

Monologue



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Religious displays placed in public areas acceptable

By Shelley Ball
Editor In Chief

The Christmas holiday (and the season accompanying it) has traditionally been accentuated with displays of decorations, both religious and non-religious, on public and private property.

Oregon's Ecumenical Ministries has taken a partial offense to this tradition, however. The organization has, in regards to the approaching holidays, formulated and recently issued a statement discouraging church and civic groups from displaying religious symbols on publicly-owned property.

A part of this statement reads, "They (religious symbols) are appropriate in and about places of worship, inside and outside of private dwellings and on other privately-owned property. They should not be displayed on publicly-owned property in any way that could be interpreted as advancing or retarding any particular religion."

The statement was made despite the United States Supreme Court's March 1984 ruling of a case involving a publicly-funded Nativity scene in Pawtucket, R.I. The Court voted 5-4 that the annual displaying of the Nativity scene by the city of Pawtucket does not violate the law of separation of church and state.

Chief Justice Warren Burger has been quoted as saying the displaying of Nativity scenes do not promote religion, in this case Christianity, but rather note "a significant historical religious event long-celebrated in the Western World."

The Court's decision was a controversial one. Nevertheless, it does make sense. Religious

symbols such as a Nativity scene or a cross should be allowed to be displayed on public property. This act should not be interpreted as a statement establishing any one religion as superior, but rather as an act expressing religious freedom.

The state is not endorsing any particular religion. What it is endorsing is the right for people to freely practice religion. Is Ecumenical Ministries asking citizens to violate the First Amendment to the Constitution, which protects the right to freely express religious beliefs, when it asks citizens not to display religious symbols on public property?

Ecumenical Ministries is not out to denounce any particular religion with its statement, though. What the statement seems to be implying is that if all religions cannot be represented equally, then any references to any one religion should be prohibited altogether on public property.

Christianity has many followers, but it is by no means the only religion in this world and should never be considered the only one whose religious symbols can be displayed at Christmas time. Local communities should take into consideration the different religious sects located in their area.

Since there is no problem displaying a Nativity scene in a public area, there's also nothing wrong with displaying other religious symbols from non-Christian groups who may live in the community as well.

Christmas is supposed to be a time of good will, and all religions should be allowed to express their beliefs pertaining to that event by having equal displaying of religious symbols.

Westmoreland case questions media practices

By Rodney Fobert
Sports Editor

If you've listened to the news, read a newspaper or picked up a magazine lately, you've no doubt heard about the libel trial of General William C. Westmoreland vs. CBS.

Gen. Westmoreland is suing CBS for \$120 million for accusing him of being part of a conspiracy during the Vietnam war.

In a 1982 CBS News documentary, Gen. Westmoreland was accused of deceiving former President Johnson regarding the number of enemy troops in Vietnam in an attempt to make it seem that the United States was making great progress in the war. The case has become known as the libel trial of the century, with more than just money at stake in the final decision.

In order for people to get a fair understanding of an issue, both sides of the story must be known. Westmoreland's lawyer, Dan Burt, has shown parts of interviews which were

originally cut out of the documentary. These excerpts would have been helpful to the general's case.

Since CBS cut out parts of interviews considered helpful to the general, then their report did not take a neutral stand and show both sides of the story equally.

Included in the group of CBS defendants is newsmen Mike Wallace, who narrated the documentary which aired in January of 1982.

The documentary implied that Westmoreland played down the number of enemy troops so that President Johnson would commit more U.S. soldiers to the war. The show also charged that an intelligence officer had later erased computer tapes in order to hide the deception. In the trial, CBS must give evidence to support these charges.

On the other hand, Gen. Westmoreland is attempting to prove that the CBS documentary was libelous and the charges made against him false. Westmoreland's lawyer, Dan

Burt, is attempting to show there was never a conspiracy to make the enemy-troop estimates seem lower than they actually were.

All of this comes down to the question of how far the television news media can go to uncover a story. Although the methods CBS used to make the documentary are questionable, the General has, so far, been unable to disprove the charges made against him.

The two sides in the case have come to a disagreement over who was counted as enemy troops. Westmoreland contends that Com-

munist self-defense forces were not counted in the enemy estimates. The much higher CIA estimate figure did, however, include these troops.

In order to win his case, General Westmoreland must prove that CBS purposefully broadcasted "defamatory falsehoods or showed a reckless disregard for the truth" in making the documentary. This complex trial promises to go on for a long time. Even after a decision is made, there will surely be many questions remaining about Westmoreland's actions during the war and CBS' editing practices in telling the story.

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