

CLERGY 9/11 GAG RULE; BLOOMBERG INSULTS FAITHFUL

Last month, New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg banned the clergy from speaking at the 9/11 ceremony that commemorated the tenth anniversary of the terrorist attack. In doing so, he angered people of all religions, and not just in New York. The Catholic League was proud to play a key role in leading the opposition.

Bloomberg first tried to say that the focus should be on the families who lost their loved ones. According to this logic, we pointed out, when the clergy are invited to speak at public events, or to open ceremonies with an invocation, they are detracting—not adding—to the overall theme. There is little doubt that if the families had been asked about the propriety of allowing the clergy to speak, most would have said yes.

Bloomberg then sounded foolish when he tried to argue that his censorial decision was made on separation of church and state grounds. This was pure bunk: never has the presence of the clergy at any public event been a problem.

Bloomberg is the same mayor who strongly promoted the building of a mosque near Ground Zero. He is also the same mayor who was entirely understanding of the move by American Atheists to sue New York City over the two steel beams shaped like a cross that were found in the debris of the Twin Towers disaster; the atheists objected when the cross was moved from St. Peter's Roman Catholic Church to its new home at the 9/11 Memorial Museum.

Almost everyone was critical of this mean-spirited gambit by American Atheists. Among those who could not summon the courage to condemn it was Mayor Bloomberg; without criticizing these activists on moral grounds, he simply affirmed their

constitutional right to sue. But he showed nothing but contempt for the constitutional rights of the clergy to speak at the 9/11 ceremony.

Our position was clear. We said that a priest, minister, rabbi and imam should be allowed to make a short statement. This nation was founded on Judeo-Christian principles, thus the rationale for the presence of the first three clergymen; the inclusion of an imam—to the exclusion of the clergy of other religions—could be justified, we said, on the basis of a goodwill gesture to the Muslim community.

Bill Donohue joined New York City Councilman Fernando Cabrera and others in a press conference protesting Bloomberg's gag rule. While the mayor got his way in the end, his reputation was damaged, and that's not something even this billionaire can control.