

BANNING CHRISTMAS IN THE SCHOOLS

There is much ignorance about the state of the constitutional law as it applies to Christmas celebrations in the public schools. To cut to the quick—they are permitted.

A Christmas play by the Minden Junior Service League, performed at Minden High School in Webster Parish, Louisiana, was recently the source of much controversy. Two of the 35 minutes of the play discussed Jesus, and some objected, including the Webster Parish School Board.

The Superintendent Johnny Rowland was sympathetic to those who wanted the play, but insisted that there is a “federal court order [that] clearly spells out what is allowable and what is not.” Despite attempts to censor the play, it was performed anyway, and was greeted with a standing ovation.

Officials at Manchester Elementary School, which is part of the Elkhorn Public Schools in Nebraska, got all ginned up over Christmas and decided to ban displays of Santa Claus, Christmas trees, Christmas songs, and the colors red and green. Candy canes were also banned. Thanks to Liberty Counsel, the decision was reversed and sanity prevailed.

What is permissible at Christmastime in the public schools?

In 1995, Secretary of Education Richard Riley issued a directive on this subject at the behest of President Bill Clinton. Here is the language of how the operative paragraph begins:

“Official neutrality regarding religious activity. Teachers and administrators, when acting in those capacities, are representatives of the state and are prohibited by the establishment clause from soliciting or encouraging religious

activity, and from participating in such activity with students.”

This first part makes good sense: it is not the business of school officials to lead students in religious activities. But the second part also makes good sense, yet it is frequently ignored.

“Teachers and administrators are also prohibited from discouraging activity because of its religious content, and from soliciting or encouraging anti-religious activity.”

In other words, school officials cannot ban voluntary, student-led religious activity at Christmastime. Students cannot be punished for singing Christmas carols, distributing Christmas cards, wearing red and green, giving Christmas presents, writing Christmas poems, giving speeches paying tribute to Jesus, etc.

No federal court has ever ruled that Christmas must be censored in the public schools. It’s about time the superintendents and their lawyers got up to speed and stopped listening to cultural fascists bent on banning Christmas: they know nothing about the First Amendment provisions regarding freedom of religion and freedom of speech.