

OPPOSITION NOTES

AN INVESTIGATIVE SERIES ON THOSE WHO OPPOSE
WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

The Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights: Neither Religious nor Civil

INTRODUCTION

Most American Catholics would look at you blankly if you asked them to enumerate the number of times in their lives they had experienced anti-Catholic sentiment. But Bill Donohue lives in another America—one where anti-Catholicism is alive and well and spreading like wildfire. It is the America of the Catholic League, a small, reactionary, conservative Catholic organization that has practiced the art of media manipulation to claim majority status for what is a very minority worldview.

In Donohue's own words, the Catholic League specializes in "public embarrassment of public figures who have earned our wrath."¹ In addition to embarrassment, the organization uses intimidation, bullying and distortion to suppress critics of the Catholic church, the Vatican, and the church's many controversial policies. It is an ally of the radical religious right, helping to promote its anti-reproductive rights, anti-gay rights, pro-censorship agenda by labeling progressive Catholics as "anti-Catholic" and using its "Catholic" nomenclature to try and undermine support for the Democratic Party among religious voters.

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Why does the Catholic League exist? What are its tactics? And who are its allies?

HISTORY

The Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights was founded in 1973 in Milwaukee by Father Virgil C. Blum, a conservative Jesuit priest and professor of political science at

KEY FINDINGS

- From the beginning, the Catholic League was marked by a schizophrenic attitude that would become its hallmark: It simultaneously argued for the right of conservative Catholics to impose their values in the public sphere, while arguing against the right of others in the public sphere to offer legitimate criticism of Catholics or Catholicism.
- The Catholic League tactics are i) manufacture controversy; ii) try to intimidate the “enemy”; iii) bully the opposition; iv) complain early and often; v) attack popular culture; and vi) silence the loyal opposition.
- In utilizing these tactics it actively embarrasses, intimidates, bullies and distorts reality to suppress critics of the Catholic church, the Vatican, and the church’s many controversial policies.
- Catholic League president Bill Donohue is in a constant quest for the next “controversy” to keep his particular brand of reactionary Catholicism in the media spotlight.
- Once Donohue has found a “controversy” he uses wildly inflated rhetoric that is sure to inflame—either in print or in one of his infamous cable TV news appearances—and then stages a protest or takes out an ad in the *New York Times* to attract attention. Then he waits for the seemingly ever-receptive press to show up.
- When it comes to peddling its special brand of inflammatory rhetoric, the media and arts have been a special target of the Catholic League since the mid-1990s.
- The number of examples of anti-Catholicism claimed by the Catholic League grew from 140 in 1995 to 320 in 2006, yet the only thing that seems to have actually increased is the League’s definition of anti-Catholic activity.
- As thin-skinned as Donohue appears to be when it comes to any one else referring to Catholicism, Jesus or the Virgin Mary, apparently his rules don’t apply to himself and his friends.
- Unable to explain away the Catholic church’s embarrassing pedophilia scandal, Donohue tried to turn it back on progressive Catholic activists, claiming that they were exaggerating the scandal to try and bring down the church.
- When the media cover the tempests he manages to whip up from time to time, few ever stop to examine the basis for his objections—they just cover the dog fight.
- Donohue claims that the Catholic League has some 350,000 members and that number is often used by the media when referencing the organization’s supposed clout. These numbers, however, appear to be a highly inflated picture of the Catholic League’s actual membership.

Marquette University, following the *Roe v. Wade* decision, to fight legalized abortion and what he saw as the removal of religious values from American public life. Blum was a pioneer of the “school choice” movement to allow public funding of parochial school education. He believed that anti-Catholicism was widespread and increasing and that Catholics needed a “civil rights” organization. This, despite the gains made by Catholics in almost every sector of life in the second half of the 20th century, including the election of a Catholic president, the rise of numerous Catholics in politics and business and the end of formal discriminatory practices against Catholics.

The Catholic League immediately set itself up on the right flank of traditional conservatives in order to dictate its concept of morals to society—including the suppression of abortion, homosexuality and dissent against the Catholic church. “The high priests of the religion of secular humanism are striving mightily to drive religion out of human affairs—out of education, business, the professions, and in recent years most pronouncedly out of government. It is our position that religious-based values are fundamental to all aspects of human affairs,” Blum explained in 1982.²

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Blum wasn’t much of an administrator or organizer. As a result, the early efforts of the Catholic League were scattershot. It litigated on behalf of Catholics whom it believed had been discriminated against and rallied periodically against what it said were anti-Catholic media portrayals, such as ABC’s steamy mini-series *The Thornbirds* about a Catholic priest who fathers an illegitimate child, but attracted little attention.³

Prominent board members rebelled against Blum’s “lackadaisical” management style in the mid-1980s, and the organization was in turmoil in the years before his death in 1990.⁴ When retired Rear Admiral John Tierney was appointed president of the organization in October of 1990, he admitted that he had never heard of it until he was asked to become president.⁵ Over the next few years, the organization remained in crisis as a series of leaders came and went, revenue declined and membership plummeted from 50,000 to 30,000.⁶

In 1993 the board appointed William A. Donohue to replace Blum as president. Donohue came to the Catholic League from the Heritage Foundation, where he specialized in attacks on the ACLU, and had connections within the conservative community. He attracted a list of prominent Catholic conservatives to the Board of Advisors, including Mary Ann Glendon, Michael Novak, Linda Chavez and George Weigel.

Donohue quickly hit upon a strategy to increase the profile of the beleaguered organization. The Catholic League protested an ad on New York City buses that showed Madonna (the singer) next to the Madonna in an ad for VH1, the music TV network, which read: “VH1, the difference between you and your parents.” Donohue argued that the city bus was public property and as such no religious symbolism was allowed; however, “if it’s used with Madonna in a form of blasphemy, it is acceptable. Suddenly it becomes freedom of speech. The double standard is an outrage.”⁷

The charge that the ad ridiculed Catholicism was itself ridiculous; the Virgin Mary is a widely recognized cultural symbol throughout the world and the ad made only a mild joke that was not at her expense. But instinctively most people are loath to be accused of religious insensitivity, and apparently the Metropolitan Transit Authority is no exception. Rather than question whether the ad was really anti-Catholic, it pulled it to avoid further controversy. Donohue

became a minor media celebrity with New York City media as a result of the “controversy,” giving numerous radio and newspaper interviews. Soon afterwards, he was being ushered into a private meeting with New York Cardinal John O’Connor, whose attention had been caught by the protest.

Now Donohue just needed a bigger target to get national media attention. It came along in 1995 in the form of the movie *Priest*, a small art film which dealt with priests struggling with, among other things, celibacy and homosexuality. The Catholic League launched a high-profile campaign condemning the movie, which was produced by Disney subsidiary Miramax. Donohue claimed that only Catholics could be so defiled—political correctness wouldn’t allow groups like Jews or African Americans to be

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maligned. The organization ran ads in the *New York Times* denouncing Disney as anti-Catholic and called for a boycott of the organization. National media attention of the “controversy,” which had been single-handedly created by Donohue, soon followed. Donohue had found his métier. The following years would find Donohue in a constant quest for the next “controversy” to keep his particular brand of reactionary Catholicism in the media spotlight.

TACTICS

The Catholic League’s tactics can be summarized as attack early and often—and loudly. Donohue obsessively mines popular culture, politics and the public sphere for self-identified infractions against traditional Catholicism, Christianity or “common decency” that can be manufactured into his trademark

“controversies.” Most of his examples are laughable; those that aren’t are legitimate forms of free speech or artistic expression which he twists into attacks on Catholicism. As John M. Swomley, a noted researcher on the religious right noted, the Catholic League “redefines religious and civil rights as opposites to those normally understood as constitutional rights.”⁸ In other words, an individual’s freedom of speech or expression is trumped by Donohue’s right not to be offended by speech that challenges his brittle worldview.

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Tactic #1: Manufacture Controversy and They Will Come

The 1995 movie *Priest*, as well as the 1997 television series *Nothing Sacred*, came along at a time of earnest exploration of the deep contradictions inherent in the Catholicism put forth by the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Long-simmering questions about sexuality—from the wisdom of requiring priests to remain celibate, to the

Popular culture was engaging in a vigorous debate about what it meant to be Catholic and how this was to be reconciled with very non-Christian attitudes toward marginalized groups such as homosexuals. For the keepers of traditional, hierarchical, patriarchal Catholicism, this was a dangerous debate. Donohue’s job was, and is, to shut down the debate itself over these issues that threaten to cleave the Catholic church. To do this, Donohue’s rhetoric insists that: a) non-Catholics have no right to participate in this debate and any non-Catholics who do so are inherently anti-Catholic (this despite the widespread influence that the Catholic church has in society at large on non-Catholics through its provision of education and health care, and vigorous lobbying of public officials on issues of concern to the church, such as abortion); and b) Catholics who engage in such debate are by definition “bad” Catholics who are out to destroy the church and therefore have no legitimate role in the debate.

