

MEDIA SPIN CATHOLIC RESPONSE TO PROTESTS

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on how some media outlets are spinning the Catholic response to the protests:

Public trust in the media is abysmal, but not without reason. To cite the latest example of unprofessional journalism, consider how some media outlets, led by the Associated Press (AP) characterized the Catholic response to the recent protests. The story was picked up by many newspapers and broadcast news outlets.

Nicole Winfield and Elana Schor of AP wrote a piece titled, "Pope Sends Strong Message to US Catholics After Floyd Death." And what is that "strong message"? Not to vote for President Trump. This is a classic case of spinning a story to achieve a political end.

Referring to the protests, AP says that "the intensity and consistency of the Vatican's reaction suggests that, from the pope on down, it is seeking to encourage anti-racism protesters while making a clear statement about where American Catholics should stand ahead of President Donald Trump's bid for a second term in November."

This is a remarkable statement. The clear message is that Pope Francis has entered the presidential race for the White House, giving American Catholics his tacit endorsement of Joe Biden. So where is the evidence?

The reporters quote Anthea Butler saying that the pope "wants to send a very clear message to these conservative Catholics here who are pro-Trumpers that, 'Listen, this is just as much of an issue as abortion is.'"

Butler is a curious choice to ask for a comment. The Ivy League professor is on record saying that “God is a white racist.” If that is her opinion, why would anyone care what she has to say about the pope? Wouldn’t he, the Vicar of Christ on earth, qualify, by extension, as a “white racist” too?

More important, why didn’t the AP reporters simply quote something the pope said that would verify their unsupported thesis?

Winfield and Schor continue by saying “Francis and the Vatican have seized on [George] Floyd’s killing” and that this “suggests a coordinated strategy.” To this end they quote a church historian, Alberto Melloni, who contends, “It’s not like seven people had the same type of reaction” by chance. This, of course, is pure conjecture. He offered no evidence of a “coordinated strategy.”

The reporters cite the pope and others who have condemned racism, saying it is a “life” issue, one that conservative Catholics, “for whom the abortion issue is paramount,” need to acknowledge. But they do. So there is nothing to this.

All Catholics, regardless of their political leanings, recognize that abortion and racism are “intrinsically evil.” Indeed, that was the way the U.S. bishops framed these two issues in their document, “Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship.” No conservative Catholic has criticized them for doing so.

Proof that there is nothing inherently liberal or conservative about condemning racism can be found by reading the dozens of statements by U.S. bishops on the subject. St. Paul and Minneapolis Archbishop Bernard Hebda was first to respond on May 27. Two days later, seven bishops chairmen of committees of the bishops’ conference issued a statement. This was followed on May 31 in an eloquent address by Archbishop José

Gomez of Los Angeles and president of the bishops' conference. All condemned racism and violence.

Washington D.C. Archbishop Wilton Gregory is mentioned for his criticism of officials at the St. John Paul II National Shrine who allowed President Trump and his wife to visit there. The event was planned in advance and the site was chosen as an appropriate venue to promote international religious liberty. Yes, it seems clear that Gregory does not like the president, but to suggest that this is part of a "coordinated strategy" is without foundation. Who else followed suit? No one.

The AP journalists also mention that the pope phoned Texas Bishop Mark Seitz of El Paso to congratulate him for his role in protesting racism. This happened on June 3rd, the same day Pope Francis made an address where he condemned both racism and violent protests. Seitz said the pope never mentioned the demonstration. More important, what the AP story did not say is critical. Seitz did not join with radicals: he participated in a prayer vigil, kneeling in a park, with priests from his diocese.

Cardinal Kevin Farrell is cited in the AP story for his comments decrying racism. Too bad the reporters didn't quote his remark denouncing attempts to politicize the reaction to the killing of Floyd. The Catholic Church, he said, "does not want to take one side against another." If we do, he maintained, "We end up identifying our Christian faith with the ideological vision of the side we have embraced." Well said.

It is one thing for someone like Joe Scarborough to put words into the mouth of the Holy Father by saying, "The pope is telling him [Trump] to cut it out." That is what this man does for a living—he spins the truth. It is quite another for AP reporters to mislead the public.