

Often no religion in holiday

I stepped up to the post office counter and asked for a sheet of stamps. "Do you want Christmas stamps?" the clerk asked. "Religious or non-religious?" she added. I was taken aback. Would a Christian clergyman purchase non-religious stamps at Christmas? Would they portray Santa or a Walt Disney Christmas? Who knows. I asked for the religious ones.

It was an incident which set me thinking for several days. How many of the customs of this season are non-religious? The longer I think about this question, the more I believe that the majority of our Christmas customs are non-religious.

Christmas manger scenes on the city hall lawn are a form of non-religious practice. Gift buying, Santa, Christmas trees, city decorations are all part of the non-religious holiday.

WE MIGHT assume that going to church Christmas eve is a religious observance. Yet some people who normally attend church say that they don't like to attend that evening because they find themselves in the midst of a crowd of strangers.

I pondered the question. What makes the difference between a religious and a non-religious holiday? There could be many ways to answer this question.

Two lines from a Gerald Manley Hopkins poem come to mind. "The world is charged with the grandeur of God. It will flame out, like shining from shook foil."

I believe a religious observance happens through the eye of the beholder. No quantity of manger scenes, or singing of carols makes a holiday holy. When a custom helps us to see "the grandeur of God", we may call its observance religious.



moral
perspectives
**Rev. David
Strong**

ANYTHING can trigger a sense of this holy grandeur in life. I read a column which described the author's attempts to save a small cedar waxwing bird which had been stunned by striking her window.

The experience, well writ, gave me a sense of the preciousness of life. More, it reminded me of the grandeur of God's creation.

My hunch is that the most outwardly religious holidays may be the most non-religious in actual meaning. I am reminded of the minister who prayed long, complicated and beautiful prayers. Yet he sounded like he was talking about God, rather than to God.

Likewise, religious holidays can be about practicing the religious holiday, rather than seeing "the grandeur of God." We can all gather together and be glad in the holiday, and not bother with God.

The test might be whether we really pray to God at mealtimes. The test might be whether any gratitude to God is aroused. The test might be whether we spend private moments in meditation with God.

I have nothing against non-religious people or non-religious "religious holiday". Yet it is best that we now what we are doing when we celebrate these occasions.

What makes for long lives?

Dear Jo:

Are their specific characteristics shared by long-lived people?

Dr. Arthur Schwartz, assistant professor of family medicine at USC, interviewed all the centenarians in the Los Angeles area to answer a question such as this. He was curious to know what their living habits were and how they differed from the population in general.

He found that they lived a balanced and moderate life, were even-tempered and had a tendency not to worry. They had a life-pattern of eating, drinking and exercising in moderation. Most seemed to have many friends and few enemies.

Other research on this subject discloses that long-lived persons' diet is usually below the caloric intake of the average North American diet and contains little animal fat. Most seem to have happy or at least content marriages and an interest in sex has been maintained throughout life.

Lastly, most persons who live long and healthy lives have parents who did likewise.

Dear Jo:

My wife and I have made arrangements



gerontology
**A. Jolayne
Farrell**

for our two granddaughters to visit us for the week following Christmas. It will be their first visit with us without our son and his wife. Now my wife, the mother of five grown children, is having second thoughts about their visit.

She is afraid something will happen to them while they are here, and she is becoming a nervous wreck. She says if one of them gets sick she wouldn't even know when to call the doctor.

Jo, she reads your column, please give her a few words of encouragement. I know, once the girls are here everything will be fine.

Dear Donna:

I can understand your apprehension

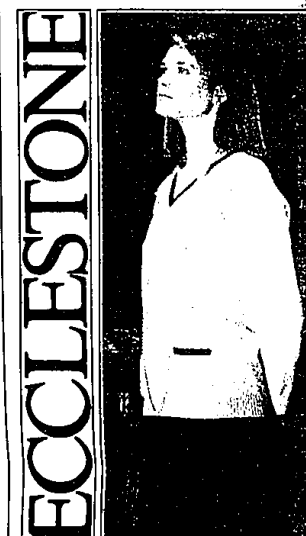
about a "first time alone" visit with your granddaughters. As the mother of five children, you really know that you will have no problem adjusting to their visit and will enjoy their stay. Perhaps you are just a little "rusty" when it comes to the parenting of younger children.

Trust your intuition. If they become sick, you'll know it. Since you're concerned about when to call the doctor, the worst-case symptoms that require medical attention are:

• prolonged flatulence, extensive vomiting, persistent diarrhea, severe coughing, rapid breathing or any other type of respiratory distress, widespread rash, high fever (over 101°F).

Doctors are very receptive and open to concerns of grandparents. One of the nice things about being a grandparent is that you have the parents of the girls who will be available if one of them becomes ill — they are as close as your telephone for advice and support. So, please relax and enjoy the girls — they grow up so fast and you don't want to miss this special time in their lives.

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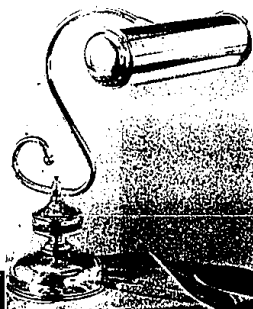
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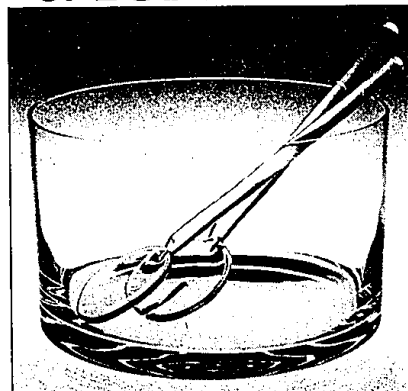


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