



Sistine reveals completed project

By John Thavis
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — Blessing a restoration job financed largely by American benefactors, Pope John Paul II viewed resplendent frescoes in the Sistine Chapel and said they constituted a "visual hymn" to God.

On Dec. 11 Vatican officials unveiled the final phase of a 20-year cleaning project in the chapel, which began with Michelangelo's famed ceiling paintings and ended with a series of 15th-century frescoes on the side walls.

The 12 side wall frescoes, by artists including Sandro Botticelli, Pietro Perugino and Domenico Ghirlandaio, feature scenes from the lives of Moses and Christ, including Christ's handing the keys of the

kingdom to St. Peter.

Covering some 5,000 square feet, the works were restored to their original brilliant colors in a five-year project costing about \$3 million.

"Most of it was paid for by American patrons, and the results are excellent," said U.S. Cardinal Edmund C. Szoka, who administers Vatican City and its museums. He introduced some of the individual benefactors to the pope at the end of a ceremony in the chapel.

U.S. Dominican Father Allen Duston, who raises funds for the Vatican Museums' restoration projects, said the patrons' generosity had allowed the museums to offer a unique, visual "witness of spiritual values."

The pope, who gave approval for the multiphase restoration of the Sistine

Chapel shortly after his election in 1978, said he was pleased with the final results.

"We have reason to be happy if such an important expression of 15th-century art is shining again in its original colors, which were regained through a diligent and modern restoration effort," he said.

He said the frescoes continue to communicate important truths about the mystery of God, in a "language" that does not grow old.

In 1980, when the Vatican's restoration team began daubing away centuries of grit and grime from Michelangelo's ceiling frescoes with a new solvent, some art historians criticized the technique and said it risked ruining the art works.

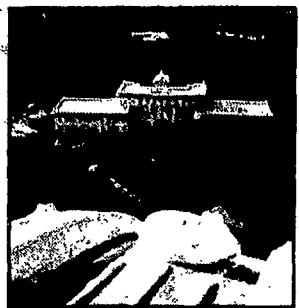
But with time, most of the criticism has evaporated, said Gianluigi Colalucci, who headed the restoration team.

Reuters/CNS
This overview image of the Sistine Chapel shows the ceiling and wall featuring Michelangelo's "Last Judgment." Pope John Paul II blessed the brightened chapel Dec. 11.

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Inside This Week



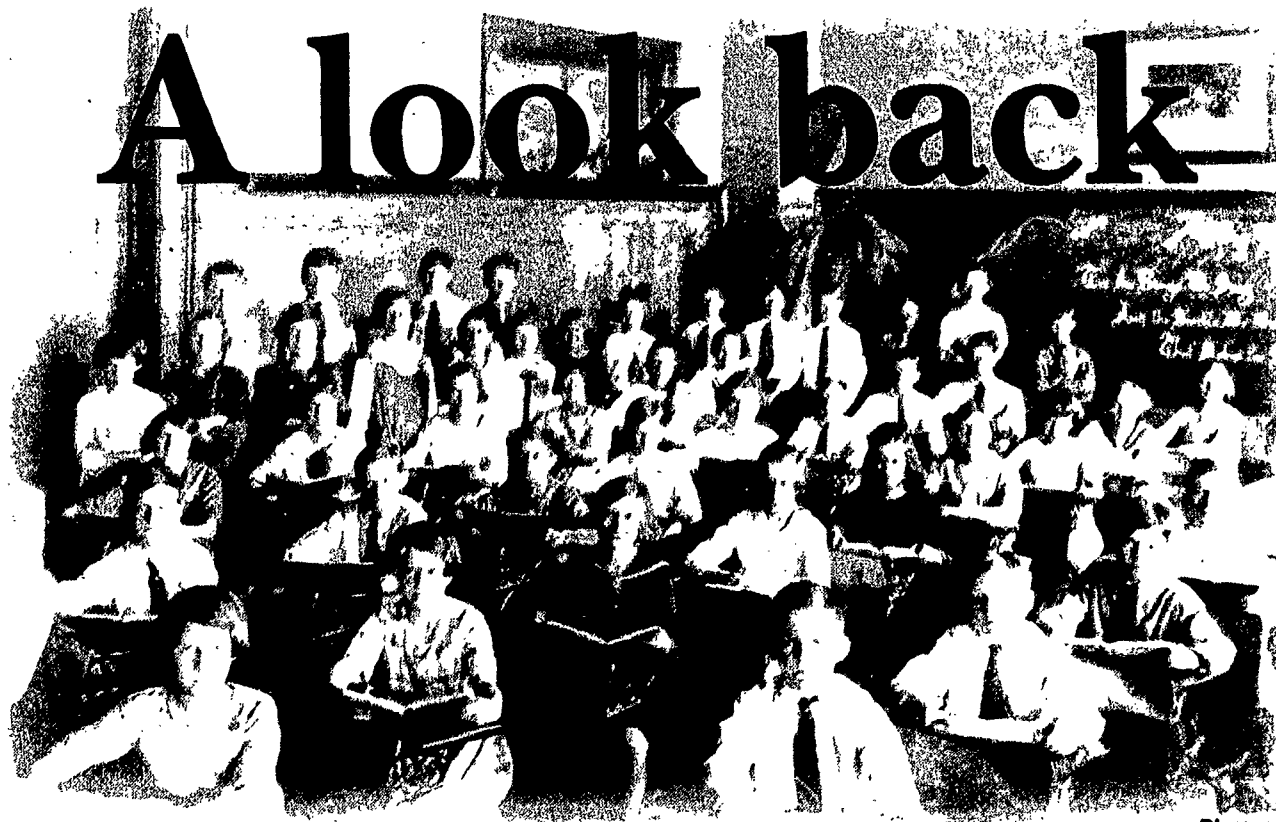
CNS names top millennium news
Great Schism, more shaped Catholicism
— Page 4

