

TRUTH, FREEDOM OF SPEECH, & MODERN-DAY CENSORSHIP



INTERNATIONAL PRIVATE EXPERT MEETING
CO-SPONSORED BY

SUBSIDIUM-THE INTERNATIONAL CATHOLIC JURISTS FORUM
RALSTON COLLEGE, THE RUTH INSTITUTE, AVE MARIA SCHOOL OF LAW,
CENTER FOR FAMILY AND HUMAN RIGHTS (C-FAM)



THURSDAY- SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 25-27, 2025



THE UNIVERSITY CLUB OF WASHINGTON DC



THE BEACON HOTEL & CORPORATE HEADQUARTERS

ARTIST: NIKOLAI GETMAN [FORMER GULAG PRISONER]
TITLE: 'IN THE NKVD'S DUNGEON,' THE GULAG COLLECTION
LOCATION: VICTIMS OF COMMUNISM MUSEUM

CONCEPT NOTE

The purpose of this meeting is to explore ways to defend, in law and the public sphere, both freedom of expression and the common good. In terms of some possible strategies we will consider:

- **Defending the concept of truth itself**, advocating for the right to express it, and articulating it.
- Studying, understanding and explaining the nature of the processes, patterns, and behaviours that have brought us to the point that **censorship is being promoted by global elites from large democracies**.
- Working to **expose the lie** that elites wish to protect people from misinformation, disinformation, and hate speech.
- **Breaking the walls of propaganda-induced social isolation, fear of ostracism and related self-censorship** provoked by fear of expressing one's thoughts on issues such as identity politics, political correctness, media and social mob agitation and control through various means (e.g., de-platforming, firings, lawfare suits, de-banking).
- **Nominating judges and electing officials** that demonstrate a respect for the Constitution.
- **Converting** those who are promoting censorship.
- **Setting up think tanks** that promote free speech, **critically evaluating censorship tools, and planning education seminars**, conferences, and small discussion groups.

AGENDA

THURSDAY
SEPTEMBER 25, 2025
3:00 PM- 7:00 PM

3:00 PM

GREETINGS &
INTRODUCTORY
INTERVENTION

Stephen Blackwood
*Censorship Today, Understanding
the Challenges*

3:30 PM

PANEL I

THE FOUNDATIONS OF FREE SPEECH

A. Truth and Freedom

Daniel Gallagher
The Philosophical Foundations of Free Speech

Joseph Capizzi
Judeo-Christian Foundations of Free Speech

B. Freedom and Authority

Douglas Farrow (Virtual)
Recognizing Authority

COFFEE BREAK

Rev. Piotr Mazurkiewicz
Authoritarianism

C. Law and the Common Good

Michał Gierycz

How Law Serves the Common Good, What it Means for Global Governance

D. Subsidiarity and Solidarity

Iain Benson (Virtual)

Origins and Contemporary Aspects

6:00 PM

BREAK

7:00 PM

DINNER

KEYNOTE
Fulvio Di Blasi

AGENDA

FRIDAY
SEPTEMBER 26, 2025
7:30 AM to 7:00 PM

7:30 AM

MASS



Cathedral of St. Mathew
1725 Rhode Island Ave NW,
Washington, DC 20036

8:00 AM

BREAKFAST

9:00 AM

PANEL II

KEY THEMES

A. Historical Manifestations of Censorship

Carlos Casanova

*The Philosophical Roots of Propaganda
and Censorship in
Communism*

Robert Fastiggi

*The Theological Roots of Censorship in
the Catholic Church: Past
(The Index) and Present*

B. The State and Censorship

Gudrun Kugler

*Between Truth and Taboo: A Catholic
Politician's Experience in the Arena*

C. Language, Law, Technology and Censorship

Iain Benson (Virtual)

*Hate Speech as a Legal Category:
Challenges and Controversies*

Juan Carlos Riofrio

*Technical Challenges in Testing
Discriminatory Speech*

DISCUSSION

11:00 AM
TO
11:30 AM

COFEE BREAK

11:30 AM

D. Health and Censorship

Fulvio Di Blasi

COVID-19 Vaccinations and Censorship

E. Sex, Gender Ideology and Censorship

Jennifer Roback-Morse

Propaganda, Censorship and the Loss of Truth: Why the Sexual Revolution Needs Power and Propaganda

Rev. Paul Sullins (Virtual)

Censorship Regarding Abortion, Conversion Therapy, and Transgenderism

DISCUSSION

1:00 PM
TO
2:00 PM

LUNCH

2:00 PM

PANEL III

KEY INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

A. Europe

Paul Diamond

Censorship in the UK: The Muslim Grooming Gangs as a Case Study

José Luis Bazán

Self-Censorship: Is Free Expression at Risk in the European Union?

