

JACKIE MASON, R.I.P.

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on the death of Jackie Mason:

We lost a true American icon on July 24 when Jackie Mason passed away at the age of 93. He was more than a remarkable comedian, he was a strong foe of anti-Catholicism. I worked with him for many years fighting this plague.

On April 20, 2005, journalist Don Feder launched a new organization, Jews Against Anti-Christian Defamation. He did so by holding a press conference at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. His advisory board was stacked with distinguished rabbis, authors, professors, and activists. There was also a stellar entertainer—Jackie Mason.

On December 14, 2005, Don held a press conference on the steps of St. Patrick's Cathedral. Attending were Jackie Mason, author and activist Rabbi Aryeh Spero, attorney Raoul Felder, radio talk-show host Barry Farber, and myself. Jackie hired limousines that rode down Fifth Avenue with a huge banner declaring, "JEWS SAY IT'S OK TO SAY MERRY CHRISTMAS."

Soon after Jackie and Raoul wrote a splendid piece explaining why it was important for Jews to speak up about attempts to censor Christmas. Here is a small selection of their essay.

- "You would have to be a refugee from a sanitarium not to look forward to Christmas. Christmas in America is not a clash of civilizations, but rather a celebration of diversity. But to lots of people, it doesn't seem that way. Across America school districts are forbidding the singing of Christmas carols, nativity scenes are being banned in public places, and in malls the 'Christmas sales' are now 'Holiday Sales.'"
- "We cannot see how our beliefs are jeopardized by someone else celebrating *his* beliefs—particularly if the

celebrations are those consisting, at least in part, of love, family values, spirituality and giving thought to the less fortunate.”

- “We would have a very fragile religion if 2000 years of our culture and beliefs were threatened by Bing Crosby singing ‘I’m Dreaming of a White Christmas’—incidentally written by a Jew, Irving Berlin—Santa Claus and mistletoe.”
- “Jews seem to be heavily involved in this repeal movement. They would do well to remember Pastor Niemöller’s observation: ‘In Germany they first came for the Communists, and I didn’t speak up because I wasn’t a Communist. Then they came for the Jews, and I didn’t speak up because I wasn’t a Jew. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I didn’t speak up because I wasn’t a trade unionist. Then they came for the Catholics, and I didn’t speak up because I was a Protestant. Then they came for me—and by that time no one was left to speak up.’”

Jackie did not limit his efforts to combat anti-Catholicism to attempts to cancel Christmas. He spoke at a rally I held in 2010 outside the Empire State Building protesting the refusal of the building’s owner not to honor Mother Teresa on her centenary by lighting the towers in her colors, blue and white; 3,500 people were in attendance. We appeared on TV together about this issue.

Jackie Mason was more than a first-class comedian. He was a first-class person who went against the grain by standing up for the rights of Catholics. May he rest in peace.