

Spiritual Orphans Lost in the Christmas Cosmos

By: Steve Jones, FEB Canada President

Have you ever heard of the writer Walker Percy? Philip Yancey introduced me to him in one of his books when he commented on the importance of Walker's contribution as a Christian apologist.

After his death, *Time Magazine* (May 1990) wrote: "Name another voice in America writing who is as beguiling and civilized as Walker Percy."

He was a medical doctor and scientific researcher—turned-writer (in his 40s) who wrote philosophical essays and six popular novels, all tackling the bleak and hopeless themes prevalent in the 20th century.

He became a Christian later in life and wrote of hope. The literary establishment wanted to ignore him and his supposedly outdated, quaint views and rally behind the bleak viewpoints of giants like Hemmingway and Steinbeck, but they could never ignore his brilliance—his writing was too compelling.

Percy once wrote of this reality, saying, "The Christian novelist nowadays is like a man who has found a treasure hidden in the attic of an old house, but he is writing for people who have moved out to the suburbs and are bloody sick of the old house and everything in it."

Many in our culture have moved out from those "past" beliefs and rally behind more "progressive" views within the culture-wars of our day.

In my opinion, this has also touched Christmas. Our culture continues to celebrate Christmas, but doesn't necessarily give much thought to its origin. And if you keep your distance from your Saviour long enough, you begin to believe the lies people say about Him.

In one of Walker Percy's essays entitled *Lost in the Cosmos*, he writes about one of his favourite themes: humanity as an orphan lost in the cosmos. He writes:

"... How can you survive in the cosmos about which you know more and more while knowing less and less about yourself—this despite 10,000 self-help books, 100,000 psychotherapists, and 100 million evangelical Christians?"
Modern man resembles a castaway on a deserted island trying to interpret the message found in a bottle, written in an unknown language. Like a prisoner in an isolation cell, straining to hear a code tapped out on the cell wall beside him.

The fact that the Gospel may not be as pronounced or embraced in our society as it used to be doesn't negate the tremendous value of the message: that a baby born in a manger came to save humanity. It's still the only message that brings hope and completely satisfies the hungry hearts of orphaned souls who are looking for peace.

The 17th-century novelist John Donne tells the story of early Spanish sailors who reached South America and sailed into the headwaters of the Amazon River. It was so immense that the sailors thought they were still continuing in the Atlantic Ocean. It never occurred to them to cup some water in their hands and taste that it was fresh water, not salt water. As a result, some sailors died of dehydration.

The scene of men dying of thirst while floating in the world's largest body of fresh water is a fitting metaphor of our own age.

Our family and friends are spiritually starving to death as they hum along to the Christmas music playing at every shopping mall—Christmas carols heralding the Saviour of the world. So close, yet so far.

Learning a New Language

We've got to learn a new language: that's hard work. Several years ago I spent three weeks studying French at the University of Montréal. I was exhausted, and so often I felt like an infant trying to communicate. It was humiliating at times, but it's a joyous experience when you realize you understand more, and are able to respond more effectively.

This Christmas, let's learn to communicate the truths of Christmas in a new way, in a new language—a language that is not so foreign to our friends who often show indifference (or contempt) when they feel like they are one of our "projects" during the Christmas season.

Hymn: "Joy to the World"

(by Isaac Watts, pub. 1719)

1. Joy to the world, the Lord is come! Let earth receive her King; Let every heart prepare Him room, And heav'n and nature sing, And heav'n and nature sing, And heav'n, and heav'n, and nature sing.

2. Joy to the earth, the Savior reigns! Let men their songs employ; While fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains Repeat the sounding joy, Repeat the sounding joy, Repeat, repeat, the sounding joy.

3. No more let sins and sorrows grow, Nor thorns infest the ground; He comes to make His blessings flow Far as the curse is found, Far as the curse is found, Far as, far as, the curse is found.

2. He rules the world with truth and grace, And makes the nations prove The glories of His righteousness, And wonders of His love, And wonders of His love, And wonders, wonders, of His love.