

Junkanoo Carnival—Pain or Opportunity

By Barrington H. Brennen, May 7, 2015

Dear readers, these are views (so far) on the Christian's response to Junkanoo Carnival, The Bahamas.

Note carefully this article is a very long and you would need to read right to the end to get my full views (at least for now). In essence, Christians, don't go to Carnival. But . . . continue reading.)

There were many who have been praying that it rains, and rains heavily to prevent Junkanoo Carnival. That truth is that will not stop it. Carnival will go on, even in the rain. That might make it even more exciting for many. In an article in the Nassau Guardian for May 7, 2015 entitled "*Carnival will go on 'rain or shine,'*" the author," Krystel Rolle-Brown quotes a Carnival organizer saying:

"Rain or shine, it's going to happen . . . There is nothing we can do about that. Some of the best concerts were enjoyed in the rain. What I suggest you do is bring a pancho when you come, or wear a bikini and bring a towel."

I want to share right up front my limited knowledge of the Adventist Church and Carnival (This might be the same with most protestant churches). I have relatives or friends who live in Brazil, Trinidad, St Maarten, and Jamaica. Note carefully that in Brazil, if an Adventist attends Carnival it is grounds to be dropped from membership. That's how serious it is. It is similar in Trinidad. The Adventist Youth Department in Trinidad and Brazil organizes events, camps, etc, at the time of Carnival to divert the young people away from Carnival. Carnival is considered a very serious breach of Adventist Christian conduct and behavior. Based on my observations of the plans for Junkanoo Carnival it will not be any different than in Trinidad except (hopefully) for the topless (nudity) dancing of women in the streets in Brazil and nude body painting in Trinidad.

Carnival is not like Junkanoo (Although I am not celebrating Junkanoo here, I just want to be objective). Junkanoo is tame compared to Carnival. Carnival is known to have an atmosphere of unfettered freedom, lots alcohol, masquerades, semi nudity to nudity, and parties on the streets for long periods at a time. In fact, the use of masks is a natural part of Carnival. Hide

yourself and do what you like. This will be the same in The Bahamas as announced by the organizers. We will see.

On the Junkanoo Carnival website the cost of the costumes range from \$400 to [\\$800](#) which participants must purchase to be a part of certain parades, except the giant concert to be on Fort Charlotte. Click [HERE](#) to see the type of costumes one can purchase. There are 30 different designs or costume groups. All of which reveal lots of body skin in both male and female. Even the names of the costume groups you might find interesting:

1. Bahamas Masquerades
2. Barabbas Carnival Tribe
3. Caribbean Sweat
4. Chickcharney
5. Cirque Fever
6. Colours Festival
7. Eden
8. Empire of Love
9. Enigma
10. Euphoria Madness
11. Explosion
12. Friends of Gus
13. Fun
14. Fusion
15. Indigenous
16. JunkaBrations
17. Junkanoo Carnival Freaks
18. Junkanoo Commandos
19. Karisma
20. Magic
21. Rhythms Bahamas
22. Sidjoyney
23. Spilligate
24. Starz
25. Sting
26. The Eutopians
27. The Grand Bahama Cultural
28. Vibes
29. Vindi Dynasty
30. Xtasy
31. Xtreme

This master concert will run all night. Yah! So have you ear plugs. The festivals and concerts will be going on all day or all night. The cost range from \$15 to \$100. Liquor, beer, rum, will be a big part of Carnival.

According to one source, the costume package contains a bottle liquor and a pack of condoms.

WHEN AND WHERE DID CARNIVAL START?

We all know that in Catholic countries it is most popular. It is a grand festival before lent in January and February. Here is what one author said about Carnival: “Tell the people to engage in revelry debauchery, wine and dance. After which ash Wednesday world wide churches are filled to capacity where, sinners of yesterday can find pardon today, with a little indulgences of course, for salvation tomorrow.” Here is more:

“Where did the word “carnival” come from? Hundreds and hundreds of years ago, the followers of the Catholic religion in Italy started the tradition of holding a wild costume festival right before the first day of Lent. Because Catholics are not supposed to eat meat during Lent, they called their festival, carnevale — which means “to put away the meat.” As time passed, carnivals in Italy became quite famous; and in fact the practice spread to France, Spain, and all the Catholic countries in Europe. Then as the French, Spanish, and Portuguese began to take control of the Americas and other parts of the world, they brought with them their tradition of celebrating carnival.

The dynamic economic and political history of the Caribbean are indeed the ingredients of festival arts as we find them today throughout the African and Caribbean Diaspora. Once Columbus had steered his boat through Caribbean waters, it was only a few hundred years before the slave trade was well established. By the early 19th century, some six million slaves had been brought to the Caribbean. Between 1836 and 1917, indentured workers from Europe, west and central Africa, southern China, and India were brought to the Caribbean as laborers.”

Carnival was introduced to Trinidad around 1785, as the French settlers began to arrive. The tradition caught on quickly, and fancy balls were held where the wealthy planters put on masks, wigs, and beautiful dresses and danced long into the night. The use of masks had special meaning for the slaves, because for many African peoples, masking is

widely used in their rituals for the dead. Obviously banned from the masked balls of the French, the slaves would hold their own little carnivals in their backyards — using their own rituals and folklore, but also imitating their masters' behavior at the masked balls. For African people, carnival became a way to express their power as individuals, as well as their rich cultural traditions. After 1838 (when slavery was abolished), the freed Africans began to host their own carnival celebrations in the streets that grew more and more elaborate, and soon became more popular than the balls.

