

CIRCUIT COURT HEARS NYC NATIVITY CASE

Oral arguments will be presented today in a case of national significance to Christians. At issue is whether it is legal to display Jewish and Muslim religious symbols in the New York City schools, but not Christian ones. For the past few years, New York City schools have allowed the menorah and the crescent and star, but not the nativity scene. The Catholic League secured a plaintiff to challenge this decision, and the Thomas More Law Center provided an attorney.

Last December, Judge Charles Sifton of the U.S. District Court ruled in favor of New York City's policy. He ruled that the menorah and crescent and star have a secular dimension while the nativity scene was "purely religious." This is the decision that is being appealed.

Catholic League president William Donohue spoke to this issue today:

"In his ruling last December, Judge Sifton said that holiday displays 'must be reviewed as perceived by the children, Christian children in particular, but not one hyper-sensitive Catholic child.' So if Catholics complain about discrimination, it must be due to their hyper-sensitivity. But what if the policy were reversed—what if menorahs and crescents and stars were censored but nativity scenes were allowed? Would the protesting Jews and Muslims be seen as hyper-sensitive by Judge Sifton?

"Even more curious is the position of the ADL. Last September, the ADL filed an amicus in this case on the side of keeping the menorah in the schools while banning nativity scenes. The crèche, it said, was an 'overly religious' symbol. It did not say what kind of meter it possesses to

measure such things, but we'd sure like to buy one.

"If the menorah were banned from the same schools that allowed the nativity scene, the Catholic League would be filing an amicus on the side of protesting Jews. That the ADL is once again working against Catholics is as revealing as it is disturbing. We won't forget it.

"In any event, when we look for our friends in the Jewish community, we look to people like Rabbi Daniel Lapin of Toward Tradition, and not the ADL."

HOLLYWOOD SNUBS MEL—AGAIN

Mel Gibson's "The Passion of the Christ" was one of 49 films deemed eligible for a foreign-language Golden Globe. But it was not among the nominees voted on today by the Hollywood Foreign Press Association.

Catholic League president William Donohue was not surprised:

"Mel Gibson releases the most significant blockbuster movie of the year, but it's not good enough to make the cut for a Golden Globe. That's because his film promotes Christianity, and the Hollywood crowd will have none of it. The only movies they like to make about Christianity these days are ones that demean it.

"But one movie that did make the cut in the foreign-language category was 'The Motorcycle Diaries,' a film that shamelessly lies about the notorious Cuban communist, Che Guevara. According to the *Christian Science Monitor*, the movie 'paints

Guevara as an amiable guy who doesn't appear to have an aggressive bone in his body.' A.O. Scott of the *New York Times* concurs, saying the film views Guevara 'as a quasi-holy figure' who turns away 'from the corruptions of the world toward a higher purpose.' This may explain why Jack Mathews of the New York *Daily News* says that director Walter Salles 'comes close at times to posing Guevara as a Christ figure.'

"In other words, because Mel gives us a faithful rendition of Christ's Passion, he is shunned by the Hollywood elite for doing so. But a movie that whitewashes a ruthless tyrant—making him into a Christ-like figure—gets the nod. The message that is being sent is unmistakable: there is no room for Jesus in Hollywood's inn, but there is plenty of room for communist thugs portrayed in a Christ-like manner."

NATIVITY SCENES VANDALIZED NATIONWIDE

Below is a list of vandalized nativity scenes this Christmas season:

- Vandals damaged a life-size nativity scene in Merced, California.
- Baby Jesus was stolen from a McKinney, Texas family's yard.
- Over a dozen statues were stolen from a nativity scene in Pasco County, Florida, and three of the inflatable snowmen were slashed.
- A nativity scene was stolen from the yard of a

Pataskala, New Jersey family.

