UNSEATING ROSS DOUTHAT

Bill Donohue comments on the strong reaction to an article by *New York Times* columnist Ross Douthat:

On October 18, the *New York Times* published a piece by Ross Douthat, "The Plot to Change Catholicism," that was critical of Pope Francis and his handling of the Synod of Bishops. On October 23, the *Times* printed several letters on his column, most of which were critical. Pretty routine stuff. Yesterday, however, a group of professors signed a letter that was pure boilerplate, lacing the columnist for his opinions.

It is a sign of insecurity when professors have to insist on turf credentials. They did just that by exclaiming that "Mr. Douthat has no professional qualifications for writing on the subject." It obviously doesn't matter to them that he is a best-selling Catholic author. Moreover, if "professional qualifications" are insisted on by these (mostly) theologians, why is one of the signatories a law professor?

When readers disagree with an op-ed, they write to the letters editor. But in this case, the professors went for the jugular, going right to the top: They wrote to the "Editor of the New York Times." Why? Their goal is not to offer another opinion; rather, it is to question Douthat's position as a regular op-ed contributor. That is why they wrote, "This is not what we expect of The New York Times." Read: We hold the *Times* to a high standard, and that excludes the reflections of conservative Catholics. This is not the voice of discerning Catholics—it is the sound of a herd.

Now we have the spectacle of *America* magazine's Jim McDermott jumping on board. He is delighted with the herd. He does not

see the irony in his comment objecting to a condition "in which whole groups of people are intimidated into silence." No, he'll settle for just one person.

Now I know it's been a rough month for all these folks (the letter was released just as the synod ended), but that is no excuse for intolerance. Freedom of speech cannot be sacrificed on the altar of theological correctness.