

FUROR OVER ISLAMIC CARTOONS; INCIVILITY DENOUNCED

Garland, Texas was home to an anti-Islam cartoon event last month that left two gunmen dead and one security guard wounded.

Minutes before Elton Simpson started shooting, one of his supporters tweeted, "If there is no check on the freedom of your speech, then let your hearts be open to the freedom of our actions." Simpson was shot dead quickly thereafter. Neither he nor his ilk ever realized that this plainly irresponsible position—no limits on speech means no limits on conduct—was the proximate cause of his death.

Bill Donohue made it clear that "there is no role for absolutism in a free society." He criticized the staged event orchestrated by Pamela Geller of the American Freedom Defense Initiative for unnecessarily taunting Muslims. It is one thing to condemn ISIS, he said, but it is quite another to deliberately insult people of faith.

In January, Donohue was blasted for saying that the *Charlie Hebdo* cartoons could not be defended morally, even if they were entirely legal. He objected to those cartoons not because they depicted Muhammad but because some were pornographic. When Pope Francis took his side, it effectively ended the debate.

The Garland event split members of the PEN American Center, an elite organization that says it defends artistic freedoms: some defended Geller's stunt and others did not. Donohue pointed out how hypocritical both sides were.

On May 5, PEN honored *Charlie Hebdo* in New York City, even though the French magazine was tied to the Paris murders. Officials from the publication received an award for "freedom

of expression courage.” But other PEN members objected, saying that freedom of expression has limits: by depicting Muslims as savages, they said, *Charlie Hebdo* was promoting bigotry.

Both factions of PEN, Donohue said, were phonies. In October 1998, he led 2,000 demonstrators in the street outside the theater that featured “Corpus Christi,” a play that depicted Christ having sex with the apostles. “From the beginning,” he wrote in the November 1998 issue of *Catalyst* “the league has argued that the play should not be censored by the government but that the producers of the play should have cancelled it in the name of common decency.” On that same rainy night there were 300 counter-demonstrators: they came to protest the league’s constitutional right to freedom of speech. Among them was a contingent from the PEN American Center.

The other PEN phonies were the ones who didn’t want to honor *Charlie Hebdo*. They have no problem offending Christians, Donohue noted, but when it comes to bashing Muslims, they are horrified. The entire organization, he concluded, was corrupt.