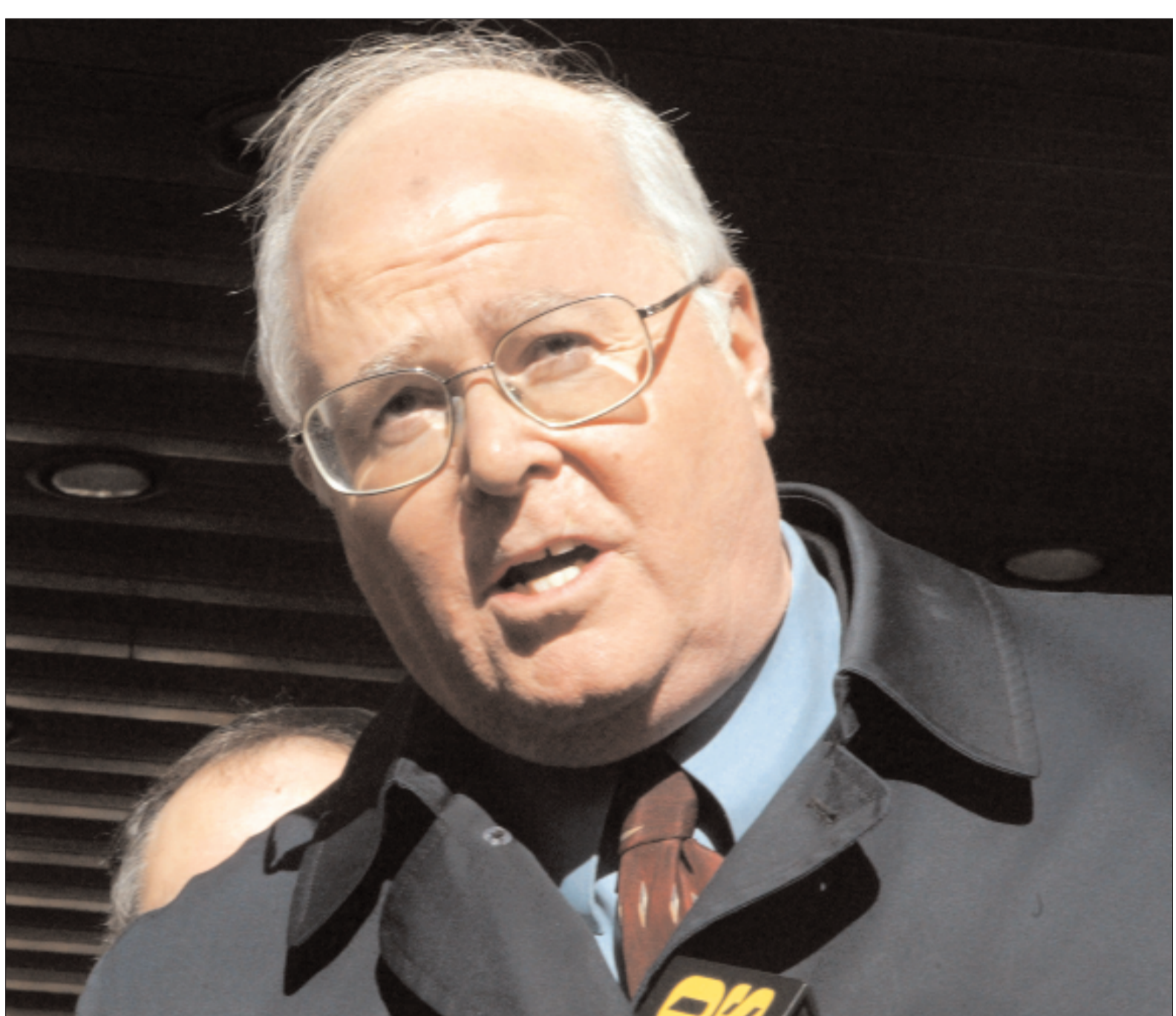


Meet the Catholic Mary Whitehouse

Bill Donohue tells Tim Stanley why he emerged as America's most vocal – and politically incorrect – defender of the faith



Bill Donohue: 'There is no paedophile problem in the Catholic Church. There was a problem in the 1960s and 1970s, but now it's got it under control'

Bill Donohue is the unacceptable face of American Catholicism. Angry, Right-wing and loud, the president of the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights can look like a dockworker in a bar shouting at the television. And yet it's Donohue's insensitivity to offence that has helped transform the way that the US media perceives Catholicism. No more is it solely the silent contemplation of the monastery or the hip liberalism of the Jesuit. Thanks to smart, politically incorrect Catholics like Donohue, Catholicism has become the public face of social traditionalism in America.

