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Faith As News: A Christian Clergy Perspective on News Media Coverage of Religion

John Baker
University of Nebraska-Lincoln, bakerjohna@hotmail.com

FAITH AS NEWS: A CHRISTIAN CLERGY PERSPECTIVE ON NEWS COVERAGE OF RELIGION

by

John Baker

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FAITH AS NEWS: A CHRISTIAN CLERGY

PERSPECTIVE ON NEWS COVERAGE OF RELIGION

John Baker, M. A.

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Adviser: Carla Kimbrough

Religion and the news media have had a long, contentious relationship. While the roots of American journalism lie in the particular theology and practices of Puritan New England, journalism's clashes with authority, including the religious establishment, set it on its course to independence.

While the general public sees the news media as largely neutral toward religion, a significant segment of evangelical Christians see the news media as "unfriendly" toward them. This thesis suggests that group identification, as well as conservative political orientation, are prime factors shaping this perception of the new media.

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INTRODUCTION

John Winthrop, governor of colonial Massachusetts, to Puritan settlers in Boston:

> Thus stands the cause between God and us: we are entered into covenant with Him for this work…we must be knit together in this work as one man;…always having before our eyes our commission and community in the work, our community as members of the same body (Winthrop 25.)

The Puritans were certain that God's work was everywhere. They saw it in momentous and innocuous events. By recording and reporting those events, they sought to build their community and nurture their faith.

In telling these stories they also gave birth to what would become American journalism.

This paper is a story told in two parts. The first part, in broad strokes, is the establishment of journalism and its religious roots, through some of the major developments in the relationship between religion and the news. Much of journalism history is about newspapers, so much of the first part of the paper is about newspapers. This part of the paper also most focuses on the earlier, pre-twentieth century developments of the religion-news media relationship.

The second part of the story concerns what a religious audience thinks of today's news media. Ministers from two Protestant traditions, Southern Baptist and United Methodist, completed a survey that asked them to describe perceptions of the news media's basic attitudes toward religion. The survey also asked them to identify the sources of news they frequently use and to assess coverage of various groups seen in the news.

Samuel Danforth's almanacs, Increase Mather's "providences," and Cotton Mather's Magnalia were the just beginning. They established the pattern of kind of reportorial empiricism journalists practice today.

Winthrop's dream of a city on a hill was the dream of a community, bound together in purpose, united in action, built on faith. Journalism was at the heart of this community.

But community can be fragile. Clashes were inevitable, like the one between James Franklin's New England Courant and the Puritan patriarch Increase Mather, described in the first chapter of this paper. With every conflict journalism matured, like a child growing up and away from its parent.

The John Peter Zenger libel trial and victory is a seminal event in the history of free expression in America. Zenger's victory, however, owed as much to religion as to law. His attorney, Alexander Hamilton, grounded his arguments in the prevalent theology of the day and appealed to religious ideas more so than legal ones. With the victory, journalism took another step toward independence.

Several men tried to publish religious news, but few succeeded. The rise of the penny press, with its stories for the masses, meant the fall of religious newspapers. One of the most significant of these penny papers, James Gordon Bennett's New York Herald, brought religion back into the paper. This time, though, religion took its place alongside crime, business news, and gossip. No longer special, now religion was just news, and the gap between the two opened wider.

Scientific advancements in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries had a profound impact on both religion and journalism. Scientific ideas challenged religious belief and pushed journalism toward what we now know as objectivity. The community-building and forum

functions the news once fulfilled gave way to the news as "just the facts." Religion did not fit well into the new paradigm, and the gap between the news and religion reached its widest point.

During the twentieth century, religion slowly receded into the background of the news. Coverage ebbed and surged, but religion never again occupied the place it had in the early years of journalism. Radio and television appeared, created more outlets for storytelling, and enabled religious entrepreneurs to use the new media for spreading news of their own.

A parallel news universe developed. Religious groups gathered and disseminated their own news for their own audiences. And they can get news made just for them.

Now the roles have reversed. In the beginning, religion was the establishment and journalism was the upstart, struggling to find its place. Today, journalism is fully grown, firmly entrenched in the establishment, and religion struggles to find its place in the news.

CHAPTER 1

On October 17, 1637, Bostonian Mary Dyer, a supporter of Anne Hutchinson (whose theological teachings ran afoul of clerical authorities and caused a stir) gave birth to a deformed, stillborn child. Despite the efforts of the women who attended the birth to keep the incident quiet, rumors spread through the town. Colonial governor John Winthrop heard the rumors and ordered the young body exhumed. This in itself was something of a sensation; more than one hundred people turned out to see the corpse (Winthrop 1:266-68.)

Dyer's "monstrous birth" was more than a sad, curious event: it was *news*. Winthrop wrote about in his journal, suggesting that by the spring of 1638 the whole town was talking about it. An account of the birth was published in a newssheet in London in 1642 and in 1644 in the first account of the Hutchinson controversy. It also appeared in an early New England almanac, the "Chronological Table of some few memorable occurrences." There, along with accounts of shipwrecks, Indian wars, earthquakes, and all manner of weather events, was this item about the birth: "Mrs. Dier brought forth her horned-foure-talented (taloned) - monster" (Nord 31.)

Why was it news in seventeenth-century New England? Was it just an oddity, or did it mean more? And does their concept of news and their news gathering practices mean anything for American journalism today?

At its heart, news is the "reporting of current public occurrences" (Nord 32.) But those terms – occurrence, current, public, and reporting – mean something within the particular social contexts of time and place. News is occurrences, but not all occurrences are news. News is about current events in that it is also about recurrent events. No matter how new or unique, most news events fit into a long-standing pattern. News is always public, but what qualifies as public

often depends on social, political, or economic power. News is reported, usually in plain language and with empirical discipline. But even reporting is a socially constructed and mediated process, influenced by social convention and power. These elements combine to define journalism in any particular time and place (Nord 32.)

In colonial New England the elements of news – occurrence, current, public, and reporting – were shaped by the Puritan theology that held that everything happened according to God's will and plan. Events were God's work in the world, patterned, recurrent, meaningful, and intelligible. Meaning was public and social; meaning was intelligible and self-evident, accessible to all. The New England colonies produced news concerned with current events but recurrent in subject matter, religious and public in importance; gathered and reported by authorities in simple, empirical form (Nord 32.)

Not that news was invented in New England. Early American literature, including journalism, was an extension of "British culture in the new world" (Spengemann 7.) In England and Europe stories like the Mary Dyer incident were common, as were tales of "monsters" and "strange occurrences" and other sensational stories derived from folklore (Park and Daston 20-54.)

But the Mary Dyer story was more than just odd or entertaining. The story was important to authorities because it had real public value. John Winthrop, the governor, investigated the incident himself and wrote the bulk of the report about it. The event had something important to say to the community. Dyer was a supporter of Anne Hutchinson, a heretic to the established order. Winthrop saw in this tragic event a message from God. Dyer's little "monster" was a sign that God was opposed to Hutchinson and her "monstrous opinions," which were undermining the authority of the Massachusetts colony. The Dyer miscarriage was not a private event but an

event that was important to the community. It was a sign of "divine providence" given to the community (Winthrop 43-45.)

Divine providence was central to the Puritan way of thinking and living, more so than it was in other colonies. Other writers used the term providence in their works, but spiritual descendants of Calvin, Zwingli, and the early Protestant Reformers, the Puritans believed that God directed human affairs and willed human action. God was immanent, speaking to man through natural events and human history, the unfolding of God's perfect plan for the world and New England's special place in it. God spoke through natural events like storms, droughts, and fires, cosmological events such as comets, and other "divine prodigies, strange and wondrous occurrences." He even spoke through Mary Dyer's baby (D. Hall 28-54.)

The concept of divine providence, central to Puritan community, also fueled the Puritan drive to record and report what would become the news (Nord 34, 35.)

The Puritans were printers and readers. Early products of the press illustrate how the Puritan idea of divine providence interacted with the news and public affairs. Two of the foundational doctrines of the Protestant Reformation, sola scriptura (scripture alone) and the priesthood of all believers, made the printed Bible central to Protestant life. In the Protestant mind, each individual had direct access to God, without the need for a human intermediary. This made learning an imperative. But reading the Bible was only part of fulfilling that obligation. The Puritans formed a covenantal society, in which all the members formally bound themselves to duties that would maintain that community. This, and New England's special place in God's plan, required community members' informed participation in civic life. Building God's kingdom on earth, not to mention John Winthrop's city on a hill, meant understanding God's plan, which meant understanding history (Eisenstein 147-51.)

An early product of the press was the almanac, a reference guide to seasonal and tidal cycles, aimed at "the most part of New-England," the popular audience. Samuel Danforth, a Cambridge printer and later a church pastor, produced the earliest surviving almanacs. Supervised by the religious and civil authorities, his almanac was part of the official public communication system of New England (Nord 35, 36.)

Besides nature, these almanacs also included recent history. The "Chronological Table of some few memorable occurrences" was a standard feature. These occurrences included historical and natural events, each of which would have current public importance. The 1630 landing of John Winthrop's fleet was the first of the "memorable occurrences" listed. The first session of the General Court, and the beginning of printing in Massachusetts were among the types of historical events included in Danforth's almanac. Droughts, storms, outbreaks of disease, and the stillbirth of Mary Dyer's deformed child were among the types of natural events he recorded. These events were reported in a plain, uninterpreted style, mingled together. There was no need to separate them, since they were all part of the same continuing story of God's work in New England (Nord 36.)

Danforth made two of his most important contributions to New England literature while a pastor. One was the execution sermon. In1674 a young man named Benjamin Goad was hanged for bestiality. Danforth preached a sermon at the execution, which was the first published one of its kind. The event was not merely a tragedy; it had meaning for the whole community, as Danforth declared that day, "Gods End in inflicting remarkable Judgements upon some, is for Caution and Warning to all others" (Danforth 12-13.)

The election sermon was another type of public communication that became common in New England in the seventeenth century. Ministers preached to the representatives who gathered

in Boston each year to elect members of the governor's council and to participate in the General Court. The predominant theme of these sermons during this time was New England's special place in God's plan for mankind. Danforth's most famous work was one of these sermons: "A Brief Recognition of New-Englands Errand into the Wilderness" (Nord 37.)

The theme of his sermon was the decline of the community's commitment to what Danforth thought was the founding mission of Massachusetts. This loss of commitment angered God. Current events were evidence of that anger: "Why hath the Lord smitten us with Blasting and Mildew now seven years together, superadding sometimes severe Drought, sometimes great Tempests, Floods, and sweeping Rains, that leave no food behinde them? Is it not because the Lords House lyeth waste? Temple-work in our Hearts, Families, Churches is shamefully neglected" (Danforth.)

While historic and astronomical events received much attention, smaller events, like an outbreak of the flu, also were signals from God shared with the community. Ministers and public officials devoted great energy and attention to recording, reporting, and interpreting events for the spiritual and civic health of their community (Nord 38.)

Eventually Boston became the printing capital of New England. Private printing, unsupervised by authorities, would come later. From the beginning, though, printers recognized and tried to feed readers' interest in current public events. While they selected material that would meet market demand, they did so while staying within the authoritative, interpretive tradition of Samuel Danforth's day (M. Hall 136, 160 and Nord 39.)

The first two pieces published by the Boston press were typical news pieces of the day. Both were sermons written by Increase Mather, tied to current events:

The Wicked mans Portion. Or a Sermon (Preached at the Lecture in Boston in New-England the 18th day of the 1 Moneth 1674, when two Men were executed who had Murdered their Master.

The Times of men are in the hands of God. Or A Sermon Occasioned by that awfull Providence which hapned in Boston in New England, the 4th Day of the 3d Moneth 167 (when part of a Vessel was blown up in the Harbour, and nine men hurt, and three mortally wounded) wherein is shewed how we should sanctifie the dreadfull Name of God under such awfull Dispensations (Nord 40.)

Mather would become the primary patron of the Boston press. He was captivated by events and their meanings for the community. Given his prolific preaching, publication, and personal theology, Mather led what "represents the first major flowering of an indigenous American journalism" (Nord 40.)

This "flowering" grew directly out of Mather's adherence to the doctrine of divine providence. In 1675, King Philip's War, between the colonists and native Americans, began. The war would be one of the worst disasters New England had seen. In his sermon "The Day of Trouble Is Near," delivered the year before, Mather believed he had seen it coming. As he later wrote in his autobiography, "It was much in my thoughts that God would visit with the sword for the reason mentioned in my sermons. Afterwards I saw that those thoughts were from God. For in the year 1675 the warr with the Indians began" (Nord 40.)

Though the colonists won, King Philip's War was devastating. One of every sixteen colonial men were killed and at least a dozen towns were completely destroyed. Mather saw it as

a message from God (Mather 7.). Based on his own reporting and interpretation, in 1676 Mather produced A Brief History of the Warr with the Indians in New-England (Nord 40.)

Mather's style was simple and empirical. At the end of this work he wrote that his interest was to provide a straightforward, unbiased account of events:

> Thus have we a brief, plain, and true Story of the war with the Indians in New England, how it began, and how it hath made its progress…Designing only a Breviary of the History of this war; I have not enlarged upon the circumstances of things, but shall leave that to others, who have advantages and leisure to go on with such an undertaking (Mather 74.)

For Mather, this war was just the beginning of a series of important events. From his 1676 account of the war until his death in 1723, he devoted himself to reporting and interpreting events in and for New England. He published An Essay for the Recording of Illustrious Providences, his most famous work, in 1684, born of a collaboration of Massachusetts ministers to record, organize, and publish all manner of events. Mather's work contained "illustrious providences" and "remarkable occurrences" such as "Divine judgments, Tempests, Floods, Earth-quakes, Thunders as are unusual, strange Apparitions, or what ever else shall happen that is Prodigious." Detailed, the book was an eclectic collection of stories of shipwrecks, witchcraft, and assorted oddities. It was something of a best seller (Mather xi-xiv.)

Mather's fascination with current events ran to the political as well as the natural. After King Philip's War, political events came fast: England tightened its grip on the colonies, revoking the Massachusetts charter and creating the Dominion of New England in 1683-84; the Glorious Revolution in 1688-89; England restored the altered colonial charter in 1691. Non-

sermon narratives increased during this period, particularly political tracts and news sheets about these events, and Mather was a primary contributor (Nord 42.)

In these more political works Mather moved away from a purely teleological presentation of events, making political arguments concerning property rights and due process though he still framed them as part of divine providence. When England proposed changing the colonial charter, Mather asserted that to do so would be sin, as the charter, like the colony, was ordained by God (Nord 42-3.)

Increase Mather's son Cotton, also a Puritan minister, followed in his father's reportorial footsteps. He produced an encyclopedia of events in the colony, the Magnalia Christi Americana, in 1702. His interest was "the Actions of a more Eminent Importance, that have signalized those Colonies," and the "Memorable Occurrences, and amazing Judgments and Mercies befalling many particular persons among the People of New-England." But the Magnalia Christi Americana was a record of the present, not just the past. Mather believed that being a reporter was part of his calling into the ministry:

> To Regard the illustrious Displays of that Providence, wherewith our Lord Christ governs the world, is a Work, than which there is none more Needful, or Useful, for a Christian: To Record them is a Work, than which, none more proper for a Minister (C. Mather 1.)

Current events captured the Puritan imagination. Reporting them was central to civic life. However, those events were not collected haphazardly, without thought. From Danforth's almanacs to the Magnalia, publications regarding current events shared similarities in how they selected and reported events. These writers established the reportorial empiricism central to what we know as journalism (Nord 44.)

The news literature of New England in the 1600s was empirical in that writers recorded what they observed. Their methodology in reporting those observations was gathering and citing the statements of sources. The writer's job was not to conduct systematic research, but to report the statements of others. It was essentially what we know today as news reporting (Nord 44.)

Danforth's almanacs provide a model for this reportorial empiricism. They were part astronomy, based on the best scientific data of the day, and collections of various events. In the comet sermon of 1665, Danforth combined scientific data with a long list of events, some from the distant past, some current, to show that comets were harbingers of disaster. These events were chosen because they fit a pattern. The appearance of a comet was noteworthy but not a mystery to Danforth, for its meaning was clear. This comet was just the latest manifestation of an event that had recurred throughout history, part of a larger, conventional pattern (Nord 45.)

Increase Mather's reportorial methods were empirical if not scientific. In his work An Essay for the Recording of Illustrious Providences he set out to tell true, accurate stories, assuring the reader that his sources were reliable. But for the most part Mather did not test the quality of the information his sources gave: he simply reported it. His sources ranged from folklore to scientific works to stories people around New England told him. His was the empiricism of the reporter, his evidence the statements of sources (Nord 45.)

For these writers, building or testing theory was not the point. They already had their theory: divine providence. For all the curious, tragic, spectacular events they collected and reported, they already knew the first cause of all of it. Unlike scientific empiricism, which is based on controlled experimentation in order to discover the new, their empiricism was about reporting what was known already. God spoke through concrete physical reality, through events

that fit into a larger, conventional pattern. The meaning of those events would be plain to all who studied them (Nord 46.)

Thus the roots of American journalism took hold in the New England religious community of the Puritans. Fed by their particular theological ideas and nurtured by patrons such as the Mathers, this early press was part of the clerical and civic establishment, an instrument of community and societal order.

CHAPTER 2

Early newspapers were exercises in persistence. Many failed. Small circulations could not feed the papers sufficiently to keep most of them alive. Add to that the ever-present threats of censorship by the authorities, who "never hesitated to annoy the poor printer whenever he put anything interesting in his paper," and the death rate of early colonial newspapers was high (Lee 28.)

Some successful newspapers did emerge in the early eighteenth century. The first of these was John Campbell's Boston News-Letter, which debuted on April 24, 1704 (Lee 19.)

