

THE POPE IN CUBA: MEDIA MOSTLY FAIR

While overshadowed by President Clinton's latest scandal, Pope John Paul II's historic visit to Cuba in January received, for the most part, very fair treatment from the American media. The Pope's strongly worded Gospel messages promoting faith, family, and the sanctity of life were all thoroughly and accurately reported, as was the outpouring of enthusiasm with which the Cuban people welcomed him.

To be sure, some commentators tried to posit a philosophical similarity between Pope John Paul and Fidel Castro (both advocates for the poor, goes the mantra). Such notions were dispelled, however, by detailed reporting of the Pope's ringing denunciations of Marxism, and his calls for freedom and justice for the Cuban people.

Most of the critical media commentary stayed within the bounds of legitimate discourse. A particularly egregious exception, which drew an immediate response from the league, was the adjacent cartoon by Rob Rogers in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. This clearly crossed the line into anti-Catholic ridicule—as did a similar cartoon by Oliphant, which showed the Pope hearing Castro's confession, with the caption, "One of them is a subversive...or both."

Columnist Colman McCarthy sounded the same theme in a *Baltimore Sun* piece headlined, "What Do John Paul and Fidel Castro Have In Common? It's Their Way Or No Way." McCarthy sought to draw a parallel between Pope John Paul's efforts to "suppress" dissent (i.e., to uphold the Church's teachings) and Castro's 40 year reign of terror in which political dissidents have been systematically tortured, jailed or executed. It is one thing to disagree with the Pope's handling of dissent within the Church. It is nothing short of obscene,

however—especially given this Pope's lifetime of courageous advocacy for human rights—to compare his actions with the human rights atrocities of the Castro regime.