

OREGON SCHOOL RESTORES “GIVING TREE”

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on the restoration of the “Giving Tree” at Oregon’s Bellview Elementary School:

After listening to parents upset with the removal of the “Giving Tree” from the lobby of Bellview Elementary, and being pounded with e-mails from Catholic League members and supporters, Principal Michelle Zundel decided to put back the tree. But there is still one hitch: it must be modified to avoid favoring any religion. We recommend cutting off all the branches, leaving only the stem.

There is no such thing as a “Giving Tree,” and everyone knows it. Moreover, the reason they are giving “presents”—another word they refuse to use—is because it is Christmastime. That’s what Christians do this time of year: they celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ by giving loved ones, friends and the needy Christmas presents. Even many of those who are doing this linguistic dance—not calling a Christmas tree a Christmas tree—are known to exchange gifts.

The politics of multiculturalism, especially when vented in December, is political correctness gone mad. Worse, it makes liars out of its proponents. To wit: even they know in their heart of hearts that there would be no Christmas tree, no exchange of presents, and no time off from school, were it not for baby Jesus.

OREGON SCHOOL BANS “GIVING TREE”

Catholic League president Bill Donohue describes the latest war on Christmas:

Michelle Zundel, principal of Bellview Elementary, situated in Oregon’s Ashland School District, says that one family didn’t like the “Giving Tree” displayed in the school lobby, so she had it removed. “The decision to remove the tree was a very difficult one because the important constitutional issues for a school are to maintain neutrality.” According to one news report, Ashland Superintendent Juli Di Chiro says that school officials are working on developing district-wide rules to address such issues.

All of this is based on ignorance: (a) a Christmas tree—never mind a “Giving Tree”—is not a religious symbol (b) there are no constitutional issues involved in displaying secular symbols in the schools, and (c) they have had a policy governing such matters since 1989.

Ashland School District 5 school officials ought to read their own policy, “Teaching about Religion.” Guideline #7 explicitly says: “No public school funds shall be used for an intended devotional display or religious symbols such as a Star of David, cross, crucifix, Christmas nativity scene or a Buddhist statue of sacred monkeys.”

Note that the policy says absolutely nothing about banning *secular* symbols such as a Christmas tree, never mind some fictional “Giving Tree.” That’s because there are no constitutional issues at stake.

In other words, this mean-spirited attempt to censor Christmas is totally contrived. It’s up to the parents, who will meet tonight, to take their school back.

Contact the Superintendent: Julidichiro@ashland.k12.or.us

OBAMAS WOULD LIKE TO NEUTER CHRISTMAS

In yesterday's *New York Times*, there was an article about White House social secretary Desirée Rogers. In it, reporter Sheryl Gay Stolberg wrote: "When former social secretaries gave a luncheon to welcome Ms. Rogers earlier this year, one participant said, she surprised them by suggesting the Obamas were planning a 'non-religious Christmas....'"

This same participant said that "the Obamas did not intend to put the manger scene on display" (this was confirmed by the White House). Indeed, as Stolberg wrote, "there had been internal discussions about making Christmas more inclusive and whether to display the crèche."

Catholic League president Bill Donohue addressed this issue today:

Unlike almost all Americans—including atheists—the Obamas do not give their children Christmas gifts. We know this because Barack bragged about this last year to *People* magazine. So it should come as no big surprise that he and his wife would like to neuter Christmas in the White House. That's their natural step—to ban the public display of Christian symbols. Have any doubts? Last April, Georgetown University was ordered to put a drape over the name of Jesus as a condition of the president speaking there.

If the Obamas want to deprive their children of celebrating Christmas, that is their business. It is the business of the

public to hold them accountable for the way they celebrate Christmas in the White House. We know one thing for sure: no other administration ever entertained internal discussions on whether to display a nativity scene in the White House.

CATHOLICS FOR CHOICE NEEDS TO CONVERT

Catholic League president Bill Donohue issued the following remarks today about yesterday's ad by Catholics for Choice in the *Washington Post*:

Last week on MSNBC I debated David Nolan, communications director of Catholics for Choice. At one point, I told him straight out that he wouldn't know what a practicing Catholic was. Then I got specific: his cluelessness was a function of his working for an anti-Catholic organization. When asked to reply, he sheepishly said that he was not the issue.

A real man would have taken me on, but only phonies work for this anti-Catholic front group. Funded by the likes of George Soros and the Ford Foundation, Catholics for Choice has twice been condemned as a fraud by U.S. bishops. So when it purports to speak for Catholics, its credibility is on a par with Jews for Jesus speaking for Jews.

