

# 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.