

# POPE FRANCIS DEFENDS RELIGIOUS FREEDOM



Bill Donohue comments on Pope Francis' remarks concerning religious freedom this morning at the White House:

Calling religious freedom “one of America’s most precious possessions,” Pope Francis this morning pointedly embraced the efforts of American Catholics, led by their bishops, to defend religious freedom against government encroachment.

The Holy Father spoke following President Obama’s welcoming address at the White House, in which the president detailed the horrific persecution of Christians and others in various parts of the world, and pledged to Pope Francis that “we stand with you in defense of religious freedom.” The President made no mention, however, of domestic attacks on religious freedom being perpetrated or supported by his own administration, such as the HHS mandate requiring religious entities to cover abortion-inducing drugs, or family-owned businesses being forced to participate in same-sex wedding ceremonies in violation of their religious beliefs.

Pope Francis made clear that the protection of religious freedom is a vital concern to Catholics in America.

“With their fellow citizens,” he said, “American Catholics are committed to building a society which is truly tolerant and inclusive, to safeguarding the rights of individuals and communities, and to rejecting every form of unjust discrimination. With countless other people of good will,” he said, “they are likewise concerned that efforts to build a

just and wisely ordered society respect their deepest concerns and their right to religious liberty. That freedom remains one of America's most precious possessions. And, as my brothers, the United States Bishops, have reminded us, all are called to be vigilant, precisely as good citizens, to preserve and defend that freedom from everything that would threaten or compromise it."

Pope Francis' words are both a message to President Obama and a summons to action for Catholics in America, to stand up courageously whenever religious liberty is threatened—here at home as well as around the world.