Accident victim slowly recovering
Drinking, driving made for nightmare
— Page 5



Warmth is No. 1 concern of many
Christmas Appeal buys scarves, gloves
— Page 12

A look back



St. Andrew's School, Rochester, circa 1920. Diocesan archives

EDITORS' NOTE: What follows is a review of Roman Catholicism through the 20th century, with an emphasis on the Rochester Diocese. While the retrospect notes numerous significant events, it is not intended to be comprehensive. The bulk of information comes from Father Robert F. McNamara's history, *The Diocese of Rochester in America 1868-1993*.

1900-1920

The waves of immigration that built up the diocese in the 19th century continued. The 1900s saw the establishment of such ethnic churches as St. George Lithuanian, Rochester, in 1907; St. Hyacinth (Polish), Auburn, in 1905; and Our Lady of Mt. Carmel for Italians, Rochester, 1909. The immigrant founders of these parishes were following in the steps primarily of the Irish and Germans of the previous century.

Bishop Bernard J. McQuaid, founding bishop of the Rochester Diocese, encouraged allegiance to the United States. "Your sons should grow up with the love of their native country," he'd say. He let national groups work out their own destinies, so their frictions tended not to cause the difficulties they did elsewhere.

Tremendous conflict within the Polish community, however, led to a split from the diocese, with many Polish going in 1907 to the breakaway, intensely nationalistic Polish National Catholic Church. The national church had resulted from disputes over pastoral and administrative matters. Yet the majority of Polish families in Rochester apparently remained loyal to St. Stanislaus diocesan parish. Father McNamara described the tumult as the "saddest

chapter in the history of the Diocese." Today dialogue continues between the Catholic Church and Polish National Catholic Church.

Bishop McQuaid insisted that each new parish, when possible, establish a school. Each parish's first building was normally two stories, one floor a church, and one floor a school.

St. Andrew's Seminary continued to grow, with a new structure dedicated Sept. 9, 1904. A first year of college was added to the preparatory school's high school curriculum. St. Bernard's Seminary likewise grew. In 1908 Bishop McQuaid's "Hall of Theology" opened on campus, and 188 students matriculated, representing 36 dioceses.

In 1906 Bishop McQuaid saw St. Ann's Home for the Aged built. The bishop decided it was needed when he realized his own frailties and aging.

In 1908 the pope moved the diocese from missionary status under the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith — recognizing the United States church had reached spiritual maturity. Its status now was with other churches in non-missionary areas of the world.

Growing numbers, war years

Statistics of 1909 showed that the Rochester Diocese was "among growing sees of middling size," according to Father McNamara. In 1868, the first year of the diocese, there were 39 priests; by 1909, 158. The diocesan Catholic population rose from 54,000

Continued on page 6

Story by Rob Cullivan • Mike Latona • Kathleen Schwar