

PRAYER IN SCHOOL ISSUE HEATS UP AGAIN

Two major developments regarding the perennial issue of prayer in the schools occurred today. The U.S. Supreme Court refused to hear a challenge to a state law in Virginia requiring a minute of silence in the schools. On the legislative front, Rep. Ernest Istook of Oklahoma announced that he plans to reintroduce a constitutional amendment that would allow religious expression, including prayer, to take place on public property without interference by the authorities.

Catholic League president William Donohue addressed this issue today:

"Since September 11 there has been a spiritual reawakening in America that is as palpable as it was predictable. That this development has touched the issue of prayer in the schools is understandable. What the U.S. Supreme Court did today was to give due recognition to the voice of the people's representatives in Virginia. As such, it seems to say that this is not the time for nine justices of the court to decide admittedly controversial issues. The Catholic League commends the high court for its restraint.

"Rep. Istook's constitutional amendment would bar state sponsorship of religion and would also prohibit preferential treatment of one religion over the other. This would simply affirm the status quo. But what it would also do is protect the right of citizens, including students, to voluntarily exercise religious speech on public property.

"There can be honest disagreement over whether a constitutional amendment is the proper vehicle of redress for legal disputes. What is important, however, is that a democratic dialogue on this critical subject go forward, and for that we can thank Rep. Istook for courageously broaching it. Those opposed to the Istook amendment should not take this opportunity to further demagogue the issue; rather they should dispassionately seek to persuade us why censoring religious speech is the American way."

SENATORIAL HOPEFUL MALIGNS CATHOLICISM

James D. Oberweis is expected to announce his candidacy for a U.S. Senate seat in Illinois within the next week. Oberweis, who is a Republican Catholic businessman, has said that his concerns about abortion should not be translated into law. On October 28, he was quoted to have said, "I think the Taliban is the best example we've ever had about what is wrong about my trying to impose my religious views on you."

Catholic League president William Donohue commented as follows:

"It does not matter that James D. Oberweis is Catholic. What matters is that he has maliciously defamed Catholicism. To compare public office holders who are pro-life to the murderous Taliban is obscene. According to Oberweis' logic, Illinois congressman Henry Hyde, who is pro-life, is indistinguishable from terrorists.

"Oberweis needs to apologize to Catholics immediately. It is our hope that Illinois citizens will hold him accountable for his actions."

IRS ASKED TO REVOKE TAX-

EXEMPT STATUS OF SISTERS OF PERPETUAL INDULGENCE

The Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights has petitioned the Internal Revenue Service to revoke the tax-exempt status of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence. The league's position is that the Sisters have long been in violation of the law that allows non-profits a tax-exempt status.

Catholic League president William Donohue commented on this development today:

"The Catholic League has legally acquired documents filed by the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence with the IRS that nominally commit the Sisters to certain legitimate goals. The problem is not what the group proclaims to be doing—fundraising and education—but what it spends most of its time doing, namely Catholic bashing. It is ludicrous on the face of it for the Sisters to maintain that one of the major issues they address is 'the role of religion in daily life.' How? By simulating sodomy while dressed as nuns, using a gas pump as a phallic symbol?

"Suffice it to say that we have compiled evidence of the group's flagrantly anti-Catholic and patently indecent activities. Hence our decision to appeal to the IRS to strip the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence of its tax-exempt status.

"If a group of white anti-black bigots dressed up as Al Jolson and mocked African Americans, no one would excuse them because a small part of what they do is to contribute a pittance to selective charities. If a group of anti-Semites were to dress as Shylock and mock Jews, no one would excuse them because a small part of what they do is to contribute a pittance to selective charities. Similarly, we do not expect

anyone—including the IRS—to excuse the Catholic-bashing the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence engage in because a small part of what they do is to contribute a pittance to AIDS-related charities.

“The evidence we have amassed is thorough and persuasive. The time has come for the government to stop the public funding of bigotry under the guise of charitable giving.”

WORLD GIRL SCOUT LEADER ACTS AS FEEDER FOR ANTI-CATHOLIC GROUP

Leslie Wright is the Team Coordinator of the New York group that represents the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS) at the United Nations; Girl Scouts USA is a member of WAGGGS. Last week she cooperated with an anti-Catholic group, Catholics for a Free Choice (CFFC), helping them to secure new personnel.

Catholic League director of communications, Patrick Scully, spoke with Jennifer Wagner, international relations coordinator for the Girl Scouts USA, and Liz Shepard, the director of media and communications for the organization, explaining the league's concerns. They defended Ms. Wright saying she was just passing along an e-mail message concerning the opening at CFFC. When they told Scully that the Girl Scouts were “an inclusive group,” the league spokesman asked whether they were aware that CFFC is an expressly anti-Catholic group. They said they “were not religion experts.” Pressed further, they reiterated that the Girl Scouts were “an inclusive group.”

William Donohue, president of the Catholic League, spoke to this issue today:

“On October 24, the Girl Scouts of the USA will celebrate United Nations Day. How unfortunate it is that an official at the umbrella organization (WAGGGS) that the Girl Scouts USA belongs to is aiding and abetting anti-Catholicism during working hours. More unfortunate still is the fact that the tired cliché regarding ‘inclusiveness’ is being voiced by Girl Scout leaders in this country. It would be instructive to know whether their commitment to inclusiveness extends to working with bigots.

“We will lodge a protest with both WAGGGS and the Girl Scouts USA. Frances Kissling of CFFC is not merely pro-abortion, she is on record saying it is her goal to ‘overthrow’ the Roman Catholic Church. That being so, it is inexcusable that any responsible person would facilitate Kissling in her quest. We certainly hope that the top people at WAGGGS and the Girl Scouts USA take our complaint more seriously than has been our experience with the latter’s officials thus far. Ms. Wright is an embarrassment to Girl Scouts everywhere.”

NBC’S “LAW AND ORDER” HITS CATHOLICS AGAIN

In last night’s episode of “Law and Order: Criminal Intent,” a sexton was murdered by a junkie who works at the parish. The junkie was then killed by another priest (who is also guilty of embezzling church funds). In addition, the priest tells the police that the junkie was his lover. Later we discover that the priest was lying: the junkie is actually the priest’s son.

It is now clear that the real motive for killing the junkie was to protect the young boy's mother—the woman the killer priest had an affair with 20 years earlier.

Catholic League president William Donohue had this to say about the show:

"In 1995, there was an episode on 'Law and Order' about a priest involved in sexual misconduct (his superiors conspired to cover it up). There was another episode that year about a 'devout Catholic' woman who kills her baby, confesses her crime to a priest in the confessional, and learns from the priest that it was God's will that she murder her child. Furthermore, the sacrament of reconciliation was ridiculed by a detective when he said, 'How many Hail Marys would one be assigned for this crime?'

"In 1997, we learned of a 'devout Catholic' mother who, according to her son, 'held a rosary in one hand and beat the crap out of me with the other.' In 1999, we met a 'very orthodox nun' who murders a young woman after a botched exorcism. Another episode that year (this time on 'Law and Order: Special Victims Unit') featured a woman who is raped on a Catholic college campus where all school officials appear weak and disinterested. And last night viewers were introduced to a priest who is guilty of lying, embezzlement, womanizing and the murder of his son.

"One wonders what those at 'Law and Order' have been inhaling that alters their thinking. More likely is the possibility that they like anti-Catholicism. All of which is quite revealing. Every day there are reports that in the wake of September 11, Hollywood is rewriting scripts and changing scenes so as not to rattle the sensibilities of the public or to show disrespect to Muslims. But when it comes to bashing Catholics, it's business as usual. They never miss a step."