

MANGER SCENE ERECTED IN CENTRAL PARK

The Catholic League erected a nativity scene today in New York City's Central Park; it will be up for two weeks. Bill Donohue seeks to clarify what is at stake:

Our life-size crèche, paid for by the Catholic League, is right in the heart of New York City; it is on the corner of 59th and 5th. Behind it stands the world's largest menorah. That is how it should be: Christians and Jews should not be excluded from accessing land that is a public forum to display their religious symbols.

There is much confusion about this issue. The courts have made it clear that the display of religious symbols in a municipal building, or on a courthouse lawn, must be accompanied by secular symbols. But if the property is a public forum, a place where musicians, artists and others gather at various times of the year, then the government cannot prohibit the display of privately funded religious symbols, even when they are not accompanied by secular ones. That is why the New York City Parks Department allows Catholics and Jews to display their religious symbols (absent secular ones) in Central Park—it is a public forum. It is important to note, too, that a menorah is not a secular symbol, and attempts to deny its religious meaning are invidious.

We hope that public officials across the country take note of these differences and understand that if the Catholic League can put a manger scene in Central Park, then there is nothing to stop them from doing likewise in a similar spot.

Significantly, the public overwhelmingly agrees: in a Rasmussen survey released last week, only 13 percent of adults object to the display of religious symbols on public property;

76 percent approve and 10 percent are undecided. Women are more tolerant than men, and blacks are more tolerant than whites. Looks like we need to work on those white boys.