

SAYING “MERRY CHRISTMAS” MADE SAFE IN SEATTLE

Thanks to the Catholic League, employees in King County, Washington, were allowed to say “Merry Christmas” this year. But if the Seattle-area county executive Ron Sims had his way, the ban he instituted would still be in place.

Sims, who is a Baptist minister, issued a memo on November 14 mandating that King County employees use “religion-neutral” language when referring to the holidays. He said it was okay to say “Happy Holidays” and “Holiday Greetings.” But all references to Christmas were regarded as taboo.

Sims explained that “we at King County want to ensure that any upcoming holiday celebration at the workplace is held in a *respectful, inclusive, and sensitive manner* that does not favor one religion over the other.” (His emphasis.) The following sentence, however, said that “Particularly in public areas, this means that any holiday recognition or celebration should be religion-neutral.”

William Donohue gave his advice in a news release that was picked up all over the country. He said the time had come for area Catholics to call the media, as well as the police, and then get arrested for saying, “Merry Christmas.” “What a show this would be,” Donohue said, “having dozens of Catholics being handcuffed by the cops for uttering what their boss regards as an obscenity.”

Donohue’s criticisms went to the heart of what has become a national problem: “The champions of diversity are the single greatest proponents of despotism in the United States today. Any expression that violates their crabbed vision of reality is subject to censorship. Indeed, in the name of diversity they promote ideological uniformity. Similarly, in the name of

inclusiveness, they exclude people of faith. The diversity despots are both a menace and a national disgrace.”

Because of the media pressure the Catholic League exerted, Sims was soon forced to reverse himself. But his attempt to say that he was misunderstood failed to convince anyone.

Sims said of his initial memo, “I believe its intent was to ask all of you to remember to be culturally sensitive...” Donohue replied, “Whenever someone says of his own words, ‘I believe its intent was,’ it is a sure bet he’s engaged in spin control. Sims knows exactly what he meant and what he meant was to censor the speech of county employees. But he got nailed and had to back off.”

eBAY PULLS TWO ITEMS

Within five days, eBay, the online auction house, withdrew two blasphemous and obscene items from its website following a complaint by the Catholic League.

The first item was called the “Weird Tattooed Jesus Statue!” It depicted Jesus with three eyes, vampire teeth and a dagger on his chest. The base was covered with roses and green painted skulls. It was pulled December 13.

The second item, “Catholic Priests F— Children,” was sponsored by Open Wound recording company and is the creation of the British band called The Grey Wolves. There was a sketch of naked boys and girls on the cover and a picture of a Catholic priest. The person who auctioned it was from Germany. It was pulled December 18.

In both instances, lawyers for eBay listened attentively to

our complaint and proved to be eminently reasonable. Thousands of items are auctioned off on this site and no one can possibly police them all. But when someone gives us a tip about some obscene item that attacks Catholicism, we investigate and then lodge a protest. Thus far, eBay officials have moved quickly and affirmatively to deal with the problem.

Members will recall that in November our lead story was on eBay withdrawing a "Virgin Mary Immaculate Conception Condom." We will continue to monitor this website and react when necessary.

In short, we are just as determined to fight these bigots as they are to continue to fight.

ANTI-CATHOLICISM ON THE SLY

William A. Donohue

The in-your-face type of anti-Catholicism is, by definition, easy to spot. Not so that which surfaces on the sly. Take, for example, some recent items that were brought to my attention.

- An article in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette mentions that a new club, the Chapel of Blues Club, was formerly a Catholic Church. The author then proceeds to take some slight jabs at Catholicism. What went unmentioned was the fact the building hasn't been a Catholic church for nearly a century. More recently, it was a warehouse and before that it was an Episcopalian church. Yet there were no cute stabs at the Anglican religion. Just Catholicism.