Lead news was usually European – court politics, official proclamations, battle action – reported chronologically. Boston political news followed, again as chronologically as possible. Then came the "providences," the fires, storms, executions, and the like that made up the rest of the paper (Nord 50, Lee 19-20.) Campbell's goal was to build a continuing record of public events, which he plainly stated in a statement at the end of the News-Letter's first year:

> As also in our Prints you have the publick Occurrences from the West-Indies and other parts: and likewise those from our Neighbouring Provinces, besides those of this and the Province of New-Hampshire…and a great any Providences now Recorded, that would otherwise be lost" (Nord 51.)

Campbell's paper, unlike the Puritan publications of the Mathers and Danforth, only reported these providences. Interpreting them was left to the clerical and political establishments. The following was a typical story in the News-Letter: "On Friday last, There was a great Thunder Shower of Rain, together with great Hail stones." That is the complete story, just the facts (Nord 51.)

Campbell's paper reflected what would become the secular drift of the news. But Campbell did follow in the tradition of the Puritan publishers in that the News-Letter was event-oriented, concerned with the unusual, and used the reportorial empiricism established by the Mathers and Danforth (Nord 50-1.)

In 1721 James Franklin, the long-time printer of the News-Letter, started his own paper, The New England Courant, in 1721 (Lee 29.) Soon Franklin had conflicts with the clerical and civil authorities. In 1721, debate raged over the practice of smallpox inoculation. Franklin was personally bitterly opposed, though he declared his paper to be impartial. Franklin claimed impartiality because he simply reported statements made by his sources, not their veracity. Never mind that most of his sources were against inoculation, not to mention critical of the local clerical establishment (Nord 52-3.)

Increase Mather, the prominent Boston clergyman, was in favor of inoculation. Franklin poked such ferocious fun at Mather in the pages of the Courant the minister felt compelled to respond with a letter to the editor of the Gazette:

> In special, because in one of his Vile Courants he insinuates, that if the ministers of God approve of a thing, it is a Sign it is of the Devil; which is a horrid thing to be related!...And he doth frequently abuse the Ministers of Religion, and many other worthy Persons in a manner, which is intolerable...I can well remember when the Civil Government would have taken an effectual Course to suppress such a Cursed Libel! which if it be not done I am afraid that some Awful Judgment will come upon this Land, and the Wrath of God will arise, and there will be no Remedy…I cannot but Advise the Supporters of this Courant to

consider the Consequences of being Partakers in other Mens Sins, and no more Countenance such a Wicked Paper (Lee 29-30.)

Franklin also criticized civil authorities. This soon led to his discharge from the paper. In order to keep the paper alive, his younger brother Benjamin took over the operation until the end of the Courant in 1727 (Lee 31.)

The fights the Courant had with the local authorities were important in that they brought the freedom of the press closer to fruition. Freedom of the American press, and its English ancestors has been closely associated with freedom of religious worship. In New England, the two existed together. Affronting authority, including the authority of established religion, was the beginning of a free press, one that came closer with every clash (Lee 31.)

Newspapers began appearing throughout the colonies. One of these, John Peter Zenger's The New-York Weekly Journal, would bring religion and the news together again (Nord 65.)

In 1735 Zenger was tried in New York for libel. His Weekly Journal was a politically partisan paper, launched by a group of powerful New York politicians intent on undermining the administration of the governor, William Cosby. The Weekly Journal routinely published anonymous essays critical of the governor and broadsides on the dangers of the abuse of power and tyranny, connected to the governor through innuendo. Among these essays were radical Whig pieces "Cato's Letters." At their heart, these essays asserted that truth was the most effective weapon against tyranny, and that human authority was divinely limited (Nord 70.) The paper also contained foreign news items and advertisements, some of which were satirical of the governor. Cosby's attempts at suppressing the paper were unsuccessful, but he succeeded in having Zenger arrested for libel (Katz 20-23.)

Alexander Hamilton, Zenger's defense attorney, argued that truth should be a defense against libel and that the jury should decide not only the facts of the case but how the law should be applied. The presiding judge rejected these arguments. Hamilton ignored the judge and made his case directly to the jury. He contended that if the material Zenger published was true it could not be libelous and that the jury had the right to decide. His arguments won over the jury, who acquitted Zenger (Katz 101.)

This symbolic watershed moment in the fight for free expression owed as much to the religious climate as it did the law. Hamilton did not make the argument that Zenger had a right to publish. Hamilton argued that Zenger had a right to tell the truth:

> Truth ought to govern the whole affair of libels. For as it is truth alone which can excuse or justify any man for complaining of a bad administration, I as frankly agree that nothing ought to excuse a man who raises a false charge or accusation (Nord 67.)

Later historians have criticized Hamilton's arguments for truth as legally weak, given that truth itself can be elusive. But that misses an important point. In 1735, truth was the unavoidable standard in Zenger's trial. Hamilton was asking the jury to consider not the nature of free expression but the nature of truth itself and how it is revealed to man. Given the Protestant Christian religious climate of the day, the jury could grapple with that question (Nord 67.)

The Zenger trial was happening as religious revivals sprang up throughout the Northeast and Middle Colonies, the early stages of what would become known as The Great Awakening. The nature of truth and its revelation to man were the main themes of these revivals. The Weekly Journal published some of the first and most important sermons on these subjects (Evans 2:1730-50 and Nord 73.)

Zenger was an early promoter of the revivalist Gilbert Tennent. He preached the message that each believer must experience a personal conversion, feeling the horror of his lost condition before he could feel the assurance of genuine salvation. Critics accused Tennent of undermining the authority of the church. Tennent's view of salvation was not purely emotional, however. He asserted that God dealt with people "in a way best suited to their rational natures." He also held that individuals had the responsibility to use their reason to search out and choose the good, which he called "consideration" (Nord 74.)

The personal nature of salvation made revivalists leery of creeds and formal doctrinal statements. Jonathan Dickinson, a revivalist in the Middle Colonies criticized the liturgy as being solely human in origin, unsanctioned by scripture (Dickinson 16.) He, like Tennent, asserted that individuals had to experience God for themselves, without coercion or compulsion. Any religion based on coercion was idolatry. The revivalists were trying to turn churches back to God's truth, which every man could learn for himself. It brought them to the principle, as it did Hamilton, that individuals had to judge for themselves (Nord 74-5.)

Hamilton linked political freedom with religious dissent. He cited precedents involving religious disputes rather than political ones. His addresses to the jury were loaded with religious language. He argued that great men, kings, judges, and popes among them, could be wrong. Nowhere did he argue that men were free from an obligation to truth. But if great men could be wrong, who could judge the truth? Hamilton argued that it was the responsibility of the jury. To Hamilton, the jury was specially equipped for the task. Their involvement in their respective communities gave them "special knowledge" of the facts of any particular case. But he also argued that for any statement to be libelous, it must be understood to be so (Katz 69, 78.)

Hamilton's argument conflated fact and law. For him, the truth or falsity of a statement lay in how it was understood. Fact and law became the province of the jury. "Then it follows," Hamilton said, "that those twelve men must understand the words in the information to be scandalous, that is to say false" (Katz 69, 78.) Hamilton placed the authority for determining the truth squarely on the jurors: "A proper confidence in a court is commendable; but as the verdict (whatever it is) will be yours, you ought to refer no part of our duty to the direction of other persons" (Katz 96.)

To drive this point home, Hamilton cited biblical passages that alluded to corrupt kings, blind watchmen, and greedy dogs. He argued that any innuendo linking these passages to the Cosby administration could render them libelous. The Bible, like Zenger's paper, could be interpreted differently by different people (Katz 95-6.) So it was imperative that the jury retain its right of interpretation, not concede it to another authority.

Hamilton's arguments followed both the tenor of popular sermonizing and the contents of the Weekly Journal itself. Zenger's newspaper made political and legal arguments against the Cosby administration, but the paper built those arguments on a foundation that linked political freedom with religious liberty, including dissent. The central questions of the paper's argument were the same as those in Hamilton's arguments at trial: what is the nature of truth, and how is it revealed to humans. The burden of discerning truth lay with the individual conscience. Abdicating that responsibility to power was dangerous (Nord 70.)

The Zenger case, an early watershed moment in American freedom of expression, owed as much to religion as to law or politics. As congregations rejected creeds and doctrinal statements to search out truth on their own, so did the Zenger jurors rejected the judge's instructions. Congregants asserted their right to interpret God's law; jurors asserted their right to

interpret man's law. In each, the foundational principle was not free expression but truth. Hamilton did not urge jurors to affirm individualism, but to affirm truth. Of course, individuals had to decide what truth was (Nord 76.)

So, the authority of God and truth and that of the individual were the same. Free expression in journalism (as in politics) was not about the individual, or his right to publish. The individual was only to serve the truth, as men were only to serve God. Only later did the concept of free expression contain the ideas of individualism and liberalism (Nord 76.)

In my opinion, an ironic result of the Zenger case, given Protestant theology's integral role in it, was that it pushed the press a little further away from religion. In pushing the press toward freedom and asserting that the journalist's duty was to the truth, the Zenger case created philosophical space between the press and established authority, including the authority of established religion.

CHAPTER 3

As America grew, the number of newspapers grew. In 1783, the country's first daily newspaper appeared in Philadelphia. By 1800, there were six dailies in the city, five in New York, three in Baltimore, and two in Charleston. By 1831, there would be more than seven hundred papers, including sixty-five dailies, in the country. By 1850, there would be more than two thousand papers, including two hundred dailies (Schudson 116.)

These papers, perhaps aware of the Franklins' experience in Boston generally kept their distance from religion. A notable exception was Nathaniel Willis, who was determined to practice Christian journalism. A publisher in Ohio, he endured some criticism from his contemporaries for including religious subjects in his paper. Still, in 1816, he launched the Boston Recorder as a general circulation, Calvinist weekly (Silk 16.)

The Recorder was divided into general-interest news and religious news. In the tradition of the early Puritan newspapers, all these events were evidence of God's work among humanity. An earthquake was a call to repentance, a recovery from an illness was a work of God's mercy. To Willis, all stories were an "occasion to record many signal triumphs of divine grace over the obduracy of the human heart, and over the prejudices of the unenlightened mind" (Silk 16.)

Other publishers also paid special attention to the moral character of their newspapers. Some, like Arthur Tappan's New York Journal of Commerce refused to gather news on Sunday or to allow advertising for saloons, theaters, and other unspiritual pursuits (Lee 266.)

Soon after the Boston Recorder other explicitly religious newspapers appeared. Most were tied to specific religious groups or denominations, including the Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, and Unitarians. These papers were part of a larger surge of Christian publishing in the early nineteenth century. The American Tract Society and the American Bible Society

developed centralized mass publication systems that distributed nearly half a million Bibles and millions of religious tracts. Secular publishers adopted those systems and the American mass media was born (Silk 16-17.)

The country's first religious daily newspaper appeared in Philadelphia in 1839, when a group of wealthy men launched The North American. While the paper kept religion out of the news pieces, the editorials were mostly moral essays. The paper strictly banned theater notices and saloon advertising. The paper sustained heavy losses, prompting its owners to unload it for the value of its parts (Lee 267.)

One of the men who bought the newspaper, Alexander Cummings, moved to New York to try again to establish an explicitly religious newspaper. The World sold for one cent, put church notices on the front page, and excluded all theater news and advertising. It failed after a year. It merged with another newspaper and successfully reemerged as the worldly World (Lee 269.)

Another New York newspaper, The Sun, began life as a secular paper, but in August of 1860, the Reverend Archibald Morrison bought it. From then to December of 1861, it became a religious newspaper. Like the North American and the World, the Sun had designs on being a "daily lay preacher" to its readers. And, like other religious papers, it strictly excluded advertising for such vices as theaters, alcohol, and other goods the owners deemed as vices. And, like the other papers, it failed and was later sold (Lee 267-8.)

During this period, another type of newspaper appeared, telling sensational and sometimes scandalous stories of life in the growing cities, selling for a penny. The first successful penny paper was Benjamin Day's The Sun in New York, the same paper later owned for a time by the Reverend Morrison. Day intended a newspaper for the masses, who had none

at the time. True to Day's plan, The Sun dished out all the town gossip and the doings of the police court. Both gossip and crime paid, and the paper soon rivaled the more expensive six-cent papers in readership (Lee 187-8.)

Other penny papers sprang up in the Northeastern cities. Some died early deaths, but many survived and eventually thrived. These papers were aggressive about courting advertising and competing with each other to get the news first. The most successful was James Gordon Bennett's New York Herald (Lee 193.)

Founded in 1835, the Herald broke with many papers of the day by forgoing direct ties to any political party. Bennett was not well-suited for being someone else's mouthpiece, anyway. Growing up in Presbyterian Scotland, he was educated for the Roman Catholic priesthood. He emigrated to Canada, then to America. Along the way he worked as a schoolteacher, then in printing and publishing (Schudson 120.)

Bennett operated on the idea that the more he shocked people the more they would read his paper. He printed stories of scandal in full detail. From time to time he was personally assaulted on the street or in his office. When that happened he ran a full report in the next day's paper under the standard heading "Bennett Thrashed Again." His paper covered the police court with "a freedom which even enlarged the time-honored freedom of the press." He published a detailed account of his own engagement that read more like a private journal entry than an announcement (Lee 196-7.)

The Herald made several important innovations in newspapers. One was a regular financial section that reported Wall Street stories and quoted stock prices. The Herald meant to be "the earliest of the early," and was aggressive about getting the news before the other papers. Bennett employed European correspondents for foreign news, developed a news bureau for the

country's interior, printed news slips which he shipped for free to interior papers, and employed boys to sell his paper on the street, directly to readers (Lee 199-200.)

Bennett also had a deep, abiding interest in religious issues and no qualms about sharing his views. He criticized the church regardless of denomination. He attacked contemporary preachers as "a class for inadequate learning, talent, and human sensitivity" and the Episcopalians for their attachments to wealth and power. Some of his harshest words were reserved for his own Catholic faith, once calling the Pope a "decrepit, licentious, stupid Italian blockhead" (Silk 18.)

Outraged by Bennett's perceived attacks, muckraking, and sensationalism, a group of Catholics and even anti-Catholic businessmen, politicians, and rival publishers declared a Moral War to drive Bennett out of business. These crusaders threatened advertisers with boycotts and asked hotel owners to refuse service to anyone carrying a copy of the Herald. But Bennett and his paper survived, and the Herald continued with business as usual (Silk 18.)

Bennett was the first to cover the annual meetings of various religious denominations and associated organizations (Lee 196.) These meetings, or "anniversaries," had been covered exclusively by religious newspapers for their denominational audiences. Bennett's coverage of these anniversaries as "human dramas of moral commitment and ecclesiastical policymaking" drew sharp criticism from both the clergy and the religious press as a secular invasion of their spiritual territory. In time, though, the religious groups expected the coverage. Frederick Hudson, Bennett's long time managing editor, noted that the same people who attacked the paper for covering the anniversaries "bitterly complained if reporter sere not sent to the meetings of the societies to which they belonged" (Silk 17-18.)

The Herald began regular coverage of Sunday sermons, enabling the city's preachers to put their message out to the masses. The paper published religious stories with strong human interest angles, which became the Herald's trademark. Bennett also inaugurated daily coverage of religious revivals by assigning a reporter to write a series on the controversial Baptist preacher Joseph Knapp (Silk 20.)

Other newspapers, notably Horace Greely's New York Tribune, joined in revival coverage. Much of what we know of American revivalism comes from the detailed, consistent reporting of newspapers from that era. For many smaller towns and rural communities a religious revival was the biggest show going, and the performance of the preacher and the potential for human emotion offered a reporter much to write about. A revival also offered potential controversy, either through the enmity of established clergy or the revivalist's attacks on local moral behavior, or both (Silk 20.)

By covering the activities of Christian denominations alongside sensational stories of crime, sex, and political muckraking, the Herald turned religion into news. Sunday services, traveling evangelists, and denominational meetings provided readers with the kind of human interest stories they craved and newspapers plenty to write about (Crouthamel 42.)

In my opinion, in turning religion into news, Bennett also widened the gap between the two, just as Hamilton's arguments for Zenger's acquittal had. Religion was not a special topic that required either deference or particular knowledge. It was just another subject for reporters to write about, not substantively different than the police court or the financial district. Sunday church services or town gossip, denominational meetings or the workings of city hall, everything was fodder for the paper. And the papers could take it or leave it.

CHAPTER 4

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries ushered modernity into competition with traditional Protestant Christianity. Waves of European immigrants brought new forms of faith predominantly Catholicism, to America. Industrialization created population shifts and cultural realignment. Scientific theories, such as Darwin's theory of evolution, and other scientific advances, gained prominence and had profound effects on how people saw their world. The Bible itself was subject to the higher criticism sweeping the world of literature (Hoover, Mass Media Religion 38.)

Journalism was not immune to the influence of science. The industry was developing an awareness of the elements of subjectivity inherent in news reporting (Lichter, et al 5.) The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries brought the expert to the fore. With their deeper knowledge and scientific approach, experts could solve the new problems of a country in transition. Experts dealt in facts (Nord 4.)

Dispassionate experts, armed with facts and information, could guide the people through the maze of issues and problems to solutions. The social psychology of that day concluded that humans had limited attention spans, seeing only their immediate, personal worlds. When humans could look beyond that world, they were guided more by transitory emotion and mood than by reason (Schudson 212.) Experts, though, were guided by a higher habit of mind. Experts were more open to discovery, and were more able to discount their own expectations (Schudson 214.)

Walter Lippmann, the early-twentieth-century journalist, made that case in his book Public Opinion. Trying to understand why New York voters turned down a progressive new constitution, Lippmann argued that the public suffered from second-hand information. The

insiders who reported the news dealt with events personally and directly, not second-hand. After World War I, Lippmann published the essay Liberty and the News, in which he wrote that "the present crisis of western democracy is a crisis in journalism" (Lippman 76) and wondered if democracy could survive when "the manufacture of consent is an unregulated private enterprise" (Lippman 5.)

