



# The Catholic Civil Rights League

[www.ccrl.ca](http://www.ccrl.ca)

Quarterly highlights, December, 2010

## League welcomes efforts to keep Christmas faith-focused

The League was pleased to hear about the public school board in Chilliwack, BC voting to re-name the two-week December holiday “Christmas vacation” rather than “winter break.” As one of the trustees, Martha Weins, put it, “We are having a holiday because it’s Christmas, so why not just say what it is.”

Though greeted with some criticism by those who considered the move insensitive or “not inclusive”, most who wrote to the local paper supported the change. After many years of efforts to remove Christian references from the public square, especially at Christmastime, there are signs that many people have had enough. Even those who aren’t particularly religious know that a lit, decorated evergreen is a Christmas tree, not a holiday or community tree, and that the holiday celebrates the birth of Christ.

Many advertisers have begun to return “Christmas” to their television and print messages, albeit alongside “Happy Holidays” and “Season Greetings.” The League thanks those merchants who have shown some sensitivity to their Christian customers. While Christmas should not be primarily about commerce, the gift-giving is part of how we celebrate.

The fact of the matter is that “cultural sensitivity” is the excuse used by extremely secular people, almost all of them lapsed Christians themselves, to remove faith from public life 365 days a year. We should all respect the beliefs of others, but it can be done without removing religion from public discourse altogether.

At Christmas, in particular, we should be grateful for the efforts of those who politely decline the invitation to downplay religious symbols. The Knights of Columbus, through their “Keep Christ in Christmas” campaign, make lawn signs available in many communities. Countless parishes, religious and community groups sponsor public crèche scenes, despite the unfortunate need to provide some security as well as the scenes themselves.

This year the nativity scene at Toronto’s Old City Hall, sponsored by the Catholic lay movement, Gethsemane Ministries, with the help of Campaign Life Coalition, was once again vandalized, by kicks that broke the plexiglass. As the League told LifeSite News, we need to keep our religious images an integral part of the public celebration of Christmas despite the threat of such incidents.

There’s also been an appreciable increase in the number of people wishing their friends, neighbours and shop assistants a “Merry Christmas.” Far from being perplexed or in any way offended, most people really appreciate the gesture.

*The Board of Directors wishes our members and their families all the blessings of the Christmas season.*

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## League supports SCC appeal in Quebec case

The League was pleased to learn in late October that the Supreme Court of Canada has allowed the appeal of families from Drummondville, Quebec seeking an exemption from the province’s ethics and religious culture (ECR) course.

“This case is about the principle of parental authority in the religious education of their children,” said League President Phil Horgan. “The appeal is a significant opportunity to affirm these rights in the public forum, and encourage parental rights in the implementation of moral and religious instruction in Quebec’s public schools.”

The League supports Quebec’s Catholic parents, and those of other faiths, in their insistence that parents are the first educators of their children, and have the right to choose their religious education. The League is among the educational and religious organizations that supported the application for appeal, in recognition of the rights of parents to direct their children’s religious education. Options for intervening in the appeal are now being explored.

## National Roundup

### Prostitution decision stayed

The League was pleased to learn Dec. 3 that the Ontario Court of Appeal has ruled that the prostitution laws will stay in place until April 2011, pending the appeal in its court. The League was a co-intervenor in the case, with REAL Women of Canada and Christian Legal Fellowship.

The stay prevents Ontario from becoming a center where pimps can operate freely with the police unable to make arrests under the impugned laws, and helps prevent the chaos and harassment of passers-by that could result in the absence of any controls on solicitation or other communication for purpose of prostitution.

With our co-intervenors, the League was never persuaded that prostitutes themselves would be any safer in the absence of the few legal controls that are placed on the industry. Much of the evidence presented in the case, and in our affidavit, suggests that in the few jurisdictions where prostitution is legal, the illegal side of the business tends to continue flourishing. Court documents and previous press re-

leases are available on our website. A date for the appeal has not been set.

### Bill C-510 to be debated

The second hour of debate and parliamentary vote on Bill C-510, the private members' bill seeking to criminalize abortion coercion, is now scheduled for December 15<sup>th</sup>, having received its first hour of debate Nov. 1. League members are encouraged to support this bill with their MPs.

