

CHRISTMAS WARS PERSIST; HIGH COURT MUST RULE

As this issue of *Catalyst* details, the annual Christmas war with secularists continued in 2006. The good news is that our side fought back with greater determination this past Christmas season than ever before. Our ad in the *New York Times* (see the November *Catalyst*), got us off to a quick start.

The Christmas war impacts everyone. Battles were waged in the schools, parks, malls and workplace. In many cases there was clear discrimination: menorahs were often allowed where manger scenes were prohibited. Christians are supposed to be satisfied with Christmas trees, so they say.

But unlike other years, the Catholic League was called upon more for leadership than actual combat. That's because so many Catholics sought our advice and then took the fight to the secularists in their own backyard. This is precisely the kind of energy that has been lacking in the past.

Some of the skirmishes were over the usual stuff—workers being told not to offend anyone by saying “Merry Christmas”—and some of it was downright obscene. But whether it was political correctness or malice at work, the bottom line is that the secularists will stop at nothing in their quest for supremacy.

The Christmas wars will not be resolved until two things happen: the Supreme Court deals with this issue in a more forthright fashion than it has previously done, and Christians continue to fight back. There is so much confusion in court rulings in this area that many government officials and school superintendents opt to play it safe each year by prohibiting nativity scenes from being displayed.

The Catholic League was happy to team up with

Father Benedict Groeschel in 2006 by launching our “Christmas Watch” program. We are delighted that so many in the media cited our work in news stories. We made their jobs easier. Indeed, we received more coverage than any other organization.

REWARDING BIGOTRY

The Thomas More Law Center, representing the Catholic League, is appealing a decision by a federal judge who declared that an anti-Catholic resolution passed last year by the San Francisco Board of Supervisors was constitutional.

The resolution, which was adopted last March, was one of the most vitriolic condemnations of the Catholic Church ever made by government officials. Without offering any evidence, the officials accused the Vatican of meddling in the affairs of San Francisco, and labeled Church teachings on sexuality “hateful,” “insulting” and “defamatory.” It also called on the local archbishop to “defy” Church teachings.

Our attorney, Robert Muise, said, “Our Constitution plainly forbids hostility toward any religion, including the Catholic faith. In total disregard for the Constitution, homosexual activists in positions of authority in San Francisco have abused their authority as government officials and misused the instruments of government to attack the Catholic Church.”

Thomas More Law Center president Richard Thompson said, “This judge totally ignored or attempted to rationalize the evocative rhetoric and venom of the resolution which are sad reminders of Catholic baiting by the Ku Klux Klan.”

Bill Donohue maintains that this lawsuit is necessary if only

because it may make the bigots think twice before they lash out at the Catholic Church again.

WE DON'T HAVE TO LIE

William A. Donohue

Those of us who are pro-life have two major advantages over our adversaries: a) the scientific evidence is on our side—life begins at conception, and b) we don't have to lie. It is this second advantage, the moral advantage, that is the subject of this article.

The other side has a difficult time just honestly describing who they are. They shun being labeled pro-abortion, preferring to say they believe in choice. What exactly it is they're choosing is never mentioned. Now at one level, everyone believes in choice: we choose what to wear, what to eat, etc. But by itself, choosing has no moral quotient—it is just a process. Morality kicks in when the object of our choice is determined. When the subject is abortion, as even those who believe in “choice” must admit, what is being chosen is life or death.

In January 2005, Senator Hillary Clinton said to her supporters, “We can all recognize that abortion in many ways represents a sad, even tragic choice to many, many women.” She never said why. After all, if abortion isn't the taking of innocent human life, it needs to be explained what is so sad about it. Moreover, how could something she says represents “reproductive freedom” be considered tragic? What is tragic about this freedom?

On February 2, 1978, Senator Ted Kennedy wrote to Tom Dennelly

of New York (a long-time Catholic League member) saying, "I am opposed to abortion on demand. This opposition is based on deep moral and religious beliefs." Well, it couldn't have been too deep—Senator Kennedy has long championed the right of a doctor to jam a pair of scissors into the brain of a child who is 80 percent born. It's called partial-birth abortion, or what the late pro-abortion Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan called infanticide.

In 1997, feminist Naomi Wolf wrote in the *New York Times* that although she wants abortion to be legal, it was time for her side to admit that abortion at any stage "involves the possibility of another life." My response, which questioned why she wouldn't want to err on the side of caution, was printed a few days later: "If I drove down a street full of children playing and saw a large cardboard box in my path, would it make sense to assume that if I ran over it I might take the life of an innocent person? And would not the right choice be evident to everyone?"

