



Clergy Abuse Story Top Religion Story In Decades

by Dr. Debra Mason, Vice-Head

Veteran religion reporters are calling the clergy abuse stories the biggest religion story in recent memory.

"The scandal appears to be the worst institutional crisis that U.S. Catholicism—or any other U.S. religious body—has ever faced," said Richard Ostling, one of AP's two full-time religion reporters. Ostling, a longtime religion editor for Time Magazine and a former RNA president, has covered the beat since the mid-1960s.

Ostling, who traveled to Rome to join AP's Vatican correspondent Victor Simpson during the Cardinals' April meeting there, ranked the scandal up with a handful of other significant religious events over the past four decades, including,

- the second Vatican Council (1962-65),
- Paul V's birth control encyclical and revolt against it (1968),
- the election of Pope John Paul II from Poland (1978),
- the Jonestown cult scare (1978)
- religious crusading for U.S. civil rights and against white rule in Africa (1960s-1990s),
- the increased support for political violence and revolution within Islam (1979-2002) and
- Jewish-Christian debates over homosexuality, abortion and women's roles."

Ostling said covering the scandal has been a challenge for AP. Religion Reporter Rachel Zoll has been covering it largely full- *Continued on page 2*

RMIG: See You In Miami

by Dr. Kyle Huckins, Head

Summer vacation is the time for taking ownership and assuming leadership in the Religion and Media Interest Group. As the 2002 AEJMC convention in Miami Beach rapidly approaches, opportunities for involvement in RMIG are as plentiful as bluebonnets along our roads in Texas.

The convention schedule of RMIG events is packed with crosspollination with other groups in the AEJMC. Sessions will be held with the Community College Journalism Association, Council of Affiliates, Entertainment Studies Interest Group, History Division and Law Division. Each session needs to have a solid turnout from RMIG members to ensure good attendance and promote the benefits of working with our group. With the roster we have, numbers shouldn't be a problem, if we can keep focused on the goal of working together to help RMIG move forward.

The panels and other events

aren't just sacrifices of time, either; these slots are filled with quality programming. During the convention, you'll be able to receive tips on teaching the First Amendment, examining the role of religion in journalism history, considering the reporting on Islam and other minority faiths, delving into coverage of the September 11 tragedy, and discovering how God impacts Bart Simpson (!!).

I want to call your attention to the Friday luncheon (11:45 a.m.) for mentoring in teaching and research. This session features veterans of religion and media courses and academic study pairing up with instructors and researchers newer to this intersection of concerns. The first such session, held last year, was a positive time for both sides of the mentoring process. I would argue that this event is vital to the future of the interest group. It encourages excellence in research and teaching and adds to the knowledge base of

ReligionLink Connects Journalists With Story Ideas

by Dr. Debra Mason, Vice-Head

Students writing about religion in their reporting classes or for student newspapers can find story ideas and potential sources in a new resource called ReligionLink, published by the Religion Newswriters Association

and funded by a grant from the Pew Charitable Trusts. Its focus is story ideas in which faith plays a role in public life.

The free service is published biweekly via e-mail and posted on the web at www.religion-

Continued on page 2



Clergy Abuse

Continued from page 1

time since January, along with their supervising editor. Ostling has also given it a majority of his time, along with dozens of AP reporters across the country and overseas.

Interestingly, Sept. 11, 2001, is still the biggest story for the web site Beliefnet.com. Because of Beliefnet's multifaith and global reach, Beliefnet News Editor Deborah Caldwell said traffic on Beliefnet.com also indicates that despite the existence of sexual abuse all over the world, the clergy scandal hasn't yet become an "international event."

Beliefnet worked with ABC News on its April 3 Peter Jennings "Crisis in the Church" piece in which the staff, including Caldwell, provided bulletin boards, stories and resources to give ABC's web site depth.

"We also co-wrote and co-sponsored a national poll on the topic," Caldwell said. "no one is committed to this story full-time here, but we talk about it daily and continue to work every angle. Each day we update our story/resource page on the crisis, and we run everything new that we can find."

Ramifications help propel story

Despite some trade publication analyses suggesting the press was not gun-shy about the story when it broke a decade ago, some reporters say the story today is different from the pedophilia stories of the 1980s and 1990s.

"It's bigger than the abuse scandal that came out around the book 'Lead Us Not Into Temptation,'" said San Diego Union-Tribune's Sandi Dolbee. "There are simply more cases, more action being taken, more

ramifications... This could very well make significant, lasting changes in the largest denomination in America."