Lippmann advocated a more professional, scientific type of journalism, that had at its core a "unity of method rather than of aim; the unity of the disciplined experiment" (Lippman 67.) At first he favored professionalization and requiring journalism school for entry into the industry. He thought better of that, but he did hold that society should recognize the dignity of journalism and invest in professional training "in which the ideal of objective testimony is cardinal" (Schudson 213.)

Lippmann's conclusions led to a clash with John Dewey, the Pragmatist philosopher and educator. Lippmann argued for an informational model of journalism, but Dewey believed journalism was useful because it promoted conversation and community. To Dewey, experts were like any class of rulers, who speak for their own interests over those of the community (Schudson 214.)

The language of objectivity, which journalists were already adopting as part of their professional ethics (Mindich 11,) set in. Faith in the authority of facts would trump faith in communal discussions as ways to solutions. Journalism was information, not introspection or interpretation. The public could decide what it meant (Nord 5.)

The gap between journalism, with its new emphasis on objectivity, and relentlessly subjective religion, would grow wider.

By the 1920s the kind of religion coverage newspapers made common practice by the New York Herald was fading, pushed out by the rise of the Saturday church page. Some papers carried religion sections as early as 1870. They published columns or religious announcements and features such as the "International Sunday School Lesson," a mainline Protestant take on the Bible. As churches multiplied they found it necessary to promote themselves by advertising their Sunday services. Newspapers found it easier and more profitable to discontinue listing all the church services for free in favor of paid advertisements (Silk 24-25.)

The church page allowed newspapers to work their way around any journalistic impiety by creating a space where no one's faith or denominational identity was challenged. Editorial content, much of it supplied by churches themselves, accompanied advertisements on an adjacent page. Averse to biting the hand that fed it, religion coverage became bland and promotional. Scandals and other controversies, if they appeared at all, ran in other parts of the newspaper. Thus, religion news became a journalistic commodity (Silk 25.)

The church page also became something of a perceived wasteland for unimpressive journalists. Religion reporters were promised a chance to "write for the rest of the paper." The plight of the religion editor was captured by an episode of the television show "Lou Grant:"

> The Los Angeles Tribune was searching for a religion editor. City editor Grant was searching, but no one would take the job. Grant was also looking for a way to get rid of a lazy, often-drunk reporter named Mal Cavanaugh. Throughout this episode, the Tribune's management had been trying to find a way to get Cavanaugh to resign. Then Grant had an epiphany:
>
> GRANT: Congratulations, Mal. You're the Trib's new religion editor.

Grant sits back in his chair, beaming. His words sink in slowly to Cavanaugh, who blinks at Grant.

CAVANAUGH: Religion editor?

GRANT: That's right, Mal. And I can't think of a better man to interview the clergy…take ministers to lunch.

CAVANAUGH: Are you kidding?

GRANT: Detail the theological frontier in this country and abroad.

CAVANAUGH: That stinks! Before you stick me with a lousy job like that, I'd quit.

GRANT: Quit? You haven't even given it a chance. You can't quit.

CAVANAUGH: The hell I can't. Just watch me.

Grant's newsroom associates beam as Cavanaugh storms out.

The audience is left with the impression that Grant's problems are solved. The religion editor position is still empty, but who cares (Silk 27.)

Wasteland or not, religion coverage was becoming more problematic. Religion diversified over the course of the twentieth century. Newer faith groups appeared. Christianity was fragmenting into more denominations and sects. Generic Protestantism was no longer the only religion (Hoover, Mass Media Religion 38) and could no longer be considered the normative faith. With a divided readership, newspapers were always on the verge of offending one group or another with an expose or ill-considered theological remark. Lawrence Martin, the managing editor of the Denver Post, said in an interview in 1940:

> Religion is a fruitful source of controversy; I mean by that the creeds, sectarian differences and denominational quibbles, which are among the human perversions of true religion. In time past, newspapers got into so many scrapes over these religious squabbles that most editors drew in their horns and actually barred from their columns any but the most harmless and non-controversial items about churches or religious topics. Even today you will find most editors refusing to print letters from leaders on religion, for fear of inciting to riot. Thus through the years there grew up, with good reason, a journalistic feeling that religion in the paper was dynamite (Silk 26.)

Substantive religion news was not dead, but it was becoming the province of specialized publications and services, some of which still operate today. In 1884 the magazine The Christian Oracle, known today as The Christian Century, went to press. Founded by the Disciples of Christ in Chicago, it offered a mainline Protestant perspective on the news and issues of the day. Committed to social justice issues, the Century was the first publication to print the text of Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Letter from Birmingham Jail" in its entirety (The Christian Century.)

In1908 the First Church of Christ Scientist, founded by Mary Baker Eddy, launched the Christian Science Monitor. From the outset, the paper sought to be a source of news rather than an organ of the church. The paper's mission, "To injure no man, but to bless all mankind," came at least in part from attacks by Joseph Pulitzer's New York World and from her unconventional theology. Her bestselling book, Science and Health With Key to the Scriptures, had been released the previous year. The World openly criticized her, deciding she is incapable of managing her own affairs, and convinces her two sons to sue for control of her estate. The paper's mission also grew out of Eddy's particular theology. In 1883 she wrote:

> Looking over the newspapers of the day, one naturally reflects that it is dangerous to live, so loaded with disease seems the very air. These descriptions carry fears to many minds, to be depicted in some future time upon the body. A periodical of our own will counteract to some extent this public nuisance; for through our paper we shall be able to reach many homes with healing, purifying thought (Christian Science Monitor.)

The Religion News Service was founded in 1933 as a non-profit affiliate of the National Conference of Christians and Jews. The RNS operated as a type of wire service, gathering and distributing stories on religion to various news outlets. In 1983 it was acquired by the Dallas-based United Methodist Reporter, then bought by the Newhouse News Service in 1994. In June of 2011 the RNS returned to its non-profit roots when it was acquired by the Religion Newswriters Association and its foundation (Religion News Service.)

The Religion Newswriters Association, founded in 1949, responded to "a new attitude in their city rooms and across the country toward religion." One of the first professional associations for beat writers, the RNA claimed it upgraded the religion beat and its credibility (Religion Newswriters Association.)

In 1956, conservative evangelicals, led by Billy Graham, founded a magazine of their own, Christianity Today (Christianity Today.) By this time, according to Graham, conservative Christianity had "fallen into disrepute," at least partly due to the influence of The Christian Century, which many evangelicals viewed as a liberal force. At first aimed primarily at ministers, Graham wanted Christianity Today to "take a more gentle and loving direction" than the "big stick" approach of previous conservative efforts to influence the public. As the

magazine gained traction it expanded its scope to include a reporting on the stories of the day, albeit through a conservative Christian perspective (Christianity Today.)

Sojourners, a news magazine published by Sojourners Ministries, first appeared in 1971 as The Post-American. The brainchild of Jim Wallis, the Sojourners community began at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois. The Sojourners opted for a communal way of living, sharing living space, money, food, and a concern for social justice issues. The magazine was an expression of their feelings about the Vietnam War. As the community grew more politically active, they moved to Washington, D. C., changed the name to Sojourners and focused on news and issues through the lens of social justice (Sojourners.)

Radio and television provided more outlets for news reporting and more avenues for Christian groups to spread their messages. The Fundamentalists of the 1920s saw radio as a new vehicle for preaching the word. Typified by Percy Crawford's *Young People's Church of the Air* (Crawford 168), some of the first regular radio broadcasts were church services or preaching. Charles Fuller was emblematic of this new breed of broadcaster, a radio ministry in Los Angeles in 1930 that over seven years grew from a local broadcast to nationally networked program. Ministers from both evangelical and mainline denominations got into the act, airing shows ranging from straightforward preaching to educational programs (Hoover, Mass Media Religion 51-52.)

In 1960 Pat Robertson founded television's first religious channel, the Christian Broadcasting Network (Corbett 285.) CBN first went on the air in 1961, on WYAH-TV (from Yahweh, a Hebrew name for God) in Virginia Beach, Virginia (CBN.com.) CBN's flagship program was the "700 Club," a magazine-style show. The show was a mix of talk segments and news and documentaries, presented through a Christian lens. CBN later developed a variety of

programming, and in1971, leased a satellite channel full time. Other religious broadcasters signed up for satellite time, and CBN became a network unto itself (Hoover, Mass Media Religion 77.)

The Trinity Broadcasting Network followed in short order, and is now the largest Christian television network in the world (TBN.com.) Like CBN, the network featured a variety of religious programming, including news reported through an explicitly Christian frame.

But broadcasting did not give religion the kind of attention print had. Networks allotted very little time for religion news and paid little attention to religion itself, Christian or otherwise. When broadcasters did cover Christianity, it was most often Catholicism or politics (Buddenbaum 64, 67.)

Even some inside the industry felt religion was getting short shrift. Dan Rather told TV Guide:

> Religion was consistently underreported [in 1993]. That's especially unfortunate when you remember how many of the worst conflicts today are born of religious misunderstanding…There isn't a news organization that wouldn't benefit from greater attention to the coverage of religion (Hoover Religion in the News 155.)

Over the course of the 1960s and 70s religion had become just another beat (Buddenbaum 601.) Coinciding with Ronald Reagan's inauguration in 1980 religion enjoyed a brief resurgence in news coverage, both in print and on the air. ABC hired the first full-time religion correspondent on television, Peggy Wehmeyer, newspapers added staff, and religion sections were poised to thrive (Hoover, Religion in the News 156.)

In the 1990s economics forced some rethinking of news operations. Religion was among the first areas of coverage to get cut. Two of the South's largest papers, the Dallas Morning

News and the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, cut their respective religion sections in 2007. Flat advertising revenues made the religion section expendable. As the journalism industry consistently lost jobs during the 2000s, newspapers bled money and staff, and religion reporters were among the first to go. CNN and Fox News both hired religion correspondents, but the overall profile of religious news continued to recede into the background (Pulliam.)

Today, CBN and TBN still televise news and documentaries. Salem Communications is "reaching audiences interested in Christian and family content and conservative values on air, online, and in print" (Salem.) The Bott Radio Network airs "Christian news" to listeners in fifteen states (Bott,) and the K-LOVE national radio network airs news segments tailored for Christian audiences around the United States (K-LOVE.)

During the media boom of the twentieth century, Christian entrepreneurs and their media outlets formed a sort of parallel news universe, aimed at a Christian audience, outside of the mainstream media establishment. Based on this development, I would say so-called "Christian" journalism grew out of the mainstream, searching for a place in the industry, just as journalism itself had once grown up out of the religious mainstream of New England.

CHAPTER 5

The news media have frequently affronted authority, including religion. With each offense, journalism took a step away from authority and toward its independence.

Even in its infancy, the news enjoyed an uneasy alliance with religion. Remember the clash between the preeminent Increase Mather and the "vile" New England Courant over smallpox inoculation, or the New York Herald and its coverage of the leading preachers and revivalists of its day.

When religious leaders were not criticizing the kinds of stories the papers wrote, lampooning the faithful, they took aim at the advertising the papers carried. Prominent Georgia revivalist Sam Jones blistered the Atlanta newspapers during one of his revivals:

> Presbyterian elders, Baptist deacons and Methodist stewards own the tow leading dailies of the city, and if the devil had planked down the cash and bought out the whole thing, with the goods delivered, they could not do his service more effectually in many ways. Their advertisements of saloons and liquors and the publication of scandals, which has in more than one case driven some victim to suicide and hell, appear in these papers; and there are some little reporters like scavengers of hell destroying character and breaking the hearts of the good mother and father at home (Silk 33.)

Sometimes it has been the medium itself that raised suspicion. A great cause of concern among some conservative clergy was the rousing success of the Sunday newspapers of the 1880s. Dr. Howard Crosby, the pastor of New York City's Fourth Avenue Presbyterian Church, wrote a pointed letter to his congregation on the subject:

> We have seen with great sorrow the entrance of the Sunday newspaper into Christian families, and having witnessed the unhappy results of this admission, are desirous of warning you against the growing evil. The Sunday newspaper not only employs a large number of persons for its sale upon God's holy day, but it furnishes secular reading to divert the mind from the holy themes especially appropriate to the Sabbath…there is no influence more insidiously seductive than this for the demoralization of our Christian households…The mind thus led becomes filled with thoughts on business, politics, games, theatres, and crimes (which form the staple of newspaper literature)…The ungodly world rejoices in beholding the religion of Christ brought down to its own level, and Satan will use every effort, through the power of fashion, to accomplish this end. The Sunday newspaper is a powerful engine to achieve this end (Silk 19.)

Christians in general, and evangelicals in particular, have had an uneasy co-existence with radio and television as well. Evangelists have used them to spread the Word and condemned them as tools of the devil (Schultze 61), sometimes at the same time.

Christians have found television particularly problematic. Some critics saw television "usurp a role which until recently has been the role of the church in our society, namely, to shape our system of values, embody our faith, and express our cultural essence." Other critics have argued that television is "restructuring the very shape of belief" (Newman 6-7.)

Conservative Methodist minister Donald Wildmon wrote that "the organized church in America faces the greatest threat to its existence since our country was founded" as "there is an intentional effort among many of the leaders of our media to reshape our society, to replace the Christian view of man as our foundation with the humanist view of man" (Newman 7.)

One might presume, then, that the problem with television news for this group of critics is that it is on television.

In 1986, Lichter, Rothman, and Lichter published The Media Elite, a look at the leadership of the most prominent national news media outlets of that time. The authors asserted that elite news media leaders were decidedly irreligious, politically and socially liberal, "natural opponents of groups like the Moral Majority" (32.) The study drew criticism from other scholars, but some Christian leaders seized on it as evidence that the values of the news media were not the values of ordinary people.

Jerry Falwell wrote that the study confirmed "what most of us already suspected," and added, "Far from reflecting what the public thinks, the press reflects what it thinks – what it believes is the right course for America to follow. No wonder those who are trying to call America back to her moral and spiritual traditions and heritage are so often ravaged by columnists and excoriated by network reporters" (Silk 37.)

Catholic theologian Richard John Neuhaus joined in the criticism, writing, "The point is that the widespread exclusion of religiously grounded values and beliefs is at the heart of the outrage and alienation (to use a much overworked term) of millions of Americans. They do not recognize *their* experience of America in the picture of America purveyed by cultural and communications elites. At the heart of this nonrecognition – which results in everything from puzzlement to crusading fever – is the absence of religion" (Silk 37.)

Evangelical author Tim LaHaye said, "It's no secret to any of us how the liberal media manages the news and helps set the national agenda on public debate. They report the news in such a way as to promote the political goals of the left…the truth in all these areas is being hidden" (Silk 34.)

Each of those critiques is at least a decade old. But the arguments have not gone away. Consider these anonymous comments from respondents to this project's survey, which is designed in part to discover respondents' perceptions of the news media's attitudes toward Christianity:

> Not only being liberal, I believe the media actually targets religious people and institutions in order to discredit them. The news is all about Obama and the liberals and very little about the good the faithful do in and around their communities and around the globe. Serious faith is a threat to the liberals and the media carries their water.
>
> To me, in the last few years news reporting had died. I have no problems with hard hitting journalism even if it hits me, but the national media's spin is so predictable it is truly sad. It has been 4-5 years since i watched network news; simply put I have no respect or trust for it. Many journalists seem to operate in a pack or herd mentality simply repeating what the intelligencia has said.
>
> I don't know of any US news media that you could call objective, including the major religious news outlets. I will watch one outlet until their bias drives me away and then on to the next and so on.

Media scholars and observers have offered possible explanations for the present gulf between the news media and Christian (and other religious) Americans. One is that there is an inherent tension between the two. Church leaders often associate mass media, including news,

with the world (Stout 85.) One is simply ignorance. Journalists, regardless of their own religiosity, do not recognize the role religion plays in contemporary life. They also are not educated in or trained to deal with religion, so they ignore religion or fall back on tired formulas (Castelli 6-12, Neuhaus 66.) Another is indifference. Journalists know about religion but do not care about it. Yet another is hostility toward religion (Hoover, Religion in the News 56.)

Any or all of those may play some role, but other ideas are also possibilities. One is that the pluralistic nature of America makes it impossible to treat all religions the same, so the safest course is to leave all religions alone. Another idea is that the institutional cultures of news media, formal journalism training, and the professional cohorts combine to create a "consciousness of indifference" toward religion. (Hoover, Religion in the News 57.)

Another is the historically secular nature of American education. Since the Supreme Court's school prayer decision, educational institutions have kept greater distance from religion. The Constitution creates institutional distance between government and religion, and government and the media. To some it naturally follows that the media and religion should be distant from each other. The secularization of education coincides with the secularization of society and the decline of institutions, including religious ones (Hoover, Religion in the News 57.)

It may be that these two, journalism and Christian religion, were destined for a cold war, or at least an uneasy détente. While Christianity helped birth American journalism, there is much the two do not share. Cardinal Avery Dulles, the Catholic theologian, enumerated the differences between the modern news media and the church, paraphrased below. Though he was writing specifically about the Catholic Church, his points apply to other branches of the Christian church as well, including the evangelical and mainline traditions.

First, Christianity deals with the mysteries of God's presence and redemptive work in the world. The proper stance for the believer is faith and reverence. The news media is iconoclastic by nature, reveling in exposing the pretentious and false.

The message of Christianity, the gospel of Jesus, is unchanging. Churches seek continuity. The news media feeds on novelty.

Churches work to promote and achieve unity and reconciliation. The news media gravitate toward conflict. After all, without conflict, there is no story.

The spiritual work of churches is insufficiently concrete, concerned as it is with the interior lives of people. The news media focuses on the tangible, overlooking the core mission of Christianity.