Last year at this time, pro-abortion writer William Saletan admitted that most Americans want restrictions on abortion, and that's because "It's bad to kill a fetus." Is this because a fetus is a baby? He doesn't say. But even Saletan must confess that no pregnant woman has ever been treated to a "Fetus Shower."

Last February, the Rev. Donna Schaper, a minister in New York, wrote that she had an abortion 19 years ago. "I am not bragging, nor am I apologizing," she said. Then she really opened up. "I happen to agree that abortion is a form of murder," she said, admitting that "I know I murdered the life within me." So abortion is not just a "form of murder," it is murder. About which, however, there is no need to apologize.

Former Senator John Danforth is an Episcopalian minister who is opposed to *Roe v. Wade*. His opposition stems solely from his conviction that judges should not decide the issue of

abortion. Regarding the big question, he is agnostic. "I have not been so certain that a fetus is a person," he says, "but I do think that, at some level, it is human life." There are enough qualifiers in that sentence to justify running for president.

Peter Singer teaches at Princeton University and believes it should be legal to kill disabled babies *after they are born*. He may be demented, but he is not dishonest. "One point on which I agree with opponents of abortion is that, from the point of view of ethics rather than the law," he says, "there is no sharp distinction between the fetus and the newborn baby." As I said, he is not dishonest.

Senator Barack Obama writes in his best-selling book that he believes in "vigorous enforcement of our nondiscrimination laws," and wants to "lower abortion rates." But he only wants to outlaw racial discrimination, not abortion. To reduce abortion, he says, we need "education"—we need to give young people "information." He does not say why we should legalize discrimination, choosing to fight it through education and information. Maybe this explains why he has a 100 percent approval rating from NARAL—the most radical pro-abortion organization in the nation. It may also explain why he has never supported a single law that would reduce abortion, either as a state senator in Illinois or as a U.S. senator.

We don't have to lie. They do. That's not enough to satisfy, but it helps. Nothing will satisfy until we get to the day when abortion will be regarded by everyone for what it is—a choice that kills.

THE SECULAR CRUSADE AGAINST RELIGION

Dinesh D'Souza

This article is adapted from Dinesh D'Souza's new book The Enemy at Home: The Cultural Left and Its Responsibility for 9/11, just published by Doubleday.

Is Osama Bin Laden right when he alleges that America is a pagan society, the “leading power of the unbelievers”? Bin Laden and the Islamic radicals point to America's policy of separation of church and state to prove their point. To many Americans, of course, this charge is ridiculous. Even so, it is worth asking why America is so committed to such a systematic exclusion of religion from government and public life. Even European countries, where religious belief and practice is much lower than in the United States, treat religion more sympathetically and provide recognition and support to religious institutions and religious schools.

So why is America virtually alone in the world dedicated to strict separation of church and state? Many Americans have become convinced that religion represents, as author Sam Harris puts it in *The End of Faith*, “the most potent source of human conflict, past and present.” Columnist Robert Kuttner gives the familiar litany. “The Crusades slaughtered millions in the name of Jesus. The Inquisition brought the torture and murder of millions more. After Luther, Christians did bloody battle with other Christians for another three centuries.” In a recent book, Richard Dawkins contends that most of the recent conflicts in the world—in the Middle East, in the Balkans, in Northern Ireland, in Kashmir, in Sri Lanka—show the continued vitality of the murderous impulse that seems inherent in religion.

The problem with this expose is that it exaggerates the crimes of religion, while ignoring the vastly greater offenses of secular or atheist fanaticism. The best example of religious persecution in America is the Salem Witch Trials. How many people were killed in those trials? Thousands? Hundreds? Actually, nineteen. Yet the event continues to haunt the liberal imagination.

It is strange to witness the passion with which some secular people rail against the Crusaders' and Inquisitors' misdeeds of more than five hundred years ago. Ironically these religious zealots did not come close to killing the number of people murdered by secular tyrants of our own era. How many people were killed in the Spanish Inquisition? The actual number sentenced to death appears to be around 10,000. This figure is tragic, and of course population levels were much lower at the time.

But even taking that difference into account, the death tolls of the Inquisition are miniscule compared to those produced by the secular despotisms of the twentieth century. In the name of creating their version of a secular utopia, Hitler, Stalin and Mao produced the kind of mass slaughter that no Inquisitor could possibly match. Collectively these atheist tyrants murdered more than 100 million people.