- A family from Whitehall, Michigan also had its entire nativity scene stolen.
- In Camillus, New York, a 75-pound nativity scene was stolen from a church.
- The nativity scene in Chicago's Daley Plaza was vandalized and baby Jesus was taken, even though the statue was locked down.
- Baby Jesus was also stolen from the Metcalf Mortuary in St. George, Utah.
- A church in Fairmount, New York had its nativity scene stolen.
- The baby Jesus was stolen from a large nativity scene in the historic Hancock Cemetery next to Quincy City Hall, Massachusetts.
- The Mountaineer Inn in Asheville, North Carolina had its nativity stolen by vandals.
- A family from Lockport, Illinois had its nativity scene stolen.
- A handmade nativity scene was destroyed by vandals on the property of a family in Lincoln, Nebraska.
- A nativity scene set inside Plexiglas was smashed to pieces in Mineola, New York.
- A front-yard nativity scene was damaged in Farmington, Illinois.
- Students at Taylor University in Indiana went on a rampage, vandalizing several Christmas decorations, including the nativity scene, and started a bonfire.

Catholic League president William Donohue commented as follows:

"This is the worst we've seen, and most nativity scenes have yet to be erected. It speaks to a problem that deserves a public discussion."

THE POLITICS OF INCLUSION AT CHRISTMASTIME

Catholic League president William Donohue spoke out today about the politics of inclusion at Christmastime:

“Students at Spring Grove Elementary School in McHenry County, Illinois recently managed to sing holiday songs without ever mentioning Christ or the Christmas story. In another Illinois community, students in the Woodland District schools were forbidden from singing ‘Jingle Bells,’ never mind ‘Silent Night.’ But lucky for them, they are now allowed to listen to Christmas songs on the school bus (a ban was invoked after one student complained, but was later reversed when parents protested).

“Freedom Elementary School is located in East Manatee, Florida. Its students used to be able to enjoy nativity scenes every year, but now even snowmen have been banished from display. Moreover, at their ‘winter concert,’ only songs about patriotism have been given the OK. In another Southwest Florida school, Braden Middle School, new guidelines forbid ‘celebrating’ the holidays—they can only be ‘recognized.’ Anthony DiBello, the school’s principal, proudly announced that ‘you won’t see any Christmas trees around here.’ As he brilliantly observed, ‘we keep it generic.’

“Students at CASY Country Day charter school in Scottsdale, Arizona have been told that songs like ‘Joy to the World’ are taboo. According to Diane Spero, the school’s music teacher, ‘we don’t do religious songs at all.’ Ruth Argabright, a music specialist in the Mesa Unified School District, says

that 'we've tried to be more inclusive as our world opens to us.'

"Schools all across the country are celebrating National Inclusive Schools Week this week. But if anything should be banned from the schools, it is this invidious application of inclusion. It is one thing to be sensitive to students from diverse backgrounds, quite another to use the concept of inclusion as a weapon to censor true diversity.

"The greatest enemy of diversity today is the politicization of inclusion, and no group has been more abused by this notion than Christians."

DON'T CALL IT CHRISTMAS

Catholic League president William Donohue addressed the growing aversion to the use of the word Christmas:

"The residents of Fontana, California celebrated their annual Festival of Winter last weekend. Santa Claus, who is not associated with anything other than Christmas, was inexplicably present in the parade through Miller Park. Just as curious, there was a tree lighting ceremony, though no one said why trees are lighted in December and why they always look like Christmas trees. In Glendale, Ohio, village officials had a Holiday Walk on the Village Square last Saturday, though no one explained what holiday was being celebrated. And in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, the town sponsored 'a series of holiday events' that included a 'Holiday Parade' and 'a Community Sing and Tree Lighting.' Again, there was no mention of exactly what holiday these people were so happy about.

“In Michigan’s historic Village of Franklin, they used to have a Holly Day Festival this time of year. But now they have progressed to calling it the Franklin Winter Festival. Why? Because as Les Gorback said (he is a prominent store owner who pushed for the name change), ‘Holly Day had the connotation it was strictly a Christmas holiday festival.’ Gorback said, ‘we wanted to try to make it more inclusive, so we changed the name.’ Why he didn’t simply move to cancel Christmas, he did not say.

“Those who think that the censoring of Christmas is a blue-state phenomenon need to consider what happened today in the *Wichita Eagle*. The Kansas newspaper ran the following clarification: ‘A story in Monday’s paper referred to a tree that was lighted at Tuesday’s Winterfest celebration as a ‘Christmas tree.’ In an effort to be inclusive, the city is actually referring to this tree as the ‘Community Tree.’

