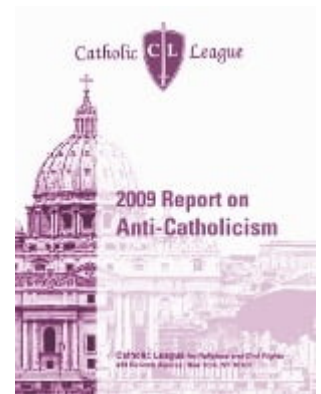


The War on Christmas

October 30

Olympia, WA – The director of the Department of General Administration signed rules that dictated no religious or other nongovernmental displays would be allowed inside any building on the State Capitol campus. But the new rules did allow for a state sponsored “Holiday Tree” to be displayed in the Capitol rotunda.



Although the new rules did not allow religious displays inside the Capitol buildings, Annie Laurie Gaylor, co-president of the Freedom From Religion Foundation, believed the rules were not strict enough because they allowed for displays outside of the buildings. She said, “I don’t think the public will be any happier about it on the outside than they would be on the inside. I encourage the state to avoid the entire debacle.”

November 2

Seattle, WA – The Freedom From Religion Foundation launched an ad campaign featuring Santa Claus saying, “Yes, Virginia, there is no God.” Foundation co-president Dan Barker said, “People have been celebrating the winter solstice long before Christmas. We see Christianity as the intruder, trying to steal the natural holiday from all of us humans.” The other co-president, Annie Laurie Gaylor, said, “We nonbelievers don’t mind sharing the season with Christians, but we think there should be some acknowledgement that Christians really ‘stole’ the trimmings of Christmas, and the sun-god myths, from pagans.”

November 11

Clarksville, TN – The ACLU asked the City of Clarksville to “end the unlawful endorsement of religion,” claiming that the city paid for the animals used in its Nativity scene. The organization had no issue with the menorah erected in Nashville’s Riverfront Park.

November 19

West Chester, PA – New rules were issued for holiday displays in front of the Chester County Courthouse. Under the new rules, four displays were allowed in front of the Courthouse for a limited period of time, provided they were “content-neutral” in terms of their message. But symbols—religious or secular—are by their very nature content-specific, thus making the request positively oxymoronic.

November 23

The American Humanist Association launched an ad campaign to celebrate “a new kind of holiday tradition.” The ads proclaimed, “No God...No Problem!” The group ran the ads on buses in Washington, D.C., New York City, Chicago, Los Angeles and San Francisco.

November 24

Manchester, MA – A woman hoped that her parish could have a live nativity scene on Christmas Eve, but was told by the town’s board of selectmen that it wasn’t an option.

The reason the board gave her was the church sits on the town common and the board was worried about the legal ramifications of allowing a crèche on public property.

November 29

Chambersburg, PA – A nativity scene that had been displayed in Memorial Square for almost 50 years was taken down following a request from Carl Silverman of PA Nonbelievers to put up a sign, saying, “Celebrating Solstice—Honoring Atheist War Veterans,” to accompany the manger.

November 30

Leesburg, VA – The grounds committee at the Loudon County Courthouse decided to ban the traditional display of the crèche, menorah and Christmas tree. A couple of weeks later, the county officials overturned the ban.

November – December

Around Thanksgiving, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) launched a Christmas campaign that exploited Christian symbols. The ads featured *Playboystarlet* Joanna Krupa: the ad showed a side angle of her naked from the waist up holding a dog and a rosary; she was adorned with angel wings and a halo. The inscription below read, "*Be an angel for Animals: ALWAYS ADOPT. NEVER BUY.*"

In December, PETA bared Krupa on another billboard in Los Angeles. Only this time, Krupa appeared fully naked as an angel holding a carefully-placed crucifix. Again, the target of the ad was pet stores.

December

For whatever reason, there were more raunchy Christmas plays in 2009 than ever before. Not surprisingly, many were gay-themed, most were confined to the east and west coasts, and all were loved by art critics. The plays ran the gamut from the irreverent to the extremely vulgar.

In New York City, naked performers were seen in "Naked Holidays NYC '09" and "Filthy Lucre: A Burlesque Christmas Carol"; the latter is the work of the anti-Catholic homosexual Christopher Durang. Gays also flocked to see "The Gayest Christmas Pageant Ever!" and "Santa Claus is Coming Out." Those who wished to see Baby Jesus electrocuted went to see "Hot Babes in Toyland," while those who wanted to see a fetal rabbit morph into Baby Jesus attended "A Very Sandwich Christmas."

"XMAS!" was hosted by Columbia University; the play depicts the Virgin Mary begging for sex. "The Eight: Reindeer Monologues" was performed in Philadelphia and featured a discussion of Santa raping Vixen.

