

PLAYING FAVORITES WITH TWO POPES

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on reaction to Pope Francis' altercation with a woman on New Year's Eve as he walked a line of greeters:

The pope slapped an Asian woman twice on the hand and walked away in a fit of anger. That much is indisputable. Why he did it and what it means is a matter of debate. The Vatican attributed his reaction to being grabbed by the woman as she sought to shake his hand, causing "a shooting pain."

The larger issue here is the way many in the media treated the pope's reaction, and how they typically respond when the source of controversy is Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI. Benedict is rarely given the benefit of doubt when a controversy arises.

Claire Giangravé wrote a piece for Religion News Service noting the Holy Father apologized for "being grumpy." The Vatican never indicated that he was grumpy on New Year's Eve, or that he reacts intemperately when he is.

AFP, the French news agency, blamed the pope's bodyguards—they should have been more vigilant.

Several commentators blamed the woman.

Dave Armstrong at Patheos said her reaching out to him with both arms was "shocking and staggering."

International Business Times said the pope's violent reaction was very "human."

The Guardian said "the woman would not let go and in a gesture that appeared to cause him pain, he slapped at her hand before pulling his hand free."

John Allen at Crux blamed the Asian woman as well. He said “it was the grasping woman rather than the pope” who was guilty. He also blamed the pope’s ethnicity, saying “the revelation that an 83-year-old Argentinean male has a temper wasn’t exactly a thunderclap.”

Why is it okay for those on the Left, who are the masters of identity politics, to blame a woman of color while using as exculpatory the pope’s alleged machismo upbringing?

There is a game going on here. We have the good pope, Francis, and the bad pope, Benedict. This is currently being played out on the big screen. Those who have reviewed “The Two Popes” have noted the unfair nature of the contrasting portrayals. This includes *Commonweal*, Bishop Robert Barron, *First Things*, the *Washington Post*, and *Vanity Fair*.

This is nothing new. On March 3, 2014, I published an op-ed ad in the *New York Times* titled, “Happy Anniversary Holy Father.” On the day of Pope Francis’ first year anniversary, March 13, I mentioned the Catholic League’s tribute to him in a news release. But I also took the opportunity to comment on the way the media were treating Francis and his predecessor.

“What is particularly odious is the increasing tendency of agenda-ridden Catholics to trash Pope Benedict XVI, as well as Blessed Pope John Paul II: this is done so that their inflated image of Pope Francis stands in sharp contrast to Benedict and John Paul II. What they hope to achieve is a sense of momentum—things are moving their way and we need to get in line. Their goal is as transparent as it is dishonest.

“The Catholic League loves all three popes, and we implore everyone to give due recognition to their very different strengths. But to those who constantly look at the world through a political lens, there are good popes (Francis) and bad ones (his predecessors). This is a jaundiced view of reality, and it is unfair to all of them.”

Looks like nothing has changed. There needs to be one level playing field, inside the Church, as well as outside.