“It’s time practicing Christians demanded to know from these speech code fascists precisely who it is they think they are protecting from dropping the dreaded ‘C-word.’ The assumption is, of course, that Jews and Muslims are bigots. It’s time we heard from them as well.”

PUBLIC CELEBRATIONS OF HANUKKAH AND CHRISTMAS

Catholic League president William Donohue commented today on the way Hanukkah and Christmas are being publicly celebrated:

“In today’s *New York Times*, there are four ads by major department stores wishing Jews Happy Hanukkah: Macy’s,

Bloomingdale's, Lord & Taylor and Saks Fifth Avenue (a fifth, Tiffany & Co., has an ad selling a menorah but extends no wishes). The Catholic League commends these stores for exercising good judgment and joins with them in wishing all Jews Happy Hanukkah. We wonder, however, why these stores, and others, have such a hard time wishing Christians Merry Christmas.

"The latest *Newsweek* poll shows that 84 percent of Americans are Christian; Jews represent less than two percent. In other words, the U.S. is more Christian than Israel is Jewish (approximately 72 percent of Israelis are Jewish), yet it is Christmas, not Hanukkah, that is considered controversial to celebrate. For example, menorahs are allowed in places like New York City public schools, but nativity scenes are banned. Similarly, menorahs can be found on public property in the Florida community of Bar Harbor Islands, but crèches are forbidden.

"It is sometimes difficult to discern whether the principal motive behind this kind of discrimination is malice or ignorance. How many times have we been told, typically by Jews, that they regard the menorah to be a secular symbol. Invariably, these are non-observant Jews, men and women whose ignorance of their own religion parallels the ignorance in the Christian community of its own heritage (many Christians think the Christmas tree is analogous to the menorah).

"So Happy Hanukkah to our Jewish brothers and sisters. We look forward to the day when Merry Christmas rolls off people's lips with the same degree of alacrity. We also look forward to the day when both holidays are treated the way they are in Chicago's Daley Plaza: not only are Christian and Jewish religious symbols featured—room has been made for the display of Islamic symbols as well."

JOINT STATEMENT ON CHRISMUKKAH: CATHOLIC LEAGUE AND NEW YORK BOARD OF RABBIS

Dr. William Donohue, President and CEO of the Catholic League, and Rabbi Joseph Potasnik, Executive Vice President of the New York Board of Rabbis, issued the following statement today on Chrismukkah:

“We are deeply concerned about the spiritual misrepresentation of a newly created ‘holiday’ called Chrismukkah. While we as Jews and Christians practice our particular traditions, we also want to see the spiritual integrity of all faiths fully protected. Chanukah and Christmas celebrated during the same period should not be fused into some cultural combination that does not recognize the spiritual identity of our respective faiths. Historically, Chanukah recalls the battle for religious independence that would permit all groups to freely practice their separate traditions without compromise or coercion. Christmas marks a most sacred period announcing the birth of the Christian Messiah, and the beginning of a sacred relationship between Jesus and the Christian people.

“Copying the tradition of another faith and calling it by another name is a form of shameful plagiarism we cannot condone. Frankly, those who seek to synthesize our spiritual traditions may be well intended, but they are insulting both of us simultaneously.

“We Jews and Christians respect one another realizing that there is a time to be separate and a time to be together. We see each other as separate spiritual brothers and sisters who

will work together to better the human family.”

CHRISMUKKAH IS A MULTICULTURAL MESS

Hanukkah begins on December 7 at sundown and ends at nightfall on December 15. Chrismukkah begins at the same time as Hanukkah, but does not end until December 25, Christmas day. Chrismukkah is a new hybrid holiday that seeks to conflate Hanukkah and Christmas. It is a reflection of the high degree of intermarriage, especially in recent times, between Christians and Jews.

Catholic League president William Donohue addressed this issue today:

“Chrismukkah is a multicultural mess that glosses over the historical significance of both Hanukkah and Christmas. Not surprisingly, it is most popular with secular Jews and their equally non-observant Christian counterparts. Though the idea of Chrismukkah comes from a teen soap, ‘The O.C.,’ the person behind the marketing of Chrismukkah is Ron Gompertz. He readily admits that Chrismukkah is taking the secularization of ‘The Holidays’ one step further.