On the west coast, "How the Drag Queen Stole Christmas" was shown in Oakland, and Seattle was home to "Ham for the Holidays: Lard Potion No. 9," a play that sparkles with a

“teeny-tiny Sequin Gay Men’s Chorus.” Also in Seattle was “It Came from Under the Tree!: A Pickled Puppet Christmas Special” that featured nudity and a Michael Jackson character who envies Santa’s way with children.

Playing on both coasts was Mimi Infurst’s “Madonna’s Christmas Celebration,” one that featured a sexual deviant dressed as the Blessed Virgin: he/she talks about the difficulty of having sex with God, and that he/she coined the phrase “Oh, my God” while having sex with Him.

December

Springfield, IL – The Freedom From Religion Foundation placed a sign at the State Capitol. Here is what the sign said:

*There are no gods,
No devils, no angels,
No heaven or hell.
There is only our natural world.
Religion is but
Myth and superstition
That hardens hearts
And enslaves minds.*

The Foundation’s co-president, Annie Laurie Gaylor, said, “This sign is a reminder of the real reason for the season, the Winter Solstice.”

December

There was a Christmas tree inside Cary, North Carolina’s town hall, but the town officials couldn’t bring themselves to call it by its proper name; instead they relabeled it the “Community Tree.”

In Madison, Wisconsin they used to have a “Holiday Tree,” but even that was deemed too improper this year, so they opted for “The State Capitol Tree.”

American Atheists threw a party and decorated what they called

their "Solstice Tree."

December

Just like in years past, we were flooded with reports from across the nation about nativity scenes being vandalized. Here is a sample of the stories that came to our attention:

- In Manchester, New Hampshire a five-foot tall figure of one of the Wise Men was stolen from a nativity scene that had been set up for 40 years.
- In a neighborhood near the University of Central Florida in Orlando, five statues of the Baby Jesus were stolen from residential nativity scenes.
- Two drunk men damaged figures of St. Joseph, one of the Wise Men, a donkey and the Baby Jesus in Pearl River, NY. The estimated damage was between \$5,000 and \$6,000.
- Vandals armed with machetes damaged a Christmas display in front of a home in Las Vegas, Nevada.
- In Johnston City, Illinois a nativity scene was stolen and \$1,000 worth of damage was caused in a residential neighborhood.
- Half of a nativity scene, including the Baby Jesus and manger, was stolen from a Baptist church in Danville, Virginia.
- In Woodland, California a nativity statue of St. Joseph was knocked over and its staff was missing inside Holy Rosary Catholic Church. A week later, the parish priest discovered someone broke off a head of a shepherd from the same nativity scene.
- Figures of St. Joseph and the Baby Jesus were stolen from a \$500 nativity set in front of a home in Visalia, California.
- Two women stole the Wise Men from a crèche outside of Town

Hall in Stony Point, New York.

- In Sandusky, Ohio, figures of the Baby Jesus and the Virgin Mary were stolen from a church's nativity scene valued at \$35,000.
- A nativity set was stolen from a Chick-Fil-A restaurant in East Point, Georgia.
- A figure of the Baby Jesus was stolen from a home in Beaverton, Oregon. The following day the homeowner discovered that the rest of the figures were missing and only the wooden stable was left.
- A drive-through nativity scene at a Christian church was vandalized in New Bern, North Carolina. The vandals painted satanic symbols and vulgarities on some figures and tore the other ones down.
- A sheep and camel were stolen from a nativity scene worth over \$1,000 in Clinton Township, New Jersey. The vandals also damaged or stole Christmas decorations from at least six homes.
- Eleven figures of the Baby Jesus were stolen from front yards in Floresville, Texas.
- In Daytona Beach, Florida a nativity scene was broken and strewn about a yard and street in front of a home.
- A few nativity sets were stolen from a neighborhood in Port Chester, New Jersey.
- Handmade figures of a Wise Man, a lamb and a shepherd were stolen from a home in Farmington, New Mexico.
- At the mayor's home in Suffern, New York, statues of St. Joseph and the Baby Jesus were stolen.
- The figures of the Baby Jesus, St. Joseph and a small lamb

were stolen from the Holy Name Catholic Church's nativity scene in downtown Steamboat, Colorado.