- St. John the Divine, the huge Episcopal cathedral in New York, was the scene of a horrific fire that destroyed part of

the church in December. Michael Kramer, a Jewish writer for the Daily News, took readers on a walk down memory lane reminiscing how a Catholic priest friend of his from El Salvador once came to New York and visited both St. John the Divine and St. Patrick's Cathedral. "The reception at St. Patrick's was not good. At St. John, I was welcomed. I found comfort there." This gratuitous remark, made in a gratuitously-written article, was highlighted by the editors: it appeared as a sidebar to a picture of the cathedral. Now it's a safe bet to say that no one in New York will ever see an article written by a Protestant that favorably compares a Jewish rabbi's experience in a New York Catholic church to his welcome in a New York synagogue.

- There was a scene in the NBC miniseries, "Uprising," regarding the Warsaw Ghetto uprising that depicts a priest on Easter Sunday closing the church's windows and proceeding with the service after detecting smoke from the ghetto's burning buildings and bodies. The show's author, Jon Avnet, was quoted as saying that his account is historically accurate. When we asked him to supply us with the evidence that this cold-hearted priest did what he was accused of, Avnet never replied.

- A story and photo article in New York Magazine about unusual dogs in New York City showed a full-page photo of a dog dressed in a nun's habit wearing a big cross around his neck. It's a sure bet that the dog wasn't running around New York with that oversized cross but both the owner and the photographer made sure it made the cut. No dog has been found in New York dressed as a rabbi wearing a huge Star of David around his neck.

- Frances Kissling of Catholics for a Free Choice recently attacked Catholic bishops with an ad campaign in the nation's capital that blamed them for AIDS (Kissling believes the fairy tale that says condoms solve everything). Only one newspaper in the nation, Newsday, ran an article on Kissling's campaign.

The author, Carol Eisenberg, ran a story recently on Mary Ramerman's make-believe ordination in Rochester, New York (see the last issue of Catalyst). Which begs the question: what explains Eisenberg's fascination with Catholic dissidents and anti-Catholic bigots? We won't hold our breath for a favorable piece on Jews for Jesus.

- Randy Cohen in the New York Times recently wrote a piece on the online bookstore, Amazon.com, that discussed how the company deals with issues of censorship. Out of nowhere, Cohen mentioned that Amazon.com still carries Roman Catholic books even though the Church does not allow women priests. I wrote to Cohen noting his selective indignation: "I've never seen an Orthodox Jewish women rabbi—have you?" He hasn't replied.

- The Village Voice had a piece on the "Best of NYC." One of its items was the "Best Place to Spill Beer on the Pope." This is what the newspaper calls its coverage of Catholics.

- In the John Travolta movie, "Domestic Disturbance," there is a violent scene in a prostitute's room that shows a large crucifix on the wall and a statue of Our Blessed Mother. Several Catholic League members wondered whether Hollywood would ever feature a Star of David in such a context.

So what's the point of all these examples? None was necessary and all were done intentionally. And all have an effect, even on unsuspecting persons. The central problem with the examples cited above is that they soften the society up for more full-fledged attacks on Catholicism. Invidious on their face, it is the cumulative effect of these instances that is the real cause for concern.

Admittedly, we do not track other forms of bigotry the way we track anti-Catholicism. But if there were the same kind of anti-Semitic or anti-black types of gratuitous attacks, we'd be hearing about it from the ADL and the NAACP. The reason we're giving notice to these hits is precisely because it

doesn't take a knockout punch to level an institution. Enough jabs may do the job just as well.

WEST PALM BEACH VA MEDICAL CENTER SHOWS BIAS AGAINST CHRISTIANS

On December 7, menorahs were removed from the Veterans Affairs Medical Center in West Palm Beach. On December 10, they were restored. The initial complaints were made by those who contended that the menorah is a religious symbol and should therefore not be displayed on government property. The second round of complaints came from the Jewish War Veterans. Even though they won, some were still upset because they said the display of menorahs should not have to be conditioned upon their placement next to a Christmas tree.

Bruce Rogow, a Nova Southeastern University law professor, was quoted in the local newspaper, the *Sun Sentinel*, saying that the problem could be resolved by banning all holiday displays. He also said the courts have determined that the Christmas tree and menorah have been transformed into secular symbols.

In reference to the 1989 Allegheny decision, *County of Allegheny v. ACLU*, Rogow added that the U.S. Supreme Court held that a nativity scene had to be removed because it was placed on the steps of the Allegheny County Courthouse and therefore had the appearance of government endorsement; he added that the high court ruled that placing a menorah next to a Christmas tree resolved the issue by representing both holidays with secular displays.

