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Weary of the War on Christmas Inclusion

**By The Reverend Irene Monroe
BC Editorial Board**

The war on Christmas is right here in my backyard.

The Registry of Motor Vehicles (RMV) in Braintree, MA had to take down their Christmas ornaments when an irate customer complained. The customer stated it was insensitive of RMV, who services people of all religious faiths, to highlight only Christmas.

The governor of Rhode Island, Lincoln Chafee, tried to avoid the controversy he generated last year (calling the state house Christmas tree a 'holiday tree') by having a surprise holiday tree lighting. His office gave just 30 minutes' notice.

Last year, the *Daily Mail* reported, "The governor defended his decision by arguing that it is in keeping with the state's founding in 1636 by religious dissident, Roger Williams, as a haven for tolerance - where government and religion were kept separate."

Is there really a war on Christmas, some ask?

Well, it depends not only on whom you ask, but which type of Conservative Christian you are.

Some see the war on Christmas as an assault on Christianity. They see the elimination of even the mere utterance of the word as gradually being expunged from the holiday public lexicon. It feels to these Christian holiday revelers as if the country, in its effort to be politically correct, is moving toward religious intolerance. For many Christians,

this is one of their high holy holidays, and it's their religious bedrock that not only anchors them in their faith but also shapes and governs them in their view of the world.

The author and Christian apologist, C.S. Lewis, eloquently captured this essence when he wrote in his 1945 essay *Is Theology Poetry?*, "I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else."

The political correctness concerning how, in public, to inclusively greet and speak about this holiday season borders on fanatical. What will this war on words lead to?

In an email exchange about this war of words, a friend from North Carolina wrote, "It's a Xmas tree for me and holiday tree doesn't cut it. This PCness feels like it's over the top. Next will be the word 'Easter'... And what about 'Saint' as in St Patrick Day...a big deal in Boston."

Using political and economic clout to cripple stores for not showing commercial deference solely to Christmas, desecrates the character of our multicultural holiday season. In the 1970s, Evangelical Christians were so outraged by the secularization and commercialism of Christmas that they were protesting to "put Christ back into Christmas." But now they want more commercialism for Christ, thus extolling materialism as piety as we see these churches' radical shift from the pew to the marketplace.

In 2009, the American Family Association boycotted Target for using "Happy Holidays" in its advertising. The Catholic League that year boycotted Walmart, and Bill O'Reilly promoted his "Christmas Under Siege" campaign that polices stores using the phrase "Happy Holidays." William Donahue of the Catholic League told MSNBC's Joe Scarborough that the problem is "secular Jews who hate Christianity in general and Catholicism in particular." Pat Robertson said on his *700 Club* television show that the problem is Muslims.

"Secular progressives are driving this movement," Bill O'Reilly said. "They don't want it as a federal holiday, they don't want any message of spirituality or Judeo-Christian tradition because that stands in the way of gay marriage, legalized drugs, euthanasia, all of the greatest hits on the secular progressive play card. If they can succeed in getting religion out of the public arena..."

Truth be told, Muslims, secular progressives and Jews have never been the folks trying to abolish Christmas. Instead, it was once an extreme group of Protestants -- yes, the Puritans. With the date of Dec. 25 deriving from the Saturnalia, the Roman heathen's wintertime celebration, and with the date found nowhere in the bible stating it as the birthday of Jesus, the Puritan Parliament banned Christmas from 1659 until 1681.

The intolerance of a multicultural theme for this holiday has little to do with a heightened renewal of the birth of Christ by the Christian Right. Instead, it has much to do with a backlash spearheaded by Christian conservatives as the country continues to grow more religiously pluralistic. It's a situation that threatens the centrality of the centuries-long stronghold evangelical Christianity has had on this particularly holiday.

As a Christian, I know that the central message of the birth of Christ is the embrace and celebration of human differences and diversity. And it is with this message that I know all people - religious and non-religious, straight and queer, black and white - can be included to enjoy and to celebrate and to acknowledge this season with one simple greeting.

Happy Holidays!

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