

POPE'S "PUNCH" QUIP AND MORE



Bill Donohue contrasts media reaction to some comments made by Pope Francis aboard the papal plane in 2013 and 2015.

When the pope was on a plane coming back from Brazil in 2013, he said, "If someone is gay and he searches for the Lord and has good will, who am I to judge?" Over 900 news stories quickly appeared, the majority of which were dishonest: "Who am I to judge?" was all they quoted. Pundits were even worse: they said the pope was asking us to be non-judgmental about homosexuality.

By contrast, today's newspapers give scant coverage to what the pope said yesterday about the Paris murders. The pope said, "In freedom of expression there are limits." He condemned the Paris murders, but he also condemned the needless provocations. "You cannot provoke. You cannot insult the faith of others." As an example, he said that if his friend, Dr. Alberto Gasparri, were "to use a curse word against my mother, he can expect a punch. It's normal."

The disparity in news coverage can be explained on ideological grounds: the media liked what the pope said on the plane to Rome two years ago but they did not like what he said yesterday aboard the plane to the Philippines. The reaction of pundits to his "punch" quip is not ideological: it offended many conservatives as well as liberals.

What explains the pundits' reaction? Humorlessness. A video of

the pope's remarks shows him standing up, microphone in hand, with Dr. Gasparri standing to his right. The pope is clearly jesting—he feigns a punch at him as he makes his quip. Gasparri was cracking up, as were others. But to the humorless, he committed a grave sin. They need to get a life. Too many conservatives are just as stiff as liberals these days.

What the pope said, and how he said it, is not hard to understand. He was simply stating the obvious: when we intentionally and needlessly insult people, don't be shocked when it triggers a strong response. That's common sense, a property that is not at all common these days.