

# Opinion

Steve Barnaby editor/477-5450

23352 Farmington Road/Farmington, MI 48024

(BAP)

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## Display controversy shouldn't be

PRAISE BE that American government does so much to protect our freedom of religion. It seems odd that some among us want government actually to promote one religion or another as well.

But the sad fact is that each Christmas season one unit of government or another finds itself in a needless controversy over attempts to use tax dollars to favor one group over another.

CONSIDER WHAT government already does for religion:

- Churches are tax-exempt.
- Our contributions to churches reduce our taxable incomes.

• Local governments will fight taking of taxable property for such tax-exempt use as state prisons and mental institutions, but you almost never hear of a local government trying to zone out a church. Local governments generally welcome churches.

• In America, churches are free to set up schools — and have done so quite successfully. Locally, one sectarian college, Madonna, has been successful in competing for federal grants to teach certain programs. On the other hand, many so-called "developing" nations have a total state monopoly over education. There are only government schools.

• Do you ever read of movie stars in European nations going through two wedding ceremonies



A federal judge has ruled that a municipality can not put up a Nativity display such as this.

— one in church, the other in city hall? The government doesn't recognize the religious ceremony. But in America, government recognizes and honors wedding ceremonies performed by the clergy.

• Many nations have constitutional freedom of religion — on paper. But try to get rationed building materials for a church edifice; try to get access to a press to print tracts or Bibles; try to set up a non-governmental TV station; try to get radio time to broadcast your religious service to shut-ins or the curious.

• The Michigan Constitution contains a positive protection of our freedom to practice our religions: "Nor shall any person be denied the enjoyment of his civil or political rights or be discriminated against in the exercise thereof because of religion, race, color or national origin. The legislature

shall implement this section by appropriate legislation." (Art. I, sec. 2)

YOU HEAR a lot about "separation of church and state." That isn't public policy in the U.S. Again let us refer to that wonderful Michigan Constitution:

"Every person shall be at liberty to worship God according to the dictates of his own conscience. No person shall be compelled to attend, or, against his consent, to contribute to the erection or support of any place of religious worship, or to pay tithes, taxes or any other rates for the support of any minister of the gospel or teacher of

religion.

"No money shall be appropriated or drawn from the treasury for the benefit of any religious sect or society, theological or religious seminary; nor shall property belonging to the state be appropriated for any such purpose.

"The civil and political rights, privileges and capacities of no person shall be diminished or enlarged on account of his religious belief." (Art. I, sec. 2)

WOW! THAT'S strong language. And it's right on page one.

Bolled down, it means government must protect our religious freedom but may not use the power of the purse to promote one sect.

But to some politicians, the Constitution doesn't count; votes do. And there are more votes in using government funds to set up Nativity scenes or St. Nicholas displays than in paying attention to a law which the people voted on but sometimes forget about.

Myself, I would feel funny asking Jews, Muslims, Unitarians, Buddhists and just plain non-believers to pay taxes to support a government Nativity scene. And I would certainly squawk at the government's spending money on a dreidl (spinning top which symbolizes the Jewish festival of Hanukkah), a Buddhist shrine or any non-Christian display.

Those of us who enjoy the Nativity scene can enjoy them at area churches rather than city halls.

## oral quarrel

### Opinions are mixed on Christmas Eve off

This week's Oral Quarrel question asked readers: If you were president, how would you rule on the Christmas-Eve-off issue for Federal employees? Following are the responses:

Make them work on Christmas Eve. I have been working on Christmas eve for 15 years so, so can they.

Give them Christmas Eve off.

Let them work until 5 o'clock Christmas Eve.

I say let them all work — even Reagan — and then it is OK for the federal employees to work and I am not a Federal employee and I never have been.

The federal employees should work on Christmas Eve. They are paid a very large salary. That is my opinion and the President is right.

Of course they should work. The rest of us in the private sector have to work and federal government employees' benefits far surpass anything in the private sector. Would your boss give you Monday off out of the goodness of his heart and pay you for not working? It is the same thing.

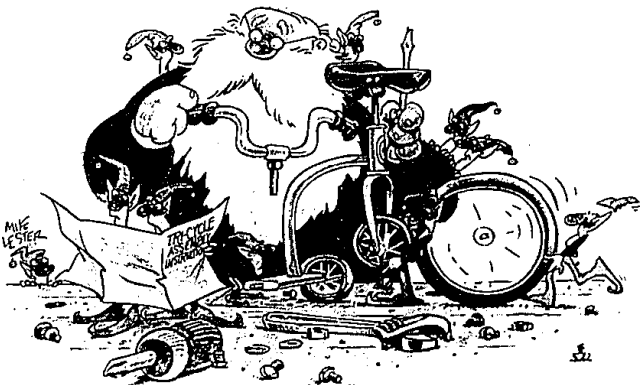
I would make them work.

If they work for the government, the government offices should be open just like normal businesses are. And there should be no differential. There is all kinds of religious beliefs in the Federal government as far as the employees go and we should not have any one religion over another.

I think sure, let them work. I have to work on Christmas Eve so why shouldn't they?

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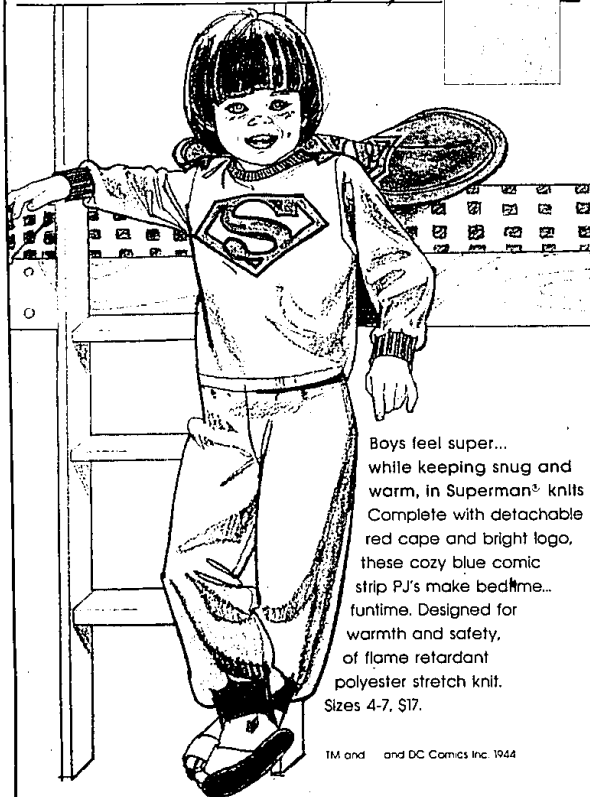
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