Moreover, many of the conflicts that liberals count as "religious wars" were not fought over religion. They were mainly fought over rival claims to territory and power. Can the wars between England and France be counted as religious wars because the English were Protestants and the French were Catholics? Hardly. The same is true today. The contemporary conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians is not, at its core, a religious one. It arises out of a dispute over self-determination and land. Hamas and the extreme orthodox parties in Israel may advance theological claims—"God gave us this land" and so forth—but even without these religious motives the conflict would remain essentially the same. Ethnic

rivalry, not religion, is the source of the tension in Northern Ireland and the Balkans.

"While the motivations of the Tamil Tigers are not explicitly religious," Harris informs us, "they are Hindus who undoubtedly believe many improbable things about the nature of life and death." In other words, while the Tigers see themselves as fighting for land and the right to rule themselves—in other words, as combatants in a secular political struggle—Harris detects a religious motive because these people happen to be Hindu and surely there must be some underlying religious craziness that explains their fanaticism.

It's obvious that Harris can go on forever in this vein. Seeking to exonerate secularism and atheism from the horrors perpetrated in their name, he argues that Stalinism and Maoism were in reality "little more than a political religion." As for Nazism, "while the hatred of Jews in Germany expressed itself in a predominantly secular way, it was a direct inheritance from medieval Christianity." Indeed, "The holocaust marked the culmination of...two thousand years of Christian fulminating against the Jews."

Is anyone fooled by this rhetorical legerdemain? For Harris to call twentieth-century atheist ideologies "religion" is to render the term meaningless. Should religion now be responsible not only for the sins of believers, but also those of atheists? Moreover, Harris does not explain why, if Nazism was directly descended from medieval Christianity, medieval Christianity did not produce a Hitler. How can a self-proclaimed atheist ideology, advanced by Hitler as a repudiation of Christianity, be a "culmination" of two thousand years of Christianity? Harris is employing a transparent slight-of-hand that holds Christianity responsible for the crimes committed in its name, while exonerating secularism and atheism for the greater crimes committed in their name.

A second justification for America's church-state jurisprudence is the claim that the founders enshrined secularism in the Constitution as the basis for their "new order for the ages." In her book *Freethinkers*, Susan Jacoby argues that it was precisely to establish such a framework that the founders declined to make America a Christian nation and instead gave us "a nation founded on the separation of church and state." Jacoby credits the founders with "creating the first secular government in the world."

But consider this anomaly. The idea of separating religion and government was not an American idea, it was a Christian idea. It was Christ, not Jefferson, who said, "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." The American founders institutionalized this Christian idea—admittedly an idea ignored for much of medieval history—in the Constitution.

The framers' understanding of separation, however, was very different from that of today's ACLU. From the founding through the middle of the twentieth century, America had religious displays on public property, congressionally-designated religious services and holidays, government-funded chaplains, and prayer in public schools. So entrenched was religion in American private and public life that, writing in the early nineteenth century, Tocqueville called it the first of America's political institutions. In a unanimous ruling in 1892, the Supreme Court declared that if one takes "a view of American life as expressed by its laws, its business, its customs, and its society, we find everywhere a clear recognition of the same truth...that this is a Christian nation."

Virtually all of the actions that secular liberals claim are forbidden by the no-establishment clause of the First Amendment were permitted for most of American history. Thus liberals like Jacoby are in the peculiar position of claiming that the religion provisions of the Constitution were

misunderstood by the founders and by everyone else for a hundred and fifty years, until finally they were accurately comprehended by liberals. The arrogance of this claim is exceeded only by its implausibility.

Finally some people defend church-state separation by pointing to the religious diversity of America. Historian Diana Eck has a recent book titled *A New Religious America: How a "Christian Country" Has Become the World's Most Religiously Diverse Nation*. Since America is no longer religiously homogenous, Eck's argument goes, there is a pressing need to adopt constitutional rules that permit minorities to freely practice their religion. We frequently hear that nativity displays, monuments with the Ten Commandments, and prayers at high school graduations all make the multitudes of American non-Christians feel extremely uncomfortable.

But where is the evidence for this? It is not the Hindu, Muslim and Buddhist immigrants who press for radical secularism, it is the liberal activist groups. So the mantra of "diversity" seems to be secular ruse to undermine all religious expression in the public sphere. Moreover, the factual premise is unsound. Contrary to Eck, America is not the world's most diverse nation. Surprising though it may seem, the total number of non-Christians in America adds up to less than 10 million people, which is around 3 percent of the population. Many Asian and African countries have religious minorities that make up 15 to 20 percent of the population.