Non-religion writers work story

Although it is a religion story, the story has often been reported by journalists on other beats. In addition, some of the earliest stories and continuing work has been done by investigative reporters. Most of the stories on Poynter's Clergy Abuse Tracker (www.poynter.com), which lists selected electronic "clips" of new stories daily, are not written by religion reporters.

In San Diego, Dolbee said she has a general assignment reporter helping her on the story, which two investigative reporters have also worked on. At U.S. News and World Report, more than half of the stories have been written by reporters other than Religion reporter Jeff Sheler. Much of the work there has been by investigative reporters at the weekly magazine, Sheler said.

At the Boston Globe, where the investigative team broke the story in January after the paper went to court to gain access to sealed documents, Religion Reporter Michael Paulson has been working the story full-time, along with several other reporters. Paulson and 7 others at The Globe are also writing a book on the story.

Media on the media

Inevitably with a story as big as this, the media analyze the coverage of the story. AJR's May 2002 issue had a cover story on the piece, as well as a reference to it in its April 2002 issue. Editor and Publisher wrote a March 22 story. And CJR's May/June issue includes a very brief article on the priests and the press. In addition, at some large media outlets, people who cover the media have

critiqued or commented on coverage. At the Los Angeles Times, editor and columnist Bob Baker has devoted two "news-thinking" columns to a day-by-day "journal" of how coverage of the stories progressed. Articles or columns on media coverage appeared in the The New York Times, USA Today, Boston Globe and elsewhere. The Catholic Press also reviewed coverage, including Commonweal, National Catholic Reporter and several diocesan papers.

Overall, most observers have assessed the coverage as fair, balanced and accurate. Complaints from the Roman Catholic leadership have noted that the stories fail to make clear that most allegations are from a decade or more ago, and that the number of pedophilia priests is a small number of the thousands of priests nationwide. The predictable charges of Catholic bashing by a secular media have occurred, however, notably in some diocesan newspapers.

Many journalists said they are tired of the story and the endless rounds of secrecy shrouding the cases and diocesan response, but expect it to slow significantly until after the Bishops' meeting in Dallas June 13-15 has concluded.

One aspect rarely mentioned is the emotional toll of the story on the journalists charged with covering it.

"For those reporters who have had dozens of cases, the turmoil has been taxing," Dolbee said. "We are dealing with broken people here, hurting people, and we can't help but take that brokenness and hurt home with us. Coping with all this, in the aftermath, would make an interesting discussion topic."

Copyright 2002 Religion Newswriters Association. Used by permission.

ReligionLink

Continued from page 1

www.religionwriters.com. To subscribe, e-mail subscribe@religionwriters.com.

The story ideas include regional sources, although at present only the Midwest and Northeast are represented. By Sept. 1, 2002, all regions of the coun-

try will have focused links.

Topics addressed in story tips so far include efforts to teach intelligent design, living wage ordinances, abstinence-only sex education, state bills to post "In God We Trust," clergy abuse, and more.

The tips have no agenda or specific slant and are intended to be bal-

anced.

The Religion Newswriters Association, founded in 1949, is the world's only association for people who write about religion in the secular media. It takes no political or religious viewpoint. For more information contact Debra Mason at mason@religionwriters.com.



See You In Miami
Continued from page 1

the field. Furthermore, it brings in new contributions to the Journal of Media and Religion and other related academic publications. Lastly, it lengthens as well as strengthens RMIG's own membership roll.

Speaking of research, the interest group set a record for submissions in the paper competition this year. RMIG members responded well to my challenge to submit their work, with 25 items turned in, nearly doubling last year's total. Thanks for your submissions, and be sure

to see the results of the paper competition in the pair of juried research sessions (Thursday, 5 p.m. and Friday, 3:15 p.m.) and the scholar-to-scholar display (Thursday, 1:30 p.m.).

One of the best ways to find out where RMIG is headed and give your input on the journey is by coming to the interest group's business meeting on Thursday at 8:30 p.m. That's when officers are appointed for the coming year, priorities are discussed and much more. You'll get a lot in exchange for your 75

minutes.

Everybody also should come by the Religion and Media table in the exhibit area. This is a new opportunity – interest groups and divisions put up displays to inform the AEJMC membership. RMIG will have materials available there throughout the convention.

It's a great time to be – or become – involved with the Religion and Media Interest Group. I look forward to seeing you and RMIG in full bloom in Miami Beach!