“No doubt the motivation behind such so-called Merry Chrismukkah cards and Yamaclaus hats is benign, but that doesn’t empty the issue. Unlike Kwanzaa, which was created in the 1966 out of whole cloth (it is not an African tradition and it has nothing to do with religion), Chrismukkah merges two religious holidays. The effect of this blending is to dilute the distinct meaning of both Hanukkah and Christmas, thus ill-serving the interests of observant Jews and

practicing Christians.

“In this vein, we would agree with the recent statement on mixed marriages prepared by the U.S. Catholic-Jewish Consultation Committee. It branded attempts to raise a child simultaneously as both Jewish and Catholic a ‘violation of the integrity of both religious traditions, at best, and, at worst, syncretism.’ From a Catholic perspective, anything which contributes to this phenomenon should be resisted, and that would include Chrismukkah.”

NBC 's DENVER AFFILIATE SPONSORS BIGOTRY

Denver's annual Parade of Lights will take place on December 3rd and 4th. This year parade organizers have decided to ban the words “Merry Christmas” from all floats; Christmas songs have also been banned. The chief sponsor of the parade is KUSA-TV, the local NBC affiliate.

Catholic League president William Donohue spoke to this issue today:

“Michael Krikorian, the parade's spokesman, explained the decision to discriminate against Christians by saying, ‘we want to avoid that specific religious message out of respect for other religions in the region.’ The specific religious message that he was referring to, but could not bring himself to say, is ‘Merry Christmas.’ Unfortunately, he does not say which people in the Denver area find it disrespectful to celebrate Christmas. Is there a problem with local Jews? If so, he should say so. Perhaps the Muslims are angry. If so,

he should say so. Or maybe he's just lying—maybe the only bigots in town are the parade organizers.

“It most certainly is a lie to maintain that the parade officials have decided to ban all religious themes from the parade. As a matter of fact, they are honoring homosexual and lesbian American Indians as ‘Holy People.’ The implication is that straight Indian guys and gals are less than holy. Either that or gay anti-Christians have hijacked the parade.

“For NBC to sponsor this bigotry is the real story. In its packet called ‘Volunteer Instructions and Policies,’ it notes that ‘the parade has a no tolerance alcohol and drug policy.’ It can now add Christians to the list.

“I am writing to Bob Wright, the chairman of NBC, to let him know how his Denver affiliate is sullyng NBC’s good name. In the meantime, the Catholic League is trying to find a holy gay Indian in Denver who is willing to sing ‘Joy to the World’ during the parade. What a conundrum that would be for parade officials.”

CHRISTMAS IS THE NEW “C-WORD”

Catholic League president William Donohue commented today on the latest attempts to ban Christmas:

“Parents in Maine’s Scarborough School District say that efforts to ban Christmas have become so extreme that they now refer to Christmas as the new ‘C-word.’ In nearby New Hampshire, things aren’t any better. For example, the principal of Epping Elementary School boasts that his school raises money for the needy, ‘but we don’t call it a Christmas

gift drive,' and that's because 'it's a time for giving and that's pretty much universal.' But if that's the case, why choose December as the gift-giving month? Similarly, why is December 'a time for giving'? His counterpart at Newfields Elementary is so wound up about Christmas that he actually said, 'we've tried to distance ourselves from religion and world events.' No doubt he's been a smashing success.

"North Carolinians are no strangers to the 'C-word,' either. At a recent Charlotte-Mecklenberg school meeting of parents, Rose Hamid, who heads a group called Muslim Women of the Carolinas, expressed her enthusiasm for censoring 'Silent Night' in the schools. She won. 'Joy to the World' was similarly banned, though apparently the parents were stumped on what to do about 'Jingle Bells': some said it was okay, but others were smart enough to say that the song is still linked to Christmas.

"The schools in Maplewood, New Jersey have prohibited the singing of all religious songs, leading some at Columbia High School to question whether 'Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer' was also verboten. City officials in Denver will allow 'Merry Christmas' lights this year—for one last time—but will go with 'Happy Holidays' starting next year.

"This is only the beginning of the Christmas season and already the anti-Christmas crusade is in high gear. In the name of 'separation of church and state,' they distort it. In the name of diversity, they crush it. In the name of tolerance, they obliterate it. Which is why we need to call them for what they are—cultural fascists."