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Anti-Christmas Bias and the Political Correctness Police

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Each Christmas seems to bring a new round of anti-Christmas bias and discrimination. As the secularists press for the virtual evacuation of all Christian symbolism from the public square, Christmas poses a particularly juicy target for litigation and intimidation. A prime example of this anti-Christmas bias is evident at the School of Law of Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis. Controversy erupted when a Christmas tree appeared in the atrium of the law school's building at the school, commonly known as "IUPUI." The tree was decorated with paper fans made of maps of the world along with other globe and map-related objects. Nevertheless, even a Christmas tree absolutely shorn of Christian symbolism was too much for the emotionally sensitive and ever vigilant political correctness police.

According to Rich Schneider, director of media relations for the school, some students contacted Dean Anthony Tarr and complained that the Christmas tree made them feel "excluded." As Schneider told the Indiana Daily Student, "the dean sees the students, faculty and staff as a family, and it bothered him that it bothered some members of that family. He didn't want to offend anyone." Did you get that? The dean was "bothered" that the mere presence of a Christmas tree "bothered" some members of the law school community. Presumably, no one was concerned that it might "bother" others when the Christmas tree was unceremoniously removed.

Schneider went on to explain that the previous decorations on the Christmas tree were chosen to express "diversity and the identification of peoples everywhere," whatever that means. He also promised that the school would keep the student complaints in mind for the next year.

Law professor Jennifer Drobac explained that the presence of the Christmas tree at the school was legal, but congratulated Dean Tarr on making the right decision. "Because ours is a state school and, to a great degree, a majoritarian society, Dean Tarr quietly replaced the Christmas tree rather than further discomfort those non-Christians who felt excluded. Under Supreme Court precedent, the tree could remain, but we are a moral community as well as a legal one, an inclusive society. Dean Tarr gave life to the concept of equal protection, as well as to the First Amendment. I agree with the prophet who said, 'blessed are the peacemakers.' I hope we can now rejoice in our peace and new understanding."

That is nothing more than blatant anti-Christian bias mixed with a confusion of legal nonsense. Professor Drobac's mention of a "majoritarian society" makes no sense in this context. Furthermore, she congratulated Dean Tarr on upholding the First Amendment, conveniently overlooking the fact that the First Amendment also assures freedom of religious expression—not of a right never to be offended by any religious symbolism.

Professor Drobac's most magnificently ironic assertion came when she claimed to agree with "the prophet" who said "blessed are the peacemakers." Of course, that "prophet" was none other than Jesus Christ, a fact she either conveniently chose to overlook, or of which she is ignorant. Either way, this is not reassuring. Evidently, Christ can be quoted, but not named.

Further evidence of anti-Christmas bias comes from New York City where Chancellor Joel Klein has ruled that a nativity scene is banned from school displays, while the Jewish Menorah and the Islamic Star and Crescent are allowed. According to the chancellor, the Menorah and the Star and Crescent are religious symbols, but they are permitted because each demonstrates a "secular dimension." As Robert Muise of the Thomas More Law Center in New York City told World magazine: "What's really going on here is anti-Christian bias."

A recent news story from the Oswego Daily News reveals that the problem is spreading from New York City to the rest of the state. According to the report, Oswego Middle School is celebrating the season with a "diversity tree" which is decorated with ornaments "used to celebrate the world's cultural, ethnic, and religious differences." Teacher Debbie Smith was at pains to insist "it is not a Christmas tree." She went on to acknowledge that the idea for the tree is borrowed from the historic German tradition of bringing a tree into a building "and adorning it with decorations of traditional or religious significance." Just don't look for any decorations of religious significance on this tree.

Ms. Smith provided further detail of the diversity tree, indicating that the decorations included cinnamon cookie shapes representing the Middle East as well as wooden shoes for Holland, wheat wreaths for Scandinavia, boomerangs for Australia, origami for Asia, and other culturally-relevant items. The tree topper is a likeness of "Grandfather Frost," a Russian secular substitute for Santa Claus. Santa Claus is outlawed, presumably because Saint Nicolas was an actual Christian figure and bishop of the church—far too religious a figure for Oswego Middle School.

Recent years have included such atrocities as the county school board in Covington Georgia deleting the word "Christmas" from the school calendar in response to a threat from the American Civil Liberties Union. Two middle school students were disciplined in Rochester, Minnesota for wearing red and green in a Christmas skit and for concluding their skit with, "we hope you all have a Merry Christmas." Alert the police! Charge these children with an illegal "Merry Christmas!"

As recounted by John O'Sullivan in National Review, "the Spirit of Scrooge is abroad in the land seeking a hostile takeover of the Christmas message." And the anti-Christmas discrimination virus is spreading to the secular workplace as well.

The high priests of political correctness are ready to offer professional advice and consultation on how to avoid offending anyone during the holidays. A Minneapolis-based firm known as ProGroup offers advice to Fortune 500 companies on diversity issues. As reported in the Salt Lake Tribune, ProGroup is highly sensitive to the "December dilemma." ProGroup president Myrna Marofsky insists that all celebrations must be inclusive. Christmas music must be replaced with "seasonal" music. The prevailing decorations should symbolize winter, not any specific holiday. Santa Claus is banned as overtly Christian, and Christmas carols are completely out of bounds.

Fraser Nelson, executive director of the Disability Law Center in Salt Lake City said that a Christmas tree is symbolically equivalent to a cross. "When I walk in the door of the Utah State Capitol and I see a Christmas tree in the rotunda, I am personally offended...It doesn't belong in the workplace and it doesn't belong in public buildings."

The end of the year will be celebrated by the ProGroup staff with an Italian dinner. Of course, participants might well complain that this is nation-specific and exclusionary in its ethnic identification. Why not Chinese? What about those offended by pasta?

In an effort to distance December celebrations from Christmas, overtly pagan symbols and references have been brought back into the picture. The presence of "Grandfather Frost" and references to the holiday as a "winter festival," have been joined to a New Age embrace of the winter solstice as the heart of seasonal celebration. This re-paganization is, of course, what partially fills the vacuum when the secularist agenda has pushed Christmas out of the picture. This effort is not likely to succeed across the culture, but it is a powerful symbol of secular forces at work. As John O'Sullivan argues: "Attempts to make [Christmas] a celebration of season or snow or mere meteorology will fail—but there is a danger that they will succeed in annoying most Americans to the point where they will wish others a Merry Christmas not

from merriment and kindness but as an act of irritation, defiance and aggression.”

Cultural opposition to Christmas is but one representation of a fundamental shift in American society. This shift has not occurred on its own. A secular elite, fueled by hostility to historic Christianity, now insists that America surrender Christmas as a public celebration.

We have reached a truly remarkable moment when wishing someone “Merry Christmas” constitutes a bold act of Christian witness.

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