

# Southern Tier minister endorses charges of anti-Catholic literature

Distribution of anti-Catholic material in Southern Tier Catholic churches earlier this month has placed some area residents in unaccustomed roles.

A Baptist pastor has endorsed charges against the Catholic Church made in comic books and leaflets left in area churches. And the editorial staff of a local newspaper has spoken out against "freedom of the press" in this case, deploring the preaching of hatred toward any religious group.

The tracts and comic books, produced by Chick Publications of Chino, Calif., were found in Elmira, Watkins Glen and Corning Catholic churches during the first two weeks of August. Among other charges, the material accuses the Catholic Church of plotting to take over the world and portrays Pope John Paul II as the anti-Christ. Catholic women, one comic book asserts, pose as fundamentalists and evangelicals in order to seduce and ruin the reputations of ministers in other denominations.

Dean Runyan, pastor of a fundamentalist Baptist church in Chambers, a small town northeast of Elmira, was quoted in an Elmira newspaper August 10 as saying that if the charges contained in the material were not true, the Catholic Church would have sued

Chick long ago.

He said the charges apply equally to Episcopalian, Lutheran and all Protestant denominations that do not interpret the Bible literally. "The Chick material is so truthful that people can't handle it. The truth hurts," he told a reporter for the Elmira Star Gazette.

However, he did not condone the covert way in which the material was left in area churches and denied having participated in its distribution.

In an August 12 editorial, Richard Price, executive editor for the Elmira Star Gazette, advised area Catholics to "forgive and forget" Runyan's comments.

"It's startling in this enlightened age to find someone in a position of such responsibility who is guided by such limited wisdom," Price said of Runyan. "Should we hate hundreds of millions of Catholics — people who try to make it through life doing the right thing like anyone else — simply because they break bread differently than Runyan?"

Price advised readers to pray that no one listens to the Baptist minister's remarks.

"Hate has a way of breeding more hate," he wrote. "Those who find themselves

outraged by Runyan's remarks would best relax — and consider the whole episode the work of one misguided man."

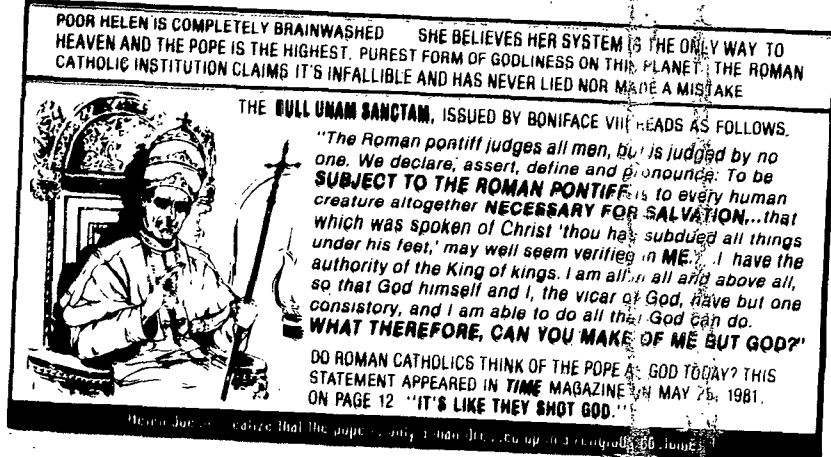
Earlier, the newspaper printed an editorial by editor James Lowman criticizing the surreptitious distribution of the pamphlets and books.

It was that editorial which drew Runyan's initial response. "Most of the public thought we went looking for him, but actually, he came to us," Lowman said. "He took offense at our editorial and at some com-

ments by the Anti-Defamation League."

Both Star-Gazette editorials have drawn a wealth of response, generally emotional on both sides of the issue. "Only a small percentage of the letters have been what I'd call enlightened," he said.

Price believes there has been an increase of anti-Catholic sentiment in the area, which he said may be indirectly related to the growth of fundamentalist denominations. "I don't think it's a dramatic rise, but it's out there," he said.



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