The bill, called "[Roxanne's Law](#)," is named after Roxanne Fernando, a Manitoba woman whose boyfriend attempted to coerce her to have an abortion after she became pregnant in 2007. After refusing to have an abortion, Roxanne was beaten and left to die in a snow bank. It was [introduced in April](#) as a private members bill by Conservative MP Rod Bruinooog (Winnipeg South), who serves as chair of the parliamentary pro-life caucus. It is opposed by Prime Minister Stephen Harper.

The bill has gained wide support among Catholic organizations, including the League, the Canadian Bishops' Catholic Organization for Life and Family, and Priests for Life.

## AGM Report: Media biases reflect social and cultural realities, says journalist

Anti-religious bias exists in the media because it exists in society and therefore exists in newsrooms, National Post reporter and editor Charles Lewis told the League's AGM in Toronto October 21.

"The Catholic Church is singled out more as a target for anti-religious bias because it is the biggest Christian denomination, has an identifiable hierarchy with no question of "who's in charge", and stands for everything that liberal journalists don't believe in," said Mr. Lewis, who serves as the Post's religion reporter and editor of the blog Holy Post.

"Whatever their own beliefs, good editors understand that religion is interesting to their readers even if they themselves are not friendly to the church." Noting that The Post is among the very few dailies that still has a religion reporter, he said that this dedicated focus may help account for why the [Christian Horizons](#) case and the [censorship of pro-life](#) student exhibits got much more extensive coverage there than elsewhere. While religion can be difficult to cover, those media that fail to do so are omitting a subject that plays a role in many of their readers' lives and in society

Mr. Lewis added that some of the problems that plague the reporting of religion also affect other subjects, given that news by definition is about the unusual or the sensational. "You could look at the coverage of the sex abuse scandal, with the "new" revelations day in and day out, and say yes, they went too far, but that's what newspapers do.

"There are no conspiracies. Inaccuracies and bias in reporting relate more to the need to meet deadlines quickly, with fewer editorial resources than we once had, and ignorance of religious matters. In general this is an age of secularism and secularism is winning. There is also huge religious ignorance, as illustrated by the recent Pew Survey, which found half of Catholics don't know the doctrine of the true presence, and as many Protestants could not identify Martin Luther."

In the business portion of the meeting, voting members of the League approved its [board of directors for 2010-11](#), welcoming Luke Campbell of Alberta. (See our website for a full list of directors.) They also approved the 2009 financial statements and annual report, [available to members](#) upon request.

## Media Watch

### Papal comments on AIDS misrepresented

As with most news involving papal comments, some reflections by Pope Benedict touching on the AIDS crisis and condom use have provoked the usual rush of anti-Catholic invective to the message boards and talk radio. However, most of the media coverage has been fair, apart from a few rather zany headlines ('*Vatican says everyone can use condoms*'), according to Associated Press (Nov. 23), perhaps having given up on narrowing it down!).

Upon closer reading, the passages in question do not represent a departure from traditional Catholic teaching on sexuality or contraception. They were made not in the setting of an official statement, but in passages from a book of interviews composed in a conversational style. Unfortunately, the media representatives who really "got it wrong" are those employed by the Vatican newspaper, *L'Osservatore Romano*, who selected and chose to print the excerpts prior to the book's release. It would not take advanced studies in media relations to know which passages the international press would be likeliest to notice.

It is true that the statements would have been attacked no matter how they were issued, but a modicum of timing and planning would likely have allowed more opportunity for explanation of what the statements meant. The principle of double effect, or lesser evil, is a long-standing part of Catholic theology. To the extent that Pope Benedict's conversation with a writer recognized that there is a situation where the use of a condom might represent the beginning of a journey toward moral sense, that would likely be part of the double effect principle.

The League does not employ moral theologians, but we do know media balance and professionalism, and – again, apart from those wide-open mikes and message boards – this story was generally covered as well as could be expected. In keeping with the League's mandate, we have asked some of the message boards to follow their own policies and remove defamatory and hateful comments, and we have provided our members with the best analysis we could find of the issue. Some of the best analytical articles are available on our website through links from this article. The book itself, *Light of the World: The Pope, the Church and the Signs of the Times*, by Peter Seewald, was released Nov. 23.

### CBC message boards challenged

As noted in the text of the article above, the anonymous message boards offered by almost all major media tend to attract strongly anti-Catholic commentary whenever the Church is in the news. Given the anonymous nature of the invective, the "alert moderator" feature is usually the only way of combating the worst excesses, though in some cases a separate message to the moderator may be worthwhile.