In terms of religious background, America is no more diverse today than it was in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. How is this possible? Because today's immigrants come mostly from Mexico and Latin and South America, and virtually all of them are Christians. So not only does America remain a Christian country, but as historian Philip Jenkins points out, its Christian population relative to non-Christians is growing. Jenkins notes that the real story of America should be titled, "How this Christian country has become an even-

more-Christian country.”

My conclusion is that the radical Muslims are wrong about America but they are right about separation of church and state. America’s church-state doctrine, in its current form, is a fraud. It is built on a bogus historical, constitutional and sociological foundation. The real purpose of its advocates is to marginalize traditional religion and traditional morality, so that the public sphere can be monopolized by their ideological agenda. It is time to dismantle the anti-religious scaffolding erected by the party of secularism.

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ANTI-CHRISTMAS FEVER ABOUNDS

Like most Jews, Olympic skater Sasha Cohen is not offended by Christmas carols. But that didn’t stop a government employee from trying to protect her. While Cohen was skating at a rink in Riverside, California, a high school choir started singing “God Rest Ye Merry Gentleman,” immediately sending Michelle Baldwin into orbit. She summoned a cop and got him to institute a gag rule: he ordered the choir to stop singing. Baldwin maintained that because Cohen was Jewish, she would be upset by the carol. But she never bothered to ask the skater if she objected. As it turns out, Cohen couldn’t have cared less. As usual, those who say we must be careful not to offend non-Christians at Christmastime are the ones who object to Christmas—not those whom they falsely claim to represent.

Like Baldwin, Sandra Byrne, principal of an elementary school in Delray Beach, Florida, has a need to show how inclusive she

is. That's why she had no Christmas tree, nativity scene or menorah in her office. Instead, Byrne decorated her office with teddy bears wearing sweaters. Moreover, only "winter parties" and "winter celebrations" are tolerated. "We're very careful about this," she says. No doubt she is.

Here's another example of anti-Christmas fever. In a Detroit suburban school district, they instituted a quota system on religious songs that can be sung at school concerts. That's right—only 30 percent of the songs at Howell Public Schools could be religious. It's not certain whether the choir director would have been fined or imprisoned if a multicultural monitor found that 31 percent of the songs were religious. We recommend incarceration.

After Pope John Paul II visited Cuba in 1998, Castro made a good-faith gesture by allowing Cubans to celebrate Christmas again. Maybe we should hire Fidel to talk to these madmen.

SEATTLE AIRPORT CHRISTMAS DEBACLE

A rabbi from Seattle threatened to sue the Port of Seattle if an eight-foot menorah wasn't erected at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport (Sea-Tac) to "balance" Christmas trees there. Airport officials responded by removing the trees.

Don Feder of Jews Against Anti-Christian Defamation and Bill Donohue issued a statement to the press. They said, "Courts have held the Christmas tree is a secular symbol (though associated with the celebration of Christmas). The menorah is clearly a religious symbol. While it would have been nice for the airport to erect a menorah, it wasn't necessitated by the

presence of the trees. To the rabbi's threat, officials at the airport reacted the way bureaucrats usually do—by choosing the path of least resistance.” Donohue and Feder called on the rabbi to withdraw his threat and called on the airport to restore the trees—whether or not any other symbol was added. They concluded, “We should all recall this is supposed to be the season of peace on earth—not animosity on earth and litigation toward man.”

After much public outcry, the rabbi agreed not to file suit and Sea-Tac restored the trees.

HANDS OFF SANTA!

At Brandeis Elementary School in Louisville, Kentucky, a teacher asked her students to make a Christmas tree out of paper; it was put on her bulletin board. But when a Jewish teacher said she was offended, she complained to the principal, Shervita West-Jordan, and got her wish. According to a news report, “She, and the teacher who complained, were bothered by the fact that the tree was made up of hands which represented all the students in the class.”

Both the teacher and the principal were angry over the words, “Santa’s Helpers,” that were placed over the tree. “Of course, the children in her classroom that were Indian and Muslim probably did not believe in Santa Claus,” Jordan said. They were not “Santa’s Helpers,” she insisted. She said the tree could stay but the words had to go. She suggested “Holiday Helpers” or “Winter Helpers,” because that would “make it a little more inclusive.”

