

How TV Views Religion

No one tracks the media better than Brent Bozell's Media Research Center. Indeed, if it is true that the media are the Fourth Estate then it must be true that the Media Research Center is the Fifth Estate. Its recent report, "Faith in the Box: Television and Religion," found several interesting items.

No religion received more coverage on TV in 1994 than Catholicism. Indeed, there were 103 stories done on Catholicism, 24 of which dealt exclusively with the Cairo Conference. According to the report, every Cairo story treated the Church with "disdain." Here are a few examples.

On September 3, 1994, CBS reporter Martha Teichner stated that a "nasty fight" between President Clinton and the Pope was brewing: "The security in effect for the U.N. Population Conference in Cairo is the kind used to prevent aircraft hijackings. But so far, the only hijacking taking place is of the agenda." It was clear from the context of the story that the Vatican was allegedly hijacking the conference.

On September 7, 1994, ABC's Peter Jennings had this to say: "In Cairo, the Pope's representatives are causing tempers to flare at the World Population Conference as the Vatican holds to its uncompromising position on abortion." Reporter Jim Bitterman then added: "Vatican representatives at the population conference were today being cast in the role of spoiler, their stubborn style angering fellow delegates... And delegates weren't the only ones frustrated. Thousands of activists who came here to push causes from the environment to women's rights, have been ignored as the representatives from 182 nations spend their time and energy debating the abortion issue."

Question: why is it that opponents of abortion are typically

portrayed by the media as “uncompromising” and “stubborn” while unyielding abortion rights enthusiasts are seen as principled? Look for more of the same in September when the media go to Beijing for the U.N.’s Fourth World Conference on Women.