

# STICKING THEIR NOSES WHERE THEY DON'T BELONG

As the lead story in this edition of *Catalyst* indicates, non-Catholic reporters and pundits used the election of Pope Benedict XVI to inject themselves into the affairs of the Catholic Church in an unprecedented fashion. What follows is a sample of just how bad things got.

In April 21, the *New York Daily News* printed two articles under the banner, "Agendas for the New Pope." Neither of the writers was Catholic. One was Stanley Crouch, a black journalist noted for being controversial; the other was Ari Goldman, a Jewish professor at Columbia.

Before Crouch got to lecturing Pope Benedict XVI, he slandered the Catholic Church's heroic efforts during the Holocaust to save Jews and blasted the Church for oppressing women. Goldman admonished the new pope to "get off his papal throne" and start reaching out to "alienated Catholics, Jews and gays." One wonders what was more insulting—the attack articles or the decision to enlist two non-Catholics to set the new pope's agenda for him.

Like Crouch and Goldman, Frances Kissling of Catholics for a Free Choice was loaded with advice for the new pope. In her press release of April 19, she even "laid out a schedule for the next one hundred days." At the top of her list was a need to "immediately meet with survivors of sexual abuse by the clergy." Second, she demanded that the new pope "form a commission to study the current church policy on condoms to prevent HIV/AIDS."

Kissling also told the pope that he needs to establish a Pontifical Academy on Women's Rights in the Church. And with a straight face, this champion of violence against innocent

children said it's time for the Church to oppose capital punishment and war in every instance.

On April 20, in the online site, SFGate.com, Mark Morford offered "14 Thoughts For The New Pope." Predictably, many had to do with sex. Yes to condoms, no to gay bashing, etc. He even advised the pope to see the movie about the sex pervert, Alfred Kinsey. Morford ended his screed by saying he was not particularly optimistic about Pope Benedict: "All signs point to more repression, homophobia, intolerance, denial, insularity, guilt like a weapon." Now if only Morford felt guilty about the intolerance he shows for Catholicism—instead of insulating himself in a web of denial—all would be well.

Richard Cohen is a Jew who feels left out because he was not asked to elect the new pope. That's right—he said so on April 21 in the *Washington Post*: "Being a non-Catholic nowadays is a bit like being a non-American most of the time. Important, maybe even historic, decisions are being made and you are totally locked out." To which Bill Donohue replied in a news release, "maybe he [Cohen] can arrange for me to vote in the next Israeli election."

Then there was Rabbi Michael Lerner, the rabbi who counseled Bill Clinton at the time of his problems with a girl named Monica. Speaking of the pope, Lerner said, "This guy is going to continue the Vatican's authoritarian, hierarchical, antigay policies." Which makes us wonder why this guy Lerner always seems to show up at the wrong time offering the wrong advice about matters he knows nothing about.

The Rev. John H. Thomas is president of the United Church of Christ, a religion so liberal it makes rabid secularists look conservative. Thomas is unhappy with the new pope, saying the selection is a "profound disappointment" for him. He called the pope's ideas "confrontational," as if Thomas' stance isn't.

Dean Hoge, a non-Catholic who teaches at Catholic University, labeled the pope a “polarizing figure,” and said that “dissident Catholics”—the only ones he would know—“won’t go away.” Indeed, he said they would “push harder,” something we have come to expect from those who complain about polarization in the Church. The irony is apparently way over Hoge’s head.

CBS Evening News, which tried to fix the presidential election, made it clear that it would not have chosen Pope Benedict XVI: “In choosing Joseph Ratzinger, the cardinals picked the most polarizing figure in the Catholic Church.” Translated, this means that CBS likes abortion and gay marriage, and the pope doesn’t.

CNN’s Jim Bittermann let his feelings loose when he opined, “Well, it’s hard for me to believe that there wasn’t at least some controversy in the decision of Cardinal Ratzinger.” Well, it’s just as hard for us to believe that he thinks there wasn’t—after all, Cardinal Ratzinger was not elected on the first ballot. In any event, we were struck by Bittermann’s decision to call the new pope “Cardinal No,” a term he said was appropriate for someone who has taken “very hard-line positions.” “Hard-line,” of course, is never used to describe those who defend partial-birth abortion.

