

DID THE POPE DEFEND VIOLENCE?

Catholic League president Bill Donohue commented today on media reports that in a speech the pope gave yesterday, he defended violence:

“In a story today by the Associated Press on Pope Benedict XVI’s address in Brazil yesterday, it says the pope ‘defended the church’s often bloody campaign to Christianize indigenous people....’ It is striking to note that in a story today by McClatchy newspapers, it says the pope ‘defended the Roman Catholic Church’s often bloody campaign to Christianize indigenous people.’

“There are several curious things about this matter. Did AP crib from McClatchy or vice versa? Or did they both rip a page from the same playbook? Secondly, it smacks of more than interpretive journalism to make such an accusation—it reads like propaganda. Thirdly, what exactly did the pope say that allowed these two media giants to come to such a fantastic conclusion? Did the pope really defend violence?

“The two reporters, Alan Clendenning of AP and Jack Chang of McClatchy, were asked by the Catholic League to explain how they both wound up with the identical language; they were also asked to ‘pinpoint the part of the pope’s speech’ where he defended violence. Clendenning never spoke to the first issue; Chang said, ‘I came up with that line on my own, for better or for worse.’ Neither could pinpoint where in the speech the pope defended violence. That’s because he never did. By contrast, the *New York Times* ran a piece today on the pope’s speech and nowhere did it mention anything about the pope justifying violence against anyone. So how can the nation’s largest news organization (AP), and the nation’s third-largest newspaper publisher (McClatchy), manage to screw things up so badly?

“AP subsequently released a revised story that amended the initial one. Nonetheless, this is journalism at its worst. We will register a complaint at both media outlets.”