

INTOLERANCE FOR FREE SPEECH IS SPIKING

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on growing intolerance for free speech:

There have always been extremists on the right and the left who are completely intolerant, and while both sides need to be condemned, the real danger comes more from the left. Not because the right-wing extremists are less intolerant, but because those on the left are more numerous *and* they occupy the command centers of our culture.

I know from a lifetime of working with those in education, activist circles and the media just how intolerant the left can be. Indeed, I could fill a book with my personal experiences. They have kept me from getting jobs, and have tried to get me kicked out of jobs, including this one. They are masters of the politics of personal destruction.

More objectively, we have the wholesale attacks on free speech and the destruction of property conducted by the likes of Antifa, the urban terrorists. Let's not forget about the Silicon Valley elites who gave us the cancel culture. We also have recent polling data that prove my point.

In 2020, a Cato survey found that 77 percent of conservatives, 64 percent of moderates, and 52 percent of liberals were afraid to say what they think. Why are conservatives the most afraid? It's not because the moderates are guilty of creating a "chilling effect" on the free speech of conservatives. We know who the guilty are.

An even more recent survey, conducted in February, and commissioned by the *New York Times* and Siena College, found that only 34 percent of Americans said they believed that all Americans enjoyed freedom of speech completely. It also

revealed that 84 percent said it is a “very serious” or “somewhat serious” problem.

As we shall see, Republicans and conservatives are the least likely to enjoy freedom of speech.

On several issues, respondents were asked, “Do you feel more free, less free, or as free as you did before to express your viewpoint in most situations on a daily basis today than you did 10 years ago?” What they found was striking.

When it comes to expressing yourself on politics, 28 percent of Democrats and 13 percent of Republicans said they felt more free; the figures for liberals and conservatives were 29 percent and 16 percent, respectively.

On the subject of religion, 33 percent of Democrats felt more free as compared to just 14 percent of Republicans; it was 32 percent for liberals and 18 percent for conservatives. We know from many studies that Democrats and liberals are much more likely to be secularists, therefore Republicans and conservatives, who are more likely to be religious, suffer the most.

The findings of the Catholic League survey, which were released in September, found that 62 percent of Catholics agree that “it is getting harder to practice your faith publicly in America.” While two out of three practicing Catholics (weekly and monthly churchgoers) say it is getting harder, even 58 percent of those who rarely or never go to church agree that it is.

When asked how free they are about discussing gender identity, the majority of Democrats (54 percent) said they felt more free today but only 20 percent of Republicans felt that way. Similarly, the figures for liberals and conservatives were 58 percent and 18 percent, respectively. That’s quite a difference. In other words, those who have the greatest reservations about gender identity are the most afraid of

speaking their mind.

When asked about race relations, more than twice as many Democrats (37 percent) as Republicans (15 percent) felt they were more free to discuss this issue today than they were 10 years ago. This suggests that those who don't follow the thinking set by elites on racial issues are seen as a problem.

None of this is hard to figure out. The ruling class has adopted the politics of the left, making it harder for conservatives and people of faith to speak their mind in public.

Further proof of the intolerant streak on the left can be ascertained by examining the responses to a question about the limits of free speech. "While I support free speech, sometimes you have to shut down speech that is anti-democratic, bigoted or simply untrue."

The poll found that 41 percent of Democrats and 16 percent of Republicans agreed with this statement; the figures were 39 percent for liberals and 25 percent for conservatives.

Notice that respondents were not asked if they supported the abridgement of speech for reasons that threatened public safety: the issue was speech that someone might object to, and that is a very different matter.

It is this kind of thinking that led the University of California, Berkeley, to recently create "Jewish-free zones" on campus, places where students can safely discuss support for Israel. That's just how sick this state of affairs has become. This proves a point I have long made: there is more free speech allowed in neighborhood pubs than in neighborhood colleges and universities.

We are at a serious juncture in American history. If people cannot express their political views—especially on college campuses—the entire nation is at risk.