- Vandals destroyed over \$1,000 worth of Christmas decorations, including a nativity scene at the Rockhill Trolley Museum in Rockhill Furnace, Pennsylvania.
- Figures of the Baby Jesus were stolen from homes or churches in Orange, California; Monroe County, Indiana; Chesterton, Indiana; Fairfield, Illinois; Ada, Oklahoma; Palmer, Massachusetts; Gastonia, North Carolina; Chesapeake, Virginia; Surprise, Arizona; Hopkinton, Massachusetts; Duboistown, Pennsylvania; Vineland, New Jersey; Folkston, Georgia; Glenview, Illinois; Ridgewood, New Jersey; Emporia, Kansas; Juneau, Wisconsin; Arkadelphia, Arkansas; Howell, Michigan; and Naperville, Illinois.

December 1-4

Chelmsford, MA – The Byam Elementary School asked parents to donate holiday gifts to the school's holiday gift shop. Shopping guidelines informed that "Seasonal items such as snowmen, mittens, snowflakes are a big hit." But the school also had a list of "Items NOT Permitted." The school was very specific about which items it considered taboo: "No Christmas, Chanukah, or religious items," and "No Santa, candy canes or stockings."

December 3

Waterbury, CT – The staff at Walsh Elementary School was under strict orders from principal Erik Brown not to employ secular, as well as religious, Christian symbols when they enjoyed their "winter celebration" on December 21. Among the symbols forbidden were Santa Claus and Christmas Trees. Yet Christmas carols were sung at the event, as were Hanukkah songs. Although the students were given gifts, Frosty the Snowman replaced Santa as the gift-giver.

Although there is no law banning the display of secular

holiday symbols in Connecticut schools, Brown said, "It is state law that a public school can't knowingly exclude children." This was not true. If that had been the case, than no Christmas or Hanukkah songs would have been sung in fear that a Buddhist child would be excluded.

December 4-8

Ashland, OR – Belleview Elementary's principal, Michelle Zundel, said that one family made a complaint about the "Giving Tree" that was displayed in the school lobby, and had it removed. "The decision to remove the tree was a very difficult one because the important constitutional issues for a school are to maintain neutrality." According to one news report, Ashland Superintendent Juli Di Chiro said that school officials were working on developing district-wide rules to address such issues.

This was all based on ignorance: (a) a Christmas tree—never mind a "Giving Tree"—is not a religious symbol, (b) there are no constitutional issues involved in displaying secular symbols in the schools, and (c) they have had a policy governing such matters since 1989.

Ashland School District 5 school officials ought to have read their own policy, "Teaching about Religion." Guideline #7 explicitly states: "No public school funds shall be used for an intended devotional display or religious symbols such as a Star of David, cross, crucifix, Christmas nativity scene or a Buddhist statue of sacred monkeys."

Note that the policy mentioned absolutely nothing about banning secular symbols, such as a Christmas tree.

A few days later, after hearing from angry parents at a school meeting and being pounded with e-mails from Catholic League members and supporters, Zundel decided to restore the tree to the school's lobby. But there was still one condition: the tree had to be modified to avoid favoring any religion.

December 7

In the *New York Times*, there was an article about White House social secretary Desirée Rogers. In it, reporter Sheryl Gay Stolberg wrote: "When former social secretaries gave a luncheon to welcome Ms. Rogers earlier this year, one participant said she surprised them by suggesting the Obamas were planning a 'non-religious Christmas....'"

This same participant said that "the Obamas did not intend to put the manger scene on display" (this was confirmed by the White House). Indeed, as Stolberg wrote, "there had been internal discussions about making Christmas more inclusive and whether to display the crèche."

In the end, the crèche was displayed.

December 9

Kokomo, IN – Lighted displays of various animals including a whale and the Loch Ness Monster were placed on the lawn of the Howard County Courthouse, rather than the usual holiday fare. Commissioner Tyler Moore defended the decision by offering up this explanation: "If we put the religious or Christmas decorations up, we'd be offending a whole other group of citizens and taxpayers."

December 10

Vineland, NJ – In an article in the *Daily Journal* about changing the name of Vineland's Christmas Parade to the Holiday Parade, a letter to the editor from Vineland officials was referenced. In the letter, Vineland Downtown Improvement District/Main Street officials said they were "precluded from calling it the Christmas parade because the city uses government revenue in the form of Urban Enterprise Zone dollars to fund the parade."

December 14

Slatington, PA – Santa was banned from his gift-giver role in the Northern Lehigh Valley School District in Pennsylvania;

instead the district mascot, the Bulldog, got the job. Superintendent Mike Michaels stated, "We're trying to make sure it's every child, no matter what their religion is, that they can feel that this season is for them."

December 18-19

Benton, AR – In the children's play "Christmas Hang-Ups," a character of a hula girl was ridiculed for not being "Christmasy." The woman in charge of the play announced that the hula girl represented the reason for the season: "The meaning of Christmas is to not judge each other."