

PUBLIC SCHOOLS SLIGHT CHRISTMAS

The Catholic League has been inundated with complaints across the country that public school teachers have been diluting the meaning of Christmas while simultaneously trumpeting the meaning of Hanukkah and Kwanzaa. It has become commonplace for public schools to teach about Hanukkah but not about Christmas, to display menorahs but not nativity scenes, and to celebrate the meaning of Kwanzaa but not Christmas.

William Donohue, president of the Catholic League, issued the following remarks on this subject today:

“In 1995, President Clinton sent a memo to Attorney General Janet Reno and Secretary of Education Richard Riley outlining the religious liberty rights of students in public schools. As he said, ‘nothing in the First Amendment converts our public schools into religion-free zones or requires all religious expression to be left behind at the schoolhouse door.’

“President Clinton was explicit about this matter: it is legal for teachers to teach about religion, for students to express their religious beliefs in their assignments, for students to distribute religious literature and to wear religious garb. Yet these rights are still being summarily ignored in certain school districts.

“In addition, it is now common practice for schools to display menorahs but not nativity scenes. Instead, the Christmas tree, which is not a religious symbol, is being displayed as though it were one. It must also be said that the sensitivity that many school districts are showing for Kwanzaa, Which was literally invented in 1966, is in stark contrast to the way in which Christmas is being celebrated.

“While it is true that there is no law that requires public

schools to display nativity scenes or teach about Christmas, it is also true that there is no law that prohibits them from doing so. In the interest of fairness, then, it behooves school authorities to accommodate Christian students as much as they do Jewish and African-American students. That is why the Catholic League will continue to press for equitable treatment."

The Catholic League is the nation's largest Catholic civil rights organization. It defends individual Catholics and the institutional Church from defamation and discrimination.