

# WAR ON CHRISTMAS

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### November

**Bellevue, WA** – Shortly after Thanksgiving, Bob McLean, a United States Postal Service letter carrier, was taken off his route by his supervisor because someone complained about his Santa Clause uniform. “The government is shutting me down because it’s a non-postal regulation uniform,” said McLean, a USPS employee since 1971. In past years, he had donned the uniform for a few days while delivering mail during the Christmas season. His, a source of local Christmas cheer, had been tolerated for over a decade.

### November

**Springhill, LA** – The Springhill Branch Library banned a living nativity scene that was to be portrayed by a First Assembly of God youth group because library officials disallowed anything with “religious tones” on library grounds. As a result, the living nativity scene was moved to elsewhere in town.

### November-December

Freedom From Religion Foundation sought to counter the display of a nativity scene in Athens, Texas with one of its mocking statements.. Similarly, hundreds of residents in Ellwood City, Pennsylvania turned out to rally in support of their crèche.

The bottom line was unmistakable. In every instance when the people got mobilized, they did so in support of Christmas. There was not a single example to the contrary: the anti-Christmas folks amount to nothing more than a few atheist

organizations and their lawyers.



*The Catholic League Nativity scene in Central Park.*

### **November 3**

The Air Force apologized after being accused of religious intolerance by the Military Religious Freedom Foundation for promoting Operation Christmas Child. Sponsored by Samaritan's Purse, a Christian group, it sends Christmas gifts to impoverished children worldwide.

### **November 30**

In Wisconsin, for the first time in years, they reverted back to calling the Capitol Rotunda Christmas tree a Christmas tree: it was called a Christmas tree for 70 years until it was renamed a Holiday tree in the mid-1980s.

In Rhode Island, Governor Lincoln Chafee decided to continue the politics of intolerance by calling the Capitol Rotunda Christmas tree a Holiday tree

Annie Laurie Gaylor of the Madison, Wisconsin-based Freedom From Religion Foundation explained why the Christmas tree in Wisconsin was rebranded the Holiday tree: "Calling it a Holiday tree was meant to be inclusive." Ironically, it has proven to be divisive—the uproar was in Rhode Island, not Wisconsin.

According to the *Providence Journal*, 87 percent of the people in Rhode Island prefer to call the Christmas tree a Christmas tree; only 8 percent think it should be called a Holiday tree. In Wisconsin, there was no discord: calling the Christmas tree a Christmas tree has brought people together. This is why Rhode Island should learn a lesson in civility and community by calling its Christmas tree a Christmas tree.

We asked: By the way, what holiday does the Holiday tree

represent?

## **December**

**Newburyport, MA** – Principal Lorene Marx banned fourth and fifth graders at Edward G. Molin Upper Elementary School from participating in “Secret Santa.” Parents were upset the tradition was being banned. Marx said her decision was based on the fact that not every student celebrates Christmas and that some might not be able to afford to take part. Marx commented, “No student needs to feel they need to give a certain amount, to feel left out or to feel unable to participate. This also ties in with the district’s inclusionary practices.” Superintendent Marc Kerble said, “Everybody has good intentions, and I think that in the spirit of giving, we need to move forward and do what’s best for the community.”

## **December**

**Fairfield, CA** – The Military Religious Foundation wrote to authorities at Travis Air Force Base asking that the Nativity scene and menorah in the base’s holiday display be moved to a chapel nearby. The group claimed that the displays constituted an endorsement of religions by the military. Lawyers for the base determined that the symbols do not violate religious freedom of the troops. The Air Force judge decided that the displays at the base were part of a more general, secular holiday display, which includes images of Santa Claus, airplanes, and Christmas trees.

## **December**

**Lincoln, NE** – A flashing message reminding passersby to “Remember the Reason for the Season” was removed from the electronic sign at Lincoln Southeast High School. Principal Patrick Hunter-Pirtle commented: “It shouldn’t have been up there. That phrase is associated with Christianity. We have Jewish students here, and we have Muslim students here. I don’t want anybody to feel like we’re favoring a religion. I don’t want to exclude anyone, and we work hard at that.”

Hunter-Pirtle had not noticed the message until receiving a phone call from the ACLU-Nebraska Executive Director Laurel Marsh.

