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One nation, under God

by Phyllis Zagano

Just Catholic

In a worldwide telecast, the National Broadcasting Company dropped God from the Pledge of Allegiance. The website for "The Manhattan Declaration" says don't worry about it because the network apologized, so it's OK.

It is not OK.

At the start of its Fathers' Day broadcast of the U.S. Open Golf Championship, NBC re-wrote the Pledge, twice omitting the words "under God." The annual golf extravaganza telecast opened with patriotic B-roll and voice-over of children reciting the doctored Pledge of Allegiance, military personnel saluting the flag, and historic footage of golfers wildly celebrating their winning the championship.

"The Manhattan Declaration" folks picked up on it. Their 2009 manifesto -- spearheaded by Princeton professor Robert P. George, Samford (Alabama) Divinity dean Timothy George, and evangelist Chuck Colson -- restates Americans' freedoms not to support abortion, embryo-destructive research, assisted suicide, euthanasia, and same-sex marriage. "The Manhattan Declaration" website argues strongly for religious values in civic life. But its blogger says we should forgive and forget about NBC rewriting the Pledge of Allegiance.

Well, forgive, yes. But I am not so sure it is a great idea to forget.

The phrase "under God" was borrowed from Lincoln's Gettysburg Address and added to the Pledge of Allegiance in 1954. Naysayers argue manuscripts of Lincoln's speech don't reference God, but each reporter's transcript records his words: "that the nation shall, under God, have a new birth of freedom."

Ever since they were written into the Pledge, the words "under God" have stood fast over the objections

of secularists and others. Even the most recent court challenges fell to a realistic receipt of history, and the Supreme Court refused the appeal of one case just a few weeks ago. Hence, we can still say what Lincoln said about the United States of America.

So why does it matter if the National Broadcasting Corporation decided for its 7.4 million viewers watching Sunday golf that "under God" is not part of the Pledge of Allegiance?

Well, there is a nasty anti-religious undercurrent in this country that wants all references to God -- even and perhaps especially the standard brand U.S. God -- out of all public spaces. That means no God, and by inference no positive mention of religion or religious belief, in public museums, in civil ceremonies, and on military installations.

They're not kidding. A few Julys ago the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) actually complained to the United States Naval Academy about mealtime grace, arguing (on behalf of nine midshipmen) that non-denominational prayers were unconstitutional. Not one of the 4,300 midshipmen was required to do anything other than stand respectfully while one of the Academy's eight chaplains followed a tradition begun in 1845. But the ACLU wanted God out of the Naval Academy.

To its credit, the Navy has ignored the ACLU. But with millions of viewers worldwide, NBC's implicit attitude is more destructive. Why put into the international psyche the inference that God is not welcome in the United States?

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And, where else will NBC clones (and the ACLU) want to remove God from public sight and sound? Will they want to change the Declaration of Independence, which argues "the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God" entitle us all to liberty?

Ironically enough, this year's U.S. Open Golf Championship was held at the Congressional Country Club in Bethesda, Maryland just outside the Beltway. As summer begins and Fourth of July barbecues beckon, perhaps we all might recall that the Declaration of Independence closes with an appeal to the "Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions."

The founders of this country wrote: "With a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our Sacred Honor."

One nation, under God. We cannot let those words be lost.

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