

CRECHES ON PUBLIC PROPERTY ARE LEGAL

Catholic League president Bill Donohue commented today on the display of crèches on public property:

“Today, the Catholic League erected a nativity scene in Central Park; it is located on the corner of 59th Street and Fifth Avenue, right near the Plaza. As we do every year, we obtained a permit from the New York City Parks Department; next to our crèche is the world’s largest menorah. We would like to be able to put a crèche in the New York City schools as well—the menorah is allowed—but unfortunately the educrats have chosen to practice religious discrimination by denying us the right to do so. Which is why the Catholic League and the Thomas More Law Center have sued the City; we are awaiting a decision by the U.S. Supreme Court on whether it will hear this case.

“Ignorance and intolerance abound on this issue. For example, on December 9, the *Courier-Post* ran an editorial saying, ‘Putting religious symbols on government property violates the law and challenges the constitutional right of religious freedom.’ The New Jersey daily is twice wrong. As we showed today, it is not unconstitutional to put a religious symbol on public property. Furthermore, it doesn’t challenge religious freedom to display a manger scene or a menorah—it demonstrates it.

“In Briarcliff Manor, village officials put up a Christmas tree and a menorah, but they balked at a request by an 80 year-old man to add a crèche (paid for by him). So he sued. In federal court, a judge ruled on Friday in his favor. Instead of adding the nativity scene to the display, officials in the

Westchester, New York town took everything down. 'The Village erected a Menorah and a Christmas tree display in a spirit of inclusion,' officials said. They did nothing of the sort: they gave Jews a religious symbol and Christians a secular one, and when they were told to treat both groups equally they elected to demonstrate intolerance towards both. That's their idea of neutrality—censor everyone equally.

"These battles are so unnecessary. If only the secularists learned to inculcate the virtue of tolerance, all would be well."