

DOES FACEBOOK HATE CATHOLICS?

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on the testimony of Facebook chairman and CEO Mark Zuckerberg before the Senate Commerce and Judiciary Committee on April 10 and the House Energy and Commerce Committee on April 11:

Sen. Ted Cruz informed Facebook chairman and CEO Mark Zuckerberg that his company “has blocked over two dozen Catholic pages,” noting they were prevented from posting on Facebook because “their content and brand were, quote, ‘unsafe to the community.’” None of the pages came even close to constituting hate speech.

Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers grilled Zuckerberg about an ad that was initially blocked by Facebook because it featured Jesus on the Cross. The ad was submitted by Franciscan University of Steubenville as a theology degree advertisement. Facebook deemed it to be “excessively violent” and “sensational.” Crucifixions usually are.

The company later apologized. The congresswoman from Washington wasn’t convinced. “Could you tell [us] what was so shocking, sensational or excessively violent about the ad to cause it to be initially censored?” “It sounds like we made a mistake there,” Zuckerberg replied.

Not mentioned in the hearings was an incident that took place between last Thanksgiving and Christmas. A Catholic vocational organization, Mater Ecclesiae Fund for Vocations, had its ads unduly held up for a bogus reason. Facebook told the organization that its content potentially violated Facebook’s policy on discrimination for housing ads. But the ad had absolutely nothing to do with housing. By the time the ad was permitted, it was too late to matter, the effect of which was to kill the fundraising effort.

A thorough search of the two-day testimony reveals that there

were no examples of Jewish or Muslim groups having their ads blocked. Moreover, no examples of anti-Semitism were mentioned. There were two references to anti-Muslim posts.

An Internet search of Facebook complaints made by Jews and Muslims turned up a few instances of alleged bias against both groups. But instances where Jewish and Muslim pages were blocked, save for clear examples of hate speech, are virtually non-existent.

What gives? Why the singling out of Catholics for censorship?

When Sen. Cruz pressed Zuckerberg about blocking some two dozen Catholic pages, the Facebook co-founder replied that he tries to make sure “we do not have any bias,” but conceded that his company is “located in Silicon Valley, which is an extremely left-leaning place.”

In other words, Zuckerberg’s attempt to screen out anti-Catholicism is being thwarted by his own employees because they harbor extremist left-wing views. This is quite a concession. It raises two questions: Why has he failed to check the bigotry, and why do left-wingers hate Catholicism?

One reason why Zuckerberg has failed in squashing anti-Catholic bigotry is the difficulty of policing his staff. He admits that he has upwards of 20,000 people working on content review. Cruz asked, “Do you know the political orientation of those 15,000 to 20,000 people engaging in content review?” “No senator,” he replied.

Actually, he does: Zuckerberg admitted that his company is located in an “extremely left-leaning” community, and no one suspects he is importing his staff from Kansas.

Furthermore, Rep. Steve Scalise, Rep. Jeff Duncan, and Rep. McMorris Rodgers all noted the anti-conservative bias at Facebook. The latter cited what FCC Chairman Ajit Pai said last November: he maintained that “edge providers routinely

block or discriminate against content they don't like." No doubt the censors consider themselves to be beacons of tolerance.

Now it is understandable why left-wingers might harbor an animus against conservatives—they are at opposite ends of the political spectrum. But why do they hate Catholics?

In fact, Facebook does not hate Catholics—it's just orthodox Catholics it loathes. To wit: there is no evidence that any of the Catholic pages blocked by Facebook are associated with dissident or liberal Catholic causes.

None of this is surprising. It all boils down to sex. The "extremely left-leaning" Facebook employees, just like "extremely left-leaning" persons everywhere, are in a rage over the Catholic Church's teachings on sexuality. It is not Church teachings on the Trinity that exercises them—it's the conviction that marriage is properly understood as a union between a man and a woman.

Zuckerberg told Rep. McMorris Rodgers, "I wouldn't extrapolate from a few examples to assuming that the overall system is biased." But we are not talking about a few anecdotes or hard choices: a pattern of bigotry is evident, and the pages being censored are not Catholic assaults on others.

Rep. Kevin John Cramer from North Dakota suggested to Zuckerberg that he should look to hire more people from places like Bismarck where people tend to have "common sense."

It's more common decency and fairness that is the problem. The fact is that those who are the captains of censorship in America work in places like the tech companies, higher education, the media, publishing, the arts, and Hollywood. What do they have in common? They are all examples of "extremely left-leaning" places that hate Catholic sexual ethics.

Zuckerberg has his work cut out for him. He can begin by hiring practicing orthodox Catholics in senior positions monitoring content review. He should also be ready to pay for relocation fees.