

STANDING UP FOR LOVE – February 2006

— By Richard L. Kiniry

Ethical Humanism tends to be a religion that is worn lightly. With little dogma, we are more an approach to living than a tight, controlling system. We also have trouble taking the dogmatic conflicts within other religions seriously. We tend to believe that most other religions don't make sense and as a result we take a laissez-faire attitude towards their internal arguments. We say, "let those people do their own thing."

Well, maybe we should look more closely. We have a world-view that makes sense, at least to us; other traditional religions posit a world-view that seems irrational, at least to us. But beyond those world-views are actions. Accompanying our world-view is the expectation that we act with love and respect for all the life around us, and we share that expectation with some traditional religious groups. One of the sayings that Felix Adler left to us is, "Deed before Creed." Although I believe creed can significantly change our deeds, the way people relate to other human beings and to life is more important than the supposed theory of any particular religion.

Recently, a controversy developed over the new television show "The Book of Daniel." The religious right considers the show to be disrespectful of Jesus and wants it off television. So, I had to see it and although I found it mildly entertaining, I understand their problem. Everyone in the show's extended family is breaking one of the Commandments and Jesus, a regular member of the cast, is understanding of all this human folly. A local television station interviewed people with different perspectives on the controversy and one woman in all seriousness said, "This isn't Jesus. It is more the anti-christ. Jesus judges and condemns sin. This is a loving Jesus who forgives people". I guess that was not unexpected but I couldn't believe my ears. She was denying a loving, merciful Jesus for a wrathful Jesus.

That is only one of many current examples of the negative interpretations of the Christian message being used to police our cultural life. Rather than sitting back and just watching this internal conflict over the Christian message, we can do our small part. Whether Jesus was a historic figure or a fictional character, there is no denying that the Jesus of the Gospels is a special person. He speaks of turning the other cheek and loving your neighbor as yourself. He hangs out with the workers, the poor, prostitutes. He says the rich are going to have a nearly impossible chance of getting into heaven. In other words, that message is so much ours that we ought to stand up for that approach when the opportunity offers.

What might be called the battle for Jesus is also our fight. Our small group is part of a bigger struggle - will respect and caring be the expectation that directs our cultural life? We can do our part by pointing out to family, friends and total strangers the hate and meanness of that wrathful Jesus approach. We can challenge governmental policy not from a political position but from the moral position that we share with other religious groups. We can encourage the loving,

humanistic side of Christianity by cooperating with Christian Churches in their programs that help the poor and fight injustice.