

Opinion



Another Viewpoint

Sweatshop crucifix demean Christians

By Jim Hightower

Just in time for Christmas came something that Christians worldwide considered to be an abomination: crucifixes and other religious articles made in deplorable sweatshops in China. They are sold not only in America's Christian stores - but even in churches.

A highly-respected workers' rights group, The National Labor Committee, has documented the brutal sweatshop conditions at the Junxingye factory in Southern China. Here, young women workers - many only teenagers - are forced to toil from 8 am to 11:30 pm, seven days a week, making Christian artifacts.

They're paid 26 1/2 cents an hour - less than half of China's miserly minimum wage. Out of this meager pay, workers are docked for bad food and bunks in cramped, filthy dorms. This lowers their pay to nine cents an hour - less than \$10 a week. They get no sick days, holidays, or maternity leave - and, ironically, they have no religious rights.

The National Labor Committee found crucifixes from this factory being sold at New York's St. Patrick's Cathedral - for \$29.95 apiece! The Cathedral has now pulled these products from its gift shops, which is an essential ethical step, but barely a start. The church must use its full moral authority and enormous purchasing power to clean up China's sweatshop factories engaged in religious commerce.

Far worse than any one gift shop is the Association for Christian Retail - a consortium of some 2,000 religious stores that do nearly \$5 billion a year in sales of Christian products. Like Wal-Mart, this profitable economic entity has shifted its manufacturing en masse to China, yet it has not revealed the addresses of its factories, much less the labor conditions in them.

This is one association that should ask itself: What Would Jesus Do? For information, call the National Labor Committee: 212-242-3002.

For more information on Jim Hightower's work - and to subscribe to his award-winning monthly newsletter, *The Hightower Lowdown*, visit www.jimhightower.com. Distributed by *minutemanmedia.org*

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U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback, 303 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. 202/224-6521

U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran, 2202 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. 202/225-2715 or Fax 202/225-5124

State Rep. Jim Morrison, State Capitol Building, 300 SW 10th St. Rm. 143-N, Topeka, Kan. 66612. 785/296-7676 e-mail: jmorriso@ink.org web: www.morrisonfamily.com

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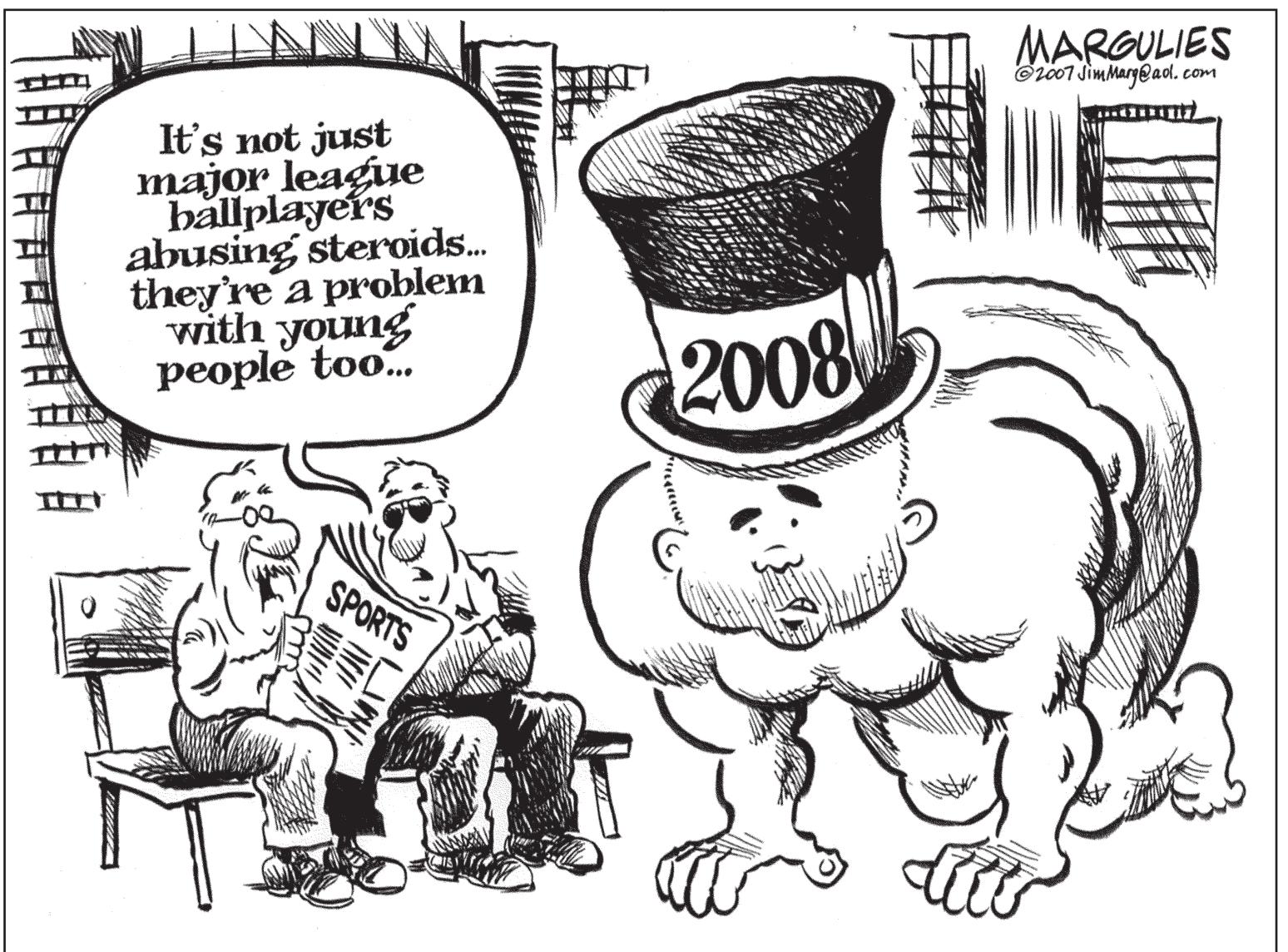
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The front lines

John Van Nostrand

• Line in the Dust



Being a former Iowa resident, I do miss the definitive seasons throughout the year, family, friends, breaded pork tenderloin sandwiches, tranquil Mississippi River views and the state's minor league baseball teams.

