

CHRISTMAS FOES WALK A MINEFIELD

It was a tricky season for those who delight in warring with Christmas. Consider what happened in Waterbury, Connecticut.

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

Is there a law against the display of secular holiday symbols in Connecticut schools? No. So why were they banned? Brown said, “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. But there is no school on that day, and that is because the Waterbury School District Calendar marks that day as “Good Friday.”

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

Come to think of it, why did they have a “winter celebration” at all? To be exact, there is no “summer celebration” scheduled for June 21. So why the discrimination? There had to be students who would like to sing “Those Lazy, Hazy, Crazy Days of Summer” and receive another round of gifts. How could they be legally excluded under Connecticut law?

It seemed to us that Mr. Brown sat through one too many multicultural workshops. We urged our members to call him and to wish him a Merry Christmas.

CRAZIEST CHRISTMAS STORIES

As usual, there was a litany of bizarre Christmas stories in 2009. A few days before Christmas, we commented on a handful of them.

There was a Christmas tree inside Cary, North Carolina's town hall, but the town officials couldn't bring themselves to call it by its proper name, instead they relabeled it the "Community Tree." In Madison, Wisconsin they used to have a "Holiday Tree," but even that was deemed too improper this year, so they opted for "The State Capitol Tree." American Atheists threw a party and decorated what they called their "Solstice Tree."

Vineland, New Jersey decided to call their Christmas parade the "Holiday parade," maintaining that because Urban Enterprise Zone dollars were used to fund the parade, they couldn't call it the Christmas parade.

Santa was also banned from his gift-giver role in the Northern Lehigh Valley School District in Pennsylvania; instead the district mascot, the Bulldog, got the job.

In Benton, Arkansas children put on Christmas skits, and in one of them the lead character wore a hula skirt and was rejected because she was not "Christmasy." The woman in charge of the "Hula Girl" skit announced that "The meaning of Christmas is not to judge each other."

Finally, one corporate diversity big shot (her actual title is executive director of diversity, inclusion and engagement) advised against saying “Happy New Year.” Instead, her recommendation was “Looking Forward.”

We at the Catholic League are old fashioned. We are pro-Christmas tree, parades and pro-Santa. We wished all the “Looking Forward” types a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

OREGON SCHOOL RESTORES “GIVING TREE”

A day after we commented and urged our members to contact Oregon’s Ashland School District Superintendent, a “Giving Tree” that was removed from Belleview Elementary School was restored.

Belleview Elementary’s principal, Michelle Zundel, said that one family made a complaint about the “Giving Tree” that was displayed in the school lobby, and 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 said that school officials were working on developing district-wide rules to address such issues.

This was all 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 have read their own policy, "Teaching about Religion." Guideline #7 explicitly states: "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 mentioned absolutely nothing about banning secular symbols, such as a Christmas tree, never mind some fictional "Giving Tree." That's because there is no constitutional issue at stake.

We urged our members to contact Di Chiro prior to the school meeting with parents upset by the situation. After hearing from those parents and being pounded with e-mails from our members and supporters, Zundel decided to restore the tree to the school's lobby. But there was still one condition: the tree had to be modified to avoid favoring any religion. We recommended that they cut off all of the branches, leaving only the trunk.

There is no such thing as a "Giving Tree," and everyone knows it. Moreover, the reason they gave "presents"—another word they refused to use—is because it was Christmastime. That's what Christians do at that 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 do the 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 school, were it not for the baby Jesus.

FAKE ANIMALS SUBSTITUTE FOR MANGER SCENE

Residents of Howard County, Indiana that were hoping to see a manger scene on the lawn of the county courthouse were disappointed this past Christmas season. Instead, they got a lighted display of the Loch Ness Monster, a whale and other animals. From the pictures we saw, the lighted whale was our favorite.

Commissioner Tyler Moore defended the exercise of censorship by offering up this explanation: "If we put the religious or Christmas decorations up, we'd be offending a whole other group of citizens and taxpayers."

