*Editorial*

This issue was put together as we moved into a new year (according to the Gregorian calendar, that is). This year, the New Year holiday coincided with the hajj and Eid al-Adha (Day of Sacrifice) celebrations. That such important Muslim celebrations closely followed Hannukah and Christmas was a wonderful reminder of the benefits and importance of interfaith harmony and mutual understanding. Though each holy day has a slightly different focus – Hannukah commemorates the Temple's rededication and the miracle of the burning oil, Christmas celebrates Jesus' (pbuh) birth, and Eid al-Adha commemorates Prophet Ibrahim's (pbuh) obedience to God (swt) by showing his willingness to sacrifice his son Ismail (pbuh) – each event consists of a joyous string of rituals that bring families and congregations together. To borrow a metaphor from mathematics, inside each concentric circle (the faith) there was peace, joy, and family happiness. And since these circles overlapped in time, it was a wonderful chance to share what was going on in one circle with those in the other circles – overlapping concentric circles.

In many places, interfaith groups took advantage of this overlap. But as most people are not involved in interfaith groups, the positive potential of good interfaith relations was cancelled by dissension over seemingly trivial matters: whether to wish people "Merry Christmas," to call the school vacation the "Christmas" or the "winter" holidays, and to call the pine trees erected in public squares "Christmas trees."

A wide-ranging and very public debate over whether a store employee should say "Merry Christmas" to a customer becomes a flashpoint of tension, because a society lives out its traditions in these customary greetings, practices, and terminologies. In addition, the traditions it chooses to honor connect adults to their childhood and their ancestors. These small traditions embody (or at least are thought to embody) an essential identity, values that a society holds dear. So even though for many people Christmas has lost its religious significance, its celebratory aspect remains salient. Although many observant Christians feel offended by this holiday's growing materialism, nevertheless at this time of year, both religious and non-religious people come together and experience a sense of unity and togetherness.

Arguments against celebrating the season as a "Christmas" season continue to hold sway in many North American cities. Proponents of the "winter" break believe that a society must follow this route in order to preserve secularism and promote multi-culturalism. A great many Christians and non-Christians support such measures because they believe it enhances minority participation in the wider society and reduces discrimination. Muslim parents who are upset that their children must sing Christmas songs extolling Jesus (pbuh) actively seek to have these songs removed from the season's school performances and replaced by more neutral songs about snow and winter.

Ensuring minority inclusion and integration are important goals in any multicultural society. However, while such motivations are laudable, from a Muslim perspective I believe that they are misplaced. First, many members of the Christian-majority population resent any tampering with their religious and cultural holiday.[1] This is neither surprising nor unreasonable. Feelings of a loss of identity and cultural invasion only enhance their dislike of minorities. Witness 2006's televison program dedicated to this issue: Fox News host Bill O'Reilly mercilessly attacked Philip Nulman, an advertising and marketing executive who suggested that not saying "Merry Christmas" made good business sense due to its more inclusive message to non-Christian shoppers.[2] O'Reilly commented provocatively: "Maybe the imams who got thrown off the plane shop there. I bet you they wouldn't get handcuffed in Crate & Barrel [a store that he thought had asked its employees not to say 'Merry Christmas'] if they started chanting and stuff."[3]

Calling the Christmas tree a "holiday tree" or "friendship tree" has the opposite effect; it does not necessarily enhance minority integration. And since the resentment is often cast in racist, anti-immigrant, and anti-Muslim terms, it is returned in kind by those toward whom it is directed. This creates a circle of distrust, even though one had hoped to achieve a circle of mutual respect and togetherness.

Second, from the minority's perspective, the naming-game remains purely semantic, for it does not fundamentally alter their orientation toward the holiday. After all, a decorated pine tree placed in a store window is not a "holiday tree" or "friendship tree," for it is only put up during the Christmas season. Moreover, while customs evolve (the Christmas tree itself is a good example of this), most adults know that a decorated pine tree in homes and stores during the last three weeks of December has, until recent attempts at inclusion, always been known as a Christmas tree. So, while the Christmas

tree was introduced into the United States during the late eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century as part of the Christmas celebrations, within a hundred years it may evolve out of this association and into a new multi-cultural "winter" festival. I think that this is not the right outcome, despite the underlying laudable motivations.

This is quite simply because people of other cultures and religions wish to mark and celebrate their own ceremonies first. A Muslim will always prioritize hajj and Eid al-Adha over a non-Muslim celebration. I surmise the same is true for all religiously observant people. To be sure, some syncretistic people in all groups may celebrate everyone's festival, but they are not the norm. Renaming the Christmas tree will not inspire most observant Muslims to put one in their homes during December.

On closer inspection, the liberal model of multiculturalism, while admirable for its attempt to enshrine mutual respect and tolerance, is not the best model. (There is a painful irony in being on a similar wavelength as Christian neoconservatives, who are more likely than liberals to engage in Muslim-bashing.) While much can be questioned about the appropriateness of a pre-modern model of multiculturalism, the Islamic model offers a better template for the modern era. In the liberal model our differences, while given importance and upheld in the private sphere, are often eliminated in the public sphere (where citizens interact), and we are sometimes forced into a single mold. Thus it was in the name of a "single law for all Ontarians" that the provincial Liberal government, with the support of normally pro-multicultural groups, outlawed faith-based arbitration as an alternative dispute resolution system in 2006. Similarly, "ostentatious" religious symbols are banned in French public schools.