I call Donohue up at his office in New York and within minutes he's saying something I can't imagine I'd hear from anyone else: "There is no paedophile problem in the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church had a paedophile problem in the 1960s and 1970s, but now it's got it under control. The rate of accusations – and that's accusations, nothing proved – is under 10 a year among a priest population of 40,000 or so. That's nothing. Compare that to the Orthodox Jews. Just last year about 85 of them were arrested in Brooklyn for paedophilia... but they are kind of a protected group within the media, so you won't hear about it."

That's the Donohue profile: a Catholic pride that borders on chauvinism. Do the research and you'll find that he's technically accurate: the US media really does report obsessively on a child abuse problem within the Catholic Church that is mainly historic rather than contemporary. Donohue's theories on why this happens so often – why the Church's teaching or record is distorted by the press – are fantastic and intriguing. The way that he puts it across might be uncomfortable reading for some Catholics. But Donohue would probably insist that the purpose of religious

revelation isn't to make folks feel "comfortable".

William Anthony "Bill" Donohue was born in New York in 1947. He studied sociology and taught at St Lucy's School in Spanish Harlem. In 1977 he started teaching at La Roche College in Pittsburgh and in 1980 he was awarded his PhD in sociology from a New York University. Donohue has also spent time at the Heritage Institute, a Republican Party-dominated think tank in Washington DC. That is significant because it speaks to the growing interest among many Catholics of his generation in mainstream conservative politics. In 1973 the Jesuit Fr Virgil Blum founded the Catholic League in response to what he perceived as a growing intolerance towards the faith within the American media and education system. It's impossible to separate this lay group's conceptualisation of Catholic "civil rights" from the contemporaneous attempt by Republicans like Richard Nixon or Ronald Reagan to exploit Catholic anger at cultural change. Throw in John Paul II's anti-Communism, the rise of the so-called Moral Majority and the expansion of the pro-life movement, and the 1970s and 1980s presented the perfect conditions for the Catholic League's success. Everything old was new again.

And yet the Catholic League in its original form was a disappointment. When Bill Donohue was invited to take it over in 1993 he recalls it being defunct.

"It had been handed over to lay people for a long time and it was run down. [The bishop] asked me to fix it."

Donohue laments that in the 60s, 70s and 80s conservative Catholics "were outnumbered by liberals", and it was difficult to motivate Catholic conservatives to become activists for themselves. They preferred to lend their energies to other, non-sectarian groups. They were also weighed down by the legacy of Vatican II, which created a

profound, near-universal liberalism within the American Church which preferred ecumenical dialogue and good works to moral or theological leadership.

Donohue says: "I always had trouble dealing with the bishops. Not that they didn't necessarily agree, but a lot of them were bureaucrats who gave a bureaucratic answer to everything."

One reason why things started to pick up for Catholic conservatives in the 1990s was that priests of the post-Vatican II generation were now rising through the ranks. Hence the Catholic counter-revolution that began in the 1970s only really had any impact at the moment that Donohue became a leader of the Catholic League in the 1990s.

Donohue injected some of the shock-jock anger into Catholic politics, going after the Church's enemies with all guns blazing. He called them bigots, fools, hippies and wreckers – people who wanted to destroy Catholicism and take western civilisation down with it. He bought the cultural Marxist line that the best way to transform a nation is by subverting its culture, and turned it on its head: exposing the lecturers, television show hosts, comedians, publicly funded artists and Hollywood stars who sought to shift America incrementally to the Left. For example, when the popular HBO comedy *Curb Your Enthusiasm* featured its lead, Larry David, accidentally urinating on a picture of Jesus (which was then mistaken

by its Catholic owners as the miraculous tears of Christ), Donohue flipped out. In a statement, he suggested that David "quit while he is ahead". He asked: "Was Larry David always this crude? Would he think it's comedic if someone urinated on a picture of his mother? This might be fun to watch, but since HBO only likes to dump on Catholics... and David is Jewish, we'll never know."

This is a regular theme in Donohue's work: the idea that the artistic community is dominated by people with an axe to grind against Catholicism. In 2004 he denounced the "relentless attacks" on Mel Gibson's movie *The Passion of the Christ* in similar terms. "Hollywood is controlled by secular Jews who hate

Christianity in general and Catholicism in particular," he said at the time. "It's not a secret, OK? And I'm not afraid to say it. That's why they hate this movie. It's about Jesus Christ."

In case it's starting to read like Donohue has a particular problem with Jewish Americans, it's worth pointing out that a lot of the Catholic League's work is ecumenical. "We build alliances with Protestants and some of our best allies are Orthodox Jews," he tells me.

Donohue's primary issue isn't with non-Catholics but rather with people who espouse a world view that isn't respectful of Catholic mores. He calls the cultural revolution that has happened since the 1960s "genital liberation" and says its

agenda is to tear down the last barriers between liberals and sexual fulfilment. "It all comes down to sex," he insists. "All anti-Catholicism is libertine. We're becoming a nation of brats. People want total genital liberation, which is what Jeffrey Dahmer got – he followed his conscience to wherever it led him." (Dahmer murdered his homosexual partners and kept their skulls as souvenirs.)

