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Q & A: Michel Martin

Michael Sean Winters | Jul. 7, 2010 Distinctly Catholic

This feature poses one question a group of prominent newsmakers and analysts. We have already heard from Sr. Mary Ann Walsh of the USCCB, ABC's George Stephanopoulos and Wihspers in the Loggia impressario Rocco Palmo. Today we here from NPR's Michel Martin, host of "Tell Me More."

This week's question is: "What is the principle impediment to good media coverage of Catholicism/religion?

Michel Martin:

You are asking at least two different questions here, maybe even three. And there are assumptions embedded in the question, not the least of which is that there is not ?good? media coverage of religion in general and Catholicism in particular now. So let?s start by agreeing to recognize that we are probably going to have different opinions of what constitutes ?good? coverage. Some people take issue with the media coverage of the clergy sexual abuse scandals (which are taking place in many religious organizations by the way) because they are embarrassed by it. That?s too bad; it is necessary , not just for the victims but also for the long term health of these institutions. I personally prefer the term comprehensive coverage, because to me that connotes reporting on institutions and people in their fullness?the good, the bad and the ugly (yes I am dating myself).

So to get to the core question. I think most media organizations are under so much financial pressure that they are having trouble reporting on the school board and city council, let alone these massive, influential and ever evolving institutions and movements. I also think that growing religious diversity of the country, and the growing awareness of the importance of non denominational Christians, of Islam, of non-Abrahamic religions, are all making reporters heads spin. Often there is a learning curve. Many people these days grow up unchurched..I am not making a statement about whether that is a good or a bad thing but it is a thing. And the basic concepts are new and must be learned.

I think the next question is, what to do about it? Do what you are already doing?write, blog, report. But I think it is terribly important to remember that many in your audience really have no idea what you are talking about. So explain explain explain. Try not to assume a base of knowledge that probably is not there. Don?t forget to support the media organizations that are actually doing the work. I am serious. There is no such thing as free content.

Tomorrow's interviewee: Terry Donilon, Communications Director for the Archdiocese of Boston.

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