B. Cuba

Jason Poblete (Virtual)
*Beyond Silence: How Decades
of Institutionalized Censorship in Cuba
Reveals a Global Crisis of Rights*

3:00
TO
3:30 PM

COFFEE BREAK

C. Africa

Marcela Szymanski
*Censorship Concerning the Persecution and
Genocide of
Christians: Nigeria as a Case Study*

D. The United Nations Organization

Stefano Gennarini
*Censorship Regarding Faith, Family and
Life: The Madness and
Methodologies*

Jane Adolphe
*The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and
Regular Migration (GCM): The
Depoliticization/Censorship Approach*

6:00 PM

BREAK AND OPEN DISCUSSION

7:00 PM

DINNER

KEYNOTE

Aaron Kheriaty

AGENDA

SATURDAY
SEPTEMBER 27, 2025
7:30 AM- 12:00 PM

7:30 AM

MASS



Cathedral of St. Mathew

8:00 AM

BREAKFAST

9:00 AM

PANEL IV

STRATEGY DISCUSSION

MODERATOR

Austin Ruse

- What are some strategies to counter the censorship problem of today?
- Regarding the formation strategy to publish the conference proceedings, are other topics needed to be addressed? If so, which ones? Who should be approached to write them?

Sean Nelson

Strategies to Combat Censorship in Europe

Rev. Piotr Mazurkiewicz

Liberalism vs. Democracy

12:00 PM

**CLOSING
REMARKS**

CONCEPT NOTE (LONG VERSION)

THE FOUNDATION OF TRUTH AND FREEDOM OF SPEECH

"The only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others" (John Stuart Mill). Professor Douglas Farrow notes that this famous maxim of John Stuart Mill, whether sound or unsound, has been met today with an explosive "harm" industry that justifies all manner of coercion. Freedom of religion and conscience, privacy rights and rights to assemble, free speech and academic freedom—all are among the casualties. Censorship and other forms of authoritarianism are on the rise, putatively for the sake of democracy and the common good.

But what is the common good? Why are promoting basic rights and freedoms essential to promoting it? Some say that technological advances necessitate the curtailing of rights and freedoms, as if technology were somehow more important than the persons or subjects of those rights. States and corporations and international organizations are claiming authority to dispense with old rights and introduce new ones; even to decide for everyone what counts as truth or must be dismissed as untrue.

The totalitarian trajectory has been noted by many. Responses, however, have tended to fall back on the individualism of either the libertarian or the classical liberal, leaving untouched the aporia between freedom and the common good. The core of Catholic social teaching—solidarity and subsidiarity—addresses that aporia. So do its foundations in natural law, the dignity of the person, and the *libertas ecclesiae*.

Political philosopher Piotr Mazurkiewicz, in Politics, Law & Religion in Times of COVID, points out that totalitarianism is endemic to modern democratic society since it coincides with the tendency of one political party to gain the upper hand:

"Both Hannah Arendt and Chantal Delsol point out that totalitarianism would not be possible without at least partial support from social and cultural elites, such as Martin Heidegger and Carl Schmitt, for example...The spread of totalitarian ideology, according to Arendt, is accompanied by institutional changes in the structure of the state, which is treated by the party as private property or something owned by the party."

He continues:

"With the adoption of the 'doctrine of the state of emergency,' and its underlying rationale, there is a 'temporary' suspension of certain civil rights, the abolition of opposition political parties, the introduction of a constitutional monopoly of mono-party, the establishment of a charismatic party leader as the head of the state, the real union of the state administration and the centralized party bureaucracy. Arendt stresses that characteristic of totalitarianism is not so much the seizure of key positions in the state apparatus by the party elite, but the coexistence of two sources of power: the party and the state."

