

BARNEYS AND CHRISTIE'S OFFEND CATHOLICS

In the storefront window at the Barneys New York clothing store on Madison and 61st Street, there is a crude characterization of the nativity scene. Three Bart Simpson dolls represent the Three Wise Men and there is a kitten representing Mary and another representing Jesus. Mary is posed with her legs spread apart wearing an undergarment that leaves her nipples in evidence; Jesus is wearing a beanie with a halo extended over his head. Both Mary and Jesus have rods extending from their cheeks, apparently representing whiskers. Hanging over the middle of the stable is the red and yellow McDonald's symbol.

After receiving many calls about this, Catholic League president William A. Donohue viewed the display himself and promptly registered a complaint with both Barneys and Christie's. Simon Doonan of Barneys extended an apology to Dr. Donohue but declined to do anything about the exhibit. He said that he did not want to interfere with the expression of the artist, Tom Sachs, who created the "Hello Kitty Nativity Scene." A spokeswoman for Christie's, which is auctioning the piece for school charities, expressed surprise about the exhibit and promised to get back to Dr. Donohue, which she never did.

Dr. Donohue had this to say about the display:

"Barneys New York and Christie's have cooperated in promoting an insulting anti-Christian exhibit. This is not the first time Barneys has done this. Simon Doonan, who is in charge of display and advertising for Barneys, previously hung condoms from a Christmas tree. Indeed when Doonan was hired by Barneys president Gene Pressman, it was on the grounds that Doonan be allowed to promote 'irreverence.' That he has chosen to target

Christians to vent his irreverence is quite obvious.

“Doonan made it clear to me that Barneys will exercise absolutely no responsibility for anything that any artist submits for display in its windows. Plainly put, this means that Barneys will respect the right of artists to show disrespect for the rights of Catholics.

“The Catholic League will disseminate this news to as wide an audience as possible. We do not accept Mr Doonan’s apology: apologies unaccompanied by corrective action do not assuage.”

The Catholic League is the nation’s largest Catholic civil rights organization. It defends the right of Catholics—lay and clergy alike—to participate in American life without defamation or discrimination.