Their artistic merits notwithstanding, both *Priest* and *Nothing Sacred* used priests as characters to examine the challenges facing the church and its evolution, or stasis, in response to these challenges. They dealt with sensitive subjects—homosexuality, abuse, celibacy and the very meaning of faith—that were taboo until fairly recently. People disagree about how the church should handle these issues and how central they are to the ability of the hierarchy to continue to claim to represent the Catholic people, but few would disagree that they are issues that need to be addressed. In a review in the Catholic magazine *America*, Richard Blake noted that *Priest* “could generate a healthy debate for churches and media alike to join.”⁹

But Bill Donohue was not looking to create “healthy” debate. He labeled any attempt to explore these difficult issues as an attack on Catholicism, again playing into most people’s natural reluctance to insult religious beliefs and their lack of understanding of the history of healthy

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subculture of homosexuality that had existed semi-openly within the church, to reproductive choice for women—were openly being questioned by Catholics and non-Catholics alike. Hints of the clergy sexual abuse scandal that would rock the church were also gaining attention.

dissent within the Catholic church. He claimed that *Priest* was “designed intentionally to insult the Catholic church and Catholics nationwide” and to suggest that the “depraved condition” of the priests portrayed is a result of the warped nature of the church.¹⁰ He claimed that the director of the movie was “an anti-Catholic bigot,”¹¹ although she herself said the movie was both a celebration of Catholicism and a protest “against a hierarchy adhering to old-fashioned rules.”¹²

Donohue’s outlandish claims of Catholic bashing quickly attracted media attention, stoked by the Catholic League’s threatened boycott of Miramax’s parent company Disney and high-profile ads in the *New York Times*. The Knights of Columbus sold its 50,000 shares of Disney stock. Republican Sen. Bob Dole, who was running for president, singled out the movie on a *Meet the Press* appearance as evidence that Hollywood lacks “family values.”¹³

Soon the *Washington Post*, the *New York Times* and other media outlets were covering the “controversy” that Donohue had single-handedly manufactured. While the US Catholic Conference urged Catholics to ignore the movie and not give it any free publicity, Donohue stoked the rhetorical fires, leading to New York Cardinal John O’Connor, who hadn’t even seen the movie, to make headlines when he called it “as viciously anti-Catholic as anything that has ever rotted on the silver screen.”¹⁴

In the end, Miramax released the movie, although it did reschedule a planned opening on Good Friday, undoubtedly to larger audiences than would normally have occurred for an art film because of the publicity offered by the Catholic League. But Donohue had perfected a media strategy that he would use again and again: generate controversy by claiming that something that was examining or questioning the Catholic church or its policies was actually a despicable form of anti-Catholicism. He knew the media

couldn’t resist a controversy; all he had to do was make one up.

Tactic #2: Try to Intimidate the “Enemy”

Donohue struck again two years later when ABC aired *Nothing Sacred*, a TV series about a young priest struggling with celibacy and his faith. This time he added another tactic that would become standard for the Catholic League—attempted intimidation. Even before the show debuted, Donohue was priming the controversy machine, telling readers of the League’s journal *Catalyst* to contact ABC to “express their concerns” about the show because it might portray a priest at odds with some church teaching.¹⁵ Then the League went after potential sponsors for the show, threatening to brand them as anti-Catholic and conduct a wide-scale boycott.

The Catholic League ran an intimidating ad in the advertising industry publication *Ad Age* headlined: “Thinking about Advertising on ABC’s “Nothing Sacred”? THINK AGAIN.”

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The ad went on to threaten to organize the organization’s claimed 350,000 members “to conduct a campaign against the sponsors that they won’t forget... A word to the wise: take this campaign seriously and move your ad money to some other show.”¹⁶ To back up its threat, the Catholic League kept a running list of “persistent” ad sponsors on its Web site.¹⁷

Because the show was generally respectful to Catholicism, Donohue had a hard time playing the anti-Catholic card. So he trotted out what would become another standard Catholic League claim—that the show should be cancelled because it was “pure

Key Catholic League Tactics

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- Try to intimidate the “enemy”
- Bully the opposition
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propaganda for Catholic malcontents and those who have an animus against Catholicism.”¹⁸ He went so far as to claim that ABC had a political agenda in running the show: “The reason that the show has always been treated differently by ABC is due to its birth: its womb is political. In other words, propaganda dressed as entertainment has been the essence of ‘Nothing Sacred’ *de novo*.”¹⁹

The creator of *Nothing Sacred* insisted it was not a polemic but an exploration of the characters’ “humanity and inner lives.” Four Catholic bishops, as well as numerous priests and nuns, signed an advertisement in support of the show and

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challenging the charge that it was anti-Catholic. The ad, which was signed by Bishop Raymond Lucker of New Ulm, Minnesota, and Auxiliary Bishops Philip Francis Murphy of Baltimore, Peter Rosazza of Hartford, and Thomas Gumbleton of Detroit, said Catholic leaders cannot “stand idly by while a wonderful television show is unfairly maligned.” The ad went on to say: “There are many voices of Catholicism in America. The Catholic League, which has orchestrated an advertiser boycott of the program, does not represent them all. In fact, by their own numbers, they represent less than one percent. They do not speak for most American Catholics. They do not speak for us. We believe ‘Nothing Sacred’ has wit, intelligence, and compassion and can serve as a positive vehicle for discourse.”²⁰

Lucker soundly rejected the idea that the show was anti-Catholic. “I don’t find people offended by it,” he said, adding, “Donohue makes it sound like he’s speaking for every Catholic in the country, but he’s really just promoting a conservative agenda. It’s not everybody else’s position.”²¹

Eventually ABC pulled the show due to low ratings. The Catholic League, however, was quick to take credit for the demise of the show and tout it as a demonstration of its considerable power. It claimed it had driven 34 advertisers from the show; however, only two, Isuzu and Weight Watchers, confirmed they had pulled their ads due to viewer protest.^{22, 23} In fact, many of the sponsors who pulled ads from the show said they did so because of poor ratings. Both AT&T and Sears, two major sponsors that the Catholic League took credit for driving away from the show, said the threatened boycott had nothing to do with their decision; Sears said it had never even heard of the Catholic League.²⁴

Donohue is constantly threatening to sic the organization’s 350,000 members on people or organizations that don’t toe the League’s line. When Wal-Mart changed “Christmas” to “holiday” on its Web site, Donohue threatened a nationwide boycott of the retailer for “banning” Christmas.²⁵ When the Democratic National Committee refused to remove a link to Catholics for a Free Choice (as the organization was known then) from its Web site, Donohue threatened to try and undermine the Democratic Party with critical Catholic voters by branding it “anti-Catholic” if it didn’t “dump” CFFC from its Web site: “Let me be clear about what we want. ...If the DNC continues to list CFFC anywhere on its web page, it does so at its own peril: the Catholic League will be the DNC’s greatest nightmare in 2004... only a fool would doubt us.”²⁶

In any case, a review of the Catholic League’s membership figures suggests it actually has less than 100,000 members (see Membership and Financials). Nor has it ever demonstrated the ability to pull off a wide-scale boycott. Usually it threatens a boycott and then calls it off shortly later when the targeted party makes some minor concession it can trump as a “victory,” such as when Wal-Mart re-renamed the “holiday”

section of its Web site the “Christmas” section.²⁷

Tactic #3: Bully the Opposition

Bill Donohue is an acknowledged master of rhetorical bullying. No attack is too harsh; no language too extreme. The rise of the Catholic League coincided with the increase in 24-hour cable news programming and its insatiable appetite for controversy. Bill Donohue is made-to-order for the high-decibel histrionics of cable news, where he is a frequent guest, especially on conservative shows. He made 23 guest appearances on TV news shows in 2004 alone. Despite his claims that Catholicism and Christianity aren’t respected, he frequently has made inflammatory remarks about people of other faiths—especially Jews and Muslims—and has perfected diatribes against progressives and homosexuals:

“Hollywood is controlled by secular Jews who hate Christianity in general and Catholicism in particular. It’s not a secret, OK? And I’m not afraid to say it.” (*Scarborough Country*, Dec. 8, 2004)²⁸

“Look, there are people in Hollywood, not all of them, but there are some people who are nothing more than harlots. They will do anything for the buck. They wouldn’t care. If you asked them to sodomize their own mother in a movie, they would do so, and they would do it with a smile on their face.” (*Scarborough Country*, Feb. 9, 2006)²⁹

“After all, 15-year-olds, they go to abortionists. They get their babies killed without parental consent. The new Puritans [those criticizing *The Passion of the Christ*] don’t seem to worry about that. They like gay sex... The same people in the *New York Times* who say this movie, I don’t think it’s not really right for kids, they have no problems when it comes to sodomy. It’s smoking they don’t like and Catholicism.” (*Scarborough Country*, Feb. 25, 2004)³⁰

“Now, in this country, we are civilized. We don’t appreciate it when somebody sticks it to you in the name of freedom of speech, sir. We condemn it. But over there, they take the uncivilized approach. And then they wonder why so many people don’t trust the Muslims when it comes to liberty, because they will abuse it.” (*Scarborough Country*, Feb. 9, 2006)³¹

“The gay community has yet to apologize to straight people for all the damage that they have done—for contaminating the blood supply in New York City and around the country. And I find it amazing that, when people are acting so morally delinquent, that they’re asking for more rights at the same time.” (*Scarborough Country*, April 11, 2005)

In a 2002 segment on MSNBC’s *Alan Keyes Is Making Sense* discussing the pedophile controversy within the Catholic church, Donohue attacked progressive Catholic activist Sister Maureen Fiedler and Mary Louise Cervone of Dignity/USA, the nation’s largest gay Catholic membership organization:

William Donohue (after Keyes lectures Sister Fiedler then abruptly asks Donohue a question, at which time Fiedler starts to respond to inaccuracies in Keyes’ statement): “I got the question! I got the question, lady! Hey, you with the earrings, hold up!” (Donohue subsequently used gestures like twirling his finger around his ear on-camera to mock Fiedler and Cervone when they spoke).

Donohue (shouting at Cervone and referring to a priest accused of child sexual abuse who was a former member of Dignity/USA): “YOU’RE in denial! [Paul] Shanley’s your boy! Shanley is your boy; he’s not my boy! That’s your boy! You’re concerned about children but you’re in favor of partial-birth abortions! Tell it to somebody who you can sell the Brooklyn Bridge to! Don’t tell it to me, lady!”³²

“As a Christian, a Catholic priest, I stand in opposition to any and all hateful speech used by anyone, especially when they do so in the name of Jesus. I do not believe that one can claim to be a disciple of Jesus and at the same time deride, mock, insult, or threaten violence against another person. Mr. Donohue clearly makes hateful remarks as well as violent comments towards Mr. Cavallaro and as such he insults God, his fellow Catholics and humanity for that point... One cannot proclaim the love of Jesus while cursing one’s neighbor...To continually use hateful, crude, violent language is indicative of what dwells within one’s heart. Mr. Donohue speaks only for himself and not the Catholic church.”

—**Father Jeff Gatlain (John Amato, “A Catholic priest stands tall against Bill Donohue,” *Crooks and Liars.com*, April 5, 2007).**

Former Catholics for Choice President Frances Kissling, no stranger to cable news shows, admitted that after a few run-ins with Donohue she didn’t want to appear with him because she felt threatened by him: “He never physically threatened me, but I felt like I was in the presence of an abuser,” she said.³³

Mark Silk, director of Trinity College’s Center for the Study of Religion in Public Life, said of Donohue’s tactics: “He’s a thug. He reverts to bullying because he thinks that’s what the job entails.”³⁴

Recently, Donohue’s hate-filled rhetoric appears to be inciting some of his “followers” to cross the line beyond rhetorical bullying. A blogger fired from John Edward’s presidential campaign after being attacked in a series of press releases from the Catholic League for her provocative statements about religion reported receiving numerous physical and sexual threats (see *Playing Politics*).

When Donohue whipped up a fury of indignation against a life-sized, anatomically correct chocolate statue of Jesus by artist Cosimo Cavallaro that was to be displayed in the Lab Gallery in a New York hotel—calling it “one of the worst assaults on Christian sensibilities ever”—the hotel cancelled the *My Sweet Lord* exhibition after receiving death threats.³⁵ Matt Semler, the gallery’s creative director, who resigned in protest, said the exhibition was the victim of “strong-arming from people who haven’t seen the show, seen what we’re doing. They jumped to conclusions completely contrary to our intentions.”³⁶

Tactic #4: Complain Early and Often

Volume is a key element of the Catholic League’s tactics. By complaining vigorously against every perceived slight against Catholicism—and often expanding its already broad definition of anti-Catholicism to include anything perceived as anti-Christian—Donohue makes it seem as if the world is awash in anti-Catholic bigots. Donohue is a one-man flurry of letters to the editor, writing

to newspapers around the country to correct any perceived slight against Catholics. Each year, the League collects all of its complaints into an annual report that it mails to lawmakers, the press and opinion leaders to show, in Donohue’s words, the “extent and depth of anti-Catholic sentiment in society.”³⁷ A review of complaints in the 1995 report alone shows how broad Donohue’s definition of anti-Catholic is:

Republican Gov. Christine Todd Whitman of New Jersey was called anti-Catholic for not halting a state-funded university’s production of *Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All for You*, a play mocking the strict, old-fashioned Catholic church.

The *New Yorker* was called anti-Catholic for running a cover illustration that showed an Easter bunny being crucified against a federal tax form.

Ann Landers was called anti-Catholic for calling the pope a “polack” who is “very anti-woman” and for suggesting that the pedophile scandal in the church might cause it to rethink mandatory celibacy.

The Population Institute was called anti-Catholic for circulating a fundraising letter calling the Vatican the “anti-contraceptive Gestapo” for its efforts to block consensus on the need for increased contraceptive access for women in the developing world at the Beijing Conference on Women.

The Hard Rock Cafe in Las Vegas was called anti-Catholic because it had a restored Gothic altar in one of its bars.

As outrageous as many of these charges are, they did have a chilling effect on legitimate criticism of the Catholic church. Ann Landers was forced to apologize and write a column calling the pope “heroic.”³⁸ The Hard Rock Cafe removed the altar after receiving a threat of a boycott of all its properties. Several

key board members of the Population Institute resigned or were forced to distance themselves from the organization, including Sen. Daniel Inouye of Hawaii, Sen. Barbara Boxer of California and Rep. Robert Torricelli of New Jersey.

Year after year, the Catholic League amasses a hodgepodge of supposed examples of anti-Catholicism in its annual report to illustrate what it claims is a growing tide of anti-Catholicism. The number of examples of anti-Catholicism in the report grew from 140 in 1995 to 320 in 2006, yet the only thing that seems to have actually increased is the League's definition of anti-Catholic activity, which has become increasingly broad. In 1997, the report accused proponents of Oregon's assisted suicide law of being anti-Catholic because they had the temerity to "challenge the Catholic Church's position on the subject."³⁹ In 1999, it accused the *New York Post* of anti-Catholicism for referring (accurately) to a young man convicted of manslaughter as a "former altar boy,"⁴⁰ and in 2001 it castigated a Seattle-area county executive for issuing a memo requesting that county employees use "religion-neutral language" when referring to the Christmas holiday.⁴¹ Other "sins" against Catholicism in the same report included a soap company that manufactured a soap called "Mother Soaperior: Cleanliness is Next to Godliness" and an ad for Lipton onion soup mix that showed a man waiting in line for communion holding a bowl of onion dip.⁴² Violations in the 2005 report included a school that cancelled a performance by a Christian rock band, an article in *Maxim* magazine about how to meet women in church, and the slighting of *The Passion of the Christ* by the Academy Awards when "films based on perverts like JM Barrie (*Finding Neverland*) and Alfred Kinsey (*Kinsey*)" and movies about euthanasia (*Million Dollar Baby*) and "Latino thug" Che Guevara (*The Motorcycle Diaries*) received nominations.⁴³ Movies were still a focus in 2006, with the Catholic League

promoting a major (failed) effort to have a disclaimer run at the start of the movie adaptation of *The Da Vinci Code* stating that it was a work of fiction and condemning *Black Christmas*, a horror movie set at Christmas time.⁴⁴

From art exhibitions depicting religious imagery, to plays examining the Catholic church either seriously or satirically (the plays *Corpus Christi* and *Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All For You* appear multiple times in every report), to opponents of school voucher plans and public officials who question privileges accorded to the Catholic church or religions in general, to just about anything involving Madonna or greeting

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cards with nuns, the reports detail exaggerated and imagined incidents of anti-Catholicism, as well as legitimate criticisms of the church and hierarchy spun as anti-Catholicism, in an attempt to suggest that anti-Catholic activity is a pervasive problem.

