

CANCEL CULTURE IS CANCEROUS

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Technically speaking, censorship is something that only the government can do: it has the power to stop speech before it is uttered and prohibit the distribution of the written word. In a free society, such instances must be limited and well defined. For the most part, our society has done a pretty good job in ensuring freedom of speech.

Today we are faced with a cancel culture, a condition whereby some controversial ideas are being cancelled; in effect, they are being censored. But the censor is not government: it is the private sector. The social media corporations—Facebook, Google, Twitter—are the major culprits. These Silicon Valley behemoths are not interested in cancelling all controversial ideas, simply the ones they dislike.

The social media ruling class is not made up of liberals; they are Leftists. That's the difference between a moderate (liberal) and a radical (Leftist). As such, they don't believe in freedom of speech anymore than they believe in freedom of religion. To say they are a threat to our society is an understatement.

If it were the reverse—if speech that conservatives disliked was being cancelled by social media companies—it would be just as appalling. To be sure, the First Amendment provisions on speech and religion do not apply to the private sector; they are only limitations placed on the government. However, when the abuse of power exercised by private-sector titans is so overwhelming that legitimate views of a contrary nature cannot be expressed, then liberty is jeopardized. Facebook, Google and Twitter need to be broken up by government.

The origins of the cancel culture are traceable to the campus, not Silicon Valley. The professoriate has long favored freedom

of speech for some, but not for others. In other words, free speech for the Left, but none for conservatives.

Remember “Crossfire,” the CNN show that featured nightly debates on current issues? It started with Tom Braden and Pat Buchanan, on the left and the right, respectively; Michael Kinsley and Robert Novak also hosted the show. Then there was “Hannity and Colmes” on Fox News. Neither exists anymore.

I mention this because I cut my teeth on these shows. When teaching at a college in Pittsburgh, I flew to D.C. on a regular basis to do “Crossfire,” and when I came back home to New York in 1993 for this job, I continued to do the show. Three years later, Fox News was founded and I was a regular on many of the shows, including “Hannity and Colmes.”

These types of shows did not die because of low ratings (a subsequent “Crossfire” was a flop, owing to attempts to tamp down the debates), but because liberals lost almost every round. If the Left was cleaning the clock of conservatives, the shows would still be on the air.

Before I left academia, the Intercollegiate Studies Institute arranged for me to debate scholars on a range of issues, in many colleges and universities. In some cases, students tried to shout me down. What was true then—it is even more true today—was the total absence of conservative students shouting down left-wing speakers. It never happens. It’s always the Left that does the cancelling.

Sometimes the Left chooses to completely ignore challenges to its perspective. That is not as morally offensive, but it is very telling, nonetheless.

The first book I wrote, *The Politics of the American Civil Liberties Union*, was published in 1985 by Transaction Press, the largest and most prestigious social science publisher in the nation. It was founded by Irving Louis Horowitz, a Rutgers University sociologist who turned out to be a dear friend, he

told me that the New York Times asked him to send a copy so they could review it. He declined.

At first I was beside myself—why would he do that? Irving said that was because the paper had a lousy record of reviewing his books. Then the Times asked again, for a second time. He sent them the book, but they never reviewed it.

I later found out why. My book had been given to Ferdinand Lundberg, a liberal chronicler of the rich, and, surprisingly, he liked it. So the Times spiked the review.

Something similar is going on right now. My latest book, *The Truth About Clergy Sexual Abuse: Clarifying the Facts and the Causes*, has been well received by many influential writers and commentators, including priests and bishops, but my usual critics on the Left, both in Catholic and secular circles, have ignored it. That's because it contains over 800 footnotes, taken from scholarly sources, and that doesn't give them much wiggle room to challenge me. They sure won't debate me, though they have been asked to do so.

As you can see from this issue of *Catalyst*, we have taken on Twitter again for cancelling speech it abhors (such as telling the truth about men and women). We will continue to do so. We may not be as big as Twitter, but our following is not small, either. There is too much at stake to lie low. We have no plans to do so.