

# FREE SPEECH UNDER FIRE

**William A. Donohue**

Over and over again, I have said that I would prefer to suffer the indignity of having my religion trashed before endorsing the right of the government to censor the offensive speech. Would there ever be an exception? Of course—no right is absolute. But in almost all cases, having the government silence the offenders is the wrong remedy.

The courts have properly carved out many exceptions to freedom of speech. Falsifying one's credentials is not protected speech. Intentionally lying, with malice, about someone—especially when the person is not a public figure—is not acceptable; that's why we have laws against libel and slander. Copyright infringement is not legal. The sale and distribution of child pornography is not constitutional. Harassing phone calls do not qualify as free speech. There are literally dozens of cases where government has a legitimate right to prohibit, or punish, speech.

It is important to note that only government has the ability to truly censor speech. For example, newspapers turn down letters to the editor every day—they have every right to do so—but they cannot stop views they disagree with from being voiced elsewhere. The same applies to all speech that is expressed in the private sector. If your father, or your employer for that matter, says, "Shut Up," it won't do you any good to claim you are being unfairly muzzled.

These cases are not controversial. Matters become contentious when the legal right to prohibit speech is not the issue, but the moral right to do so is called into question. It is even more contentious when the speech deemed offensive is simply of a disagreeable nature. We don't lack for recent examples.

The campuses are hotbeds of left-wing intolerance these days.

Brandeis University banned Ayaan Hirsi Ali from speaking at its commencement because of her pointed criticism of Islam. Smith College pressed Kathleen Lagarde to withdraw from speaking because she is the head of the International Monetary Fund, and that organization is too capitalistic for her critics. Rutgers forced Condi Rice to drop out because her record of fighting terrorism upset them. The former chancellor of the University of California at Berkeley, Robert Birgeneau, a flaming liberal, was coerced to withdraw from speaking at Haverford College because in 2011 he asked the campus police to stop anarchists from taking over the campus. Former New York City Police Commissioner Ray Kelly was stopped from speaking a few months ago at Dartmouth because protesters objected to measures he instituted that resulted in a sharp drop in crime.

It's not just on the campuses where the left-wing tyrants are flexing their muscles. Mozilla CEO Brendan Eich had to resign under pressure because he supports marriage between a man and a woman. "Duck Dynasty" star Phil Robertson was suspended from A&E because he called homosexuality a sin. Two Christian brothers, David and Jason Benham, were dropped by HGTV because they, too, don't approve of two men marrying. Football players are also being censured because they object to public displays of homosexuality.

Here's one that hits home. Fr. Thomas Doyle, a Dominican, is a very unhappy man. Indeed, the dissident priest is in a state of perpetual rage. I am one of the reasons he sulks and flies off the handle. I've never met him, though I have been well aware of his trotting around the nation maligning the bishops any chance he gets. On April 5 this year, he spoke before a group of Catholic malcontents in Hartford, Connecticut begging the bishops to silence me. Doyle said that the bishops "continue to treat victims [of abuse] with disdain at the very least." He then listed seven examples, the last of which was, "Failing to muzzle Bill Donohue."

Doyle is not alone in wanting to silence me. To wit: not a single person at the conference blasted him out for his intolerance. Moreover, Michael Sean Winters of the *National Catholic Reporter* wrote a short piece on this incident asking, "Who wants to muzzle Bill Donohue?" His reply, "Form a line."

What I find so amazing is not that anyone would want to silence me—left-wingers by the dozens have long pleaded with TV producers never to allow me to speak again. And they have done more, though I do not want to go into it, save to mention the politicized attack on me by the IRS (which didn't work). Nor is it the fact that Doyle is still technically a priest that is surprising. It is the rank hypocrisy of those who always go bonkers when the bishops sanction a theologian, or a wayward nun. Yet when it comes to me, they have no problem demanding that those same censorial bishops shut me up.

There are plenty of lay people, priests, and nuns with whom I sharply disagree, but it would never move me to ask the bishops to silence them. But there is a silver lining: I must scare the hell out of them, and for that I am very happy. Moreover, I am not going away.