



*In a dark time the eye begins to see.*  
- Theodore Roethke

Phil Frank



## O COME ALL YE FAITHFUL

by Michael Paul McCusker

Christmas, that pagan holiday appropriated from the followers of Odin, is a time for feast and fellowship, a convivial warmth and mantle against the cold winter ahead. It is a parochial celebration that affirms a civic Christianity as the national religion although the nation is the uneasy host for every conceivable form of theology. Usually the public piety is casual, observed indifferently, but occasionally the frontier past takes power, generally during periods of disruption or confusion, such as the present when political leaders are imprinting a grim, intolerant and despotic orthodoxy upon Constitutional law.

It might still be difficult to become accustomed to ignorance and vengeance as the center of political direction and intellectual discourse but that anguish underlies American culture, built as it has been by breakaway Christian sects that fled persecution by other Christians. The political tolerance for a variety of religions that is assured in the nation's laws is probably due more to an awareness that no one sect has been powerful enough to rule over the others, and just to be sure, religion has not been allowed to directly interfere with government except as inspiration and manifest destiny.

By its own law the government cannot and should not enforce or impose any manner of worship or religion upon its citizens or any others who live in this country. It cannot attempt to regulate or interfere with religion or with anyone's choice of worship or choice not to. The current debate about church and state is less about religion than it is a dichotomy of political values between those who would impose a narrow doctrine of absolutes that are not to be questioned or resisted, only obeyed, and those who believe that everyone has the right and obligation to choose their own beliefs about what is right and wrong.

If the United States adopted a single religion distinct from a loosely defined public religion other religions, especially those that are not Christian, would be purged. Races other than white would lose all of their already minimal civil rights, women would be shoved back into second class status, and most democratic

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