



Statement for The West Australian

22 December, 2016

I am always saddened when I hear of efforts to remove any references to Christ from the celebration of Christmas, or indeed to take steps to completely re-define Christmas as a totally secular celebration. While it is true that some people do so in an attempt to avoid offending those who do not share Christian beliefs, my impression is that most people who belong to other religious traditions are at ease with the Christian celebration of Christmas and enjoy taking part in it in ways that are compatible with their own traditions. Indeed for many of these religions, Jesus is recognised as a prophet, or a great teacher, or simply an extraordinary example of what a person of integrity looks like in practice. I am not sure therefore where the push for a “Christ-less” Christmas is coming from. I certainly do not think it is an expression of a wide-spread popular movement.

As Australians we are, I think, rightly proud of the multi-cultural society we have created and which we are striving to maintain. One of the strengths of this inter-mingling of cultures is the exposure it brings to a rich variety of cultural and religious traditions. Rather than trying to suppress this richness, a society comfortable with itself will welcome the colour and life this adds to our experience. Because of the profound influence of the Christian tradition in this country since European settlement, it is only natural that Christian celebrations, especially Christmas and Easter, have assumed a prominent place. Australia is rapidly changing. Precisely because of this, it would be wise to continue to honour our history and our cultural roots and see them as a solid foundation for the ongoing challenge of constructing a society that continues to be rich in colour and diversity, rather than bland and superficial.

For myself, I think it is a sign of hope that Australia is still able to dedicate some time each year to the memory and celebration of a man who has had and continues to have, such a positive impact on our world. At a time when so many parts of the world seem to be engulfed by mindless violence, it is good to celebrate the birth of a man whose words and actions provide us with a sense of hope that there is another path humanity can follow.

This seems to be the case here in Western Australia. In Perth itself, the city decorations include images from the Christmas story. The same is true in some of the major shopping centres. Many local councils and other organisations hold “Carols by Candlelight” functions in different venues. People love singing about the “Silent Night” in Bethlehem when Jesus was born. They enjoy belting out the “Alleluias” from the “Alleluia Chorus”. They embrace the sense of inner peace that singing “Away in a Manger” creates. And generally, these various expressions of the religious dimension of Christmas bring a smile to people’s faces. Surely this is a good thing!

Archbishop Tim Costelloe

Archbishop of Perth