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Why I Say "Merry Christmas": A DEI Perspective

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Why I Say "Merry Christmas": A DEI Perspective

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A few weeks ago, [Dr. Daniele Struppa](#), our [Chapman University](#) President approached me with a cultural protocol question regarding sending holiday cards to his international collaborators overseas. Dr. Struppa who currently serves on the [Board of Trustees](#) of the American University of Sharjah has become professionally and personally acquainted with some members of the Royal family of the United Arab Emirates, some Social Entrepreneurs, Businessmen, Professors, Scholars and others through this academic engagement. Dr. Struppa was wondering whether or not it is appropriate to send a Chapman University Christmas Card during the Holidays even though December is technically not a celebration period in the United Arab Emirates.



Dr. Daniele Struppa and Essraa Nawar

I have known Struppa since 2009, not only as the President of Chapman University but as someone that I had so many conversations with about a variety of topics such as: religion, philosophy, interfaith, international relations, parenting, the University's dedication to the principles of intellectual freedom and freedom of expression and last but not the least [Diversity, Equity and Inclusion \(DEI\)](#).

“The university doesn’t have a policy or a rule on whether certain topics should be discussed,” Daniele Struppa, Nature (2005).

I was always pleased to see him take stand on social issues, make statements supporting victims of any kind, writing effective Op-Eds such as [Don’t blame Islam for radicals like ISIS](#), and even focusing on the figure of **Ibn Rushd (Averroes)** one of my favorite Arab/Islamic scholars and Philosophers from Cordoba who (in the **12th** century) created a bridge between the Greek and Islamic cultures during his [inauguration speech](#) as the President of the University in 2016.

Struppa chose Ibn Rushd (Averroes) because he believes that our thirst for knowledge and our quest for understanding *bring us all together*. In fact, these pursuits are the most powerful instruments we have to *connect us as people, no matter the circumstance*.

My answer to Dr. Struppa at the moment was straight and simple:

"A Chapman Holiday Card will be welcomed and celebrated the same way he would welcome a card from the United Arab Emirates or any other country as they celebrate any of their traditional Holidays. Additionally, UAE is known for its welcoming people who are interested in learning about cultures and people from all over the world."

Since this is the busiest time of the year for most of us: *Professionally and Personally*, a longer email would not have been the way to go. I took Dr. Struppa's consent to share this timely story as an opportunity to start a conversation around Why I say "Merry Christmas"?..



Lighting some candles at the Holy Virgin Mary & St Pishoy Coptic Orthodox Church, Santa Monica, 2021

Multi-Layered Argument

Jesus place in Islamic Theology

I am not a theologian, but I am an Academic Librarian with subject expertise in Religious Studies and a practicing Muslim. I grew up both loving and learning about Jesus from an early age. The Quran places Jesus **among the greatest prophets**, and mentions him with various

titles. Jesus' birth from a virgin mother was a sign of God's greatness. Even his birth was a mercy and a miracle.

God said, "It is easy for Me, and We will make him a sign to the people and a mercy from Us" [Qur'an, 19:21].

Jesus is a central figure in the Qur'an, the Hadith, and other Islamic literature, and plays an important role in Islamic theology. Muslims believe that at the end days Jesus will descend from heaven to bring peace and justice to the earth. The Virgin Mary (called "Maryam" in Arabic) has an [entire chapter](#) in the Qur'an named for her — the only chapter in the Qur'an named for a female figure.

