



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on July 27, 2011

Atheists Sue to Stop Cross Display at Ground-Zero 9/11 Memorial

As the symbolic World Trade Center Cross (left) was moved to its permanent display site at New York's 9/11 Memorial Museum on July 23, an atheist group filed a lawsuit to have the inspirational symbol banned from the museum. Discovered by construction worker Frank Silecchia in the rubble of the Trade Center two days after the attack, "the 17-foot-tall cross became an icon of hope and comfort throughout the recovery effort in the wake of the 2001 attacks," noted a museum press release.



Joe Daniels, 9/11 Memorial president, told [CNN News](#) that the cross is "an important part of our commitment to bring back the authentic physical reminders that tell the history of 9/11 in a way nothing else could."

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In a service prior to the installation of the massive cross in the museum, Father Brian Jordan, a Franciscan monk who ministered to workers and blessed human remains at the site of the attack, blessed the symbolic relic, noting that after 10 years of shuffling to different sites, "the World Trade Center Cross has finally found its home." Added Father Jordan, "I am grateful to the leadership of the Memorial Museum for their sensitivity, compassion, and professionalism. I urge all those who believe in the consolation and power of the Cross to visit it in its future home in the Memorial Museum."

However, the inspiration and awe felt by thousands over the cross were not shared by all, as a group called the [American Atheists](#) filed suit to stop the display of the cross at the memorial museum, charging in a press release that "government enshrinement of the cross" is an "impermissible mingling of church and state."

The group's spokesman, Dave Silverman, noted that the cross had become a Christian icon, and, thus, was an unacceptable addition to the memorial. "It has been blessed by so-called holy men and presented as a reminder that their god, who couldn't be bothered to stop the Muslim terrorists or prevent 3,000 people from being killed in his name, cared only enough to bestow upon us some rubble that resembles a cross. It's a truly ridiculous assertion," Silverman said.

He said that the cross has now become "a part of the official WTC memorial. No other religions or philosophies will be honored. It will just be a Christian icon, in the middle of OUR memorial." Citing the focus of the atheist lawsuit, Silverman charged that as "a public accommodation, the memorial must allow us (and all other religious philosophies) to include our own display of equal size inside the museum, or not include the cross. Equality is an all-or-nothing deal."

But the conservative [American Center for Law and Justice](#) said the atheist suit is without merit and said



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it would file a “friend of the court” brief in defense of keeping the memorial cross at the museum.

“This is another pathetic attempt to re-write the Constitution and re-write history by removing a symbol that has deep meaning and serves as a powerful remembrance to that fateful attack nearly ten years ago,” said Jay Sekulow, ACLJ’s chief counsel. He said the suit represented “the latest chapter of an anti-God strategy employed by atheist organizations across the country — a strategy offensive to millions of Americans, a strategy that we’re confident ultimately will fail in court.”

The ACLJ head ridiculed the atheists’ claim in the suit that they “continue to suffer damages, both physical and emotional, from the existence of the challenged cross.” Wrote Sekulow in a recent op-ed: “They are injured by the mere existence of the cross? We’re talking about two intersecting steel beams that held up when the Twin Towers collapsed. Yes, it is cross-shaped. But, suffering physical and emotional damage because of the existence of the cross? Give me a break. This claim is ridiculous. If someone doesn’t like it, look the other way. Skip that part of the exhibit.”

Noting that similar atheist lawsuits targeting the Pledge of Allegiance, the National Motto, and the National Day of Prayer have all failed, Sekulow said that the ACLJ would “aggressively defend” placement of the cross at the ground-zero memorial. “This memorial, a powerful part of the history of 9-11, serves as a constitutionally sound reminder of the horrors that occurred nearly a decade ago,” he said.

Sekulow said that the ACLJ brief in the case would be filed on behalf of former NYC firefighter and first responder Tim Brown, who lost nearly 100 friends in the terrorist attack.

As reported by [The New American](#), last month a New York atheist group complained about a street sign honoring seven firefighters killed during the 9/11 terrorist attacks, demanding that it be removed because of its religious implications.



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