

CHRISTIAN *School* COMMENT

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A Lesson for the Holidays: Merry Christmas!

Have you ever wished, as soon as you spoke, that you could stuff your words right back into your mouth before anyone heard them? I've had that experience.

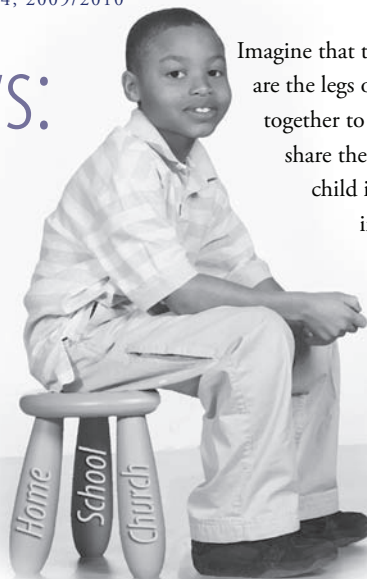
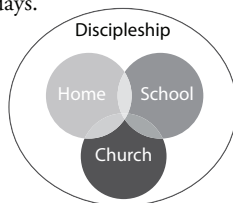
Several years ago, I spoke at the annual Christmas chapel for the K–12 school I led. I prepared my lesson prayerfully and carefully. Our large gymnasium held 1,600 students, teachers, and parents. The kindergarten students were seated on their knees right in front of me, the first graders behind them on the floor, and so on. Middle school and high school students were seated in the bleachers, and parents (mostly moms) were standing in the rear with smiles on their faces.

In Christian schools, we still sing *Christmas* songs at Christmas. Following the singing in our service, I explained from Philippians 2 the truth of the Virgin Birth—that Jesus is 100 percent man and 100 percent God. So far, so good. I said Jesus came to earth to live and to die on the Cross to provide the way for sinful humankind to be reconciled to a holy God. I explained that Jesus, in His grace, gives good gifts to His children even while they are yet sinners. Then—and to this day I do not know why—I said that this was unlike Santa Claus, who only gives gifts to good people ... and we all know that Santa does not exist anyway. Yes! I said those words!

Instantaneously, the mothers' faces turned bright red, some of the children in front of me began to cry, and the high school students began to boo! When I got back to my office, an angry mother greeted me. Then the phones lit up, and I apologized for the next three days.

Why was this such a colossal blunder?

Simply put, what parents choose to teach their children about Santa Claus is in the purview of the home. Ideally, home, school, and church all work together to train up young people in the way they should go, with the goal that they will one day be thoroughly prepared for life and become sold-out followers of Jesus Christ. Most parents choose for their children to learn biology or calculus at school. Churches don't teach those courses. Some areas, however, overlap. For example, churches and schools both might conduct worship services. I learned the hard way that what is taught about Santa is in the nonoverlapping section of the circle labeled "home."



Imagine that the home, school, and church are the legs of a three-legged stool, working together to support the child. All three share the same biblical values. Ideally, the child is taught truth in each of these institutions. When one of these legs wobbles, the child suffers, and when one or more legs is missing, the stool is no longer able to support the child as God intended.

Secular schools cannot teach the whole truth. Those who reject a Christian worldview are intellectually bankrupt. For them, the message of

Christmas has been replaced by a winter celebration, and Christmas carols have been replaced by "Frosty the Snowman." There is nothing wrong with Frosty, but a fictitious snowman story is a poor substitute for the life-changing truth about the Babe in a manger!

This Christmas, what an opportunity we have for the home, school, and church to all work together to teach the true reason for the season—the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

In his book *Truth and Transformation*, Vishal Mangalwadi writes of a flight he and his wife took on Christmas Day. When he said "Merry Christmas" to the airline crew, they merely nodded politely. On the plane, the flight attendant greeted everyone with "Happy Holidays." Vishal asked the flight attendant if she was allowed to say "Merry Christmas." She replied that she had to say "Happy Holidays." Vishal responded, "I thought America was tolerant—the land of the free and the home of the brave.... And here you are—you cannot even wish us 'Merry Christmas!'" She said, "Religious terms such as 'Christmas' offend liberals." He concluded, "Should you surrender your freedom or teach them tolerance?" (2009, 68).

As the president of ACSI, I promise you that in our schools we will teach the truth about Jesus as the reason for the season—and you will often hear a heartfelt *Merry Christmas!*

Brian S. Simmons, President
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Reference

Mangalwadi, Vishal. 2009. *Truth and transformation: A manifesto for ailing nations*. Seattle, WA: YWAM Publishing.

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