

NEW YORK TIMES' DUMB TAKE ON CATHOLICISM

There was a book review in yesterday's *New York Times* by Bill Keller, executive editor of the newspaper, of *Absolute Monarchs: A History of the Papacy*, by John Julius Norwich. Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on it today:

It's hard to say who is dumber—Bill Keller or John Julius Norwich. But to say that Pope Urban VIII imprisoned Galileo and banned all his works is without doubt the voice of a moron: Urban VIII lauded Galileo's work and showered him with gifts and medals. Furthermore, Galileo was never imprisoned; he was put under house arrest in an apartment in a Vatican palace, with a servant.

Similarly, to say that Pope Pius XII was an enabler of fascism is libelous: no one in the world did more to save Jews and undermine Hitler than Pius XII. That is why the Israelis planted 800,000 trees in his honor, one for every Jew he saved.

Keller is right to say that Norwich is "no scholar," and he is doubly right to say that he is "selective about where he lingers." Where he lingers is in the mythical world. Any author who wants to be taken seriously does not offer an entire chapter about some alleged historical figure whom the author reluctantly admits never lived. But that is just what he did by offering up fairy tales about "Pope Joan."

Naturally, Keller says the bishops blamed "the libertine culture" for the "scourge of pedophile priests." But the "blame Woodstock" explanation originated with the *New York Times*, not the bishops, and the scourge he mentions is homosexuality, not pedophilia. So he is twice wrong.

It is not surprising that the book ends by begging the Catholic Church to accept homosexuality and women priests. That is what these people live for. But since neither Keller

nor Norwich is Catholic, why should they care? They care because the Church does not entertain their trendy ideas about sexuality, and it never will.

Contact Bill Keller: keller@nytimes.com