

Keyword: global-warming

Headline: Can gift-giving harm the planet?

Byline: Rodel D. Lasco

Published Date: 04:03 AM December 24, 2019

Section: opinion

Word Count: 609

Content:

Christmas is understandably the most celebrated holiday in the country. Part of the festivities is the traditional gift-giving that everyone looks forward to. However, we should realize that the kind of gifts we give could have negative impacts on the sustainability of our planet.

In countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States, waste volume spikes by about 25-30 percent during the holiday season, driven by massive amounts of consumption including gift-giving. The Philippines may not be far behind, if not more so, as our Christmas season is much longer.

Consider how gifts impact the environment. Their production, transport and marketing utilize materials and energy that affect raw material extraction and greenhouse gas emissions, among others. Packaging material used to wrap them consume enormous amounts of paper and other materials, which contributes to increases in solid waste production. Finally, disposing of gifts (especially those that are short-lived or unwanted) exacerbates the garbage problem.

Not a few of us are aware of the above, yet it seems profligacy continues to reign every Christmas, notably when it comes to gift-giving. Part of the reason may be explained by "the gift theory" first postulated by Mauss in 2002 and further developed by Osteen. For example, in a study conducted in Wollongong, Australia, Farbotko and Head (2013) observed that "green" consumers are not necessarily green gift-givers. They attributed this behavior to gift theory, which hypothesizes that gifts are not just commodities one buys and gives, they are also given to affirm social relations. As such, the chief concern of the giver is to satisfy the recipient (and thus enrich social relations), while environmental considerations take a back seat. In our country, gift-giving is rooted in our Christian tradition and culture, inspired by the gifts that the Wise Men offered to the Lord Jesus.

What the above implies, among other reasons, is that we have to consciously strive to overcome our innate apathy to factor in the environmental effects of the gifts we give. Without such commitment, it is easy to be carried away by emotions and easy sentiment.

Can we really give gifts that are more environmentally friendly while affirming the value of our social relations? I believe we can. Here are some of the ways we can reduce holiday waste, as adapted from the Stanford University recommendations. First, economize in the use of wrapping paper, which is often used once and then discarded, contributing to solid waste volume. Try using reusable containers or bags, or better still avoid using such items at all. Second, choose gifts that are really useful and long-lasting. Avoid faddish gifts that quickly find their way into the trash bin. Third, select gifts that contribute to lowering one's ecological footprint, such as refillable water bottles and those made of recycled products. Fourth, give gifts that have much less environmental impact, such as tickets to a concert or a theme park, gift certificates or magazine subscriptions. Lastly, we can give unwanted gifts to others who may need such items.

While we celebrate the coming of the Savior and rejoice with our loved ones, we must remember that the state of our environment also demands continued vigilance. Instead of dreaming of a white Christmas, we are better off pursuing a green one.

* * *

Rodel D. Lasco is a member of the National Academy of Science and Technology (NAST) of the Philippines. He is the executive director of The OML Center, a foundation devoted to discovering climate change adaptation solutions (<https://www.omlopezcenter.org/>)

Subscribe to our daily newsletter

By providing an email address. I agree to the Terms of Use and acknowledge that I have read the Privacy Policy.