

A War on Christmas

A Discussion

By

Lauren N. Nile

Among the more interesting issues that caught my attention this past year is actually one that received quite a bit of media attention this current holiday season. It's the issue of whether a war has been declared on Christmas. It seems that there are millions of Americans who are of the opinion that because many of us have over the past several years begun to wish others, "Happy Holidays" instead of "Merry Christmas", that a war has been declared on Christmas.

In attempting to look at this phenomenon from the perspective of those who believe that there **is** a war on Christmas, I see that perhaps they experience American culture as having declared a war on most things they hold as holy. For example, there is a growing pervasiveness of pornography in our society, the popularity of television shows that for our amusement, portray children disrespecting their parents. There is the senseless sex and violence of many movies, as well as just the overall decrease of manners, politeness and civility in our culture. We see that lack of civility in everything from the way we drive, to the way four-letter words seem to have just somehow become acceptable in popular culture.

Because our culture really **does** seem to be succumbing to greater and greater vulgarity, it just may be that for many, the perceived war on Christmas is simply an extension of their feelings about what is happening in our society-at-large. In other words, they **may** feel that there is a war.....on goodness. Well, in view of all of the ways in which our culture has **indeed** become less civil, and some would say more secular less spiritual, and yes, less good, I suppose that it was just inevitable that a certain segment of our society would experience the move from "Merry Christmas to "Happy Holidays", as yet another secularization of the culture, accompanied by a host of unholy consequences.

I myself am as sickened as I believe anyone **can** be by all of the ways in which our culture has become increasingly less civil, increasingly vulgar, increasingly vile. From print, television, large screen and internet pornography, to the senseless sex and violence that pervades Hollywood's "action" films, I, not unlike millions of other Americans, am **disgusted** by those and the many other forms of profanity which have become mainstream in American society.

That being said, however, I think it vitally important to clearly distinguish between increasing utter incivility on the one hand and the attempt to become a more conscious, a more polite society on the other. After all, it is only polite to wish someone, "Happy Holidays" instead of "Merry Christmas" when we don't **know** if the person to whom we are speaking celebrates Christmas or some other holiday. Now of course we know that since the vast majority of Americans identify as Christians, and thus presumably **celebrate** Christmas, the chances are quite good that most people whom we may greet with "Merry Christmas" do indeed **celebrate** Christmas.

But while that may be **true**, it isn't the **point**. The **point** is that while they are a minority, there are nonetheless **millions** of Americans who do not celebrate Christmas, **usually**, although not always, because they are of another faith and it's simply considerate, it's just good manners for those of us who **do** celebrate Christmas, to not assume that **everyone** does.

There is a scene that's been playing in my head around this issue that demonstrates the kind of feeling that I wish we had for each other as human beings. In it, one person, making eye contact with another in an elevator, with all good intention, wishes the other person, "Merry Christmas". The response of the person who's just been greeted is, "Thank you. I actually celebrate a different holiday, but Merry Christmas to you and your family." I don't know why that scene is playing in my head but I **do** like it. I like it, I think, because in it, two very valuable things happen: The responder exercises an exemplary level of understanding and compassion and the greeter learns a very valuable lesson.

If we **know** that the person with whom we're speaking **does** celebrate Christmas, then of course, it's absolutely fine to wish the person a merry Christmas. However, in extending "Happy Holiday" wishes to others whose faith we **don't** know, we haven't declared a war on Christmas. We're simply growing up as a society.

As children, many of us had to learn that not all the toys under the Christmas Tree were ours, that we had to share the toys with our sister or brother. That was a lesson that we had to learn as children. Now, as adults, we're learning that we have to share **the holiday season** with our sisters and brothers of other faiths. **That** is a lesson that we have to learn as a mature, compassionate **society**.

We **could** see this as a matter of cultural inclusion and being culturally sensitive, but I prefer to see it as simply a matter of manners, of just being considerate. When we don't know someone's spiritual orientation, in other words, when we don't know whether they celebrate Christmas or Chanukah, Ramadan, Kwanzaa, Diwali, or some other holiday, wish them "Happy Holidays". It's not at all a war on Christmas. It's the thoughtful, the considerate thing to do.

Happy holidays to you and yours!

Lauren N. Nile