



Bah Humbug

By William A. Borst, Ph.D.

Christmas is a time of joy, giving, and the celebration of the birth of Jesus. Plastic Angels swing from brightly-colored Christmas trees, right next to glittering snowmen, festooned with top hats. Santa's sleigh and his reindeer decorate snow-covered lawns next to nativity scenes, with shepherds and wise men. Buildings and their walls echo with the pleasant mixture of festive hymns such as *White Christmas*, *Jingle Bells*, as well as *Silent Night* and *Come All Ye Faithful*. Man still renders to God while paying his homage to Caesar with colorfully wrapped packages and holiday cheer.

THE CHRISTMAS STORY

This dual scenario underscores the fact that man is a mystical composite of body and soul. While he plants his feet firmly on the ground, his eyes aspire to the heavens above. The creative geniuses of Charles Dickens with his *Christmas Carol* and film director Frank Capra's *It's a Wonderful Life*, presented a similar theological view that was incarnated within the material joys of the Christmas season. Both Ebenezer Scrooge and George Bailey received a measure of redemption despite their human failings. No season better represents the constant pull between heaven and earth than Christmas.

The story of Christmas deftly parallels this conflict between matter and spirit. Author William J. Federer has written a short pamphlet, entitled *There Really Is a Santa Claus: Origins of the Christmas Holiday*, that traces the history and evolution of Christmas. According to Federer the holiday originated with the charitable activities of Bishop Nicholas, a devout clergyman in Asia Minor in the 4th century. He helped the family of a nobleman who was in dire financial straits and whose only hope was to marry his daughters before the creditors could take them, presumably to a life of prostitution. The father did not have enough money for their dowries, a marital prerequisite. The bishop learned of his plight and secretly threw bags of gold in the family's window at night until his daughters were safely married. When the father found out the source of the gold, Bishop Nicholas swore him to secrecy so the glory would go solely to God.

Despite the father's promise, knowledge of the bishop's charity became legendary spreading throughout Turkey and Greece and into

Europe where a tradition of *secret gift giving* became the focal point of St. Nicholas' feast day December 6th. By the 13th century, St. Francis of Assisi became alarmed by the materialistic nature of the gift giving. To return to the simplicity of Christ's birth, he created the first crèche or nativity scene.

After the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther ended all praying to or honoring of saints, including Nicholas. He believed that the focus should be solely on Christ. He originated *Kris Kindl* (Christlike), later pronounced *Kris Kringle*, which is German for *Christ Child*. King Henry VIII's break with the Church over his divorce from Catherine of Aragon and remarriages ended the honor of all saints in England. Henry also realized the importance of Christmas, but instead of going back to the Christ Child, the king introduced *Father Christmas*, a reincarnation of Saturn, the pagan Roman god of plenty. Saturn was pictured as a large man clothed in deep green or scarlet robes lined with fur, who supposedly brought peace, joy, good food, wine, and revelry. In the 19th century, writers such as Washington Irving and Episcopal minister Reverend Clement Moore depicted a secular St. Nicholas as a jolly old man with a flowing white beard and a stomach that *shook like a bowl full of jelly*. By the 1860's, his name had evolved into *Santa Claus*.

THE ACLU GRINCH

By the middle of the 20th century any resemblance Santa had to a saint was purely coincidental. Doctrinaire anti-religious groups, such as the American Civil Liberties Union, took it upon themselves to insure that any spiritual representation of Christmas was sidelined to the distant corners of the public arena.

Women's suffragette Crystal Eastman and Socialist Roger Baldwin founded the ACLU in 1920. During its formative period, according to Earl Browder, the General Secretary of the American Communist Party, the ACLU served as a *transmission belt* for the party. Under the guise of protecting the Constitution, the ACLU has historically done everything in its considerable power to undermine and subvert the Judeo/Christian underpinnings of the U. S. Constitution. It has used its influence to thwart the public by hiding behind what Phyllis Schlafly calls *The Supremacists* interpretations of the document

(also the title of her new book).

The ACLU has been a thorn in the side of Christians since its founding. It has supported every counter-cultural activity that has come down the pike such as abortion, and homosexual rights and has even opposed abstinence education. The ACLU is engaged in what Keith Fournier, the Director of the American Center for Law and Justice, has called a *religious cleansing*, that is a legal and political containment. Its war plan calls for the elimination of religion, religious symbols and any mention of God from the American political and social landscape. In his reliable book, *The Politics of the American Civil Liberties Union*, William Donohue, the founder of the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, observed that *removing religion from the womb of culture has become the practiced virtue of the ACLU*.

Like a sinister pack of *Seussian grinch*s, the ACLU and its partners in cultural subversion, Freedom from Religion and the Americans United for Separation of Church and State, have been not only stealing Christmas but also deconstructing it from the public square. In doing so, they have taken unfair advantage of the public's ignorance of its basic rights. They have used pressure, threats, and intimidation to get local social districts and other government entities to censor Christmas in ways that no court has decreed.

