

The Limbaugh Letter, “My Conversation with Bill Donohue”

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My Conversation with Bill Donohue

by Rush Limbaugh

A privilege to speak with this religious freedom warrior, president of the Catholic League, a bold presence on television, the author of many books, including [Secular Sabotage: How Liberals Are Destroying Religion and Culture in America](#) and [Why Catholicism Matters: How Catholic Virtues Can Reshape Society in the 21st Century](#):

Rush: Dr. Donohue, this is great. I have wanted to talk to you for the longest time, and I’m really appreciative that you’ve been able to make the time here.

Donohue: Wait, what? For you? What, are you kidding me? You’re number one, buddy. [Laughs]

Rush: You intrigue me. I’ve been watching you for years on tv. Since I’ve got you here, could you tell me a little bit about

the Catholic League? How old is it? What is its purpose?

Donohue: It was founded in 1973 by a man I never got a chance to meet; he died a couple of years before I took over in 1993. Back in 1973 Father Virgil Blum, a Jesuit priest, professor of political science at Marquette University, founded the Catholic League. Even though that was the year of Roe v. Wade, that wasn't his top issue. His top issue was anti-Catholicism. He wanted this organization to be somewhat analogous to the ADL [Anti-Defamation League] in the Jewish community. His driving issue more than anything else back in '73 was actually school vouchers. Then abortion, then other things. But that was it, to defend individual Catholics and the institutional church.

Though he was a priest, he felt the need for a lay organization. I can tell you from my conversations with a lot of bishops and cardinals over the years, they very much feel there is a need for a lay organization because, quite frankly, I can say some things that they may want to say, but they're constrained by the collar. There's a need for Catholics to enter into a more robust debate.

All our money comes from voluntary contributions. We don't get our money from Wall Street; we get our money from Main Street. We have the support of many bishops and priests, obviously, but we don't get a dime from the Catholic Church. I don't report to a bishop. I report to a Board of Directors, mostly attorneys and businessmen and women. We're a 501(c)(3) – basically an anti-defamation organization.

Rush: To my mind, you are the country's foremost Catholic advocate, but you obviously go way beyond. You're obviously focused on civil liberties as a whole, with an emphasis on religious freedom.

Donohue: I started off teaching in Spanish Harlem and I went on to get my Ph.D. in Sociology from NYU and then went on to

be a college professor in Pittsburgh. I wrote a Ph.D. dissertation and two books on the ACLU. I'm the guy who gave Bush 41 everything he used against "the Little Duke" [Michael Dukakis] back in '88.

Rush: Aha!

Donohue: It was the Little Duke who made the ACLU an issue when he said he was a [card-carrying](#) member. I was at The Heritage Foundation then. The ACLU book [[The Politics of the American Civil Liberties Union](#)] got me there. I wrote another book about the ACLU [[The Twilight of Liberty: The Legacy of the ACLU](#)], and now I'm writing books about the Catholic Church. I've taught political science and Constitutional law, the latter as a result of tracking the ACLU. I don't address the ACLU as much anymore because I didn't want to turn this into Bill Donohue's anti-ACLU crusade. Quite frankly it has been eclipsed by so many other governmental and cultural forces.

Rush: I don't think there's an advocate who does it better, and you do it in a way that's not overtly devout or religious.

Donohue: Well, you've got to have a sense of humor. I'm Irish. I come from a blue-collar background. My father left me when I was a child. I was raised by my grandparents who were born in Ireland, didn't have any education. My mother was a nurse. I got taught by the Marxists at NYU and The New School for Social Research, but it didn't have any effect on me because I had common sense. I'm fed up with the left in terms of their hypocrisy. I think that's what drove me. I started as a Democrat. I became Republican, but I've been happily independent over 20 years. I'm proud to be a conservative. I'm a former Bradley Resident Scholar at The Heritage Foundation. But I am not a Republican, I am not a Democrat, and I want to keep that clean so that I can go where the action is.

Rush: Now, you may laugh at the question, but I need to ask

it. Are you a devout Catholic? Whatever the Church's teachings are, you support them? You're not in business to establish your own point of view on the religion.