Many of the examples are impossible to confirm as bona fide instances of anti-Catholicism, for instance, church statues that have been vandalized or school plays being renamed "holiday" plays instead of Christmas plays. Few religious experts, however, would qualify most instances reported by the Catholic League as anti-Catholic. Jay Dolan, a professor of history and author of *The American Catholic Experience*, said of the League: "When there's blatant discrimination against Catholics, somebody should denounce it. But it's just not as widespread as they make it seem, and their reactions are so overblown as to be unhelpful."⁴⁵ He went on to say the League's reaction "borders on paranoia," noting that anti-Catholic activity in the United States peaked before the Civil War.⁴⁶

As thin-skinned as Donohue appears to be when it comes to any one else referring to Catholicism, Jesus or the Virgin Mary, apparently his rules don't apply to himself and his friends. Deal Hudson, a prominent conservative writer and advisor to the Bush administration was forced to step down from the editorship of the conservative Catholic magazine *Crisis* after the *National Catholic Reporter* published an article showing that he had been dismissed from Fordham University a decade previously on morals charges. He had invited a "vulnerable freshman undergraduate" to join a group of students at a bar in Greenwich Village and ended the night exchanging "sexual favors" with her in his office.⁴⁷ Donohue downplayed the serious charge in a press release (later completely removed from the Catholic League Web site), dismissing it as "made almost a decade ago by a drunken female he met in a bar."⁴⁸ In a bizarre attempt at a joke at the expense of the immaculate conception, the same press release read: "Effective today, the Catholic League has a new requirement for all future employees: all employees must show proof of being immaculately conceived, that is, they must demonstrate that they were conceived without sin."⁴⁹

Tactic #5: Attack Popular Culture

When it comes to peddling its special brand of inflammatory rhetoric, the media and arts have been a special target of the Catholic League since the mid-

exhibition like *Sensation*, which famously featured a painting of the Virgin Mary with elephant dung on her breasts. In 2006, about one-third of the 320 reported instances of anti-Catholicism in the League's annual report were in the arts and entertainment, everything ranging from mild jokes to a *Good Morning America* poll about whether priests should be allowed to marry that was open to non-Catholics for voting, to an episode of the TV show *Without a Trace* in which an FBI agent called exorcism "hocus pocus."⁵¹

In the late 1990s, the Catholic League made headlines across the country for its protests of the play *Corpus Christi*, which retold the story of Jesus through the life of a gay man, and the *Sensation* exhibition. In both cases, the League held dramatic demonstrations during which it claimed it spoke for a majority of outraged Catholics and drew widespread media coverage with gimmicks like handing out "vomit bags" at *Sensation*. In both cases, Donohue generated lots of media coverage but didn't achieve his objective—although many in the arts community worried about the long-term effect on artistic expression and public funding for the arts. *Corpus Christi* was temporarily cancelled as a result of the protests, but rescheduled after a counter-protest from the art community. Egged on by the Catholic League's labeling of the exhibition as "blasphemous," then-New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani threatened to cut the city's funding to the Brooklyn Museum of Art and reclaim the city-owned building that housed it if *Sensation* were not terminated or moved. But the museum's trustees held fast and the exhibition went forward.⁵²

As far as Donohue is concerned, there is no such thing as art for arts' sake. Works of art designed to be critical of the Catholic church or which incorporate universal, cultural symbols such as the Virgin Mary are merely a disguise for attacks on Catholics. "There is something terribly perverse going on in the artistic

As far as Donohue is concerned, there is no such thing as art for arts' sake.

1990s. Donohue admitted as much when he said that attacking popular culture is "faster and easier than dealing with lawyers."⁵⁰

Nothing attracts attention to the League better than an attack on a high-profile film like *Dogma* or *The Da Vinci Code* or a controversial art

community. The need to offend Catholics is so deep and so sick that it can only be described as pathological... What is perhaps most disturbing about this campaign to attack Catholics is the cowardly attempt to hide this bigotry under the cover of artistic expression," he said of the play *Corpus Christi*.

Donohue's attacks on the arts are based on the assumption that only "good" Catholics—meaning traditional, obedient Catholics in agreement with the Vatican—can say how Catholic symbolism should be used. He claims for himself the right to censor art which does not agree with his concept of Catholicism. Yet when the media cover the tempests he manages to whip up from time to time, few ever stop to examine this basic premise of his objections—they just cover the dog fight.

Tactic #6: Silence the Loyal Opposition

Donohue seems to believe that Catholics who dare disagree with the Vatican or the official teaching of the church have no right to claim the mantle of "Catholic" or to air publicly their disagreements with the church. In Donohue's view, groups seeking to reform church policies, such as Catholics for Choice or Call to Action, are by the mere act of dissent disqualified from taking part in any discussion about Catholicism or the church. He further holds that the media should ignore the opinions of these Catholics in favor of what he considers "good" Catholics. He charges that anyone who gives voice to these reform-minded Catholics is a co-conspirator in efforts to destroy the Catholic church and is therefore anti-Catholic. Donohue is in effect holding the media responsible for suppressing these groups that he himself hates and fears—precisely because they seek positive changes to the ossified form of Catholicism that he holds dear.

In 1995, *60 Minutes* ran a segment on Call to Action, a Catholic reform group seeking changes in the priesthood such as

married and women priests. They requested interviews with a number of US bishops but were turned down. Catholic League board members Mary Ann Glendon and George Weigel were interviewed for the segment, but the producers felt the interviews didn't work with the report and decided not to use them. The program was blasted by the

Apparently it is for Bill Donohue to say who has and has not earned a platform within the Catholic community.

Catholic League for "giving succor to bigots" and "allowing extremists an uncontested opportunity to rail against the Catholic church."⁵³ According to Donohue, *60 Minutes* had given "the disaffected a platform that they have not earned within the Catholic community."⁵⁴ Apparently it is for Bill Donohue to say who has and has not earned a platform within the Catholic community.

No group has drawn the Catholic League's ire more than Catholics for Choice. In an August 2000 fundraising letter, Bill Donohue announced a campaign to discredit CFC with the media. Donohue's problem with CFC is that the media often turn to it for an alternative Catholic voice, which, according to him, they should not do because CFC does not have in his mind an "authentic membership" (see the section on "Membership" for a discussion about how authentic the Catholic League's membership is) and because the US bishops have said that CFC is not an "official" Catholic organization—although CFC has never claimed to be an "official" Catholic group, but simply a voice for the many Catholics who disagree with some teachings of the church.

Two years later, the Catholic League tried mightily to whip up a "controversy" over the fact that the Democratic National Committee listed CFC on its Web site under the "Catholic section." The Catholic League claimed it was wrong for the DNC, or the media, to

accept CFC as a prochoice Catholic group but should recognize it as “anti-Catholic” because it opposes the Vatican and is often critical of the church hierarchy and its policies. While CFC’s views on contraception, abortion and reforms in the church are in line with the majority of Catholics, Donohue claimed it was an outrage for the DNC to consider CFC representative of its Catholic base. The League took out ads and wrote to all the Democrats in the House and Senate to pressure then-DNC Chair Terry McAuliffe to disassociate itself from CFC, threatening: “We are prepared to spend considerable resources informing the public of what the DNC considers its Catholic base to be...it is both insensitive and ignorant for the DNC to associate itself with Catholics for a Free Choice [as the organization was called at the time].”⁵⁵

Shortly thereafter, the Rev. Msgr. William P. Fay, the general secretary of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops, wrote to McAuliffe to inform him that the US bishops did not consider CFC a Catholic organization and suggested that the DNC instead list the USCCB on its Web site as “a connection to the Catholic voice in the United States.”⁵⁶

When a spokesperson for the DNC replied that the organization had reviewed the CFC Web site and found