In Meriden, CT a public library refused to display paintings of Jesus' Nativity and Resurrection as part of its rotating display of local art. The city of Troy, MI prohibited private citizens from placing Christmas displays on its public property at the Troy City Hall. In Elizabeth, CO the Elbert County Charter School was threatened with a suit for refusing to remove all religious songs from its holiday concert after a Jewish family complained that *the children felt unwelcome and unsafe*.

THE OUTER AGNOSTIC

No greater insight to the ACLU's campaign to take Christ out of Christmas can be found than in the changes to everyday language. It has become politically correct to refer to the Christmas season with such vacuous secular euphemisms such as the *Winter Break*, *Winter Solstice*, or the ever-popular *Xmas*. People have been conditioned to substitute *Happy Holidays* for the traditional Yuletide greeting *Merry Christmas*. In their eagerness not to offend, the extraction of Christ amounts to a modest denial of faith.

David Limbaugh sensed this problem in his 2003 best selling book, *Persecution*. He recounts the story of a father in Scottsdale, AZ who was singing *We Wish You a Merry Christmas* with his five year-old daughter, who interrupted him to insist that they substitute *Happy Holidays*. She said that one of her teachers did not celebrate Christmas. Days later at the school concert, he found that there were no references of Christ or Christmas in any of the songs.

Limbaugh also raises the question that it should be very hard for the songs of celebration of one very large religious group to offend the sensitivities of other religions, unless, of course there were a deep

and unresolved bigotry toward that religion. He quotes a 2000 Gallup Poll that found that 96 percent of Americans celebrate Christmas. Americans have allowed a small minority to enforce secularism around the country.

While the politically correct attitude, not to offend with religious references, has become a national obsession, the Christmas season is just a part of a larger campaign to eliminate religious symbols from the public square. As Limbaugh indicates, this is also bigotry of the worst kind. Terms, such as *religious right*, or the *Taliban* as applied to Christian fundamentalists are pejorative references, designed to equate belief in Jesus with the blood-thirsty thugs of the Middle East. Christians are being taught to internalize the contempt that the secularists have for them. The left has created the situation where religious people are expected to be outwardly agnostic toward public issues and policies.

Limbaugh's book has literally hundreds of anecdotal examples of this really occurring. The state of Oregon, which allowed such provocative license plates as *Hot Dam* and *2Sexy*, refused a citizen's request to use *PRAY* on a license plate. A child in Kentucky had her drawing of a cross for an independent art project rejected.

WALL OF SEPARATION

How did this all happen? The establishment clause in the First Amendment has become the most contentious and least understood clause in the Constitution. It has served as the Trojan Horse through which an unsuspecting American public has allowed its Christian heritage to be pillaged. The early colonists had to develop their own local traditions about religious tolerance and pluralism. The framers had a clear understanding of the meaning of *establishment* given their long and troubled history with the Anglican Church, the established Church of England. The colonists strove for an atmosphere that would tolerate diverse religious views.

David Limbaugh reminds the public that the establishment clause was to serve two purposes: it prohibited the federal government from establishing a national church, and it *prohibited the federal government from interfering with the church/state relations of the individual states*. It has been the U.S. Congress's designated role of neutrality that has been tossed aside in this age of activist judges and legislatively-minded jurists. Columnist Joseph Sobran's 1983 book, *Single Issues*, says that far from equalizing unbelief, secularism has succeeded in virtually *establishing* it.

It is evident that the purpose of the First Amendment was not to lower the Christian religion to the level of other religions, such as Islam or Buddhism but to exclude all rivalry among Christian sects and insure that Christianity maintained its strong impact within American society. In quoting Supreme Court Justice Joseph Story, Limbaugh also affirms that it was probably the universal sentiment in 1789 that *Christianity ought to receive encouragement from the State*. Sobran echoes Limbaugh when he wrote: *the religious clauses...no more signify a commitment to 'neutrality' as between reli-*

gion and non-religion, let alone a preference for the latter, than the press clause implies neutrality about whether men should learn to read.

The waters of constitutional debate became further muddied by the addition of the extra-constitutional precept of *separation of church and state*. The term first appeared in President Thomas Jefferson's 1802 letter to the Danbury Baptist Association in Connecticut. His use of the phrase was designed to stress the protection of religion from the state, not the state from religion. The United States Supreme Court first used that phrase in 1947 in *Everson vs. Board of Education* to interpret the First Amendment's *establishment clause*. According to Limbaugh Justice Hugo Black's language *proved to be the best weapon ever handed to those who would strip Christianity from the public schools or public life*.

THE INVISIBLE HAND

The irony of this bitter debate is that the Founding Fathers always recognized the existence of a Supreme Being. In his inaugural address to Congress on April 30, 1789, George Washington said *No people can be bound to acknowledge and adore the Invisible Hand, which conducts the affairs of men more than the people of the United States*. It is the Supreme Being, this *Invisible Hand* that has been the target of these cultural grinchers. Religion and morality were necessary to America's success as a nation. Washington once said that anyone who attempted to remove religion and morality from our country *could not be considered a true patriot*. As late as 1952, Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas opined *that we are a religious people, whose institutions presuppose a Supreme Being*.

