

# WASHINGTON POST CHAT

*At the height of the controversy over the Smithsonian exhibition, Bill Donohue was invited by the Washington Post to enter an online discussion with his critics. They posed the questions, and he chose which ones to answer. Below is a selection of the Q&A:*

**Washington, D.C.:** Mr. Donohue, I can't begin to say how angry and disappointed this censorship makes me. My simple question/comment is this: If you don't want to see this exhibit, don't go see it. Why do you think that you have the right to keep me from seeing it?

**Donohue:** Nothing I did constituted censorship, nor did I even ask that the vile video be pulled. Censorship means the government abridges speech—all I am asking is for the House and Senate Appropriations Committees to reconsider federal funding of the Smithsonian. My principle is this: if it is wrong for the government to pick the pocket of the public to promote religion, it should be equally wrong to pick its pocket to assault it.

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**Fairfax, VA:** What were the criteria used by you to ask that it be removed?

**Donohue:** The criteria I used were honesty and common sense. I know, as well as my critics, that if Muhammad were shown with ants eating him, Muslims would never allow the retort that it wasn't meant to offend. So what was this vile video? A Christmas gift to Christians. It was hate speech, pure and simple, and it should not be funded by the 80 percent of the nation which is Christian.

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**Washington, D.C.:** Will the committees consider withholding funding?

**Donohue:** I hope they will reconsider funding. After all, why should the working class pay for the leisure, e.g., going to museums, of the upper class? We don't subsidize professional wrestling, yet the working class has to pay for the leisure of the rich. Not only that, because the elites don't smoke, they bar the working class from smoking in arenas. This is class

discrimination and should be opposed by those committed to social justice.

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**Philadelphia, PA:** Actions like this make people more curious about the work—this spineless action by the Smithsonian will result in more people making an effort to see the work. Is that what you wanted?

**Donohue:** If someone wants to peddle hate speech disguised as art, let them do it on their own dime. Moreover, when the Chicago City Council ordered the police into a museum in the 1980s to take down a portrait of the black mayor, Mr. Washington (he was shown in his underwear), none of those branding me a censor said a word. I have never called for censorship, but I have asked legitimate questions regarding the propriety of funding hate speech directed at my religion.

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**Washington, D.C.:** Ants crawling on a crucifix is no different than ants crawling on a rock. They're both inanimate objects. Whether you're a member of organized religion or not, anyone with an open, intellectual mind is able to understand this.

**Donohue:** Fine. Then let the ants crawl on an image of Martin Luther King next month when we celebrate his day, and let the taxpayers underwrite it.

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**Washington, D.C.:** David Wojnarowicz's video was set in the days of the AIDS epidemic. He had been thrown out of his home when he came out, and had to survive in the streets. His art was about alienation, despair, rebellion and survival. When placed in context, you can see that this was not an assault on the Christian faith. Why do you deny us the opportunity for a conversation? The whole point of this exhibit was to confront and try to look behind the veil, not to change points of view but show that there other points of view.

**Donohue:** Someone should have gotten to him earlier and told him to stop with his self-destructive behavior and to stop blaming the faithful for his maladies.

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**Contradictions?:** You say that the government should not

promote or assault religion. So what happens when the National Christmas tree is illuminated?

**Donohue:** Christmas is a national holiday and the Christmas tree is a secular symbol.

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**Pittsburgh, PA:** How do you define the difference between art and anything that might be deemed offensive? The very nature of art is expression and individuality. How is this different than many other almost macabre images of the crucifixion, Jesus's suffering, or cruelty of man against man—all depicted in art.

**Donohue:** People in the asylum are expressive as well, and so are children in nursery schools. Should we subsidize them as well?