

The Media trashes the Pope

This piece was written by the League's Patrick Riley and appeared in the Chicago Tribune on August 19, 1993

The press, by all appearances, is out to get the Pope. Anyone surveying the sea of print media during John Paul II's visit to Denver would find its waters red with his blood and roiling with anti-Catholic sharks.

The papal youth rally in Colorado was seized as an occasion to drag out tired anti-Catholic cliches, from sexual repression to the repression of Galileo. In fact the two were combined by a syndicated columnist named Georgie Anne Geyer, who seems to think the Church's age-old condemnation of contraception dates only twenty-five years back to the encyclical *Humanae Vitae*.

This condemnation, like the condemnation of Galileo, is "basically unscientific." It is "spiritual poison." It "cannot be simply respected as the theological position of one church," but "has become the business of all of us." Why? Because the world "is adding 97 million people every year," and "30 million are starving in Africa alone."

Does Ms. Geyer think drought, bad government, or war might have something to do with famine in Africa? Not that we can see. Papal teaching is the villain.

She concludes:

So, as the pope visits the Rocky Mountains this week, his teachings and policies on birth control can no longer be seen merely as the business of Catholics. The church's teachings ... could now instead lead to the death of us all.

If Catholic teachings threaten our very lives, shouldn't they be outlawed? Right reason would surely tell us so.

But if you think Ms. Geyer is alarmist, try *Washington Post*

columnist Judy Mann:

Pope John Paul II is scheduled to visit Denver this week in connection with World Youth Day. The anti-abortion forces are taking the occasion to stage a variety of demonstrations and to whip up the zealots. It is only appropriate that the rest of us take the occasion of his visit to reflect on the disastrous consequences of the church's stand against artificial birth control methods and abortion. The dead children of Rio – as many as 14 were killed in the incidents that night- should not be forgotten.

You see, the Pope and his “disastrous” opposition to contraception and abortion are responsible for the murders of street children in Rio de Janeiro.

For incisiveness, it's hard to beat the rebuttal of Russell Shaw, a national board member of the Catholic League and an official of the Knights of Columbus. He wrote in the *Washington Post*:

Judy Mann blames the wretched condition of street children in Rio de Janeiro on the Catholic Church and its teaching on birth control and abortion. I have only one question. On whom does Ms. Mann blame the wretched condition of children in Washington, D.C., where birth control and abortion are condoned, accepted, and encouraged by the public authorities?

Not all taking part in this papal feeding frenzy were professional journalists. One of them aborts babies for a living. Dr. Warren Hem, a nationally-known abortionist in the Denver suburb of Boulder, claimed in the *New York Times* that he “began wearing a bulletproof vest to work” because the Pope was coming to town.

The Pope and his bishops have so harshly attacked abortion for so long, it has created a climate of permission for the most radical activists. Now the church does not wish to take responsibility for the

unpredictable, violent consequences of its rhetoric.... I hope that when Catholic officials next hear of a violent attack against a physician or a patient at an abortion clinic, they can bring themselves to ... realize their own culpability.

The headline given Dr. Hem's article by the *New York Times*: "The Pope and My Right to Life."

Another non-journalist, a schoolteacher in Virginia who had been a Jesuit seminarian, was given a full page in the *Washington Post* to expatiate on various criticisms of the Church, including the charge that it is run "by old men in Rome who have an anti-woman mentality."

To this claim Professor William E. May, a Catholic League member who is also a member of the Vatican's International Theological Commission, responded that the writer should read Pope John Paul's letter on the dignity of woman.

Even campus journalism has caught the anti-papal bug. The *Broadside*, a student newspaper at George Mason University across the Potomac from Washington, ran a cartoon blaming the Pope for deaths from AIDS. Actually the campus newspaper went the professional newspapers one better, showing the Pope gloating over the graves of his victims.

Anyone who thinks anti-Catholicism is passe need only read the newspapers for a rude awakening. Contemporary anti-Catholicism, if anything, is more venomous, more explosive politically, than the naive nineteenth-century biases of Thomas Nast and the Know-Nothings.