

U.S. POSTAL SERVICE VIOLATES SUPREME COURT RULING

The U.S. Postal Service is in direct violation of a Supreme Court ruling on nativity scenes and menorahs. In Postal Operations Manual (POM) and Handbook PO-203 Revision, 221.528, section c, it explicitly states that menorahs are permissible in post offices but nativity scenes are not. The Post Office is under the erroneous impression that a menorah is not a religious symbol. Not only is this historically incorrect, it was definitively decided in Allegheny County v. ACLU, Greater Pittsburgh that a menorah is a religious symbol.

The Catholic League has filed a complaint with the Equal Employment Opportunity office of Hauppauge, New York, in support of a case filed by postal service employee George Cornwall (case #4A-117-1030-95). Mr. Cornwall seeks to have the aforementioned regulation overturned. Dr. William A. Donohue, president of the Catholic League, issued the following statement today:

In 1989 the Supreme Court ruled that a menorah, like a nativity scene, was a religious symbol. It allowed, affirming an earlier decision in Lynch v. Donnelly, the placement of religious symbols on public property, provided that they were accompanied by secular symbols. Yet POM and Handbook PO-203 Revision, 221 528, section c, fails to comply with this ruling. It bars nativity scenes, crosses and the Star of David on the grounds that they are religious symbols but finds as 'permissible' such items as stamps and stamp art, evergreen trees bearing non-religious ornaments, menorahs (when displayed in conjunction with other seasonal matter)...etc.

"Not only does this fly in the face of Allegheny County v. ACLU, Greater Pittsburgh, which held a menorah to be a religious symbol, it inexplicably states that a menorah must

be 'displayed in conjunction with other seasonal matter.' But if the menorah is not a religious symbol, then it is superfluous to maintain that it should be displayed with other secular symbols. That this escaped the logic of those who authorized the regulation is truly astonishing

"The Catholic League wants the U.S. Postal Service to realign its regulations to meet the letter of the law. It does not recommend that both nativity scenes and menorahs be banned from post offices, rather it seeks to accord a place for both religious figures, allowing, of course, provision for the mandated secular symbols that must accompany them.

"The Catholic League will not desist in its action until justice is done."

The Catholic League is the nation's largest Catholic civil rights organization. It defends the right of Catholics—lay and clergy alike—to participate in American life without defamation or discrimination.

BOMB THREATS AGAINST BARNEYS DENOUNCED

On December 13, Barneys New York issued "an apology" stemming from an offensive nativity scene that was displayed as "art" in its store at 61st and Madison Avenue. Though the statement was more of a public relations commentary than a true apology, it has been accepted as satisfactory by the Catholic League, the organization that first lodged the complaints against the store. Unfortunately, it now seems that some of the critics of Barneys have gone too far: Barneys has been the target of at least three bomb threats. Speaking to this issue is Catholic

League president William A. Donohue:

“While the Catholic League takes no responsibility for the excesses of others, it condemns all threats of violence that have been made against Barneys. To be sure, Barneys could have avoided all the retaliatory measures that have been waged against it had it moved expeditiously to remove the exhibition, “Hello Kitty Nativity Scene,” after I made my complaint on December 7. That it didn’t, however, is no excuse for making threats. Barneys has removed the offensive display and has issued a public apology that, however lame in its wording, is no cause for violence.

“The Catholic League condemns all violent acts that have been threatened, or might be threatened, against Barneys. It asks New Yorkers of all faiths to join with us in denouncing violence and in dissuading would-be terrorists from acting.”

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BARNEYS AND CHRISTIE’S OFFEND CATHOLICS

In the storefront window at the Barneys New York clothing store on Madison and 61st Street, there is a crude characterization of the nativity scene. Three Bart Simpson dolls represent the Three Wise Men and there is a kitten representing Mary and another representing Jesus. Mary is posed with her legs spread apart wearing an undergarment that leaves her nipples in evidence; Jesus is wearing a beanie with

a halo extended over his head. Both Mary and Jesus have rods extending from their cheeks, apparently representing whiskers. Hanging over the middle of the stable is the red and yellow McDonald's symbol.

After receiving many calls about this, Catholic League president William A. Donohue viewed the display himself and promptly registered a complaint with both Barneys and Christie's. Simon Doonan of Barneys extended an apology to Dr. Donohue but declined to do anything about the exhibit. He said that he did not want to interfere with the expression of the artist, Tom Sachs, who created the "Hello Kitty Nativity Scene." A spokeswoman for Christie's, which is auctioning the piece for school charities, expressed surprise about the exhibit and promised to get back to Dr. Donohue, which she never did.

Dr. Donohue had this to say about the display:

"Barneys New York and Christie's have cooperated in promoting an insulting anti-Christian exhibit. This is not the first time Barneys has done this. Simon Doonan, who is in charge of display and advertising for Barneys, previously hung condoms from a Christmas tree. Indeed when Doonan was hired by Barneys president Gene Pressman, it was on the grounds that Doonan be allowed to promote 'irreverence.' That he has chosen to target Christians to vent his irreverence is quite obvious.

"Doonan made it clear to me that Barneys will exercise absolutely no responsibility for anything that any artist submits for display in its windows. Plainly put, this means that Barneys will respect the right of artists to show disrespect for the rights of Catholics.

"The Catholic League will disseminate this news to as wide an audience as possible. We do not accept Mr Doonan's apology: apologies unaccompanied by corrective action do not assuage."

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CRÈCHES DESERVE EQUAL TREATMENT WITH MENORAHS

The Catholic League has been struck by the prevalence of menorahs on public property and the absence of crèches in the same places. Menorahs have been evident in public schools, in post offices, in train stations and in public parks, but there are noticeably few crèches. Christians are being told that they should be satisfied with the display of a Christmas tree. Furthermore, public school students are learning about the meaning of the menorah but not the crèche. Such inequity is inexcusable. Catholic League president William A. Donohue released the following remarks on this subject today:

“The Catholic League calls on every public authority who permitted the display of menorahs on public property to permit the display of crèches 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 crèches.

“The law on this subject is unambiguous. In Lynch v. Donnelly (1984), the Supreme Court allowed the display of a crèche 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 shameful that a change was made in the Postal Operations Manual (POM and Handbook P0-203 Revision) that allows the display of a menorah in a post office but forbids the display of a crèche (see 221.528 section c). This decision, which claims that a menorah is not a religious symbol, is in flagrant contradiction with the ruling in Allegheny County. Accordingly, the Catholic League will assist a postal worker from Long Island, George Cornwall, in his Equal Opportunity Complaint of Discrimination.

“It is similarly disturbing to learn that public school students are learning about the meaning of the menorah but not the crèche. 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 crèche.”

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