

TEN COMMANDMENTS ON TRIAL

On March 2, the U.S. Supreme Court considered two cases on the public display of the Ten Commandments. One case dealt with whether the monument belongs on property owned by Texas; the other deals with a display in Kentucky courthouses. Whatever the high court decides may have an impact on religious displays on public property, such as a nativity scene.

The Ten Commandments has a secular as well as religious dimension: its historical significance is disputed by no one. The question is whether church-state boundaries have been crossed.

Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor has proposed a four-part test that should be applied in such cases. Government may acknowledge religion, she says, so long as the given issue satisfies standards of "history and ubiquity," does not include worship or prayer, is "nonsectarian" and possesses "minimal religious content."

On the one hand, what O'Connor has proposed is a useful way to think about these issues. On the other hand, this kind of jurisprudential calculus reflects just how muddled the case law is in this area. To be exact, the Supreme Court owes it to the country to finally speak with clarity about the First Amendment, especially as it touches on religion.

The push to scrub our society clean of the public expression of religion is not being driven by fidelity to the Constitution. It is being driven by hate. Hatred of religion, especially Christianity.

Here is the final irony: in the courtroom where the Supreme Court justices meet, there are marble carvings of "great lawgivers of history." One of them is a depiction of Moses holding the Ten Commandments.

“MILLIONS” WORTH OF ENJOYMENT

Fox Searchlight Pictures has released “Millions,” a movie that our own Kiera McCaffrey previewed and found uplifting.

The film is set in Liverpool on the fictional eve of the conversion of the British pound sterling to the euro. Two Catholic brothers who have recently lost their mother find a bag containing over £200,000. In the final days before the changeover (when the pound notes will be rendered worthless), the boys must decide how to spend their riches.

Though Damien, age 7, wishes to use the cash to help the poor, Anthony, 9, longs to splurge on cell phones and video games. In spite of his older brother’s attempts to dissuade him, Damien is determined to use the money for noble ends. Damien has an avid interest in the lives of the saints; several saints appear to him in visions, providing him with encouragement and comfort.

In Damien, “Millions” offers viewers a character who has enough faith to look past the empty promises of worldly goods that entice his brother (and later, his father). Throughout the film, the saints are held up as examples of those we should emulate. Damien’s faith, though challenged, is shown to persevere over the skepticism and materialism of his family.

While perhaps not suitable for the very young (due to adult themes and a potentially frightening villain), “Millions” is a wholesome family film which may serve to bolster interest in the saints and in helping others.

“Millions” premiered on March 11 in select cities and is rated PG. It will open across the country in April.

ANOTHER CATHOLIC-BASHING PLAY

The Playwrights Theater in Manhattan—whose board includes Terrence McNally, of anti-Catholic “Corpus Christi” fame—recently staged the bizarre play, “Whores,” written by Lee Blessing. While mainly an anti-American satire, “Whores” is also intentionally offensive to Catholics.

A barely fictionalized Central American general who ordered the murder of four nuns now lives in Miami. The audience of “Whores” is assaulted by his various delusions. It is here that Blessing seems to think he can stick it to the Church with immunity. The four nuns, of course, represent the real-life rape and murder of three nuns and a lay worker in El Salvador in 1980 by a government death squad who considered the women Communist guerilla sympathizers. Four actresses perform multiple roles including the nuns, but also including prostitutes. And these roles overlap within the general’s hallucinations, which are often sexual and include him acting in a pornographic movie.

Naturally, the result is the vile spectacle of nuns acting and speaking as prostitutes. As a *Chicago Tribune* review of the original production staged in West Virginia noted, “As a theatrical curtain-raiser, having a nun in red garters perform sexual acts in a porn movie rather gets one’s attention.”

Does Blessing think he’s insulated himself against “Whores” being characterized as anti-Catholic because the play amounts to one character’s surreal dream? Indeed, in interviews, Lee Blessing has focused on his play’s anti-Americanism and has refrained from lashing out at the Church.

Yet the *Washington Times* called it “loaded with anti-

Catholicism.” The *Asbury Park Press* remarked that “the play opens on the general starring in a private porn-flick scenario that features an eager-to-please young nun. Blessing and director John Pietrowski spice the proceedings with a bit of striptease, lapdancing, masturbation and salty sailor-talk.” And consider this sampling of a speech by one of the nuns: *“I was a Catholic nun! Every man is Daddy for me! For Christ’s sake, think about it. What’s the Holy Trinity all about? I married my Daddy! A nun is the ultimate passive entity. I am what I submit to. Daddy, I submit to you, to the glory that is salvation and to the evil that takes my life...”*

It would be instructive to interview the people who are attracted to this kind of play. We have a hunch: none would admit to being a bigot and all would consider themselves tolerant. Par for the course.