Guest Column/Debbie Fleischman

Christmas decorations offend non-Christians

At this time of year, the MIT campus is traditionally covered with Christmas decorations, including a massive Christmas tree, wreaths and other ornaments. In addition, all over the campus there are Christmas parties sponsored by the dormitories, the SCC and various departments.

For some, albeit a minority, these decorations and parties are offensive and isolating. Those who believe in the separation of church and state feel that other people must not impose their beliefs in a public place on campus. Of course, people have the right to defend any belief they were nevertheless removed from the picture book like everyone else. They can practice their own beliefs and not be forced to associate this symbol with Christianity.

Remember, all Christians may wear a cross because it is pretty or out of tradition, but one looking at a cross falsely associates this symbol with Christianity. There are those who argue that the Christmas is a purely secular holiday. Yet no other religion but Christianity celebrates Christmas and puts up Christmas trees. The fact that this tree is called a Christmas tree, not a Winter Tree or an American Christmas tree, bespeaks a statement. This tree is put up at the time Christians celebrate the birth of their god, not during June or November. One can choose to ignore the relationship between Christmas decorations and the religion of Christianity but the evidence is overwhelming that such a relationship existed. To those who claim that no one, I would be tempted to ask where are the pagans who follow such customs and why is this the only pagan custom observed?

Non-Christian religious groups in America have traditionally, against their will, been forced to observe, to some degree, the practices and customs of the dominant religion. Non-Christian children are taught the Christmas story in school. Non-Christian parents may observe Christmas with their children, and make Christmas decorations. These are blatant in society, to impose practices of a separation of church and state, as guaranteed by our Constitution.

But Christians, as Pope John XXIII noted, are notoriously insensitive to Jewish people. Perhaps an analogy might help. If a smoker were to enter a completelysmoke-filled dorm, let us say, where all must stay in an uncomfortable environment. And would he consider it a comfortable environment. But a non-smoker would not do so. Moreover, up to a certain point, we would have to participate in Christian holiday celebrations, we might have chosen a different school.

Another is the argument that the Christmas is a purely secular holiday. Yet no other religion but Christianity celebrates Christmas and puts up Christmas trees. The fact that this tree is called a Christmas tree, not a Winter Tree or an American Christmas tree, bespeaks a statement. This tree is put up at the time Christians celebrate the birth of their god, not during June or November. One can choose to ignore the relationship between Christmas decorations and the religion of Christianity but the evidence is overwhelming that such a relationship existed. To those who claim that no one, I would be tempted to ask where are the pagans who follow such customs and why is this the only pagan custom observed?

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