Donohue: There's no question I am a devout Catholic. The Catholic League is not a debating society. We're here to defend the right of the Church to say whatever it wants in the public arena and people are free to agree or disagree. As John Paul II said, "We're not here to impose anything. We're here to propose." Might I have a few teachings that I might wrestle with? Well, yes, which I'm not going to make public because it's not about Bill Donohue. It's about me saying we have this indispensable moral voice and it needs an airing and a respectful hearing instead of catcalls. We don't have our own views. We don't have our own teachings. Whatever the teachings are of the Catholic Church, we're simply saying, "Give it a respectful hearing and then we go our way."

Rush: Okay, I wanted to set the table with that. What is your assessment of the state of religious freedom in the country today, and how has it changed since you took over the Catholic League?

Donohue: When I took over in 1993, quite frankly, I wondered if I would have enough work to do. That's because, like a lot of Catholics, I was not myself a victim of discrimination. That existed in the 18th, 19th, and maybe the first half of the 20th century. I'm not just using JFK as the proverbial example, and it is true that in the 20th century the progress that individual Catholics made was gigantic. But while individual Catholics have made tremendous progress, the denigration and defamation of the institutional Church through the movies, through TV, what's said in the schools, and artistic exhibitions and the like – it's incredible the double standard, the hate-filled obscene comments that are made and lies about the Catholic Church. I think a lot of Catholics have said: "Well, that's for Father Murphy to take care of." No. We need something like Article 5 of NATO: If there's an

attack on my church, it should be viewed as an attack on me.

Rush: Bill, that's one of the reasons why this is so important. I think the flock, if I can term it that way, is somewhat like many in the Republican Party. They're just scared. They're scared of media. They're scared of opposition and they'd rather slink away than engage this defamation of the Church. I remember in 1993 when ACT UP ran through St. Patrick's throwing condoms at Cardinal O'Connor. I wondered, why is it up to the Church to change? The Church is not reaching out and demanding these people be anything. If you don't want to be a Catholic, don't go in. Stay away. What is the threat? Why does the Catholic Church, religion in general, threaten so many on the left?

Donohue: The biggest threats today come from government. They used to come from the media. The biggest change, and this is pernicious, it's not just coming from Hollywood, it's now coming from government which obviously is much scarier. Father Blum, the founder of the Catholic League, said the problem with Catholics is they're "[political eunuchs](#)." That's why we have to have a Catholic League to try and jack these people up and get with it. As I like to say to Senator Schumer – and he gets a kick out of this: "The Catholic League is theologically Catholic, but we are behaviorally Jewish." In other words, we're going to be a little tougher and stand up for our rights.

Now, why the threats? Most of the attacks – not all, but the lion's share of them – have to deal with matters sexual. Evangelicals, Orthodox Jews, Muslims, Mormons, and others share the same idea of sexual ethics, which is what I call "sexual reticence." In other words, the necessity of restraint. "Restraint" is not a dirty word. It's actually good if people practice it. The people who don't practice it, well, they wind up dead. Physically dead, spiritually dead, morally dead.

Why the Catholic Church? We're the big fat target. Orthodox Jews are too small, so are the Mormons, so are the Muslims and they fear the Muslims. Evangelicals they don't like, but they're kind of scattered. They don't have that same kind of institutional big target. We've been around for 2,000 years. We've got the Pope at the top. If your goal is libertinism, which essentially means license to do whatever you want, no holds barred, if the three most dreaded words in the English language are, "Thou shalt not," no, you're not going to like the evangelicals, the Orthodox Jews, the Mormons, and the Muslims, but boy, the one you want to get, the big fat target, the bull's-eye, is the Roman Catholic Church. Because to the extent that you can weaken its moral authority, its moral voice, you will have largely been able to win. That's what is driving almost all of it.

Rush: Are they afraid that you're judgmental of them? Are they afraid that you are going to succeed in curtailing their freedom?

