

CHRISTMAS WARS INGNITE; NEW BATTLE WITH ATHEISTS

The atheists are out in force this year trying to neuter Christmas. But they are being met with stiff opposition from the Catholic League.

The battle lines were drawn early. On November 10, news reports stated that several atheist organizations were seeking to use the Christmas season to garner new recruits. Their weapons of choice: billboards placed on highways and bus shelters, and TV advertisements.

The billboard campaigns run the gamut from the benign to the malicious. Some merely ask those who don't believe in God to join them, but others are a direct assault on Christianity. American Atheists, for example, is currently featuring a billboard with a picture of a nativity scene which reads, "You Know it's a Myth. This Season Celebrate Reason"; it is prominently displayed in New Jersey near the entrance to the Lincoln Tunnel that connects to New York City.

As soon as news stories surfaced about the American Atheists' billboard near the Lincoln Tunnel, we were contacted by an anonymous donor who wanted to do something about it. We suggested placing a graphic of a nativity scene on a billboard on the New York side of the tunnel, one that read, "You Know it's Real. This Season Celebrate Jesus." He liked our idea immensely, so we made the arrangements, and he paid for it. This was a very Catholic League kind of rejoinder.

Knowing how aggressive these activists have become in recent years, we were more than ready with a strong response. So on the same day of the news stories about the atheist campaigns, we pulled our trigger: we announced that we had just mailed a Holy Family Nativity Scene to the nation's 50 governors. We quickly heard from Tennessee Gov. Phil Bredesen, Virginia Gov. Bob McDonnell and Alabama Gov. Bob Riley thanking us for the gift.

In his letter to the governors, Bill Donohue explained that it was our "sincere hope that it [the crèche] will be displayed in the Capitol Rotunda alongside secular symbols (e.g., a Christmas tree) this coming Christmas season." It is up to

Catholic League members to follow through by contacting the chief of staff serving their respective governors; the manger scenes were mailed to them.

The atheists are not happy about our counter-campaign. But we are proud that we led the Christian community nationwide with an immediate response. Moreover, unlike their negative campaign, ours is entirely positive. And that is exactly how it should be.