Donohue believes that something has changed in the war against Catholicism. "It's moved from culture to politics. In all my life I've never seen anything like what the current administration is doing," he says. The Obama White House has tried to compel Catholic organisations to provide

contraception to employees as part of their health insurance. "If the Supreme Court strikes the entire Obamacare thing down, then we're home free," he says. But the contraception mandate wasn't part of the original package that the court was asked to adjudicate on, so "if just a part of it remains legal and becomes law then we're in trouble".

Donohue predicts civil disobedience among Catholics as a result. At the very least, more schools, hospitals and adoption agencies will close. It could deal a savage blow to Catholicism as a civic enterprise.

Obama's machinations have confirmed Donohue's worldview of a liberal Left driven mad by its hormones. To be sure, Obamacare represents a unique invasion of the Catholic conscience, a direct assault on its theology not seen since the 19th century. A lot of what Donohue has said has been hitherto denounced as hysteria. But the Catholic League's outrage seems vindicated.

Whether Donohue will lead the coming "civil disobedience", I'm not so sure. His style seems more in tune with the late 1990s and early Noughties, when Right-wing pundits like Ann Coulter, Rush Limbaugh and Glenn Beck were at their zenith. Today, the great religious causes are led by quieter, younger Christians. The National Organization for Marriage, which helped outlaw same-sex civil unions in North Carolina, is dominated by Catholics raised on Donohue's rhetoric but less likely to invoke it. Their company is softer, more legalistic and wonkish. Arguably, it's achieving bigger and better results.

Nevertheless, Bill Donohue has established himself proudly and permanently as the Mary Whitehouse of American Catholicism. Thanks to him, the war on permissiveness and the defence of public morals are associated in the popular mind with a Catholic. Without him, American Catholicism might have succumbed to the numbing political irrelevance of the Episcopal Church. In politics, irrelevancy is far worse than controversy.

Tim Stanley is a historian at Oxford University and a blogger for the Daily Telegraph. His latest book, The Crusader: the Life and Trumphant Times of Pat Buchanan, is out now

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A loving defeat

Cardinal Angelo Scola explains how Catholics should respond to the pain of family breakdown

More and more families are experiencing poverty. Households with more than two children are especially affected by the trend, a sign that creating a family is becoming increasingly expensive.

But there is also a relatively new kind of poverty that affects single-parent families emerging from divorce or separation. Experts say that the incidence of poverty among these families recently grew from four to seven per cent in Italy in just four years, an unprecedented rate that reflects something more than a lack of economic resources. It has to do with a lack of relations, health, housing, education and work.

Of course any family can "get sick": trust and justice coexist with their opposites in all relations. But since our society is often confused about its foundational principles, it's no surprise that primary relations often lack trust and suffer from prevarication and injustice.

But a closer look shows that single-parent families and families with many children are especially poor – and not just in economic terms. Multifaceted poverty, according to experts, affects 17 per cent and 15 per cent of these families, respec-

tively. Children who belong to families affected by separation or divorce are particularly at risk. Separation is a painful and traumatic experience for them, since it disrupts the family order and brings emotional and routine changes. While children are often believed to not only survive but also to gain strength from such trauma, it's impossible to ignore their suffering.

So how can families be rescued from situations of crisis and from fractures? Adults must be responsible for their children. Separation is always a defeat, but in some cases it can be viewed as the ultimate expression of love, given that it respects the institution of marriage and, while accepting the fact that spouses can live separately, does not exclude the possibility of a reconciliation.

That is why children feel that the union among their parents is stronger than the weakness and exhaustion that keep them apart. That's not the case when spouses sever their relations by opting for a divorce.

It's certainly not my intention to judge individual people: Jesus came among us to save, not to condemn, and the Church only aims to defend and protect true love. For Christians, vocation is a constant fact throughout life. All relations and situations that are based

on truth are determined by God and allow us to relate to Him. Jesus constantly asks us what he said to Peter: "Do you love me?" And he does that even when incomprehensible and unacceptable injustices occur, such as having an unfaithful spouse. Jesus asks us to keep love alive and offers you support to keep your marriages alive even when the relation with your spouse is over. Marriage is much more than a relationship between wife and husband.

Children are often part of it, and God's initiative, to which the spouses freely and publicly accede, is always present. An unfaithful spouse makes it harder to be faithful. But in a way the choice of being faithful seems even more free and necessary.

What about those who do not believe in Jesus? They should always look at love as a never-ending experience. As Shakespeare said: "Love is not love that bends with the remover to remove."

Cardinal Angelo Scola is the Archbishop of Milan. The Seventh World Meeting of Families (Family2012.com) is currently taking place in his archdiocese and concludes on Sunday, June 3

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