

RELIGIOUS LIBERTY AND “RELIGIOUS LIBERTY”

Let's contemplate a scenario: assume that the federal government tries to censor the *New York Times*, and that critics of the newspaper take it to task for complaining that their “free speech” rights have been violated. The *Times* would be justly angered at the suggestion that their First Amendment right to free speech was being discussed as if it were their so-called free speech rights. Well, here's how it handles the religious liberties of Catholics under fire from President Obama.

- *Times* reporter Laurie Goodstein wrote a story, “Bishops Open ‘Religious Liberty’ Drive” (11-15-11)
- An editorial slammed Mitt Romney for “promising to defend the Roman Catholic Church’s ‘religious liberty’” (2-2-12)
- An editorial discussed the “phony crisis over ‘religious liberty’” (2-11-12)

Bloggers and other newspapers also picked up on the “religious liberty” rights of Catholics (Pam's House Blend, 2-10-12; Ira Chernus, Religion Dispatches, 2-21-12; an editorial in Vermont's *Brattleboro Reformer*, 2-21-12).

The *New York Times*' game of dumbing down the religious liberty rights of Catholics even extended to mocking the title of pro-life leaders: Richard Doerflinger, the associate director of the Secretariat of Pro-Life Activities of the bishops' conference, was referred to in a news story as the “associate director of ‘pro-life activities.’”

It would be wrong to conclude that the *Times* always speaks derisively about religious liberty. In an editorial on Nov. 22, 2010, it pointedly said, “Mr. Obama respects religious liberty.” And on Sept. 19, 2011, it said, “Mayor Michael

Bloomberg rightly stood up for religious liberty.”

What was the issue? Mayor Bloomberg’s support for building a mosque at Ground Zero.