

the doctrine of the Just War. Catholics and all Christians have a moral responsibility to light the way out of this century of war and destructionism into a time of peaceful cooperation among nations. This is why John Paul II has been such a consistent voice for peace, and why so many Catholics have joined the effort to rein in the messianic ambitions of the new godless threat, our very own government.

There is no threat from abroad that compares with the danger that the federal government represents to our property, our families, our schools, our parishes, and the peaceful practice of our faith. It is not only a danger to us, but to everyone around the world who desires to live in peace.

What is the financial force behind the global proliferation of weapons of mass destruction? What is the institutional force behind the continued subsidization of abortion and birth control here and around the world? Whose military bases are surrounded by nude bars and prostitution, even child prostitution, at home and abroad? Which government continues to prop up and subsidize anti-Christian regimes abroad and promote policies, as in Bosnia, that bring about wars against Christian peoples?

The culprit is not in Bagdad, but in Washington, D.C. That is why every American Catholic has a moral obligation to be aware of the danger the U.S. imperium represents, to resist its encroachments so far as he is able, and to pray for its end. As a first step, the murderous sanctions on the people of Iraq must be lifted. [RRR]

DO REGULATORS MAKE US SAFE?

L.H.R., Jr.

It was the consumer-protection news of the season. Some brands of hanging icicle lights, a favorite item of last year's Christmas decorators, presented a risk of electric shock. In a press release, the Consumer Products Safety Commission announced that retailers were recalling these lights "in cooperation" with the Commission. Newspapers put it on page one.

Did a government agency save us from roasting on an open wire? The Commission wanted us to believe that, as well to think it stopped manufacturers from profiting from the public's insatiable lust to conspicuously celebrate Christmas.

But is it true? Not in the slightest. Let's take a closer look.

The problem was first discovered by a private safety testing group—the Underwriters Laboratories of Northbrook, Illinois. UL specializes in rendering a safety verdict on hundreds of thousands of products. It was writing safety standards long before the regulatory state was born. It's been testing Christmas lights since 1905.

What's more, UL announced the problem before the Christmas season even began, back on October 28. That's nearly a month and a

half before the government decided to call in the TV cameras to take credit.

The tip-off was a phoney UL symbol on certain brands of these lights. Retailers and distributors practically insist that any electric equipment be certified by UL, and manufacturers pay a fee for the costs of testing. UL had certified some of these lights (ones with no splicing connectors), but not others. Some shady operator had tried to fob off unsafe lights as UL approved.

Underwriters Laboratories spotted the fraud, tested the product and found it unsuitable, and immediately released the information. Retailers and distributors all over the country responded by taking the

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lights off the shelves, and for obvious reasons. They don't want to be held legally liable, but also, and more importantly, they want to retain consumer confidence in the quality of

their products.

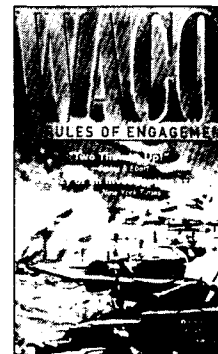
Interestingly, UL took action even though there is no recorded instance of someone having been hurt by the icicle lights. That's because its standards of safety are determined by objective factors and many years of experience, not public relations. It doesn't wait for accidents to happen; it acts before the problem crops up in the first place.

This goes on everyday. Consumers don't even have to know the details, which is why such matters rarely appear in the press. The media aren't usually interested, considering it of concern only to those who make it their business to know.

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When does the government's safety bureau come into this? Not until six weeks after UL first revealed the problem. The Consumer Products Safety Commission's press release left the impression that it was the Commission that had discovered the problem. The media dutifully echoed that spin, and readers around the country were supposed to imagine public servants faithfully testing every product we use to protect us from danger.

Baloney. The government's press release was merely a rewrite of the announcement issued five days earlier by Underwriters Laboratories, the real hero of the day. UL had published an update of serial numbers

of icicle lights with fraudulent UL stamps. The release included helpful photographs of lights that do and do not meet UL requirements.

By the time the government butted in on the deal, the lights were off the shelves. The regulators sought only to make a big public splash, while taking credit for a market-driven and highly effective means of keeping us safe from bad products.

The lesson? We can trust Underwriters Laboratories, a private regulator; it exists within the framework of the market economy and its standards of safety are reasonable and scientific. But we can't trust government to do anything but

horn in, take credit for things it doesn't do, and smear private enterprise in the process.

So low is public esteem for government that I wonder if the Commission's action didn't cause people to question whether the icicle lights really are dangerous. After all, it was federal regulators who brought us "safety" air bags that kill little children and compact cars that save gas but crush people, and who routinely raise the costs of business in the name of protecting the public.

The lesson is that the market does a great job of regulating itself. It's the government that operates without oversight. **RRR**