

POLITICIZING CHRISTMAS; REVOLT AGAINST INTOLERANCE

No religious holiday sparks as much controversy as Christmas. It's not because most Americans are anti-Christmas—they are not. It's because so many activists, public officials, and educators are working against them. Quite frankly, they have unnecessarily politicized Christmas.

Some of them are bigots; some are ignorant of what the courts have ruled; and some are simply cowards. No matter, the result is an annual mess. But the good news is that our side continues to push back.

We played a role in beating back the Christmas foes in several instances, but none was more satisfying than our input in the University of Tennessee (UT) case.

The Office of Diversity and Inclusion at UT issued guidelines indicating which kinds of “holiday” celebrations would be tolerated, and which would not be. All parties, the multicultural gurus said, should be absent any “emphasis on religion or culture.” They did not say how it was possible to celebrate a holiday without also celebrating that part of the culture from which it springs.

Best of all was their admonition not to hold “a Christmas party in disguise.” They can hold gay pride celebrations all year long, but they cannot tolerate Christmas parties, even if held in a speak-easy.

Bill Donohue pulled the Catholic League staff to work overtime on this issue. We contacted every Tennessee lawmaker who has anything to do with education, as well as other public officials, calling for an investigation into the workings of the Office of Diversity and Inclusion. We also notified all the other legislators—those who do not deal with education. We

blanketed the Tennessee media.

We were pleased to hear of the support we received from some of the lawmakers. We also were happy that the Tennessee media picked up on our work, including newspapers on the UT campus. Most of all we were delighted that our protest led to the guidelines being withdrawn; we were gratified that the person most to blame for this decision was removed from making such rulings again.

Last month we reported in *Catalyst* that we contacted town officials in Wadena, Minnesota, advising them that they could display a nativity scene in a “public forum,” such as a park. We are pleased to say that a local resident picked up on this idea and successfully erected a crèche in a park. It was also great to learn that residents of Wadena responded by displaying a record number of manger scenes on private property.

The Supreme Court needs to offer more clarity on what is constitutional and what is not. Until then, the controversy will rage.

AFFIRMING GENOCIDE

The whole world knows that Christians have been targeted for genocide by radical Muslims, yet we still don't have a congressional resolution, supported by our president, affirming this reality.

A week before Christmas a group of congressmen, from both parties, along with noted scholars and activists, assembled in Washington D.C. to press for a resolution. Specifically, they called on President Obama and Congress to unequivocally call

for a public declaration condemning ISIS for waging genocide against Christians.

The best President Obama has done is to acknowledge that Christians are among the victims of genocide. Worse, according to Rep. Chris Smith, reports have surfaced indicating that the White House is considering a statement condemning genocide that would exclude Christians. If we can't get our own country on board, chances are the U.N. will do nothing.

George Mason University professor Gregory Stanton detailed how the ISIS war on Christians and Yazidis fits the U.N. definition of genocide. Nina Shea of the Hudson Institute explained how a rigged levy on Christians, the jizya tax, is nothing but a pretext for murder. Both Stanton and Shea pointed out that because Christians can't afford to pay the tax, and they manifestly refuse to convert, they are beheaded.

We need all the presidential candidates to speak to this issue. If they don't have the courage to call for a formal declaration condemning ISIS for its genocidal campaign against Christians, they are not suited for the job.

ABORTION KILLS, USUALLY

William A. Donohue

Melissa Ohden should have died in 1977, but the abortion failed. On September 9, 2015, the founder of Abortion Survivors Network testified before the House Judiciary Committee to explain her story. I cannot improve on her testimony, so I offer an excerpt:

“From ‘botched abortion’ to ‘the dreaded complication of

abortion' (a child who lives), I've been called just about everything you can imagine. But as you can see here in my medical records from 1977, I am the survivor of a failed saline infusion abortion (the exact wording in my records reads—'a saline infusion for an abortion was done but was unsuccessful.')

"A saline infusion abortion involves injecting a toxic salt solution into the amniotic fluid surrounding the preborn child. The intent of the salt solution is to scald the child to death, from the outside in.

"For days, I soaked in that toxic salt solution, and on the fifth day of the procedure, my biological mother, a 19-year-old college student, delivered me, after her labor was induced. I should have been delivered dead, as a successful abortion.

