

# MEDIA TREAT POPE FAIRLY

In the days before and after Pope John Paul II's Silver Jubilee, the Catholic League carefully monitored media coverage. Here is a summary of our observations that were released to the press:

"Most of the print and electronic media did a very fair job covering the events surrounding the Silver Jubilee of Pope John Paul II. As expected, commentary on the pope's tenure, whether expressed as an editorial or by a columnist, tended to be more critical. But criticism of the pope, or of any Catholic teaching or tradition, is not synonymous with bigotry. Indeed, the charge of anti-Catholicism loses force when promiscuously distributed: it should be reserved for instances when criticism spills over into disdain, disparagement and insult. Take, for example, the article in today's *Los Angeles Times* by Daniel C. Maguire, professor of moral theology at Marquette University. Here is a sample of his vitriol:

- The pope has "squandered his moral authority on issues in which he has no privileged expertise."
- The pope has "silenced the voices of many Catholic theologians and arrogantly asserted his own unique teaching prerogatives in ways that cut the legs out from any true ecumenism."
- "Two areas especially signaled his inadequacy as a moral world leader: his demeaning view of half the human race—women—and his obsessive concern with what can be called pelvic orthodoxy."

- The reason why Mother Teresa is being elevated to sainthood is because she “was a firm defender of male dominance.”
- The Vatican holds an “unduly privileged perch” at the U.N., “even though it strains credulity to ponder how 110 acres with no women and children could be considered a ‘nation.’”
- Vatican opposition to condoms is “murderous.”
- It smacks of a “naïve mythology” to see the pope as “almost single-handedly bringing down Soviet communism.”

“This is the voice of an embittered ex-priest, now in his seventies, in search of an audience. We just gave him one.”

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## **WASHBURN UNIVERSITY OKAYS CATHOLIC BASHING**

A controversial sculpture that depicts a Catholic bishop wearing a hat that resembles a phallic symbol was chosen for display by some faculty members and students at Washburn University in Topeka, Kansas. The exhibit also featured an offensive inscription mocking the confessional.

Printed below is Catholic League president Dr. William A.

Donohue's letter of October 2 to Washburn University president Dr. Jerry B. Farley:

*On March 14, 1998, you were cited in the Topeka Capital-Journal as approving the unanimous decision of the student-faculty board that reprimanded Ryan Steiner for insulting some students. Steiner, then editor of the Washburn student newspaper, made disparaging remarks about nontraditional students and called another student a "wack-o" and a "loser." You were quoted as branding Steiner's remarks "insensitive," and that is why you approved the resolution that accused him of engaging in "unethical and unprofessional conduct."*

*As someone who spent 20 years teaching—16 of them in higher education—I believe it took great courage on your part to denounce Steiner's behavior. But I am perplexed as to why you have suddenly turned on a dime when it comes to anti-Catholicism: the official position of the university towards the offensive exhibit by Jerry Boyle, "Holier Than Thou," is without condemnation. Yet it was professors and students on the Washburn Campus Beautification Committee who chose to insult Catholics by selecting the Boyle sculpture for campus display.*

*Any fair-minded observer would conclude that Steiner's offense pales next to the Beautification Committee's decision to honor Boyle. So please explain to me why Steiner's foray in bad taste resulted in his being placed on probation—with the explicit threat of dismissal hanging over his head—while those who sanction Catholic bashing are treated as mere agents of free speech?*

The reply we got was unsatisfactory. David Monical, Executive Director of Governmental and University Relations, gave us the old "No one involved...intended for any viewers to experience pain or hurt."

The good news is that because of all the media coverage the

issue engendered, it did not die.

On October 15, the Washburn University Board of Regents held one its scheduled two-hour meetings. Fully 75 percent of the meeting was devoted to this subject, but when no resolution could be met, they tabled it.

We are happy that Archbishop James Keleher of the Archdiocese of Kansas City in Kansas got involved. Catholic students on the campus, as well as area Catholics also made their voices heard. This is the kind of response that must be forthcoming if incidents like this are to be avoided in the future.

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## CONDOMS AND AIDS

On October 9, Cardinal Alfonso Lopez Trujillo, head of the Pontifical Council on the Family, said that condoms don't protect against AIDS. There was an immediate uproar from some quarters of the scientific community. The next day, Dr. William Donohue debated this issue on the "Today" show with Dr. Desmond Johns, Director of the Joint U.N. program on HIV/AIDS. Here is a sample of what Donohue said:

- "If condoms work so well, then we should see a decrease in STDs [Sexually Transmitted Diseases], right? After all, there's been an increase in condom use over the last 10 years throughout the world, and yet we've had an explosion of STDs. You take the case of Uganda. The only success story in all of Africa is Uganda. And guess what? On the advice of the pope, they took the Catholic Church's position and they have an abstinence program."

- “Did you ever read what the CDC [Center for Disease Control] says about the 15 steps [of correct condom use]? Now look, we don’t live in the world of the laboratory, we live in the world of a back seat of a Chevy with some 15-year-old kid who’s drunk out of his mind and he’s going to go through the 15 steps? The same kid who can’t even do his homework, who’s probably illiterate, but he’s going to go through 15 steps and say, ‘Is there enough air at the tip of the condom, honey? Did you make sure that you cut your fingernails this morning so you don’t have another hole in the condom?’ I mean, it’s about time the scientific community caught up with the morality of the Catholic Church because not only is it morally right to preach abstinence, it works.”
- “The primary reason why Uganda’s a success and stands out, along with Senegal and Zambia, is because they emphasize abstinence. Look, we don’t say to kids, ‘Don’t drink and drive, but in the event you do, make sure you have some coffee and wear that seat belt.’ We tell them not to do it. We tell them not to smoke, we tell them not to drink we tell them not to take drugs.”
- “Why don’t we have warning labels on condoms? There’s a 30 percent failure rate. We have labels on cigarettes and beer, why not on condoms?”