

# God and the public

by Adam Levenstein

*The entire purpose of the Bill of Rights is to protect the minority from the whims of the majority.*

Once again, December is upon us. It is during this month that stores get overcrowded, old Christmas commercials get recycled (and even dumber ones pop up), and public schools around the county gear their students toward Christmas.

Some people would argue that the last statement was a little harsh; however, if you look at the situation, that is exactly what society does. This can be shown even by looking at Penn State-Behrend. Every student that has eaten at Dobbins hall in the past few days has seen the decorations and the monstrous Christmas tree. If you were to look at many public schools, you would see a similar phenomenon. In fact, a Christmas tree and a Menorah appear in front of the White House.

It can be argued that these are not Christian icons; rather, they are merely "winter traditions." Unfortunately, "Hanukkah Harry" and the "Hanukkah Bush" have yet to be widely accepted, and Santa Claus does not typically deliver presents to good little Jewish boys and girls under the Christmas tree. In addition, other major religions of the world (Hindu, Islam, Buddhism, etc.) do not have holidays during this time. Conclusion? These should not be used to do so. This means that no matter how many symbols you put in the room, one group will inevitably be predominant, and in any case, there can never be enough to represent everyone.

Another issue that has come up regarding God and the public is the issue of prayer in the public schools. There is a common misconception, mainly put forth by rightist groups such as the Christian Coalition, that the Supreme Court has outlawed voluntary prayer in public schools. There are those who even claim that any student caught with a Bible in a public school will be punished.

The facts of this case are simple. In 1962, the New York Board of Regents passed a resolution that all students were to pray in the morning after the Pledge of Allegiance. After a long fight, this case wound up in front of the Supreme Court. The Court ruled, not on the basis of the separation of church and state, but rather on the establishment clause of the First Amendment. The clause, which reads "Congress shall make no

law respecting the establishment of religion," bans the government from establishing any religion. The Court ruled that by forcing students to pray, the Board of Regents was establishing Christianity as the "official" religion of the state of New York. It was *then* that the phrase "separation of church and state" first came into official use.

Obviously, the right of students to pray voluntarily is up to the students *as individuals*. It would be fascistic to say otherwise. However, for the students as a whole to vote whether or not to have a morning prayer simply does not recognize the rights of individuals. The entire purpose of the Bill of Rights is to protect the minority from the whims of the majority. Unfortunately, the Bill of Rights has not always been able to fulfill this purpose, as was evident with slavery and segregation, as well as the McCarthy witch-hunting era.

One other obvious question to ask is whether or not it is necessary to have prayers in the public schools. Many people argue that the "fabulous fifties" were more "morally correct," because there were prayers in the schools. It is an interesting argument - unfortunately, it is a false one.

To begin with, most schools during this era did *not* have enforced prayer. This is a documented fact. Were you to ask an older adult, at random, whether or not he or she had to pray every morning in school, the answer is probably "no."

In addition, *since when is segregation and discrimination considered MORAL?* During those "fabulous fifties" blacks were segregated and discriminated against not only in the South, but in the North as well. African-American citizens were routinely beaten and arrested by the police for daring to ask for their rights. Interestingly, this is an obvious example of the rights of the minority being sacrificed for the oppression of the majority.

What conclusion is to be drawn from this? As a matter of opinion, I do not believe that anything would be gained from introducing prayer into the public schools. If students wish to pray, I see no reason why they shouldn't; however, to enforce one's view on another is unconstitutional and fascistic in nature. In the words of one Methodist minister, "When they start to teach God in the schools, I will teach trigonometry during Sunday services."

## X-mess

by John Rossomondo

With Christmas less than three weeks away, it is time to reflect upon the commercial mess that this holiday has become. Once upon a time, Christmas was a holiday based upon caring and the Birth of Jesus. Today it has been perverted into a materialistic day, completely unrelated to the true meaning of the holiday. Organizations such as the ACLU cry foul when a nativity scene is placed in a public place because it is religious.

Many people forget that Christmas is the second holiest day on the Christian calendar. Instead of the Blessed Mother, St. Joseph, and the Infant Jesus, a pagan array of Santa Claus, Frosty the Snowman, and Christmas trees now obscure the true meaning of Christmas. Materialism is now the norm and not the exception. Christmas never was a holiday based upon materialism until late in this century, formerly Christmas was celebrated in a wholly religious fashion without any non-religious character. Do non-Christians that observe Christmas understand what they are celebrating? Probably not.

Materialism obscures the significance of Christmas by subjugating the real significance of the holiday. If people really want to understand Christmas, they need go no further than the first chapters of Matthew and Luke. They testify to how God loved humanity so much that he humbled himself and became man in order to provide a spotless lamb for the sins of the world. How can we try to obscure such a beautiful event with pagan traditions, unrelated to Christ-mas. Would it be appropriate to commercialize Ramadan or Hannakuh in order to rob them of their religious character? Absolutely not.

Christmas should not be a holiday of indulgence, but rather a holiday of penance and joy. Christmas is the beginning of the road to salvation, in which we proclaim the coming of the Lord. Any other reason is useless. Christmas is a purely religious holiday, not a holiday to celebrate Santa Claus. To quote Ebenezer Scrooge, "Bah Humbug" because today Christmas has no meaning besides commercialism.

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