

OPEN LETTER TO UNIV. OF VIRGINIA

Bill Donohue

This letter is in response to an anti-Christian incident that took place last month at the University of Virginia.

November 20, 2024

Ms. Nicole Thompson
Senior Compliance Director for Equal Opportunity and Civil Rights
University of Virginia
Office for Equal Opportunity and Civil Rights
O'Neil Hall
P.O. Box 400219
445 Rugby Road
Charlottesville, VA 22903

Dear Compliance Director Thompson:

I recently learned that you were taken aback when you fielded a complaint from a student who reacted with disdain to a hat worn by UVA student Simon Goldstein. The hat was adorned with the inscription, "Make America Christian Again." But your concern was not directed at the complaining student—it was directed at Goldstein. This is astonishing.

From reports I have read, you took the opportunity to ask Goldstein why he bought the hat and why he chose to wear it. More disturbing, you asked him if he could understand why some might "perceive that message negatively, and whether he had plans to make any changes." While no disciplinary action was taken, you clearly created a chilling effect on this student's freedom of expression and freedom of religion.

If a student objected to someone wearing a t-shirt with a picture of Martin Luther King on it, would it not be obvious that the person in need of counseling is the complainant? And would not the appropriate response be to ask that the student exhibit more tolerance to messages that he finds disagreeable? After all, in neither instance are we talking about patently obscene messages.

In First Amendment law this is called the "heckler's veto." If those who heckle speakers succeed in silencing those they disagree with, they have effectively vetoed that person's right to free speech.

Christian students on our nation's campuses are increasingly reluctant to express their beliefs, so intolerant are those who find their convictions offensive. This has to end. They are not second-class citizens.

One final comment. Did you ever ask the complaining student to practice greater tolerance for speech he finds disagreeable?

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

William A. Donohue, Ph.D.
President

cc: Emily Springston, Associate Vice President EOCR
Jenn Kabbany, College Fix

Contact Nicole Thompson: nm5j@virginia.edu