Donohue: I think they're afraid that I would succeed in getting forth the message to enough people that these attacks are malicious, that they're unfair, and that we need to have a respectful voice for the Catholic Church. I'll give you one quick example. In the last week I've spoken to some very nice liberal guys – Alan Colmes, Joe Piscopo – who were unaware that in the St. Patrick's Parade we do not bar gays from marching. We bar gays from having their own banners and contingents. We also bar pro-life Catholics from marching in their own contingent with their own banners. If the St. Patrick's Day Parade is "anti-gay," then it must logically be anti-life. Nobody believes that. When I get that message out, fair-minded liberals say, "I'm with you Bill." But our side has been intimidated. I can't tell you the number of the Catholics who have wined and dined me, who are good men and women, but I've just about given up with them. I said to them, "Listen, guys, I can give you the talking points. I can frame

the issues. You know what I can't do?" And they ask, "What's that, Bill?" "Courage: it's not transferable." The reason you've made it, Rush, is not just because you're a brilliant commentator, but because you have courage. If you don't have it, forget it.

Rush: Are you worried the Church will succumb? That there might be enough pressure brought to bear that the Church would dramatically alter its position, say, on female priests?

Donohue: No.

Rush: You've never had any doubts about that?

Donohue: No. And I'll tell you why. One, they can't change. We can change meat on Friday; we can change celibacy. That's a man-made rule. That's what they call in the Catholic circles a "discipline." It's not dogma. It wasn't written in Scripture. It was optional for the first thousand years, and then they made it a requirement. They can change that next week if they want. But there are certain things they can't change, such as women priests, positions on abortion and marriage, and the like. So I'm not worried about that.

And there's another reason. When Napoleon told Cardinal Consalvi he was going to destroy the church, Consalvi said, and I'm paraphrasing, "Listen, if we cardinals and bishops with all the people that we've had screwing up for 18 centuries haven't destroyed the Church from within, you're not going to do it from outside either." There is a Holy Spirit. We blunder, we make our mistakes, but no, we're going to be here and I'm not worried about that.

Now, am I concerned that there are some bishops, some priests, and a whole lot of nuns who have gone off the rails? Oh, yeah. I've named names. There's no question about it. These Catholic dissidents – if I was that unhappy with an organization I am voluntarily staying with, I'd go someplace else. We don't lack for religions in this country that accept pro-abortion

positions and gay marriage and everything else. It's mostly the mainline Protestant denominations. I say to people, "If you want to join, don't walk down the street, run. Because they're shutting the doors very quickly." If that were the answer they should be booming, but instead the Catholic Church is holding steady, Orthodox Jews are growing faster than Reformed Jews and Conservative Jews, the evangelicals are growing faster than the mainline Protestants. People don't want to give up something just so they can adopt the editorial policies of *The New York Times*. They want something to put their teeth into. The Catholic seminaries that are the most orthodox are growing. The same is true with orders of nuns. Those orders of nuns that have mistaken their vocation for that of social work are dying out.

Rush: The left worldwide long ago concluded that in the arena of ideas they can't win. They cannot out-argue. Because they're not on the right side of any morality. However, they have attempted to corrupt the institutions that oppose them.

Donohue: That's right.

Rush: You don't worry that the College of Cardinals can somehow be corrupted ten, 20, 30 years from now? What about the priesthood? Some say that the abuse of children thing is the result of infiltration, to create the exact image of the Church that has happened.

Donohue: The sexual abuse scandal in the Catholic Church was an absolute, utter disgrace. John Jay College of Criminal Justice, not an arm of the Catholic Church, put the timeline as overwhelmingly from the mid-60s to the mid-80s. Mid-60s, the beginning of the sexual revolution. Mid-80s, because I would argue AIDS was discovered in '81 and that put the brakes on people.

Why did it affect the Catholic Church? When the winds of culture change dramatically, it gets through the military, it

gets through the churches, everybody. That's not an excuse. You had two principle actors: the molesting priest and the enabling bishop. Most of the molesting priests, according to John Jay, were men who had sex with men. Now they don't use the word I'm going to use: homosexuality. John Jay said less than five percent were pedophiles. In other words, it was guys hitting on adolescent guys.

