



## The “Fanatics” of Christmas

Abortion, [Joe Sobran](#) noted long ago in a book called *Single Issues*, appears to be the single issue about which one must not be a single-issue voter. No one, it seems, blames Social Security recipients for voting only for candidates who promise to protect Social Security; or labor leaders for opposing any candidate who does not support an increase in the minimum wage; or a school teacher who will vote only for a candidate who promises an increase in teacher pay or smaller class sizes — or both. But let someone publicly oppose a candidate because that candidate is a “pro-abortion” and suddenly the single-issue voter is a pariah, as much to be pitied as to be scorned.



And I suppose it goes without saying that people who stand out in the cold to picket an abortion clinic are considered fanatics. I was one of four or five people standing with our signs outside a Planned Parenthood clinic in my city recently when a motorist pulled up at curbside to deliver a harangue.

“Why don't you get your pervert priests straightened out instead of harassing these young women!” he demanded. In fact we were not harassing anyone with our peaceful, silent protests. We were not shouting at the young ladies going to and from the clinic the way our anti-harassment visitor was shouting at us. And he apparently assumed we were all Catholics, just as he seemed to assume all priests are “perverts.” He was convinced that we were fanatics and bigoted against young women. He, of course, was a moderate, progressive thinker.

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Even religious folks who are not politically active are sometimes branded as religious fanatics. The political activities of my maternal grandmother never, to my knowledge, included more than going to the polls and voting on Election Day. But I do recall a small plaque she had on the wall with a little poem on it. “Only one life, 'twill soon be past. Only what's done for Christ will last.” She believed that seeking first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness was more important than all competing worldly claims. For that she may have been considered a “religious fanatic,” and was no doubt called that at least a time or two in her long and generous life.

But I rather like the way [Santayana](#) defined a fanatic: one who “redoubles his effort when he has forgotten his aim.” When you think of it that way, a lot of very high-ranking and respectable people might be fanatics, though they appear to all the world to be nothing of the kind. Consider, for example, the college president who becomes so involved in fundraising, public relations, and expanding the physical plant on campus that he pays no attention to what is happening to the quality of education there. Or think of the bishop or pastor who is so wrapped up in budgetary considerations and administrative tasks that he has no time for the effort to “seek and save” those who are lost. I recall having once heard of a church that was closed and had a revealing sign posted in front of it: “Gone out



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of business; didn't know what our business was." Sadly, that could be said of a lot of churches.

Or consider a well-meaning citizen who is elected to Congress and arrives at our nation's capital determined to "clean up the mess in Washington." But he is not there very long before he is so caught up in raising money for reelection and pleasing various constituency groups that he becomes enmeshed in the very culture of spending and corruption he had come to change. He redoubles his efforts; but he has forgotten his aim. Yet no one thinks him a fanatic, for he is "just like all the rest."

Then, too, consider all the well-meaning souls who had resolved at the start of this "holiday season" to find the time to "watch and pray" and ponder the "real meaning" of Christmas amidst all the glitter and noise. Then they got so caught up in shopping and wrapping, sending cards, attending and hosting parties, cooking and cleaning that the big day has come and gone with scarcely a thought of the birth of the Savior. They have redoubled their efforts but forgotten their aim.

Now consider the characters we remember at this time each year. The Magi made what must have been a difficult journey to follow a star to see a prophecy about a newborn king fulfilled. All of Jerusalem was troubled by their mission and at least some of their own countrymen doubtless considered them fanatics. A virgin called upon to carry in her womb and give birth to the Messiah gave her unconditional consent to the service of the God of Israel: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord. Be it done unto me according to thy word" (Luke 1:38). Consider that Joseph, in faith believing, took unto him Mary, his wife, though she was with child before they had come together. In the eyes of the world, he might have been considered a fanatic or, worse, a fool.

Consider the single-minded devotion of John the Baptist. Born six months before Jesus, he would grow up to be the forerunner of the Messiah and bear witness to the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). When captured, John was brought before the king, who had arranged to have his own brother killed so he could marry his brother's wife. John confronted him on that issue and the baptizer literally lost his head rather than withhold the truth. By today's polite standards, he was excessively "judgmental." He must have been a "fanatic."

Or consider the Messiah himself. He whose birth we have just celebrated lived His life with one goal in mind: to do the will of the One who sent Him. When He was but 12 years old, he declared, "I must be about My Father's business." Later He would say, "My meat is to do the will of Him who sent Me, that I may perfect His work" (John 4:34). He might have avoided all conflict with both the secular and religious authorities if He had limited His ministry to saying only those gentle, reassuring things we like to remember from the Sermon on the Mount — forgetting the many warnings about hell in that same sermon. But He spoke that we might know truth about the choices we must make between God and mammon — the God of Heaven and Earth or the gods of the marketplace.

"And Christ died for all," Saint Paul wrote, "that they who live should live no longer for themselves, but unto Him who died for them and rose again" (II Corinthians 5:15). Like many of the saints, Paul abandoned a comfortable and privileged life to preach a Gospel that brought him suffering and persecution. To the world he seemed a fanatic, as did the Lord he followed.

For the Child born in a stable in Bethlehem was the Savior who would die for a world of sinners unable to save ourselves. Toward that end He never let up in His effort.

And He never forgot His aim.



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