But I don't miss caucus season - even being in the news business.

Thursday is the Iowa caucus, the first step in seeing whom our next president will be. Since the early 1970s, Iowa has been the first state to start the proverbial ball rolling. The ball is quickly becoming the size of Jupiter.

I worked in Iowa during the 2000 and 2004 caucuses. It is interesting to meet the candidates, and their spouses, who campaign the state from corner to corner. Most of the events, especially in smaller towns, are informal and most everyone in attendance can shake the candidate's hand.

In August 2003 I met Howard Dean, at the time, the leading candidate for the Democrats. I thought his foreign diplomacy platform was reasonable until his entire campaign turned into a Bush-bashing event. He threw aside all reasons why to vote for him and emphasized reasons why not to vote for Bush. It was very disturbing.

At that moment, I thought all the Democrat candidates met in early summer to collectively strategize their platforms and Dean volunteered to sacrifice his own campaign and voter-appeal to be used only to kamikaze Bush.

I also stood outside a mom-and-pop hamburger-and-fries place with Dennis Kucinich. The fries that fell out of the fry vat were more interesting. Yes, he was that far off. I don't think Kucinich ever, formally quit his campaigns from years past.

Joe Lieberman avoided Iowa, implying the state wasn't important. He didn't get the support in Iowa and eventually quit. Gee, what a

coincidence.

I did like Dick Gephardt's plans to have America more energy self-reliant in the future. His speech was far more interesting than the menu at the restaurant I heard him speak at. I liked him. Nice guy.

That is the problem with the caucuses. Most Iowa people are too close to the action. That goes both ways. On one side, you can actually see John Edwards fix his hair in a high school boy's bathroom. On the other side, you heard the flood of spoofs and jokes based on Dean's so-called speech in Des Moines after the 2004 caucus was over.

Des Moines, where all the big candidate parties are held, returns to normal the day after the caucus.

The national, and some international news outlets, immediately leave town and head for New Hampshire. Of course, all the people and candidates have dropped a few bucks in the state, so there are some economic benefits.

Then there are some candidates who think Iowa, and follow-up state of New Hampshire, are not representative of what America voters want in the White House. Some, like New Mexico's Bill Richardson, had the support of the Western Governors' Association, to somehow create a super primary including all of its member states to trump the Iowa Caucus.

I read between the lines and saw how two important electorate states are out west (Texas and California). One person in the organization said Iowa is too "white bread" for the political system. The person suggested Iowa and New Hampshire residents are not representative of determining who should get the early nod for president.

That again bothered me as rural Iowa, (which most of Kansas can relate too) is a perfect place to see what America needs in its politics. We find ways to merge small, struggling schools to provide an education. We have people volunteer to run county fair rides for their neighbor's kids. We have homespun, annual festivals, some based on local history or heritage. Rural America makes things work. We expect the same out of our elected officials.

Stereotypically, metro residents are too accustomed to having everything provided for them. They become the fabric of the glitz, glamour and desensitizing media coverage. You can take the people out of the city, but can you take the city out of all the people?

Educating the rest of the country about caucus is another aspect that is not done enough (it does get forgotten every four years). During a business meeting in Illinois once, I was asked about the caucus. Some people think a caucus is something stored in a closet and pulled out every fourth January. It's not a tangible item. It's just a complex selection process.

But the people of Iowa are tangible. They deserve all the respect from the rest of the country for taking the lead in this system and the consequences of doing so.

- John Van Nostrand is publisher of the Colby Free Press

Memories

Robert T. Stephan, chairman Domestic Fatality Review Board

It is difficult to know how to express what I want to say in this article.

Memories store up happenings from a person's life experiences. In a sense memories guide us for better or for worse. No one would expect life to be perfect and so memories will be comprised of both good and bad life experiences. Hopefully, those experiences will weigh more heavily on the positive side but for me there are times of the year when memories of family negatives seem to come to the fore more than others. At times domestic violence takes center stage and overpowers my desire to set it aside. Since being appointed Chair of the Domestic

Violence Fatality Review Board by Governor Sebelius, I have relived violence that was once submerged in my psyche but is now as real as if it was happening today. Without a doubt, I have been blessed by good fortune and the positive memories exceed the number of negatives. In many instances - what if - comes into the equation.

Each year with the approach of Christmas I have positive memories and appreciation for the magnificent love my mother showed me, my brother and sister. But there is always a shadow that is part of the experience.

In my first fatality review board article I described the domestic violence hell that was visited upon my saintly mother. That horrible experience has followed me all my life and seems

to especially well up in my consciousness during the Christmas season. It is not isolated to that time but the battle to understand and be rid of guilt is especially acute during this time.

You might ask - guilt? - Why guilt? It was my father who inflicted physical and mental abuse on my mother and on me. At times it is difficult for me to hold back tears when I think of her suffering. I ask myself why I didn't do more to help her and stand up to my dad. I have never been able to answer that question. I don't know if I was afraid or accepted violence as a way of life. I just pray that God and my mother understand.

The preceding column was written by Robert T. Stephan, chairman of the Governor's Domestic Violence Fatality Review Board

About those letters . . .

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Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

