

NEW DEVELOPMENTS IN “HOLIDAY WARS”

Yesterday, the Catholic League issued a news release on the “holiday wars” over the display of crèches and menorahs on public property. The release stated, among other things, that a menorah had been banned from display in public land in Watchung, New Jersey; it also said that in Airmont, New York, a crèche had been banned.

But now a Jewish group, the Watchung Memorial Lighting Group, is seeking an injunction in the courts to block the town from enforcing its ruling. And in Airmont, Mayor John Layne has pledged to add a crèche to its annual holiday display. He disputes a newspaper account that implied he would not accede to requests to erect a manger scene; it was never his intent to do so in the first place.

On a related matter, the Catholic League commented on December 2 that U.S. Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens had ruled on November 29 that the city of Cincinnati could not grant itself exclusive use of Fountain Square during the holiday season, thereby banning crèches and menorahs. The city has now decided to appeal this ruling to all nine members of the high court.

Catholic League president William Donohue commented as follows:

“We are delighted that a Jewish group in Watchung, New Jersey, is standing up for its rights in challenging those who would deny them their First Amendment rights of freedom of speech and freedom of religion. We are similarly delighted to learn that Mayor John Layne never had any intention of banning a manger scene from the holiday display; a conversation I personally had with him today clarified this matter in a most

satisfactory manner.

“With regard to the city of Cincinnati, the brazenness of these public officials is astounding. It’s time the whole court taught them a definitive lesson on the First Amendment.

“We will continue to monitor this issue throughout the Christmas season and take whatever steps are necessary to ensure justice for all.”

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."

DAVID E. KELLEY LASHES OUT AGAIN: "BOSTON PUBLIC" USED TO VENT HIS BIGOTRY

Last night's Fox TV show, "Boston Public," featured a reckless boy who admits to his concerned teacher that he has been sexually abused by a priest, Father Egan. It turns out that the molesting priest previously abused the boy's teacher, Danny Hanson. Hanson then confronts Father Egan threatening him with violence. The next episode will continue the storyline. The show is the creative work of producer David E.

Kelley.

Catholic League president William Donohue remarked as follows:

“There is no one in Hollywood who hates the Catholic Church more than David E. Kelley. We know this by his acts: he has written or produced more anti-Catholic shows than any of his peers. Less than a month ago, I issued a news release titled, ‘David E. Kelley’s Obsession With Catholicism.’ It addressed the November 10 episode of the ABC show, ‘The Practice.’ Like last night’s attack, this episode drew on the scandal in the Catholic Church for script.

“It cannot be argued that Kelley is a master of adapting current events for TV material. For instance, he has shown no interest in portraying Muslims as terrorists. To do so would be to invite charges of stereotyping Muslims, and this is one sin Kelley avoids like hell. But when it comes to painting an ugly face on Catholic priests, he shows his masterful credentials. More important, Kelley did not need the scandal to vent his bigotry—he’s been doing it for years. Consider this: the November 9, 2000 episode of ‘Boston Public’ painted the Catholic Church as anti-gay. Yet for some reason, Kelley’s interest in the role of gays in the Church never extends to portraying gay priests as molesters. This is another sin Kelley avoids like hell.

“The scandal in the Catholic Church is of its own doing. But the outburst of anti-Catholicism that has come in its wake is not. If it is wrong to bash X for its dirty laundry, why is it acceptable to make exceptions for the Catholic Church? After all, 99.3 percent of priests are in good standing. This should matter, even to the likes of David E. Kelley.”

SUPREME COURT PERMITS HOLIDAY DISPLAYS ON PUBLIC PROPERTY

On November 29, U.S. Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens ruled that the city of Cincinnati cannot bar the display of a menorah on a downtown plaza during the holidays. The municipal ordinance that was overturned said that only the city can use Fountain Square during the last two weeks of November through the first week of January. Stevens, who oversees the Sixth Circuit, upheld U.S. District Court Judge Susan Dlott's ruling that the city could not grant itself exclusive use of the square during the holidays; Stevens overruled an appeals court decision blocking the display of the menorah.

Catholic League president William Donohue commented as follows:

"The Catholic League is delighted with this Supreme Court ruling. Now is the time for Christians and Jews to demand that all municipalities accommodate public displays of religious symbols during the holiday season. Supreme Court Justice Stevens has given us the green light to proceed and it is up to the rest of us to get the job done.

"U.S. District Judge Susan Dlott was right to say that the city's ban was 'offensive.' It was also a frightening reminder of just how intolerant many public officials are of the concept of diversity. Moreover, no one should be fooled when separation of church and state zealots cloak their contempt for the public expression of religion by invoking terms like 'inclusive.' To wit: Balboa Park officials in San Diego justified changing the name of a holiday event from Christmas on the Prado to Balboa Park December Nights by saying the new name was more 'inclusive.' The truth is the name was changed because of an anti-religious animus. But to

admit to this is to admit to bigotry.

“As we do every holiday season, the Catholic League will closely monitor how public officials handle this issue. What we want is an even playing field: where a menorah has been displayed, a nativity scene should follow. A Christmas tree is no substitute for a crèche.”