The Catholic League pointed out to the press that this account was so full of errors that it “couldn’t be outdone by *Saturday Night Live*.” First of all, the high court ruled in the Allegheny decision that the menorah is a religious symbol. The reason they allowed it to stay on government property was because it was placed next to a secular symbol, the Christmas tree. The nativity scene had to go because it was not placed next to secular symbols.

Accordingly, we argued that “if the VA Hospital is going to allow menorahs, it should also allow nativity scenes.” We called upon the Catholic War Veterans in that area to press the case.

What is overlooked with regularity is that there are two ways the government can be neutral: by being intolerant and banning all religious symbols or by being tolerant and allowing all of them. Unlike professor Rogow and other civil libertarians, the Catholic League prefers the latter option. And yet they have the nerve to call us the intolerant ones.

We urge you to write a letter of protest to Edward Seiler, Director, Veterans Affairs Medical Center, 7305 North Military Trail, West Palm Beach, Florida, 33410.

ARIZONA ATTORNEY GENERAL’S OFFICE BANS SANTA CLAUS

The Catholic League triggered a media frenzy in Arizona that embarrassed its Attorney General for supporting a ban on Santa Claus in public areas of her office.

It began when Gale Garriott, chief counsel of the Agency

Counsel Division of the Arizona Attorney General's office, issued a memo banning the display of Santa Claus from areas open to the general public. In his memo of November 28, Garriott banned any items "that have a religious significance attached to them." He specifically listed Santa Claus as an example. When workers complained, he issued a memo on December 6 that left in place all the banned items save that he excised the words "religious significance."

In an employee's own work area, "reasonable decorations that are respectful of the views of others and that are consistent with the mission and professionalism [sic] standards of the Office are permissible." In the general work area, "Unacceptable decorations would include nativity scenes, crosses, Stars of David, Christmas trees, Santa Clauses, Santa Claus related items, and other similar items that may be offensive to some of our employees or the public."

As a result of Garriott's decision, workers decided to mock his memo by displaying Holiday Greetings from the Loch Ness monster and Bigfoot.

William Donohue branded Garriott as "Arizona's Commissar of the Commonweal." He then used sarcasm to score points. Referring to Garriott, Donohue said, "he needs to explain more fully what he means by decorations that are 'respectful of the views of others.'" Donohue suggested, "For example, snowflakes may be innocuous to him, but not to others. Therefore, why should he imply a tolerance for snowflakes when he could simply have added them to his censorial bag? After all, it makes no sense to ban Santa and allow snowflakes."

We contacted Garriott's boss, Attorney General Janet Napolitano, as well as Arizona Governor, Jane Hull, informing them of their commissar's edict. We got two very different responses.

Arizona Governor Jane Hull called William Donohue on December

18 thanking him for notifying her of the ban on Santa Claus in public areas of the Attorney General's office. But Attorney General Janet Napolitano justified the ban by saying that her office constitutes a "people's lobby" that does not allow displays that might offend those of various "faiths and cultures."

Donohue told the media, "Arizona Governor Jane Hull is a model of reasonableness." He also noted that "She not only understands that the ban on Santa is 'idiocy,' she is baffled (as we are) that given the events of 9-11 why anyone would want to censor freedom of expression—of such an innocent kind—during the holiday season."

Donohue then took aim at Napolitano: "It is important to note that there is absolutely nothing in either federal or state law that requires Attorney General Janet Napolitano to support a ban on the display of Santa Claus in her 'people's lobby.' It is purely a matter of her desire: she has a preference for certain types of gag rules."

The business that some might be offended by Santa was called "a ruse" by Donohue. "Many more are offended by his absence," he noted. He then asked, "And what exactly is Napolitano going to say to those who say they are offended by pictures of Martin Luther King in her lobby next month? Is she going to take down the pictures in deference to those who are offended or is she going to brand those who object as bigots?"

