

# SMITHSONIAN RELIGION

# REDISCOVERS

The Smithsonian has hired its first religious curator since the 1890s. "Peter Manseau was born for the job," says the *Washington Post*. "The son of a priest and a nun," the story notes, "Manseau was meant to be a scholar making sense of history." For five years, he will oversee new exhibitions on American religious history, and will add to the museum's holdings on religious objects.

This could signal a real breakthrough, providing wonderful opportunities for the public to rediscover the religious roots of America. Or it could wind up like so many other Smithsonian projects and become another exercise in political correctness.

To the latter point, the Smithsonian's new African American Museum is a disgrace: every major black scholar, politician, and activist of a conservative bent has been whitewashed out of existence. Also, the Smithsonian's willingness to offend Christian sensibilities was on grand display six years ago when it launched the exhibit, "Hide/Seek." It featured large ants eating away at Jesus on the crucifix. A Catholic League protest of this scurrilous video led curators to withdraw it.

Therefore, much depends on Manseau. From what we know, there is cause for concern.

His book, *One Nation Under Gods: A New American History*, was hailed by Publishers Weekly for being "subversive." What was subversive about it? Manseau wrote extensively about "the supposed Christian roots of the Republic." So who does he think founded America? Buddhists?

Manseau's Catholic roots are themselves interesting. It is telling that his father, Bill, did not accept the Church's teachings on ordination: he said he was called to be a married

priest. Also, both of his parents worked to reform the Church along the lines of the mainline Protestant denominations. By any measure, that hasn't worked out too well.

It should also be noted that Manseau is not a practicing Catholic. No wonder he likes Andrew Greeley's definition of a Catholic: it depends on whether the person is "loyal to the poetry of Catholicism." For some reason, there are no entries in the Catholic Catechism on that interpretation.

Stay tuned.