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A tale of two conventions

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This is a big week for Catholic publishers, with dueling conventions in New Orleans and outside Chicago. The Catholic Media Convention, in the Big Easy, gathers diocesan and other newspaper journalists as well as those who work on Catholic magazines, websites, and audiovisual media, plus PR and communications folks. Meanwhile, Catholic book publishers and booksellers are meeting outside the Windy City at the Religious Booksellers Trade Exhibit (RBTE).

I used to attend the former regularly, back when it was just the Catholic Press Association (CPA). And yesterday I attended the latter.

RBTE's lunch keynote speaker Joan Chittister challenged book publishers and sellers to continue their "ministry to honor the great spiritual questions of today." The previous day Joyce Rupp spoke on the "The Bookseller as Compassionate Presence." (Both women, by the way, are NCR columnists.)

Meanwhile, the Catholic Media Convention had Republican commentator Mary Matalin, who stepped in for her Democratic husband, James Carville, who apparently couldn't make it. And a panel on the role of Catholic media with three archbishops and two bishops.

It would be oversimplistic to say the book publishers' group is more liberal than the newspaper, magazine and TV/radio journalists, although I had noticed a definite rightward slant at the last CPA conventions I attended. But ETWN radio was broadcasting live from RBTE, and there were plenty of pope books and other traditionalist tomes being touted there, too.

The New Orleans location for the Catholic Media Convention meant some journalists got a first-hand look at the devastation from the oil spill (including NCR's Dennis Coday). A group of conventioners also will stay on to help a Catholic Charities project to rebuild homes destroyed by Hurricane Katrina.

Things the two groups share in common: a focus on economic survival and keeping up with technology, with plenty of workshops on web presence and social networking. Oh, and a tendency to imbibe a bit at the end of a long convention day.

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