

Newspapers Biased on Abortion

By Ann Dargis
Religion Today

Newspaper coverage of the abortion issue includes much that is biased, unprofessional, incomplete and less than truthful. So say leaders of several major national pro-life groups.

"I'm convinced we would be closer to a human life amendment if coverage were better," Ann O'Donnell, vice president of the National Right to Life Committee here, said.

"There's never been a poll that said abortion for the sake of convenience should be available throughout the nine months of pregnancy."

Several pro-life leaders said journalists' word choice often reveals a bias in favor of pro-abortionists:

"Is it a 'fetus' or 'unborn child'?" asks Paul A. Brown, president of the Life Amendment Political Action Committee, Inc. (LAPAC).

Denyse Handler, writing in *The Uncertified Human Magazine*, comments on media bias: "Here are some typical media-style statements about abortion: 'Women have trouble getting abortions privately here in Stonytown.'"

"Suppose the statement had read, 'Women have trouble abusing their children privately here in Stonytown.' That's unlikely."

"But do you see why? Abortion is equated in the media with birth control, not with child abuse."

"That's bias, all right, a prejudgment of the issues at stake. But chances are excellent that the journalist who wrote that never saw it that way. She just assumed that bias, handed down to her from earlier writers, and she would be very surprised to hear you call her biased at all."

Individual columnists are exceptions to the general tendency toward a pro-abortion bias, but the bias is often at the highest levels of newspaper management. Dr. Joseph Stanton, a member of the board of governors for the Value of Life Committee in Brighton, Mass., believes.

Judie Brown, president of the American Life Lobby, Inc., in Stafford, Va., disagrees: "I can't call coverage biased, but it shows a lack of knowledge. I've sat down with too many reporters and told them things they didn't know to think it's biased, as a rule of thumb."

'Abortion is equated in the media with birth control, not with child abuse.'

"The opposition has a lot more money to educate the media to their point of view," Brown said. "Since we don't we have to educate reporters in the process of an interview."

As a result of a pro-abortion bent, the leaders claim several false ideas have been perpetrated by the media. These include:

- The belief that abortion is a Catholic issue. In the eyes of pro-life groups, perhaps the chief offender among media is the *New York Times*, which has been guilty of identifying pro-life backers as Catholic, while failing to identify the religion or lack of religion of pro-abortion-backers or non-Catholic pro-lifers.

However, three times in recent months the private, independent National News Council, an organization which reviews news media performance, has upheld charges of bias against the newspaper for introducing references to Catholicism into stories dealing with abortion.

- An incomplete definition of the U.S. Supreme Court's 1973 decision in *Roe vs. Wade*. "It's always referred to as a decision that made abortion legal during the first three months of pregnancy. That's one-third right," said Doug Badger, congressional lobbyist for the Christian Action Council in Washington.

In the second trimester, Badger said, abortion must be available but the state can specify that it is performed in a hospital or by a licensed practitioner.

In the third trimester, the state may go as far as to proscribe abortion, except when it would be necessary to preserve the health of the mother.

"Health," Badger said, is broadly defined to include "all factors — physical, psychological, familial, and the mother's age — relevant to the well-being of the patient."

In essence, abortion on demand exists for the first six months and virtually throughout the whole pregnancy.

making abortion legal throughout the nine months of pregnancy.

- A legal abortion is a safe abortion. "The back alley abortionist of 1970 is the mainstream abortionist of today," Judie Brown said. "The complications have never decreased in the past 20 years. They're always trying new methods. And abortion is never safe for the baby."

An unpublicized study by the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, she said, showed a higher incidence of sterility and premature births among women who had had abortions than women who had not.

- Pro-lifers are totally opposed to women. "They try to show us as caring more for the baby than for the mother," Nellie J. Gray, president of March of Life here, said.

"We're trying to save both of them, and society. Society is based on the value and dignity of human life. It is well-ordered when it protects its least defensible and weakest members."

Pro-lifers often are simply trying to point out extreme complications from abortions that women aren't told about, Judie Brown said. "Women are pawns on drug manufacturers' chess boards and for doctors who want to make a buck on abortion: it's a multi-million industry."

Alan Guttmacher, a leader of Planned Parenthood when the organization was lobbying in favor of abortion, states in his book "Case for Legalized Abortion Now": "Today it is possible for almost any patient to be brought through the pregnancy alive unless she suffers from a fatal illness such as cancer or leukemia and, if so, abortion would be unlikely to prolong, much less save, life."

- Abortion should be available for rape victims. Badger cited several studies that found an almost non-existent number of rape victims becoming pregnant. A study reported in "Child & Family" found no such cases in more than 30 years in Buffalo.

Whether friend or foe, the Fourth Estate will not prevent the pro-life movement from achieving its goals, particularly the adoption of a human-life amendment to the Constitution, many pro-life leaders confidently assert.

"But people in the press, medicine, courts, Congress and everyone else who propagandizes for abortion will be held personally accountable for the death of over 8 million innocent human beings," Nellie Gray warned.