Today, carnival in Trinidad is like a mirror that reflects the faces the many immigrants who have come to this island nation from Europe, Africa, India, and China. African, Asian, and American Indian influences have been particularly strong.” *Excerpts taken from article entitled “All Ah We . . . Building Bridges Through Culture”*

What about Fat Tuesday? You might find this interesting. Many of us Carnival virgins are totally naïve on the subject. Here is what Wikipedia says:

Fat Tuesday, in English refers to events of the Carnival celebrations, beginning on or after the Christian feasts of the Epiphany (Three King's Day) and culminating on the day before Ash Wednesday. Mardi Gras is French for "Fat Tuesday", reflecting the practice of the last night of eating richer, fatty foods before the ritual fasting of the Lenten season.

TEACH PERSONAL CENSORSHIP

Junkanoo Carnival is here now so what are we to do as Christians? I know many Christians would like to march against Carnival. Or many would like to ban it. Yes, I am truly disappointed Carnival is here because of its potential damage to our social fabric. If Carnival remains and become imbedded in our culture, what should the church do? Should we protest?

I have written a few articles on censorship regarding another topic but its principles are the same. The discussion about banning not banning Junkanoo Carnival is really about censorship. Here is an important principle. The church is to teach personal censorship and not national censorship. What do I mean by that? While I believe we can and have our views and concerns about Carnival we must keep in mind that personal choice, freedom to choose, it what matters most and what facilitates the spread of Christianity

at its best. I also think that the Christian church is too often trying to “coerce” the citizens to follow its practices. This should not be so. This also is the tension we have Christianity and its role in the world. Read on.

Several years ago I wrote an article on [censorship](#). It was a response to pornography, etc.. However, you can easily apply the principles to Carnival. Here are some excerpts from my articles:

“The challenge I have is when individuals pressure the Church or an association of churches to force the government to require all citizens to have the same values and practices. While some may not want to put pornography (*and Carnival*) in this category, I cannot but logically admit that although porn (*Carnival*) can be considered evil, government cannot legislate moral and individual values. These are personal decisions.”

“The role of the church is to expose the Gospel and not to impose the Gospel. . . This is the gospel that impacts every-day living—the mental, spiritual, physical, and social. This is the gospel that motivates not just extrinsic behavior but also intrinsic values that transcend the immoral and social pressures in society. This is the gospel that teaches how to recognize the stupidity of immorality so that the learners can apply it to their lives. This gospel does not teach arrogance and pride where its followers believe that their righteous behavior automatically gives them brownie points for the kingdom.”

“What then should be the church’s approach when it comes to what it calls moral issues in society—pornography, gambling, legalizing of marijuana, nude clubs, etc? It is my view that the church must first make sure its members are practicing pure Biblical living standards and that they are living that way simply because it is a result of a loving relationship with Jesus, and nothing more. The wise Christian knows, that in this sinful world, the bottom line is that Jesus saves and not the absence of pornography or gambling in one’s life. In addition, the wise Christian knows that Jesus, through the power of the Holy Spirit, gives the power to avoid pornography, gambling, etc. Good church leaders do not simply tell their congregants that pornography or gambling is wrong, but teach them how to know for themselves the dangers or risk factors. When Jesus says do not do something there is usually a real

practical reason behind it. Hence members are better equipped to withstand the onslaught of immorality in society.”

“The only role of the church as an organization is to ensure fair play and religious liberty for all. The Christian Church is to ensure that all faiths/religions, including those that are non-Christian, have the freedom to grow, and proclaim their teachings without fear, intimidation, or ridicule. No government should make laws to prevent that. Should it be the same with pornography and gambling? Or at least shouldn't the government allow the people to speak on these matters? It is my view, and mine alone, that the church should have a loud voice on moral issues or immoral living but first through the loud “voices” of the holy lifestyles of their followers and not through forced legislation. The church wants to ban *Carnival*, gambling and pornography, but some of the pastors are known to have extra marital affairs, abuse women and children, and are disingenuous with money. What hypocrisy! Maybe that's our problem in the society. Far too many Christians are duplicitous and the world knows that they are.”

While I wish and many of you wish that there will be no Carnival I restate what I did in the Nassau Guardian in 2004 “ I prefer personal censorship any day than legislative censorship. We do have a limited kind of legislative censorship already through our national film board for movies shown in our theaters. That is good. But we need to move forward with caution. Christians, stand up with your godly lifestyle. Its effects will last through eternity. Its practices will transcend illicit, immoral, and illegal behavior.”

Dear readers, these are certainly signs that the end is near. The Adventist Christian is to live a Godly life. The Adventist Christian is to influence others around him/her by Christ-like, loving, kind, behavior. “This shall all people know that you are my disciples if we love one another.” In 2014 I wrote something quite provocative for some readers regarding religious freedom. It is "When the church insists that the country have laws that express “Christian values” it might be barking up the wrong tree. While many national laws are similar to Biblical principles, Biblical laws are not by default national mandates.”

I would be ashamed if any Adventist is seen participating in Junkanoo Carnival. If this festival continues as an annual tradition, the Adventist

Church might have to do like Brazil and Trinidad by having activities during the time of Junkanoo Carnival to attract our young people, and older ones to. These are certainly the last days. While I am “against” Carnival, this might be an opportunity to propel us to be more creative by providing meaningful, practical activities for your youth. We must think out of the box. Do not focus on “getting rid of Carnival” we might embarrassingly lose that battle. Instead, focus on building Godly lives.

“Adventist Christians, stand up with your godly lifestyle. Its effect will last throughout eternity. Its practices will transcend illicit, immoral, and illegal behavior.” Expose the gospel but do not impose it. “Let’s make the gospel attractive by our lifestyle and the Junkanoo Carnival less attractive by our Godly attitude.”