"In 2013, I learned through contact with my biological mother's family that not only was the abortion forced upon her against her will, but also that it was my maternal grandmother, a nurse, who delivered me in this final step of an abortion procedure at St. Luke's Hospital in Sioux City, Iowa. [It is a Protestant facility.]

"Unfortunately, I also learned that when my grandmother realized that the abortion had not succeeded in ending my life, she demanded that I be left to die.

"I may never know how, exactly, two nurses who were on staff that day...found out about me, but what I do know is that their willingness to fight for medical care to be provided to me saved my life.

"I know where children like me were left to die at St. Luke's Hospital—a utility closet. In 2014, I met a nurse who assisted in a saline abortion there in 1976, and delivered a living baby boy. After he was delivered alive, she followed her superior's orders and placed him in the utility closet

in a bucket of formaldehyde to be picked up later as a medical waste after he died there, alone.

“A bucket of formaldehyde in a utility closet was meant to be my fate after I wasn’t scalded to death through the abortion. Yet here I am today.

“I’m here today to share my story to not only highlight the horror of abortion taking place at Planned Parenthood, but to give a voice to other survivors like me, and most importantly, to give a name, a face, and a voice to the hundreds of thousands of children who will have their lives ended by Planned Parenthood this year alone.

“And I have long believed that if my birthmother’s abortion would have taken place at a Planned Parenthood [facility], I would not be here today. Completing over 300,000 abortions a year provides them with the experience to make sure that ‘failures’ like me don’t happen again.

“As a fellow American, as a fellow human being, I deserved the same right to life, the same equal protection under the law as each and every one of you. Yet we live in a time where not only do such protections not exist, but my own tax dollars and yours go to fund an organization that has perfected the very thing that was meant to end my life.”

UNIV. OF TENNESSEE ABRIDGES CHRISTIAN RIGHTS

Bill Donohue wrote the following letter to all members of the Tennessee legislature whose responsibility it is to monitor education. He called upon them to empanel a committee that

would critically assess policies initiated by the Office of Diversity and Inclusion at the University of Tennessee. This request was made in light of morally offensive, and constitutionally suspect, policies that abridge the rights of Christian students on the campus.

December 4, 2015

Hon. Dolores Gresham
Chair, State Senate Standing Committee on Education
301 6th Avenue North
Suite 308 War Memorial Bldg.
Nashville, TN 37243

Dear Senator Gresham:

As president of the nation's largest Catholic civil rights organization, it is my responsibility to monitor, and respond to, instances of defamation and discrimination against Catholics. We work closely with many evangelical organizations, as well, so our reach extends to all Christians.

My reason for writing concerns the University of Tennessee's Office of Diversity and Inclusion's statement on Christmas celebrations. To say it is obnoxious is an understatement: it expresses an animus to Christianity, and therefore to Christians, that is palpable.

My doctorate is in sociology, and I spent two decades on the board of directors of the National Association of Scholars. So my concerns transcend the interests of religion. I approach this issue as both a civil rights leader and as an educator.

After receiving criticism from public officials for the statement, "Best Practices for Inclusive Holiday Celebrations in the Workplace," the University is now saying that this is not a policy: it is just a list of suggestions. It does not matter. What matters is that it (a) creates a "chilling

effect” on free speech, (b) engages in viewpoint discrimination, and (c) creates a hostile environment for Christians. These conditions are not only offensive, they have grave constitutional implications.

Among the most egregious “suggestions” is the first one: “Holiday parties and celebrations should celebrate and build upon workplace relationships and team morale *with no emphasis on religion or culture. Ensure your holiday party is not a Christmas party in disguise.*” (My italics.)

Do the people who wrote and approved this statement realize what they are saying? It is positively impossible to celebrate a holiday without also celebrating culture, and in many instances, religion. To wit: All holidays are ineluctably grounded in culture. Moreover, the heart of any culture is religion. Indeed, the word holiday means “holy day.” This is not an issue of constitutional law—it is a matter of competence. Why are taxpayers funding the salaries of employees who are sociologically illiterate, especially given the fact that their charge is to administer cultural events?

