

League Assists Ex-Con

Ex-cons have rights, too, and no right should be given greater prominence than freedom to worship. That was the central motivating force behind the League's willingness to support a grievance by Robert Scone, a man convicted for sexually molesting his own children. Once Scone was released from prison, he was denied by the Division of Parole of New York State from attending Mass. While the League was sensitive to the circumstances surrounding this decision, it could not countenance the state interfering with an individual's right to worship. Separation of church and state, we said, cuts both ways.

Contacted originally by Father Francis J. Case of the Church of St. Theresa of the Infant Jesus in New Berlin, New York, the League brought this matter to the attention of the parole officer assigned to Mr. Scone. "If the issue were Mr. Scone's suitability to be a Boy Scout Master," the League said, "there would be no argument. But his right to attend Mass is altogether different, if for no other reason than he has a constitutional right to do so. After all, even those who have been sentenced to life imprisonment are entitled to the right to attend religious services of their choice. Are those who have served their time expected to bear penalties that those who have yet to complete their sentence are exempt from?"

The League is pleased with the response of the Division of Parole. Reasonable conditions were placed on Mr. Scone's attendance at Mass: he must notify the Rector that he is on parole; he must notify the parole officer which Mass he wishes to attend; and he must disclose the nature of his criminal history and his pedophilia must be made known to his Rector.

This kind of accommodation makes sense, especially given Mr. Scone's past. It also makes for good social policy: about the only elixir that works on recidivists is religion, therefore

the state should be encouraging, not discouraging, religious worship for ex-cons.