

# Activist Organizations

January 8



**Des Moines, IA**—The local ACLU complained that only one version of the Ten Commandments (the King James version) was posted in the Iowa Statehouse. What made the ACLU's complaint so bogus was the fact that this was a privately-funded display commemorating the moral and legal underpinnings of the U.S.

January 23

**New York, NY**—ADL head Abraham Foxman gave the Los Angeles Times his thoughts on the marketing practices for "The Passion of the Christ": "[Mel Gibson is] hawking it on a commercial crusade to the churches of this country. That's what makes it dangerous." William Donohue wrote to Foxman: "The subtext of this remark is that church-going Christians are latent anti-Semitic bigots ready to lash out at Jews at any given moment." Donohue asked for a public apology, which was never given.

March 15

**Duluth, MN**—The City Council voted to settle a lawsuit brought by the ACLU of Minnesota to remove a 47-year-old Ten Commandments monument outside City Hall. The structure was removed three months later.

April 6

**Boston, MA**—People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) unveiled "The Cow Pope," a 10-foot tall statue of a cow dressed as a pope wearing a sash that read, "Blessed are the Merciful. GoVeg.com." Created by Greg Metz, the statue showed the cow holding a crucifix that had another cow on it. This, according to PETA, was to "remind Catholics that few activities contribute more to suffering—both for animals and humans—than eating meat." The cow was eventually displayed in New York, Philadelphia, Washington, DC and Providence, RI.

April 11

*San Francisco, CA*—The Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, a group of gay men who dress as nuns in outrageous costumes, held its 25th Annual Easter Sunday celebration in Dolores Park. This included their annual “Hunky Jesus” contest in which gay men dress as Jesus and are judged on physical appearance.

April 24

*Washington, DC*—At a protest during a meeting of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, onlookers spotted a T-shirt that read, “Pro-Choice and Anti-Catholic.”

**April 25**

***Washington, DC***—At the pro-abortion “March for Women’s Lives,” demonstrators held signs that read, “Keep your rosaries out of our ovaries.”

May 4

*Everett, WA*—Americans United for Separation of Church and State filed suit against Everett, Washington, seeking to declare a monument of the Ten Commandments unconstitutional.

May 25

*Chicago, IL*—The Rainbow Sash Movement announced it would wear its rainbow sashes in Chicago-area churches on Pentecost Sunday to protest Catholic teaching on homosexuality. Cardinal George asked his pastors not to give Holy Communion to the protesters.

May 27

*Washington, DC*—Barry Lynn of Americans United for Separation of Church and State wrote the IRS asking it to investigate what he termed “electioneering” by the Diocese of Colorado Springs. Lynn said Bishop Michael Sheridan’s pastoral letter about politicians receiving Communion was “code language that says ‘Re-elect Bush and vote Republican.’” Lynn called it “part of a larger trend among some members of the Catholic hierarchy to influence Catholic voters in this election year.” He cited the bishops of New Jersey and Archbishop Raymond

Burke of St. Louis.

June 1

*Los Angeles, CA*—The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors voted to remove a small cross from the Los Angeles County Seal. The seal, in use since 1957, included the cross to represent the Catholic mission that was the foundation of the city. The board voted after being threatened with a May 19 letter from the ACLU of Southern California. The letter threatened a lawsuit against the city for violating the separation of church and state if the cross was not removed.

July 14

*Johnson County, KS*—The Mainstream Coalition authorized its members to spy on area churches to see if clergymen were violating IRS guidelines that govern political campaigns. The Catholic League protested the covert operation as being inimical to the spirit of freedom of religion as guaranteed by the First Amendment.

July 14

*Cleveland, OH*—An appeals court affirmed a lower court ruling that a poster of the Ten Commandments in the Richland County Courthouse was unconstitutional. The ACLU of Ohio filed the lawsuit in 2000 after a judge hung the poster in his courtroom.

August 13

*Convoy, OH*—The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit reversed a lower court decision that said the Crestview school district violated the First Amendment by allowing fliers advertising religious events to be distributed in students' mailboxes. The ACLU of Ohio, which brought the original lawsuit, said it would appeal.

**August 21**

***Columbus, OH***—A U.S. District judge denied a request by the ACLU of Ohio to stop a gospel concert for the benefit of the

Franklin County Children Services. The judge ruled that the concert could proceed because the event's main purpose of helping foster children was not religious and did not violate the principle of separation of church and state.

**August 24**

*Millsboro, DE*—The ACLU of Delaware threatened to sue the Sussex County school board for opening its meetings with a prayer and for allowing invocations at graduations and other school events. The ACLU took action after a local Jewish woman complained.

**August 27**

*Louisville, KY*—After a complaint by the ACLU, post offices in Kentucky banned the sale of teddy bears with religious messages sold by HolyBears, Inc. The God Bless America Bear, God Bless Our Postal Workers Bear and God Bless Our Troops Bear were all nixed.