Very generally, some boards are more sensitive than others to the issue of fairness in religious content. We have an ongoing inquiry with CBC.ca about some extreme content that was left online after numerous church-related stories. One of our members has filed a human rights complaint, citing religious discrimination, about the boards.

### PETA campaign in poor taste, says League

The League Dec. 7 called on People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) to consider the anti-religious message given by its recent campaign.

PETA doctored a picture of the pope to appear as if he's tossing a condom to a crowd, and says it has launched an international tour of Catholic institutions with leaflets saying, "Dogs & Cats Can't Use Condoms. We Are in the Midst of an Unholy Animal Overpopulation Crisis. Spay or Neuter Today."

In an e-mail to PETA, League Executive Director Joanne McGarry noted that the campaign is in poor taste and has anti-Catholic overtones.

"To alter the photograph of any public figure by putting a personal product into their hands is in bad taste. In this case, it can also be interpreted as an effort to mock Catholic teaching. It's unlikely that you would take a similarly free hand with other religions, but singling out Catholicism in a negative way never seems to lose its appeal.

"It's too bad that a good message about animal welfare is lost under all the bad taste. You've already lost one animal lover and will probably lose many more with this campaign," said Ms. McGarry.

In response, the organization apologized for any offense given, but maintained that the pope's reputation as a compassionate man and opponent of cruelty justified the use of the image.

# League News

## Coming events

In January, League President Phil Horgan will be part of a debate at Hart House, University of Toronto, about the recent court decision lifting Canada's last provisions against prostitution. (The decision is currently stayed pending appeal.) Once confirmed, the date will be shared with our Toronto and area membership. On January 17, Executive Director Joanne McGarry will speak at King's College, University of Western Ontario, about the role the media played in the liberalization of abortion. The event is sponsored by King's Live for Life.

We're happy to provide a guest speaker for parish and school events in any centre where we have a director available. Contact Joanne at 416-466-8244 or [ccrl@ccrl.ca](mailto:ccrl@ccrl.ca) for more information.

## Development appeal update

Your generous response to our Fall development appeal is greatly appreciated, and will help us continue our work on the issues discussed in this bulletin. With stronger support we would be able to consider other cases. *League subscriptions can be requested as Christmas presents for family and friends for a donation of any amount. Send names and e-mail addresses to us at the address below.*

## E-mail newsletter update

It's almost a year since we changed our communications program to provide one monthly electronic newsletter, a single sheet insert for renewal notices and literature displays, and a quarterly hard copy bulletin for those who prefer postal mail. By now we hope all our supporters are receiving their newsletter by the route they prefer.

If you would like to sign up for the monthly electronic letter, simply send your name and e-mail address to [ccrl@ccrl.ca](mailto:ccrl@ccrl.ca). If your friends and associates say they have not been receiving any newsletters from us, it's most likely because we do not have their current e-mail address or because they have not let us know their preference. Send their information to us and we'll be happy to update our records.

If you're an e-mail subscriber and aren't hearing from us at least once a month, the problem may be your spam filter. Give us a call and we'll suggest some solutions.

## Chapter contacts

For upcoming meetings of our Windsor-Essex chapter contact Bob Baksi at [robert@baksi.com](mailto:robert@baksi.com).

Antigonish chapter meets the first Tuesday of each month and is active in media and public school issues. At its last meeting, Greg MacDougall was elected chapter president. He can be reached at: [danielgregmacdougall@hotmail.com](mailto:danielgregmacdougall@hotmail.com).

A League member from St. Catharines, Ont. is interested in forming a chapter in that region. If you live in the St. Catharines diocese and are interested, please contact us and we will include your name on the initial interest list.

## Mark your calendars

The League's annual dinner will take place Thursday, June 2 in Toronto. The evening will include the presentation of the Archbishop Exner Award for Catholic Excellence in Public Life. We welcome written nominations for the award. Guest speaker at the dinner will be Dr. Donald De Marco, professor of philosophy at St. Jerome's College in Ontario, and author of several books, including *The Heart of Virtue* and (with Benjamin Wiker) *Architects of the Culture of Death*

## Support the League

We rely completely on your generosity to continue our work. Gifts can be made online ([ccrl.ca](http://ccrl.ca)) or by mail to CCRL, 500 - 120 Eglinton Ave. E., Toronto, ON M4P 1E2., using this convenient form:

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