

The wrong kind of pluralism

By [Julie Clawson](#)

December 17, 2010

The American Family Association has published this year's "[Naughty or Nice?](#)" list. It measures which businesses support, marginalize or censor Christmas by how often they use the word "Christmas" in their advertising. Concerned Christians then know which businesses to support and which to avoid.

The so-called Christmas wars have been keeping the love of Christ out of Christmas for years now, with people on both sides neglecting to consider others' feelings. This hit home when my daughter came home from kindergarten and asked for permission to attend her public school's holiday party. It's a highly generic winter/Christmas/Chanukah/Kwanzaa mash-up, yet students must have parents' permission to attend.

My daughter was seriously worried that I might not let her go and relieved when I told her she could. But seeing her anxiety made me feel bad for the many Muslim mothers in the class who may have had to explain to disappointed children that they couldn't attend the party because of their faith. What does it do to a five-year-old's perception of his faith to be forced to avoid a class party because of it?

In the name of secularism we've reduced faiths to their lowest common denominators, creating hollow and inoffensive shells out of deeply treasured practices. As a result of all this blandly reductive pluralism, we see people reacting out of fear and insisting on their right to their observances.

I can see how people might respond this way. But I'd rather see a *truly* pluralistic society, one in which all religious (or nonreligious) groups are allowed to be themselves alongside other groups. I want my child to learn the stories of all major religious holidays; I'd rather she

know the world's diversity than be protected from it by a cheapened, secularized version. I'd like my daughter to understand what the Muslim students in her class believe, not to see them as the weird kids who won't celebrate Christmahanukwanzakah.