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December 30, 2014: The Radical Religious Message of A Charlie Brown Christmas

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Title: The Radical Religious Message of A Charlie Brown Christmas

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12/30/2014—I did not see A Charlie Brown Christmas this year, though I read that it did air on ABC uncut on December 16. The radical message of this classic Christmas story is simply that it properly sets its feel-good story of the little Christmas tree against the background of the Gospel message—Linus quotes the second chapter of the Gospel of Luke, verses 8 through 14 from the King James Bible, in which angels from heaven tell a group of shepherds of the birth of the baby Jesus, and instruct them as to where they can "find the babe" who is the savior. It is safe to say that today, although the story of the miserable little tree that only needed a little love versus the commercialization and gift-giving frenzy of Christmas, might still be able to find a national audience, the link to the Gospel would never be permissible. The show still airs because in 1965, when it was made, the link could still be made. And the show is too beloved for the networks to pass up. The triumph of love and giving is a theme in a lot of Christmas programs. But the actual Christmas message itself cannot be told today to a mass audience. Nor could it seriously be suggested today that all the kids in the neighborhood celebrate your basic Protestant Christmas—Linus is reading from the King James Bible. It's not true anymore—and was not true in 1965. And what is the link? On the simplest level, the Christ child is this Christmas tree, rejected by society as poor and marginal, but seen in a different way, a true symbol of love. The truth of the universe is here, at the margins and with the rejected ones. Charlie Brown is the Christian seeker, whose doubts and failures are used by God to bring the world closer to Christ. I urge everyone to see it and show it to their children, whatever their orientation. The best part of the show is the lightness with which all of this is done. For on the one hand, A Charlie Brown Christmas is too religious for a mass audience today. But on the other hand, it is way too secular for a Christian audience. It makes its religious points with real restraint.