Instead of instructing the teacher who was offended on her need to practice tolerance, the principal rewarded her for her

intolerance. That's because she's cut from the same cloth. We have entered a new day when those on the public payroll are spending their time worrying if some non-Christian kid's hands helped to make a secular symbol. Their selective interest in inclusion, which just happens to come up every December—and just for Christmas—is nothing but a ruse to disguise their bigotry.

Instead of telling some children they can't put their hands on a Christmas tree, educators would do well to adopt a hands-off policy and let kids be kids.

CRECHES ON PUBLIC PROPERTY ARE LEGAL

Note: At press time, the Supreme Court of the United States had yet to decide on whether it would hear the case on allowing a crèche in New York City public schools.

On December 18, the Catholic League erected a nativity scene in New York's Central Park; it was located on the corner of 59th Street and Fifth Avenue, right near the Plaza. As we do every year, we obtained a permit from the New York City Parks Department; next to our crèche was the world's largest menorah. We would like to be able to put a crèche in the New York City schools as well—the menorah is allowed—but unfortunately the educrats have chosen to practice religious discrimination by denying us the right to do so. Which is why the Catholic League and the Thomas More Law Center have sued the City; we are awaiting a decision by the U.S. Supreme Court on whether it will hear this case.

Ignorance and intolerance abounded on this issue. For example,

on December 9, the *Courier-Post* ran an editorial saying, “Putting religious symbols on government property violates the law and challenges the constitutional right of religious freedom.” The New Jersey daily was twice wrong. As we showed with our nativity scene, it is not unconstitutional to put a religious symbol on public property. Furthermore, it doesn’t challenge religious freedom to display a manger scene or a menorah—it demonstrates it.

In Briarcliff Manor, village officials put up a Christmas tree and a menorah, but they balked at a request by an 80-year-old man to add a crèche (paid for by him). So he sued. In federal court, a judge ruled on December 15 in his favor. Instead of adding the nativity scene to the display, officials in the Westchester, New York town took everything down. “The Village erected a Menorah and a Christmas tree display in a spirit of inclusion,” officials said. They did nothing of the sort: they gave Jews a religious symbol and Christians a secular one, and when they were told to treat both groups equally they elected to demonstrate intolerance towards both. That’s their idea of neutrality—censor everyone equally.

These battles are so unnecessary. If only the secularists learned to inculcate the virtue of tolerance, all would be well.

BABY JESUS EVICTED FROM MICHIGAN TOWN

In December 2005, the ACLU threatened a lawsuit against Berkley, Michigan unless a crèche outside the city hall was removed. This past November, the Berkley City Council voted

6-1 to remove it, angering many of the residents who packed the building.

There is a lot of blame to go around. First, there is the ACLU, an organization that is so terrified of religion that it has actually expressed anger over a 9-foot statue of Jesus that is located on the ocean floor off the coast of Key Largo. Second, there are the spineless residents and clergymen in the area who liked the idea of giving the nativity scene to the Berkley Clergy Association for display on church property (it was one of three options on the table); in doing so, they handed a victory to the ACLU. Third, there is the bogus argument made by the mayor, Marilyn Stephan, who said, "It's a risk to the safety of the crèche. We want Santa to come and do the Christmas tree lighting and for the safety of all who come, you can't have all that stuff around." The stuff—baby Jesus, Mary and Joseph—has been in the same spot for 65 years, without incident. Fourth, there was the concern, expressed by some city officials, that the cost of litigation might prove prohibitive: six organizations, including the Thomas More Law Center, agreed to accept the case pro bono (the only reasonable concern was that if the town lost, it would have to pay the ACLU's legal fees).

Perhaps the most telling commentary in this case came when a city ad hoc committee suggested that, as one of three options, residents consider establishing a free-speech zone for religious displays. That the ACLU—the so-called guardians of liberty—would oppose a free-speech zone says it all. But it's a sure bet that if the zone were to house child pornography, the ACLU would have broken out the cigars. That's because it sees nativity scenes as obscene, not pictures of sexually abused kids. And owing to the fact that the ACLU wants all drugs legalized, it probably would have broken out the cocaine, not the cigars.

SUPPORT FOR BISHOPS

A recent poll of American Catholics shows a 71 percent approval rating for U.S. bishops. In the fall of 2001, before news of the scandal hit, their rating was 83 percent. Post-scandal it hit a low of 59 percent in 2003 and 58 percent in 2004. The pope received an approval rating of 83 percent.