The news media tend to view the workings of religious bodies through a democratic lens. The news media has a natural bias against authoritative teaching.

Moral and spiritual teaching is complex and often subtle. The news media seeks short, simple, dramatic stories.

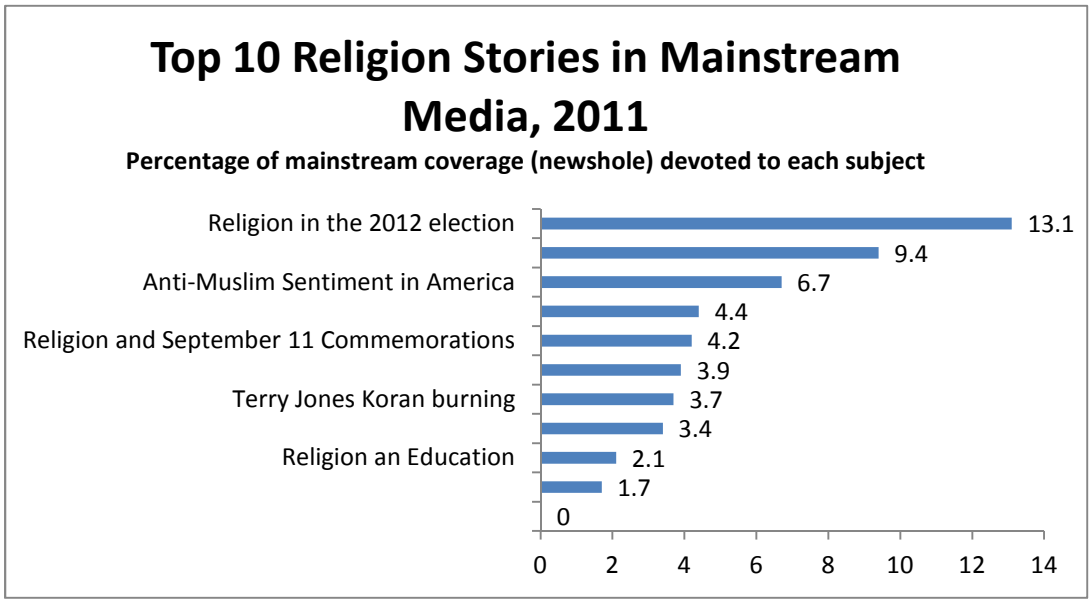
Lastly, a core element of Christianity is revelation, and the core work of the church is to call people to a commitment to Jesus. The news media seeks to make stories accessible to as wide an audience as possible, acceptable even to non-believers. The news media cannot accept revelation (Dulles 6-9.)

Of course, journalists have values. According to Herbert Gans, in the newsroom the two that matter the most are: get the story, and get it better and faster than everyone else (Gans 32.)

CHAPTER 6

This chapter of the project is based in part on studies and surveys by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, the Gallup Organization, and a joint study by the University of Southern California and the University of Akron. The full report of this study is available at http://annenberg.usc.edu/~/media/PDFs/winston-bliss.ashx.

According to the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life's 2012 Religion in the News report, in 2011 religion accounted for .7 percent of all mainstream news stories. More of those stories (13.1 %) concerned religion in the 2012 presidential election than any other topic.



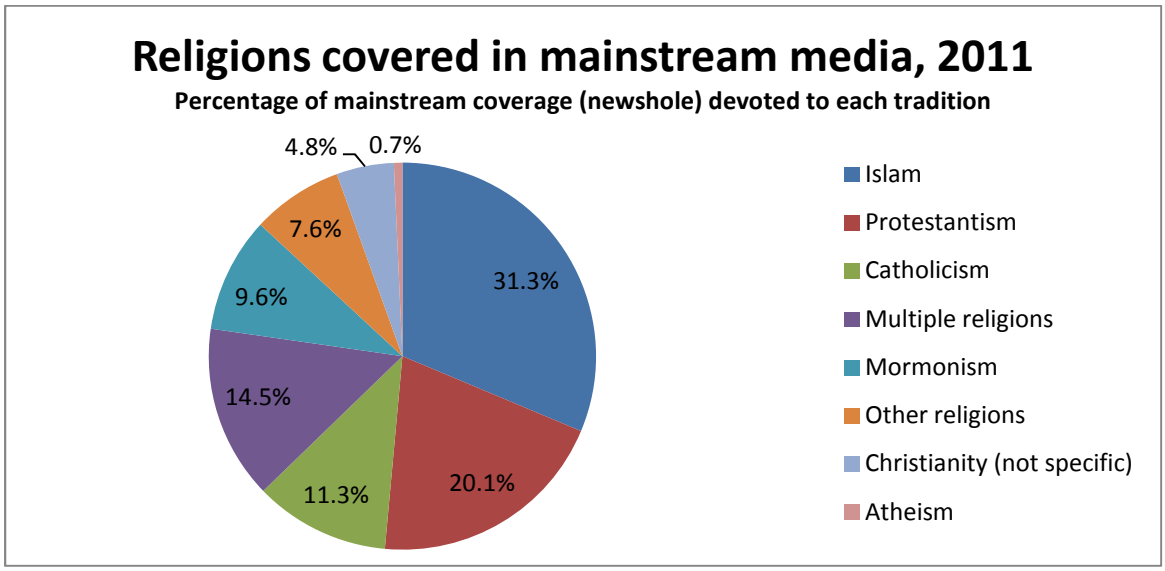
Peter King's (R – N. Y.) Congressional hearing on "Radical Islam" was the second most-covered religion story (9.4%), followed by stories about anti-Muslim sentiment in America (6.7%). These stories were not tied to any particular event (pewforum, 2012 4-5.)

The Supreme Court ruling upholding the rights of Westboro Baptist Church to protest at military funerals accounted for 4.4% of religion stories, making it the fourth most-covered subject in 2011. Religious commemorations of the ten-year anniversary of the September 11th terrorist attacks (4.2%) was the fifth most-covered topic in 2011. The continuing Catholic priest

sex abuse scandal (3.9%) was sixth, down from 2010, when it accounted for a little over 18 percent of news media coverage (pewforum, 2012 8.)

Florida pastor Terry Jones's threat to burn the Koran (3.7%) was the seventh-biggest story of 2011. The role of religion in the Arab Spring was the seventh biggest religion story (3.4%), followed by a mix of stories about religion and education (2.1%) and the death of Osama bin Laden (1.7%) (pewforum, 2012 6.)

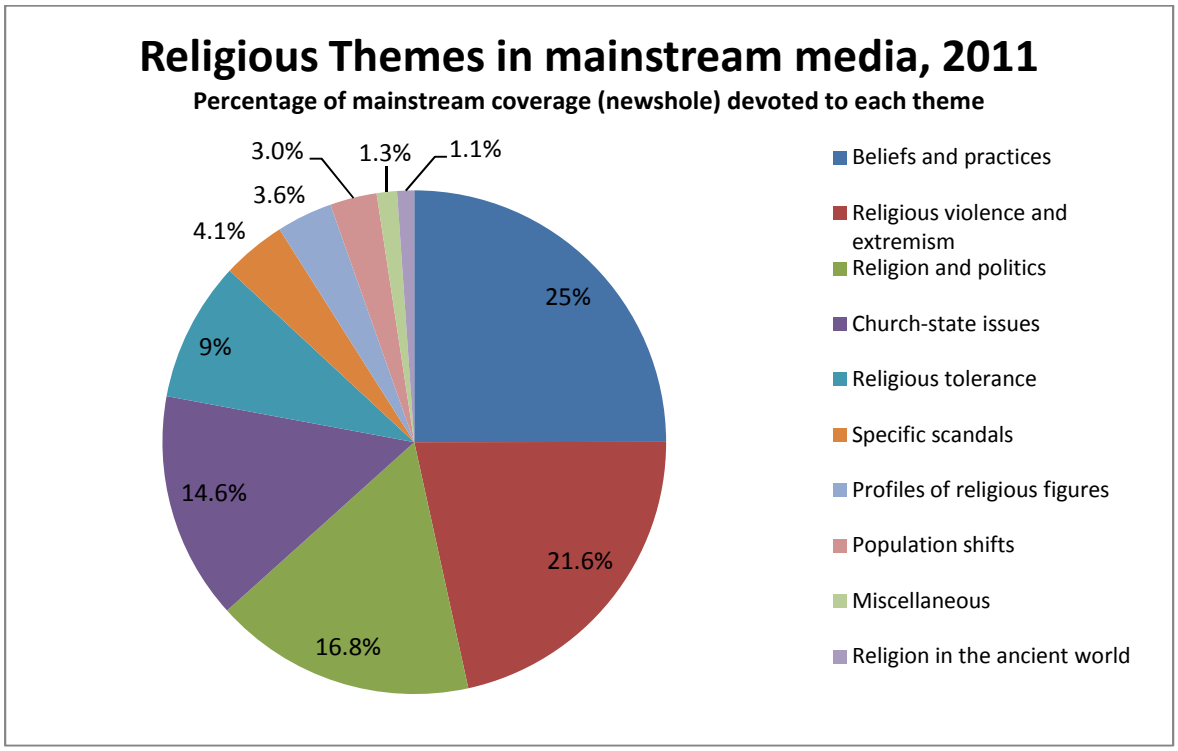
Islam was the most-covered religion in 2011, accounting for 31.3 percent of all religious news coverage. Protestantism was next at 20.1 percent, followed by Catholicism at 11.3 percent.



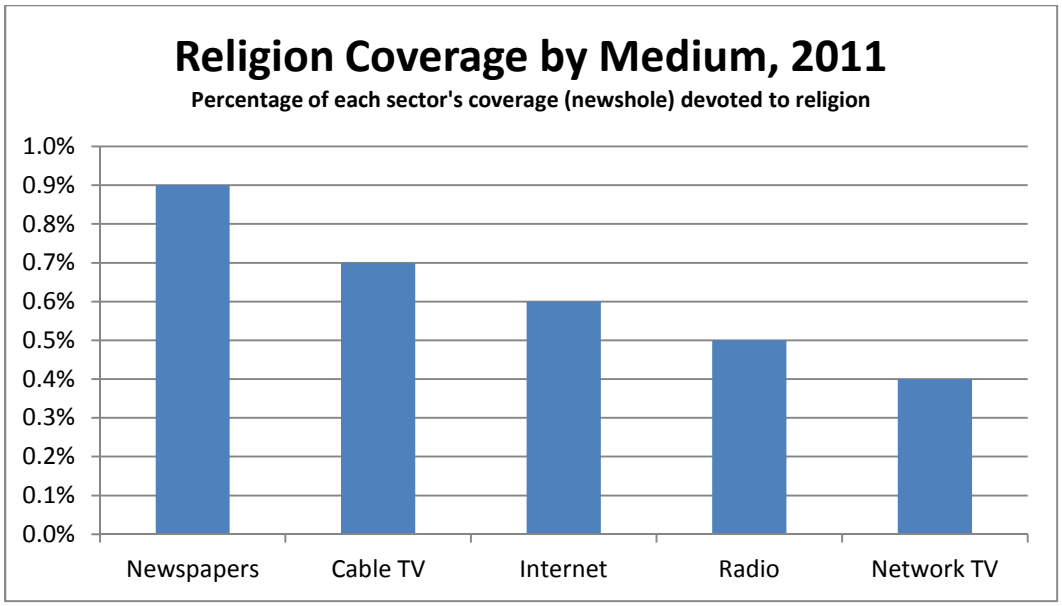
Stories about multiple religions comprised 14.5 percent of coverage, followed by Mormonism (9.6%), most of which revolved around politics, other religions (7.6%), general stories about Christianity (4.8%), and atheism (0.7%) (pewforum, 2012 10.)

One-fourth of religion coverage in 2011 focused on the beliefs and practices of the faithful. Religious violence and extremism, mostly revolving around the Muslim community accounted for 21.6 percent of coverage, followed by religion and politics (16.8%) (pewforum, 2012 10.)

Church-state issues (14.6%), religious tolerance (9%), specific scandals (4.1%), profiles of religious figures (3.6%), population shifts (3%), miscellaneous religion stories (1.3%), and stories about ancient religion (1.1%) (pewforum, 2012 10.)



No single medium stood out in terms of the amount of religion coverage it offered, at least when religion was at the top of the news agenda. Newspapers offered the most, allotting .9 percent of their collective newshole to religion. Cable television (.7%) was second, with most of the religion coverage there related to politics. The internet was (.6%) was third, radio (.5%) was fourth, and network television (.4%) was fifth (pewforum, 2012 12-13.)



In 2010 religion accounted for about 2 percent of all mainstream news stories, the highest rate of coverage since Pew began tracking religion in 2007. The majority of those stories focused on the proposed Islamic center in New York City. In 2010 Islam was the most-covered religion. (pewforum, 2012 1.)

The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life started tracking religion coverage in 2007. Five years later the Pew Forum has concluded that religion has not been a focus of the news. In any given month, coverage of religion has accounted for no more than about two percent of all news stories. Controversy is more likely to draw news coverage than other types of stories. In all of those years, religion stories were primarily episodic, focused on events or personalities. Faith and its deeper meaning were not news. The two biggest religious news stories over that time were the controversy over the proposed Islamic center in New York City and Florida pastor Terry Jones's threat to burn the Koran on the anniversary of September 11th. The third biggest story was pope John Paul II's visit to the United States (pewforum.org, 2012 12.)

The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life's 2007 U. S. Religious Landscape Survey reports that 78.4 percent of all Americans identify themselves as Christian. Of this group, 51 percent are Protestant, 24 percent are Catholic, 4.7 percent are "other religions," which includes Mormonism, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, and others. Only sixteen percent of Americans identify themselves as "unaffiliated" with any particular religion (pewforum.org 2007.)

A Gallup poll released in June of 2011 reported that 92 percent of Americans believe in God. When given a choice between God, a "universal spirit," or neither, 80 percent still indicated a belief in God (Newport 2011.)

The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life's survey "How Religious is Your State?" published in December of 2009 found that 56 percent of Americans indicated that religion was "very important" in their lives, 71 percent were certain of their belief in God, and 58 percent prayed at least once a day (pewforum.org, 2009.)

And apparently the news media is still affronting religion, according to respondents of a Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life survey published in December of 2009. Participants were asked to rate various groups' friendliness, neutrality, or unfriendliness to religion. These groups included both Republican and Democratic political parties, President Obama, scientists, Hollywood, and the news media.

The news media placed behind both political parties and the President, and just ahead of Holly wood and scientists. The chart at the top of the next page is taken from that Pew Forum survey.

Comparison of Various Groups "Friendliness" Toward Religion

	% Friendly	% Neutral	% Unfriendly	% Don't know
Republican Party	**48**	**29**	**12**	**12**
Obama administration	37	36	17	10
Democratic Party	29	39	22	11
News Media	14	42	35	9
Scientists	12	42	35	11
Hollywood	11	34	47	9

While a plurality of respondents said that the news media are neutral toward religion, only 14 percent said the news media was "friendly" to religion, while 35 percent of respondents said the news media was "unfriendly" to religion.

The survey also broke the numbers out by Christian denominational affiliation. A little more than half (52%) of white evangelical Protestants indicated the news media was "unfriendly" to religion, the highest rate of all the groups. Almost one-third (32%) of white mainline Protestants indicated the news media was "unfriendly" to religion. Those unaffiliated with any religious group indicated the lowest response rate of "unfriendly" (22%) and the highest rate of "friendly" (19%.)

	% Friendly	% Neutral	% Unfriendly
White evangelical Protestant	**8**	**32**	**52**
White mainline Protestant	10	49	32
Unaffiliated	19	50	22

In March of 2012 The Pew Forum published another survey, again asked to rate various groups' friendliness, neutrality, or unfriendliness to religion. These groups again included both

Republican and Democratic political parties, President Obama, scientists, Hollywood, and the news media.

With regards to the news media, survey results were similar to the 2009 survey:

Comparison of public perception of news media's "friendliness" toward religion, 2009 and 2011.

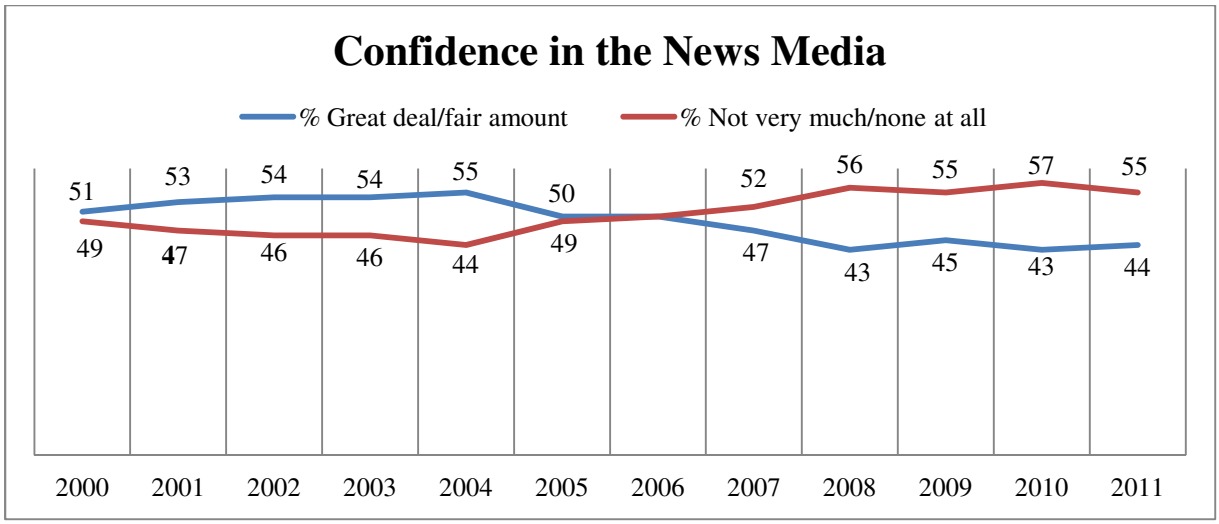
	% Friendly	% Neutral	% Unfriendly	% Don't know
News media (2009)	14	42	35	9
News media/reporters (2011)	19	38	35	8

This time, though, the news media were seen as "friendly" to religion by 19 percent of respondents and "neutral" by 38 percent of respondents, a shift of 4 percentage points. While that is a positive development, the percentage of respondents indicating the news media is "unfriendly" to religion held steady at 35 percent (pewforum.)

