

## Holiday greetings

To the Editor,

How do you know that it is beginning to look a lot like Christmas? Is it the snow? Is it the cold weather? Is it the Christmas music playing in the stores? Well for me, I know that the season of compassion and giving is upon us when I start to see Facebook posts that show the rear window of someone's car with the phrases 'Seasons Greetings' and 'Happy Holidays' crossed out and they are replaced by: 'Welcome to CANADA: MERRY CHRISTMAS'. Another Facebook post that I often see this time of year has an arrow pointing to the profile picture and it says: 'This person does not say Happy Holidays they say Merry Christmas so get over it'. I don't know about you, but the feelings that these statements invoke certainly cannot be described as the 'Christmas spirit'. I believe that these e-posts are designed to create a climate of fear and distrust of non-Christians, and are meant to provoke a militant Christian attitude that is based not on acceptance, love, compassion or understanding, but ethnocentrism, anger, and loathing for all those nameless people who are offended by the term 'Merry Christmas'.

Another recent example of this militant Christian mentality was espoused by Rev. Robert J Sprague in his letter to the editor entitled 'Christians taking up the cross' when he says, 'No longer are we (Christians) willing to put up with secular phrases such as Seasons Greetings or Happy Holidays,' and he adds that 'Christians are beginning to rise up and demand that their voice be heard.' Rev. Sprague's article goes on to mention that we need bring God back into our government and schools and although he does not say it he clearly implies that that this would make things 'better.' When I hear that Christians are refusing to use secular greetings I do not see this as a good thing, I see this as a regression back to a more intolerant time where if you were not with us you were against us and if you don't conform you better watch out. I fail to see how not respecting others rights to celebrate the holidays in whatever fashion they choose by assuming that all people are Christian is a step in the right direction? Secular greetings are not meant to be an attack against religion they are meant to reflect the reality that not everyone shares the same religious beliefs. Secular greetings are meant to provide space for all beliefs and it worries me that people are not 'willing to put up with' something that was meant to create acceptance and respect for all people's right to practice whatever religion they desire. We live in a multicultural society and our language should reflect that fact. The father of liberty, John Stuart Mill once said, 'Human kind are greater gainers by suffering each other to live as seems good to themselves, than by compelling each to live as seems good to the rest,' and I think this is as true today as it was then.

The underlying messages put forward by Rev. Sprague and the Christmas e-posts portray a very narrow definition of what it means to be Canadian. They imply that as a Canadian you are supposed to be Christian and as a Christian you are supposed to always be on guard. You are supposed to walk around with a hostile attitude waiting to jump down the throat of the first person who wishes you well in a non-Christian way; this militant attitude also makes people want to say 'Merry Christmas' not in an 'I wish you well' sort of way, but in a smug arrogant 'Welcome to Canada' way. This is not the spirit of Christmas, nor is it the spirit of most world religions or of most people in general.

I would consider these comments and posts fear mongering designed to stir up some of the worst human emotions such as arrogant pride, hatred and intolerance, and I think that the world has enough of these emotions already. Perhaps encouraging 'humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love' might bring about a world where we all can all find a common ground in which to live, love and be loved. We do not need tolerance, no one wants to be 'tolerated,' what we need is acceptance. Simply accepting that although not all people may share your beliefs, they can still be good people.

Wishing a happy holidays to all.

Bill Kilpatrick

L'Amable