

## The Essence of Christmas

Written by Chinyere Ojide

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One of the oldest and touching Bible- related songs one hears repeatedly this time of the year is the popular “Silent Night”. Some said “it is becoming too boring to hear the same tune from childhood to adult hood with same import”. Others believe in its salvation realities and solemnity. Someone teased that the song reminds one of the busiest time of the year when every body gets crazier about business and money, especially the dollar. Sometimes I do wonder aloud what “Silent Night’ has to do with a Chinese Hindu or Arabic Islam or even African drummer when I see these and others who apparently believe in other religious concepts play “Silent Night’ and other Christmas songs on the subways with their donation containers beside their musical instruments. Doesn’t the money cans speak louder than the songs? They seem very artistic perhaps more so than the original composer of Christmas choruses. Crowd always gathers to enjoy their art or should I say their “act’. A friend of mine once said “Oh what they have in common is the ultimate denominator, the dollar...the only constant that erases religious or racial lines in multi ethnic New York. It does not matter what one believes in New York as long as one could squeeze out money from others at a time people are relaxed to spend and enjoy themselves in the name of the Lord.

For as long as I have lived in the US, I have seen less religious piety that has accompanied the celebration of Christmas. Many immigrants who came from societies with high sense of Christmas piety have made same observation. Some lamented that Christmas day in America is just like any other Holy day that affords the restless inhabitants of this great country opportunity to enjoy full day luxurious sleep. The mega marketing and inherent extortion (black Fridays, Christmas sales) in the name of the Lord is outrageous. Wall Mart’s two years ago “Black Friday’ was really dark and fatal for a lowly security guard who had hoped to come back to celebrate Christmas with his family. He never did as he got trampled to death by Christmas shoppers! Perhaps church attendance may rise on the eve of Christmas by one or two percent but business success and socialization would triple their percentages at Christmas time.

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In many places in Africa, church attendance maximizes at Christmas same as business profits and social ceremonies. Many communities have fixed all fund raising meetings at Christmas. In a place like Nigeria for instance, it is a time for mass home return with attendant spiral inflation, uncontrollable road accident, and post Christmas teen pregnancies. The story is not different in other African countries where Christmas has merged with the people's traditions to generate some conventional mix "in the name of the Lord". Whatever pattern Christmas takes in any society, it has fallen completely or partially out of the original context. It is being shaped and reshaped to the tune of values of each society, unfortunately to the exclusion of Christ.