The Gallup Organization published a survey in September of 2011 that indicated that a majority of Americans do not have confidence in the news media to report "fully, accurately, and fairly." Forty-four (44) percent of respondents indicated a great deal or fair amount of trust in the news media, while 55 percent indicated little or no trust in the news media. These findings continue a trend of erosion in confidence in the news media, illustrated by the chart below (Morales.)

Gallup question asked:

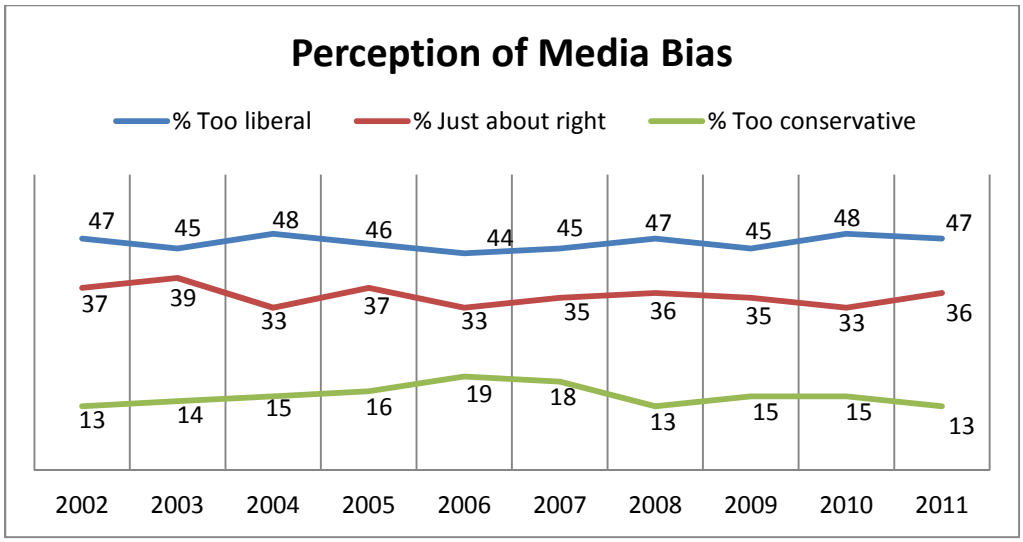
In general, how much trust and confidence do you have in the mass media – such as newspapers, TV, and radio – when it comes to reporting the news fully, accurately, and fairly – a great deal, a fair amount, not very much, or none at all?



The Gallup survey also indicated that a majority (60%) of respondents perceive bias in the news media. Forty-seven (47) percent indicated that the news media are too liberal, 13percent indicated the media are too conservative, and 36 percent indicated the media are "just about right." These findings continue a trend in the perception of media bias, illustrated by the chart below (Morales.)

Gallup question asked:

In general, do you think the news media are too liberal, just about right, or too conservative?



According to the Gallup survey, partisans perceive media bias differently. Seventy-five (75) percent of Republicans indicated that the news media were too liberal, 20 percent indicated the media were just about right, and 4 percent indicated the media were too conservative. Twenty (20) percent of Democrats indicated the news media were too liberal, 57 percent indicated the media were just about right, and 20 percent indicated the media were too liberal. Fifty (50) percent of Independents indicated the news media were too liberal, 32 percent indicated the media were just about right, and 13 percent indicated they were too conservative.

Finally, among liberals, 16 percent indicated the news media were too liberal, 42 percent indicated the media were just about right, and 37 percent indicated the media were too conservative. Thirty-five (35) percent of moderates indicated the news media were too liberal, 50 percent indicated the media were just about right, and 11 percent indicated the media were too conservative. Seventy-five (75) percent of conservatives indicated the news media were too liberal, 21 percent indicated the media were just about right, and 3 percent indicated the news media were too conservative.

The table below, taken directly from the Gallup survey, illustrates these perceptions of news media bias, categorized by political party affiliation and ideological identification (Morales.)

Perceptions of Media Bias, by Political Party and Ideology

	% Too liberal	% Just about right	% Too conservative
Democrats	**20**	**57**	**20**
Independents	50	32	13
Republicans	75	20	4
Liberals	16	42	37
Moderates	35	50	11
Conservatives	75	21	3

CHAPTER 7

THE SURVEY

To examine current perceptions of news media "unfriendliness" to Christianity, the researcher surveyed clergymen in two Protestant Christian denominations, Southern Baptist and United Methodist, in Nebraska, Kansas, Iowa, and Missouri. These denominations are currently the largest representatives in both the evangelical and mainline traditions, respectively.

These traditions share Christian identity but differ in important ways. According to results of the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life's 2007 U. S. Religious Landscape survey, Southern Baptists tend to be more uniformly conservative than United Methodists theologically, politically, and on social issues like abortion or gay marriage (pewforum.org.)

Clergy were selected as respondents for this study because they tend to be opinion leaders for their congregations and, given that they deal with societal issues as well as theological ones, tend to be more attentive to news and current events than their congregants (Brown and Smidt 77.) Also, as people who are highly involved and who closely identify with religion, they are more likely to have a more intense personal interest concerning religion, more experience thinking about religion, more knowledge about religion, and more defined views about religion than the general public (Gunther 151.)

The statewide administrative bodies of each denomination compile and maintain a directory of churches on their respective internet websites that includes contact information. Churches were randomly selected from these directories using a random number generator. These churches were selected because each of them was listed in these on-line directories, each is a member of either the Southern Baptist or United Methodist denominations, and each had a working e-mail address to which the church could receive the recruitment e-mail.

The survey was administered through Survey Monkey, an on-line survey administration tool. The researcher sent a recruitment e-mail containing the link to the on-line survey to each of the members of the sample list of churches. If an e-mail address was listed for the church pastor, this e-mail was sent directly to that senior pastor or minister of the church. Where only an e-mail to the church office was listed, the recruitment e-mail was sent to that e-mail address.

Some of the churches included in the first random sampling did not have working internet websites or working e-mail addresses. The surveys were sent and received through the internet, so only churches that had valid internet e-mail addresses were included in the sample. Churches that were originally selected but did not have websites or working e-mail addresses were removed from the sample. Churches were then randomly selected to replace those that were removed. If any of those churches did not have websites or working e-mail addresses, they were removed and the process was repeated until the target sample size of 400 was met for both the Southern Baptist and United Methodist groups.

This recruitment e-mail containing the link to the on-line survey was sent to 400 Southern Baptist churches and 400 United Methodist churches. For United Methodists, the sample constituted a proportionate stratified sample of more than 2,700 churches. For Southern Baptists, the distribution of churches across the four states is unequal. Nebraska, Kansas, and Iowa collectively have roughly 200 churches while Missouri has almost 550. To achieve representation of each state in the sample, all of the churches listed in the on-line directories of Nebraska, Kansas, and Iowa were included. Southern Baptist churches in Missouri were randomly sampled in order to reach the target sample size of 400.

The thirty-question survey included questions designed to gather information in the following areas: demographics, levels of conservatism, news media usage, and perceptions of

news coverage of various demographic groups. Demographic information included denomination, the state in which the church is located, age, gender, length of service and level of education of the respondent, and church locale (urban, suburban, small town, or rural). Respondents were also asked to self-identify their levels of conservatism in three areas: politics, theology, and on social issues: abortion, gay marriage, and government spending on social programs. Given the complex current media environment, respondents were asked to identify which types of media they use most often for information about current events and which specific programs or publications they most often use for information about current events. Respondents were also asked to rate news coverage, from being too favorable to too negative, of the following groups: Republicans, Democrats, evangelical Christians, Catholics, non-Christian religions, gays and lesbians, racial and ethnic minorities, corporations, scientists, and celebrities. The survey also included space for respondents to make additional comments. See the appendix for the full list of questions used for the survey.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Which demographic factors are related with perceived media "unfriendliness" to religion?

How does the level of conservatism on various issues relate to the level of perceived media "unfriendliness" to religion?

CHAPTER 8

RESULTS OF THE SURVEY

Fifty-nine (59) respondents began the survey. Some respondents did not answer some questions.

Southern Baptists comprised more than half (57.1%) of the respondents, while United Methodists comprised slightly more than 39 percent. Two respondents did not identify their denominational affiliation.

Missouri accounts for half (50%) of all respondents. Kansas (28.6%) was second, Iowa (14.3%) third, and Nebraska (7.1%) fourth.

Most of the respondents' churches are located in small towns (46.4%). Urban churches were next with almost 18 percent, followed by those in small to medium-sized cities (14.3%), rural locales (12.5%), and finally, suburban settings (8.9%)

The age of the respondents ranged from under 30 to over 60. Only one (1) respondent was under the age of 30. Thirteen (13) respondents were ages 31 to 40, comprising almost 24 percent (23.6%) of total responses. One quarter (25.5%) of respondents were ages 41 to 50, over one quarter (27.3%) were ages 51 to 60, and almost 22 percent (21.8%) were older than 60 years.

Respondents were overwhelmingly male (85.5%), which was not unexpected given that women are not ordained as pastors or senior ministers in Southern Baptist churches. The remaining 14.5 percent of respondents were women.

Respondents with more than 20 years of experience comprised the largest group, accounting for almost 42 percent (41.9%) of survey respondents. They were followed by respondents with 6 to 10 years of experience (20%), those with 15 to 20 years of experience

(16.4%), those with 2 to 5 years (10.9%), and those with 11 to 15 years (9.1%). Only one (1) respondent has been a minister for less than one year.

The majority of respondents (62.5%) completed a theological seminary degree, followed by an undergraduate college education (16.1%), a non-seminary graduate degree (14.3%). Respondents who completed some college and those who indicated "other" for the highest level of education completed each comprised 3.6 percent of respondents.

The majority of respondents are politically conservative (44.6%) or have conservative leanings (21.4%). Almost 18 percent (17.9%) of respondents described themselves as moderate, slightly more than those who described themselves as liberal (8.9%) or as having liberal leanings (5.4%) combined. One respondent did identify him or herself as "other."

When it comes to theology, 53.6 percent of respondents indicated they were conservative, almost 20 percent (19.6%) said they had conservative leanings. Theological moderates comprised 14.3 percent of respondents, followed by 5.4 percent of those who described themselves as liberal and 5.4 percent who said they have liberal leanings.

In terms of social issues, such as legalized abortion, gay marriage, and government spending on social programs, slightly more than 60 percent (60.7%) indicated they were conservative, almost 9 percent (8.9%) indicated they had conservative leanings. Moderates comprised 8.9 percent of respondents, those who indicated liberal leanings made up just over 7 percent (7.1%) of respondents, and those who described themselves as liberal on social issues made up slightly more than 14 percent (14.3%) of respondents.

In which denomination are you a minister?

Southern Baptist	**32 (57.1%)**
United Methodist	22 (39.3%)
Other	2 (3.6%)
(Three respondents skipped question)	

In which state is your church located?

Nebraska	**4 (7.1%)**
Kansas	16 (28.6%)
Iowa	8 (14.3%)
Missouri	28 (50%)
(Three respondents skipped question)	

What is your church's locale?

Rural	**7 (12.5%)**
Small town	26 (46.4%)
Small/medium-sized city	8 (14.3%)
Suburban	5 (8.9%)
Urban/large city	10 (17.9%)
(Three respondents skipped question)	

What is your age?

Younger than 30	**1 (1.8%)**
31 to 40	13 (23.6%)
41 to 50	14 (25.5%)
51 to 60	15 (27.3%)
Older than 60	12 (21.8%)
(Four respondents skipped question)	

What is your gender?

Male	**47 (85.5%)**
Female	8 (14.5%)
(Four respondents skipped question)	

How long have you been a minister?

Less than 1 year	**1 (1.8%)**
2 to 5 years	6 (10.9%)
6 to 10 years	11 (20%)
11 to 15 years	5 (9.1%)
15 to 20 years	9 (16.4%)
Longer than 20 years	23 (41.89%)
(Four respondents skipped question)	

What is the highest level of education you have completed?

High school	**0 (0%)**
Some college	2 (3.6%)
College	9 (16.1%)
Graduate school (seminary)	35 (62.5%)
Graduate school (non-seminary)	8 (14.3%)
Other	2 (3.6%)
(Three respondents skipped question)	

In addition to the basic demographic questions, respondents were asked to describe their levels of conservatism on a five-point scale (conservative, lean conservative, moderate, lean liberal, and liberal) across three different areas (politics, theology, and social issues.)

How would you describe yourself politically?

Conservative	**25 (44.6%)**
Lean conservative	12 (21.4%)
Moderate	10 (17.9%)
Lean liberal	3 (5.4%)
Liberal	5 (8.9%)
Other	1 (1.8%)
(Three respondents skipped question)	

How would you describe yourself in terms of theology?

Conservative	**30 (53.6%)**
Lean conservative	11 (19.6%)
Moderate	8 (14.3)
Lean liberal	3 (5.4%)
Liberal	3 (5.4%)
Other	1 (1.8%)
(Three respondents skipped question)	

How would you describe yourself in terms of social issues such as legalized abortion, gay marriage, and government spending on social programs?

Conservative	**34 (60.7%)**
Lean conservative	5 (8.9%)
Moderate	5 (8.9%)
Lean liberal	4 (7.1%)
Liberal	8 (14.3%)
Other	0 (0%)
(Three respondents skipped question)	

Which demographic factors are related with perceived media "unfriendliness" to religion?

Respondents were asked the following question: Overall, would you say that the news media is generally friendly, neutral, or unfriendly to Christianity?

Due to the relatively small sample size, the answers to the survey question above were recoded into two categories: "unfriendly" and "not unfriendly." "Friendly" and "neutral" answers were recoded as "Not unfriendly."

An Analysis of Variance Between Groups (ANOVA) was run to test for statistically significant relationships between the following demographic factors and perceived media "unfriendliness" to Christianity.

Denominational affiliation, the locale of the church, age, gender, the years of experience, and educational attainment. (State-by-state comparisons of respondents' answers to the survey question were not possible given the grossly unequal distribution of respondents across the four states surveyed.) Due to the relatively small sample size, the locale of the church was combined into two categories: rural and urban. Age was combined into four categories: younger than 40, 41-50, 51-60, older than 60. Years of experience were combined into two categories: less than 10 years and more than 10 years of experience. Educational attainment was combined into two categories: seminary and other.

The ANOVA indicated that none of the demographic factors showed a statistically significant relationship to whether the respondent indicated that the news media is "unfriendly" to Christianity, except for one demographic factor.

One, gender, showed a potentially statistically significant relationship to the answer of "unfriendly" for the survey question. However, males (N = 47, p = .004) far outnumbered females (N = 8, p = .004.) More females described themselves as non-conservative (N = 6) than conservative (N = 2) on each of the three measures of conservatism (politics, theology, and social issues.) Given that 6 of the 8 female respondents indicated they are non-conservative, and conservatism is shown in this study to have a statistically significant relationship to whether a

respondent indicated the news media is "unfriendly" to Christianity, the p-value (.004) indicating statistical significance could be related to the females' non-conservative political, theological, and social-issue orientation.

Does the level of conservatism (political, theological, and on social issues) relate to the perceived media "unfriendliness" to religion?

Respondents were asked the following question: Overall, would you say that the news media is generally friendly, neutral, or unfriendly to Christianity?

Due to the relatively small sample size, the five categories of conservatism (conservative, lean conservative, moderate, lean liberal, and liberal) were combined into two groups: conservative (those who self-identified as conservative or lean conservative) and non-conservative (those who self-identified as moderate, lean liberal, and liberal) for each of the three measures (politics, theology, and social issues) in order to test for statistical significance.

The answers to the survey question (friendly, neutral, unfriendly) were recoded into two categories: "unfriendly" and "not unfriendly," in order to test for statistical significance. The "not unfriendly" category consisted of "friendly" and "neutral" responses to the survey question.

For the first measure of conservatism, politics, a single-tailed t-test was run to determine whether a statistically significant relationship exists between identifying oneself as conservative and answering that the news media is unfriendly to Christianity.

In the survey, conservatives (N = 37, p = .000) outnumbered non-conservatives (N = 18, p = 000.) Sixty-seven (67) percent of all respondents indicated that the news media was "unfriendly" to Christianity.

Ninety-two (92) percent of respondents identifying themselves as politically conservative indicated that the news media is “unfriendly” to Christianity, while eight percent of politically conservative respondents indicated the news media was “not unfriendly” (neutral) to Christianity.

Among non-conservatives, 33 percent of all respondents indicated that the news media was “not unfriendly” to Christianity. Among those respondents, only 12 percent of those who identified themselves as politically liberal indicated the news media was “not unfriendly” to Christianity.

The t-test showed a statistically significant difference between political conservatives and non-conservatives when it comes to perceived news media “unfriendliness” to the Christian faith.

For the second measure of conservatism, theology, a single-tailed t-test revealed a statistically significant relationship between identifying oneself as conservative and answering that the news media is “unfriendly” to Christianity.

In the survey, theological conservatives (N = 41, p = .004) outnumbered non-conservatives (N = 14, p = 004.) Seventy-six (76) percent of all respondents indicated that the news media was “unfriendly” to Christianity, 24 percent of respondents indicated the news media was “not unfriendly” to the Christian faith.