"It just can't go on and there be no accountability."

Theology and Religion on Catholic Campuses

Bishop Daniel Pilarczyk recently pointed up a problem which needs to be dealt with by the people who run Catholic universities.

The auxiliary bishop of Cincinnati recognized that religious issues can and should be handled in two different ways in higher education. Both are legitimate and needed. Neither should be neglected; the two should not be confused.

One is the work of theological scholarship and the education of professional theologians. This work must be free to investigate any problem, to re-examine the basis for any belief. It provides a creative, scholarly resource for the church as it formulates the authoritative expression of faith in terms of contemporary problems and knowledge.

Such scholarship must be sensitive to its impact on the church at large (particularly when it is popularized) but its purpose is not catechetical; such scholarship seeks truth, not a persuasive justification of ecclesiastical teaching. Necessarily, much of it is tentative, subject to error.

The second function is a general education of young Catholics in the teachings, the history, the symbols and stories of their religious tradition.

In this work, the approach, the purpose and — to some extent — the subject matter are different

from those of theological scholarship.

The purpose is to provide the ordinary Catholic university student with a knowledge of the church which is appropriate to his or her general level of education. We expect such students to acquire a knowledge of American history, government and literature which is superior to that of the student who ends his formal education with high school.

If the student attends a Catholic university, we should expect a similar growth in knowledge and understanding about the church.

Prior to Vatican II, there was precious little theological scholarship here in America. The Catholic universities focused almost entirely on the second purpose, advanced religious education.

Since the Council, theological scholarship has become respectable; it has become jealous of its own integrity; often it has become ecumenical and inter-religious; and it has resisted the responsibility for what might be called advanced catechetics.

As a result, the general student is often introduced to a fairly sophisticated exploration of a few theological issues or problems, possibly from an ecumenical rather than a Catholic viewpoint, while



remaining basically illiterate about huge sections of Catholic teaching and tradition.

The issue now is not the placing of blame. The change of emphasis is understandable in the light of recent history. The concern for the integrity of theological scholarship is legitimate and important for the welfare of the church.

But the problem exists; the need calls for a response. And the responsibility lies primarily with the administrators of the universities, not with the

theology departments themselves.

Perhaps it will be necessary to set up distinct programs for the two purposes. By comparison, the science classes for the Arts and Letters students are distinct from those in a pre-med program.

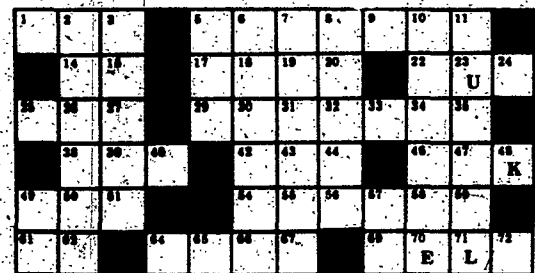
On the campus where I live, the problem is recognized. A lot of people are searching for appropriate solutions. Thus far, none of the proposals offer easy, uncomplicated answers.

My purpose here is not to suggest any one answer but simply to emphasize the two distinct activities identified by Bishop Pilarczyk. University administrators should be able to work out programs to respect both purposes.

If they can, these institutions will serve the church more effectively in both activities and there will be an easing of tensions between the campuses, the chanceries, and the expectations of Catholic parents.

Sunday Scripture Quiz

I. Gospel Reading:
Lk 10:1-12:17-20 — Your peace will rest upon him.
Below is a key passage from Sunday's Gospel reading. You can determine what this passage is by finding the answers to the questions below the puzzle and then putting the letters in their appropriate box. The first one is done for you.



- 1. Gospel writer: **L U K E**
71 23 45 70
- 2. Tranquility: **72 9 38 19 65**
- 3. Evil one: **35 6 49 55 66**
- 4. Tender meat: **47 11 51 46 53**
- 5. Shrivels up: **44 18 1 28 58 34 10**
- 6. Take it easy: **17 3 54 24**

Based on scripture readings for Sunday, July 6, 1980, C Cycle.
Following are key passages from Sunday's scripture readings. Fill in the missing words.

- II. First Reading:**
Is 66:10-14 — I will send toward Jerusalem like a river.
Phrase: As a _____ comforts her _____, so will _____ comfort _____ in _____ you shall find _____ When you see this, your _____ shall _____ and your _____ flourish like the _____.
- III. Second Reading:**
Gal 6:14-18 — The marks I carry on my body are those of Jesus Christ.
Phrase: Henceforth, let no _____ trouble _____ for I _____ the _____ of _____ in my _____ may the _____ of our Lord Jesus _____ be with your _____.

Answers on Page 7

Passage I words: Luke, both, withers, peace, fresh, Tom, astar, shroud, rest, steak, thrive, her.
Passage II words: Jerusalem, grass, comfort, mother, I, heart, son, bodies, rejoice, you.
Passage III words: Brothers, Christ, bear, man, Jesus, spirit, body, marks, favor, me.