

GEORGIE ANNE GEYER



When moral and civic visions part

What a strange Christmas season! As they have been for so many years now, strictly Christian observances are banned in public spaces and schools where children supposedly learn of their history and heritage. Yet in San Jose, Calif., a statue of the Toltec-Aztec Mexican god Quetzalcoatl was just unveiled in a downtown plaza.

After a good deal of controversy — one Christian pastor characterized the “plumed serpent” god as “a dead, forgotten god who deserved to be dead because of all the lives sacrificed to him” — the city paid \$500,000 for the statue, all (yet again) in the service of “diversity.”

Result: Christianity, being the mainstream religion of America, has to be restrained for the tastes of the “politically correct,” but obscure and even morally offensive gods such as Quetzalcoatl are now encouraged and even publicly subsidized.

Meanwhile, we talk endlessly of orphanages as potentially an answer to the decaying morals of so many single and/or irresponsible parents in our society today. But the dirty secret is that the orphanages of yesteryear, which turned out many stable and principled adults, would not be the orphanages of today. Those institutions worked in previous generations precisely because they were moral and most often religious places, with moral and religious training. Hardly what would be likely to happen today.

Over the last 50 years in America morality has been completely divorced from society's presumed responsibility for its members. We have gone from an era in which every institution in society was automatically presumed to have a moral base to today's “liberal” programs, where not only are traditional Christian religious values proscribed but any values at all are considered improper in public life.

If we need examples of this odd new liberalism — which is totally removed from the more traditional and truly progressive liberalism of, say, a John F. Kennedy or a Hubert Humphrey — we can look at the discussion over unwed mothers today. The old liberals would say: Help them to help themselves. The new liberals say: Help them without question, regardless of what

they do or cause — more, accept even traditionally deviant behavior as the new norm.

Sen. Patrick Moynihan is the author of the term given to this new syndrome. He calls it “defining deviancy down.” He traces superbly how a society that refuses to base its subsidies or its judgments upon values — rewarding people down instead of lifting them up — just keeps declining.

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the moral underpinnings of other societies are also a major concern facing the world. This is true for at least two reasons: (1) Because of the collapse of the potent secular “religion” of communism; all across the East Bloc, the desperate search today is for some value system to replace the lost faith of

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Marxism.

(2) Because in contrast to earlier eras of mankind's development, today all peoples feel they have a right to development. But there can be no development without a moral system to underlie it through mutually accepted rules and principles; and so the absence or decline of those systems, as in Serbia and even Rwanda, becomes the major force for evil on a world scale.

The sad disjunction here is that never in history has the world so urgently looked to America for leadership — at the same time that America has so defined deviancy, in its divorce of the moral from the civic, that it has few lessons to offer anymore.

And so, yes, Christmas: the consummately moral against the persistently amoral! But at least this year, the good news is that the debate has been engaged in a novel manner. You can love someone like Newt Gingrich or you can hate him, but at least he has introduced ideals into our national discussion.

When this revolutionary centrist says, “I am suggesting a different version of human beings, a different version of how to help them,” he is helping us immensely to illuminate the dangers of the moral abyss that threatens us. And this Christmas, thank God for that!

Georgie Anne Geyer is a nationally syndicated columnist.