

# PROTEST WORKS FOR SENIORS; CHRISTMAS FOES RETREAT

*Newsweek* recently did an article on the annual Christmas controversies that included comments by Bill Donohue. It maintained that “The War on Christmas Is Over” and “Christmas Won.”

We are happy to report our role in achieving a victory in California this past Christmas season.

On December 6, we learned that a Christmas tree was removed from a senior citizens’ housing complex in Newhall, California; the management company told the staff that the tree was a religious symbol and must be taken down. On December 7, after an organized protest by the Catholic League, the Christmas tree was restored.

The decision to ban the tree was made by a private company, thus it was within their purview to make such a choice; it also made moot any separation of church and state argument. But there was still the moral issue: the idea that senior citizens couldn’t enjoy a Christmas tree at Christmastime struck us as mean-spirited. It was also a dumb move—a Christmas tree is a secular symbol.

We decided to notify our e-mail list about this matter; it reaches a huge audience. Indeed, we provided the e-mail address of the company’s department of human resources, making it likely the message would get through. It did. After being bombarded with angry missives, management decided it wasn’t worth the effort, and so it yielded.

To show how things are changing for the better, consider that last year the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) sent a threatening letter to city authorities in Faribault, Minnesota complaining about a nativity scene in the local library. This

year the Faribault City Council voted unanimously to display a crèche on public land. As one council member put it, “This really bugs me. I mean, one person complained. There are 17,000 members [of FFRF] in the whole nation. That’s really a minority. We’re the majority here.”

Also, after years of court battles, the Thomas More Law Center scored an impressive victory when a nativity scene that was built by a local resident was returned to its longtime home on a median in Warren, Michigan.

Citizens of Oskaloosa, Iowa turned out in large numbers to attend a city council meeting on whether to keep a nativity scene in the city’s public square. The city council voted to keep it.

The authorities in two New Jersey towns, Woodbridge and Woodcliff Lake, successfully took on Christmas foes in their respective localities.

There were many more examples like these. While it may be premature to say our side has won, we’re definitely gaining momentum, and our foes are in retreat.

---

## **HHS SHOWDOWN**

This is the year that the final showdown will take place between the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and Catholic institutions. As 2012 came to a close, the judiciary was still sending mixed messages.

At the end of November, the U.S. Supreme Court ordered the Fourth Circuit of Appeals to rule on the religious-liberty issues of ObamaCare that are being contested by Liberty

University. Previously, the circuit court ruled that a challenge was premature, but the high court vacated that decision.

In early December, a U.S. District Court ruled that the Archdiocese of New York could proceed with its lawsuit against the HHS mandate. District Judge Brian Cogan said the federal government's pledge that it would not burden the Archdiocese once ObamaCare kicks in was not satisfactory. As he neatly put it, "There is no 'Trust us, changes are coming' clause in the Constitution."

In mid-December, the U.S. District Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia heard arguments on the propriety of allowing a lawsuit by Wheaton and Belmont Abbey, two religious colleges, to go forward even though the HHS rules have not been finalized. A ruling will soon be made whether to proceed now or wait.

The confusion will come to an end no later than August; that is when the final HHS rules will be released. In the meantime, Catholic League advisory board member Tom Monaghan (founder of Domino's Pizza) has also decided to challenge the legality of the HHS mandate.

---

# **INTERPRETING ABORTION DATA**

**From The President's Desk**  
**William A. Donohue**

The most controversial social issues of our day, namely abortion and gay marriage, are overwhelmingly funded and researched by those who are advocates for these causes. Similarly, those who report on these subjects, as well as

those who teach about them in the classroom, are also mostly partisans for these causes. It is difficult, then, to get a clear picture of what is really happening. Still, with perseverance, it can be done.

Take for example the recent report on abortion that was published by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). The CDC is an agency of the Department of Health and Human Services, and it is run by a pro-abortion extremist, Secretary Kathleen Sebelius. Moreover, the CDC cites as reliable the work of the most prominent pro-abortion research group in the nation, the Guttmacher Institute (formerly the research arm of Planned Parenthood).

Does this mean they cook the books, making up data to suit their politics? No. But it does mean that the lines of inquiry that they pursue, and their interpretation of the data, can readily be challenged.

On November 21, the CDC published a report, "Abortion Surveillance—United States, 2009." It offers the most recent data on abortion nationwide. Far and away its most significant finding was the 5 percent decrease in abortions between 2008 and 2009, the largest single-year decrease in a decade. Also of importance was the finding that 18 percent of all pregnancies end in abortion; the rate among African Americans, who have the highest rate, is four times that of whites, who have the lowest rate.

The data, while important, did not include figures from California, Delaware, Maryland, and New Hampshire; those states account for 21 percent of all the abortions. However, by relying on the research of the Guttmacher Institute, the CDC was able to consider the numbers from these states. Mississippi had the lowest abortion rate, and Delaware had the highest.

