

“MERRY CHRISTMAS” RETURNS; CULTURE WAR CONTINUES

The culture war over Christmas got off to a flying start in November when Wal-Mart and other department stores said they would invoke “Merry Christmas” this year instead of the secular greeting “Happy Holidays.” Everyone credited the Catholic League with the turnaround, save, of course, for Bill O'Reilly who once again took credit for our win; that's why we call his show the “O'Shameless Factor.”

Last year we launched a boycott against Wal-Mart because of its discriminatory practice of treating Hanukkah and Kwanzaa with respect, while showing nothing but disrespect for Christmas. Not only was Christmas not acknowledged on Wal-Mart's website, a statement about its alleged pagan roots was promoted by an employee and was then defended by its top public relations officer. We sought an apology, a withdrawal of the offensive statement and a revision on its website. All three demands were met within 48 hours of announcing the boycott; it mattered to Wal-Mart that we had contacted 126 religious organizations across seven faith communities to join us.

Others stores have gotten the message as well. Macy's, Kmart, Kohl's and Target are emphasizing Christmas this year. Last year, we initially had a problem with Lands' End because of its “Holiday” promotions; this year it has both “Holiday” and Christmas catalogues. Customers at Sam's Club and Wal-Mart are being greeted with “Merry Christmas,” and in many stores Christmas carols are being piped in for shoppers to enjoy. According to one report, there is a 60 percent increase in seasonal “Holiday” merchandise being renamed “Christmas.” We know of only one store, Best Buy, that still refuses to acknowledge Christmas.

While this is encouraging, the same old fight is going on in the schools, the workplace and in parks; a particularly vicious assault on Christmas was found on a prominent atheist website (see p. 12). So the Catholic League is not ready to declare victory.

We are working this Christmas season in tandem with Father Benedict Groeschel, C.F.R. on a "Christmas Watch" program (see p. 2). In addition, on November 28 we hit the pages of the *New York Times* with our provocative ad on celebrating Christmas and diversity (see p. 13).