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Of halos, crosses, stars and Boy Scouts

Phyllis Zagano | Jul. 31, 2013 Just Catholic

It's a tough day for a saint when the halo goes. That's what's happened to Saints Cyril and Methodius, ninth-century missionaries to the Slavs. The European Union wants haloless saints. Can't have Christianity tramping about the territory, you know.

The European Commission overruled the saints' halos on their images on new commemorative Slovakian euro coins. Oh, and get rid of the crosses on the monk's habits while you're at it. Even *The New York Times* *[1]* reported [1] that the halo-stripping signaled Christianity's retreat from Europe.

Too bad. Cyril and Methodius were an interesting duo: brothers born in Greece who brought Christianity to the Slavic peoples. Their mother may have been a Slav. They are credited with all manner of cultural advancements. Cyril gave his name to an alphabet used for translations of the Bible and church fathers' writings from Greek.

The brothers are national saints in Slovakia and the Czech Republic and are honored with a national holiday in Macedonia. In Bulgaria and Russia, they are recognized with Slavonic Literature Day. And in 1980, Pope John Paul II ranked them up there with St. Benedict as co-patrons of Europe.

But the European Commission's steadfastly secular bureaucracy is dead set against any halos -- or crosses -- on European coins. It also sees a coded Christian message in the EU flag's 12 yellow stars on a field of blue, complaining they recall iconography of the Virgin Mary's crown of 12 stars.

Forget the "secular city" Harvey Cox wrote about. Now there is an entire secular continent.

Whose fault is that?

In 1965, Cox's *The Secular City* argued that the business of church is to influence individuals, not the state. People of faith in action make up the church. So, when the pomposity of the institutional church huffs and puffs against the brick fortresses of the secular society, it does so from within its own straw houses.

Where are the people of faith in action? All manner of folks have commented on the bad catechesis of Gen X, Gen Y and Gen Z, post-boomers all who probably never heard of the *Baltimore Catechism*. As bad as it is in the U.S., it is worse in Europe. The under-60 crowd has not only turned and walked away from Christianity; it has run screaming into the disco away from any religion. Religious belief, if they have any at all, is more cult-like and faddish than devotional and pious.

So the thought of approving a Slovakian coin design that, truth be told, rightly reflects how Europeans think of Saints Cyril and Methodius is an anathema borne of ignorance. And it is an anathema borne of ignorance that carries over into every sphere of life: marriage, children, education, ethics, social services, you name it.

It's not only a European virus. In the United States, even private organizations are in the sights of the secular

society. A small but noisy crowd known as the Freedom From Religion Foundation is attacking the Boy Scouts of America for maintaining "no member can grow into the best kind of citizen without recognizing his obligation to God." For the secular complainers, this is a problem. They call religious belief "religious bigotry." Excuse me; I call you, all of you, bigots.

People's histories and beliefs must be honored and cherished lest we become the sort of state George Orwell envisioned in *1984*. We cannot, and we should not, rewrite histories to salve the wrinkled noses of those who hate Christianity (and Christians), who want no recognition of anything religious in any forum, public or private.

We can assume the Boy Scouts of America will ignore one private group's demands that they remove God from Scouting. Would the Freedom From Religion Foundation not better form its own "Freethinker Scouting Association"?

And we can herald the folks at the National Bank of Slovakia. They've ignored the European Commission's complaints and are keeping their original coin design.

Even so, you can be sure the halo, cross and star hunt will continue in Europe, finding its way across oceans to wherever the name of God is mentioned.

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