Reporter calls Christians 'twits' for practicing freedom of speech

By Bob Emmers

Editor's note: This editorial, from the Orange County, California, ***Register,*** *is typical of much of the secular media's coverage of Christians who have expressed opposition to MCA/Universal's* **Last Temptation of Christ.**

Looks like Those Who Know Better are at it again. You can't escape them, no matter how hard you try. They're always there. They might lie dormant for a while, like some kind of virus, but sooner or later they'll pop up again and resume telling the rest of us what's right and wrong.

Those Who Know Better currently have their sights set on a movie.

The Movie is called **The Last Temptation of Christ**. Based on the novel by the Greek writer Nikos Kazantzakis, it's a fictional treatment of the life of Jesus, portraying him as a very human man struggling against temptation and evil.

I loved the book. And the movie is directed by one of my favorites, Martin Scorsese, so it ought to be real [sic] good, too. I've been looking forward to seeing it when it's released in September.

Now enter Those Who Know Better. In this case, a group of conservative, fundamentalist church people.

If it's up to them, nobody will get a chance to see **The Last Temptation of Christ.** That's because even though they haven't seen the movie yet, they've decided it's blasphemous and mocks Christ. They say it contains nudity and sex and other horrible, nasty things like that.

Those Who Know Better have demanded that Universal Studios cancel the release of the movie and destroy all copies of it. They've threatened a boycott unless the studio knuckles under.

There's an Orange County connection, too. Foremost among Those Who Know Better is our very own Trinity Broadcasting Network, based in Tustin. The network has called on all its viewers to flood the studio with threatening phone calls.

"We just could not sit by and see such a terrible program perpetrated on the people of America," network Vice President Philip Crouch told me.

Universal has tried to debate with Those Who Know Better, arguing that this is really a very religious movie and not blasphemous at all.

In fact, the whole controversy has now become a debate about whether the movie is blasphemous.

Unfortunately, this obscures two vital questions.

First, does Jesus really need the Trinity Broadcasting Network and all the rest of Those Who Know Better to defend Him?

And second, let's suppose for a minute that the movie is more or less blasphemous, whatever that means.

Let's suppose the movie does portray Christ as a sex-starved lout, as some of Those Who Know Better charge. Let's suppose the movie does mock Jesus. Let's suppose the movie does raise questions about whether Jesus is the son of God. Let's suppose the movie does contain, gasp, sex and nudity. Let's suppose all of this is true.

So what?

I still ought to be able to go see it without a bunch of holier-than-thou twits telling me it's not good for me.

After all, one man's blasphemy is another man's piety, and the Constitution protects it all.

The problem with Those Who Know Better is that they actually think they do. In this case, they think that Christianity is the one true faith and should never be criticized and should never be portrayed in any way that differs from the way Those Who Know Better think it should be portrayed.

What a crock. Personally, I'd like to see someone come up with a campaign to boycott the Trinity Broadcasting Network and all the rest of Those Who Know Better until they admit that they don't.

Meanwhile, I'm looking forward to seeing Scorsese's movie. I might even go see it twice.

So there. Amen.

Media hostile to Christianity

By Dr. Marvin Olasky
Journalism Prof., Univ. of Texas

Editor's Note: Marvin Olasky is a journalism professor at University of Texas, Austin. His new book ***Prodigal Press: The Anti-Christian Bias of the American News Media*** *(Crossway, 1988) is a revealing story of how American media moved from a Christian worldview to materialist humanism.*

Media-bashing has become a common pastime for many Christians. There is much to be bashed, but criticism of news coverage is ineffective when couched in generalities. We need to know how secular journalists perceive their work and then be able to point to examples of how some are covering up and manipulating the news.

First, the self-perception: Many journalists see themselves as altruists doling out positive publicity to those causes they believe are worthy.

Karen de Young, foreign editor of the *Washington Post,* explained her positive coverage of the Sandinistas when they seized power: "Most journalists now, most Western journalists at least, are very eager to seek out guerrilla groups, leftist groups, because you assume they must be the good guys."

To insert her own opinions into news stories, Norma Quarles of NBC practices journalistic ventriloquism: "I can't really say it. I have to get somebody else to say it."

In the 1970s, Geraldo Rivera reported for ABC in Panama. When a violent incident threatened Senate ratification of a treaty relinquishing U.S. control of the Panama Canal, Rivera says, "we downplayed the whole incident. That was the day I decided that I had to be very careful about what was said, because I could defeat the very thing [passage of the treaty] that I wanted to achieve."

NBC anchorman Tom Brokaw, in a *Mother Jones* magazine interview, called middle-class values "pretty simplistic, pretty old-fashioned," without "much application to what's currently wrong or troubling a lot of people." Journalists can help provide a different perspective, he said.

Unfortunately, there are many documented instances of news people manipulating or covering up the news. To mention just a few such examples:

A *Detroit Free Press* article, "Gays Rally for Right and Respect," reported a homosexual march as if it were an Easter parade, emphasizing "diversity" and "family." The report did not mention groups in the march such as Dykes on Bikes, the pederastic North American Man-Boy Love Association, or the sadomasochistic Society of Venus. Those details might have made readers question the "family" nature of the march.

Recent school textbook cases raised some hard questions: Are public schools infringing on the right to free exercise of religion? Is a pluralistic public school system possible? But the *Austin American-Statesman,* instead of examining those questions, grabbed hold of one negative passing comment about *The Wizard of Oz* and began its story, "In the peaceful hills of Tennessee's Bible Belt, Dorothy and Toto and the Good Witch are on trial this week."

