

NEW YORK TIMES MALIGNS SAINT; NO EVIDENCE PROVIDED

On September 30, when Bill Donohue read a *New York Times* front-page story on Saint Junípero Serra, he could hardly believe his eyes. The 17th century priest, who championed the rights of Indians, had just been canonized by Pope Francis the week before. So it came as a shock to read that he was accused of torturing Indians.

As Catholic League members know, in anticipation of the expected controversy over Father Serra, Donohue authored a booklet on him a few months ago. He read widely on the Franciscan priest, and published his findings in *The Noble Legacy of Father Serra*; he used a Q&A format to make his research easily accessible to readers. In all his readings, Donohue never found a single scholar who ever accused Father Serra of torturing Indians.

The reporter who wrote this story, Laura M. Holson, offered this remarkable sentence: "Historians agree that he [Serra] forced Native Americans to abandon their tribal culture and convert to Christianity, and that he had them whipped and imprisoned and sometimes worked or tortured to death."

Donohue readily concedes that the Indians were not treated justly. But it was the Spanish conquerors, not the Franciscans, who were responsible for the worst excesses. Indeed, Father Serra's heroism, which led to his canonization, is largely a function of his opposition to Indian maltreatment. It was he who insisted that the Indians should be treated with the dignity afforded all human beings.

On the day the story appeared, Donohue emailed the reporter asking her to provide evidence that "Historians agree" that Father Serra had Indians "tortured to death." [To read his

letter, and all the subsequent exchanges he had with *Times* officers, see pp. 4-5; it is laid out in chronological order.]

As you can see, none of the parties at the newspaper were able to answer his one question: Who are these historians? Yet they refused to run a correction.

No one disputes that radical activists, racists, and anti-Catholics have made wild and unsubstantiated accusations against the Franciscans. But there is a difference between these agenda-ridden ideologues and scholars. The latter would be expected to provide evidence, and that is why the charge that "historians agree" that Father Serra was a barbarian is complete nonsense. If this were true, the *Times* would be able to name them.

Finally, it must be said that Vatican scholars pored over thousands of documents related to Father Serra and released a 1,200 page position paper on him. They would never recommend for sainthood anyone who ever authorized the torturing of innocent persons