

Do 'nonreligious' face discrimination?

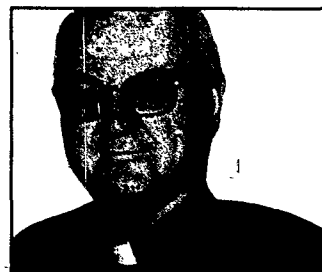
Earlier this year, there was an insightful column in *The Boston Globe* by Cathy Young, one of the paper's two "conservative" columnists, under the headline, "The new discrimination against the nonreligious" (1/20/04).

Gov. Howard Dean, the then-leading candidate for the Democratic nomination, had been asked by Newsweek whether he believed Jesus Christ to be "the son of God and ... the route to salvation and eternal life."

Young pointed out that Dean's "somewhat cagey" answer would probably do little to assuage the doubts and concerns of religiously conservative voters. He said that he "certainly" sees Jesus as "the son of God," but that salvation is "not gonna be up to me." When he discusses "spirituality," he admitted, "it is generally divorced from any mention of God or church."

Young was astonished that Dean would be asked such a personally intrusive question by so mainline a publication, suggesting that he had become "the target of something dangerously close to a religious witch-hunt."

In late December *The New Republic* magazine had published a cover story, "Howard Dean's religion problem," proposing that Dean would have trouble running as a moderate or centrist because he is "one of the most secular candidates to run for president in



Father Richard McBrien

Essays in Theology

modern history."

Young pointed out that, in reaction to the negative publicity generated by that article, Dean's attempt to "repackage himself, rather clumsily, as a man of faith," made him look "opportunistic and insincere."

A rabbi, writing on the Web site *beliefnet.org*, gratuitously charged that non-religious people have a problem taking a strong stand against evil, and cited Dean's position on the war in Iraq to support his claim.

"What piffle," Young retorted, pointing out that religion can be a force for good or evil. It inspires some people to rise to new and unexpected heights of generosity, self-sacrifice and courage in the face of injustice. It generates in others, however, feelings of superiority, self-righteousness and even sometimes the desire to kill "in the name of God."

The Pew Research Center released a poll this January that disclosed that six out of 10 Americans acknowledged that religion seldom or never influences their

voting decisions. And in a Gallup poll last year, 60 percent of Americans said that religious leaders should not try to influence public policy on abortion.

Young's conclusion is especially pertinent to our reflections here: "Political leaders whose faith is central to their lives ... have every right to discuss their religious beliefs in public; to muzzle them would be intolerant and illiberal.

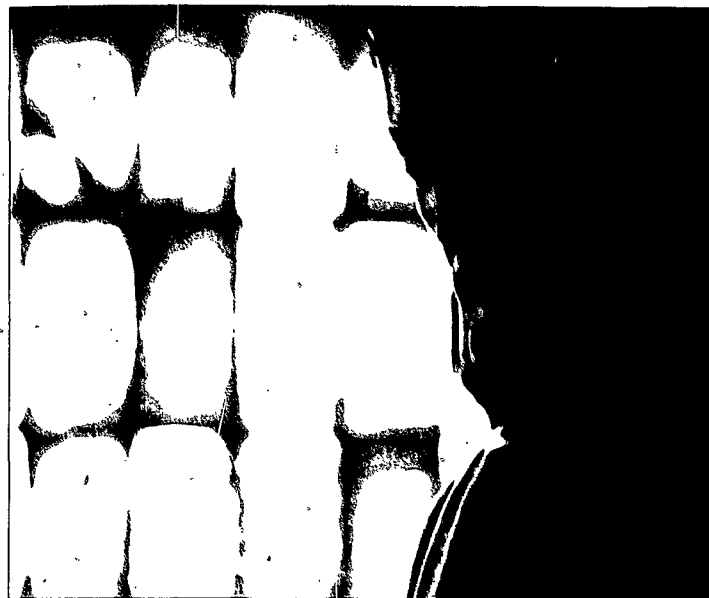
"But what about the intolerance of stigmatizing secularists? Polls show that approximately 40 percent of Americans do not belong to a church and do not consider religion as a very important part of their lives. The state of political discourse today seems to reduce them to second-class citizens."

A few conservative pundits proudly point out that George W. Bush received a far greater percentage of the votes of those who attend church regularly than did Vice President Al Gore, while Gore came out ahead among those who are not actively religious.

Building on statistics like these, Pentecostal Protestant broadcaster Pat Robertson announced recently that God had assured him that President Bush will win reelection in a "blowout."

Apparently, Gov. Dean had more than the media to worry about.

Father McBrien is a professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame.



Mike Crupi/Catholic Courier

When entering a lot of Catholic churches, our flag is nowhere to be seen — well, maybe up in the unused choir loft. I will be the first to agree that our flag represents freedom. And one of these freedoms is to display or not display our flag. It has nothing to do with separation of church and state. But, it does have a lot to do with showing our thanks for living in our great country and being able to worship in the church of our choice, and thanking The Lord for our veterans, many of whom are not with us today because they made the supreme sacrifice in defending our freedoms.

Don Hergenroder
Ann Marie Lane
Honeoye

Thoughts for November

To the editor:

When I was growing up, my parents talked about political party candidates. Republicans were for the rich, Democrats for the poor. Republicans were hawks, Democrats were doves. Later, Conservatives endorsed Republicans, Liberals endorsed Democrats.

Today, there is another difference between candidates. Our President is anti-abortion and protects unborn babies. The Democratic candidates are pro-choice, pro-abortion. When dealing with life, how can there be such a gross differ-

ence? God's Laws are for all people, all parties.

We elected politicians who removed the Ten Commandments in Alabama, who discussed removing God from the Pledge of Allegiance. We still elect pro-abortion politicians but this is changing. People are being offended when holiday celebrations, different than theirs, are mentioned. Our Constitution is being challenged. People want to be politically correct, what about being Biblically correct? Think of this between now and November.

We see what's going on — look at what we have done and we wonder why God lets these things happen?

Stephen DeLucia
Marquart Drive
Webster

Sorry to see pastor move

To the editor:

Recently I was hospitalized, therefore postponed this letter to the editor. Our good priest, Father Bob Gaudio's assignment to St. Anne's, Palmyra and St. Gregory's, Marion, has ended. He accomplished much while at our cluster parish. I was unable to join the festivities but learned everyone had a good time. It's sad to see Father Bob leave, but wish him well in his new assignment at St. Christopher's in North Chili.

Rena B. Camblin
Meadow Drive
Palmyra

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Although we cannot publish every letter we receive, we seek to provide a balanced representation of expressed opinions and a variety of reflections on life in the church. We will choose letters based on likely reader interest, timeliness and a sense of fair play. Our discerning readers may determine whether to agree or disagree with the opinions expressed.

Letters must not exceed 300 words. Anonymous letters and the use of pseudonyms are unacceptable. We reserve the right to edit letters for legal and other concerns. With respect to errors in submitted text, we will correct spelling only.

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