

Question: How should Christians react to efforts to take Christ out of Christmas and eliminate nativity scenes and other public references to him?

While Jesus is always happy that people think and talk about him at any time of the year, I don't think he is surprised that there are people who would eliminate public references to him. He told his disciples, "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first" (John 15:18; cf. 1 Corinthians 1:20-25). Neither should we be surprised that some people find the stories of Jesus offensive and try to stop his influence upon our world. People who are not of the Kingdom of God should not be expected to think and behave as if they were of his Kingdom. The transforming power of God's Holy Spirit has been given only to those who have submitted to the reign of God in their hearts. Understanding this, we need to learn from the way Jesus handled opposition.

Many attempt to deal with opposition to Jesus Christ, especially during the Christmas season, by grumbling, writing letters to the editor, engaging in public protests and perhaps by enacting laws to protect and promote Christianity. However, when Jesus faced death on a cross, he said: "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place" (John 18:36). This suggests that the methods that may be appropriate for the kingdoms of this world are not the methods of the Kingdom of God. As the apostle Paul said: "For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world" (2 Corinthians 10:3-4).

About the only thing accomplished by insisting on the right to place Christmas signs and nativity scenes on the court square and other public places is to create resentment and a negative image of what it means to be followers of Jesus. The responsibility to proclaim the name of Christ belongs to his followers and not to the general public. Every Christian who is concerned about having a nativity scene displayed should place one in his own front yard. This might eliminate the need for one on the public square. After all, Jesus never asked that we celebrate his birth with any of these things.

Instead of attempting to force himself upon others, Jesus chose to teach, persuade, serve, heal, love and die for them. If we truly desire to honor his coming into our world, we should stop complaining and begin acting as he did. Why not visit with and minister to those who are elderly and live alone at home or in special nursing facilities? Instead of spending money on Christmas cards only for our friends, why not write letters of love and hope to soldiers on foreign battle fields or people in prisons and jails? Instead of giving your children a lot of gifts you can't afford and they do not need, why not spend time with them? Tell them the story of the birth of Jesus and why he came into this world! Why not invite someone who lives alone to come share Christmas with you and your family. Even if someone does not wish us Merry Christmas, we can still love them and give them our Christmas greetings. The Bible shows that Jesus was far more concerned about things like this than about using the right words and nativity scenes on the courthouse square. Above all, Jesus wants us to be a loving, patient and kind people. He said, "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:35).

I pray that all of my readers have a joyful Christmas with family and friends this year. Thanks for your many expressions of appreciation for this weekly column.

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