Religious symbols and music are necessary for American freedom. They remind Americans that they are not alone in the universe. There is a God who governs in human affairs whose Divine Providence must be respected at all times. What the country is enduring today is a sophisticated form of religious persecution. The battle over religious symbols and religious songs is a manifestation of a deeper spiritual war.

TURF WAR

This battle over religious symbols has become the culture fault line within American society. Several groups have met the Christmas Grinchers on their own legal turf. Liberty Counsel provides free legal information and will defend *pro bono* any case that might arise out of such disputes. Another group, the Alliance Defense Fund has hundreds of lawyers who are fighting the battle to keep Christ in Christmas. The ADF, an evangelical Christian organization, sponsors *the Christmas Project*, a national effort to stand up to groups such as the ACLU. The Christian Law Center and Thomas More Law Center in Ann Arbor, MI, (734-827-2001) are also fighting this wave of secular forces that want to destroy the nation's Christian heritage.

Their main weapon is information. These groups list religious activities that are within the legal guidelines of the U. S. Supreme

Court but they are not known by the average school administrator or parent. They reveal that public officials may not censor the religious aspects of a national cultural holiday like Christmas. They have underlined the fact that the inclusion of a religious component in holiday displays and concerts in public does not violate the so-called separation of church and state doctrine. Schools and communities may have seasonal decorations that include a crèche along with secular symbols of Christmas, such as snowmen, reindeer, and Santas. The nativity cannot be banned where other seasonal exhibits are permitted. The high school choir can sing *Silent Night, Holy Night*, as long as it also sings a secular song, such as *Jingle Bells*. A privately sponsored nativity scene on public property *does not have to have any secular association to remain constitutional*, says Liberty Counsel.

Children can give religious gifts to their teachers or to other students, just as other government workers and employees may distribute religious greeting to co-workers. Private businesses can clearly keep Christ in Christmas, since they are not bound by any establishment declaration of neutrality. No court can or has ordered *school officials to censor Christmas carols or to eliminate all references to Christmas*, says Alan Sears, the president of the ADF.

Congress has proclaimed Christmas to be a legal public holiday and celebrating it is part of being an American. Christians should remind their communities that neutrality requires an accommodation of religion, not hostility toward it. According to the U. S. Supreme Court, even a crèche is an appropriate and constitutional part of a school or community. It appears that the cynical tide of Scrooge's *Bab Humbug* has turned and Christians will be successful in keeping Christ in Christmas.

William A. Borst is a weekly talk show host on WGNU radio. Author of *Liberalism: Fatal Consequences* and new book, *The Scorpion and the Frog: A Natural Conspiracy*, available from PO Box 16271, St. Louis, MO 63105, for \$17.50 ppd. (*Consequences*) and (*Scorpion*) for \$19.95 soft and \$35 hard ppd. (BBPROF@aol.com)

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Eleanor Schlafly, *Publisher*
e-mail: info@mindszenty.org
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Christmas Blessings

Two decades ago I lived for a time with the Benedictine monks in the thousand-year-old Archabbey of Pannonhalma in Hungary. The ancient monastery founded by St. Stephen himself, was so important that even the godless Communists did not suppress it. It embodied the rich Catholic spirit of the land which gave the world such lights as our own Cardinal Mindszenty.



I have many moving memories. One is of a secret Requiem Mass I said for Cardinal Mindszenty on the tenth anniversary of his death in 1985. The Communist regime was in its decline, but mention of the Cardinal's name was still a major offense.

Over many years CMF has battled atheistic Communism, Marxism on our campuses, diabolical influences in the media, secularism, rampant godless attacks on Catholics, and watered down religion in our schools and churches. We must continue to expand our mission to defend **Faith, Family and Freedom**.

That's why I ask you to support the Cardinal Mindszenty Foundation with a Gift at Christmas!

One thing I learned from the Benedictine Fathers is the wisdom of their motto: “Ora et Labora-Pray and Work”. To accomplish anything, we must do both. As the old saying goes: “Pray as though it were all up to God, and work as though it were all up to you”. This is the spirit that has motivated the **Cardinal Mindszenty Foundation** from the beginning.

Your countless prayers and sacrifices have been richly rewarded. Many in Eastern Europe are now free and restoring their lives, churches, and families.

Still, there remains much to be done for over one billion people in China, Cuba, Sudan, and other countries. They still look to us; let us not forget them.

Your Christmas donation to this constantly caring CMF apostolate is one way you can make this Holy Season brighter with hope for the New Year.

At this blessed season of Christmas, be assured that I and the other CMF Council Members will offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass for you and your intentions.

May the Christ Child shower His blessings upon you and your families!

Reverend Kevin E. Rettig
CMF Council Member

JOHN 1:14

“And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.”