## **December**

The Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) launched its atheistic billboard campaign against the Christmas season. The billboards read "Imagine No Religion" and "Reason's Greetings." For the first time, billboards went up in Salt Lake City, Utah. Brookville, Indiana also saw atheist billboards in response to a crèche controversy from the preceding year, in which FFRF disputed the placement of a Nativity scene on public property.. This year, the Nativity was displayed again on courthouse grounds, but in a different location by the street. New York City was also included in the billboard campaign.

In Warren, Michigan ""FFRF tried to put up a "Winter Solstice" sign next to a crèche inside Warren City Hall. The sign was to include the statement that religion is a "myth and superstition that hardens hearts and enslaves minds." Warren Mayor James Fouts responded against the sign with a letter to FFRF in which he wrote, "I cannot and will not sanction the desecration of religion in the Warren City Hall atrium."" On December 23, FFRF sued the Warren mayor for "government censorship of nonreligious views and unlawful endorsement of religion."

## **December**

**Portland, Ore.** – A former church, now a small arts venue, displayed a local artist's take on the nativity scene. It was called "alien nativity." The exhibit, entailed 3D special effects, included four extraterrestrial magi as well as a portrayal of Santa Claus as shaman bedecked with an antlered deer's skull.

## **December 4**

**Leesburg, VA** – A life-size crucified skeleton wearing a Santa

Clause outfit appeared on the grounds of the Loudon County courthouse. According to the application for the display, the skeleton Santa was meant “to depict society’s materialistic obsessions and addictions and it is killing the peace, love, joy and kindness that is supposed to prevalent during the holiday season.”

## **December 8**

We launched our “Adopt an Atheist” campaign in response to David Silverman’s remarks: “We want people to realize that there may be atheists in their family,” he told the New York Times, “even if those atheists don’t even know they are atheists.” Approximately 80 percent of Americans are Christian, and 96 percent celebrate Christmas. Of the 20 percent who are not Christian, non-believers make up the largest segment, though the number of self-identified atheists is tiny. David Silverman, president of American Atheists, knew this to be true, which is why he was frantically trying to inflate his base.

We thought that there was some merit in Silverman’s idea, even if he had things backwards, as usual. So, in response to him, we launched our “Adopt an Atheist” campaign, the predicate of which was, “We want atheists to realize that there may be Christians in their community, even if those Christians don’t even know they are Christian.”

Here is what our campaign entailed. We asked everyone to contact the American Atheist affiliate in his area, letting them know of his interest in “adopting” one of them. We asked our members to let the atheists know of their sincere interest in working with them to uncover their inner self. We said that the atheists may be resistant at first, but eventually they may come to understand that they were Christian all along.

Bill Donohue discussed the urgency of this campaign, “If we hurry, these closeted Christians can celebrate Christmas like the rest of us. As an added bonus, they will no longer be

looked upon as people who 'believe in nothing, stand for nothing and are good for nothing.'"

### **December 12-30**

"The Gayest Christmas Pageant Ever!" made its premier on the West Coast at the Avery Schreiber Theatre in North Hollywood, California and ran through December 30. On the East Coast, the play was a success off-Broadway in New York and ran from November 14 through December 31.

Director Paul Storiale said, "We have lots of different characters. There's a narcoleptic with Tourette's, over-the-top gay, over-the-top black, a gay Mexican Jesus. This show is filled with every stereotype; no group goes untouched."

Music director Geo Santini described the character of Jesus as "silly" and "deviant."

An actress played a lesbian angel in bow tie and suspenders, "butching up" the Nativity. She said: "The underlying message is one of visibility, and those of us who are gay and lesbian struggle with that. The hope is that some day [this play] won't be a big deal because it's gay. It will just be another Christmas pageant people will want to see because it's well-written and because it's funny."

### **December 13**

The following are some of the positive and negative stories that cross our desk leading up to Christmas.

On the positive front, the residents of Ellwood City, Pennsylvania turned out by the hundreds on December 2 to rally in support of their nativity scene. There is a live nativity scene on city property in Minden, Louisiana, and after some initial resistance, a church hand bell group will soon take command of the Springhill library's courtyard. After a nativity scene was banned for years on the grounds of the Muskingum County Courthouse in Zanesville, Ohio, the county commissioners voted unanimously to put it back. Similarly,

Wisconsin reverted back to its display of a Christmas tree at the state capitol. “Keep Christ in Christmas” was the banner that stretched across the street in Pitman, New Jersey, and attempts by atheists to censor it have failed. And, in Athens, Texas, 5,000 people took to the streets in support of the crèche on the grounds of the Henderson County Courthouse after the Freedom From Religion Foundation called for its removal.

