

CRUCIFIED SANTA BACK IN NYC GALLERY

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on a window display at the Central Park Fine Arts in New York City:

Robert Cenedella's "The Presence of Man," a painting of Santa Claus nailed to the Cross hovering over New York City, is now being displayed in the window of the Central Park Fine Arts gallery in New York City. It caught my eye when it debuted some 20 years ago.

At that time, I said, "We took no objection to art that protested the commercialization of Christmas, but we also maintained that it was not obvious that the painting conveyed that message."

More recently, thanks to a reporter from the *Daily News*, Cenedella and I exchanged our thoughts on his painting.

"My personal conclusion on the matter, after years of considering different opinions," Cenedella said, "is that Santa Claus has become the embodiment of Christmas, and to see him in place of Christ confuses and challenges those who have accepted a myth in place of what is considered the most important person in human history."

"We are not far apart," I replied. I told the reporter that "I take him at his word—the message he seeks to convey is indeed the commercialization of Christmas. I agree that it is not an auspicious development."

But I hastened to add that I still had two concerns, one from 1998 and one from now.

In 1998, I said, "Our point was that the artist could have made the same point by putting Santa in a noose, thus avoiding

a conflict with Christians.”

Cenedella’s answer was revealing—he said that would offend African Americans. Yes it would. But to concede that point undermined his contention that his depiction of Santa crucified should not offend Christians. “To be exact,” I said at the time, “blacks and Catholics are properly concerned about depictions of their heritage that appear insensitive.”

Cenedella now writes that “what amazes me is that people are so offended by a character that is crucified, while the image of a *human being* in the same position is perfectly acceptable.” (My italics.)

“What he wrote is disturbing,” I replied, “though I hasten to add that I do not believe it was intentional. Christians believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, albeit in human form. Thus, he is not just another human being.”

No matter, Cenedella has convinced me that he is well meaning. I am also convinced that he is more sensitive to other demographic groups than he is Christians.

Will the Catholic League protest his Santa crucified? No. Good intentions, while not dispositive, are important when assessing such matters. Also Cenedella’s willingness to engage me is much appreciated. Besides, I save my real salvos for egregious attacks on Catholicism.