RMIG Wants You!

Join the Interest Group that Supports Your Work in Religion & Media

The Religion & Media Interest Group is an organization dedicated to research and pedagogy in the area of the media and religion interface. Each year the group features research paper sessions and panel discussions on topics ranging from religious audiences to news coverage of religion. Membership in RMIG provides an easy way to network with colleagues with common research interests. Membership fee is only \$5 per year. For more information, contact:

Head/Chairman: Dr. Kyle Huckins
Christian Institute of the West
Phone: 806-373-7490
E-mail: khuckins@aboutchristiancollege.org

Vice-head/Program Chair: Debra Mason
Religion Newswriters Association
Phone: 614-891-9001
E-mail: mason@rna.org

Annual Dues Only \$5!

International Communication Association to Feature Panel on Religion and the Internet

A special panel titled, "Cross-cultural and Cross-national Analysis of The New Media and Religion" will be presented at the annual conference of the International Communication Association (ICA) in Seoul, South Korea on Tuesday, July 16th.

The panel encourages dialog between North American and Korean scholars on the emerging realities of new media and popular communication. Stewart Hoover, of the University of Colorado at Boulder is organizing the session. "The panel will address the issues of the emerging new media in terms of their depth by looking at one of the most radically "cultural" of realms: the one that contains "religion" but also contains the quasi-religions of the postmodern era, spirituality, transcendence, seeking, the self, new movements, new consciousness, etc." said Hoover.

Clotilde Lee of Sogang University will discuss "Digital Science Fiction Bible Animation for Children" and Hoover's presentation will focus on religion, new media, and visual culture. Daniel Stout of Brigham Young University will address the topic, "Religion and the Internet: Beyond Determinism" and Jin Kyu Park of the University of Colorado will discuss his paper, "Constructing Religion: Issues of the Study of Religion and the Internet."

New Asian Research Center Offers Resources for Scholars

The Asian Research Center for Religion and Social Communication (ARC), hosted by Saint John's University in Bangkok, was organized in 1999.

With a view toward stimulating original research in Asia on religion and social communication, the ARC web site abstracts some 200 studies from across Asia on 40 topics (<http://www.stjohn.ac.th/arc/> <<http://www.stjohn.ac.th/arc/>>).

The page also includes links to

significant Church documents, especially those on communication, and to other sites offering background on Asian countries and potential research topics.

The ARC publishes a quarterly bulletin, *Media, Religion and Culture*, which reports new research in Asia and new acquisitions in the center's specialized 3,500-volume library.

The center links researchers in the field and seeks to collaborate with other institutions.

Magazine Reports Results of Study on U.S. Religion

The May 6, 2002 issue of *U.S. News & World Report* features an article by Jeffrey L. Sheler that details the results of a recent poll of the religious faith of Americans. The poll, conducted by U.S. News/PBS, sought to discover the importance of religion in everyday life, frequency of attendance at religious services, regularity of reported spiritual experiences, and levels of tolerance for others' faith. Additionally, Sheler's article suggests that clusters of regional faith remain strong and that there are few signs of diminishing religious conviction among Americans—despite widely publicized incidents of terrorism, ethnic conflict, and clergy controversy. Nevertheless, many respondents indicate misconceptions about Islam.



AEJMC Religion & Media Interest Group

Head/Chairman: Dr. Kyle Huckins
Christian Institute of the West
Phone: 806-373-7490
E-mail:
khuckins@aboutchristiancollege.org

Vice-head/Program Chair: Debra Mason
Religion Newswriters Association
Phone: 614-891-9001
E-mail: mason@rma.org

Research Head: Eric Gornly
University of North Texas
Phone: 614-891-9001
E-mail: Gornly.unt.edu

Asst. Research Head: Ken Loomis
University of North Texas
Phone: 940-369-7470
E-mail: Loomis@unt.edu

PF&R Head: Barry Hollander
University of Georgia
Phone: 706-542-5027
E-mail: barry@uga.edu

Secretary: Eleanor Block
Journalism Library
614-292-8747
E-mail: block.3@osu.edu

Teaching Standards Head: Susan Willey
Florida Atlantic University
Phone: 561-799-8718
E-mail: swilley@fau.edu

Newsletter Editor: Dan Stout
Brigham Young University
Phone: 801-422-7551

Religion and Media Bulletin
C/O Daniel Stout
Dept. of Communications
Brigham Young University
Provo, Utah 84602