**September 5**

*Oceanside, CA*—The city council voted unanimously to hang a new plaque in the council chamber saying "In God We Trust" with "Liberty" underneath. The ACLU threatened to take legal action to remove the plaque, but eventually backed off.

**September 15**

*Plattsmouth, NE*—An atheist and ACLU member successfully sued the town to remove a five-foot granite slab of the Ten Commandments erected in 1965 in the corner of a public park.

**September 18**

*Moorhead, MN*—The Freedom from Religion Foundation sought to pressure municipal officials to remove a Celtic cross from the city-owned Heritage Hjemkomst Center.

**September 28**

*New York, NY*—In a full page ad in the New York Times, MoveOn.org sought to impugn the integrity of the Gallup

organization by alleging that a Christian bias colored its work. Unhappy that Kerry was trailing Bush in a recently published Gallup poll, MoveOn.org implied that George W. Gallup Jr.'s evangelical Christian status tainted the results.

September 29

*Los Angeles, CA*—A group of residents sued the three county supervisors who had voted for a new county seal earlier in the month that removed a small cross and substituted an Indian woman for the pagan goddess Pomona. The lawsuit said the supervisors' action was hostile toward religion and a waste of taxpayers' money. The supervisors action was in response to a threatened lawsuit by the American Civil Liberties Union.

October 1

**Riverside, CA**—The ADL's Pacific Southwest regional office wrote to officials of the Riverside County Courthouse asking them to censor a quote by Theodore Roosevelt that reads, "The true Christian is the true citizen." The words, which were engraved in gold letters on a mahogany wall, were to be covered while the court was in session; they were to be uncovered during historical tours.

The ADL said the quote should be covered because it could be seen as "a specific endorsement of the Christian faith." The regional office said it did not object to the entire statement by Roosevelt (some 80 words); its problem was that the remark in the courthouse was taken out of context.

In response, the Catholic League wrote to the courthouse officials, the judge, and the ADL offering to pay to have the entire Roosevelt quote engraved on the wall; we heard from everyone but the ACLU. Because a lawyer filed suit claiming censorship on the part of the ADL, no decision regarding the Catholic League's offer will be made until the case is adjudicated.

October 26

*Clay, WV*—The ACLU of West Virginia threatened to sue the Clay County commissioners if they did not remove a plaque of the Ten Commandments behind the commissioners' seats. The complainant was a non-Christian "who feels unwelcome in a governmental environment that endorses a particular religion."

#### **November 16**

*Cranston, RI*—U.S. District Judge William Smith ruled that the City Hall's holiday display featuring a crèche and a menorah was not unconstitutional, contrary to the contention of the ACLU.

#### **November 17**

*Washington, DC*—Americans United for the Separation of Church and State threatened to sue after Congress submitted a bill to President Bush authorizing \$10 million to refurbish 21 historic Spanish missions in California, 19 of which are owned by the Catholic Church and two by the state. The Catholic League noted there were no objections raised by civil libertarian groups when funds from the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the state of California were used to complete a renovation of the Breed Street Shul in Los Angeles earlier in the year (including restoration of the synagogue's stained glass windows).

#### **November 17**

*Washington, DC*—Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER), a group of activist lawyers assisting whistle-blowers who identify violations of environmental law within government, launched a bigoted anti-Catholic attack on Bush administration special counsel Scott Bloch. In filing suit under the Freedom of Information Act to obtain Special Counsel records regarding personnel practices, a PEER press release called Bloch "a religious conservative" who hired "recent graduates of the ultra-conservative Ave Maria law school." PEER executive director Jeff Ruch said, "Scott Bloch's personnel practices are taken straight from The

DaVinci Code rather than the civil service manual.”

December

*New York, NY*—The Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding called for a “Seasonal” or “Winter” party instead of a Christmas Party, in the name of being “fair” and so as to “not offend anyone.” The firm also advised a “Seasonal” or “Holiday” gift exchange.

In the same set of “tips for handling this tricky season,” however, Tanenbaum called for an array of accommodations for Muslims celebrating Ramadan. These include staggered work hours in which Muslim employees leave work early each day, plus the rescheduling of “important meetings or high-stress assignments.”

December

*San Francisco, CA*—The Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, described affectionately by the Los Angeles Times as “queer nuns,” mocked Christmas all month long. For example, it joined with the San Francisco Gay Men’s Chorus in showing “grown-ups sitting on Santa’s lap,” along with transvestite elves.

December 15

*Reynoldsburg, OH*—Atheists lost in their attempt to stop the display of a nativity scene at City Hall. Faith Chapel, which had been displaying its crèche on the city property for five years, agreed to donate it to the city.

December 15

*Bellevue, WA*—An atheist couple asked the city council to remove its “Giving Tree” (which is what city officials call the Christmas Tree in Bellevue City Hall in hopes of not offending atheists).

December 19

*Milford, CT*—American Atheists staged a demonstration at a privately funded crèche on the public park of Milford Green,

but only four protesters showed up. The four were greeted by 200 pro-crèche supporters waving homemade signs and singing Christmas carols.