On the negative front, a school counselor at an Arkansas elementary school was told that she must remove her posting of a nativity scene on her billboard; her decoration was permitted for more than 20 years. Tulsa, Oklahoma long had a Christmas parade, but in recent years it was renamed the Holiday parade.

But just as the people in Rhode Island sang Christmas songs at their secularized “Holiday” event, the people in Tulsa countered with their own Christmas parade.

Indeed, we saw more examples of the pro-Christmas side not settling for a secular outcome than its obverse. More important, when the anti-Christmas side pushed back, those doing it were activist atheists. When the pro-Christmas side pushed back, it was a grassroots effort. In short, “Power to the People” never sounded so good.

## **December 15**

We issued a press release on the anti-Christian tactics of atheist groups.

“If we can’t censor, then compete.” That’s the preferred modus operandi of many atheists out to smash Christmas. Their first instinct is to ban nativity scenes wherever they can. If that doesn’t work, then they lay claim to the same spot seeking to display their anti-Christmas message.

The Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) was the most active atheist group using this two-prong strategy in 2011. In the Mississippi State Capitol, FFRF displayed a sign mocking

religion; it did the same in the Wisconsin State Capitol. It also waged war in small towns such as Athens, Texas and Prineville, Oregon.

Sometimes the efforts of radical atheists yield really ugly fruit: in Santa Monica, city officials used a lottery system to sort out all the requests for display on public property, the result being that atheists won most of the spots.

Unfortunately, some government officials took the easy way out by electing to ban all displays. For example, in 2010 the Catholic League protested the display of the menorah, a religious symbol, and the banning of a nativity scene, also a religious symbol, at the St. George Staten Island Ferry Terminal and in Boca Raton, Florida. This year the courageous souls who run things in both places chose to ban all displays.

## **December 19**

We issued a press release addressing intolerance at Christmastime at home and abroad.

North Korea is putting South Korea on notice, warning of “unexpected consequences” if Seoul displays Christmas lights near the border. In China last week, government officials and the police smashed the sound equipment of Christians who were about to celebrate Christmas in a village outside Beijing.

In a South Carolina cancer center, a 67-year-old volunteer Santa was evicted because of the “different cultures and beliefs of the patients we care for”; it later reversed its decision. In an elementary school in Stockton, California, poinsettias were banned but somehow snowmen were permitted; they justified their censorship by saying there was a Sikh temple in the city (note: there is no evidence that Sikhs are offended by poinsettias.)

A homosexual group on the campus of Washington and Jefferson College succeeded in getting the Dean to approve a condom-



decorated Christmas tree.

Most atheists are not intolerant, but rare is the atheist qua activist who is not. Unfortunately, we don't have to look overseas to Communist nations to witness this verity. That they show up at Christmastime, as well as at Easter, is proof that their real hatred is of all things Christian.

### **December 21**

**Holyoke, MA** – Parts of the Nativity from the closed Mater Dolorosa church were moved to the Holy Cross Church. This sparked outrage from protesters occupying the closed church. They claim they set up the manger scene to set up the Christmas holiday. However, a diocesan spokesman said workers went to retrieve the Nativity for a nearby open parish and found that the protestors had set it up without permission.

### **December 23**

**Tarrytown, NY** – A Christmas tree was veiled with a black curtain in the lobby of the Doubletree Hotel Tarrytown at the request of Jewish guests who were scheduled to stay at the hotel for a Hanukkah celebration, occupying 180 of the hotel's 250 rooms. The general manager said guests were concerned that the tree would be a safety hazard to the large number of children in the hotel: "We did it more to protect a lot of children...from a safety perspective."

The only report on this incident in the *Journal News* did not mention how the manager justified his claim that a tree with a curtain would be less of a safety hazard to children than a tree without a curtain or why the curtain, itself was not a safety hazard.

One Roman Catholic patron staying at the hotel said, "I think it's a slap in the face. The whole purpose of the holiday season, whether it's Christmas, Kwanzaa or Hanukah, is everybody celebrating their beliefs. If I went in and put a cover on a menorah, I'd probably have lawyers calling me." He

may no longer give his business to the hotel, saying: "Why should I have to go in there and look at a black curtain instead of a Christmas tree?"

