

# DONOHUE ON HITCHENS

*When I learned that Christopher Hitchens died on December 16, I decided not to issue a statement. It is no secret that we had an on-again, off-again relationship, and given my mixed feelings, I thought it best not to say anything. But when a reporter asked to speak with me a few days later, I elected to talk.*

*The article below is a reprint from the website of the Daily Caller; it was published December 19 by Steven Nelson under the title, "Hitchens Nemesis Bill Donohue Remembers 'Sloppy,' 'Overrated,' but 'Brilliant' Adversary."*

*I debated Hitchens many times on TV, and had a particularly eventful encounter with him in 2000 at the Union League Club in New York City. We sold copies of the video at the time, the proceeds going to the Catholic League.*

*Bill Donohue*

Few critics of the Catholic Church were as caustic as Christopher Hitchens. That yielded a sour public relationship with Catholic League President Bill Donohue.

But a few days after the death of one of the most famous and forceful advocates of atheism and anti-theism, Donohue largely had fond words for the man he bitterly dueled with in televised debates.

"We came together on two things," Donohue told The Daily Caller. "While it wasn't particularly well-known, Christopher was pro-life and I am pro-life, and I commended him on that." Donohue also expressed admiration for Hitchens' understanding of "what these Islamofascists are about."

But their relationship wasn't always cordial. Donohue recalled Hitchens delaying a television debate until Good Friday, to

his great irritation.

Donohue also recalled an episode where Hitchens “crossed the line” with comments about Mother Teresa – about whom Hitchens wrote “The Missionary Position,” describing her as a “fanatic” and a “fraud.”

“He apologized to me two years ago and I accepted it, because that’s the way I am,” said Donohue, explaining, “Christopher was going after Mother Teresa again, but he called her a bitch, and I said, ‘you know you’re crossing the line here.’ And he admitted it and he said he was sorry.

“We were supposed to get together for a couple pints of Guinness, because both of us like to drink. Unfortunately for Christopher, he didn’t have very good brakes, but I like a man who drinks, so Christopher and I had some things in common,” said Donohue.

Discussing Mother Teresa, Donohue’s disdain for Hitchens’ book about her clearly came through. He particularly took issue with what he believed was the lack of supporting documentation. Hitchens, while he was alive, said that none of his assertions were factually lacking.

“Quite frankly he was very sloppy when it came to scholarship,” Donohue said. “I mean in many respects he was a brilliant guy, he was quick, he was a provocateur, and that’s the part of Christopher Hitchens that I loved. But when it came to the facts it didn’t seem to matter to him.”

Donohue said that he was sad to hear about Hitchens’ diagnosis with esophageal cancer. “Once I heard about that I did feel badly,” he said, “and I didn’t want to say anything negative unless someone would think, ‘oh Donohue is trying to take a cheap shot, riding off of his legacy.’”

He similarly decided against posting a statement on the Catholic League’s website, because it “would give the

appearance of very bad taste.”

“I do like the idea that he was a maverick, an iconoclast, that he went against the grain, that he did not accept political correctness and didn’t swallow the moonshine,” said Donohue. “There is a great deal there that I admire.”

“With many of the people I’ve dealt with on the left, they are cowards,” he said. “Christopher Hitchens was not a coward.”

Donohue said he wouldn’t presume to know whether Hitchens is in hell. “I would never pass judgment on him or anyone else,” he said. “It’s part of Catholic teaching that we don’t know, and indeed I would condemn any Catholic or non-Catholic who seems to know with some degree of certainty where Christopher Hitchens is.”

“For us to presume where he is would be arrogant and condemnatory,” he added. “So I would never get into that, but I can talk about the fact that he was totally overrated as a scholar, he was sloppy in his research, he was a great essayist, but an essayist is not necessarily a scholar.”

Donohue did say he prayed for Hitchens. “He was in my prayers, whether he wanted them or not, that’s none of his business, that’s my business,” he said.

The atheist movement has taken a hit with the death of the “God is Not Great” author, according to Donohue.

“I think it’s in trouble, because he was enormously influential,” said Donohue. “I’m not saying that all the atheist activists are jerks – you still have Dawkins and Dennett and these people – but I think he will be missed, because his style would at least get people to listen to him. I don’t think you can say the same for the others. They lack that panache that Christopher had.”