

Christians and non-Christians can celebrate Christmas

By Dely Farrace

Political correctness over Christmas began to evolve in the last half century, subtly at first, but so much more fiercely over the last decade.

In fact, Christmas is now actively being challenged. With an ever-diversifying population, it's no wonder Canada's holidays are being challenged. But is it right to do so?

Canada became a nation by the unified front of Loyalists and Native Aboriginal peoples. Celebrated holidays were based on Christianity. Canadians have been celebrating Christmas since colonial times, bringing these traditions with them from Europe. For decades, the word 'Christmas' has been interchanged with 'Holidays' or 'Holiday Season' to somehow include non-Christians. Is it politically correct to call Christmas something else?

Over the last two millennia, Christmas has become a very special holiday, albeit emerging from a rather more sordid seasonal celebration centuries before Christ's birth. For devout Christians, the Christmas season emphasizes the religious aspects, advent, the birth of Jesus, the virgin mother, Mary, the feast of the epiphany.

For everyone, including non-Christians who wish to partake in the non-religious customs, Christmas is full of wonder and excitement, especially for children. Santa Claus, a Christmas tree (not a Holiday tree), presents, stockings, songs were all designed to bring joy to children, many of whom, at the time these traditions were developed, lived in abject poverty, with survival to adulthood a mere contingency. Instead of foolishly arguing over cultural differences, why not concentrate on the 29 per cent of our children today living in poverty in such an affluent society?

Although pernicious notions do exist in the origins of Christmas, they exist in the origins of many things. But removing the hedonistic and vile parts of these customs has created a more civil society. Is that not the way of evolution? We simply have become better human beings, taking the good out of old ideas, and removing nefarious practices. Christ is not an evil thing. Who can condemn a man who was a prophet at the very least and the son of God to many?

Newcomers to Canada should be encouraged to educate themselves in and embrace these cherished traditions that Canadians have so enjoyed and shared for centuries. We come together as a people - all people, Christians and non-Christians - most during this special season of Christmas. Christmas is a time to share joy, give from the heart, spread love and good cheer to all. If we allow ourselves to become immersed in the joys, traditions and literature like *The Gift of the Magi* by O. Henry and *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens, we open up our hearts to receive the gifts of love, altruism and peace.

Instead of actively rejecting the most beautiful and peace-promoting holiday of the year, why not embrace it? If the gift of peace is allowed to permeate our hearts, the world around us could become a more hopeful and inspiring place. As Agnes M. Pharo wrote, 'What is Christmas? It is tenderness for the past, courage for the present, hope for the future.'

The path to peace is not one of war. Those of us in power can promote peace by extending true assistance, not benevolence, to those in need. Everyone can promote peace by replacing resentment with a positive attitude, anger with an open heart, and rejection with a warm embrace.

May all Canadians have a Merry Christmas!