When a year-long campaign failed to stir up the expected protest, the Catholic League ran an ad on the op-ed page of the *New York Times* in September of 2003 asking: “Why are the Democrats insulting Catholics?” and threatened to “conduct a year-long campaign aimed at educating every Catholic in the nation regarding the invidious relationship.”⁵⁹ But instead of launching a tirade of protest against the DNC, the League’s campaign failed to remove the link and the League became a target for protest.⁶⁰

Another attempt to silence the loyal opposition involves the pedophile scandal that has dominated news about the church over the past few years. Unable to explain away the Catholic church’s embarrassing pedophilia scandal, Donohue tried to turn it back on progressive Catholic activists, claiming that they were exaggerating the scandal to try and bring down the church: “For the past few decades, so-called progressive Catholics have been itching for large-scale reform in the Catholic church. What they object to most of all is the church’s teaching on sexuality. Representative of the fringe, they are now seizing the moment to install their agenda...Make no mistake, the Catholic bashers are loving this moment.”⁶¹

Overall, Donohue has been an apologist for the church on the issue of clergy sexual abuse and echoed the conservative line that the problem was not one of pedophilia or mandatory celibacy but of homosexuality: “For 2000 years, the Catholic Church has been the subject of countless lies, especially on issues that touch on sexuality. Today, the biggest lie is that the Church suffers from a ‘pedophilia’ problem. And now that the Vatican has released its document on homosexuals in the priesthood, look for the lie to grow like a cancer.”⁶²

In advance of two major studies on the extent of sexual abuse committed by Catholic priests, the Catholic League produced a study which appeared to be trying to whitewash the scandal by claiming that the rate of sexual abuse in

Unable to explain away the Catholic church’s embarrassing pedophilia scandal, Donohue tried to turn it back on progressive Catholic activists, claiming that they were exaggerating the scandal to try and bring down the church

that it was not anti-Catholic, Donohue replied by likening the CFC Web site to the Ku Klux Klan’s Web site.⁵⁷ When that bit of demagoguery wasn’t enough, the League ran an ad in the Capitol Hill newspaper *Roll Call* insinuating that the DNC was “anti-Catholic” because it had a Web site link to CFC. According to Donohue, the DNC was “tacitly endorsing Catholic bashing.”⁵⁸

the church was no higher than in other religious denominations: “the incidence of the sexual abuse of a minor is slightly higher among the Protestant clergy than among the Catholic clergy, and it is significantly higher among public school teachers than among ministers and priests.”⁶³ The study also claimed that “almost all the priests who abuse children are homosexuals.”⁶⁴ In fact, studies have shown that many child molesters don’t have an adult sexual orientation at all, so they cannot be meaningfully described as homosexuals or heterosexuals. Their sexual attraction is based on age, not gender, so the data suggest that gay men are not any more likely than heterosexual men to molest children.⁶⁵

PLAYING POLITICS

Under the Catholic League’s 501(c)(3) nonprofit status, it is not allowed to engage in political activity. However, on several occasions it has engaged in high-profile campaigns to attack Democratic candidates, often working indirectly to discredit people who work for them, and giving Republicans a much easier ride. Donohue strenuously asserts that the Catholic League is bipartisan but a review of its activities raises questions about that assertion. Members of the Catholic League’s Board of Directors are well-known figures from the conservative right, largely affiliated with the Republican Party, including L. Brent Bozell III, Linda Chavez, Dinesh D’Souza, Robert George, Mary Ann Glendon, Alan Keyes, Thomas Monaghan, Michael Novak, Kate O’Beirne and George Weigel.⁶⁶

Except for a handful of times when Donohue has spoken out about blatant anti-Catholic activities or sentiment by evangelical Protestants, such as a letter circulated among evangelicals in Iowa slamming GOP presidential hopeful Sen. Sam Brownback for converting to Catholicism,⁶⁷ his forays into politics

have almost exclusively attacked Democrats or furthered the conservative Republican agenda. He even gave a virtual free pass to then-Governor George W. Bush when he visited the notoriously anti-Catholic Bob Jones University in his 2000 campaign for president, complaining that Bush’s opponent, John McCain, made too much of it.⁶⁸ In addition, the Catholic League advertises on the conservative Republican Web site GOPUSA, which forwarded a Catholic League recruitment letter to its e-mail list that trumped the importance of the upcoming presidential election, where “religion is bound to be an issue.”⁶⁹

Even when 2008 Republican presidential candidate John McCain was endorsed by Rev. John Hagee—a notorious anti-Catholic bigot—Donohue’s criticism was easily muted. After calling Hagee the “biggest anti-Catholic bigot in

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the evangelical community,”⁷⁰ Donohue condemned McCain’s embrace of the pastor, whose descriptions of the Catholic church included phrases like “the Great Whore” an “apostate church,” the “anti-Christ” and a “false cult system.” But unlike his merciless attacks on Kerry and other Democratic candidates where he called for people to be fired or for an individual to be repudiated, Donohue simply called for McCain to “retract his embrace of Hagee.”⁷¹ After several days, McCain issued a pseudo-apology, simply rejecting certain comments, not Hagee himself: “I repudiate any comments that are made, including Pastor Hagee’s, if they are anti-Catholic or offensive to Catholics.” Donohue’s reaction?: “As far

as the Catholic League is concerned, this case is closed.”⁷²

Donohue has worked hard to undermine the credibility of the Democratic Party and its candidates with Catholics (see section above on the Catholic League’s badgering of the DNC to disassociate itself from Catholics for Choice). The attacks on the 2004 Democratic presidential candidate Sen. John Kerry began as soon as it was clear that Kerry would be the candidate. As a

In October, shortly before the election, he said on *Hardball* what even the Catholic hierarchy couldn’t say: “I’m saying if a Catholic votes for Kerry because they support him on abortion rights that is to cooperate in evil.”

Catholic, Donohue was uniquely qualified to try and discredit Kerry; it was more difficult for the GOP’s evangelical allies to attack a Catholic without being called anti-Catholic.

Donohue began fishing for issues to entangle Kerry in the question of the authenticity of his Catholicism. In April of 2004, Donohue issued a series of press releases questioning whether Kerry was “contravening church teaching” by receiving communion because he married his second wife, Teresa Heinz, in a civil ceremony and didn’t seek an annulment of his first marriage until after the marriage.⁷³

In June of 2004 Kerry hired Mara Vanderslice as director of religious outreach. Donohue wasted no time in slamming her because of her liberal credentials, which included “attending a Quaker school known for its adherence to pacifism” and taking part in protests against the World Trade Organization and the World Bank. He basically called her a communist, concluding that “her resume is that of a person looking for a job working for Fidel Castro.”⁷⁴ The attacks by the Catholic League embarrassed the Kerry campaign. In response, it silenced Vanderslice, undermining its efforts to do genuine religious outreach.⁷⁵

When Kerry held that he personally believed that life begins at conception and was opposed to abortion but would not try to legislate his personal beliefs, Donohue called it “morally outrageous and ethically indefensible” that Kerry was “prepared to do absolutely nothing to safeguard innocent human life at every stage of development.”⁷⁶ When, in an interview with ABC’s Peter Jennings, Kerry made a reasonable distinction between the beginning of life and fetal personhood, Donohue compared his logic to the notorious Dred Scott decision that slaves were not people.⁷⁷

However, when Catholic Republican GOP hopeful Rudolph Giuliani recently clarified his prochoice stance, Donohue merely derided his stance as “incoherent” before assuring members of the Catholic League that if Giuliani “appoints the kind of judges he says he will appoint, it is not likely they will uphold the wholly contrived right to abortion-on-demand.”⁷⁸

When the left cried foul over Catholic bishops’ involvement in electoral politics after several said they would not allow Kerry to receive communion because of his prochoice stance, the Catholic League took an ad out in the *New York Times* accusing the “cultural elites” of trying to censor clerics. While the ad defended the right of Catholic bishops to insert themselves in electoral politics because abortion is a “public” issue, the ad stated: “No non-Catholic has any business lecturing Catholics on the house rules of the Catholic church.”⁷⁹

Donohue also went on conservative cable talk shows to try and discredit Kerry with Catholic viewers. In April 2004 he told viewers on *Scarborough Country*: “There’s nobody in the United States Senate who has a more radical voting record on abortion than John Kerry. He’s never found an abortion that he couldn’t justify...Well, first of all, the guy [Kerry] is an idiot. He doesn’t even know there never was a [Pope] Pius XXIII in the first place.”⁸⁰ In October, shortly before the election, he said on

Hardball what even the Catholic hierarchy couldn't say: "I'm saying if a Catholic votes for Kerry because they support him on abortion rights that is to cooperate in evil."⁸¹

Having successfully stirred up controversy over Kerry's religious outreach director by pointing out that she was a liberal, Donohue then attacked the Rev. Brenda Bartella Peterson when she was appointed the DNC's director of religious outreach in July 2004. As soon as the appointment was made, the Catholic League "decided to find out who this woman is."⁸² What they found was that Peterson, an ordained Disciples of Christ minister and head of the Clergy Leadership Network, an organization of progressive clergy organized to oppose the Bush administration, had joined 31 other religious leaders in signing an amicus brief supporting an atheist's attempt to have the words "under God" removed from the Pledge of Allegiance under the principle of the separation of church and state.