## **Christmas Vandalism**

During each Christmas season, our desks are loaded with stories on Christmas vandalism. This year was no different. Here is a list of incidents that came to our attention:

### **November**

***St. Paul, MN*** – Copper thieves cut and stole heavy and light duty electric cords from lighted Christmas displays in Phalen Park.

### **November 11**

***Indiana, PA*** – A 4-foot Christmas tree decorated with multicolored lights was uprooted and stolen from the backyard of the rectory of St. Thomas More Roman Catholic Church, home to priests at the parish serving Catholic students at Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

### **November 22**

***Moreno Valley, CA*** – A family had its outdoor Christmas decorations stolen after just setting them up. The thieves took most of the expensive decorations. The stolen items were worth \$1600.

### **November 28**

***Antioch, IL*** – Toys, coats, and other items intended for Open Arms Mission Charities were stolen from St. Stephen Lutheran Church. The stolen items were worth \$700.

### **December**

***Philadelphia, PA*** – The Salvation Army had three of its red kettles stolen from bell ringers at two grocery stores in the Northeast part of the city.

### **December**

***Golf Hammock, FL*** – Inflatable lawn decorations, including a Frosty the Snowman display as well as two Santa displays, were destroyed by vandals in a rash of incidents. One resident claimed that she knew of five vandalized inflatable decorations and that four homes were hit.

#### **December**

***Lonaconing, MD*** – Christmas decorations were damaged throughout the town, resulting in up to \$800 in costs to replace damaged or stolen displays.

#### **December**

***Meridian and Lauderdale Counties, MS*** – In a series of incidents, decorations were stolen or vandalized within the span of a few weeks. Some had their decorations vandalized multiple times. One citizen remarked, “But I honestly believe that is more a breaking down of society. I think that we don’t value things like we used to and we don’t value hard work like we used to.”

#### **December**

***Ramsey, NJ*** – Presents, toys, and gift cards for the needy, valued at \$3,000, were stolen from St. Paul Roman Catholic Church.

#### **December 3**

***Sacramento, CA*** – A family’s Christmas decorations were a neighborhood staple until this year, when vandals slashed an inflatable Santa, ripped off Rudolph the reindeer’s head, and made off with an oversize Grinch figure.

#### **December 10**

***Milton, GA*** – In the Gates Mill subdivision, residents were hit with a rash of vandalism hitting up to five homes. The damage included: a baby Jesus figure tossed from its Nativity scene, knocked over reindeer lights, a deflated Santa Claus, a Santa Claus lawn decoration hanging from a tree. According to authorities, yards were strewn with broken, bent, and beheaded

Christmas decorations.

### **December 17-18**

**Yonkers, NY** – Religious statues at six homes and two churches—one Episcopal, the other Catholic—were desecrated by vandals. Statues of the Virgin Mary were spray-painted black and some stolen.

### **December 19**

**Fairhaven, MA** – According to police, a pickup vehicle deliberately crashed head-on through a Nativity scene in Benoit Square, dragging wreckage including the infant Jesus, Mary and Joseph. The crèche was repaired by volunteers from the North Fairhaven Improvement Association, which maintains and decorates the square for the season.

### **December 20**

**Oildale, CA** – A were defaced by vandals with spray-paint who drew an upside-down cross and the numbers 666. Among the decorations defaced were a Nativity scene, a Bible verse and a sign that said “Happy Birthday Jesus.”

### **November-December**

Figures of the Baby Jesus were stolen from homes, businesses or churches in the following locations: Fayetteville, Arkansas; Monmouth, Illinois; Worcester, Massachusetts; Detroit, Michigan; Macon County, Missouri; St. Louis, Missouri; Pearl River, New York; Chambersburg, Pennsylvania; Fredericksburg, Virginia; Port Angeles, Washington

### **January 2**

**Bangor, PA** – Towards the end of the Christmas season, this defaced baby Jesus (see above) was found hanging in a tree outside of Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church. The Baby Jesus was part of its outdoor crèche before it was stolen.

The front side of the figure was marked with the message, “I am the Antichrist,” on the loincloth, an anarchy sign on the

chest, horns on the forehead, and stigmatic dots on the hands and feet.

The back of the figure was marked with the number "666" down the spine as well as the message, "Demonization is religious oppression."

Bangor Borough Council authorized an award of up to \$500 for information leading to the apprehension of the perpetrators.

#### **January 14**

***Quinter, KS*** – Two Baby Jesus figures were stolen from a United Methodist Church as well as a painting of Jesus. One of the figures was hand-crafted by church members.