Yesterday's ad tried to scare the public into thinking that if the health care bill that the bishops want goes through, the sky will fall on women. Catholics for Choice is good at that—always exploiting women to make a cheap political point.

The truth is that Catholic-bashing groups cannot believe the clout that our bishops have recently exercised. As a result, they are desperately resorting to demagogic measures, all designed to frighten the uninformed.

Christmas is coming. Time for Catholics for Choice to convert.

CHRISTMAS FOES WALK A MINEFIELD

Catholic League president Bill Donohue talks about the way Christmas foes navigate the holiday:

This is a tricky season for those who delight in warring on Christmas. Consider what is happening in Waterbury, Connecticut.

Erik Brown is the principal of Walsh Elementary in the Waterbury School District. His staff is under strict orders not to employ secular, as well as religious, Christmas symbols when they enjoy their “winter celebration” on December 21. Yet Christmas carols will be sung at the event, as well as Hanukkah songs. And students will be given gifts.

Is there a law against the display of secular holiday symbols in Connecticut schools? No. So why the ban? Brown says, “It is state law that a public school can’t knowingly exclude children.” He is, of course, wrong: there is no such law. If there were, then his school would be open on April 2, 2010. But there is no school that day, and that is because the Waterbury School District Calendar marks April 2nd as “Good Friday.”

Why are Christmas carols and Hanukkah songs allowed to be sung on “winter celebration” day? Don’t they exclude Buddhists? And if those songs are okay, why are teachers forbidden from displaying Frosty the Snowman, never mind Baby Jesus? Moreover, why is it okay to sing “Santa Claus Is Coming to Town,” but it is not okay to display a poster of Santa?

Come to think of it, why are they having a “winter celebration” at all? To be exact, there is no “summer celebration” scheduled for Monday, June 21, 2010. So why the discrimination? Aren’t there students who would like to sing “Those Lazy, Hazy, Crazy Days of Summer” and receive another round of gifts? How can they be legally excluded under Connecticut law?

Seems to us that Mr. Brown has sat through one too many multicultural workshops. Give him a call at (203) 574-8164, and wish him a Merry Christmas.

GAY MARRIAGE REJECTED IN NEW YORK

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on the vote by the New York State Senate rejecting a bill to legalize same-sex marriage (the vote was 38-24):

The left-wing Huffington Post had a headline earlier today that was classic. It read, “START SPREADING THE NEWS: New York Debating Historic Gay Marriage Measure, Vote to be Razor Thin.”

Now that those who sought to reinvent the institution of marriage got clobbered, the Catholic League will be only too

happy to START SPREADING THE NEWS.

Kudos to New York State Senator Reuben Diaz and all the other good men and women who resisted this illegitimate push to treat marriage and the family as if they were merely items on a moral smorgasbord of lifestyle choices.

NIH OKAYS EMBRYONIC STEM CELL RESEARCH

Catholic League president Bill Donohue addresses today's news that the National Institutes of Health (NIH) has cleared the way for federally funded embryonic stem-cell research:

When Barack Obama was in the Illinois State Senate, he fought passionately to deny little babies born alive as a result of a botched abortion the medical care they needed to survive. It is not surprising, then, that it took this ethically challenged man only seven weeks to overturn President Bush's executive order limiting government money to research on existing embryonic stem-cell lines. Now the NIH has decided which new lines are "appropriate," leading those scientists who will get rich from this disturbing decision to jump for joy.

It is true that all the stem lines that were approved involve embryos left over from fertility clinics. But it won't stop there, and that is because those with the muscle to do something about this issue—beginning with the president—are essentially utilitarians who lack a principled ethical base.

Dr. Bernadine Healy, a former director of the NIH, recently said that embryonic stem-cell research was basically

“obsolete.” That’s because, in part, there are ways in which scientists can approximate this research by using ethically neutral adult stem cells. But this isn’t good enough for those scientists who are literally salivating over the thought of getting their hands on the stimulus package loot. Dr. Francis Collins, the NIH’s director, said it well when he offered the following Pavlovian response: “People are champing at the bit for the opportunity to get started.”

What’s next? Intentionally creating and destroying embryos with more stimulus money? To those who say it doesn’t matter, remember this: every one of us started as an embryo, and it is impossible to do this kind of research without first killing nascent human life. One more thing that should give us pause: Germany has the strictest bioethical guidelines in Europe. They know what happens when human rights are treated cavalierly. Obama should know something about the same subject.