The Catholic League put out three press releases about Peterson in three days. The first declared the Democrats "0 for 2 in appointing a senior religious liaison," comparing Peterson to a "gay basher" hired to "reach out to homosexuals."⁸³ The second showed how closely Donohue hews to the conservative GOP line when it decried Peterson for saying that "paying taxes is a way of loving your neighbor."⁸⁴ The third release, headlined "DNC's Religion Advisor Unmasked," summed up Donohue's findings.⁸⁵

The same day, both CNN and the *Washington Times* did stories on the pledge "controversy." The *Washington Times* ran an article headlined "Democratic adviser backed atheist in suit" in which it noted that the Clergy Leadership Network was "trying to oust President Bush and undermine religious conservatives" and in which Donohue charged that "the elites are making choices that are anti-religious" which "shows that the Democrats place no priority on appealing to people of faith."⁸⁶

Unfortunately, like the Kerry team before it, the DNC allowed the Catholic League to define who was acceptably "religious" without making a case for progressive religious values. Once the news stories broke, Peterson was forced to resign for fear that the pledge "controversy" would be a distraction to the Kerry campaign. The Democratic

Rev. Brenda Bartella Peterson said that the Kerry campaign "didn't really understand [that] Donohue...was a member of the religious right intent on discrediting people of faith who signed on with Kerry."

Party had allowed Donohue to create and control a narrative which asserted that Democrats did not have authentic religious values and, as a result, were inept in reaching out to religious voters. Peterson later confirmed that the Democrats had allowed themselves to be bullied by Donohue. "The campaign didn't really understand who Donohue was or where he fit on the Catholic religious continuum," she said, noting that he was "a member of the religious right intent on discrediting people of faith who signed on with Kerry."⁸⁷ She said that if it hadn't been her signature on the amicus brief, "Donohue would have found something else."⁸⁸

With the approach of the 2008 presidential election, Donohue is wheeling out his well-worn tactics for another go. In February of 2007, in a news release entitled "John Edwards hired two anti-Catholics," the Catholic League demanded that John Edwards' campaign fire two recently hired campaign bloggers because of provocative commentary they had written before they were hired about the Catholic church and conservative Christians.⁸⁹ Amanda Marcotte had written that the church's opposition to contraception forced women "to bear more tithing Catholics," while Melissa McEwan had referred to President Bush's "wingnut Christofascist base" and "repeatedly used profanity in demanding

the religious conservatives stop meddling with women's reproductive and sexual rights."⁹⁰ Donohue labeled the women "anti-Catholic, vulgar trash-talking bigots."⁹¹

The story was quickly picked up by the *New York Times*, the Associated Press, CNN and MSNBC. While the media accounts were quick to feature Donohue's charge that the bloggers were

In the days that followed, Marcotte received hundreds of misogynistic, violent, hate-filled e-mails inspired by Donohue's campaign against her.

"anti-Catholic" and offer spicy excerpts from the blogs, there was no examination of whether the blogs were genuine examples of religious bigotry or merely strong opinions. Nor was there any examination of who Bill Donohue was—and his history of outrageous statements—and if he could be said to fairly represent Catholic opinion in the United States.

When Edwards said he would not fire the bloggers, Donohue turned to intimidation: "We will launch a nationwide public relations blitz that will be conducted on the pages of the *New York Times*, as well as in Catholic newspapers and periodicals. It will be on-going, breaking like a wave, starting next week and continuing through 2007...What Edwards did today will not be forgotten."

Within a little more than a week, both bloggers had quit the campaign; Marcotte after her "e-mail inbox began to fill up with vitriolic messages, some of them promising violence."⁹² In the days that followed, she received hundreds of misogynistic, violent, hate-filled e-mails inspired by Donohue's campaign against her.⁹³

THE "WAR" ON CHRISTMAS

With his trademark attacks on popular

culture failing to stir up as much press coverage as in the days of *Priest*, Donohue has had to develop new strategies to attract attention. Enter the "war on Christmas." The Catholic League has included various "attacks" on Christmas—school children being forced to celebrate "holiday" pageants instead of Christmas plays, nativity scenes being removed from public property, baby Jesuses stolen from crèches—in its annual reports since 1994. Around 2000, the Catholic League began reporting on the "forced secularization of Christmas" as more merchants and corporations moved to make holiday celebrations inclusive.⁹⁴

In 2004, the radical right began to crystallize around the "war on Christmas" as Fox News anchor John Gibson released the book *The War on Christmas: How the Liberal Plot to Ban the Sacred Christian Holiday Is Worse Than You Thought*. The Heritage Foundation and Fox News' Bill O'Reilly began hyping the "war on Christmas," which O'Reilly called part of a "secular progressive agenda...to get Christianity and spirituality and Judaism out of the public square" in order to promote "legalization of narcotics, abortion at will, [and] gay marriage."^{95, 96}

In 2004, Donohue told the *Washington Post* that he believed that there was an increase in vandalism of nativity scenes, and that he "can only see it as part of the trend of Christian-bashing and trying to stamp out Christmas."⁹⁷ In 2005, the Catholic League added a "War on Christmas" section to its annual report on anti-Catholicism, providing readers with a laundry list of schools that had switched to holiday pageants or seasonal decorations, towns with inclusive public holiday displays, and retailers that had replaced "Christmas" trees with "holiday" trees. The same year, Donohue announced a boycott of Wal-Mart because it had replaced the word "Christmas" on its Web site with "holiday" and had told a woman who complained about it that the organization was trying to be inclusive.⁹⁸ Two days

later the “boycott” ended when Wal-Mart changed its Web site back to “Christmas.”

MEMBERSHIP AND FINANCIALS

Donohue claims that the Catholic League has some 350,000 members and that number is often used by the media when referencing the organization’s supposed clout. These numbers, however, appear to be a highly inflated picture of the Catholic League’s actual membership.

According to an interview that Donohue did with the *National Catholic Reporter* in 1997, some 200,000 of these “members” are people who at one time or another gave money to the organization but aren’t card-carrying members.¹⁰³

According to Donohue, there are about 140,000 members who contribute regularly, but he counts every check as one and one-half members on the assumption that many “members” are couples, which leaves a grand total of about 94,000 members at that time.¹⁰⁴

One can be sure that a more-than-tripling of its membership in the intervening years would have been heralded on every possible occasion.

The Catholic League is organized as a 501(c)(3) public charity. It asserts that it does not receive money from the Catholic church and is completely donor driven. The Catholic League’s 2005 990 Form filed with the Internal Revenue

Relationship with the Church

The Catholic League claims to be a completely member-supported, lay nonprofit. It has no formal affiliation with the Catholic church; however, it rents its offices from the Archdiocese of New York. Several prominent bishops have spoken out in favor of the Catholic League’s work and urged Catholics to join:

“The Catholic League performs an invaluable service in defending the Faith. All too often, the Church and her faithful are misrepresented and even slandered in contemporary society. However, the Catholic League always stands ready, willing and able to challenge those who would malign us and our beliefs. Ever vigilant, the Catholic League does what other lay organizations hesitate to do—protect the religious and civil rights of Catholics according to the provisions of the United States Constitution. I am happy to assure the Catholic League of my support and esteem.”

—*Cardinal Edward Egan*
*Archbishop of New York*⁹⁹

“I encourage you to join the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights which defends not only the interests of Catholics, but of all victims of anti-religious bigotry.”

—*Cardinal Roger Mahony*
*Archbishop of Los Angeles*¹⁰⁰

“The Catholic League has the courage to speak up candidly and forcefully for the Church when circumstances call for fighting the good fight. The League should be on every Catholic’s short list of essential organizations to support.”

