

Do They Know It's Christmas?

“’Tis the season to be jolly.” But, as usual, not for all of us. It is the Christmas season, that time in December when all good Christians celebrate the birth of the

Savior of mankind, born in a stable in Bethlehem 2,000 years ago.

It is a time of family gatherings and gift-giving, of joyous music and fond memories. For some, it is one of the two days of the year, Easter being the other, when they return to the old church for the feast day that yet retains its hold upon them from childhood. Even many nonbelievers celebrate, for Christmas joy is contagious.

But not for all. For some, it is not too much to say they hate the idea of Christmas with a deep abiding hate, not just the “Bah, humbug!” dismissal of old Scrooge. They want Christmas dead.

As usual, they are busy at work, going to court to get Nativity scenes expunged from public squares, demanding that statues of Mary, Joseph, and the infant Jesus be removed from department stores and parades, checking vigilantly to see that any and all caroling at public schools is free of such outrages as “Silent Night.” For such as these, even Santa has become an intolerably divisive figure who must be purged from public life.

And this year again they are meeting with some success, especially with a business community for whom Christmas has always been about sales volume not salvation.

Target stores have told the Salvation Army it may no longer station volunteers with their red kettles at store entrances to solicit charitable contributions for the poor. The 30-year tradition that reaped the Army \$9 million a year has been terminated.

The reason, says Target, unconvincingly, is so the company can have a consistent policy of no solicitations outside its stores. But in recent years the gay lobby has pressured Target to ban the Army because it is Christian and rejects homosexuality as sinful.

Now Macy's has stopped using the phrase “Merry Christmas” in all store advertising, replacing it with what Macy's calls the more inclusive “Seasons Greetings” and “Happy Holidays.”

But how is it “inclusive” to exclude the Christians' greeting? Is that not anti-Christian? Why would the Macy's of the “Miracle on 34th Street” do such a thing? Why would Federated Department Stores, Macy's parent company, impose such a policy?

By Newton's laws of motion, an object moving in a given direction will continue to do so unless an outside force intervenes. What hidden force intervened to cause Macy's to reverse course and suddenly sever its ties to Christmas? Who insisted that Macy's cease to mention Christmas, the holiday around which its selling season is built?

It is hard to believe some Macy's executive took it upon himself to make so offensive a decision as to expunge “Merry Christmas” from the store when so many of Macy's most loyal shoppers were certain to be disheartened and hurt. Who is trying to kill Christmas?

It needs to be said: what we are witnessing here are hate crimes against Christianity, the manifestations, the symptoms of a sickness of the soul, a disease a Vatican diplomat correctly

calls “Christianophobia,” the fear and loathing of all things Christian, coupled with a fanatic will to expunge from the public life of the West all reminders that ours was once a Christian civilization and America once a Christian country.

Americans are among the most tolerant of peoples. No one demands that any dissenting adult or child be made to say the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag, or join in Christmas caroling, or be forced to say a prayer before class, or go to church at Christmas. The Christian majority only asks that they be free to be themselves, to exercise their freedom to express their love of their Savior as the First Amendment has always guaranteed.

But what are we to make of Maplewood, New Jersey, where the Columbus High School brass ensemble was ordered not to play a single Christmas carol at their holiday concert, not even an instrumental version? Parents and students were outraged. “This is censorship at its most basic level,” said student Ryan Dahn. Correct, Ryan.

In Denver, officials of the annual Parade of Lights refused to permit in the parade a float carrying the banner “Merry Christmas” with members of the Faith Bible Chapel congregation who were to sing Christmas carols. Approved was a float sponsored by Two Souls, an American Indian group that considers homosexuality holy.

While Christmas often brings forth the best in some of us because of who and what is being celebrated, that is not true for all of us. For some it brings forth the purest malevolence. Why? Sadly, because they do not know Him. Nevertheless, Merry Christmas—to all. ■

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[yankee come home]

A Time for Leaving

American security and Iraqi stability depend on a prompt handover.

By William R. Polk

FROM CHILDHOOD, we Americans are deluged with slogans. We often select our breakfast food, our soap, and our toothpaste by jingles and catchphrases rather than by reading the labels. So we fall easily into accepting evocative expressions in place of analysis even when it comes to national security. Our parents were sold on the slogan that the First World War was the “war to end all wars,” although the 20th century had more of them than any other in history. We went into Vietnam fearing the “domino effect,” although the struggle there had little relationship to events in any other Asian country. We were rushed into the war in Iraq by the assertion that little, poor, remote Iraq was at the point of attacking mighty America, and now we are bogged down there allegedly by a ragtag faction of Ba’athist diehards.

Seldom do we hear hard-headed analysis of what is happening, what is possible, what the alternatives are, how much each will cost in lives, treasure, prestige, and security. When I was the member of the U.S. State Department’s Policy Planning Council responsible for the Middle East, I had the duty to try to understand the reality in the problems we then faced, to comprehend the forces at work, and to identify what could be done. Now as a private citizen, I ask: what is the reality of Iraq, what do we face there, and what can we do?

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Leaving aside Kurdistan, where roughly a quarter of all Iraqis live, Iraq is a shattered country. Its infrastructure has been pulverized by the “shock and awe” of the American invasion. Few Iraqis today even have clean drinking water or can dispose of their waste. About 7 in 10 adult Iraqis are without employment. Factories are idle, and small shopkeepers have been squeezed out of business. Movement even within cities is difficult and dangerous. And the trend in each of these categories is downward. Iraq’s society has been torn apart, and perhaps as many as 100,000 Iraqis have died. Virtually every Iraqi has a parent, child, spouse, cousin, friend, colleague, or neighbor—or perhaps all of these—among the dead. More than half of the dead were women and children. Putting Iraq’s casualties in comparative American terms would equate to about one million American deaths. Dreadful hatreds have been generated.

Not all hatreds are on the Iraqi side. American soldiers, often not knowing why they are in Iraq but only that they are getting shot at in 50 to 100 attacks each day, are fearful. Against an indistinguishable enemy, who fades into the general population, their fear turns into general hatred. To GIs, the natives are “ragheads,” just as in Vietnam they

were “gooks.” And they may be suicide bombers. Hatred of the enemy appeared in a film made by NBC News inside a mosque in Fallujah showing a Marine shooting a wounded Iraqi. It also appeared in the photographs of the torture of prisoners at the Abu Ghraib prison. Those scenes, in turn, helped to cement the image of the uniformed, indistinguishable foreign troops as the common enemy, whom the Iraqis are beginning to call the “crusaders.”

Such graphic demonstrations of hatred and contempt also, of course, echo far beyond Iraq among the more than one billion Muslims throughout the world. They have tended to corrupt the greatest of America’s national treasures, the nearly universal respect of mankind. As one former senior Army officer Andrew Bacevich said, “My sense is that such an impression has already taken hold in the Arab world.” He is certainly right.

Thus, even when, as in the Fallujah battle, the insurgents were outnumbered at least 20:1, and it was obvious that they could not win against a phalanx of helicopters, gunships, fighter-bombers, tanks, and artillery, they fought to become martyrs for their cause and thus to inspire others to take up their mission. They lost the battle of Fallujah as they will lose every battle. But they have not lost the war. This is the reality with which America must deal.