Now, I can say this to you because you'll give me a chance to say it. I've said it a million times, but nobody wants to quote me on this. Most gay priests are not molesters, but most of the molesting priests have been gay. Now, I'm Irish. My people have a problem with alcoholism. It doesn't mean if you're born Irish you're going to become an alcoholic. It means that maybe you ought to take a look at certain communities. That's all I'm saying.

Now, the enabling bishop. What drove him? Clericalism. That's the term that's used in Catholic circles. Those who are not Catholic would probably understand it more in terms of elitism, arrogance, pomposity. "The bishop knows best." "Don't worry about that, I'm taking care of things." Yes, you took care of things real well, some of you.

This should never have happened. They were teaching in some of the seminaries in the 1970s that all kinds of sexual expression was okay. As in the 1977 book [*Human Sexuality*](#), by a former priest, Anthony Kosnik. It's stunning. Everything goes. I'm saying the Catholic Church became corrupt, morally speaking, on matters sexual in the 1970s when the lid blew. Not all seminaries, obviously, but too many of them. So there was this enabling factor, "Send the guy to therapy and he'll be just fine." Well, some people are intractable. I'm not saying you throw them in the street or lock them up, although some of them certainly should be, but what you can't do is put them back into ministry.

"Give the poor devil therapy" was the zeitgeist. That was the

spirit of the times in the 60s and 70s. You could rehabilitate anybody. Therapy was for everybody. People were bragging about their analysts, and too many bishops got advice from the psychiatrists and they accepted it. It was a sad chapter. In the last six years, we have [seven](#) credible accusations made against 40,000 priests. There's a serious problem of child rape going on in other demographic communities about which you will hear nothing. Almost every case you hear today is an old case which is being resurrected. There's no bigger devil in this than the Catholic left and those who claim to be Catholic and have one foot out the door or who have long left and who are angry. Particularly watch out for the ex-priest, the ex-seminarian, and the ex-nun.

Rush: Exactly. You said the government is now the greatest threat. I assume you're talking about government imposition, a policy of violation of religious freedom, such as forcing religious institutions to dispense contraceptives and pay for them. I've often wondered, look at a great Catholic school like Georgetown. Why do they cave? Why do they not stand up when this kind of attack is made on the morality of the Church? Maybe "caving" is the wrong word.

Donohue: No, it isn't. They have caved. They've long caved. They're a disgrace. I've asked Jesuits, "Can you explain to me the difference between George Washington University and Georgetown?" There are two pro-abortion groups on the campus of Georgetown. One of them is Hoyas for Choice and the other was founded by Sandra Fluke. Now, you have good Catholic schools like Catholic University of America run by John Garvey. They're not going to put up with that. But there's a craven need on the part of a lot of Catholics to be liked.

In the late 90s, Cardinal O'Connor asked to see me. But we never got around to what he wanted to see me about because when I got in, I was ticked off. He said, "Sit down, Bill, what's the matter?" I said, "What's wrong with a lot of these priests? They never stand for anything. They're a bunch of

wimps.” He said, “Bill, you’re right. They want to be liked.” I said, “I like to be liked too, your Eminence. I’m not a masochist. But I want to be respected first.” These people want the acclamation and affirmation of secular liberals. They themselves are liberal and they’re almost ashamed to be Catholic. They don’t want to be called “parochial.” That would be the worst thing in the world. So they will bend over and suck up to the secular left so much that they lose their own identity.

Rush: Not just the Catholic Church, but many religions have thrown in with the left. If you trace it back you find when socialism or Big Government-ism, whatever you want to call it, was translated to mean “charity,” it was like a magnet. The Church glommed onto it and ended up supporting socialist politicians and socialist governments because theft and redistribution was called “charity” – which it isn’t. I think you have much the same circumstance here with these universities.

Donohue: They also want to be welcomed to parties. They want to get those Park Avenue parties and the ones in Georgetown. They want the recognition of the secular left that they’re not like Donohue: “Donohue is a conservative. Donohue still actually believes in these old-fashioned ideas. You’re an open-minded guy.” It’s so open I sometimes wonder where the mind has gone. They’ve sold out. And they’re happy to sell out because in return they get to be a member of the liberal club.

