

Vatican Removes Nativity Scene Portraying Baby Jesus Lying in Manger with Palestinian Keffiyeh

Following the unveiling of a nativity scene featuring the baby Jesus lying in a manger draped with a Palestinian keffiyeh, the Vatican chose on Wednesday to remove the display due to significant backlash.

The nativity scene was donated to the Vatican by the Higher Presidential Committee for Church Affairs in Palestine, a body within the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). It was one of several pieces created by Palestinian artists Johny Andonia and Faten Nastas Mitwasi from Dar al-Kalima University in Bethlehem, on behalf of the official Palestinian Mission to the United Nations, specifically for display during the Christmas season.

The unveiling of the nativity display immediately caused controversy due to its unhistorical portrayal of Jesus as a Palestinian.

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Several images showed Pope Francis, seated in a wheelchair before the nativity scene. This appearance was seemingly part of the unveiling of the nativity scene to the pope, along with the donors and artisans who had created it.

Traditionally, the Nativity scene at the Vatican is displayed with the baby Jesus until Christmas Eve, the evening of Dec. 24.

According to Catholic news outlet Crux, the Vatican did not explain why it removed the display, however, many commentators believe it was due to the backlash. The site also noted that this particular nativity scene is not the official nativity scene displayed in St. Peter's Square.

International Christian Embassy of Jerusalem (ICEJ) Vice President and Spokesman David Parsons praised the removal.

"We are relieved at reports that the Vatican has decided to remove the provocative Nativity display with an infant Jesus resting on a black-and-white keffiyeh, which is an unmistakable symbol of Palestinian nationalism," Parsons said. "This Crèche not only denigrated Jewish heritage, it also undermined core tenets of the Christian faith. Indeed, millions of Christians worldwide were instantly incensed by this exhibit ahead of the Christmas season, and the Vatican did the right thing in taking it down."

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Parsons said the Jewishness of Jesus is central to the Christian message, as the promised Messiah had to be born from Israel.

"If Jesus were a Palestinian Arab, then he would not have qualified to be the Christ, the promised Messiah, and Savior of the world," Parsons explained. "The Hebrew and Christian Scriptures are all clear that he would be the 'Son of David' springing forth from the 'root of Jesse,' the least clan of the tribe of Judah. The New Testament affirms he was born in the 'City of David,' where the wise men came seeking him who was born 'King of the Jews,' not the rais of Ramallah."

"Taken together, these actions by the papacy have signaled a disturbing ill-will towards the Jewish state and people. We commend the Vatican for changing its mind on the Nativity

display and urge the pope's handlers to also abandon any anti-Semitic messaging," Parsons concluded.

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