

Happy Holidayze

I remember when I was young, while my dad was yet alive. Christmas cards were something we did as a family, sending out maybe a dozen to as many as 50 (that was, no doubt, the high-water mark), typically using card assortments purchased at the dime store. (Remember dime stores?) In those days, the emphasis in cards was usually upon "Merry", to send pleasant greetings. You could in those days even find New Year cards as well, although, I think, not so many. If you sent cards that said "Happy Holidays," you meant to include greetings for Christmas, the New Year, and, maybe (should you send them early enough) Thanksgiving. The only other holiday in view (if you lived or conversed among Jewish people) was Hanukkah - an observance among Jews, but quite less significant than Passover or Yom Kippur. No one had ever heard of Eid or Kwanzaa. Businesses would send out cards, or even calendars, saying either outright, "Merry Christmas," or, perhaps, for reasons named above, "Season's Greetings." And everyone, yes, everyone, knew what season it was.

Today, however, I'm afraid "Happy Holidays" mostly means, "Let's party, and spend, without calling it Christmas." Employers are concerned about having a "Christmas" party; we must call it a "Holiday" party. Let's not mention the name of that legal holiday which, for some businesses, generates as much as half a year's income. We now have at least two new not-quite-holidays: Black Friday and Cyber Monday. (And, BTW, however much we don't want to say "Christmas": just a bit earlier in the year, we don't mind saying, and celebrating by name in the workplace, Diwali; I think this is all about being "inclusive".)

Well, when it comes to Christmas, while I don't object to people celebrating whatever it is they themselves celebrate in their homes, their lives, their places of business, I do quite object to the suppression of "Christmas," so called and so acknowledged. The fact is that the holiday of the year having by far the greatest commercial horsepower is, after all, the celebration of the birth of the Savior, God in the flesh, God-with-us. And why such a celebration, continuing for centuries? Who is this, Whose birthday we celebrate? The God of the universe, Who made everything ever there is, or was, or will be, knew that we are a lost people, in childish rebellion against Him. He therefore provided a substitute in the person of His own Son, One with Himself, yet come in the flesh for the very purpose of dying for us. His birth was how He came among us to begin the earthly process of this great work. THAT's how the celebration became so durable, with giving of gifts as a pale commemoration of His amazing, beyond-words gift.

That's uncomfortable truth to many. We, as kids, often think of "Christmas" as that day we get stuff. Not surprising, because we do get stuff - sometimes the best stuff we'll see all year. And suppose we then go off to a church where we are vaguely taught about a God Who is way-up-there and out of our daily experience, with a sweetness-and-light kind of connotation. Or, perhaps, to a slightly different kind of church where we have some kind of candle-lighting, religious-devotional presentation of a baby and His mother with glowing halos (what happened to Joseph?). If that's what's presented to us, we may see such services as a mere parenthesis, delaying our enrapturement with opening packages full of stuff. And "stuff" satisfies, somewhat, for a time. If we have good times with loving family and friends, perhaps we discover that that can be better than "stuff". But you can't have it on demand, and (if you have \$\$\$) you can get "stuff". For some more, for some less, this attitude can follow us into adulthood. In commerce, it often becomes institutionalized.

Now, what to do with uncomfortable truth? Well, in my experience, truth becomes less uncomfortable when one considers that what is true is that with which we must live. Denying it just puts us in a position of relying upon false premises, which usually, over time, winds up amplifying, not mitigating, discomfort. I wouldn't by any means abolish giving of gifts, but I would advocate perspective and priorities. If it is His birthday (yes, we may not have the exact date correct, but we do have an agreed-upon date, worldwide), let's first acknowledge Him and His purpose in coming and give Him honor. Then, what giving or partying we do, let that come in true celebration of this wonderful thing He has done for us. O come, let us adore Him: Christ the Lord!



So, *Merry Christmas!* And many more!