

RIPPING UP THE RELIGIOUS ROOTS OF CHRISTMAS

Catholic League president William Donohue offered the following observations today on attempts to rip up the religious roots of Christmas:

“The controversy over the display of religious symbols on public property has already begun. While the U.S. Supreme Court has not spoken with clarity on this issue, there is some settled ground that public officials can repair to in making decisions. For example, in 1984 the high court said it was okay to have a city-sponsored nativity scene as long as it was part of a larger secular holiday display. In 1989, the Supreme Court ruled that it was okay to display a menorah on public property because it was situated next to a secular symbol (a Christmas tree) but it was not okay to put a crèche standing by itself on public property. In any event, the current status in the U.S. is troubling.

“In New York City, a menorah and a crèche (the latter owned by the Catholic League) are allowed to be erected in Central Park. In Chicago, Daley Plaza is home to both religious symbols. But in Airmont, New York, menorahs are allowed and crèches are banned. The same is true in Birmingham, Michigan. In this instance, the town’s mayor, Seth Chafetz, has unwittingly insulted Christians by saying his city is a model of ‘tolerance and diversity’ because it allows a menorah and a Christmas tree. He mistakenly drew on the 6th U.S. Circuit Court decision in 1986 that banned the nativity scene from being erected in front of City Hall in Birmingham because it was not adorned by secular symbols. In short, he could okay a crèche in the same spot as the menorah.

“Portland (Maine) City Hall’s Ganley Plaza gives a green light to a menorah but a red light to a nativity scene (it is

relegated to other public parks). Watchung, New Jersey, has banned a menorah from the town circle but is allowing a Christmas tree. And so on.

“The Catholic League believes the state has no business allowing some religious symbols on public property while denying others.”