

**DR. DONALD A. DOYLE: A TRIBUTE TO A DEFENDER OF
THE CATHOLIC FAITH**

***THE CATHOLIC ALTERNATIVE
RADIO SHOW, WHPC-90.3 F.M.
NASSAU COMMUNITY COLLEGE, GARDEN CITY, NY***

*Host: Dr. Joseph A Varacalli, Director
Nassau Community College Center for Catholic Studies
And Professor of Sociology at Nassau Community College—SUNY*

Interviewee: Dr. Jane Gilroy

J.V. *The Catholic Alternative* is today truly honored to interview the distinguished Catholic scholar and pro-life activist, Dr. Jane Gilroy on today's topic: "Dr. Donald A. Doyle: A Tribute to a Defender of the Catholic Faith." Jane Gilroy, a frequent guest on the *Catholic Alternative Radio Show*, is Professor Emerita of English at Molloy College in Rockville Centre, NY. She is also the Founder and President of the Long Island Chapter of University Faculty for Life. On today's program, Dr. Gilroy will be providing a discussion of the varied contributions to family, Church, and society that her long-time colleague at Molloy College, political scientist Dr. Donald A. Doyle, made throughout his own distinguished career. Welcome back to *Catholic Alternative*, Jane.

J.G. Thank you, Joe, and I'm very happy to be here.

J.V. Well Jane, it's always an honor to have you, and you have your fans out there, our faithful listeners of the *Catholic Alternative*. Now Jane, for the benefit of our listeners, can you start by telling us a little bit about Dr. Donald Doyle and also how you met him?

J.G. Well, Joe, Donald Doyle was an outstanding lay Catholic, an educator, and a family man. He was a person who brought his Catholicism into every area of his life. He taught social studies at Memorial and Stimson junior high schools in South Huntington for 30 years, and he also served as chairman of the department. When I was getting ready for the interview here, I talked with many of his friends, and I found out that one of the reasons he

taught in public school was that he felt the Catholic influence was very important there. He also served as a member, vice-president, and president of the Commack Board of Education from 1963 to 1978, even though he did not teach in that district nor did his children attend public school there. And, again, that was for the same reason.

Don was willing and even eager, to debate hot issues that came up, such as sex education in the schools. And I understand that there was a program where they were going to start from kindergarten on up with sex education. He has often times been in that debate situation and yet people aptly describe him as non-confrontational. He never presented his opinion with hubris, but rather with clarity and humility. It was very important to him, however, that the truth be stated, and one of the reasons he pursued his doctorate was that he knew it would add more weight to his positions.

After he retired from the public schools, Don taught history and political science at Molloy College in Rockville Centre, where I teach, and where he also became Chairman his Department.

J.V. Now Jane, can you tell us a little bit about how you met Donald Doyle?

J.G. Yes, it was quite a long time ago. It was in the late 1960s when Don and my husband, Francis, were active in the Intra-Church Relations Committee. That was a group of speakers—and later writers—who defended the liberal, moderate, or traditional views on various Church issues. Later we were all involved in the beginnings of the Right to Life Party. Then when he came to Molloy College, where he taught for twenty years, I had the pleasure of seeing him more often. We also worked together on the founding the Long Island Chapter of University Faculty for Life, with Bob Kinpoitner. Dr. Kinpoitner is the chairman of the English Department at Molloy, and Don was our first Vice-President. He served faithfully until he began having problems with his health.¹

J. V. Now Jane, can you tell us a little bit more about these groups? For example, you mentioned the Intra-Church Relations Committee and the position Don represented on the committee.

J. G. Yes, it was a very interesting group. In the late 1960s, post-Vatican II, Church issues were much in debate; and Don participated early by speaking for the group, taking the traditional viewpoint. Later, Father Paul Driscoll, who was moderator, and who became a great friend of Don's, started an Intra-Church column, which was published nationally. Don again represented the traditional viewpoint. He had studied the documents that had come out of the Vatican Council and he believed they were not so much a departure from the past but rather "an emphasis, a renewal of our roots."²

Don believed that the teachings of the Church were a great gift to humanity. He took them seriously, and he was able to defend them joyfully, having the great gift of not taking himself too seriously. For example, he took great delight when a liberal diocesan newspaper³ cancelled the column because of one of his articles. In it he had criticized Church organizations that maintained known dissidents on their staff, and this paper had one. He seemed to take the cancellation as a compliment.

J.V. That's Don.

J.G. He also saw the humor when a liberal at one of the Intra-Church dialogs preferred him to a moderate. The moderate had labeled her approach the most anti-intellectual he had ever heard because the main thrust of her talk concerned the great religious experience she had watching sunlight and sunbeams coming in through a window. It was too much for this professor to tolerate. Somehow she didn't think Don all that conservative at all, she said later, when she talked with the moderator. After all, he had used overhead slides to make his points. But actually, I think what happened was that Don was always so gracious and respectful in a debate that people with opposing views found it easy to listen to him.