Rush: That’s why I asked if you worry something like that could happen down the road in the College of Cardinals. It’s clear that it can happen.

Donohue: There’s no question about that. Remember what Pope Paul VI said back in 1972, referring to the sexual abuse crisis, the homosexual scandal: “The smoke of Satan is in the Church.” Didn’t just about every one of the Apostles turn on Jesus?

Rush: Right, yes.

Donohue: But I scratch my head every day about the renegades and heretics: “Why don’t you just move on? Why do you camp out where you’re no longer wanted?” It’s because they know where the power is and if you can change the Catholic Church from within – Gramsci, the Italian Marxist, talked about this. He said, “Marx was wrong to take the economic lever as the path to socialism. The path to socialism is: take command of the cultural centers.” Take command of the media, the arts, entertainment, change people’s thinking. He did say get into the Catholic Church.

Rush: It wasn’t long ago – ten years ago – that most, if not all, major religious groups opposed same-sex marriage, but there’s a February [poll](#) by something called the Public Religion Research Institute that says that 58 percent of white Catholics, 56 percent of Hispanic Catholics now favor allowing gay and lesbian couples to marry. Do you believe polls like that?

Donohue: No. Take the new [Pew](#) poll results. If you take a look at practicing Catholics, those who go to church once a week, the figure of support for gay marriage is 33 percent. There’s a difference of 23 percent, which is an enormous margin, between practicing Catholics and non-practicing Catholics, those who almost never go to church. I got my doctorate in this area in sociology. The first thing we’ve got to do is disaggregate. If I ask someone, “Are you a vegetarian?” and he says, “Yes,” but he’s eating a hot dog – would I count him in a poll of vegetarians? Quite frankly, what’s going on here is a bit of a game. They don’t like to disaggregate. When they do, they find that practicing Catholics, for example, did not vote for Obama in either of the last two elections.

But that said, there has been a softening up. You’ve got a whole generation of kids who have been reared to believe from K right through graduate school that today’s gays are

yesterday's blacks. Most blacks take umbrage at that. Where we're winning, fortunately, is on abortion.

Rush: Yes.

Donohue: More young people, not just Catholic, are becoming pro-life. I suspect that's due to two reasons: 1) pictures – sonograms; and 2) nobody wants to talk about it. A lot of these young kids have friends or a brother or sister they've never met. In other words, their mother or their friend's mother had an abortion. That could have been them. Couple that with the sonograms – the picture doesn't lie – and I'm very optimistic. We're not going to change all the laws tomorrow. In New York it will always be legal to kill kids, because it's a very liberal state, but I think Roe could be overturned and it will go back to the states. On gay marriage it's more difficult because the gays have been very successful at taking that value of the American creed called “equality” and selling it.

Rush: I know. Marriage is what it is, except it isn't. [Laughter] Marriage is now something that is discriminatory, and it isn't. It's in the process of being redefined.

Look, since we've ended up here, back on February 27 you were on CNN with Chris Cuomo, who went after you for your support of that vetoed bill in Arizona, the religious liberty bill. The words “gay” or “homosexuality” weren't in it. But few people – you were one – stood up and defended and properly explained that bill. Cuomo said to you, “Nobody's saying that a religious organization has to perform gay marriages because of this.” You said, “Oh, wait a minute...”

Donohue: That's where we're going.

Rush: So clearly you think this bill could lead someday to somebody suing or demanding the Church marry a gay couple. Right?

Donohue: Let me be more specific even. I played a role along with others in killing the nomination of Dawn Johnsen, who in 1988 worked on an ACLU case to strip the Catholic Church of its tax-exempt status because the Church is pro-life. I know where they're going. Which brings me back to HHS. I refer to Obamacare as "the abortion-inducing-drug mandate." Contraception is not exactly a hot-button issue with Catholics, including practicing Catholics, these days. But abortion is a different matter altogether. Why did the HHS mandate try to force contraception, sterilization? Why did they throw in the abortion-inducing drugs? Because that's the camel's nose under the tent. That's where they want to go. The big prize is not contraception. It's abortion.

