



## Focus on Religious Freedom

*"Religious freedom is the lifeblood of the American people, the cornerstone of American government." - Cardinal Timothy Dolan*

### **What, Exactly, is Religious Freedom? And How Does This Affect Public Christmas Displays?**

Religious freedom protects people's right to live, speak, and act according to their beliefs, peacefully and publicly. It protects their ability to seek the truth about God and live according to those beliefs. Religious freedom is more than the "freedom to worship" at a synagogue, church, or mosque. No other nation has America's robust protection of religious freedom in a Bill of Rights. <sup>(1)</sup> Sadly, in recent decades, some government actions have encroached on this God given and Constitutional freedom.

The U.S. Supreme Court rejected the idea that the government should or could compel any citizen to adopt any official belief in its 1943 decision, *WV State Board of Ed.v. Barnette*. They wrote, "If there is any fixed star in our constitutional constellation, it is that no official, high or petty, can prescribe what shall be orthodox in politics, nationalism, religion, or other matters of opinion to force citizens to confess by word or act their faith therein." <sup>(2)</sup>

Since the principles of religious freedom prevent the cultural majority from using the power of the state to impose their beliefs on others, both religious and nonreligious alike, the government cannot become so powerful that it can tell people what to think and how to act. <sup>(3)</sup> This is especially important to know during this Christmas/Hanukkah holiday.

"The U.S. Supreme Court and numerous federal appeals courts have recognized that government entities may recognize Christmas as a holiday and may maintain Christmas displays that include both religious and secular symbols." <sup>(4)</sup>

"Publicly sponsored Nativity scenes on public property are constitutional, especially when the display includes other secular symbols of the holiday. In fact, removing only the religious symbols of the holiday display would demonstrate hostility toward religion, which the First Amendment forbids," said Liberty Counsel. <sup>(5)</sup>

([learningforjustice.org](http://learningforjustice.org); [religiousfreedominstitute.org](http://religiousfreedominstitute.org), 11/1/19; [heritage.org](http://heritage.org) (1)(2)(3);  
[uscbb.org](http://uscbb.org), [libertycounsel.org](http://libertycounsel.org), 4/1/21(4)(5))

*"God never gives someone a gift they are not capable of receiving. If He gives us the gift of Christmas, it is because we all have the ability to understand and receive it." - Pope Francis*

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usccb.org; libertycounsel.org. 4/1/21(3)

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