J. V. And I can certainly confirm that. That is so true. Now Dr. Gilroy, can you talk a little bit about Don's active involvement in politics and also in the founding and institutionalizing of the Right to Life Party?

J. G. Yes. Don and his wife, Arlene, and many of their friends out in Suffolk began working on Pro-Life campaigns in the late 60s and early 70s, trying to bring the pro-life message to as many people as possible. Because of Don's avid interest in politics and his teaching ability, he played a valuable role in bringing other volunteers into the movement. We were working in a similar manner in Nassau County.

Father Driscoll, who was one of the Human Life Coordinators for the Rockville Centre Diocese at that time, helped to bring the groups together. Eugene McMahon, a lawyer who volunteered countless hours to help us in our Right-to-Life efforts, provided the political expertise needed for these campaigns. When the Right to Life party was incorporated in July of 1970, it was Don, Ellen McCormack, and my husband, Francis, who signed the incorporation papers.

J. V. You know, as we go through this interview, Jane, it's going to be perfectly clear to the listeners of the *Catholic Alternative* what a rich and important life Don Doyle lived. Now, you've worked closely with Don in the Long Island Chapter of University Faculty for Life. Can you tell us a little about that organization, yet another commitment of Don's, and Don's involvement in it?

J. G. Yes, Joe. University Faculty for Life, the national group, was founded in 1989 to promote a scholarly approach to life issues. It fosters research, dialogue, and publication among faculty members who respect the value of human life from its inception to natural death. We have yearly conferences at UFL where papers focusing on basic life issues, such as abortion, infanticide, and euthanasia, are discussed. Those that pass peer review are published in *Life and Learning*, a scholarly journal based on the proceedings of these conferences.

Don, Dr. Kinpoitner, whom I mentioned before, the Chairman of the English Department at Molloy, and I, were all members of

University Faculty for Life, and we wanted to bring to our own area some of that emphasis on scholarship. At first we attempted to start a Molloy Chapter, but when that didn't get approval, we broadened our base by making it the Long Island Chapter of University Faculty for Life, and that worked even better. We now have representatives from seven area colleges among our members. I'd be happy to send more information and application forms if anybody listening from among the faculty members were interested.

J.V. Jane, can you give the e-mail address?

J.G. Oh, yes: jgilroy@molloy.edu. At one of our conferences, Don spoke on a subject that was dear to his heart, "The Crucial Distinction between Civil and Natural Rights." He considered that basic to an understanding of the pro-life position. He saw it not as a religious position, but as one that applied to all people, so that was the real foundation.

When I introduced him, I noted that he had appeared on *Cablevision*⁴ and on the *Catholic Alternative Radio Show*, that we are on now, and that he had had writings published in *The Long Island Catholic*, *Social Justice Review*, and *The Catholic Social Science Review*. I also noted that he had been a founding member and first president of the New York Chapter of the Society of Catholic Social Scientists.

J.V. Yes, indeed he was, Jane. And now we go into yet another facet or angle of the life of this extraordinary man. Now, Jane, you just mentioned that Don was a founding member and first president of the New York Chapter of the Society of Catholic Social Scientists. Could you tell us a little more about that?

J.G. Well, I'm sure you could provide more information than I on the beginnings of that organization, but what I do recall is how excited Don was about it and about its speakers. We would talk in the hall between classes, and he would tell me about them. I began to understand that his connection with the Society was part of the reason he was so well versed in the social teachings of the Church and knew of so many outstanding Catholic scholars, whom he admired greatly, such Mary Ann Glendon from Harvard

Law School. He encouraged me to join and gave me a brochure and an application form.

I was very impressed that the criteria for membership included fidelity to the Magisterium of the Catholic Church, especially in its social teachings, of course making distinctions between those that were obligatory, that concerned moral principles, and those that had legitimate differences of opinion regarding their application, but I was so impressed, in fact, that I joined.

J.V. And the society is better off for the fact that the great Jane Gilroy is now a member of the Society of Catholic Social Scientists. It's absolutely true that Donny was very influential in the founding of the local New York metropolitan chapter. As you know, Jane, he worked hand-in-hand with Professor Edward Echeverria, then of Molloy, and now based at Sacred Heart Major Seminary in Detroit, in holding conferences and lectures at Molloy College and also at Nassau Community College. Don and Ed brought such famous and distinguished Catholic speakers as Ralph McInerny of the University of Notre Dame and Father George Rutler of New York City to Molloy College, for instance.

