

World & Nation

In New York City,

Cardinal Ratzinger's talk draws positive reaction

By Tracy Early

New York (NC) — Some people might not expect that an abstruse lecture delivered in Germanic academic style by a Vatican official could become the "hot ticket" event of the evening in midtown Manhattan. But on January 27 one did for considerable numbers of the religious community and beyond.

A record attendance at the annual Erasmus Lecture — along with demonstrators outside and a few hecklers inside — were part of the New York greeting for Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, head of the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

His appearance in the particular spot under the particular auspices was extraordinary in itself. The cardinal's address was sponsored by the Rockford Institute's Center on Religion and Society, an independent, ecumenical agency led by a Lutheran minister, the Rev. Richard J. Neuhaus. The Rev. Neuhaus said he initiated discussions leading to the cardinal's appearance after meeting him in Rome during the 1985 world Synod of Bishops.

Cardinal Ratzinger delivered his talk in St. Peter's Lutheran Church. The lecture was to be followed by a two-day private conference in which the cardinal, who has been at the center of Church controversies over theological dissent, homosexual activity and Jewish relations, would discuss issues as a fellow scholar with 20 or so Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox scholars.

The evening became even more of a celebrity event with the arrival of Judge Robert Bork, whose nomination to the U.S. Supreme Court was rejected by the Senate last year. Afterward Bork said he attended primarily because of the interest of his wife, Mary Ellen, a former nun. Asked if he agreed with the lecture on biblical interpretation, he replied, "I'm going to have to read it to fully understand it."

New York's Cardinal John J. O'Connor, with whom Cardinal Ratzinger was staying, noted in introducing him that it was the Inquisition that developed into the Holy Office that became the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Cardinal O'Connor recalled that in "The Brothers Karamazov" Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoyevsky had given such a "chilling" and "terrifying"

account of the Grand Inquisitor that more than 50,000 commentaries had been written on the passage.

"In essence, you are looking at the Grand Inquisitor," he said jokingly of Cardinal Ratzinger. And it may be, Cardinal O'Connor continued more seriously, that more than 50,000 commentaries will someday have been written about Cardinal Ratzinger without having "exhausted" the subject.

Cardinal Ratzinger preceded the reading of his lecture by correcting his introducer, pointing out that Dostoyevsky had presented a Grand Inquisitor of the Spanish Inquisition. "The Roman Inquisition was never so famous," Cardinal Ratzinger remarked in his low-key style.

Among those on hand were protesters from Dignity and other homosexual organizations. Cardinal Ratzinger was about 20 minutes into his lecture when several of the protesters stood and started shouting "bigot," "fascist," "Antichrist" and other

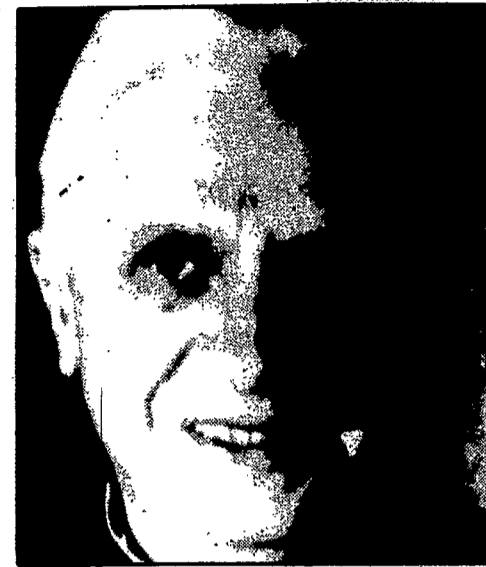
epithets. After a few minutes, the protesters were removed.

A police official later said that six demonstrators were taken to the local precinct house and given summonses for criminal trespass. He said that about 50 people participated in a demonstration outside — their chants at times audible inside — and about 70 uniformed police had been on hand.

In addition, four "community affairs officers" in civilian dress stood around Cardinal Ratzinger throughout the lecture and watched the audience. None of the demonstrators attempted to approach the cardinal directly.

Jesuit Father Avery Dulles, theology professor at The Catholic University of America in Washington who was among those scheduled to join Cardinal Ratzinger in the two-day conference beginning the next day, praised the cardinal's lecture as "a very impressive performance" that was "erudite"

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Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger

U.S. Catholics are loyal to Church, Cardinal observes

By Gerald M. Costello

New York (NC) — Despite reports to the contrary, the Church's leading spokesman on faith and morals finds the state of Catholicism in the United States alive and well.

"Essentially, Catholic people have a deep 'sensus fidelium' (sense of faith) and a profound love for the Holy Father," said Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, who heads the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

The cardinal was interviewed January 30 by Catholic New York, newspaper of the Archdiocese of New York, a few hours before returning to Rome after a five-day visit.

Published reports often picture the cardinal as someone convinced that stern measures are needed to curb dangerous trends in the Church in this country, but his informal remarks provided a different view entirely. He pointed to the visit of Pope John Paul II to the United States in September for additional evidence of his own positive impressions.

"The Holy Father returned to Rome with great satisfaction," Cardinal Ratzinger said.

"In general, he found Catholics here deeply committed to the Holy See, even if there are many problems that need to receive attention."

But those problems, he quickly pointed out, are not unique to the United States; the declining moral standards of much of Western civilization, are at odds with the Church's teaching and Christian life in general.

"We Catholics are contemporaries with this phenomenon," he said. "In this kind of climate, it is important to remember two things: First, that the moral doctrine of the Church is not easy and can create tensions; and second, that in a democratic and egalitarian society the hierarchical structure of the Church is something that can be difficult to accept."

"But fundamentally," he continued, "we have a Catholic identity that comes from the Lord. It is contemporary with the Church of our time, but also it is contemporary with the Church of all time."

In person, Cardinal Ratzinger is not the grim taskmaster that many American press accounts have made him out to be. Soft-spoken and quick to smile, he reacts warmly

to references to his native Germany. His English is moderately accented but easy to understand, and in the course of a half-hour conversation consulted with an aide only once for the precise English word he was seeking.

At 60, he is a bit younger than his full head of snow-white hair might suggest. A longtime theology professor, he served as archbishop of Munich before being called to Rome in 1981.

Although his American experience is not extensive — his late-January visit was only the second he has made to this country — the mail provides him with continual information about the Church here.

"Oh yes," he said with a smile, "I get many letters from the United States, not only from bishops but from Catholic lay people as well. The United States and France are the two countries we hear from the most, and perhaps that is because of the high educational standards and the democratic traditions in both countries."

Asked what kinds of Americans write and what they write about, the cardinal replied that most of the letters are from those who

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