

JOURNALISM—FAIR AND UNFAIR

One question the league is often asked is how we make determinations on what we deem to be offensive. Here's a good example of how the process works.

This past fall, the *Dallas Morning News* ran a story, "Crimes of the Father," on a death row prisoner in Arkansas. It showed a picture of the man holding a rosary bead that was draped around his neck. The cutline under the photo read, "Darrel Hill, on Arkansas' death row, wears a crucifix that was worn by friends on the row who were executed." We had no problem with that, but we did raise an objection when the story and photo ran a few weeks later in the *Florida Times-Union*.

Under the photo in the *Florida Times-Union*, it read, "Darrel Hill, on Arkansas' Death Row, believes he inherited his criminal tendencies from his father, and passed them on to his son, Jeffrey Landrigan, who is on Death Row in Texas." The headline read, "What makes a human kill?"

The problem with the Florida newspaper is that it gave the impression that there was some inherent connection between the criminal's Catholicism and his crime. We wrote to the editor of the *Florida Times-Union* explaining how the *Dallas Morning News* handled the story fairly. We also said that in his paper "the picture is gratuitously displayed under a sensational headline, creating an immediate link which is nowhere dispelled."

The contrasting accounts is the difference between professional and tabloid journalism. It's also the difference between informing readers and needlessly offending Catholics.