J.G. Yes, and I know I was at Father Rutler's talk, and it was excellent, and they really did a service to the school and to the community because those talks were open to the community also.

J.V. Now you really can't talk about the contributions of a Catholic to social issues unless you talk a little bit about Don's commitment as a family man, and I know the listeners of the *Catholic Alternative* would like to know a little more about Don's family and his devotion to it.

J. G. Yes, it was evident to all who knew him that above all Don was a family man. He loved his wife, Arlene, his children—he had four sons and two daughters— and their children, they had thirteen grandchildren. He delighted in speaking about them, and proudly displayed their pictures in his office. I had the distinct impression that I was one of many he brought in to see these pictures.

J.V. I'm sure that's the case.

J.G. He beamed when he showed me two of his grandchildren sitting on Cardinal O'Connor's lap. His secretary, and also a few of the people I talked to from the department, mentioned that his prize possession was a calendar his children gave him with pictures of his grandchildren for every month. While he loved teaching and had great intellectual interest and concern for current affairs, and was, as one colleague stated, of one mind and heart with the organizations to which he belonged, his family always came first. At times family plans would supersede attendance at conferences or other scholarly pursuits, and he seemed able to achieve a healthy balance there.

J. V. **I think, Jane, that that's a great word, *balance*, for Don Doyle. I know you have spoken with many of Don's friends, colleagues, and co-workers about him. In addition to his love for his family, have any other recurrent themes emerged about Don that you could share with us?**

J. G. Yes, Joe. For several of us, joy was the first quality that came to mind. We can't think of Don without smiling. Those who worked with him said he brought joy to the office every time he opened the door. He was described as joyful, jovial, good humored. One of the funny things that happened when I spoke with people in preparation for this program was they couldn't resist telling stories prefaced by, "You can't tell this on the program, but . . .," or "You can tell this, but don't mention my name." I think we all have little stories like that about Don.

On a personal note, though, his secretary recalled how he was always "upbeat," even about his cancer, and because she was battling it at the same time, they would laugh and share and commiserate together. Another comment that came up frequently was that he was a gentleman, with the emphasis on "gentle." He respected his students and they respected him, regretting it when they heard of his retirement. He was always available if they had problems, and he really listened to them.

One person commented, also, that he could be a good friend to faculty members, even when they disagreed about almost everything, because he could see beyond the disagreement to how good the person was. He didn't let the differences block their goodness.

J.V. That's a great insight of yours, Jane.

J.G. It's such a wonderful trait to see in a person, and I try to imitate it, but I don't know if I can.

J.V. Well, we all try. Don succeeded.

J.G. His attitude towards those who disagreed with him, especially regarding social justice and the teachings of the Church, was, "They were missing the boat."

J.V. You know, Jane, as you say that, I can hear that phrase ringing in my ears right now. That's exactly one of Donny's favorite phrases.

J.G. Right. He believed they were losing out on the good things that the Church brought to the world, especially its guidance and hope, its opportunities for renewal. He wanted everyone to discover or rediscover the treasures it had to offer.

Another recurrent phrase was "committed Catholic." You couldn't know Don long without knowing that he was committed to the Church. For example, he was excited about a group that was formed at Molloy to study the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* when it was first published in English. They met during the week at lunchtime, and they discussed several items each week. He was quite enthusiastic about it. I know Father Madigan was in it, and, as you mentioned before, Ed Echeverria. He was actually, I think, the one who would lead the group. But there were others in it also. Unfortunately, I had a time-conflict, so I couldn't join. But he would he would come and tell me a little bit about it.

His commitment to the Church's social teachings was reflected in the classroom, also, and he would bring in the Popes' social encyclicals as part of his courses, and he felt it was important to do so, but he would bring in other views also. When he taught "Women in Politics," which was a popular course, he would discuss Ellen McCormack's presidential campaign, something most of the students had not heard about. And so what he brought to his class was refreshing, and he was open to hear all of his students' views also.

J.V. So it's absolutely the case, Jane, that Dr. Donald Doyle represented a kind of beacon of an intelligent, authentic, moderate, healthy Catholicism at Molloy College.

J.G. Oh, yes, I would agree with that.

J.V. Is there any particular quality of Don's that you would like to emphasize for the listeners of the *Catholic Alternative*?

J. G. Yes, I would. Sometimes when we praise people we like to speak of them as unique or inimitable, beyond the scope of most of us. I think one of God's gifts to us through Don is that many of the good things he did are imitable. While his approach was intellectual, he was, as one colleague said, an educator rather than a scholar. He earned his doctorate, but he would be the first one to tell you that it took hard work and humility. When I was struggling with my dissertation—I was a returning student—and I was working on that dissertation and revising it again and again, Don said to me, "Watch, I'll show you how I did it. He lowered his head and then he said, as though he were talking to his mentor, "Oh that is what you want! Of course." He said, "Once you get it, then you could do what you want, but until then, do whatever they tell you."

