

# 50th ANNIVERSARY DINNER WAS A HIT

**William A. Donohue**

On April 27, we celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Catholic League at the New York Athletic Club. In attendance was the Archbishop of New York, Cardinal Timothy Dolan, Bishop Peter Byrne, Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of New York, Bishop Joseph Coffey of the Archdiocese for the Military, and several priests, including Father Gerry Murray of EWTN fame.

Several notable lay people were also in attendance. They included Tom Monaghan, founder of Ave Maria University and Ave Maria Law School; Chris Ruddy, founder of Newsmax; Brent Bozell, founder of the Media Research Center; Lauren Green, Fox News religion reporter; Bob Royal, editor in chief of The Catholic Thing; George Schwartz, CEO of Ave Maria Funds, and many other distinguished persons.

EWTN host and Fox News contributor Raymond Arroyo was the Master of Ceremonies. As expected, he had everyone laughing. He introduced Walter Knysz, the chairman of the board of the Catholic League. He spoke at some length about our founder, Father Virgil Blum, and how we have grown since his death in 1990. Cardinal Dolan also addressed how the Catholic League has changed since 1973, offering his personal reflections about it. I wound up the program.

My comments were mostly on the changing face of anti-Catholicism. From colonial times to the mid-twentieth century, our nation's "last acceptable prejudice" was driven by the WASP elite, mostly over theological differences.

The animus against Catholic individuals waned once JFK was elected president in 1960. However, hatred of the institutional Church continued, with even greater vigor. This

time it was militant secularists who were the biggest bigots on the block, bashing the Church for its teachings on marriage and sexuality.

When I took over in 1993—I will be president and CEO for 30 years on July 1—most of the anti-Catholicism emanated from the media, the entertainment industry, the arts, education and activist legal organizations.

The first big change, I told the crowd, became evident in the late 2000s when Barack Obama was elected president. Now the government had become the biggest threat to Catholicism, especially with Obama's Health and Human Services mandate; it tried to force the Little Sisters of the Poor, and other Catholic non-profits, to provide for abortion-inducing drugs in their healthcare plans.

Matters have only gotten worse under President Biden. Though he identifies as a Catholic, he is presiding over the most anti-Catholic administration in modern times, perhaps ever.

Never a pessimist, I ended my talk mentioning several things that give us hope. The extraordinary reaction to our Disney movie—millions have watched it—surely has something to do with the fact that Disney's subscribers have taken a deep dive. The blowback that Anheuser-Busch is experiencing for hiring a transgender person to hawk Bud Light is encouraging. I offered many other examples.

I cited the movement by African Americans, Asians, Hispanics and Muslims toward a more aggressive embrace of traditional moral values as another example of how things are changing. I told the attendees that at the end of the day we have only two choices: we can either quit or fight. For us, it's a no-brainer.

While there is reason to be optimistic, I would be lying if I said Catholics are not worried about our society.

During the cocktail hour, and later in the evening, I had a chance to talk to many people. Virtually everyone I spoke to, male or female, young or old, clergy or lay—it made no difference—is seriously concerned about the state of our country. On so many levels, our country is going south, especially culturally.

We are tired of being lied to. From Covid to transgenderism, we have been lied to incessantly. Indeed, in my closing remarks I said we should be skeptical of elites. To be specific, I said that the next time you hear some “expert”—the ones with the alphabets after their name—say something that strikes you as nutty, trust your gut, not them.

We know that the Catholic Church has the answers to what ails us. Unfortunately, that voice of reason is being thwarted by the ruling class, the elites who run our major institutions. They have broken bread with the so-called progressives, or what is more accurately called the woke mob. But they don’t have to have the last word.

Enough of that. Back to the party.

If there is one thing that happened at our Gala dinner that stood out, it was the way Cardinal Dolan worked the room. He met virtually everyone, going around from table to table. He won a lot of people over, and no one was happier with his affability and graciousness than the boys from my local pub. They are now his biggest fans. They are also the thirstiest people I have ever known.

[On pp. 8-9](#), you’ll find an assortment of pictures from this event. It would not have been such a success without the work that our vice president put into it, Bernadette Brady-Egan. She will be VP for 28 years come July 1. This was one of her many shining moments.