

MOST TREAT POPE FAIRLY; SOME CROSS THE LINE

Pope Benedict XVI's visit to the United States was a huge success. He brought joy to millions of Catholics, as well as non-Catholics, and he won over some of his biggest skeptics.

For the most part, he was treated fairly by the media, especially those covering his many events. But some of the commentators got downright ugly. Comedian Bill Maher got the ball rolling even before the pope arrived, calling him a Nazi. He apologized after we hit him hard.

There were any number of columnists who vented their anger at the Catholic Church, and we responded to many of them. An ex-priest, Robert McClory, wrote one of most inane columns in the *Chicago Tribune*; he said the pope should take this occasion to change the Church's teachings on such things as "homosexual acts."

The professional victims' advocates, led by SNAP and Voice of the Faithful, proved once again that they refuse to recognize the progress that has been made in dealing with sex abuse. As we said many times during the pope's visit, in the year 2007 there was a grand total of five accusations made against over 40,000 priests. Not to acknowledge this as progress undercuts the credibility of these finger-pointing groups.

ABC's "Nightline" did a hatchet job on Francis Cardinal George, triggering a strong response from us. In a slickly packaged piece, the program essentially challenged the right of accused Catholic priests to have the same constitutional rights as others. We were only too happy to point out that in New York City and Miami, ABC kept on the job reporters accused of sexual harassment and gun toting on school grounds.

Perhaps the biggest surprise came from CNN's Lou Dobbs. We've

been tracking his boilerplate remarks about the right of the Catholic clergy to address the issue of illegal immigration, but we didn't expect him to blow his stack over the pope's discussion of the social context in which the scandal took place. Bill Donohue publicly challenged him to either apologize or agree to debate him. He did neither.

Naturally, no papal visit would be complete without those silly surveys the media like to run. We especially got a kick out of those surveys that included ex-Catholics, as if their voice matters. The larger point is this: we live in a pluralistic society where people are free to join or quit any religion they want. Or found one of their own!

All in all, however, the pope was welcomed in a manner befitting his status as the greatest religious leader in the world.