

Papal trip goes smoothly

By John Thavis
Catholic News Service

NEW DELHI, India — Despite much talk of fundamentalist Hindu protests and the potential for extremist violence, Pope John Paul II's visit to India went off without a hitch — much to the delight of church planners and government hosts.

Those expecting an interreligious battle in New Delhi were disappointed. In the end, protests fizzled and good will prevailed during the Nov. 5-8 visit.

Many Indians appeared tired of what they saw as "media hype" over the Hindu extremist agenda, with its demand for a freeze on Christian conversions and a papal apology for historical misdeeds.

"This is a free country, a democracy, and there are small groups of protesters.

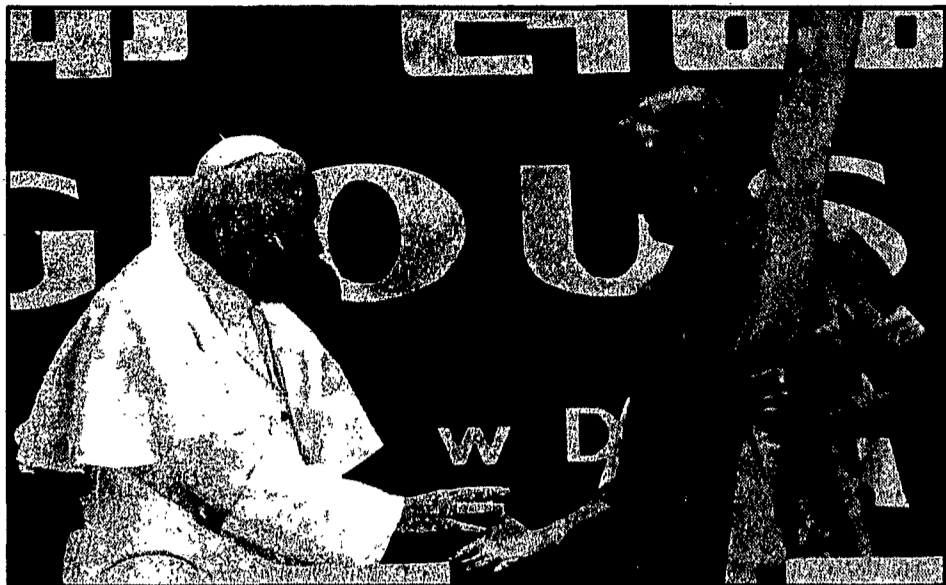
I don't think it goes beyond that," said Margaret Alva, one of 22 Christians in India's Parliament.

Even Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, whose Hindu nationalist coalition has links to some of the most strident Hindu organizations, told the pope the "intolerant fringes" of Indian society were causing the problems.

The government allowed demonstrations except near papal event sites, saying the pope should be welcomed as a guest and a holy man. That was a prevailing sentiment among Indians, according to Divine Word Father Dominic Emmanuel, spokesman for the Indian bishops' conference.

"The people making protests have managed to get a lot of attention because

Continued on page 10



Hindu holy man Shankaracharya Madhavananda Saraswati greets Pope John Paul II at an interreligious meeting in New Delhi Nov. 7.

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Inside This Week



Scholars discuss Thomas Merton
Evening honors Msgr. Shannon
— Page 3



Christian rock in Southern Tier
Colorado band to appear Nov. 15
— Page 8

Priest speaks on aging gracefully
Dominican guests at parish mission
— Page 7

Fall books fit every interest

An abundance of new books rolled off the presses this year, just in time for Christmas shopping. What follows is a brief roundup of some of the hottest books, including comments from reviewers.

One of the most-talked-about releases this fall is the latest book on the life of Pope John Paul II: *Witness to Hope: The Biography of Pope John Paul II* (HarperCollins Publishers Inc., \$35 hardcover).

Catholic News Service describes the book — written by newspaper columnist George Weigel at the request of the pope — as "An imposing yet highly readable volume that runs nearly 1,000 pages, including footnotes."

According to Weigel, senior fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center in Washington, the idea of producing an in-depth biography of the pope came up in May 1995 in informal conversations with Vatican spokesman Joaquin Navarro-Valls. Later, the pope invited Weigel to dinner.

"In the course of the evening he made it clear, quite vigorously, that he would be grateful if I would take on the project," Weigel told CNS. The pope assured him they would meet as often as necessary, and the author would get any needed materials and have complete editorial control, Weigel said. This arrangement allowed him to write "the first full-scale biography that presents the pope's life from 'inside' the convictions that have shaped that life."

The book has received high marks from Cardinal John O'Connor and Cardinal Francis George.

Mary Ann Glendon of Harvard Law School observed, "At last, a biography worthy of the man of the century. George Weigel's graceful writing, meticulous research, political sophistications, and technological understanding make this a matchless portrait — not only of John Paul II, but of the world and the Catholic Church entering the third millennium."