Other “suggestions” are equally astonishing. “Holiday parties and celebrations should not play games with religious and cultural themes—for example, ‘Dreidel’ or ‘Secret Santa.’” Since when has it been the business of any university office, especially on a state campus, to discourage students from playing innocent religious and cultural games?

It hardly exaggerates to say that such “suggestions” have a “chilling effect” on the free speech rights of Christians. Unlike other segments of the student population, they cannot be assured that the manner in which they choose to express themselves, especially at Christmastime, will be looked upon with approval by school administrators. The implication is, of course, that the best way to avoid trouble is to muzzle any expression that might be seen as untoward by campus officials.

The holiday “suggestions” are also constitutionally suspect because they do not apply equally to all students. For example, last February, during Black History Month, the University sponsored an event titled, “Black History Month Program: A Century of Black Life, History, and Culture.” From my perspective, such an event should be welcomed. But this raises a serious issue: Why is it acceptable for black students to celebrate their culture, but not Christians? After all, Christians are being told not to have events that emphasize “religion or culture.” (my italics.)

The Office of Diversity and Inclusion has a “Cultural and Religious Holidays Calendar” that lists many religious events, covering many religions, throughout the academic year. Yet when it comes to the application of the draconian holiday “suggestions,” they are not inclusive: they are targeted almost exclusively at Christians (there is a stricture warning Jews not to play “Dreidel” games—it does not say who might be offended, other than the authors of this dictum).

These are examples of viewpoint discrimination, a condition that violates the First Amendment. Quite frankly, it is not legal for a state entity to single out one religion for special consideration, especially when the directive seeks to limit constitutionally protected speech.

In 1984, in the U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Lynch v. Donnelly*, it was held that the Constitution “affirmatively mandates accommodation, not merely tolerance of all religions, and forbids hostility toward any.” It can be reasonably maintained that the effect, if not the intent, of these “suggestions” is to create a hostile environment for Christians.

I am calling upon all members of the Tennessee legislature that have committee assignments dealing with education to empanel a body that would critically assess the policies of the University of Tennessee’s Office of Diversity and

Inclusion that touch on religion and free speech issues. There is obviously something seriously wrong. For a state institution to promote policies that are inimical to Christianity—or any religion—is unacceptable. That these policies are driven by an alleged concern for tolerance makes the need for such an investigation all the more compelling.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

William A. Donohue, Ph.D.
President

CONCESSIONS GRANTED

The edict issued by the University of Tennessee's Office of Diversity and Inclusion effectively banning Christmas celebrations on the campus drew the ire of local and federal public officials, students, faculty, and alumni. From Bill Donohue's perspective, it was not only offensive to Christians, it was constitutionally suspect.

Following Donohue's issuance of the above letter, requesting of all members of the Tennessee state legislature who are responsible for education issues that they establish a panel to "critically assess the policies of the Office of Diversity and Inclusion at the University of Tennessee," Chancellor Jimmy G. Cheek announced that the offensive "suggestions" had been taken down; they no longer appear online. In addition, the person who wrote them, Vice Chancellor for Diversity and Inclusion Rickey Hall, has been "counseled" by his superiors. Furthermore, he will no longer be permitted to write any

guidelines for this office.

This announcement makes sense, but it is disingenuous of Chancellor Cheek to maintain that the problem was purely a matter of “poorly worded communications.” It was not. The problem is deeper—it stems from a mentality that is common to all university offices that are charged with advancing diversity and inclusion. To be specific, there is a built-in intolerance for Christianity, in particular, and for Western Civilization, in general.

The steps taken by the University of Tennessee are reassuring, but more needs to be done. Donohue has stood by his call for a probe of the Office of Diversity and Inclusion.

CHURCH INVASIONS IN LAS VEGAS

Catholic churches in Las Vegas are being stormed by an organized band of crazed evangelicals known as Koosha Las Vegas. They invade churches during Mass, shouting at parishioners to repent. “Pope is Satan!” “Mary is a Satan!” “Stop worshipping the idols!” “Idols are not going to save you!” “You need Jesus Christ!” Police have confirmed at least three incidents.

Catholic school students are also being harassed. “If you look at the Catechism of the Catholic Church and you look at the Scriptures,” the bigots scream, “you know why God hates this religious system.”

The cops have thus far not made any arrests, claiming no law has been broken. They are mistaken.

