

SANTA CLAUS CRUCIFIED

In a story that received national attention, the Catholic League protested a painting that hung in the front window of the Art Students League in New York City. The painting, by Robert Cenedella, showed Santa Claus nailed to a cross, hovering over New York. The artist claimed that his work was designed to protest the commercialization of Christmas.

The league asked the executive director of the Art Students League to move the painting inside, to a place that was less conspicuous; the display on a busy street, 57th street, made it difficult for passersby to avoid. Her refusal led to a media blitz over the matter.

The league's objection centered strictly on the misappropriation of the cross. 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. Our point was that the artist could have made the same point by putting Santa in a noose, thus avoiding a conflict with Christians.

What revealed the hypocrisy of the artist was his statement that he would not want to put Santa in a noose because that would offend African-Americans. Yet the same artist had no problem offending Christians by misusing the cross!

Because we never sought to remove the painting from the gallery, we were successful in carrying the argument; public sentiment was on the side of the Catholic League.