He goes on:

"There is a bizarre duplication of positions, which means in practice the coexistence of (apparent) state constitutional mechanisms and (real) party administration together with the constant shift of power between party institutions by party leaders."

In this way, there is political dualism: party dominance with a façade government created for foreign use. There is also a system of physical and psychological terror that is exercised by the secret police, while the power of the party bureaucracy is apparent. As a rule, terror is not directed against strictly defined enemies of the regime, but against arbitrarily selected social groups, making it impossible to protect oneself from harassment by choosing a particular behavior. As a result, everyone feels potentially threatened.”

What about the Judeo-Christian basis of truth, love and freedom of speech?

THE CENSORSHIP PROBLEM TODAY

World politics, especially on the left, has shown a declining interest in freedom of expression. Consider the intervention of American Vice President J. D. Vance when he spoke to Europeans at the Munich Security Conference in February 2025, and expressed his worries about the retreat of Europe from fundamental goods shared with the United States of America such as protection of freedom of speech. Similarly, a few months later, Mark Rubio, US Secretary of State, promoted freedom of expression as a cornerstone of what it means to be American when he announced the closure of the State Department’s Counter Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (R/FIMI), formerly known as the Global Engagement Center (GEC), which had been used as a tool to censor Americans.

While the laws protecting freedom of speech remain in many countries, breaches of freedom of speech are rampant across the globe. For example, some are wrongfully stopped from continuing their studies at universities for saying that homosexual acts are sinful on their private social media accounts; street preachers continue to be wrongfully arrested and receive payouts from local police; many are ruthlessly bullied on social media platforms for disagreeing with the transgender movement while professors have unlawfully lost their jobs for claiming that biological men are not women and still others are wrongfully arrested for “misgendering” (noting someone’s biological sex as opposed to subjectively chosen identity) and others dragged through the courts for citing bible verses or refusing to make cakes celebrating sinful lifestyles and subjective sexual identities.

Moreover, while speech that incites violence, terrorism or antisemitism is illegal, protests in favor of Palestinians after the barbaric attacks on Israeli citizens in Israel by Hamas, a terrorist group has been illuminating. In 2024, Harvard President Claudine Gay resigned amid controversy over allegations of plagiarism and backlash over her congressional testimony about antisemitism on campus, wherein she claimed that genocide, an inherently evil act and crime against humanity, was something that required context. One might query: if it is contextual, who is qualified to make the complex judgements about a person’s motivations? The same goes for “hate speech,” usually defined so broadly as to be devoid of all meaning with serious implications for Christians when they voice their belief concerning the immorality of cohabitation, same-sex ‘marriage,’ homosexual acts and so forth.

What about the underlying foundation for freedom of speech, once thought for the purpose of communicating the truth and promoting right action in accordance with the truth? If speech is simply a means to an end in a power game, rather than an expression of truth then there is no need to listen to other viewpoints with the goal of determining the truth, an assumption that has led to the demise of mainstream media, which has aligned itself with political allies and renounced the original purpose of its existence, reporting the truth of things to the general public.

What does one make of the adult pornography and freedom of speech debate currently taking place in the face of efforts to require digital identification requirements to protect children? Certainly, the truth about its negative effects on adults as well as on children are not being discussed.

Missing discussions about the meaning of truth will continue to have a negative effect on Christians. After all, according to the *World Watch List 2025* released by the organization Open Doors, jihadist and authoritarian restrictions against Christians have increased globally over the past year, especially in Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa: “more than 380 million Christians face high levels of persecution and discrimination for their faith.” Any survey of the loss of free speech is part of a larger survey of the decline of Western civilization, the foundations of liberal democracy are being questioned, and deemed hollow and meaningless without the Christian moral foundation.