While, Muslims and Christians have differing views about **the Holy Spirit**, Muslims do revere Jesus as an important prophet. Muslims, according to Ibn al-Qayyim, are waiting for the [Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary](#), to come down from heaven and the Mahdi, who would bring justice to the earth (Ibn Qayyim, 1999, p. 286)

Muslims LOVE Jesus

Resources:

Saritoprak, Z. (2014). *Islam's Jesus*. University Press of Florida.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvx0793x>

Khorchide, M., von Stosch, K., & Pare, S. (2019). *The Other Prophet: Jesus in the Qur'an*. Gingko. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvs32t2v>

Honoring Christmas in Muslim Countries

While Islam is the official religion of many of the Countries in Middle East, go to any of these countries during *December/January* and you will find giant Christmas trees, Santas on the streets and Christmas lights all over the place. People are embracing the season, the festivities and the spirit of the world. You can definitely call it commercial, corporate America or even social media. The bottom line, people all over the world have embraced the festivals and have continued to do so for ages. Similarly, I am starting to see countries with a large population of Arab/Muslim immigrants for example adopt so many traditions and even commercial opportunities too, for example: I saw a Ramadan Deal one day in Walmart!!!

Diverse Religious Identities of the Middle East

Diverse in our Faiths. Common in our Humanity. Together in Peace.

While Islam is the most prevalent religion in the contemporary Middle East, the Middle East is still home to many faith traditions and people get to practice their traditions freely and peacefully.

Abrahamic Family House

Did you hear about the Abrahamic Family House in Abu Dhabi? [Abrahamic Family House](#) .. Encompassing a mosque, a church, a synagogue, and a Forum for gathering and dialogue, the Abrahamic Family House welcomes people from all walks of life to exchange knowledge and practice faith..... a groundbreaking project and the first in the middle east..

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI): Avoiding Backlash, Cutbacks and De-funding...

In 2020, Dr. Kevin Ross, the Dean of the Leatherby Libraries charged me with creating a comprehensive [Diversity, Equity and Inclusion \(DEI\)](#) plan for the Libraries. I cautioned Dean Ross that my DEI perspective is: *nontraditional* and we were immediately **aligned**. We recognized that DEI is a core pillar of our thought process and that it is not just a feel-good initiative. Together we won several meaningful DEI [awards](#), [re-imagined](#) DEI work at the library , and we recently were just named a recipient of the inaugural Insight Into Diversity magazine [2024 Library Excellence in Access and Diversity \(LEAD\) Award](#) recognizing outstanding commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI): in **research, technology, accessibility, exhibitions and community outreach**. One of the things we believe had made us unique and successful is that we **authentically advocate and champion everyone**..and we focus on defining Diversity *organically* and *holistically*.

One of the things I think about often when it comes to the [War on Christmas](#) is: What if someone created a *War on Ramadan* and told me during Ramadan "Happy Holidays" instead of the traditional "[Ramadan Kareem](#)" that Muslims like to greet each other with during this holy month?

Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, observed by Muslims worldwide as a month of fasting, prayer, reflection, and community.

Whether you celebrate Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, Vaisakhi or any other festive tradition, I hope this time is filled with love, happiness, and a well-deserved Holiday Season. May we all get to celebrate our special traditions in their own unique and special ways. **The idea is NOT about changing each other but about appreciating one another.**

Unleash the power of being different and at the same time connected to the rest of the world.
#Changethenarrative

Christmas Around The World Display Books on Christmas Traditions From Around the World!

A selection of books to help the Chapman University community learn and discover different Christmas traditions from countries worldwide. This display was curated by student employees Arianna Tillman an '25, Isabella Piechota a '25, and Kalea Brown '26.



Christmas Around The World Display Books on Christmas Traditions From Around the World!
#DEI

Check more DEI Book displays and exhibits...and follow us for more upcoming and exciting activities and events in 2024! #DEI #Libraries #Changethenarrative Chapman University



Merry Christmas 2023

May the new year ahead be filled with new opportunities, growth, and continued success for everyone...

"Disclaimer: Opinions expressed are solely my own and do not express the views or opinions of my employer."

**Special thanks to Alyssa Castanon for her help with the title selection...*

- This article may contain controversial/unpopular/Nontraditional opinion or DEI practice. Let's create some buzz and start a conversation. Do you agree, disagree...? Please practice courtesy and respect in your comments.

References:

1. Brumfiel, G. Who has designs on your students' minds?. Nature 434, 1062–1065 (2005). <https://doi.org/10.1038/4341062a>