



## Texas AG: Banning Christmas Poster Violates First Amendment

“She said my poster is an issue of separation of church and state. She said the poster had to come down because it might offend kids from other religions or those who do not have a religion.”

That is how Dedra Shannon, an aide in the school nurse’s office at Patterson Middle School in Killeen, Texas, explained the confrontation she had with the school’s principal concerning the poster she had used to decorate the door to the nurse’s office in the school, depicting a famous scene from the traditional Christmas TV show *A Charlie Brown Christmas*.



In the scene, a frustrated Charlie Brown asks if anyone knows what Christmas is all about. At that point, his friend Linus quotes the biblical passage about the birth of Christ found in the second chapter of Luke’s gospel, including the words, “For unto you is born this day in the city of David a savior who is Christ the Lord.” Linus then tells Charlie Brown, “That’s what Christmas is all about, Charlie Brown.”

Inspired by that scene from the TV program that has run for almost half a century, Shannon used the image of Linus, a scrawny Christmas tree, plus the Bible verse that Linus cited, in a six-foot poster on the door of the nurse’s office.

Across America, school nurses regularly inform young teenagers about the availability of birth control pills, and even where they can access an abortion, but this is the poster that is “offensive” in Killeen, Texas?

Shannon put the decoration up on December 5; then on December 7 the school’s principal told her, “Please don’t hate me, but unfortunately you’re going to have to take your poster down.” According to Shannon, the principal said it was “an issue of separation of church and state. She said the poster had to come down because it might offend kids from other religions or those who do not have a religion.”

The principal said Shannon could leave up the poster itself, if she removed the Bible verse.

“I just took the entire thing down,” Shannon said. “I wasn’t going to leave Linus and the Christmas tree without the dialogue. That’s the whole point of why it was put up.”

Shannon noted, “Throughout the school there are talks about diversity. Well, you aren’t being very diverse if you are not allowing the Christians to put something up that refers to a Christian holiday.”

Last year, another school canceled a stage performance of “A Charlie Brown Christmas” because of concerns it might violate the First Amendment to the Constitution. Or at least a judge’s interpretation of the First Amendment. But it is highly unlikely that James Madison would have viewed a poster of Charlie Brown as a violation of the First Amendment, which prevents *Congress* from establishing a *national religion*.



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The Killeen school administration defended the principal's action. "Our employees are free to celebrate the Christmas and holiday season in the manner of their choosing. However, employees are not permitted to impose their personal beliefs on the students. The display in question was a six-foot-tall-plus door decoration in the main hallway of the school building, and included a reference to a Bible verse covering much of the door." Horrors!

Texas Values, a non-profit advocacy group, is providing legal representation to Shannon. In a letter the group sent to the district, they argue that the display is no more of an establishment of religion than the Pledge of Allegiance (which includes the phrase "under God," and has been upheld by federal courts).

"It's amazing that even a quote from 'Charlie Brown's Christmas' is not even safe for some overzealous or misguided government officials," said the group's president, Jonathan Saenz.

Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton weighed in on the controversy, declaring the actions of the school district a violation of both the First Amendment and Texas law. He argued that Shannon's display is specifically protected by the "Merry Christmas Law," which was enacted in 2013 by the Texas Legislature. "We passed that law precisely because of this type of discrimination against people of faith," stated Paxton, adding, "No school official in Texas can silence a biblical reference to Christmas. This is an attack upon religious liberty."

The "Merry Christmas Law" was a reaction to school districts and government agencies telling employees that they could not even so much as say "Merry Christmas" to fellow employees.

This is not the first time in history that the Christian faith in general, and the celebration of Christmas in particular, have come under attack by governmental authorities. In the 1930s, National Socialists (Nazis) in Germany pushed the "de-Christianizing of rituals related to birth, marriage, and death," according to Klaus Fischer, writing in his book *Nazi Germany: A New History*. In 1938, carols and nativity plays were forbidden in the schools. Even the word "Christmas," celebrated in Germany for over a thousand years, was replaced by the secular "Yuletide."

One is not surprised that a totalitarian regime such as that led by Adolf Hitler would hate the Christian faith, but it is disheartening, to say the least, that such an attitude could prevail in the heart of Texas.

"I'm disappointed," Shannon said of the school's censorship of the poster. "It is a slap in the face of Christianity."

It would seem so. All across the country, Christian beliefs are regularly challenged in the public schools, including beliefs about evolution and creation, the institution of marriage, and abortion. The Christian belief that sexual relations should be within the institution of marriage between one man and one woman is not only ridiculed, it is labeled as bigoted.

Of course, there are hundreds of thousands of teachers in the country's public schools who are devout Christians, but they are often afraid to speak of their faith for fear of being reprimanded, fired, or sued.

Yet, Christmas is a federal holiday. Considering that, shouldn't students be informed, as part of their education, just what it is that Christians believe about Christmas? After all, without the birth of Christ, no such holiday as Christmas would even exist. In fact, it is very unlikely that the United States of America would even exist had not Jesus Christ been born.

For example, teaching in a civics class what Democrats believe, citing the party's most recent platform, is certainly not imposing the Democratic Party on students. Teaching what Adolf Hitler, Muhammad, Karl Marx, or Woodrow Wilson believed is not imposing the beliefs of those historical individuals on



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anyone, either.

Linus, a cartoon character created by Charles Schulz, a devout Christian, accurately summed up what Christmas was “all about” — certainly what Christians believe it is all about. Should school children be shielded from that knowledge? After all, the celebration by Christians of the birth of Christ has generated a wealth of literature through the years, including *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens, *The Grinch Who Stole Christmas* by Dr. Seuss, and the poem “T’was the Night Before Christmas” by Clement Moore.

Is an explanation of what Christians believe about their own holiday, which places such literature in context, something that should be censored in the public schools? Is it imposing a religion to say that Christians believe the birth of Christ is “what Christmas is all about?”

Perhaps Shannon’s father, Danny Brey, pastor of the Soliders of the Cross Cowboy Fellowship near Fort Hood (located outside Killeen), said it best: “People want us to be tolerant for everything but they don’t tolerate Christianity. They bow down to everything else, but when it comes to Christianity...”

Just as the Apostle Paul demanded his rights as a Roman citizen under Roman law, Christians should likewise demand that they be treated equally in the public schools, which their tax dollars financially support.





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