Of course, of grave concern for Americans should be the information gained from the examination of discovery process in key court cases that disclose a federal government censorship regime coordinated at the highest levels. It includes patterns of lies and hiding of evidence together with the outsourcing of censorship operations to shell corporations and other private companies staffed with former CIA and FBI agents. Members of Congress have requested Big Media to disclose government pressure to remove the speech of Americans from the said platforms. (e.g., Google, Instagram, Meta, Microsoft, Snapchat, TikTok, and X (formerly Twitter)). Responding to changes on the political (e.g., Trump administration) and legal landscape (SCOTUS case that found affirmative action programs discriminatory), Meta has reversed course, and in so doing has followed others (e.g., McDonald’s, Southwest Airlines, Toyota, Walmart) to advocate for free speech and the dissolution of DEI teams, which characteristically trammled free speech in the name of diversity, equality and inclusion. Meta CEO, Mark Zuckerberg, announced the dismantling of fact-checkers admitting that they “had become too politically biased,” in favor of a community notes system. Time will tell whether the new technology is another name for censorship.

Culturally, the hegemony of left-wing culture that has led to these censorious extremisms, especially during the pandemic, has led to a global backlash that has been seen in the recent political victories of the center-right, most recently that of the Trump administration. This is an interesting change of direction that shows the vigor of human nature when its requirements of freedom and dignity are excessively denied.

WHO IS PROMOTING CENSORSHIP?

Understanding that freedom is the cornerstone of democracy, it is alarming to hear elites attack the First Amendment right to free speech. For example, the Biden-Harris administration routinely used the power of law enforcement to censor free speech during the COVID era in collusion with Big Tech Media platforms. On the campaign trail, Kamala Harris promised to shut down free speech, in particular Elon Musk’s X platform, which he took over from Twitter and transformed into a free speech platform. Now that Trump has won, it is the European Commission that is similarly threatening to shut down Musk’s platform if he does not agree to submit to state censorship.

In 2024, Former American Secretary of State John Kerry gave a speech at the World Economic Forum, in Davos Switzerland, wherein he described the First Amendment of the United States Constitution as a “major block” in the face of “disinformation” and the ability to build consensus around an issue in democracies. He called for change through elections of the right people who would implement controls on what can be said or read by the people. Similarly, Former American Secretary of State Hilary Clinton is an advocate for criminalizing free speech.

While certain global elites are pushing censorship, surveys show that the message is seeping into the larger culture, at least in some countries. In 2017, *Whitestone Insights* based in the UK found that “nearly a quarter of young people would consider banning the Bible if they thought it contained ‘hate speech.’” Similarly, at *The King’s College London Policy Institute* in 2022 more people are self-censoring compared to two years ago.

Censorship is today promoted above all by a new oligarchy aiming at a new world order. In *Politics, Law & Religion in Times of COVID*, Fulvio Di Blasi underlines the following.

“The concept of democracy requires the ultimate sovereignty to belong to the people of that state, but the political and financial processes of globalization have shifted real sovereignty elsewhere... Money and politics have always been best friends, and both have learned that the control of today’s world lies with those who are able to manage its communication channels and bureaucratic structures.”

He continues:

“Today there are a very few super rich who own most of the wealth on the planet and have formally decided to decide its fate. And what does an oligarchy of this type do to take control of the planet? First of all, it generates meeting opportunities in which to agree on common strategies, as happens, for example, at the *World Economic Forum*. Then control of the communications hardware (mainstream media and social networks) is ensured in order to standardize the world to its own truth and censor the opposite and uncomfortable truths. Third, it takes control of international political agencies such as the UN and the WHO, bribes or buys politicians, scientists, and technicians, and exploits emergencies (more or less real or fake) with which to direct populations and politicians towards certain choices with the same ease with which fear of spanking makes children obey.”

WHAT ARE THE MANY FACES OF CENSORSHIP IN HISTORY AND TODAY?

Controlling speech has always been a strategy of war, and a particular tool of tyrants and authoritarian governments who detest open conversations, and the ability of people to gather informally and formally in order to talk openly and pursue the truth. The Catholic Church has also engaged in censorship (e.g., Index (1590-1966)). The new term, self-censorship, has been developed to describe those protecting themselves from anti-freedom of speech activists, while the terms “censorship, misinformation and disinformation” are used as social-control linguistic tools.

The extreme political use of censorship and its totalitarian implications have sadly been seen during the pandemic which has been notoriously controlled by a global power elite. In *Politics, Law & Religion in Times of COVID*, Fulvio Di Blasi notes the following.