ATHEISTS LAUNCH GRINCH CAMPAIGNS

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on the latest Grinch campaigns:

This is a lonely time of year for those who believe in nothing. Most, however, manage to get by without lashing out at believers. But not the Freedom from Religion Foundation. Last year, this group took its campaign to Olympia, Washington, and this year the Wisconsin-based religion haters are taking their show on the road to Springfield, Illinois. Here is what their sign says:

There are no gods,
no devils, no angels,
no heaven or hell.

There is only our natural world.

Religion is but
myth and superstition
that hardens hearts
and enslaves minds.

By contrast, the American Humanist Association's campaign is not anti-religion; it is simply pro-atheism. Nonetheless, its timing is clearly designed to compete with the Christmas message. It says, "No God...No Problem!" This sign will appear in several cities, including Washington, D.C.

It is not clear how many believers, if any, will be persuaded to change their minds and start believing in nothing. It seems more likely that these anti-Christmas campaigns are directed at fellow atheists: they function as a collective psychological massage, a kind of Dr. Feelgood exercise.

It would behoove them to follow my advice and stop at the nearest saloon for a couple of pints—it costs a lot less and promises to be the best feel-good exercise imaginable. However, there is one hitch: it won't offend anyone.

YELLOW JOURNALISM: WASHINGTON POST AND NEW YORK TIMES

Catholic League president Bill Donohue goes after the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* for yellow journalism:

On [November 24](#), John Kelly of the *Washington Post* distorted

what I said last year about the American Humanist Association, and [today](#) Ian Urbina of the *New York Times* compounds the problem by plagiarizing from Kelly.

Kelly wrote a piece about the American Humanist Association's new holiday ad promoting atheism. In referencing a previous campaign, he said it received "a bunch of publicity." Then he wrote the following: "The head of the Catholic League lumped secular humanists in with such figures as Jeffrey Dahmer and Hitler."

Here is what Urbina wrote today about the same subject: "The head of the Catholic League linked secular humanists to figures like Hitler and the serial killer Jeffrey Dahmer."

On November 12 last year, I debated Jesse Galef of the American Humanist Association on the Fox News Network. After Galef spoke, host Heather Nauret said the following: "All right. You know, Bill, they have their First Amendment rights. They've got to say what they want." Here is my reply: "Right. That's right. They shouldn't be profoundly ignorant, though. Sociology 101 says that morality has always been grounded in religion. They are trying to say, 'No, it is grounded in individuals.' Well, Jeffrey Dahmer had a conscience, too, Heather. And you know what? He destroyed his victims and then ate them. We saw what happened with militant secularism in the 20th century. Over 150 million dead because of this man's *philosophy*—Pol Pot, Hitler, Mao and Stalin."

To say, as Kelly and Urbina did, that I made my comment about the American Humanist Association's silly campaign—and not the *philosophy* of militant secularism—is a gross distortion. And by the way, can't they do their own research at the *Times*?

PETA BARES CHRISTMAS CAMPAIGN

Catholic League president Bill Donohue addresses the latest scam by PETA:

It would be hard to find an organization in the U.S. which treats animals more unethically than People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA). In 2008, as demonstrated by the Center for Consumer Freedom, PETA killed 95 percent of the adoptable pets in its care. Indeed, it killed an average of 6 pets a day last year at its Norfolk, Virginia headquarters, placing only seven in adoptive homes. Between 1998 and 2008, it killed a total of 21,339 cats and dogs. To top it off, despite a budget of \$32 million, PETA does not operate an adoption shelter.

Now the animal killers have launched a Christmas campaign that exploits Christian symbols. It features *Playboy* queen Joanna Krupa: before Thanksgiving it showed a side angle of her naked from the waist up holding a dog and a rosary; she is adorned with angel wings and a halo. The inscription below reads, "*Be an Angel for Animals: ALWAYS ADOPT. NEVER BUY.*"

Today PETA bares Krupa on a Los Angeles billboard. According to Hollywood.com, she appears "as a winged angel, covered by a carefully-placed crucifix." Once again, the target is pet stores.

The fact is that cats and dogs are a lot safer in pet stores than they are in the hands of PETA employees. Moreover, pet stores don't rip off Christian iconography and engage in cheap irreligious scams.

PETA is a fraud. It also has a long and disgraceful record of exploiting Christian and Jewish themes to hawk its ugly services. Those who support this organization sorely need a reality check. They also need a course in Ethics 101.

Contact PETA Executive VP Tracy Reiman: TracyR@peta.org