

SEEING EVIL IN GOOD

Prayer and the crucifix. Fairly non-controversial subjects, one would think. But to some, they are sources of evil.

The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) has been combating anti-Semitism since the early part of the 20th century. That some of its leaders are in need of a workshop on tolerance is as regrettable as it is true. Take Dena Marks, for instance, the head of the Texas ADL.

Ms. Marks is opposed to students praying in a huddle before a football game. But besides the usual church-state argument, she advances a non-legal position, one which gives clarity to her reasoning: she sees sectarian prayer as hate speech.

Appearing on the March 28 edition of "Pros & Cons" on COURT TV, Marks explained her objection this way: "When it [prayer] excludes certain people, when it excludes the people who aren't the majority or the people who aren't saying that prayer, that can also be a trigger for hatred." That this should roll off the lips of a professional engaged in fighting intolerance is cause for real concern. She apparently is oblivious to her hypocrisy.

Then there is the case of the school crucifix that scared the daylights out of Jewish professors. It seems that some of them went ballistic when informed that the Organization of American Historians had settled on a Catholic institution, St. Louis University, to hold its annual meeting. St. Louis, the angry historians protested, was run by the Jesuits. Worse, they had crucifixes in the classrooms, symbols of "lethal anti-Semitism."

"To us," wrote one of the historians, "it [the crucifix] is a particularly potent historical symbol of aggressive, even lethal, Antisemitism." Who the "us" is he did not say, but it is only logical he meant Jews. That, however, makes him appear

even dumber: most Jews do not suffer apoplexy when confronted with Christian symbols.

The historian continues by bashing Catholicism and then justifying it: "And it is not bigotry. It is the response to over a thousand years of persecution in the name of Christianity—a persecution which has persisted into our own lifetimes." Yet when someone says that anti-Semitism can historically be understood as a reactive condition, namely as a response to offensive Jewish behavior, he is instantly branded a bigot. But one size evidently doesn't fit all.

To those who think that such thinking only applies to the public display of Christian symbols, think again. "If they really want to spare the feelings of Jews," writes the professor, Christians "shouldn't display the cross on the outside of their churches, or wear crosses around their necks. Indeed, Christians shouldn't even have crosses inside their churches, or inside their purses or pockets, because it is the same antisemitic symbol, hidden though it is from their Jewish brethren. In fact, the hiddenness [sic] makes it seem even more sinister and sneaky."

What is most troubling about this remark is its totalitarian implications. The goal is not to privatize religion, which is offensive enough, but to eradicate it. Indeed, there is no law punitive enough to satisfy such perverted urges, which is why freedom of conscience remains the first freedom: it is the one freedom even the most committed tyrants cannot destroy.