J.V. For any aspiring doctoral students out there, that is some excellent advice.

J.G. Yes, and it worked, so that I was able to finish it and not be too discouraged. But he set a great example for all of us. His love of Christ and the Church showed in every aspect of his life. He did as Mother Teresa recommended, "little things with great love." Above all, he said "yes" to the challenges of life, yes to marriage, yes to raising a family, to participating in and even initiating political, social, and pro-life groups to further the good of the Church and of all of society.

I would like to add "courageous" to the list of attributes because I think Don courageously upheld the teachings of the Church and the right to life of the unborn in a world that too often derides such beliefs, either subtly or in an outright manner.

At Don's funeral Mass, His grandchildren handed out an insert with all the family names and on the reverse side a brief description that captured their grandfather's goodness, and I'd like to read it if I may:

Donald Doyle's journey through his earthly life has been a testament to the potential of the human spirit to seek and act on the side of good more than on the side of evil. It has been a pilgrimage to holiness, filled with thoughtfulness, compassion and honor. At every milestone, the markers of respect, truth and love were evident. Perfection was never to be, but always in his sights. Don was always a witness and a standard-bearer for freedom, responsibility and the Christian mission. He took his steps humbly and remained focused on his final and glorious destination.

J.V. Amen! Now Jane, we have a few more moments, and when I think of Jane Gilroy, there are several things that pop up to my mind. One is, again, your outstanding work in establishing the Long Island Chapter of University Faculty for Life. I also remember that brilliant talk that people are still talking about that you gave at Nassau Community College on the presidential campaign of Ellen McCormack, and also the important doctoral dissertation that you did. Now, we just have a couple of minutes. Would you like to talk about any one of those three subjects?

J.G. Well, as I mentioned, Don was really involved with many of those, especially in the beginning of the Long Island Chapter. When I say "courageous," whenever you have right-to-life work, and especially when you have it at the academic level, I think it takes a lot of courage to speak out. Don was very good and very encouraging to our group, and very supportive. And so when we began, we really needed to have that kind of support. I think that many times I was able to confer with him on those subjects. So I see it as involved, not just for myself, but also for him. And also I would say I have to compliment Dr. Kinpoitner, who supported us so very often at that time.

J.V. Yes, and you have that great character, Father Madigan, at Molloy College. A word or two about the great Father?

J.G. Oh, he was wonderful, and a great friend of Don's. You would see him often with Don. But, if we have a couple of seconds, you know what I would like to add?

J.V. Please, Jane.

J.G. One of those stories where I was told, "You can't tell my name on the radio," but I can at least tell the story. I was talking with a faculty member, and he said, when you speak with so-and-so, will you ask him about his and Don's connection with the "Manhattan Club." And I was thinking of the Downtown Athletic Club or something along that line. And the fellow said, "I'm not going to tell you what it is," but ask this professor. So I called up the professor, and I interviewed him and mentioned the Manhattan Club, and he bust out laughing. And he said, "Do you know what that was?" He said, "Don and I taught at night, and we'd meet in the hall and we'd talk about philosophy, we'd talk about the Church, we'd talk about all of these things." So he said to Don, "Do you have time? Can you come over to my apartment before you go home and we'll have a cocktail? And we had Manhattans." So, after that, when Don was teaching at night, on occasion he would peek into this other professor's room, and he would say at the beginning of the class, "Is the Manhattan Club meeting tonight?" And they would get to talk.

J.V. Well, I was never a member of the Manhattan Club. I was a member of the Bourbon Club. But I think we were not that far apart there, Jane. That's great. What a wonderful man Don Doyle was and we know he's still with us, and we pray that he is praying for us, and we know that his work is going to continue. Now we want to thank you Dr. Gilroy for really a spectacular interview. Don Doyle has a lot of friends out there, and there are a lot of people who are going to appreciate this interview. There are a lot of people who will also benefit by learning about this great man, and may he inspire future generations to do the kinds of things that he did so successfully with such humility and with such Christian charity.

Notes

1. Doyle was Vice President from Fall 2000 until Spring 2004.
2. Interview by Stuart Vincent, "At 'Seder,' Catholics Go Back to Roots," *Newsday*, 8 Apr. 1993, Nassau and Suffolk editions. :4.
3. *The Brooklyn Tablet*, ed. Don Zirkel.
4. Cablevision (Nassau and Suffolk), Channel 55 (New York City), and Channel 12 (daytime news Long Island).