Rush: Yes. It always circles back to that.

Donohue: The most pernicious thing about the HHS mandate is not even forcing Catholics to pay for abortion-inducing drugs. It goes back to 2000 in California where the Obama Administration picked up the idea from the ACLU that a Catholic organization is not a Catholic organization in terms of exemptions if it hires and serves people who are not Catholic. So we're being punished. This is the most dramatic thing about this and a lot of people don't know about it. The government of the United States wants to redefine what constitutes a Catholic organization. Catholic hospitals don't have signs up saying, "Jews, Muslims, Atheists, Mormons, you're not welcome." We welcome them in. The Little Sisters of the Poor tend to old people who are not Catholic. They don't ask what your religion is as a condition of service.

This Administration, and this is what's so maliciously obscene about it, it's worse than abortion. They're saying, "You're no longer a Catholic organization because you hire and serve people who are not Catholic." I can't say this enough times to people. Talk about separation of church and state; this is the government redefining what religion is! By the way, when this gets before the Supreme Court, I predict a victory. I think

the Obama Administration is in for a sad awakening.

Rush: Before we go I need to ask you something I've observed. The left in this country has traditionally opposed the Pope. They like this one. What is it about Pope Francis that they like? Do they think he's in the process of rejecting Catholic doctrine? He supposedly said, "Who am I to judge gays?" Are leftists looking at that as though the Pope might be malleable?

Donohue: See what they do? The left obviously lusts for power, and they're dishonest. What the Pope actually said was: "If someone is gay and he searches for the Lord and has good will," two conditions, "who am I to judge?" What the left does, and the Catholic left is the worst, they take that and run with it because they're trying to tell the bishops and the priests and the laypeople in this country, "You've got to get with the program." Cuomo tried to do this with me, "You're out of step with your Pope." But the Pope never said that. They try to create momentum.

Now, it is true that when it comes to socioeconomic issues, he's out of Latin America, he has a different model. People are free to disagree on that. People said to me, "Why didn't you come against Rush Limbaugh for criticizing the Pope on that?" I said, "This is really stunning. Rush Limbaugh didn't say anything. He never used an insulting term like Bill Maher and you people do all day long. He disagreed with the Pope. You're the guys who disagree with the Pope for a living. That's how you make your money at *The National Catholic Reporter*. And you say because Rush disagrees with the Pope, as many, many Catholics do, that's a problem?" How about my friend [Father Sirico](#) of the Acton Institute and many others who are free marketeers? That doesn't constitute anti-Catholicism. I don't go after anybody for disagreeing with a public policy position of the Catholic Church unless they get insulting.

The left likes this Pope because he does tend to more of the left policies when it comes to the economic area. But look what he says about marriage. Look what he says about abortion. Look what he says about so many other things that matter. The left never quotes those. Here's what I like about Pope Francis. He is very much against clericalism. He is shaking up some of these bishops who have gotten too comfortable. He calls them the "airport bishops." This is where the right and the left can come together: "Stop with your elitism." The Pope is a populist guy. He resonates with the people. That's long overdue. I don't like pompous priests and he certainly has no use for them.

Rush: By the way, thank you for defending me on that and speaking up properly. You nailed that.

Donohue: It was just so unfair. It was so transparent.

Rush: Well, I appreciate it. But you know something else? They look at the Catholic Church like it's a political organization, getting votes. It's not. They're trying to corrupt everything.

Donohue: They are. They know where the power is. It all comes down to sex. The straights want their sex. If a kid comes along, abort them. The gays want their sex. If they get a disease, I should pay for it. It's libertinism, and the Church represents traditional moral values. Which, by the way, in the Pew survey, 81 percent of Catholics – 81 percent, the highest rating – say the Pope is doing an excellent/good job on the defense of traditional moral values. I put that statement out because I know left-wing Catholics won't be trumpeting it.

Rush: Bill, I want to thank you for your time. There is no better advocate for what he believes than you, and I've long admired your work. I wish you all the best and if there is ever anything we can do to help, would you please let me know?

Donohue: I would. Thank you, buddy.

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