—*Most Rev. Charles Chaput*
*Archbishop of Denver*¹⁰¹

“The Catholic League has done much to ensure that the Church’s positions are presented clearly and fairly. Too often those who do not understand the Church or Her teachings are the interpreters of the doctrines and events in the life of the Church. The work of the League is important in the mission of the Church which must teach the hard truths of the Gospel in season and out of season.”

—*Cardinal Sean O’Malley*
*Archbishop of Boston*¹⁰²

According to an interview that Donohue did with the *National Catholic Reporter* in 1997, some 200,000 of these “members” are people who at one time or another gave money to the organization but aren’t card-carrying members.

Service reported \$2.5 million in direct public support. If that is divided by \$30, which is the cost of annual membership, it produces just over 83,000 members. Of the \$2.5 million it received in 2005, the Catholic League spent approximately \$807,000 on fundraising—or a third of its

total public revenue.¹⁰⁵

The Catholic League has received some support from conservative foundations in the past, including the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, the John M. Olin Foundation, and the William E. Simon Foundation, but appears today to receive most of its funding from individuals.¹⁰⁶

While the Catholic League claims the problem of anti-Catholic activities is increasing, which would suggest that more Catholics would be moved to join

and the Catholic League have is sometimes real. From art exhibitions that have been cancelled, to campaign operatives who have been fired, to media figures who have been forced to apologize for daring to mention the Catholic church in a critical way, Donohue is only effective when fear or ignorance is allowed to trump common sense and freedom of expression. The sheer number of complaints registered by the Catholic League can have a chilling effect on authentic dialogue about the future of the Catholic church and its role in society. The organization's impact would be muted if those caught in its snare would take a moment to examine the charges, rather than react blindly or rashly for fear of offending some nonexistent constituency that Donohue supposedly represents.

The Catholic League uses embarrassment, intimidation, bullying and distortion to suppress critics of the Catholic church, the Vatican, and the church's many controversial policies. It also serves as an attack dog for the radical right, helping it to promote its anti-reproductive rights, anti-gay rights agenda, and uses its "Catholic" status to try and undermine the Democratic Party with religious voters.

American Catholics support pluralism, diversity and the freedom to criticize important and powerful institutions such as the Catholic hierarchy. Most American Catholics realize that the days of outright anti-Catholic bigotry are long gone and are willing to allow their religion and church to be fairly critiqued in art, politics and the media. When people listen to the Catholic League, they are listening to a radical voice from the far right with an agenda that is not in keeping with the values of American Catholics.

The Catholic League serves as an attack dog for the radical right, helping it to promote its anti-reproductive rights, anti-gay rights agenda, and uses its "Catholic" status to try and undermine the Democratic Party with religious voters.

the organization, its income seems to be declining. It reported more than \$3.5 million in income in 1999, \$3.2 million in income in 2000 and 2001, \$2.8 million in 2002, just under \$3 million in 2003, and \$2.7 million in 2004, before dropping to \$2.5 million in 2005.¹⁰⁷ Its 2006 report shows a significant increase, the majority of which seems to have come from a large donation, obscuring the amount which came from individual donors.

AFFILIATES

The Catholic League has a small network of affiliates. According to its Web site, affiliate offices are located in Ann Arbor, MI; Baltimore, MD; El Paso, TX; Long Island, NY; Los Angeles, CA; Pittsburgh, PA; and Rockford, IL. Most of the affiliate offices appear to be "one person" shops.¹⁰⁸

CONCLUSION

While most of Bill Donohue's examples of anti-Catholic bigotry are fabricated or wildly exaggerated, the impact that he

Key Individuals

Board of Directors

The Catholic League has a 17-member Board of Directors. Most members of the board are local, New York-area conservative Catholic and antichoice activists. Key members are profiled below.

William Donohue

Donohue is the president and CEO of the Catholic League. He earns a salary of just over \$300,000 per year.¹⁰⁹ He earned a doctorate in sociology from New York University and taught for 15 years at La Roche College. He is the author of *The Politics of the American Civil Liberties Union* (1985), *The New Freedom: Individualism and Collectivism in the Social Lives of Americans* (1990), which was written while Donohue was a Bradley Resident Scholar at the Heritage Foundation, and *Twilight of Liberty: The Legacy of the ACLU* (1994). Donohue is adjunct scholar at the Heritage Foundation and serves on the board of directors of the National Association of Scholars. He also serves on the board of advisors of the Washington Legal Foundation, the Educational Freedom Foundation, the Society of Catholic Social Scientists, Catholics United for the Faith, the Jewish Action Alliance, Ave Maria Institute and the Christian Film & Television Commission.¹¹⁰

Bernadette Brady

Brady is vice president of the Catholic League. She was formerly the director of the Archdiocese of New York Family Life/Respect Life Office, which is responsible for antichoice activities.

Rev. Philip Eichner

Eichner is the chair of the Board of Directors and a Catholic priest. He is the head of Kellenberg Memorial High School in Uniondale, Long Island.

David Gregory

Gregory is general counsel for the Catholic League and a professor of law at St. John's University Law School, where he specializes in labor and employment law. He wrote the entry on "Religion in the Workplace" for the *Encyclopedia of American Civil Liberties* (2006) and is a member of the Fellowship of Catholic Scholars and the Society of Catholic Social Scientists.

Raymond Arroyo

Arroyo is a journalist who is the host and creator of EWTN's news magazine *The World Over Live*. He is the author of *Mother Angelica: The Remarkable Story of a Nun, Her Nerve and a Network of Miracles* (2005) and *Mother Angelica's Little Book of Life Lessons and Everyday Spirituality* (2007).

Thomas Brennan

Brennan is a former chief justice of the Michigan Supreme Court and founder of the Thomas M. Cooley Law School.

Ann Corkery

Corkery is a lawyer who writes and lectures about the proper role of women in Catholicism. She worked for the Republican National Committee as part of the "Catholic Vote for Victory 2000" and was "an informal advisor to the White House on moral and social issues."¹¹¹ In 2003 she was appointed by President Bush to be a delegate to the 58th UN General Assembly, where she lobbied for the ban on human cloning. In 2004, she was a delegate to the UN Commission on the Status of Women.¹¹²

Robert Lockwood

Lockwood is the Catholic League's director of research. He has written extensive conservative takes on questions of Catholic history, including the Inquisition, Galileo and the Catholic church, and Pope Pius XII and the Holocaust. He is the editor of *Anti-Catholicism in American Culture* (2000).

Kenneth Whitehead

Whitehead is a former US assistant secretary of education. He is the author of *Agenda of the Sexual Revolution: Abortion, Contraception, Sex Education and Related Evils* (1981) and editor of *Marriage and the Common Good* (2001), which contains essays on marriage by conservative scholars. He is the author of *Everything You Need to Know about Partial-Birth Abortion*, a pamphlet that synthesizes the conservative right's arguments against this abortion method.

In addition, the board includes the following officers: **William Lindner**, secretary; **Marilyn Lundy**, vice chair; and **Jerome McDougal**, treasurer.

Key Individuals (continued)

Board of Advisors

The Catholic League has a 23-member Board of Advisors which comprises several prominent conservative Catholics. Conservative and neo-conservative organizations and publications that are heavily represented include the Heritage Foundation, the American Enterprise Institute, the Institute on Religion and Democracy, *National Review* and *First Things*—all of which stand at the nexus of American conservative thought and organization and are heavily funded by conservative foundations. The affiliation of the board members appears to be exclusively with the Republican Party. Key members are profiled below.

L. Brent Bozell III

Bozell is president and founder of the Media Research Center, which examines the media for “liberal bias” and the Conservative News Service. He is the nephew of the late columnist William F. Buckley and the son of L. Brent Bozell, Jr., who assisted Barry Goldwater with the writing of *Conscience of a Conservative*. Before founding the MRC in 1987, Bozell ran the National Conservative Foundation project at the National Conservative Political Action Committee. He is a syndicated columnist and a regular on television, including the Fox program *Hannity & Colmes*.¹¹³

Gerard Bradley

Gerard Bradley is a professor of law at Notre Dame and a past president of the Fellowship of Catholic Scholars. He is member of the board of advisors of the Cardinal Newman Society, chair of the Federalist Society’s Religious Liberties Practice Group, member of the Ramsey Colloquium on Theological Issues and member of the board of advisors of the Society of Catholic Social Scientists. He is the author of *Catholicism, Liberalism and Communitarianism: The Catholic Intellectual Tradition and the Moral Foundations of Democracy* (1995).¹¹⁴

Linda Chavez

Chavez is a conservative author and commentator. She is president of the Center for Equal Opportunity, which opposes affirmative action. She was appointed White House director of public liaison (1985) and staff director of the US Commission on Civil Rights (1983-1985) by President Reagan. President Bush nominated her to be secretary of labor, but the nomination was withdrawn over a controversy over whether she had employed an undocumented immigrant. She is a political commentator for Fox News.¹¹⁵

Robert Destro

Destro is a professor of law at Catholic University. He was appointed to the US Commission on Civil Rights by President Reagan after having served as general counsel to the Catholic League from 1977 to 1982. He is the author of *Religious Liberty in a Pluralistic Society* (1996).

