A Time for Truth: The Bold Voice of Religion in Public

This past November, the American Atheists organization provoked a debate. But not without merit. As soon as the Christians began their Advent services in church and their Christmas shopping in the malls, some atheists attacked the very fact that Jesus was born. They put up a billboard on the New Jersey side of the Lincoln Tunnel that boldly declared, “You know it’s a myth. This season, celebrate reason.” Nearly 80% of Americans are professedly Christian. How neighborly is it to demean their faith at one of the most festive Christian holy days? Whatever happened to tolerance? Does it no longer apply to Christians? And what about civility?

No surprise that the atheists’ challenge to faith was met with an immediate response. And on both sides of the Lincoln Tunnel! The Catholic League answered with its own billboard on the New York side of the tunnel. Its billboard assured readers by saying, “You Know It's Real: This Season Celebrate Jesus.” The Manhattan-based Times Square Church put up their message on the very same billboard that the atheists had used on the New Jersey side of the tunnel. It simply said, “God is.”

At the same time that Lincoln Tunnel commuters between New York and New Jersey were caught up in the debate over God and Christmas, so were people of Texas. The Dallas-Fort Worth Coalition of Reason posted an ad on four buses that read, “Millions of time for truth. The whole truth. The truth that religion can offer.

The dignity of the human person. The just distribution of this world’s goods. Care for the environment. The respect due immigrants. The sanctity of life from conception to natural death. The need for sound, universal health care. The family. In the coming new year, we must face these and other serious issues. Our stance will determine whether we continue as a great civilization or are confined to the dustpan of history. Religion teaches that there is more to this world than matter. Religion upholds the spiritual values of self-sacrifice, charity, justice, tolerance and non-violence. But ridicule faith, demean religion and, in the end, morality vanishes.

In years past, America has always welcomed religion in the public forum. On the visit of Pope Benedict XVI to our country, President Bush remarked, “Here in America you’ll find a nation that welcomes the role of faith in the public square. When our founders declared our nation’s independence, they rested their case on an appeal to the ‘laws of nature, and of nature’s God.’ We believe in religious liberty. We also believe that a love for freedom and a common moral law are written into every human heart and that these constitute the firm foundation on which any successful free society must be built” (April 16, 2008).

The atheists are right in this: reason makes us celebrate. With the knowledge given us through science and technology, with the sense of right and wrong impressed on us by the Creator and with the mystery of Christ among us, we can make our country great. We can make our world a true home for all, if we dare to be courageous in our faith and public in our beliefs. Now is the time for truth. The whole truth. The truth that religion can offer.

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