

Editorial: The ‘war on Christmas’ has been won

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The “war on Christmas” seemed quieter, more low key this year.



Marv Knox Maybe that’s because we’ve been distracted by real war and strife across the globe. We’ve seen ISIS-backed genocide of Christians and other religious minorities in Iraq and Syria. We’ve watched terror-perpetrated mass starvation in Africa. We’ve observed refugees streaming across borders. We’ve viewed ongoing acts of violence—from terrorist rampages in Europe, to racial violence and police shootings of innocent victims and ambushes of innocent police across America.

So, declaring an ideological war of words feels inflated. What’s a war over seasonal salutations and the color of coffee cups when hatred inspired by religion and/or race eliminates lives, threatens entire ethnicities and collapses countries?

External challenges

Or maybe a “war on Christmas” struck a false note. The nation’s president-elect won the White House with support from 81 percent of evangelical Christians. He gained that vote by campaigning, in part, to “make” businesses say, “Merry Christmas.”

So, complaining about a theological war of ideas sounds self-indulgent

when your people won the presidency and some of your most prominent preachers are out buying new suits to wear to the inauguration.

On the other hand, maybe a “war on Christmas” took on a muted tone because, as with tangos, it takes two to tussle. Maybe, after all the years of fending off complaints about how they respond to Christmas, people of other faiths and no faith decided, “It’s their holiday; let them celebrate how they want.” This is hard to document, but maybe Americans who could say, “Happy holidays” with conviction but could not intone “Merry Christmas” with integrity just decided to smile and say, “Thanks for shopping.”

So, griping about a verbal war of yuletide yakking finally ended in an armistice of apathy.

Internal struggle

Finally, maybe the “war on Christmas” never was fought in battles with unbelievers. Maybe it signaled a struggle within our own souls. Like the saint who gets skittish around sexual sinners, or the devotee who dreads dealing with a drunk. It’s not because she can’t stand [strumpets](#), or he loathes luses. It’s because they can’t trust themselves. They’re not sure about their own transgressions, so they lash out at others’.

Of course, Christians don’t fear Christmas. But maybe we fear how we fail to fulfill its meaning. Maybe the impulse to counter “Seasons greetings” with “Merry Christmas” wells up from fear we haven’t embraced the spirit of the season with selfless abandon. Maybe we’ve been afraid we—even we—have not celebrated Christmas as befits the birth of our Savior.

This is understandable, since U.S. Christians aren’t much different from the prevailing culture. We’re just as materialistic and often as shallow. So, we can subsume ourselves in buying and giving gifts, decorating houses and lawns, taking time off from work and spending time with family—all of which are fine, but not the point of Christmas. Maybe we resist overt

secularization of Christmas because we're scared that's how we treat it, too.

Higher stakes

Perhaps Christians sometimes fight the "war" because we make too little of Christmas. We know the story of Jesus' birth is miraculous, splendid and glorious. But why do we celebrate Jesus' birth differently than we celebrate others'? At birthday parties for family and friends, we don't spend all the time talking about the day they were born. We revel in the people they have become.

With Jesus, the stakes are even higher. He is the God/Man who came to Earth "to proclaim good news to the poor ... freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." He compelled us to follow him, to be his "body," to do as he did. When we leave him a baby in a manger, we ignore the deeper—harder, more challenging—story of what Christmas means.

And, ultimately, maybe we have engaged in a superficial "war on Christmas" because we've forgotten the essential truth: Christmas leads to Easter, which means Jesus won the ultimate victory, and all who believe in him, follow him, celebrate him and take up his cause will share in that victory.

No matter if a shopkeeper says, "Seasons greetings."

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