Pro-abortion groups have mounted a massive public relations campaign against pro-life counseling centers. *USA Today* and dozens of other newspapers and magazines have printed their charges of "deception" and "psychological terror" (for showing a woman what the child inside her womb looks like) and have patted themselves on the back for performing a public service.

These problems in American journalism are not because of some conspiracy, but the result of a materialist world view hostile to Christianity. Most journalists see leftist guerrillas, homosexual parades, and anti-Christian textbooks as the good news of our era, and they do not want to stand in the way of liberation. Until that world view changes, there will be few improvements in our news coverage.

To change that view, more young Christians need to be trained in the journalistic skills and discernment needed to work in the secular media. Others need to consider developing or starting newspapers and broadcast news shows with a Christian perspective.

As Christians, we should also learn to read the news more intelligently, knowing how reporters load their stories while making them seem balanced.

For example, according to ABC executive producer Av Westin, network abortion stories in the 1970s followed a formula: first, dramatic photos of bruised, "unwanted" babies or shots of "a silhouetted woman telling how she nearly died after an illegal abortion." Then, "with the case for legalized abortion powerfully presented, an opponent of abortion would be given a chance to make the pro-life side of the case, usually without dramatic pictures, inserted merely as a 'talking head.'" Equal time, yes—but equal impression?

We need to discern the agenda that journalists are setting. Is South Africa the center of oppression on earth? How often is persecution of Christians in the Soviet Union and other countries reported? Which stories make the front page? It takes time to be a smart consumer of the news, but we do not glorify God by being sheep walking peacefully toward the wolves, even if the shepherds say the journey is for our own good.

Media trying to influence election outcome?

According to the *National Right to Life News,* many surveys of the major media demonstrate that more than 90% of the members of this elite group are pro-abortion and an overwhelming majority also admit they regularly vote for Democrats for President.

Could it be that because media people, who are members of the media elite, hold certain opinions and vote certain ways, it follows that the news product they produce is tilted in that direction?

Syndicated columnist William Rusher has documented that the networks have hired a bevy of Democratic political operatives as part of their "team" in covering national politics in 1988.

John Merriam, of *USA Today,* recently pointed out that the three major television networks are giving pro-life Vice President George Bush more than five times more negative coverage as they do Michael Dukakis, the pro-abortion governor of Massachusetts.

National reporters appear determined to ignore Democrat Dukakis's staunchly pro-abortion history and the efforts of pro-lifers to alert the public to his track record.

The national media covered the 1984 appearance of pro-abortionist Geraldine Ferraro in Scranton, Pennsylvania but failed to cover the April 1988 appearance of Michael Dukakis in Scranton.

When congresswoman Ferraro, like Dukakis, was vocally pro-abortion at her appearance in Scranton, she was met by numerous pro-life demonstrators. Coverage of them included all major networks, with the NBC news lead devoted to the pro-life demonstration. Even the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* covered it.

However, the same story about abortion was there in April of 1988, when Democrat Michael Dukakis came to Scranton. The pro-life demonstrators were there, also, but the press ignored them. They weren't interested to find out why pro-lifers were opposing Dukakis.

Local media coverage of the Dukakis visit ranged from good to excellent. However, the three major networks, ABC, NBC and CBS, ignored the protest.

Could it be that they were tired of the abortion issue? Or could it be that the liberal national press discovered in the 1984 election that drawing attention to a candidate's pro-abortion stance is detrimental to his chance of being elected president, so they want to hide Dukakis's pro-abortion stand from the public?

Is this silence on the abortion issue another case of "the media's attempt to shape history rather than report it?"

Those opposing censorship often practice it the most

Those who say they are opposed to censorship are the ones who often practice it the most. Various studies show, groups like Homosexuals Anonymous confirm, that homosexuality can be treated and cured in the same way that alcoholics give up booze. But don't try talking about this on the radio.

Tony Lutz, a resident of the Washington, D.C. area, reports that he was cut off in mid-sentence when he tried to make the point on a local radio show that homosexuality is a reversible mental illness. The manager of programming and operations told him in a letter that he was censored because his comments were perceived as offensive to "a significant portion of the listening audience." Lutz was told by the station: "These are the 1980s, and regardless of any personal moral opinions any of us might have, homosexuals and sympathizers to the homosexual cause do constitute a sizable segment of the population, and one which [the talk show host] chose not to risk offending."

Mike Ward of Minneapolis, Minnesota got similar treatment when he phoned the Michael Jackson radio talk show during a discussion of lesbianism and wanted to make the point that lesbians can give up their "lifestyle" in the same way he had recovered from alcoholism. He was told by a screener of phone calls that his comments were inappropriate and he would not get on the air.

This is the same secular media which says it is opposed to censorship.

Visual media concerns NEH chairman

The chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities worries that visual media are largely responsible for the "chaos in American culture today."

NEH Chairman Lynne V. Cheney told a panel discussing the decline of cultural values, "Television doesn't instill the ideal of human excellence and nobility...is there anything in 'Dirty Dancing' that inspires human excellence?"

Mrs. Cheney gave the panelists some numbers to ponder:

-The television set is on an average of 31 hours, 28 minutes a week.

-50% of the U.S. population 16 or older has not read any portion of a book in six months.