

Church Suit May Go to High Court

It's not unusual for churches to rent school auditoriums for worship services. The Bronx Household of Faith just wants the same rights other community groups have to assemble in public schools during off hours. But school officials who preside over the New York borough are allegedly discriminating against the group because it would use the facility for religious services, the church claims.

The New York City Department of Education consistently rejected Bronx Household's request to meet at a school building for weekend services until a federal district court in 2002 issued an injunction prohibiting the department from keeping churches out. Now the U.S. Supreme Court may decide the matter. It's a case that could have far-reaching ramifications for churches across the nation that wish to hold meetings in public schools.


The Politics of Sunday Sermons

Should government regulate Sunday morning sermons about political candidates? Most Protestant pastors don't think so. A survey shows they want the freedom to preach what the Bible says about candidates' positions.

According to LifeWay Research, nearly nine out of 10 Protestant senior pastors believe government should not regulate sermons.

“The survey confirmed what pastors of nearly every persuasion have told us for years: They don’t want the IRS or any other governmental agency to censor what they say from their pulpits,” said Alliance Defense Fund Senior Legal Counsel Erik Stanley.

Europe’s Illegal Faith

Religion is on the move in Europe, but it’s heading in the wrong direction for Christians. 

On the one hand, the pilgrim industry is booming. The European Union, local governments and liberal churches are investing millions to modernize and market medieval pilgrim routes. Millions—including a growing number of nonbelievers and charismatic Christians—have set out on holy trails.

On the other hand, campaigns are mounting against Bible-believing Christians who hold on to Jesus as the *only* way. Europeans, even within the churches, perceive biblical persuasions and morals as fundamentalist and anti-democratic. In some cases biblical Christianity is already illegal.

For centuries European emperors and kings imposed their religion of choice upon subjects—and European governments still claim the right to control religion. Authorities increasingly intervene, judging which religious convictions are compatible with the ruling definition of European democracy—which is secular pluralism.

Feedback

"I am so impressed with Charisma and how it has progressed with the times without losing sight of our mission as believers."

-Sarah Matthews

A Virtual winner

Wow! The October issue was very powerful and informative. Awesome research on all the new digital and virtual technology for spreading the Good News of Jesus around the world. I also loved the 30-year-old picture of beloved founder and publisher Steve Strang.

Bob Weiner, Gainesville, Fla.

*I've been carrying my October issue in my tote because it is chock-full of articles I intend to share with friends and family. *Charisma* is always a blessing.*

Lisa Letterii DeFelice, Marlboro, N.Y.

October was one of the best issues yet. The cover looks like Moses giving the Ten Commandments. Brilliant!

DaisyMay Rader, Minneapolis

The October issue was OK for me. We are in a small town with a small-town church, so none of this stuff really applies to us.

Colleen Cobb Audette, Sebastian, Fla.

Staying true to the mission

I'm a long-time reader and I am so impressed with *Charisma* and how it has progressed with the times without losing sight of our mission as believers.

I also get Charisma News updates on my iPhone. I love getting kingdom news—and you certainly can't get that in the mainstream media. Keep up the great work!

Sarah Matthews, Jacksonville, Fla.

Let's 'watch' our Timing

Regarding your article "Timing the Spirit" (September, Inform), I say, "Amen." I suggest that pastors and teachers remove their watches in the pulpit. It is a pet peeve of mine, seeing them checking their time.

I have said to them on occasion that they should not be concerned about how long the message goes; it is the Holy Spirit's work, not theirs. I too wonder how many wonderful things have been missed because there was more concern for people-pleasing.

Thanks for all the great articles and information in your magazine. I look forward to *Charisma* every month. J. Lee Grady is right-on and almost every column of his gets a hearty "Amen!" from me, too.

Pam Dolson, Lihue, Hawaii

Our Banana Tree Christmas

Facing a 'different' Christmas while in Africa, our family discovered new meaning in the season



Christmas is the time when nothing ought to change.”

Our newly married daughter, Liz, put into words what all of us were feeling. We had come from our home in New York state to spend the holidays with her and her husband, Alan, in their new apartment in Tucson, Ariz. Outside, on Christmas Eve, cactus-wrens hopped about the mesquite bushes beneath a glorious desert sky, while indoors the four of us gulped iced tea and thought of pine woods and falling snowflakes.