Media coverage of the report was revealing. Here is how the

Associated Press (AP) reported on one CDC finding: "The majority of the abortions are performed by the eighth week of pregnancy, when the fetus is about the size of a lima bean." This is true but it is incomplete. More important, it is incomplete for entirely ideological reasons.

What AP didn't say is that at eight weeks the baby's heartbeat is beating at approximately 150 times a minute, double that of the mother's. Nor did it mention that the baby's fingers and toes are poking out of his or her hands and feet. It also failed to say that the baby's eyelids practically cover his or her eyes, and that breathing tubes extend from the throat to the developing lungs. Similarly, it did not cite the fact that nerve cells in the brain are branching out to connect with one another. What accounts for these glaring omissions? To mention them would get in the way of their preferred "lima bean" optic.

The CDC report attributed the dramatic decline in abortions to contraception, restrictive state laws, the availability of abortion providers, the economy, access to health services, etc. The media focused almost entirely on contraception.

I was curious about the role played by abortion providers, so I did a little digging. One of the endnote sources that the CDC relied on regarding this factor came from a 2008 study. After I found where it was posted on the Internet, and paid \$35 to download it, what I uncovered was insightful.

The study was co-authored by current and former Guttmacher Institute researchers. They found that the number of abortions peaked in 1990 and has been declining ever since. The number of abortion providers peaked in 1982, and while they have been steadily declining, a leveling off has been evident since 2005.

The good news is that 27 states and the District of Columbia have experienced a decrease in abortion providers; nine have

shown an increase and 14 witnessed no change. The only part of the country where abortion providers are increasing is in the west, largely because of a 23 percent increase in California.

In general, a decrease in abortion providers has led to a decrease in abortions. This matters if for only one reason: Catholic liberals who claim to be pro-life, but who are nonetheless associated with the politics of abortion, have long argued that the best way to stem abortion is to push for an economic safety net for the poor. Yet there is much more evidence showing that the number of abortions declines when the number of abortion providers declines; the relationship is not one-to-one, but it is impressive.

Finally, the co-authors of the abortion-provider study are quick to denounce any efforts to deny women access to abortion, listing “harassment” as the lead problem. Not until you actually read the data do you learn that in their minds the number-one form of “harassment” is picketing, a basic First Amendment right.

Don’t give up praying and protesting. While the pace of change is not fast enough, keep in mind that our side is winning. And remember, those statistics represent human beings, not lima beans.

---

## **CHRISTMAS TREE RETURNED**

A few weeks before Christmas, residents at a Newhall, California senior citizens’ apartment complex were told to remove their Christmas tree. The company in charge of the complex, JB Partners Group Inc., told staff at The Willows residence that the Christmas tree was a religious symbol and must be taken down.

Because this is a private venue, there was no role for government involvement. But there was a moral issue, and it needed to be addressed. The residents, including those who are not Christian, wanted the Christmas tree. Moreover, the tree is not a religious symbol.

We suggested that everyone on our e-mail list contact the tyrants who were attempting to shove their secular agenda down the throats of these senior citizens. We provided the e-mail address for the Human Resources department at JB Partners and, as usual, our members did not disappoint.

After our news release was issued, the company was bombarded with thousands of e-mails. The good news is that within hours of our news release, the senior citizens were told they could get their Christmas tree back.

Many thanks to all those who protested. It goes to show that while cable TV commentators may opine on the War on Christmas, it takes an organized effort by a national civil rights organization to bring about real change.

---

## **ATHEISTS            EXPLOIT            JESUS CRUCIFIED**

The celebration of Hanukkah began on December 8, but fortunately for Jews they were not attacked by David Silverman. No, like other haters in the atheist community, the president of American Atheists saved his vitriol for Christians.

Silverman's latest assault was a huge billboard in New York's Times Square erected only three days after the start of

Hanukkah. The message was neither new nor particularly offensive: “Keep the merry! Dump the myth!” What was offensive was the photo below a picture of Santa—it depicted Jesus with a Crown of Thorns on the Cross.

The decision by Silverman to exploit Jesus crucified as part of his annual attack on Christmas was not hard to explain. Two years ago, he ran a billboard on the New Jersey side of the Lincoln Tunnel that said, “You Know It’s a Myth: This Season Celebrate Reason.” We answered with a billboard on the New York side of the Lincoln Tunnel which read, “You Know It’s Real: This Season Celebrate Jesus.” Both the league and American Atheists actually had some fun with that exchange.

Last year Silverman’s billboard outside the Lincoln Tunnel featured a picture of a statue of the Roman god Neptune, a classical portrait of Jesus, a depiction of Santa, and a guy in a devil’s mask. It said they were all myths. When asked by the *New York Times* why he wasn’t upset, Bill Donohue said, “It’s inane. Nobody knows what this means. I mean, Neptune? Over here, we just looked at each other in puzzlement.”

