

MEDIA TAKE AIM AT THE POPE; BIGOTRY EXPLODES

Beginning in March, and extending well into April, the *New York Times* ran a series of articles seeking to tie Pope Benedict XVI to the priestly sexual abuse scandal. It was quickly joined by other media outlets, the most prominent of which was the Associated Press. The net result was an absolute explosion of anti-Catholic bigotry, the most vicious of which took direct aim at the pope.

The Catholic League was proud to respond with a full-page ad on the op-ed page of the *New York Times* that quickly rebutted the most serious accusations. The response it garnered, from the Vatican to American cardinals, was profoundly gratifying. Even those who are not normally on our side weighed in with praise, as did many non-Catholics.

On the other hand, the Catholic League came under fire from many quarters, and from many parts of the world. Much of the criticism was simply boilerplate: bloggers, in particular, painted us as defenders of sexual molestation, using the most vulgar language imaginable. In fact, we could fill this entire issue of *Catalyst* with all the invective used to smear us. Fortunately, we could also fill this edition with all the media hits we had—we were simply all over the news.

We are convinced that some of the attempts to finger the pope—none of which had any real sticking power—were designed to unseat him. Quite frankly, the pope is hated because he heads the most powerful countercultural institution in the western world. His enemies want to weaken his moral authority, and some have even called for his arrest the next time he steps foot on foreign soil. Yet as Bill Donohue told the *Washington Post*, “there is not a shred of evidence he did anything wrong.”

Our most common complaint against the media was its exclusive concentration on sexual abuse cases in the Catholic Church that extended back to the mid-20th century. No other religious or secular institution was targeted by the media—they were all given a pass. What made this resemble a modern-day witch-hunt—about events which occurred a long time ago—was precisely its cherry-picking nature.

The good news is that the more we made plain our case, the more receptive an audience we found. To wit: our good friend in the Jewish community, former New York City Mayor Ed Koch, branded the attacks as “manifestations of anti-Catholicism.” We are pleased to note, as well, the support that the pope received from Harvard law professor Alan Dershowitz.