   | sad       |
| d. characterized | marked    |
| e. intimate      | personal  |
| f. madness       | insanity  |
| g. causes        | creates   |
| h. connection    | link      |
| i. goods         | products  |
| j. big           | huge      |

### PHRASE MATCH:

- |                                             |                                   |
|---------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| a. commercialization is polluting the true, | religious meaning of Christmas    |
| b. his regular Sunday                       | speech at the Vatican             |
| c. the Christmas season suffers             | from...commercial pollution       |
| d. a joy that is not exterior               | but intimate                      |
| e. setting up scenes in their               | homes showing the birth of Christ |
| f. It is easy to agree                      | with Pope Benedict                |
| g. the madness                              | of Christmas shopping             |
| h. companies do their best                  | to sell their non-Biblical goods  |
| i. non-Christmassy                          | Christmas songs                   |
| j. less than one percent of                 | the population is Christian       |

### ODD WORD OUT:

#### Pope: Christmas polluted by consumerism

Pope Benedict XVI has warned that commercialization is *dirtying* / *polluting* / ~~*cleansing*~~ the true, religious meaning of Christmas. He said in his regular Sunday *speech* / *address* / ~~*street*~~ at the Vatican: "It is ~~*fortunate*~~ / *sad* / *unfortunate* that in today's society of consumerism, the *festive* / *Christmas* / ~~*soocer*~~ season suffers from...commercial pollution. This risks [changing] its spiritual authenticity, which is characterized by *meditation* / ~~*medication*~~ / *reflection*...and by a joy that is not exterior but intimate." The Pope told Christians worldwide to celebrate Christmas by setting up scenes in their homes *showing* / *depicting* / ~~*snowing*~~ the birth of Christ.

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