

# POPE'S JOYOUS ANNIVERSARY; WORLDWIDE ACCLAIM

The Catholic League chose Monday, March 3 to make a special tribute to Pope Francis on the op-ed page of the *New York Times*; it is ten days before his one-year anniversary as the leader of over one billion Catholics. We will publish our op-ed ad in the next edition.

By all accounts, the pope has won the acclaim not only of practicing Catholics, but of many who have fallen away. Those from other religions, as well as many who are not religious, have also recognized his gifts: he is a populist pope, one who resonates well with the average person.

We chose to make a statement in the nation's most influential newspaper the week before the Holy Father's special day because we wanted to influence the impending discussion on his first year. To be exact, we are concerned about those who have previously been at odds with the Vatican, but are now trying to claim the pope as one of their own. These are more than cafeteria Catholics—they are playing politics.

In other words, some of his new fans have an agenda. They want practicing Catholics to think that Pope Francis is unhappy with their traditional focus on the rights of the unborn and other cultural issues. This is untrue, but it is an idea that has gained currency: it is not the pope who feels this way; rather, it is those who seek to alter public discourse on some important Catholic teachings.

Owing in large part to Pope Francis' relaxed style of conversing with the media, his words have proven to be fodder to those who are bent on parsing them. Some of the misinterpretations may be innocent, but some are not: the deliberate twisting of his comments to fit a particular

political vision is not uncommon.

What is particularly odious is the increasing tendency of agenda-ridden Catholics to trash Pope Benedict XVI, as well as Blessed Pope John Paul II: this is done so that their inflated image of Pope Francis stands in sharp contrast to Benedict and John Paul. What they hope to achieve is a sense of momentum—things are moving their way and we need to get in line. Their goal is as transparent as it is dishonest.

The Catholic League loves all three popes, and we implore everyone to give due recognition to their very different strengths. But to those who constantly look at the world through a political lens, there are good popes (Francis) and bad ones (his predecessors). This is a jaundiced view of reality, and it is unfair to all of them.

Congratulations Pope Francis!