This year Silverman wanted to make a big splash, so he decided to draw blood. It showed what he is made of. He and his supporters do not want to be left alone—they want to inflame the passions of those with whom they disagree. Unlike Christians who do not provoke, harass or otherwise mock atheists, Silverman and his ilk wanted nothing more than to stick it to Christians at Christmastime. It’s who they are.

---

## CRÈCHES BANNED BUT NOT PUBLIC



# NUDITY?

For most of American history, manger scenes adorned public property at Christmastime without controversy. It was also normal to ban public nudity. But times have changed: the authorities in Santa Monica and San Francisco recently ruled on these issues.

In 2011 an atheist in Santa Monica succeeded in getting his anti-Christmas message shown alongside a nativity scene in Palisades Park, and in 2012 the city ruled against all of these displays. Not surprisingly, an anti-Christian group from Madison, Wisconsin, Freedom From Religion Foundation, heralded the bigot. A federal judge sided with the Santa Monica officials offering an opinion that deserves an entry in the *Guinness Book of World Records*: she ruled that displays of any kind would destroy the turf and obstruct ocean views in the park. Apparently this had never happened in the 60 years that the nativity scene occupied the area.

Homosexuals have been walking around naked in San Francisco with increasing regularity, and lawmakers recently ruled to adopt an ordinance that would make public nudity illegal. However, there was a caveat: because gay pride is inseparable from genital liberation, the law still allows these men to go naked at the annual gay pride parade, and at the Folsom Street Fair; the latter event is marked by naked homosexuals who whip each other in the street. Jolly for them, they will still be allowed to torture themselves naked in public even if the law is passed.

Such is the state of American culture in 2012, California-style.

---

# **“ANGRY ATHEISTS” WAR ON CHRISTMAS**

One of the most famous atheists in American history, Paul Kurtz, died late last year at age 86. While not religion-friendly, he was by no means a hater. Indeed, he hated what he called “angry atheists,” the kind we see with increasing frequency these days. It is hardly a stretch to say that today’s breed of atheists more closely resemble fascists than they do intellectuals like Kurtz. Consider some of their latest attacks.

Students at an elementary school in Little Rock, Arkansas were invited to see the play, “A Charlie Brown Christmas,” at a local church during the Christmas season. Seeking to avoid controversy, no students were required to attend, and bus service was scheduled for those who wished to go. A ruckus ensued when one atheist complained, enlisting the help of a local atheist group. Due to the pressure from the Arkansas Society of Freethinkers, the church’s pastor called off the production for the school and instead invited the public to attend a showing over the weekend.

For several decades, the Illinois village of Alsip has erected a cross on its water tower, but this year it was not displayed: the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) threatened to sue, forcing the village’s authorities to cancel the display. Town officials said they simply couldn’t afford legal fees had FFRF filed suit. Outraged by the FFRF opposition, one resident said, “This ticks me off. This is about taking more of our freedoms away. What happened to freedom of speech?” This sentiment can be found throughout the country where FFRF is involved.

Freedom From Religion Foundation is one of the most aggressive “angry atheists” groups in the nation. It was co-founded by

Annie Nicol Gaylor, whose values were clearly enshrined in her 1975 book, *Abortion Is a Blessing*. Fortunately for her daughter, Annie Laurie Gaylor (she runs FFRF today), Annie Nicol did not exercise her blessing.

Today's atheists have no identity save for what they are against. What else but malice would drive atheists to display their hate-filled message alongside religious symbols in Santa Monica last year? This year local officials practiced their neutrality by censoring all displays equally; a federal judge sided with the city.

So we not only have to deal with "angry atheists," we have to deal with their sympathetic dunces on the bench, as well.

---

## ATHEISTS ORGANIZE TO TARGET CHRISTMAS

Every year, the Catholic League comes across stories of atheist groups and their attempts to neuter or eliminate Christmas. The following is a partial list of campaigns orchestrated by such organizations during Christmas 2012.

In Niles, Illinois, the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) placed a Winter Solstice sign in the Village of Niles Plaza to protest the town's life-size crèche. It featured the Bill of Rights in a manger surrounded by the Statue of Liberty and three Founding Fathers.

In Ellwood City, Pennsylvania, FFRF pressured the city to not erect its nativity scene that had been on borough property for over 50 years.

In its hometown of Madison, Wisconsin, FFRF placed its "Natural Nativity Scene" in the Wisconsin State Capitol Rotunda to counter the Wisconsin Family Action's nativity scene in the same location.

Not only did the Arkansas Society of Freethinkers (ASF) ruin the opportunity of elementary-school children to see a production of "A Charlie Brown Christmas," the group also protested the nativity scene on the grounds of the state capitol in Little Rock. The ASF placed its own sign explaining the science behind the Winter Solstice in response to the crèche.