“Home in Leicester,” Alan recalled of his Massachusetts upbringing, “we’d generally go skating about now.”

“And tonight there’d be the midnight service at St. Mark’s!” Liz said. “Remember, Mom and Dad, how you can see your breath, walking in from the parking lot?”

We did remember. We wanted every time-hallowed tradition just as it always had been. No changes. Not at Christmas.

The Wonder of Bethlehem

Christmas should be a time of awe and reverence. Our salvation was made possible because God took on human flesh in a manger in Bethlehem.



The shepherds saw a babe in a manger. The wise men, arriving

later, also saw a young child. But the one who emerged from Mary's womb that cold winter night in Bethlehem of Judea was much more than what was discernible with human eyes.

He was God. The sacred record is clear: "Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid.

"Then the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.'

Angels We Have Heard (and Seen)

Explaining the reality of angelic beings in everyday life



Angelic activity always increases at times of great spiritual breakthrough in the kingdom of God. Christmas was just such a moment in history. At the first advent of Christ, the earth exploded with angelic activity.

God sent angels to make announcements to all who took part in the birth of the Savior. Gabriel appeared to the priest Zacharias and told him: "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son,

and you shall call his name John” (Luke 1:13). Soon after, Elizabeth was pregnant with the Messiah’s forerunner, John the Baptist.

Gabriel was also sent to Mary, Jesus’ mother, to herald her as the woman chosen by God to birth His Son. Joseph was reassured of Mary’s virginal purity by an angel who appeared to him in a dream. An angel directed the shepherds to Bethlehem so they could find the stable where Jesus was. The same angel along with countless others serenaded above the shepherds’ field.

Extravagant Giving

When giving comes from the heart, God will bless the gift-and reward the giver




Luke 6:38 is a wonderful verse. But it’s also one of the most frequently misapplied, misunderstood Scriptures in the Bible. It’s so familiar to Christians, you can probably quote it from memory: “Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over. ... For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.”

Many people assume that Jesus is speaking only of money here. In truth, He was unveiling a principle of God’s kingdom that applies to every area of human life. Back up some and read verses 36 and 37: “Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful. Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.” Only after making those statements does Jesus say, “Give, and it will be given to you” (v. 38).

Jesus was talking about the broad principle of giving. He was saying, *whatever* you give is going to be given back to you in “good measure” and “running over.”

God Gave Beauty for Ashes

Paul and Betty Neff lost four children in a fire just days before Christmas. Six years later, their only remaining son was killed. Yet through it all, they've watched God turn  their grief into something beautiful.

Betty Neff was 23 and a first-time mother when she dreamed she visited heaven:

“I was a young girl, running barefoot through a soft grassy meadow. I came to a small hill and immediately recognized Jesus standing at the top. He wore a long, white robe with a blue sash draped over one shoulder and wrapped around His waist. I couldn't see their faces, but there were four children on Jesus' right side and a person the size of an adult on His left.”

The week before Christmas in 1983, Paul and Betty Neff's youngsters were pleading with their dad, hammering away at his refusal to attend their Christmas play at church that afternoon: “Please, Daddy, oh, please! It just won't be the same without you there,” they exclaimed.

Paul, a 37-year-old, 222-pound ex-Marine who had fought some pretty tough battles in Vietnam, realized that in this case it would be easier to surrender. “OK, I'll go,” he announced.

The Christmas Rush

Are there blessings hidden amid the tinsel, the sales and the madness at the mall?



Does it bother you at Christmastime when carols are being played in shopping malls to the accompaniment of ringing cash registers? Does it upset you when the symbols of Christmas such as the Bethlehem star and the manger scene are used to sell merchandise and cards and decorations?

There's no doubt, the commercialization of Christmas *has* been overdone. It would be nice if Christmas tinsel wouldn't appear until at least after Thanksgiving. Nevertheless, I suggest we cool it on the complaining.

It's unfair to put down people who make their living in merchandising just because they like to do a brisk business at Christmastime, and because they use the Christmas symbols and themes to help them do it. Like it or not, we are a "nation of shopkeepers"—we believe in and depend upon free business, which is a lot better than depending upon the government to feed us and tell us what to do.