

League Addresses Creche – Menorah Inequity

In December, the Catholic League was struck by the prevalence of menorahs on public property and the absence of creches in the same places. Menorahs were evident in public schools, post offices, train stations and in public parks, but there were noticeably few creches. Christians were told that they should be satisfied with the display of a Christmas tree. Furthermore, public school students were learning about the meaning of the menorah but not the creche. Such inequity provoked the following response from the Catholic League:

“The Catholic League calls on every public authority who permitted the display of menorahs on public property to permit the display of creches on the same property. We do not object to, indeed we support, the display of menorahs on public property. We only request that a double standard not be practiced by disallowing the display of creches.

“The law on this subject is unambiguous. In *Lynch v. Donnelly* (1984), the Supreme Court allowed the display of a creche on public property so long as the religious symbol was surrounded by secular symbols. This ruling was strengthened in *Allegheny County v. ACLU. Greater Pittsburgh* (1989). It was also decided in *Allegheny County* that the menorah was a religious symbol and the Christmas tree was not. Therefore, it will not do to say that the Christmas tree is the functional equivalent of a menorah.

“It is similarly disturbing to learn that public school students are learning about the meaning of the menorah but not the creche. While the law bars the teaching of religion it does not bar teaching about religion, that is, it is perfectly legal to discuss the traditions, customs, social conventions and doctrinal beliefs of any religion. The Catholic League

supports educating students about the religious meaning of the menorah and the religious meaning of the creche.”

The Catholic League was called upon by many Catholics to assist them in informing school officials, librarians and others about the status of the law on the subject of menorahs and nativity scenes. We were generally pleased with the response: in most instances we were successful in getting the authorities to act decisively, pulling up nativity scenes where there had been menorahs.

What the Catholic League was not pleased with was the response of many Catholics and Protestants. Far too many Christians are of the opinion that we should leave well enough alone and not risk being called anti-Semitic for fighting for our rights. Such logic is infuriating as it implies a willingness to succumb to injustice and to simply ignore the rights we are given under the law. The Catholic League made it clear that it is not against the display of Jewish symbols on public property, it only wants the same rights accorded to Jews to be granted to Christians.