Other inconsistencies become apparent when we consider that however it is celebrated (or ignored), December 25 is still a public holiday. So even though we are not celebrating Christmas publicly, we are having a holiday anyway. The logic is something like this: "We must celebrate at this time of year, since it's a public holiday. But we must not call it Christmas so that we can all celebrate it." But maybe non-Christians do not want to take this day off. Perhaps Muslims would prefer a three-week holiday during Ramadan. I remember in the early 1990s that the city of Toronto considered a proposal that Jewish and Muslim employees be allowed to work on December 25 in exchange for time off for their religious celebrations. The proposal was decried as a "threat to the fabric of Canadian society." The Islamic model avoids this by allowing a greater degree of separateness and difference, even in the public sphere. Liberals may decry this as a

throwback to the Ottoman *millet* system: a presumed ghettoization of minorities, about separateness impeding a sense of common civic duty, a lack of commitment to the nation, and the like. But liberal theory has not properly recognized that sometimes a greater degree of separateness actually enhances interaction.

Moreover, seeking a common citizenry imposed by more uniformity in the public sphere has not achieved the desired goal of inclusiveness. Racism, discrimination, and alienation are hallmarks of western liberal-democratic public spaces. While much has been made of the supposed "preaching of hate" in mosques in the West, little attention was paid to the fact that all of the youths arrested in 2006 in Canada and the United Kingdom on terrorism-related charges had been educated in public schools. The very place that was to teach them how to be tolerant members of civic society simply alienated them, thereby making them susceptible to anti-western messages propagated by some Muslims.

Europe and North America are becoming more xenophobic toward Muslims in part because certain segments of their populations fear a cultural invasion and a loss of identity. Witness radio host Dennis Prager's fear that Keith Ellison, the United States' first Muslim congressman, would somehow undermine American civilization by swearing on the Qur'an in a private ceremony after the official swearing-in ceremony.[4] But if the notion was more that each one of us, the multi-nations, could live together in mutual respect and harmony without imposing our ways of life on each other, and through this experience could support a single nation, then I think we would sap a lot of the West's rising anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant sentiment. In addition, this would go a long way toward sapping anti-western rhetoric in Muslim communities and pave the way for more harmonious relations.

The genius of Islamic civilization was to perceive its non-Muslim inhabitants' desire for more distinctiveness and thus allow them a greater degree of freedom. I suspect that adopting this model could alleviate a great deal of interfaith tension. It at least deserves more consideration than it is currently receiving. Let the Christmas tree be a Christmas tree, and let Christian schoolchildren perform a Christmas play. But do not require non-Christian children to participate unless they (or, more precisely, their parents) want to. Let there be also a winter play, a Jewish one about Hannukkah, and a Muslim play about hajj.

All of this issue's articles are closely related to the above themes and to each other. Since *political Islam* is usually singled out as the enemy to be tar-

geted by western civilization, any scholarly work that provides a more nuanced and sophisticated understanding of this phenomenon is especially welcome and timely. Matthew Cleary and Rebecca Glazier's "Contemporary Islamism: Trajectory of a Master Frame" makes just such a contribution via social movement theory's (SMT) concept of master frames. Paradoxically, political Islam, one of the twentieth century's most important social movements, is one of the least studied by social movement theorists. The insights of this body of literature are mostly still awaiting application to political Islam. Given the fecundity and heuristic value of SMT literature, this is a great pity. Cleary and Glazier are part of a small group of scholars bringing SMT's insights to bear on this topic. Here, they analyze the Muslim world's transition from the master frame of nationalism to Islamism during the 1970s and to jihadism during the 1990s (a frame is an "interpretive schema … that guides individuals to interpret a situation or event in a particular way." [p. 4]).

Abdelaziz Berghout's "Toward an Islamic Framework for Worldview Studies: Preliminary Theorization" argues that Muslim scholars need to articulate a coherent and comprehensive Islamic worldview that can contribute to the growing field of worldview studies in the West. In "Liberal Islam: An Analysis," Mumtaz Ali asserts that Islamism will empower Muslims to solve the challenges facing them. From his perspective, Islamism is an attempt to provide an Islamic worldview for the modern age instead of applying liberal Islam's prescriptions, which usually entail reconciling Islamic perspectives with western worldviews.

Our last article, "More Than the Ummah: A Study of Religious and National Identity in the Islamic World," asks if empirical data supports the notion that Muslims are exceptional in their transnational identities. D. Jason Berggren examines data from the 1995-1997 World Values Survey from ten countries, supplemented by data from Zogby International and the Pew Research Center. He suggests that these surveys show that Muslims, like other faith communities, have multiple identities that co-exist. Thus, "Islam is not an exceptional faith in eliminating or mitigating other identities." He concludes that this should caution those who approach Muslims through a "civilizational" paradigm.

This issue's "Forum" section contains two articles. Asma Barlas' thought-provoking keynote address, delivered at the second annual AMSS-Canada conference, was so well received by the audience that we decided to share it with our readers. This is followed by Kaleem Hussain's analysis of the "war on terror." His experience in law school has convinced him that this

"war" is not producing the harmonious world it seeks to; rather, it is destabilizing the world and will have a "catastrophic significance for the overall welfare of humanity on global scale."

Katherine Bullock

### Endnotes

1. John Gibson, *The War on Christmas: How the Liberal Plot to Ban the Sacred Christian Holiday Is Worse Than You Thought* (Sentinel*:* October 2005).
2. http://mediamatters.org/items/200511100014.
3. http://media.www.lpcexpress.org/media/storage/paper1047/news/2006 /12/08/Editorials/If.We.Dont.Say.Merry.Christmas.The.Terrorists.Win-2525632.shtml?sourcedomain=www.lpcexpress.org&MIIHost=media.collegepublisher.com.
4. http://www.townhall.com/columnists/DennisPrager/2006/11/28/america, _not_keith_ellison,_decides_what_book_a_congressman_takes_his_oath_on.

> Erratum: The panel on "The Israeli Lobby and the U.S. Response to the War in Lebanon" reported on in the last issue was "one of the most viewed on C-Span," not CNN.