

DID THE POPE DEFEND VIOLENCE?

In a May 14 story on Pope Benedict XVI's address to bishops in Brazil, the Associated Press reported that the pope "defended the church's often bloody campaign to Christianize indigenous people..." The same day, a story by McClatchy newspapers said that 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 Catholic League asked the two reporters, Alan Clendenning of AP and Jack Chang of McClatchy, to explain how they wound up with identical language; they were also asked to pinpoint where the pope 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 reporter was able to pinpoint where the pope justified violence. That's because he never did.

By contrast, the *New York Times* covered the pope's speech and nowhere mentioned anything about him justifying violence against anyone. So how could the nation's largest news organization (AP) and third-largest newspaper publisher (McClatchy) screw things up so badly?

AP subsequently released a revised story that amended the initial one. Nonetheless, this was journalism at its worst. The Catholic League registered a complaint at both media outlets.