

## Christmas Hate Speech from the Left

Contributed by George Landrith  
Thursday, 15 January 2009

Every December, while outdoor temperatures are dropping, prominent atheists use the approaching Christmas holiday as an excuse to stoke the flames of the culture war. This year is no different. Dan Barker, the Co-president of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (based in Wisconsin) traveled to Olympia, Washington to post an anti-Christmas sign next to a nativity display at the state capitol. For the record, there is also a Menorah on display and a large "Holiday Tree" which is part of a local business's charitable effort to benefit poor children. Barker dismissed the idea that his sign was merely another religious display. He said, "It is not a religious display. It is an attack on religion."

Every December, while outdoor temperatures are dropping, prominent atheists use the approaching Christmas holiday as an excuse to stoke the flames of the culture war. This year is no different. Dan Barker, the Co-president of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (based in Wisconsin) traveled to Olympia, Washington to post an anti-Christmas sign next to a nativity display at the state capitol. For the record, there is also a Menorah on display and a large "Holiday Tree" which is part of a local business's charitable effort to benefit poor children. Barker dismissed the idea that his sign was merely another religious display. He said, "It is not a religious display. It is an attack on religion."

I am at a loss to understand why he went to the trouble to "attack" (in his words) Christianity. If he were merely sharing his beliefs, that would not necessarily be an attack. Christians who share their faith with non-believers do not intend it as an attack, nor is it reasonably seen to be one. But Barker is in his own words "attacking" Christianity. So please don't tell me there isn't a culture war raging in America.

Barker's sign read: "At this season of the Winter Solstice may reason prevail. 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." In an interview on Fox News, he explained the motivation behind his sign, "We atheists and agnostics love this time of year -- the food, the family, the fun, the music, the fellowship. It is a natural season that belongs to all of us, not just to Christians. Christians came along and basically stole this time of year .... December does not just belong to Christians. We see the nativity scene as a direct attack on good human values...."

Barker continued his anti-Christian and anti-Christmas rant, "This time of year is ... a natural season. The Christians basically stole this season from us human beings by using the hate speech of the nativity scene. He then referred to Jesus as "that little baby who became the dictator." This bears repeating -- Barker labels the nativity scene and Christmas -- a time of tremendous goodwill and an outpouring of charity and kindness -- "hate speech." He calls Jesus "that little baby who became the dictator." Do you still believe there is no culture war?

Barker's words are so outrageous that I almost missed commenting on the name of his organization -- The Freedom From Religion Foundation. Not surprisingly, he claims that freedom of religion includes freedom from religion. The First Amendment of the Constitution says, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." Simply stated, government may not establish a state sponsored religion, nor may it prohibit individuals from the free exercise of religion. That means that Americans also have the right to not be religious. But the First Amendment does not give Americans a constitutional right to live in a society free of religious people, religious beliefs and religious practices -- that would infringe on the free exercise rights of everyone else.

That the vast majority of Americans choose to celebrate Christmas for religious, spiritual or cultural reasons, does not impose religion or Christianity on those few who do not wish to celebrate Christmas. When Jews celebrate Hanukkah or Passover or Rosh Hashanah, it does not reduce or impose on my religious rights in any way. Likewise, when I celebrate Christmas or Easter, it does not reduce or impose on the religious freedoms of my Jewish friends.

The same is true for atheists -- their right to not believe in either Christian or Jewish religious traditions is not diminished when Christians and Jews practice their religion. Thus, Barker's Freedom From Religion Foundation is poorly named if it is trying to reflect the religious freedom encapsulated in the First Amendment. But worse than his fundamental misunderstanding of religious freedom is that he thinks to practice his "religious" or "non-religious" views, he must attack other religions -- according to his own words.

The extreme Left is engaged in a culture war. They do not merely want to be allowed to believe as they wish -- something they already enjoy. They wish to reduce the rights of the rest of us to freely practice our religious beliefs. If they succeed in their culture war, it will be because too many of the rest of us refused to believe them when they told us that they intended to attack us and our religious beliefs.

George Landrith is the President of Frontiers of Freedom Institute.