

CHURCH BURNINGS SUGGEST MORE THAN RACIAL PREJUDICE

In June, there was a flurry of stories regarding the rash of church burnings that have taken place, the most recent of which targeted black churches. The Catholic League deplored the burnings but also took note of the fact that most of the media attention focused on the racial aspect of the fires, downplaying the religious dimension. A letter was sent to U.S. Department of Justice Secretary Janet Reno calling on her to investigate the extent to which the burnings carried an anti-Christian message.

According to the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF), there have been 123 church fires occurring in 27 states from coast to coast over the past five years. More than two-thirds of the burnings occurred at white churches. Moreover, satanic markings have been found on some of the churches, leading investigators to explore the role of devil-worshipping cults.

The league issued the following statement to the press regarding this issue:

“The Catholic League is delighted that the House Judiciary Committee has approved the Church Arson Prevention Act, making it easier for federal prosecutors to punish those who damage religious property or obstruct another person’s free exercise of religious beliefs. We hope the Congress approves this legislation.

“Given the fact that the latest church burnings have decimated black churches, it is understandable that the media have focused on the racial dimension of these attacks. But it should also be noted that since most of the churches that have been burned in the past five years have been in white

neighborhoods, the problem is deeper than racial animus: it suggests an attack on Christianity. The specter of satanic cults being involved in some of the arson attacks raises the likelihood that an assault on Christianity is a prime motivating factor behind the church burnings.

"The recent attacks on black churches may very well be the result of both racial prejudice and an hostility directed at the vibrancy of their Christian mission. To the extent that the latter is true, the Catholic League is calling on the U.S. Department of Justice to uncover the sources of anti-Christian prejudice, as well as the role of racial bigotry.

"The league also implores all Catholic leaders, clergy and laity alike, to do what they can to facilitate those who have been displaced as a result of the arson attacks."

On July 5, Deval Patrick, the Assistant Attorney General of the Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Department of Justice, thanked the league for its letter and promised to do whatever was necessary to bring justice to bear.