The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution guarantees

religious liberty. If that means anything, it means that people of faith must be free to practice their faith. Moreover, these Nazi-like tactics are prohibited by the Nevada Constitution, the second ordinance of which reads as follows: "That perfect toleration of religious sentiment shall be secured, and no inhabitant of said state shall ever be molested, in person or property, on account of his or her mode of religious worship." There are also laws against trespassing, as well as hate crimes statutes.

The Catholic League asked the Office of The Sheriff at the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department to arrest any person who storms a Catholic church, or any house of worship. They need to be prosecuted with the full force of the law.

Swift action followed our intervention. As the *Las Vegas Review-Journal* reported, a police press conference on the matter "came a day after the New York-based Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights called on supporters to demand increased protection from Clark County Sheriff Joe Lombardo." The Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department has assured the public, in writing, that it is "investigating these incidents" and "taking this matter seriously."

JAMES MADISON UNIV. CENSORS CHRISTMAS

"Mary Did You Know" is a song that cannot be tolerated at James Madison University. Lyrics include, "Mary, did you know that your baby boy would save our sons and daughters?" It also contains lyrics which note that when Mary kisses her baby, she has "kissed the face of God."

This song was to be sung on Dec. 11 at the annual "Unity Tree" [read: Christmas tree] lighting ceremony. But after the song was banned, the students who were to sing it refused to sing any songs at this event.

Bill Wyatt, associate director of communications at the school, explained the decision to muzzle the free speech of these students. "JMU is a public university, so because it was a school-sponsored event, the song choice needed to be secular." He is wrong. The following events have taken place at other Virginia public institutions:

George Mason University: On November 29, "A Chanticleer Christmas" concert was held that featured "ancient hymns" and "venerated sacred music." On Dec. 18, the Vienna Boys Choir offered a "Christmas in Vienna" concert that included "sacred hymns."

Virginia Military Institute: On Dec. 8, it held an event, "Carols in the Courtyard" that included, "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen."

Radford University: On Oct. 23, the Madrigal Singers performed "Hail Mary."

University of Mary Washington: On Dec. 4 and 5, a faculty member sang "Ave Maria" and "O Holy Night" at the Holiday Pops Concert. No one was arrested.

Censoring Christmas is obscene, but lying about it is even worse. There is no law banning religious songs from being sung at public schools.

Officials at JMU heard that message loud and clear after a number of print, broadcast and online media outlets picked up our news release and publicized the school's offensive conduct.

BANNING CHRISTMAS

The school superintendent in Marlborough, New Hampshire, Robert Malay, banned use of the word “Christmas” from all Christmas events, including celebrations at the local American Legion post. He said he was constitutionally obligated to censor Christmas. This, of course, is a lie.

Instead of pleading with Malay to reconsider his decision, Bill Donohue contacted him and asked him to follow through on his convictions. Donohue suggested that he contact the United States Congress and demand that it rescind Christmas as a national holiday. Not unexpectedly, he did not get back to Donohue.

Following the Catholic League’s intervention, however, Malay apologized to American Legion Post Commander John Fletcher, both privately and on a local radio show. He said he plans to review the policy.

SCHOOLS SHOULD CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS

The following article by Bill Donohue was recently published by Newsmax.

Religious expression in the schools is a perennial issue, but at no time in the school calendar is it more controversial than at Christmas. This year is no exception.

Just recently, the University of Tennessee sought to ban Christmas celebrations, but thanks to a public outcry, which included input from the Catholic League, the draconian guidelines issued by the Office of Diversity and Inclusion were rescinded.

Now the Catholic League is drawing attention to the banning of religious songs at a concert on the campus of Virginia's James Madison University. A university spokesman says, "JMU is a public university, so because it was a school-sponsored event, the song choice ["Mary Did You Know"] needed to be secular." He is wrong.

As the Catholic League demonstrated, many public colleges and universities in Virginia have already held concerts this year featuring sacred music. And guess what? There have been no lawsuits and no arrests.

This problem is also commonplace at the elementary and secondary levels. The fact is that public schools, at all levels, are neither required nor prohibited from holding Christmas celebrations, including concerts that feature religious lyrics. But due to the lack of a clear affirmative ruling on this subject, many school officials, worried about a lawsuit, play it safe and opt for a censorial approach.