It's not that easy. What if some were offended because all of the lighted animals were oversized? Would they feel obliged to include small lighted animals? No, of course not. We appealed to our members to inform Commissioner Moore that either he include a lighted ant, or the display should be taken down. Since all it takes in America anymore to veto the rights of the majority is for one person to object, then those who are anti-ant should not have been allowed to get away with venting their bigotry.

Of course, an ant never was included and the other animals remained through Christmas.

HOLIDAY GIFTS BANNED IN SCHOOL GIFT SHOP

The Byam Elementary School in Chelmsford, Massachusetts asked parents to donate holiday gifts to the school's holiday gift shop; the shopping days were December 1-4. Shopping guidelines informed that "Seasonal items such as snowmen, mittens, snowflakes are a big hit."

But the school also had a list of "Items NOT Permitted." The school was very specific about which items it considered taboo: "No Christmas, Chanukah, or religious items," and "No Santa, candy canes or stockings." How snowmen made the cut but stockings did not was not explained.

The school, of course, observed Christmas by closing, yet it would not allow Christmas gifts to be sold in its holiday gift shop, thus making it inexplicable why gifts celebrating the holiday being celebrated were banned.

Some may have seen this as absurd. We saw it as pernicious: in the name of diversity and inclusion, the multicultural tyrants got to do what they have always wanted to do—censor Christmas. Parents upset by this authoritarian decision met to overturn the ban—it failed. We asked our members to contact the school's principal, and they didn't disappoint.

OBAMA'S DOUBLE CROSS ON

ABORTION

Presidential advisor David Axelrod recently made it clear that President Obama opposed the amendment introduced by Rep. Bart Stupak that would ban abortion funding in the House version of the health care bill. When the Senate version was completed, it contained nothing like the language of the Stupak amendment. As reported by the AP, "On a controversial issue that threatened to derail House legislation, [Senate Majority Leader] Reid would allow the new government insurance plan to cover abortions and would let companies that receive federal funds offer insurance plans that include abortion coverage."

President Obama, after telling the public that he would not support a bill that provided federal funds for abortion (and was hailed by the U.S. bishops for doing so), championed the Senate bill that would do just that. Moreover, by pushing for this legislation, he did the opposite of what the American people support: In a recent CNN survey, 61 percent of the public is in favor of banning the use of federal funds to pay for abortion.

In other words, President Obama decided to renege on his promise, betray the bishops and defy the American people. That is risky business given that recent poll numbers show his job approval rating declining. And these results were before the public found out that he double crossed them on abortion.

CHURCH'S CRITICS WANT GAG

RULE

Getting Nancy Pelosi to accept a health care bill that bans federal funding of abortion was the greatest victory scored by the U.S. bishops in a generation. It also unleashed an attempt to censor them. Among them was Geoffrey Stone of the Huffington Post.

Stone found it troubling that the bishops were so vocal. He yearned for a time when JFK was president, a time when separation of church and state met his approval. Perhaps the Chicago law professor forgot about Rev. Martin Luther King, the minister who took to the pulpit and lobbied for civil rights in the name of free speech and religious liberty. Should King have been muzzled as well? Or did Stone just want to silence today's bishops?

Here are some others who would like to censor the bishops: Rep. Lynn Woolsey, Rep. Diane DeGette, Rep. Patrick Kennedy, Frances Kissling, Planned Parenthood, Feminist Majority, Catholics for Choice, Americans United for Separation of Church and State, the National Organization for Women, and many others favored a gag rule.

Nancy Snyderman of MSNBC spoke for many when she said that "This is going to be a Pollyannaish statement. The Catholic bishops appearing and having a political voice seems to be a most fundamental violation of church and state."

There were a number of religious groups that wanted abortion coverage in the health care bill, including: Episcopal Church, Union for Reform Judaism, Central Conference of American Rabbis, United Church of Christ, United Methodist Church, Unitarian Universalist, Presbyterian Church (USA), Lutheran Women's Caucus and the YWCA.

So why didn't Stone and company want to silence these groups as well? Let's face it: they don't have a principled bone in

their collective bodies.

NIH OKAYS EMBRYONIC STEM CELL RESEARCH

In December, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) cleared the way for federally funded embryonic stem-cell research. We unleashed as soon as we caught wind of this development.