Donohue ended his comments by saying of Napolitano, "What she refuses to recognize is that anyone who is offended by either the display of Santa, or by pictures of Martin Luther King, in her People's Republic of Arizona lobby, is, in fact, a bigot. And by definition that would certainly include her."

We are pleased that the media did its job by exposing Napolitano. The people of Arizona were overwhelmingly on our side.

COURAGE REBOUNDS

Father John Harvey heads a wonderful outreach program to homosexual Catholics who want to remain faithful to the Church's teachings on sexuality. It is called Courage. Father Harvey is testimony to the fact that the Catholic Church turns its back on no one.

Unfortunately, the registry company that handled Courage's initial website did not notify Father Harvey that his domain name was about to expire. And so it did. Immediately, a Russian-owned porn company grabbed the name. Thus, unsuspecting persons seeking to access Father Harvey's website got (and still get) porn instead.

The good news is that Courage has a new website, courageRC.net. Everyone is invited to check it out and pass the word about Father Harvey's courageous ministry.

NYC PRINCIPAL FORCED TO REVERSE DISCRIMINATORY MEMO

A New York City principal, Dr. Fran Levy, came under fire from the Catholic League when she discriminated against Christians. By putting the media spotlight on Levy, principal of PS 22 (The Thomas Jefferson Magnet School of Humanities in Flushing), we were able to force her to reverse her decision that allowed teachers to bring Jewish and Muslim religious symbols to work yet banned the display of a Christmas tree.

We received a tip from a Catholic League member who worked at the school that on November 29, Dr. Levy ordered a three-foot Christmas tree taken down because it was larger than a cutout display of a menorah and the crescent and star. On November 30, Levy issued a memo inviting teachers to bring to school religious symbols that represent the Muslim, Kwanzaa and Jewish religions. (Kwanzaa, however, is not a religion.) No mention of Christianity was made.

It was the following news release that garnered quick coverage by the media:

"Dr. Levy has issued a memo that is mind-boggling. She has set her school up for a lawsuit. It would be hard to find a more classic demonstration of discrimination against Christians in a public school anywhere in the nation.

"The Catholic League will not be appeased if Dr. Levy decides to put back the Christmas tree. The Christmas tree is a secular symbol. If she is going to allow religious symbols such as a menorah and crescent and star, then she must permit the display of a nativity scene. Either that or ban all religious symbols. But we will not tolerate a discriminatory policy and that is why we will use all our resources to correct this injustice."

We didn't have to expend many resources to get what we wanted. Dr. Levy came under such pressure that she had to reverse her decision allowing the religious symbols of Judaism and Islam in her school. But that didn't satisfy William Donohue.

Donohue registered a complaint with the attorneys who work in the New York City Schools Chancellor's office. He demanded that disciplinary action be taken against Dr. Levy for discriminating against Christians. A spokeswoman for the chancellor's office said that Donohue's complaint would be given serious consideration.

NEW YORK CITY SCHOOL SYSTEM DISCRIMINATES AGAINST CHRISTIANS

In December, the Catholic League charged the New York City school system with discrimination against Christians. It plans to sue New York once a family with children in the New York City public schools agrees to be party to the suit; this is a requirement for the league to achieve standing. Working cooperatively with the Catholic League in this effort is the Thomas More Center for Law & Justice, based in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

William Donohue was disturbed when he learned that New York City Schools Chancellor Dr. Harold Levy said that "The Supreme Court has previously refused to permit erection of a nativity scene on public property." Dr. Levy's remarks came in reply to Donohue's request that nativity scenes be displayed in the public schools alongside menorahs. Donohue quickly corrected Dr. Levy's interpretation by citing decisions of the U.S. Supreme Court that allow nativity scenes on public property. He used the Catholic League's own nativity scene in Central Park as an example.

Noting the discriminatory conditions in the schools, Donohue said, "Right now menorahs and crescents and stars (religious symbols of Judaism and Islam) are allowed in the public schools precisely because they are surrounded by a Christian secular symbol, namely the Christmas tree." Donohue then commented, "Now imagine the uproar if New York City schools banned the menorah and crescent and star and allowed a nativity scene next to a dreidel!"