Of respondents who identified themselves as theologically conservative, 88 percent of them indicated the news media is “unfriendly” to Christianity. Among the non-conservative respondents, none of those identifying themselves as theologically liberal indicated the news media was “unfriendly” to Christianity, while 75 percent of moderates indicated the news media is “unfriendly” to Christianity.

The t-test indicated a statistically significant difference between theological conservatives and non-conservatives when it comes to perceived news media "unfriendliness" to Christianity.

For the third measure of conservatism, on social issues, a single-tailed t-test revealed a statistically significant relationship between identifying oneself as conservative and answering that the news media is unfriendly to Christianity.

In the survey, social conservatives (N = 39, p = .000) outnumbered non-conservatives (N = 17, p = 000.) Seventy-five (75) percent of all respondents indicated that the news media was "unfriendly" to Christianity, 25 percent of respondents indicated the news media was "not unfriendly" to Christianity.

Of the respondents who identified themselves as conservative, 92 percent of them indicated the news media is "unfriendly" to the Christian faith. The other 8 percent indicated the news media was "neutral" to Christianity. None of the conservative respondents indicated the news media was "friendly" to Christianity.

Of the non-conservatives, 25 percent of respondents identifying themselves as liberals indicated the news media was "unfriendly," 67 percent indicated the news media was "neutral," and 8 percent indicated the news media was "friendly" to Christianity. Sixty (60) percent of moderates indicated the news media was "unfriendly" to Christianity, while 20 percent indicated the news media was "neutral" and 20 percent indicated the news media was "friendly" to Christianity.

The t-test indicated a statistically significant difference between social conservatives and non-conservatives in regards to perceived news media "unfriendliness" to Christianity, with social conservatives far more likely to indicate the news media is "unfriendly" to Christianity

than non-conservatives, but there are also differences between social moderates and liberals when it comes to perceptions of news media "unfriendliness" to Christianity.

Credibility

Respondents were asked to rate the credibility of the following news media: broadcast television, cable television, national newspapers, local newspapers, radio, the internet sites of newspapers, television, or radio stations, internet blogs or specialty sites, religious publications, television or radio programs, and websites, news magazines, and relatives, friends, or co-workers.

Due to the relatively small sample size, the five categories of conservatism (conservative, lean conservative, moderate, lean liberal, and liberal) were combined into two groups: conservative (those who self-identified as conservative or lean conservative) and non-conservative (those who self-identified as moderate, lean liberal, and liberal) for political orientation in order to test for statistical significance.

An Independent Samples Test revealed statistically significant relationship between respondents who identified themselves as politically conservative and those respondents who identified themselves as politically non-conservative and how they rated the credibility of two news media: broadcast television and national newspapers. For the other media, the test did not reveal a statistically significant relationship between conservatives and non-conservatives and how they rated the credibility of those media.

With regards to broadcast television there the test revealed a statistically significant relationship between respondents identifying themselves as politically conservative ($N = 37$; $p = .016$) or non-conservative ($N = 18$; $p = .016$) and how they rated the perceived credibility of broadcast television.

Seventy-three (73) percent of respondents identifying themselves as conservative indicated that broadcast television is “somewhat credible” or “not at all credible.” Twenty-seven (27) percent of conservative respondents indicated broadcast television was “very credible” or “usually credible.”

Forty-four (44) percent of non-conservatives indicated broadcast television was “somewhat credible” or “not at all” credible. Fifty-six (56) percent of non-conservatives indicated broadcast television was “very credible” or “usually credible.”

For national newspapers there is a statistically significant relationship between respondents identifying themselves as politically conservative ($N = 34$; $p = .002$) or non-conservative ($N = 18$; $p = .002$) and how they rated the perceived credibility of national newspapers.

Sixty-eight (68) percent of conservatives indicated national newspapers were “somewhat credible” or “not at all credible.” Thirty-two (32) percent of conservatives indicated national newspapers were “very credible” or “usually credible.”

Sixty-one (61) percent of non-conservatives indicated national newspapers were “very credible” or “usually credible.” Thirty-nine (39) percent of non-conservatives indicated national newspapers were “somewhat credible” or “not at all credible.”

The Independent Measures Test revealed a statistically significant difference between political conservatives and non-conservatives when it comes to the perceived credibility of broadcast television and national newspapers. Conservatives are more likely to indicate these two news media are less credible than non-conservatives. Non-conservatives are more likely to indicated these two news media are more credible than conservatives.

Among all respondents, religious publications rated the highest, with almost 68 percent of respondents indicating a "very credible" or "usually credible" opinion. Local newspapers were next with almost 63 percent, followed by radio with almost 52 percent.

No other news medium received at least 50 percent of respondents indicated a "very credible" or "usually credible" rating. Almost 47 percent of respondents indicated internet websites of newspapers, television, or radio stations were "very credible" or "usually credible," followed by national newspapers (almost 42 percent,) broadcast television (almost 38 percent,) news magazines (just over 36 percent.) Thirty-three (33) percent of respondents indicating friends, relatives, or co-workers were "very credible" or "usually credible," placing other people ahead of cable television (just over 32 percent) and internet blogs and specialty sites at 20 percent.

Survey question: *In your opinion, how credible are the following news sources?*

	Summary of all respondents (56 total respondents)		
	% Very/usually credible	% Not very/not at all credible	Response count
Religious publications, TV or radio, websites	**68**	33	56
Local newspaper	**63**	38	56
Radio	**52**	48	56
Internet – websites of newspaper, TV or radio stations	47	**54**	56
National newspaper	42	**59**	53
Broadcast television	38	**63**	56
News magazines	36	**64**	55
Relatives, friends, co-workers	33	**67**	53
Cable television	32	**67**	56
Internet – blogs, specialty sites	20	**80**	55

Among respondents who indicated the news media is “unfriendly” to Christianity, religious publications and programs were also the highest rated in terms of credibility. Almost 74 percent of respondents indicated religious news media were “very credible” or “usually credible.” Local newspapers rated slightly lower among this group of respondents when compared to all respondents with almost 60 percent of respondents indicated a “very credible” or “usually credible” rating, followed by radio with almost 52 percent. Half (50 percent) of respondents indicated internet websites of newspapers, television, or radio stations were “very credible” or usually credible,” which was slightly higher than the rating given by all respondents. Friends, relatives, or co-workers received the next-highest rating, with almost 38 percent of respondents indicating a “very credible” or “usually credible” rating, higher than among all respondents. Cable television was rated slightly lower (31 percent) among this group than among all respondents, as were national newspapers (30 percent,) news magazines (almost 27 percent,) and broadcast television (almost 24 percent.) Internet blogs rated slightly higher among this group (almost 27 percent) than among all respondents.

Percentage of respondents who indicated news media is "unfriendly" to Christianity
(56 total respondents)

	% Very/usually credible	% Not very/not at all credible	Response count
Religious publications, TV or radio, websites	74	26	42
Local newspaper	60	41	42
Radio	52	48	42
Internet – websites of newspaper, TV or radio stations	50	50	42
Relatives, friends, co-workers	38	63	40
Cable television	31	69	42
National newspaper	30	70	40
News magazines	27	73	41
Internet – blogs, specialty sites	27	73	41
Broadcast television	24	56	42

Perceptions of News Coverage of Various Groups

Respondents were asked to rate news coverage of various groups as too favorable, just about right, or too negative. Those groups were Republicans, Democrats, evangelical Christians, Catholics, non-Christian religions, gays and lesbians, racial and ethnic minorities, corporations, scientists, and celebrities.

Due to the relatively small sample size, the five categories of conservatism (conservative, lean conservative, moderate, lean liberal, and liberal) were combined into two groups: conservative (those who self-identified as conservative or lean conservative) and non-conservative (those who self-identified as moderate, lean liberal, and liberal) for political orientation in order to test for statistical significance.

More respondents identified themselves as politically conservative (N = 37) than as non-conservative (N = 18.)

An Independent Samples Test revealed a statistically significant relationship between whether a respondent identified him or herself as politically conservative or as non-conservative and the respondent's perception news coverage of various groups.

Survey question: *Overall, is news media coverage of the following groups too favorable, about right, or too negative?*

	Percentage of all respondents (56 total respondents)			
	% Too favorable %	About right%	Too negative	Response rate
Republicans	11	38	**52**	56
Democrats	**52**	38	11	56
Evangelical Christians	11	18	**71**	56
Catholics	5	39	**55**	56
Non-Christian religions	**52**	36	13	56
Gays and lesbians	**68**	14	18	56
Racial and ethnic minorities	25	**57**	18	56
Corporations	27	**54**	20	56
Scientists	29	**63**	10	56
Celebrities	**89**	9	2	56

For two groups, Catholics and celebrities, the test did not reveal a statistically significant relationship between whether a respondent identified him or herself as politically conservative and his or her perception of news media coverage of those groups.

The test revealed a statistically significant relationship (p = .000) between whether a respondent identified him or herself as politically conservative and whether he or she identified news media coverage of Republicans as too negative. Sixty-seven (67) percent of conservatives indicated news coverage of Republicans was too negative. Twenty-two (22) percent of non-conservatives indicated news media coverage of Republicans was too negative.

The test revealed a statistically significant difference between conservatives and non-conservatives and their perceptions of news media coverage of Republicans as too negative.

The test revealed a statistically significant relationship (p = .000) between whether a respondent identified him or herself as politically conservative or non-conservative and whether he or she identified news media coverage of Democrats as too negative. Five (5) percent of conservatives indicated news media coverage of Democrats was too negative. Twenty-two (22) percent of non-conservatives indicated news media coverage of Democrats was too negative.

The test revealed a statistically significant difference between conservatives and non-conservatives and their perceptions of news media coverage of Democrats as too negative.

The test revealed a statistically significant relationship (p = .000) between whether a respondent identified him or herself as politically conservative or non-conservative and whether he or she identified news media coverage of evangelical Christians as too negative. Ninety-five (95) percent of conservatives indicated news media coverage of evangelical Christians was too negative. Twenty-eight (28) percent of non-conservatives indicated news media coverage of evangelical Christians was too negative.

The test revealed a statistically significant difference between conservatives and non-conservatives and their perceptions of news media coverage of evangelical Christians as too negative.

The test revealed a statistically significant relationship (p = .000) between whether a respondent identified him or herself as politically conservative or non-conservative and whether he or she identified news media coverage of non-Christian religions as too negative. Three (3) percent of conservatives indicated news media coverage of non-Christian religions was too negative. Twenty-two (22) percent of non-conservatives indicated news media coverage of non-Christian religions was too negative.

The test revealed a statistically significant difference between conservatives and non-conservatives and their perceptions of news media coverage of non-Christian religions as too negative.

The test revealed a statistically significant relationship (p = .000) between whether a respondent identified him or herself as politically conservative or non-conservative and whether he or she identified news media coverage of gays and lesbians as too negative. None of the conservatives indicated news media coverage of gays and lesbians was too negative. Fifty-six (56) percent of non-conservatives indicated news media coverage of gays and lesbians was too negative.

The test revealed a statistically significant difference between conservatives and non-conservatives and their perceptions of news media coverage of gays and lesbians as too negative.

The test revealed a statistically significant relationship (p = .000) between whether a respondent identified him or herself as politically conservative or non-conservative and whether he or she identified news media coverage of racial and ethnic minorities as too negative. Five (5) percent of the conservatives indicated news media coverage of racial and ethnic minorities was too negative. Forty-four (44) percent of non-conservatives indicated news media coverage of racial and ethnic minorities was too negative.

The test revealed a statistically significant difference between conservatives and non-conservatives and their perceptions of news media coverage of racial and ethnic minorities as too negative.

Percentage of respondents identifying themselves as conservative
(37 respondents; 66% of total respondents)

	% Too favorable	% About right%	Too negative	Response rate
Republicans	3	30	**67**	37
Democrats	**76**	19	5	37
Evangelical Christians	0	5	**95**	37
Catholics	5	30	**65**	37
Non-Christian religions	**70**	27	3	37
Gays and lesbians	**97**	3	0	37
Racial and ethnic minorities	35	**60**	5	37
Corporations	22	**49**	29	37
Scientists	43	**54**	3	37
Celebrities	**92**	5	3	37

The test revealed a statistically significant relationship ($p = .032$) between whether a respondent identified him or herself as politically conservative or non-conservative and whether he or she identified news media coverage of corporations as too negative. Twenty-nine (29) percent of the conservatives indicated news media coverage of corporations was too negative. None of the non-conservatives indicated news media coverage of corporations was too negative.

The test revealed a statistically significant difference between conservatives and non-conservatives and their perceptions of news media coverage of corporations as too negative.

Finally, the test revealed a statistically significant relationship ($p = .000$) between whether a respondent identified him or herself as politically conservative or non-conservative

and whether he or she identified news media coverage of scientists as too negative. Three (3) percent of the conservatives indicated news media coverage of scientists was too negative. Twenty-two (22) percent of non-conservatives indicated news media coverage of corporations was too negative.

The test revealed a statistically significant difference between conservatives and non-conservatives and their perceptions of news media coverage of scientists as too negative.

Percentage of respondents identifying themselves as non-conservative
(18 respondents; 33% of total respondents)

	% Too favorable	% About right%	Too negative	Response rate
Republicans	28	**50**	22	18
Democrats	6	**72**	22	18
Evangelical Christians	33	**39**	28	18
Catholics	6	**56**	38	18
Non-Christian religions	16	**56**	28	18
Gays and lesbians	11	33	**56**	18
Racial and ethnic minorities	6	**50**	44	18
Corporations	33	**67**	0	18
Scientists	0	**78**	22	18
Celebrities	**83**	17	0	18

DISCUSSION

The ministers and church pastors surveyed for this project are highly involved and identify closely with the subject of religion in the news media. People with high involvement or identification with an issue are more likely to have strong, well-defined opinions on that issue.

They are more likely to have prior knowledge about the issue, have more experience with the issue, and have more intense personal interest in the issue (Gunther 151.)

Group membership has been shown to play a role in perceptions of the fairness of news media coverage (Gunther 161.) Group identification has also been shown to a strong factor in audience's perceptions of bias (Kim and Pasadeos, 99.) In addition, personal beliefs shape perceptions and influence the conclusions people reach about the world around them (Kunda 480.)

The respondents in this study, Christian ministers, hold membership in more than one group. They identify with others in their respective faith traditions and have political, theological, and social issue orientations.

Demographic factors did not differentiate levels of perceived news media "unfriendliness" to Christianity. That suggests that there are other factors influencing this highly involved group's perception of the news media's fundamental attitude toward Christianity.

It is worth noting here that in this study, respondents who identified themselves as politically conservative also identified themselves as conservative with regards to theology and social issues. Those who did not identify themselves as conservatives were not monolithic in their views of theology and social issues.

The findings of this study indicate that a respondent who identifies him or herself as politically conservative is more likely to indicate the news media is "unfriendly" to Christianity than one who does not. The same relationship held true for theological and social conservatism.

Conservative and non-conservative respondents differed in their perceptions of news media coverage of Republicans, Democrats, evangelical Christians, non-Christian religions, gays and lesbians, racial and ethnic minorities, corporations, and scientists.

This suggests that for respondents who indicated the news media is "unfriendly" to Christianity, that particular group identification may be a factor in influencing their opinions.

Some 70 percent of evangelical Protestants and just over half of mainline Protestants support the Republican Party (pewforum 2012.) The Republican Party is perceived to be friendlier to religion than the Democratic Party (pewforum 2010.) Their perception of the differences in news coverage of the two political parties suggests that political identification with the Republican Party may be related to their indication of "unfriendliness" by the news media.

Conservative respondents also said that for evangelical Christians news coverage is too negative and for non-Christian religions it is too favorable. The Pew Forum study of religion in the news indicates that evangelical Christians have hardly been covered at all over the past five years. What coverage exists has been event driven (Westboro church protests, Koran burning, Catholic sex abuse scandal.) Islam is now the most-talked-about religion in the news. This suggests that self-identification as a Christian may be related to their view of the news as negative toward their group.

Conservative respondents also said that gays and lesbians get news coverage that is too favorable. Homosexuality is a contentious issue within Christian circles. In general, evangelicals have a well-defined position opposing homosexuality. An attempt by news media to be fair or impartial when reporting stories about gays or gay issues might be seen as approval by this group, which would be in opposition to their own view. If that is the case their view of homosexuality may be derived, at least in part, by their particular understanding of the Bible, which they might identify as their primary guide to faith and moral issues.

This study did not have the sample size to enable statistically based conclusions, it does reveal some directions that further research could pursue. Particularly with regard to the

particulars of religious group identification and religious values, a more detailed survey instrument, as well as interviews with respondents, could tease out a more comprehensive look at the interplay between group identifications, media choice, and media credibility, which lies at the center of this study.

CONCLUSION

In the early days of America, Christianity was the establishment. New England was founded by a people with a particular view of God which shaped the order of their society and their sense of mission.

Journalism, such as it was, was central to this sense of mission, a way of communicating God's working out of his plan for mankind in general and New England specifically.

As America grew and industrialized, journalism grew. The newspaper became a central feature of urban life and a community-building force. Through fits and starts, and clashes with clerical and civic establishments, journalism grew up into an independent and influential industry.

Religion faded from the news, though not from American life. The penny press brought it back but made it just another subject to read about, no different from crime, sex, or money.

Scientific discoveries and advancements reordered American thinking, pushing us toward a more scientific, mechanistic way of approaching life. America became the land of experts, and journalism one of their provinces.

Objectivity became the order of the day, replacing the traditional roles of community-building and discussion. The new technologies of radio and television opened more avenues for

news, while expanding the influence of elite newspapers (Lichter et al 11,) at least for a few years.