“Indeed, the administrative state usurped democratic self-governance with its carefully designed mechanisms of checks and balances. Working with private partners (big tech, big media, big pharma, big business), state bureaucrats together with experts used the tools of fear-mongering, censorship, and administrative regulations to force populations to comply with mask wearing, lockdowns (including places of worship), restrictions on expression, assembly, travel and vaccination campaigns, with its frequent denials of religious exemptions and gaslighting of victims suffering adverse effects from the vaccines.”

He continues:

“The measures also encouraged ostracization, humiliation, and punishment of the unvaccinated through shaming, constant testing, and job loss. Censorship campaigns through public-private partnerships (e.g., bureaucrats and big tech) ensured the cancellation of opposing viewpoints, demonized persons espousing them, and discouraged scientific debate while strict controls were placed on economic life that choked supply chains and hindered the movement of people with the assistance of surveillance, even invasion of homes and forcible detention that led to starvation for its occupants, in countries such as China.”

WHAT ARE THE CASUALTIES OF MODERN-DAY CENSORSHIP?

There is no doubt that censorship is promoted and appreciated by those who have a substantially anti-democratic conception of power and who unduly exploit democratic tools to promote their own vision of the world in contrast with the classical liberal one. In fact, in this way, democracy is "used" to demolish its foundations, starting with the fundamental rights of the person, which must yield to the new totalitarian ideologies.

Censorship therefore goes hand in hand with cancel culture and the international movement that seeks to undermine Christian culture and civilization. Rewriting history, taking over communication tools and promoting censorship under the pretext of fighting disinformation are aspects of the same fight against classical Christian and liberal culture. The primary victims of this fight are therefore Christians and all so-called conservative people, who place the values of religion, of the nation and of the family at the center of their lives.

A TRIBUTE TO CHARLIE KIRK

Iain T. Benson PhD. JD, FRSN Professor of Law, University of Notre Dame Australia

Vale Charlie Kirk:

The murder, by an assassin's bullet, at a Utah University campus, on September 10, 2025 of young American "influencer" Charlie Kirk has sent waves of shock and grief around the world.

Here in Sydney Australia, so far away in distance, a vigil was held last evening, September 12 2025 in the largest city park. At it, many hundreds of Christians gathered to pray, sing and express gratitude for the life of this remarkable young man.

Only 31 years of age, Charlie Kirk had for years debated hot button political issues on hundreds of University and College campuses in and outside the United States. His fame and influence were spreading beyond "Turning Point America," the group he founded when he was 18 years old and that he grew into a multi-million-dollar political engine that was particularly influential in the super-heated world of American politics.

Most recently, he spoke at the famous union Society of Cambridge University in England; an experience he likened to a "snake-pit." In the "take no prisoners" cancel culture that typifies so much of the worst of contemporary public discussion, Kirk stood out for his brilliance, respect, and balanced presentations. His stance on issues such as abortion, transgenderism, and DEI made him many enemies as well as admirers.

We can only be grateful that this talk at Cambridge and so many of his speeches at hundreds of campuses and other settings have been recorded for posterity in a variety of social media settings. He will teach from beyond the grave. We need these exchanges because Charlie Kirk was a remarkable exponent of courage and common sense.

He was a conscientious Christian who spoke from an informed biblical and natural law perspective. His courtesy in dealing with often antagonistic student questioners on campuses was a remarkable aspect of his character and credibility.

Many of the responses to his horrific shooting, from those who wished him ill, show both his remarkable courage, prudence, and moderation but also the continuing hatred and irrationality that continues to lay just below the surface of so many so-called "progressives," today.

There is a need for many more Charlie Kirks. It was famously attributed to Tertullian (160-240) that the "blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church." There's little doubt that Charlie Kirk, courageous and well aware of the risks he was taking, is a martyr of the contemporary Christian faith and the signs are there, already within days, that his witness and murder may well lead to something perhaps just short of a full-scale revival as many young people reflect afresh on what Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote of as "The Cost of Discipleship."

How broad and deep any reflection and revival go remains to be seen, but the early signs are that his example in life: his courage, charity, and goodwill, have had an influence on hundreds of thousands if not millions of people around the world many of them young people. Here, indeed, was a man! We can all be grateful for his witness and draw from his example. What a marvelous legacy to leave for one who shall forever, by his death, remain young.

RIP Charlie Kirk.