

# NYC DISTORTS COURT RULINGS ON HOLIDAY DISPLAYS

Catholic League president Bill Donohue commented today on the way the New York City Department of Education is misrepresenting court decisions on holiday displays in the schools:

“Bridget Kearney, an officer of the Ladies Order of Hibernians, recently received a letter from the New York City Department of Education that flatly distorts the truth about court rulings regarding holiday displays. Kearney wanted to know why New York City continues to allow menorahs and crescent and stars to be displayed in the classroom while banning nativity scenes. She was told that ‘the Department of Education’s policy regarding holiday displays permits the display of holiday symbol decorations with secular dimensions’ and that religious symbols ‘are prohibited.’ She was then informed that this policy ‘has been upheld in federal court.’

“What Kearney was told is a serious distortion of the truth. What happened is not debatable: a) the district court first ruled that because the menorah and crescent and star were secular symbols, they could—unlike the nativity scene—be displayed in the schools, and b) the circuit court ruled that the district court erred in declaring the Jewish and Islamic symbols as secular—it said that the New York City policy ‘mischaracterizes the menorah as a secular symbol’ and that the ‘same conclusion applies to the policy’s treatment of the star and crescent.’ The circuit court added that while New York City was not legally obliged to display a crèche (the Christian holiday was represented by a Christmas tree), it also said, ‘We do not here decide whether the City could, consistent with the Constitution, include a crèche in its holiday displays.’ The U.S. Supreme Court declined to hear an appeal.

“In other words, New York City is allowed to display the Jewish and Islamic *religious* symbols and it is *not prohibited* from displaying nativity scenes. Thus, it is not the law that is standing in the way of equal treatment—it is the Department of Education. What we want is parity: if Jews and Muslims are allowed to display their religious symbols, it is nothing less than insulting to tell Christians to be satisfied with a secular symbol at Christmastime. I am requesting a meeting with the Schools Chancellor about this matter.”