...
The Secret History of Pius XII, by John Cornwell (Viking, 430 p., \$29.95) is "one

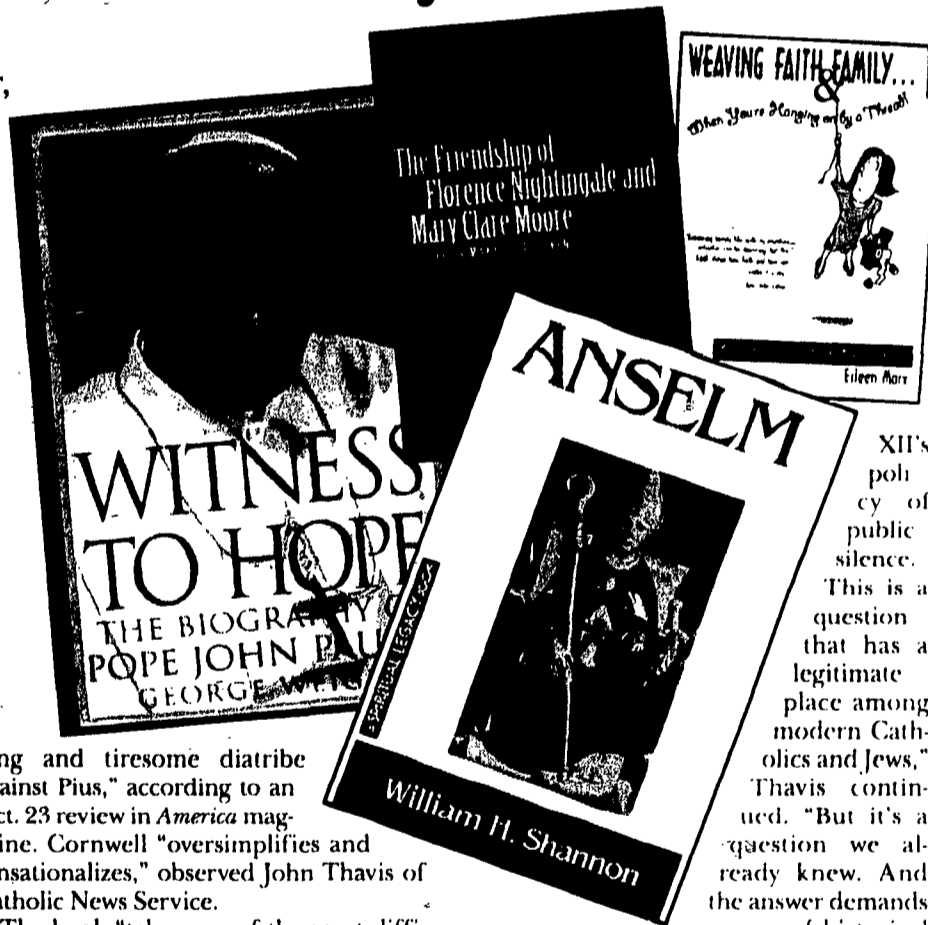
long and tiresome diatribe against Pius," according to an Oct. 23 review in *America* magazine. Cornwell "oversimplifies and sensationalizes," observed John Thavis of Catholic News Service.

The book "takes one of the most difficult and disturbing questions the church has faced in the 20th century, whether Pius XII should have done more to help save Jews from Nazi persecution, and turns it into an almost comic-book account of good guys vs. bad guys," Thavis wrote.

Although the book charges that Pius XII was an anti-Semite, the CNS reviewer said it offers slim evidence. Almost all the information presented has been interpreted and debated by experts inside and outside the church for years, he added.

Thavis allowed that "the book's most convincing and disturbing chapter is a narrative of the events of 1942, a year in which several Allied diplomats called on the Vatican to request a strong papal statement about the persecution of the Jews."

"Throughout the war, the Vatican professed it could not know the extent of the Nazi extermination effort. Yet these pages, which include excerpts from the diaries of diplomats, make a strong case against Pius



XII's policy of public silence. This is a question that has a legitimate place among modern Catholics and Jews," Thavis continued. "But it's a question we already knew. And the answer demands a sense of historical fairness that is missing in this book."

The Rochester Diocese's prolific writer Msgr. William H. Shannon, saw his latest book, *Anselm: The Joy of Faith* (Crossroad Publishing Co., \$15.95), published earlier this year. It examines the Benedictine archbishop of Canterbury (1093-1109) whom scholars have considered "the most influential intellectual between Augustine and Aquinas."

Msgr. Shannon, professor emeritus at Nazareth College, a recognized writer in spirituality, wrote the work for Crossroad's Spiritual Legacy series. He said that he had long felt drawn to write about the Italian St. Anselm, a holy man with "unbounded confidence" in the faith he professed, even submitting his faith to rational examination. "He had no anxieties that the whole system might fall apart if reason looked too closely at what faith believed."

Continued on page 10