Religion was fading from the mainstream news media. Too controversial, too introspective, religion receded to the background of the news. A smaller, parallel news universe developed in the twentieth century, in which some religious entrepreneurs developed media vehicles for delivering their versions of the news to the faithful.

For the ministerial audience addressed in this project, mainstream news media credibility is low for most media. The highest-rated medium, in terms of credibility, were religious publications and programs.

Today, religion is not often part of mainstream news. A majority of the Christian ministers surveyed for this project indicated that they feel at odds with the news media. Conservative ministers, particularly, see the news media as unfriendly to Christianity, but they also see non-Christian religions as getting treatment that is too favorable. They also see political and social groups other than their own getting news coverage that is more favorable than them.

Whether this is due to solely to political orientation, theology, or attitudes on social issues, or some combination of the three, Christian ministers expressed a dim view of the news media. And there may be other factors involved, also.

What is more evident to me is this: once the establishment and a driving force behind journalism, religion now finds itself on the outside of the news establishment looking in. The child, journalism, is now grown and on its own.

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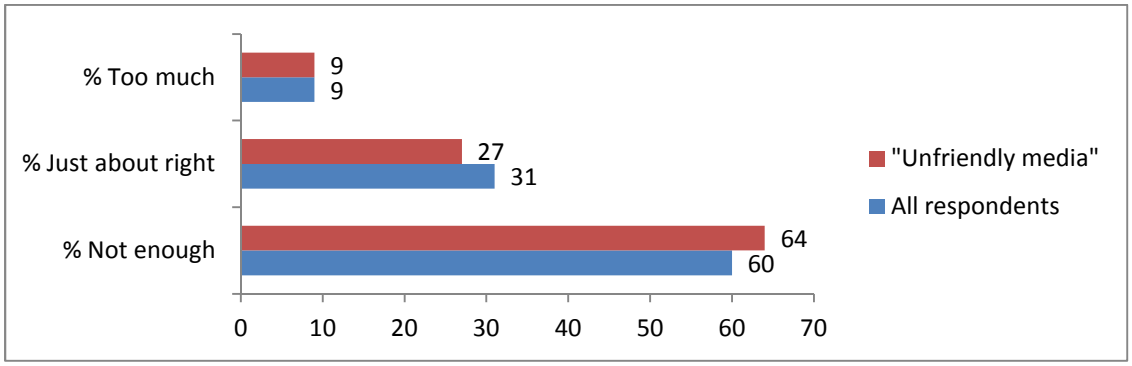
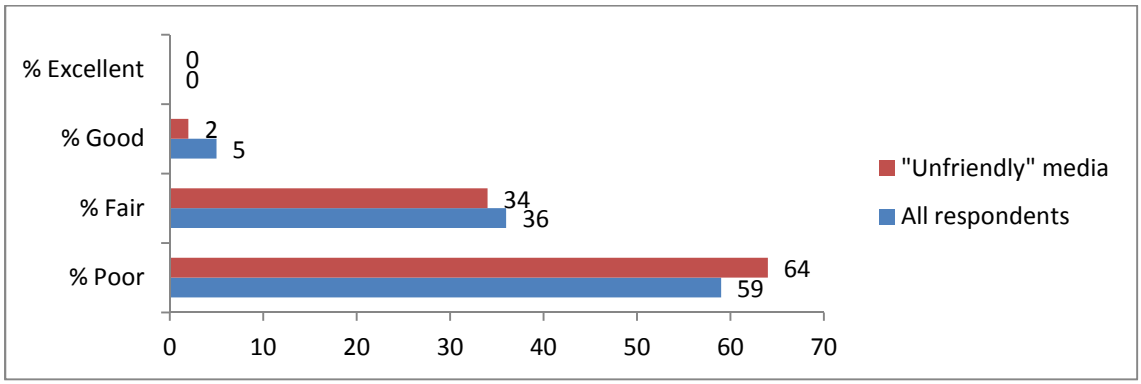
APPENDIX: SURVEY RESULTS

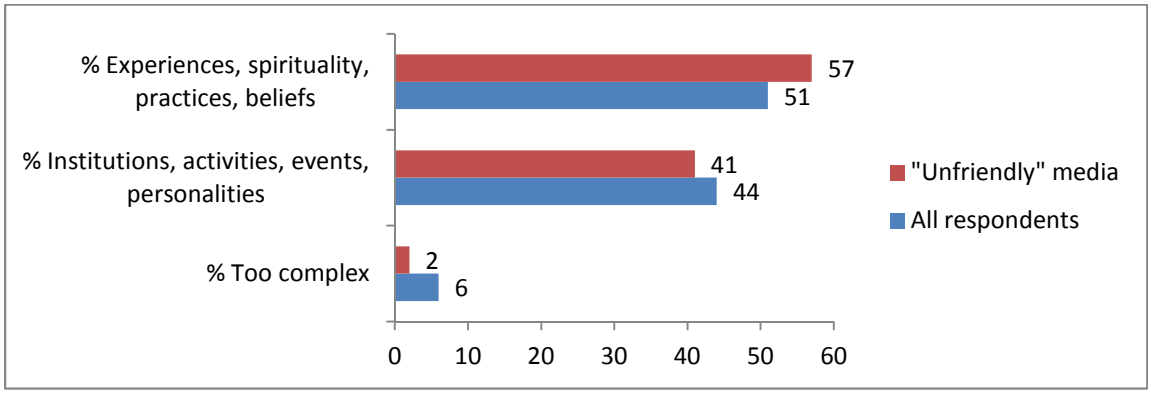
When it comes to the amount of news media coverage of Christianity, would you say that there is too much, just about the right amount, or not enough?



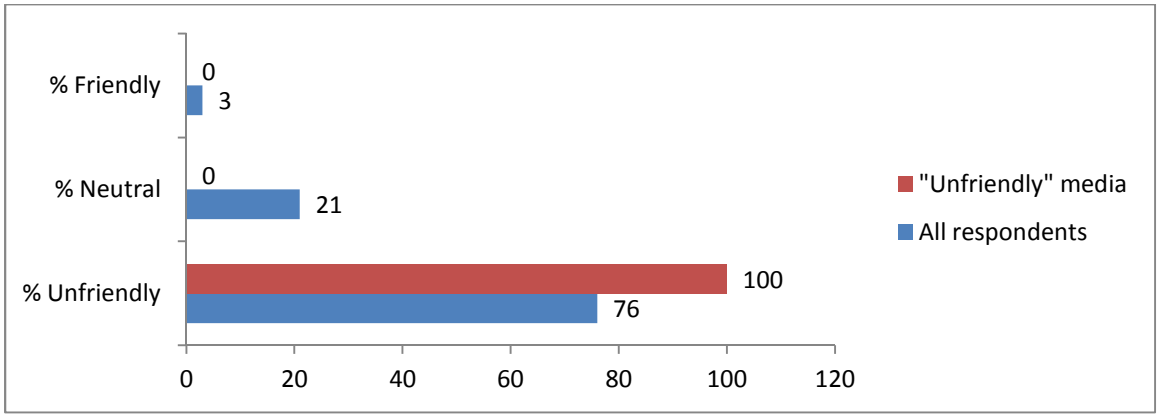
When it comes to the quality of news media coverage of Christianity, would you say the news media does an excellent, good, fair, or poor job?



Overall, do you prefer coverage of Christianity with an emphasis on:
experiences, spirituality, practices, and beliefs?
Religious experiences, spirituality, practices, and beliefs?
Religious institutions, activities, events, and personalities?
Faith is too complex for the news media to cover well, so they should just leave it alone.



Overall, would you say that the news media is generally friendly, neutral, or unfriendly to Christianity?



When you want state, national, or international news, how frequently do you use the following sources? (% of respondents who indicated news media is "unfriendly" to Christianity; % of all respondents)

	Frequently	Sometimes	Seldom	Never
Internet – websites of newspapers, television, or radio stations	**69.8** **68.4**	18.6 17.5	11.6 14	0.0 0
Internet – blogs, specialty websites	**39.5** **35.1**	25.6 24.6	20.9 26.3	14 14
Religious publications, television or radio programs, websites	37.2 31.6	**51.2** **49.1**	11.6 19.3	0.0 0
Cable television	**34.9** **36.8**	32.6 31.6	23.3 17.5	9.3 14
Local newspaper	32.6 **35.1**	23.3 26.3	**34.9** 29.8	9.3 8.8
Radio	30.2 36.8	**53.5** **43.9**	11.6 12.3	4.7 7.0
Broadcast television	27.9 **38.6**	27.9 28.1	**37.2** 28.1	7.0 5.3
News magazines	11.6 14.3	25.6 25	**37.2** **33.9**	25.6 26.8
Relatives, friends, co-workers	11.6 11.1	**44.2** **40.7**	39.5 **40.7**	4.7 7.4

Respondents indicated preferred news sources across a variety of media. The following chart indicates the number of times, by percentage, a source was listed by a respondent.

News sources cited by each of the following groups (% of times the source was cited)

Percentage who indicated news media is:	Unfriendly (%)	Not unfriendly (%)
Cable Television		
Fox News	**49**	8
CNN	22	**31**
MSNBC	3	**31**
Headline News	5	0
Fox Business Channel	2	0
Radio		
Public radio (including NPR)	**22**	**31**
Local stations	16	23
Religious networks	14	0
Talk radio	16	8
Fox News radio	3	0
Internet – blogs, specialty sites		
Aggregators	**19**	**8**
Drudge Report	16	0
Other sites	11	**8**
Religious Publications (including web)		
Christianity Today	**8**	**8**
World Magazine	8	0
Christian Century	0	**23**
Sojourners	3	8
Other publications	24	23
Broadcast Television		
NBC	**11**	**23**
CBS	**11**	0
ABC	5	8
Local affiliate	8	15
PBS	5	8
Local Newspapers	**27**	**23**
Internet – sites of newspapers, TV, radio		
Fox.com	5	0
CNN.com	3	0
NYTimes.com	3	0
USA Today.com	3	0
National Newspaper		
USA Today	**11**	0
New York Times	0	**15**
Wall St. Journal	0	8
News Magazines		
TIME	5	0
Newsweek	3	0
Reader's Digest	0	8
Mother Jones	0	8

In your opinion, how credible are the following news sources?

(% of respondents who indicated the news media is "unfriendly" to Christianity; all respondents)

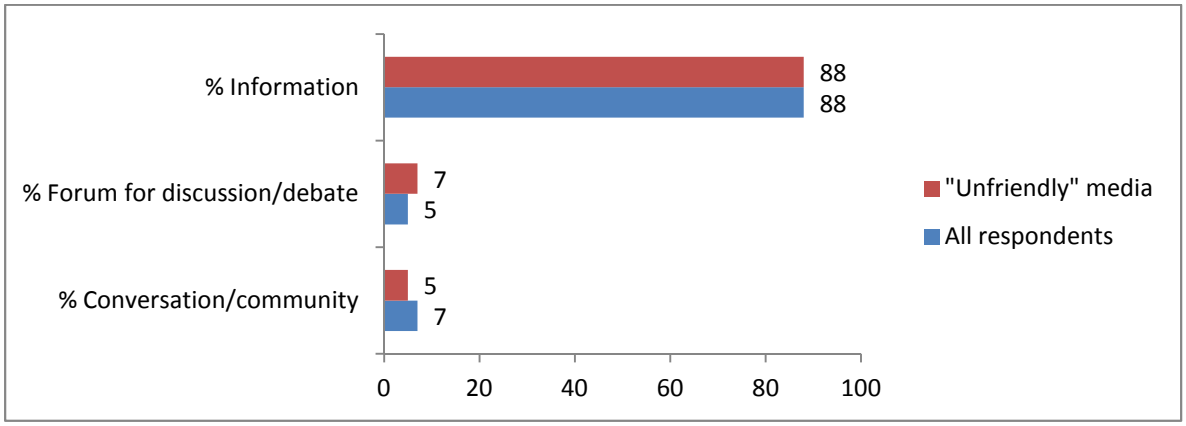
	% Very/usually credible	% Not very/not at all credible
Religious publications, TV or radio, websites	73.8 67.5	26.2 32.5
Local newspaper	59.5 62.5	40.5 37.5
Radio	51.8 51.8	48.2 48.2
Internet – websites of newspaper, TV or radio stations	50.0 46.5	50.0 53.5
Relatives, friends, co-workers	37.5 33.0	62.5 67.0
Cable television	31.0 32.2	69.0 67.8
National newspaper	30.0 41.5	70.0 58.5
News magazines	26.8 36.3	73.2 63.7
Internet – blogs, specialty sites	26.8 20.0	73.2 80.0
Broadcast television	23.8 37.5	56.2 62.5

Overall, is news media coverage of the following groups too favorable, about right, or too negative?

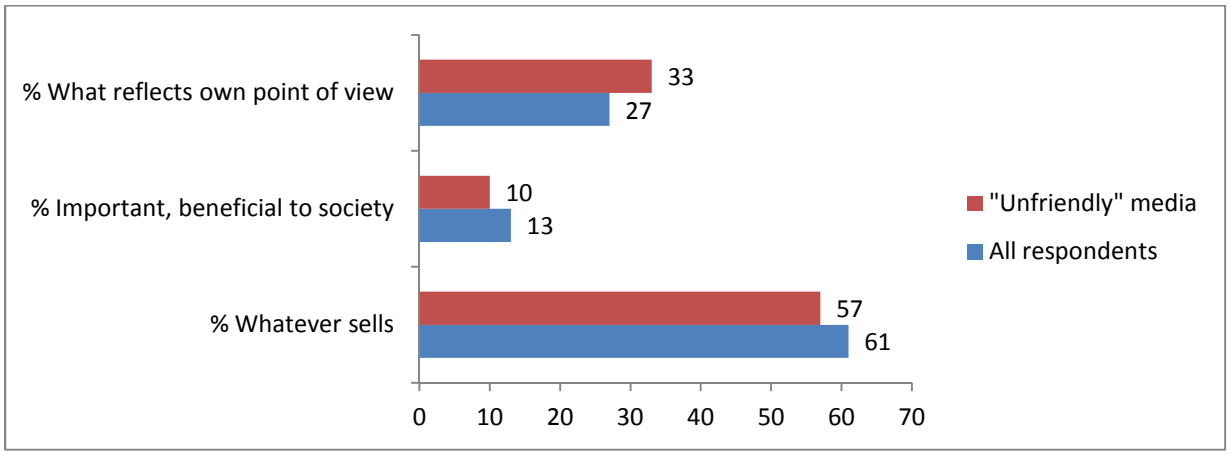
(% of respondents who indicated the news media is "unfriendly" to Christianity; all respondents.)

	% Too favorable	% About right	% Too negative
Republicans	4.8	31.0	**64.3**
	10.7	37.5	**51.8**
Democrats	**64.3**	26.2	9.5
	51.8	37.5	10.7
Evangelical Christians	4.8	7.1	**88.1**
	10.7	17.9	**71.4**
Catholics	4.8	28.6	**66.7**
	5.4	39.3	**55.4**
Non-Christian religions	**66.7**	26.2	7.1
	51.8	35.7	12.5
Gays and lesbians	**85.7**	4.8	9.5
	67.9	14.3	17.9
Racial and ethnic minorities	33.3	**52.4**	14.3
	25.0	**57.1**	17.9
Corporations	23.8	**52.4**	23.8
	26.8	**53.6**	19.6
Scientists	35.7	**59.5**	4.8
	28.6	**62.5**	8.9
Celebrities	**90.5**	7.1	2.4
	89.3	8.9	1.8

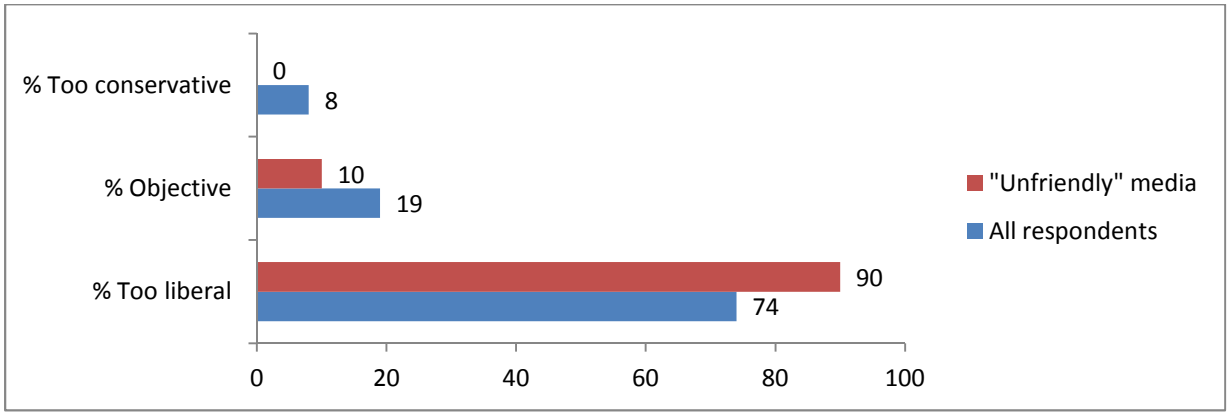
The primary function of the news media is:
To give the public information.
To provide a forum for public debate on important issues.
To help promote conversation and community.