Dinesh D’Souza

D’Souza is the Robert and Karen Rishwain Fellow at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University. Before joining the Hoover Institution, he was the John M. Olin Fellow at the American Enterprise Institute. He is the author of *Illiberal Education* (1991), *The End of Racism* (1995), and *The Enemy at Home: The Cultural Left and Its Responsibility for 9/11* (2007).

Laura Garcia

Garcia is a professor of philosophy at Boston College. She has written extensively for conservative publications about religion and family values. She is a member of the Fellowship of Catholic Scholars, co-founder and member of the board of Women Affirming Life, co-founder and past executive officer of University Faculty for Life and a contributing editor to *Crisis* magazine.¹¹⁶

Robert George

George is the McCormick Professor of Jurisprudence and director of the James Madison Program in American Ideals and Institutions at Princeton University. A natural law theorist, he is a member of President Bush’s Council on Bioethics. He is the author of *In Defense of Natural Law*, *Making Men Moral: Civil Liberties and Public Morality*, and *The Clash of Orthodoxies: Law, Religion and Morality in Crisis* and is on the editorial board of *First Things*. He is the past chair of the Federalist Society’s Religious Liberties Practice Group and is on the board of the Institute on Religion and Democracy.¹¹⁷

Key Individuals (continued)

Mary Ann Glendon

Glendon was recently appointed to be the US ambassador to the Holy See, having previously been a professor of law at Harvard University Law School. A prominent Catholic antichoice feminist, she is a member of President Bush's Council on Bioethics and is the first woman to serve as president of the Vatican's Pontifical Academy of Social Science. In 1995 she was the Vatican representative to the UN Conference on Women in Beijing, where she spoke against the use of condoms to prevent HIV/AIDS. She is on the board of advisors for the Institute on Religion and Democracy.¹¹⁸

Dolores Grier

Grier is an antichoice activist and served as vice chancellor of Community Relations for the Archdiocese of New York. She is the author of *Death by Abortion: The Basic Facts* and president of Black Catholics Against Abortion.¹¹⁹

Alan Keyes

Keyes is a conservative political activist who was appointed ambassador to the UN Economic and Social Council by President Reagan and served as assistant secretary of state for international organization affairs from 1985 to 1987. Keyes ran for the Republican presidential nomination in 1996 and 2000 on an antichoice platform.¹²⁰

Stephen Krason

Krason is associate professor of political science at Franciscan University of Steubenville, a consultant to the Pope John XXIII Medical-Moral Research and Education Center and president of the Society of Catholic Social Scientists. He is the author of *Parental Rights—The Contemporary Assault on Traditional Liberties* (1998) and an editor of the *Encyclopedia of Catholic Social Thought, Social Science and Social Policy* (2007). He is the co-author of *Making Men Moral: Civil Liberties and Public Morality* (1993) with Robert George.¹²¹

Lawrence Kudlow

Kudlow, a convert to Catholicism from Judaism, is a conservative, supply-side economics commentator. He hosts *Kudlow & Company* on CNBC and is the economics editor for *National Review*. He served as associate director for economics and planning in the Office of Management and Budget during the Reagan administration.¹²²

Thomas Monaghan

Monaghan was the founder of Domino's Pizza. After selling Domino's, he dedicated himself to conservative, antichoice causes. He is the founder of Legatus, an organization of conservative Catholic business leaders, the Ave Maria Foundation and Ave Maria Law School.¹²³ Monaghan has bankrolled the development of a new town in Florida, Ave Maria, which serves as a base for Ave Maria University. The development has met with controversy at every turn, from environmentalists and the local Catholic hierarchy to gay rights activists and the ACLU.

Michael Novak

Novak is the George Frederick Jewett Scholar in Religion, Philosophy, and Public Policy at the neoconservative American Enterprise Institute and a contributing editor to *National Review*. He is a conservative Catholic social theorist who has written extensively about the intersection between democracy and religion. He is a member of the board of directors of the Institute on Religion and Democracy and a co-founder of *First Things*, a conservative journal.¹²⁴

Kate O'Beirne

O'Beirne is the Washington editor of *National Review*. She was a deputy assistant secretary at the Department of Health and Human Services during the Reagan administration and was deputy director of domestic policy studies and vice president of government relations at the Heritage Foundation. She is a conservative commentator on CNN's *Capital Gang* and is the author of *Women Who Make the World Worse: And how their radical feminist assault is ruining our schools, families, military and sports* (2005).¹²⁵

Thomas Reeves

Reeves is a senior fellow at the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute and a professor of history at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside. He claims that *Roe v. Wade* is one of the five worst Supreme Court decisions in history¹²⁶ and is the author of *Empty Church: the Suicide of Liberal Christianity* (1996).

Key Individuals (continued)

Patrick Riley

Riley has served as a spokesperson and research associate for the Catholic League. He is the author, along with Russell Shaw, of *Anti-Catholicism in the Media* (1993).

Robert Royal

Royal is president of the Faith and Reason Institute in Washington, DC. His books include *1492 and All That: Political Manipulations of History* (1992), *Reinventing the American People: Unity and Diversity Today* (1995), and *The Virgin and the Dynamo: The Use and Abuse of Religion in the Environment Debate* (1999). He is a columnist for the conservative Catholic magazine *Crisis*, and has written for *First Things*, the *Washington Times*, *National Review* and the *Wall Street Journal*.

Ronald Rychlak

Rychlak is Mississippi Defense Lawyers Association Professor of Law and associate dean for academic affairs at the University of Mississippi School of Law. He is an academic fellow at the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies. He is also an advisor to the Vatican's delegation to the United Nations and has received three papal medals for his diplomatic service to the Holy See. He is the author of *Righteous Gentiles: How Pius XII and the Catholic Church Saved Half a Million Jews from the Nazis* (2005).¹²⁷

Russell Shaw

Shaw is a Washington, DC-based freelance writer. He is the former secretary of public affairs for the US Conference of Catholic Bishops and coordinated media relations for Pope John Paul II's visits to the US in 1979 and 1987. He has written for and edited a number of conservative Catholic publications, including *Our Sunday Visitor*, *The Pope Speaks*, and *Crisis*. He is author of *Beyond the New Morality* (1988) and editor of the *Encyclopedia of Catholic Doctrine* (1997).¹²⁸

William Simon, Jr.

Simon, the son of President Nixon's Treasury Secretary William E. Simon, served as assistant US attorney for the Southern District of New York under Rudolph Giuliani. He ran for governor of California in 2002 as a conservative Republican. In February 2007, Simon was appointed director of policy for the Rudy Giuliani Presidential Exploratory Committee.

Joseph Varacalli

Varacalli is a professor of sociology and director of the Center for Catholic Studies at Nassau Community College-SUNY. He is the co-founder of the Society of Catholic Social Scientists and on the advisory board of the Catholic Educator's Resource Center. Formerly editor-in-chief of the *Catholic Social Science Review*, Varacalli more recently was one of the editors of the *Encyclopedia of Catholic Social Thought, Social Science, and Social Policy* (July 2007).

Paul Vitz

Vitz is a professor of psychology at New York University and an adjunct professor at the John Paul II Institute for Marriage and Family. He has written about the "complementary" nature of men and women in the conservative Catholic model. His books include *Defending the Family: A Sourcebook* (1998) and *Psychology as Religion: The Cult of Self Worship* (1994).¹²⁹

George Weigel

Weigel, a Catholic theologian, is a senior fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center, a neoconservative foundation that promotes a greater role for religion in public life and works to undercut secular humanism. He is a conservative scholar and has written numerous books on Catholicism and politics, including *Witness to Hope: The Biography of Pope John Paul II* (1999).¹³⁰

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