Matters got worse when we learned that on November 28, Chad Vignola, general counsel to the chancellor, released a memo to all superintendents and principals declaring all secular holiday symbols to be permissible in the schools. This was unexceptional save that Vignola listed as examples “Christmas trees, Menorahs, and the Star and Crescent.”

Donohue wrote to Dr. Levy, making public his remarks in a news release: “It will come as a surprise to constitutional scholars, to say nothing of most of those in the Jewish and Islamic communities, to learn that their religious holiday symbols, namely the menorah and the star and crescent, have been declared by your office to have solely a secular meaning.’”

The Catholic League is determined to secure standing by getting a Catholic family with children in the New York City public schools to take part in a lawsuit. This outrageous policy will not stand up in court and we will see that it doesn’t.

CATHOLICISM TRASHED BY GREETING CARD COMPANY

Every December we uncover greeting cards that obscenely portray Christmas. In this regard, NobleWorks, a greeting card company from Hoboken, New Jersey, is arguably the worst offender.

NobleWorks has two categories of greeting cards: “nice” and “Extra” (which they call “naughty”). There are no cards in the latter category for Ramadan, Hanukkah or Kwanzaa. But there are more than a dozen tailored to Christian holidays.

For example, the "Extra" selection has a Christmas card that comments on how someone exposed himself at a party. Another card has a picture of Our Blessed Mother holding baby Jesus with the inscription, "Losing those 15 pounds was sure to be a bitch." And there is another one with the picture of an angel that remarks how she will still enjoy the holidays even though she is having her period.

The "Extra" selection of birthday cards include the following: two cards that mock Christ on the cross; one that shows a priest by a urinal with a sign overhead that reads, "Holy Water"; and a nun who is shown buying a card not from the "Wedding" or "Birthday" section of a card store but from the one that reads, "Castration." There is also a Mother's Day card that shows Mary commenting to Christ, "Uh, excuse me, Mr. Savior of Mankind, but did you remember to put on clean underwear in case you get crucified?"

In our news release of December 21, we said:

"NobleWorks does not make these cards purely because they hate Catholics. They do so because there is a market for them. Indeed, just this week a young woman called our office early in the morning and, almost in tears, told us that she spotted one of these cards at a Christmas party the night before in someone's house.

"Sadly, there is also a market for Jew-bashing cards. Millions of people hate gays. Ditto for Muslims. White racists abound. But there are no cards, thank God, that attack these groups. Just Catholics."

A letter to the offender is recommended. Write to Ron Kanfi, president, NobleWorks, P.O. Box 1275, 123 Grand St., Hoboken, NJ 07030. Why not ask him straight out why he doesn't make cards that insult Jews, blacks and gays? Let him know you're from the Catholic League and fail to the humor in his bigotry.

MAKERS OF HOLIDAY GREETING CARDS DUMB DOWN CHRISTMAS

Makers of holiday greeting cards show great unevenness in their handling of Christian, Jewish and Muslim holidays. Here is what our review of the greeting cards available on the home page of Yahoo! revealed:

There are over 350 Christmas cards yet only 25 have a religious content. There are at least 8 objectionable cards in the "Humorous" and "Naughty" categories. For example, these categories have cards that show naked buttocks, animals urinating, Santa on the toilet, etc. Most of the 48 Hanukkah cards show a picture of a menorah or a Star of David. Of the 5 "Humorous" cards, none was as offensive as any of the Christmas cards in this category. There was no "Naughty" category. The 66 Ramadan and Eid ul-Fitr cards were all respectful of Islam and most showed a star and crescent. There were no "Humorous" or "Naughty" categories. All the Kwanzaa cards were respectful and there were no "Humorous" or "Naughty" categories.

We released the following comment to the press:

"American Greetings is the worst offender of the mainline greeting card producers. One of the worst offenders is Tomato cards. It has a card this year that mocks the Blessed Virgin Mary.

"What this just goes to show is that there is a contempt for Christianity among our elites in this country that has no rival. Sometimes the bias they sport is subdued and other times it is not. But that it exists is beyond question. Dumbing down Christmas is very important to these people

otherwise they wouldn't be working overtime to get the job done. We will do our best to inform the public as to their agenda."