The lack of clear guidance from the federal courts is what allowed a New Jersey school district to lose in a circuit court ruling in 2009: the Supreme Court refused to hear the case that banned "Silent Night" from being sung at a school concert. However, the same ambiguity allowed a Wisconsin high school in 2013 to reverse its decision banning religious songs: the concert featuring sacred music was held without a problem.

In 1992, President Bill Clinton summoned his secretary of education to work with his attorney general on this issue. He asked them to devise a set of guidelines for school

superintendents across the nation on the subject of religious expression in the schools. They did a splendid job.

In 1995, those guidelines were published, and among them was a statement of neutrality. While teachers could not encourage religious activity, they "are also prohibited from discouraging activity because of its religious content, and from soliciting or encouraging anti-religious activity." Regrettably, those guidelines have too often been ignored.

The closest the federal courts have come to settling this matter was in 1980. In *Florey v. Sioux Falls*, a federal appeals court took a mostly favorable stance on the issue of religious beliefs and practices in the schools. As to be expected, it prohibited the promotion and disparagement of religion by school officials, but it also called for tolerance of religious expression.

As a direct result of this decision, the Sioux Falls School District issued its own guidelines. They included the following: "Music, art, literature and drama having religious themes or basis are permitted as part of the curriculum for school-sponsored activities and programs if presented in a prudent and objective manner and as a traditional part of the cultural and religious heritage of the particular holiday." In other words, summarily banning "Silent Night" in the schools finds no support in this Supreme Court ruling.

In this decision, the majority opinion leaned on the 1948 ruling in *McCormack v. Board of Education*. In that decision, Supreme Court Justice Robert Jackson wrote that "Music without sacred music, architecture minus the cathedral, or painting without the scriptural themes would be eccentric and incomplete, even from a secular point of view."

Such a commonsensical approach to this subject is sorely missing these days. Perhaps that's because we have too many lawyers on the bench: Justice Jackson was the last Supreme

Court justice appointed who did not graduate from law school.

So what should the schools do? They should allow Christmas celebrations, including religious songs at a Christmas concert. It is not only constitutionally acceptable, it makes good common sense: America was founded by Christians, and its heritage is based on the Judeo-Christian ethos.

It must also be said that the much-vaunted commitment to diversity—which is all the rage in the schools—argues persuasively for celebrating this Christian holiday. Those who seek to neuter Christmas celebrations in the name of inclusion do violence to the principle of diversity.

Those who bear an animus against America's heritage have a right to free speech, but they have no right to prevail in their quest to censor Christmas in the schools.

DID CHRISTIANITY INSPIRE ABORTION KILLER?

A recent *New York Times* front-page story, "Religion, Abuse and Rage in Colorado's Suspect's Trial," tried to establish a connection between the Planned Parenthood killer, Robert Dear, and Christianity. But most of the article described his multiple abuses of women. This explained why a *Washington Post* story from the same day was titled, "Colo. Shooting Suspect Has Long Trail of Abuse Allegations."

Dear's three wives said that he believed in the Bible. But they also acknowledged that he was never a practicing Christian. Indeed, there was no evidence that he ever belonged to a church congregation in his entire life, or that he was

ever involved in a Christian community. This is significant: When survey researchers seek to measure religiosity, or how religiously committed someone is, the first question asked is how often the respondent attends church services.

The previous day, the *Times* ran a front-page story on Abdelhamid Abaaoud, the Muslim ringleader who masterminded the Paris killings. But there was a glaring omission—he was never identified as a Muslim (his role in the Islamist State's hierarchy is the closest the story gets to identifying his religion). In fact, the only religion mentioned was Catholicism: the story said he was “sent to an exclusive Catholic school.” It did not say that he lasted only one year; he either flunked out or was dismissed for bad behavior.

Now consider this: The *New York Post* reported that Abaaoud was raised in a Brussels neighborhood known as “a hotbed of Islamic extremism—before joining ISIS and embracing its war against the West.” More important, the issue of the *New York Times* from the previous day failed to report what Abaaoud said in a video just last year: “I pray that Allah will break the backs of those who oppose him...and that he will exterminate them.”

So which killer was more motivated by his religion? Dear or Abaaoud?