

# Media Treat Pope Fairly; Protesters Fail to Score

By all accounts, the visit of Pope John Paul II to the United States was a smashing success. Media treatment of the papal visit was, with few exceptions, very fair. Protesters were few in number and without impact. From beginning to end, this papal visit proved to be the most triumphant of them all.

The only complaint that the Catholic League lodged against the media during the papal visit concerned the coverage of Catholic dissidents. The Catholic League did not object to media coverage of dissent within the Catholic community, but it did object when groups that are not Catholic were presented as such to the public. The League cited the October 5 edition of *NBC Nightly News* with Tom Brokaw as an example.

Brokaw provided a platform for Catholics for a Free Choice (CFFC) and Dignity. CFFC is an anti-Catholic front group run by Frances Kissling and has been labeled by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops as having “no affiliation, formal or otherwise, with the Catholic Church.” Dignity is an organization of gays and lesbians who claim to be Catholic while openly flouting Catholic doctrine. Unlike the gay Catholic group Courage, which is recognized by the Church (these are men and women who accept the Church’s teachings on homosexuality), Dignity is not listed in the *Official Catholic Directory*, precisely because it has no standing as a Catholic organization.

The Catholic League released the following statement regarding media treatment of CFFC and Dignity: “The media do a great disservice to Catholics and non-Catholics alike when Catholics for a Free Choice and Dignity are presented as though they were genuine voices in the Catholic community. The effect of such misrepresentation is to promote dissent rather than to

record it. As such, it is irresponsible for the media to allow itself to become willing accomplices to public deception. The term catholic means universal, but to be a Catholic is to acknowledge the authority of the magisterium of the Catholic Church. This is something that neither group accepts, the effect of which is to nullify their status as Catholic."

Anti-Catholic bigotry was evident even before the arrival of the Holy Father in Newark, New Jersey. In the vicinity of Giants Stadium, a group called His Marvelous Light Ministries distributed copies of a booklet titled "Do You Really Know Who This Man Is?"; on the cover is an illustration of Pope John Paul II. The entire text is given to portraying the Pope as Satan. Speaking of the "revival of the papacy," the text says, "The beast is coming to life again and the world is giving power to the Papal beast." The gist of the publication is that the Pope is a blasphemous agent of Satan, if not Satan himself.

On the cover of the October 15 edition of *LGNY* (Lesbian & Gay New York) is an illustration of Cardinal O'Connor and Pope John Paul II kissing. The following headline statements appeared on the cover. "OH MARY! Revealed! *Real Reason For Papal Visit!*" "O'Connor & Pope's Secret *GAY LOVE!*" "Vatican Shocker! *Men in Dresses!*" "*TEARFUL ADMISSION: We Were WRONG About Homosexuality! And Abortion! AND Infallibility!*" Finally, there was this choice headline: "Their Urgent Warning: *THE CATHOLIC LEAGUE ARE FALSE PROPHETS!*"

Both the size of the protests and the coverage afforded them by the media were meager. The Catholic League learned of a protest meeting at New York's Gay and Lesbian Community Center on September 26 and made arrangements to field a report on the proceedings. We were notified that three principal groups were organizing the protests: ACT-UP, American Atheists and NARAL (National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League). Literature was passed out labeling the Pope as "The Foremost Symbol of Religious Superstition, Intolerance and Bigotry." In

Baltimore, where the papal visit ended, literature was distributed that said, "Show 'His Silliness' that the United States is NOT part of the 'Holy Roman Empire of 1995.'" "

The protest that greeted the Pope at the United Nations was so bad that police officers complained that it was a waste of their time. Only about 15 protesters were present, most of them from the American Atheists group. But there were several hundred protesters who marched up 6th Avenue on Saturday, October 7.

The march up 6th Avenue began at Bryant Park, located behind the New York Public Library. The groups included members from ACT-UP, People for the American Way, National Organization for Women, NARAL, Dignity, American Atheists, the ACLU and Planned Parenthood. They protested the Church's positions on women, homosexuality and abortion. Four members from ACT-UP were arrested when they broke away from the march and headed toward St. Patrick's Cathedral where the Pope was reciting the rosary.

The Lesbian and Gay Papal Visit Coalition (a front for ACT-UP) solicited the support of the New York Civil Liberties Union in an unsuccessful bid to petition the police to allow them greater access to a spot near St. Patrick's so that the Pope would hear their protest. A banner, however, was unfurled from a sixth floor balcony at Saks Fifth Avenue, overlooking the Cathedral. In obvious reply to the Catholic League's 1994 anti-condom posters that appeared in the subways ("Want to Know a Dirty Little Secret? CONDOMS DON'T SAVE LIVES"), the banner read, "Condoms Save Lives." The six who staged the event were immediately arrested.