

MEDIA TREATED POPE FAIRLY

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On Thursday, March 31, I addressed some of the law students at Notre Dame University on the subject of media objectivity. But I was distracted all day, listening to reports on how the pope was doing. That night, I was interviewed by Aaron Brown of CNN at the local NBC affiliate, a studio conveniently located on the campus. The next morning, I was interviewed by Don Imus, the national radio-talk show host whose program is simulcast on MSNBC-TV. The questioning of John Paul II's legacy had commenced in earnest.

When I got back to New York on Friday, the pace quickened: I had 15 calls from the media at my home; two dozen more on my cell phone; and at least 50 more at the office. Kiera McCaffrey, our new director of communications, stepped up to the plate with authority, speaking to reporters and granting TV interviews; her youth made her all the more impressive. Meanwhile, I was running from studio to studio.

It so happened that on Saturday, April 2, I was scheduled for a 3:20 pm hit on the Fox News Channel (I had been on "Fox and Friends" that morning). When I left for the studio, the pope was still alive, but when I got to Fox just before 3:00, things had changed. While waiting for security to let me in, John Moody, senior vice president at Fox News (and a great Catholic), walked by saying that AP (Associated Press) was reporting the pope had died. He then said, "look," pointing to the TV monitors located right above us—Fox was reporting that Pope John Paul II had died. John then raced me to the studio where I was interviewed live by Shepard Smith, who was in Rome.

The media have been, for the most part, overwhelmingly fair. So fair that it has angered the bigots, many of whom came out

of the woodwork. One of whom was Christopher Hitchens.

Hitchens is an Englishman, a socialist, an intellectual, an atheist, a contrarian and a bigot. His bigotry is visceral—towards the Catholic Church, in particular. I've debated him live on the subject of Mother Teresa, and many times on TV on various issues. Besides Mother Teresa, Hitchens hates Reagan and Clinton, and just about everyone else. Including John Paul II.

On April 5, I was asked to debate Hitchens on MSNBC; he was in D.C. and I was in New York. The show, "Scarborough Country," airs at 10:00 pm on the east coast, and is usually done live. But this time they wanted to tape our debate a few hours earlier and show it later that night.

Hitchens started bashing the pope, blaming him for the sexual abuse scandal, obstruction of justice, etc. As he is wont to do, he provided no evidence for his absurd charges, just arguments. When asked by Joe Scarborough whether I agreed with Hitchens, I said only a madman or a bigot would. At that, Hitchens started screaming bloody murder and stormed off the set. I continued to make my points, unfazed, much to the delight of Joe and Pat Buchanan.

I went home that night anxiously awaiting the show (when you do TV by satellite, you are asked to talk into a blank camera and cannot actually see what is going on). Our segment never aired. Though disappointed, I understood the reasoning of MSNBC officials: out of respect, they thought it imprudent to air this segment the week of the pope's burial. They were certainly not mad at me—it was Hitchens who angered them. Imus made a quick mention of this a day or two later on his show.

Hitchens may have been among the worst offenders, but he was not alone. From punks like Bill Maher, to ethically challenged persons like Arianna Huffington, the Catholic bashers were in full swing. They hit on all the usual topics: celibacy, women

priests, abortion, birth control, stem cell research, homosexuality, euthanasia, and dissent.

And then, of course, we heard from Catholics, or at least those raised Catholic. Thomas Cahill, author of *How the Irish Saved Civilization*, ripped the pope from end to end, saying John Paul II “may, in time to come, be credited with destroying his church.” But if the Church has managed to survive dissidents like Cahill and his ilk, it’s a sure bet it’ll be here for time immemorial.

It never ceases to amaze me why those who hate Catholicism find it impossible to move on. After all, those who don’t like being Catholic are free to leave, and those who aren’t Catholic have no logical reason to fret. If they really believed in diversity, they wouldn’t try to bully the Catholic Church into adopting their radical agenda; they’d simply herald the diversity the Church represents and join a religion that shares their secular fantasies.

But this aside, Catholics have rarely had such positive coverage. As I said on more than one TV show, there is no religion on the planet that could capture the attention of the media the way the Roman Catholic Church can. As I said on Fox, we Catholics are “going to own the month of April.” And we did it with style.