It wasn't just organizations that were involved with attempts to neuter Christmas; indeed an atheist in Deerfield Beach, Florida specifically requested to place an "anti-religious display" to counter the nativity and menorah on city property. With help from the local chapter of the ACLU, the man erected a Festivus pole made from 24 stacked beer cans to honor a faux holiday popularized by the sitcom "Seinfeld."

These angry atheists weren't confined to the lower 48 states, indeed a public high school in Honolulu, Hawaii canceled its annual Christmas concert due to pressure from the Hawaii Residents for Separation of Church and State. Mitch Kahle, the founder of the group wrote a letter on FFRF letterhead to the Hawaii Department of Education claiming that the school was involved with New Hope Church, because some church members had volunteered to sell tickets and work on the set. What's worse is that the concert has raised over \$200,000 over the past six years for Mercy Ships, a charity that houses American doctors in Africa on medical missions.

These militant atheists will never cease in their quest to eliminate Christmas. These incidents, along with the events in Santa Monica and the American Atheists billboard in Times Square, are clear demonstrations that Christmas is in their crosshairs. They aren't happy with not celebrating the

holiday. No, they want all to adopt their Scrooge-like mentality.

---

## DENYING THE WAR ON CHRISTMAS

An editorial in the *Duluth News Tribune* recently questioned, “There’s Still a ‘War on Christmas’?” Atheist Jeff Sorensen flatly said on Huffington Post that “There is no war on Christmas.” *Statesman Journal* columnist Dick Hughes wrote a piece about the “phony and irrelevant War on Christmas.” MSNBC madman Lawrence O’Donnell said the War on Christmas has a “body count” of “zero.” Frank Bruni of the New York Times said there could hardly be a War on Christmas given that “We have God on our dollars, God in our pledge of allegiance, God in our Congress.” The Boston Globe editorialized that “Ignoring the ‘war on Christmas’ is the best way to eliminate it altogether.”

There is little doubt that the anti-Christmas side has been weakening. But the war is hardly over. The big battle won by the Thomas More Law Center in securing the right of a nativity scene to be erected on a public median in Warren, Michigan is evidence that we need to continue to fight for our rights. Thanks to us, senior citizens in Newhall, California got their Christmas tree back after management tried to ban it. Children who attend Terry Elementary School in Little Rock, Arkansas know about the War on Christmas: their planned trip to a local church to see “A Charlie Brown Christmas” was cancelled. An anti-Christmas billboard in Times Square that shows a depiction of Jesus crucified is testimony to the vile nature of the War on Christmas. There is no shortage of such examples.

O'Donnell is right to say that this war has a body count of zero. The same is true of the alleged War on Women—no one has died in the battle over who should have to pay for Sandra Fluke's contraception. Bruni's point is undermined by the ACLU: it has tried to delete God from our coins and the Pledge, and has sought to deny Congress its chaplains. Finally, if the best way to eliminate a culture war is to ignore it, then the *Boston Globe* should remain agnostic in the War on Christmas.

Atheists say they want a public display of their beliefs. The complaint is bogus: most parks already have huge areas where there is absolutely nothing.

---

## IGNORING CHRISTMAS

The War on Christmas typically involves attempts by militant atheists and multicultural fanatics to kill Christmas. But a much softer, and less obvious, way of neutering Christmas is to simply ignore it. Take, for example, the way the leading divinity schools addressed Christmas.

On Harvard Divinity School's website there were pictures and a list of events, but not one had to do with Christmas. Yale Divinity School's website had no Christmas pictures, and aside from one "Advent Service," that was it.

The University of Chicago Divinity School's website had no Christmas pictures, and save for one Christmas Eve event, the holiday was ignored. Emory's School of Theology had a website devoid of Christmas pictures, but listed a few Advent-related events and an off-campus Christmas concert. Duke Divinity School's website had no Christmas pictures and listed one Christmas Eve event. First prize went to Vanderbilt's Divinity

School website which listed neither Christmas pictures nor events.

It's not just liberal religious institutions that ignored Christmas. For instance, ten days before Christmas, one of the most prominent liberal websites that has a section devoted to religion, the "On Faith" blog of the Washington Post, listed at the top of its homepage the following subjects: Noah's Ark, Atheists, Hanukkah, All Saints Church, Sistine Chapel, and Christmas (nice to know that the only group mentioned on the blog were those without faith). The Christmas section featured 18 pictures, and aside from the first one which showed a statue of Jesus in the background behind Santa, there were no religious persons or symbols to be found. By contrast, all of the 14 pictures in the Hanukkah section showed either a rabbi or a menorah, or both.

Liberals who dabble in matters religious don't think too deeply about Christmas. They just ignore it.