

HYPING PENTAGON-VATICAN FEUD

Fact checking is a non-stop business at the Catholic League, and we are proud of our record. Michael McDonald, our director of communications, uncovered some aspects of an alleged war between the Pentagon and the Vatican that sets the record straight.

It was recently reported that the Department of War threatened the Vatican with military action. It was a bogus story, but it made the rounds on the Internet.

There are two culpable sources: the Free Press and Christopher Hale. The Free Press has done some fine reporting, so this is more of an anomaly. Hale is a left-wing Catholic whose ethics is on a par with his fidelity to Church teachings. Once the story was debunked, Hale was still sticking to his guns; the Free Press backed off.

On April 8, the Free Press reported on an allegedly tense and confrontational meeting between representatives from the Vatican and Trump administration officials. The meeting quickly became hostile, so said the anonymous sources cited for the article. Allegedly, the Papal Nuncio to the United States was given “a bitter lecture warning that the United States has the military power to do whatever it wants—and that the Church had better take its side.”

The Free Press noted that “As tensions escalated, one U.S. official went so far as to invoke the Avignon Papacy, the period in the 1300s when the French Crown leveraged its military power to dominate the papal authority.” The reporter was good enough to admit that this came from anonymous sources. But it is also true that he has drafted numerous articles that pit the Vatican and the Department of War against each other.

Hale claims on his blog that unnamed Vatican officials told

him they “saw the reference to an Avignon Papacy as a threat to use military force against the Holy See.” He is so radical that even the far-left and anti-Catholic *National Catholic Reporter* notes that Hale’s activities on his blog are “partisan wish-casting” in a crude effort “to co-opt the papacy to fit into a progressive political agenda.”

On April 9, the Department of War issued a statement claiming that the portrayal of the meeting with the Papal Nuncio is “inaccurate.” The spokesman said the reporting has been “highly exaggerated and distorted,” insisting that “the meeting between the Pentagon and Vatican officials was a respectful and reasonable discussion.”

Further, United States Ambassador to the Holy See Brian Burch spoke with the Papal Nuncio who also “confirmed the recent media characterizations of his meeting...are fabrications and were just invented.” The ambassador also quoted him saying the meeting “was frank and cordial,” and that there was no mention of the Avignon Papacy.

These new revelations generated more interest, and several outlets ran stories featuring statements that corrected the fabricated narrative put forward by Hale. These outlets included the *Washington Post*, the *Hill* and *Forbes*.

Even the hardcore ideologues at the *New Republic* and the *Daily Beast* ran a news story on the meeting referencing the Department of War and Vatican statements, distancing themselves from Hale.

Hale discredited himself—again.