Want to hear what a real crackpot had to say? This is what an unidentified CNN “insider” is reported to have said: “I can’t believe the Catholic Church would do this. This guy [the new pope] doesn’t believe in abortion, contraception, same-sex marriage, or female priests. I was really anticipating that the Catholic Church was ready to elect a pope that was not a true Catholic. Someone far more flexible on these issues. You know. Like a Unitarian Church leader.” Spoken like a true CNN insider.

“There’s widespread doubt here that he will be able to overcome his reputation as the intimidating enforcer, punishing liberal thinkers and keeping the Church in the

Middle Ages.” Now how’s that for objective reporting? According to Christel Kucharz of ABC news, this is the way some Germans feel. We are to believe that she didn’t meet any Germans who were delighted that one of their own was elected pope.

Morton Kondracke of the Fox News Network could barely contain his disdain for the new pope. “What I’m worried about is the dictatorship of certitude, where you stifle dissent, you prevent growth...What worries me is that this Catholic...basically [was] trying to discourage Catholics from voting for...John Kerry.” In other words, Kerry is Mort’s kind of Catholic—a dissenting one.

Endtime Ministries runs an internationally syndicated anti-Catholic radio show. In its April 19 edition, Irvin Baxter and Eddie Sax declared the pope to be a “false prophet.” They said that when the anti-Christ comes, he will have as his partner the person who is pope at that time. Indeed, they said that the pope will have enough power to appoint the anti-Christ the leader of the world. They allowed that Ratzinger was probably too old to be the last great “false prophet,” although they confessed that if he stays healthy, anything could happen. So stay tuned.

A Latino minister from New York, Rev. Allan Ramirez, saw racism in the selection of a European pope: “It is insulting to the Latin church. It is insulting to the African church.” (And all along we thought there was just a Catholic Church.) Mary Mitchell, a columnist for the *Chicago Sun-Times*, is a Ramirez soul mate, with an edge. She is so disheartened that a “brown” or “black” person didn’t get the nod that, “It’s pretty clear, at least to this Baptist, that the Holy Spirit didn’t get the final word.” In other words, the Holy Spirit wanted anyone but a white.

The *Los Angeles Times* made Ramirez and Mitchell look good. In a pointedly labeled editorial, “The German Pope,” the

newspaper said, "The church is sadly putting off a change in worldview and retaining its Eurocentric focus. By failing to pick a pope from Latin America or elsewhere in the developing world, the church reinforces the impression that it is a colonial enterprise, run in Europe." Colonial empire has a better ring to it, and it conveys what the writers were thinking anyway.

Gay radicals weren't too happy either. Rev. Troy D. Perry is a homosexual activist and moderator of the Metropolitan Community churches. He expressed a "deep sadness that one of the world's most homophobic religious leaders has been elevated to the papacy, and regret that his policies will continue to devalue the rich spiritual gifts of LGBT people and women of faith." LGBT, for the uninformed, stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender. They allegedly have some "rich spiritual gifts" that make them different.

An editorial in the *San Francisco Chronicle* was laden with raw emotion. "The secrecy of his selection as Pope Benedict XVI rules out direct testimony about what was said by the red-robed figures behind the closed doors of the Sistine Chapel." But when the dourly dressed Harvard faculty assembled behind closed doors to silence their president, Larry Summers, the same editorial writers let it pass. The fact that the vote to punish Summers—for exercising his free speech rights—was taken in secrecy similarly meant nothing to these savants.

*People* magazine is often read at checkout counters; some even buy it. The May 2 edition was almost worth purchasing because in it readers learned that the new pope used to command the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, an office that *People* parenthetically branded, "formerly the Inquisition." The Jewish *Forward*, a weekly newspaper, went further, calling the office the Sacred Congregation for the Universal Inquisition, adding parenthetically, "yes *that* Inquisition." (Emphasis in the original.)

Ellis Henican writes for *Newsday* and is a Fox News contributor. The day after the new pope was named, he unleashed his fury: "The only person around here yesterday who seemed truly excited about the news was Bill Donohue, head of the ultra-conservative Catholic League. Donohue's group is the closest thing we have to our own Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith—weighing in on movies and books that go against church teachings, denouncing alleged anti-Catholic bias in the media."

As Donohue said in our press release on this subject, "After listening to these people rant, the idea of bringing it [the Inquisition] back is awfully tempting."