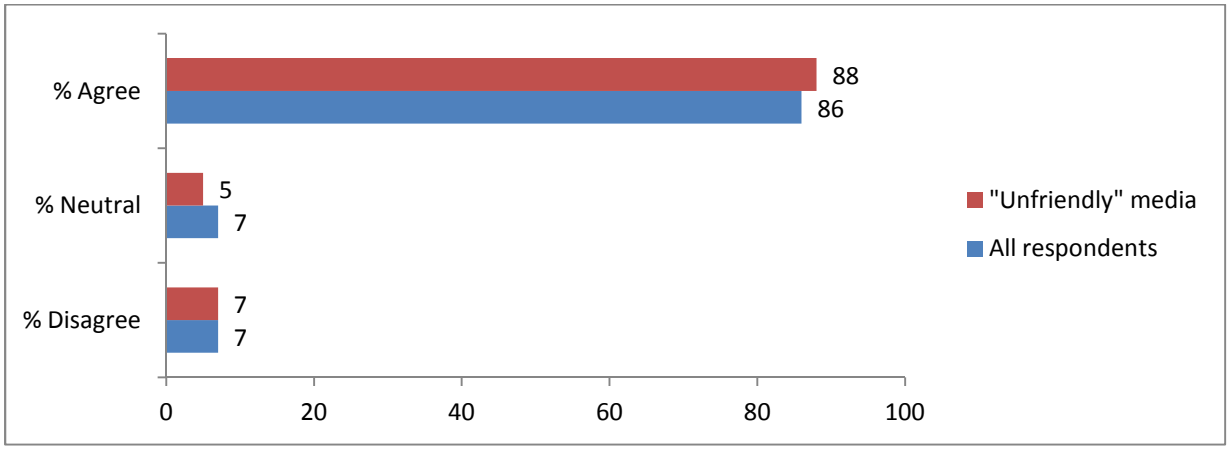
When it comes to which stories the news media choose to cover, which statement best describes your opinion?
Journalists tend to cover stories that reflect their own points of view.
Journalists cover stories they think are important or beneficial to most people.
Journalists cover whatever they think will sell.



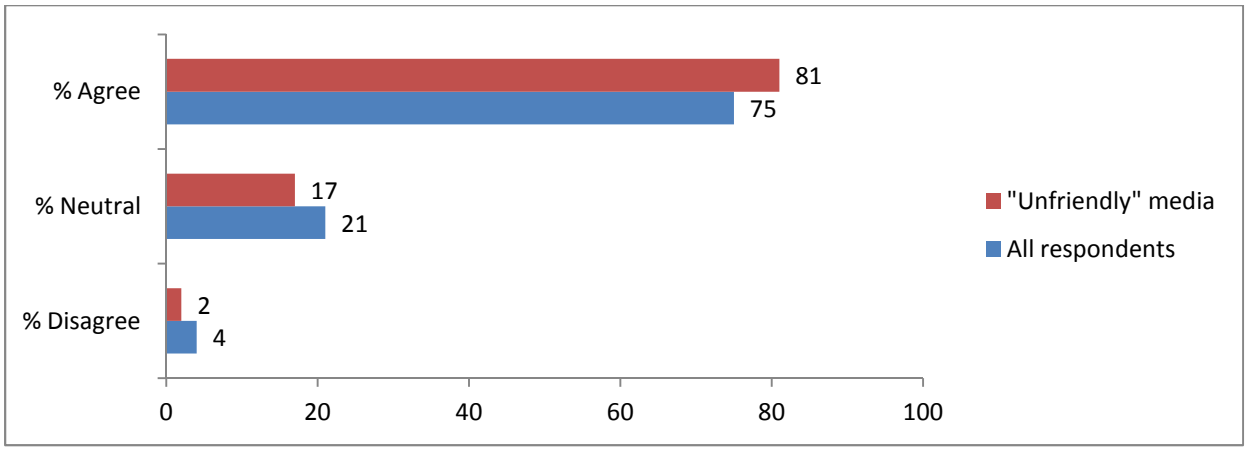
Overall, would you say the news media does a good job of being objective, are they too liberal, or too conservative?



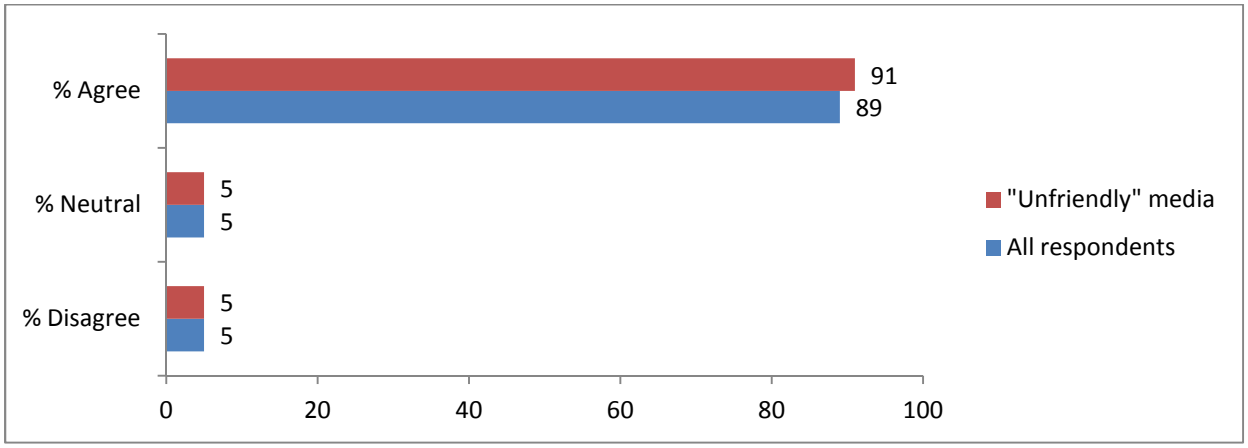
Faith and spirituality play a more important role in daily events than most journalists realize.



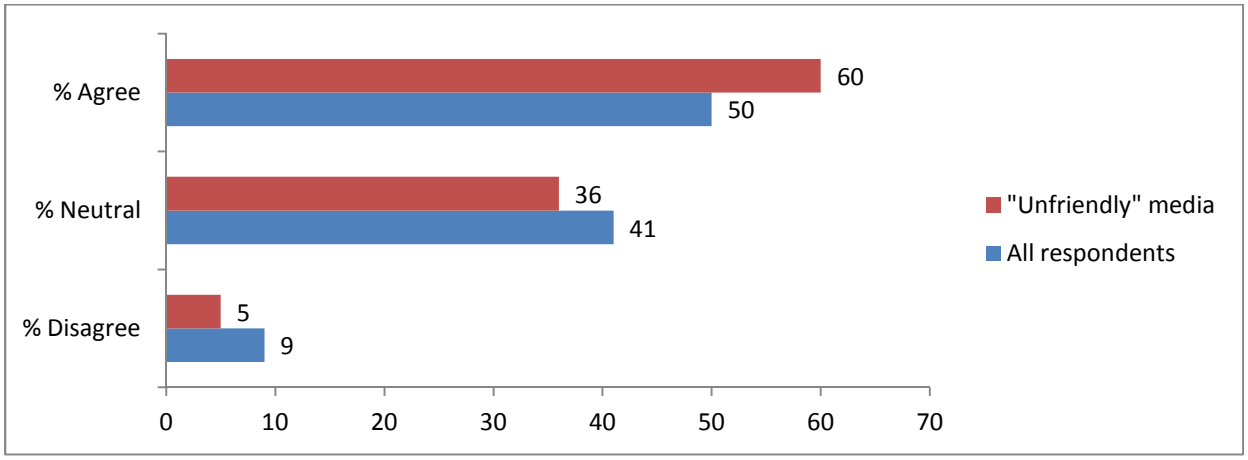
The news media focus too much on scandals, controversy, and bad news.



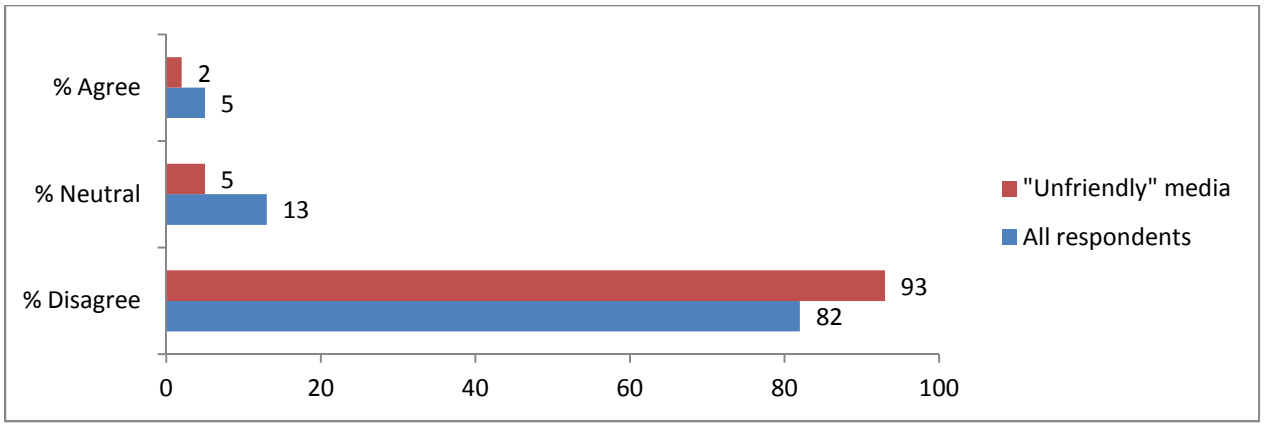
The news media rely too much on religious stereotypes.



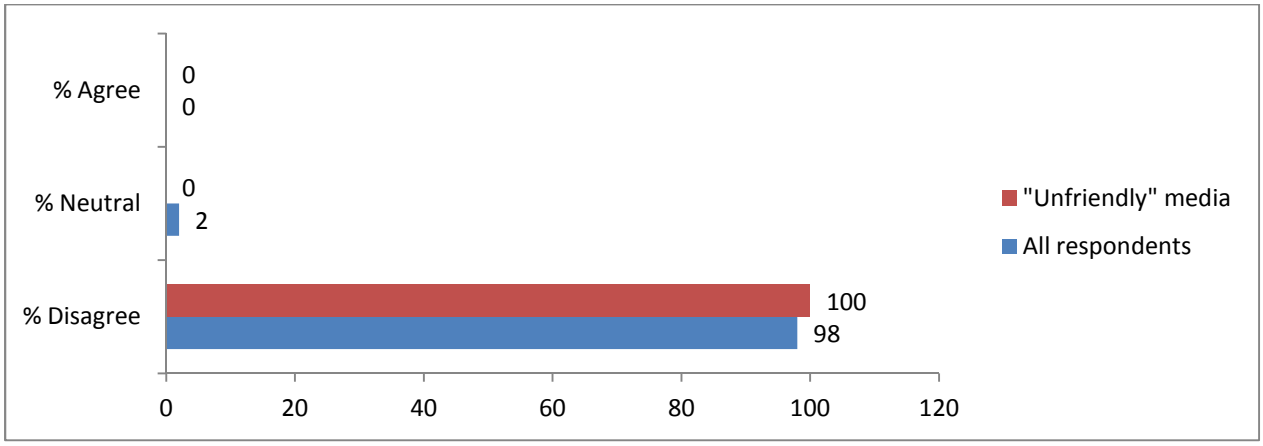
Most journalists are not personally religious or have strong religious backgrounds.



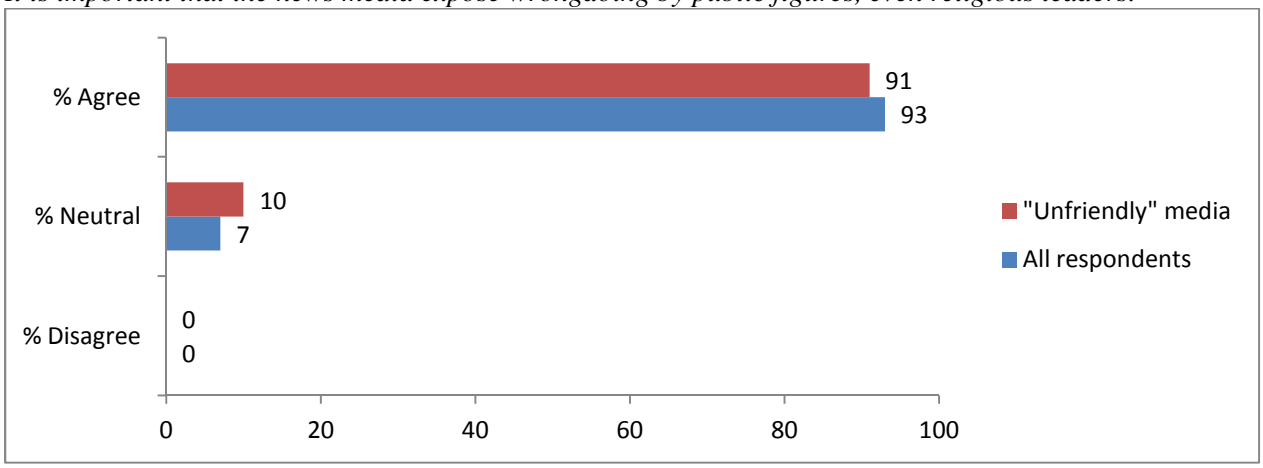
Overall, the news media cover Christianity accurately and fairly.



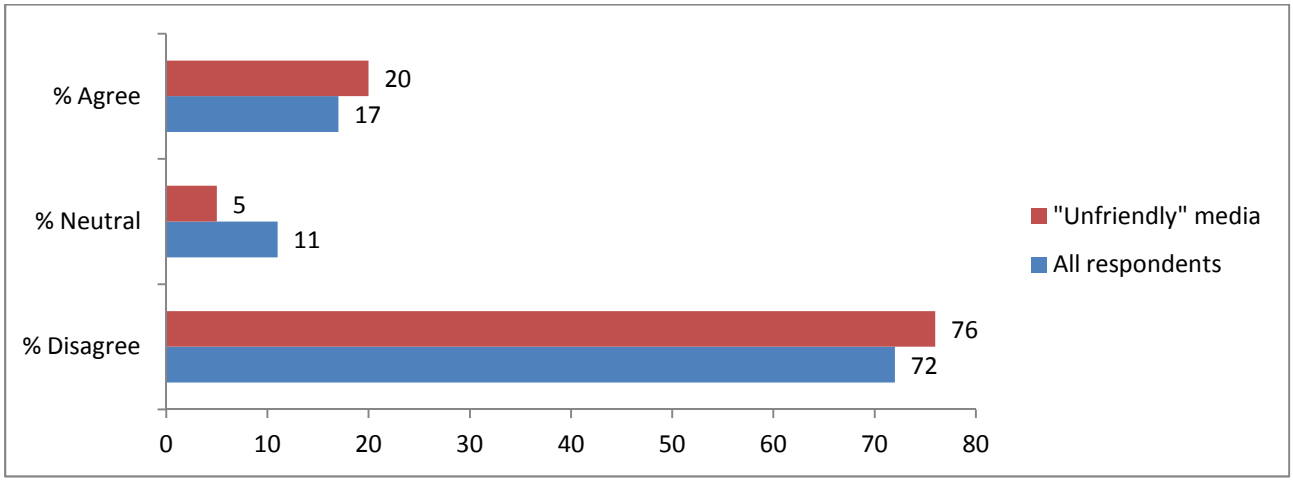
The news media do a good job explaining religion and faith in society.



It is important that the news media expose wrongdoing by public figures, even religious leaders.



Lack of knowledge is not a major challenge for journalists in covering Christianity.



In which denomination are you a minister?

Southern Baptist	**32 (57.1%)**
United Methodist	22 (39.3%)
Other	2 (3.6%)
(Three respondents skipped question)	

In which state is your church located?

Nebraska	**4 (7.1%)**
Kansas	16 (28.6%)
Iowa	8 (14.3%)
Missouri	28 (50%)
(Three respondents skipped question)	

What is your church's locale?

Rural	**7 (12.5%)**
Small town	26 (46.4%)
Small/medium-sized city	8 (14.3%)
Suburban	5 (8.9%)
Urban/large city	10 (17.9%)
(Three respondents skipped question)	

What is your age?

Younger than 30	**1 (1.8%)**
31 to 40	13 (23.6%)
41 to 50	14 (25.5%)
51 to 60	15 (27.3%)
Older than 60	12 (21.8%)
(Four respondents skipped question)	

What is your gender?

Male	**47 (85.5%)**
Female	8 (14.5%)
(Four respondents skipped question)	

How long have you been a minister?

Less than 1 year	**1 (1.8%)**
2 to 5 years	6 (10.9%)
6 to 10 years	11 (20%)
11 to 15 years	5 (9.1%)
15 to 20 years	9 (16.4%)
Longer than 20 years	23 (41.89%)
(Four respondents skipped question)	

What is the highest level of education you have completed?

High school	**0 (0%)**
Some college	2 (3.6%)
College	9 (16.1%)
Graduate school (seminary)	35 (62.5%)
Graduate school (non-seminary)	8 (14.3%)
Other	2 (3.6%)
(Three respondents skipped question)	

In addition to the basic demographic questions, respondents were asked to describe their levels of conservatism on a five-point scale (conservative, lean conservative, moderate, lean liberal, and liberal) across three different areas (politics, theology, and social issues.)

How would you describe yourself politically?

Conservative	**25 (44.6%)**
Lean conservative	12 (21.4%)
Moderate	10 (17.9%)
Lean liberal	3 (5.4%)
Liberal	5 (8.9%)
Other	1 (1.8%)
(Three respondents skipped question)	

How would you describe yourself in terms of theology?

Conservative	**30 (53.6%)**
Lean conservative	11 (19.6%)
Moderate	8 (14.3)
Lean liberal	3 (5.4%)
Liberal	3 (5.4%)
Other	1 (1.8%)
(Three respondents skipped question)	

How would you describe yourself in terms of social issues such as legalized abortion, gay marriage, and government spending on social programs?

Conservative	**34 (60.7%)**
Lean conservative	5 (8.9%)
Moderate	5 (8.9%)
Lean liberal	4 (7.1%)
Liberal	8 (14.3%)
Other	0 (0%)
(Three respondents skipped question)	