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6-18-2013

June 18, 2013: Growing Secular Hostility Toward Religion in Europe

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Ledewitz, B. (2013). June 18, 2013: Growing Secular Hostility Toward Religion in Europe. Retrieved from <https://dsc.duq.edu/ledewitz-hallowedsecularism/754>

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Title: Growing Secular Hostility Toward Religion in Europe

Date: 2013-06-18T19:34:00.004-04:00

6/18/2013—The New York Times reports today, in a story by Andrew Higgins, about increased efforts by secularists in Europe the ban all religious imagery from what Americans would call the public square. One vignette in particular was telling. Last year, the national Bank of Slovakia announced that the European Commission, the executive arm of the European Union, ordered the national Bank of Slovakia to remove halos and crosses from commemorative euro coins that were due to be minted. The coins were intended to celebrate the 1150th anniversary of Christianity's arrival in Slovak lands. The Commission violated European rules that ban any tilts toward a single faith. Now this does seem peculiar. If one can commemorate 1100 years of Christianity, then one must do so with Christian symbols. It is not as if this history never happened. And unlike American experiences in this regard, this really was a historical commemoration—not a disguised propaganda push for Christianity today. As the article makes clear, aggressive secularists wishing to ban religious symbols is not the whole story. There is another divide in Europe: mostly secular Western Europe vs. profoundly religious nations in the east, like Poland. In the instance that issue, the Slovakian euro, France, perhaps the most aggressively secular country in the world, brought the complaint. And secular belief, meaning really nonreligious belief, meaning really non-Christian belief, is widespread to a degree that is shocking to any American. For example, the Times reports that in Britain more people believe in extraterrestrials than in God. In Europe as a whole half the population believes in God, compared with over 90% in the United States. The article ends somewhat ambiguously. The Slovakian euro, with halos and crosses, is finally coming out. But it is fair to say that many secularists consider hostility to religion to be the equivalent of a way of life. Eventually, we will find out that hostility toward religion is not a philosophy. It is indeed a distraction from developing a genuine, secular way of life.