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 was 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 have 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-cell 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 salivating over the thought of getting

their hands on the stimulus package loot. Dr. Francis Collins, the director of NIH, said it well when he offered the following Pavlovian response: "People are champing at the bit for the opportunity to get started."

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 killing nascent human life. One more thing that should give pause: Germany has the strictest bioethical guidelines in Europe. They know what happens when human rights are treated cavalierly.

MIXED RESULTS ON GAY MARRIAGE BILLS

When the D.C. gay marriage bill was first introduced, the Archdiocese of Washington kept quiet because the bill protected the rights of churches and other houses of worship not to perform gay marriages. But then the gay overreach took place: the language was changed to narrow the religious liberty protections. Because the archdiocese feared that the new language could be used to force it to provide health benefits to gay couples, and allow for gay adoption, it said it could not abide by the provisions of the revised bill. In practical terms, this meant that Catholic Charities would suspend its city services, a move that would terminate its medical clinics, foster care and adoption services, tutoring for GED tests, mental health services, homeless shelters, etc.

The reaction from the Church's critics was not only harsh, it was over the top. "What the Church is doing is an uncharitable and cruel maneuver," wrote Petula Dvorak in the *Washington*

Post. In the Huffington Post, Allison Kilkenny concluded that "If gay folk can marry, the Catholic church refuses to feed the homeless." Adele M. Stan at AlterNet.com said that this decision, along with the bishops' opposition to the health care bill that offered abortion coverage, "serve the bishops' obsession with the sex lives and reproductive organs of others." She showed her true colors when she opined, "As an institution, it [the Catholic Church] ranks among the world's most sexually dysfunctional."

If Alabama Governor George Wallace had told the Archdiocese of Mobile that as a condition of receiving state aid for social services it had to cease performing interracial marriages, few would have criticized the archdiocese for exercising its doctrinal prerogatives. Indeed, it may have even been applauded for doing so. Now it should not matter what the issue is that the Church decides it cannot in good conscience support—what should matter is its First Amendment right to do so. The unprincipled, of course, cannot understand such logic.

Unfortunately, the bill was passed and signed into law by D.C. mayor Adrian M. Fenty on December 18.

A few weeks prior to D.C.'s bill being passed and signed, some good news came out of the New York State Senate: it rejected a bill legalizing gay marriage by a vote of 38-24. Earlier that day, the Huffington Post ran a headline that was classic. It said, "START SPREADING THE NEWS: New York Debating Historic Gay Marriage Measure, Vote to be Razor Thin."

After those who sought to reinvent the institution of marriage got clobbered, we were all too happy to "START SPREADING THE NEWS."

Kudos to New York State Senator Reuben Diaz and all of 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. Too bad that

their D.C. counterparts didn't follow suit.

GAY ACTIVISTS BULLY D.C. PRIESTS

A homosexual website, ChurchOuting.org, was launched with the intent of publicly disclosing the gay priests serving in the Archdiocese of Washington. The goal of this outing was to intimidate gay priests, as well as heterosexual priests who may be "romantically involved," into voicing objections to the Church's opposition to gay marriage.

This initiative is the work of Phil Attey, self-described as a "Liberal-Gay-Ardent Obama Supporter"; he was active in the Obama Pride Metro-DC campaign. According to a news report, "Attey is going to approach priests he thinks are gay, and warn them that they better stop lobbying against gay people, seeing how gay they are...or...else?"

Catholic priests were also being pressured to sign the "Declaration of Religious Support for Marriage Equality," a statement by Clergy United for Marriage Equality. The statement, while it was not one we support, was respectfully written. Accordingly, we wrote to members of the Steering Committee of this group and asked that they disassociate themselves from this attempted hijacking of their effort.

We announced that we were prepared to assist any priest in the Archdiocese of Washington who was the victim of harassment, intimidation or stalking. Whatever resources a priest would need, we would see to it that he would be served. Fortunately, we didn't have to.

If radical gays wanted a showdown with the Catholic League, they should have known that we never back down from a fight.