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November 13, 2008: The Fight Over Christmas

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Title: The Fight Over Christmas

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11/13/2008--Recently, the media have reported on the planned Washington D.C. bus advertising campaign by the American Humanist Association. The ads will proclaim, "Why believe in a God? Just be good for goodness sake." The ads contain a link to a humanist website. The ads brought the following response from American Family Association President, Tim Wildmon, "It's a stupid ad. ...How do we define 'good' if we don't believe in God? God in his word, the Bible, tells us what's good and bad and right and wrong. If we are each ourselves defining what's good, it's going to be a crazy world." The AFA has its own "It's OK to say Merry Christmas" campaign going. As a nonbeliever, I think Mr. Wildmon missed a great opportunity. Forgetting the Bible for a minute—for after all, the Bible does not speak at all clearly on most issues that confront us—the humanists would probably agree with him that goodness is an objective standard not dependent on human will. Once upon a time, nonbelievers confronted the implications of relativism, but my impression is that today's humanists do not. Even the tone of the proposed ad suggests there is such a thing as goodness. Belief in objective right and wrong is not exactly the same as belief in God, but C.S. Lewis, for one, considered the former commitment to be the one that really defines the common core of religious belief—including forms of philosophy we do not usually consider religious. Mr. Wildmon should have responded by asking the reporter to go back to the humanists. "Tell them I think it is right to kill people," he should have said, and "ask them whether, if I think that is good, it is good? If the answer is no, ask them what standard other than human will could exist in a world without God?" I think there is an answer to that question, but I'm not sure the humanists want to debate the matter.