



WANTED:

Better-Trained Catholic Journalists

By ISABELITA FRANCISCO

The end of journalism in general is to communicate ideas and information. The aims of Catholic journalism are to convey accurate information, to impart knowledge and interpret all news and events from the standpoint of Catholic philosophy with the aim in view of restoring all things in Christ.

With this aim in view, it is evident that Catholic journalism must be universal, that is, universal in its contents and universal with regard to its readers. If it is a fact that the value of any newspaper or magazine depends upon the benefits the readers derive from it, the Catholic newspaper or magazine should aim to reach the maximum number of Catholic adults in order to influence their thoughts and actions and thus direct their lives towards their final goal.

But in order to be read and to be useful to the maximum number of Catholic adults, the Catholic newspaper or magazine must be written in the spirit, the tempo and the language of the times; and to influence

the trend of thought along the lines of sound morality, the newspaper should stress the need for justice and charity in the different phases of our present society.

Catholic journalists should present the Catholic viewpoint on the whole of life; they should sell Catholicism as a system of thought or a way of life and be able to convince their readers that it is the only answer to the present day world problems, as it has been the answer to the problems of life in the past. Consequently, a Catholic newspaper must be Catholic with regard to the principles involved and their application to current events.

In the light of the foregoing principles, let us examine the present condition of Catholic journalism in the Philippines. We need not be silent about the fact that the Catholic voice in the Philippines is so weak that it is lost in the roar of secularism and in the deadening silence of indifference.

I admit that the causes are all tied up in the general condition of moral degradation and indifference of our people—that there are what we call natural difficulties which hinder the progress of Catholic journalism in our country, but we cannot deny that much of the weakness of the Philippine Catholic Press is due to negligence, incompetence and pure cowardice.

First let us take the case of our only national Catholic weekly. "The Sentinel". A certified statement of circulation as of October 8, 1950 shows a total of 20,076 subscriptions three fourths of which are from the provinces. Note that all are subscriptions and that until now The Sentinel has not hit the newstand. Why? Because it has no popular appeal for the following reasons:

—First—inadequate coverage of the news. It tries to cover all the religious activities so that little space is left for the important issues disturbing the church, the nation and the world.

Second, our Catholic weekly has little if any influence on the trend of thought in our present society. The paper does not place enough stress on the Catholic viewpoint on the social, political and economic issues of the day. For example, not enough emphasis is placed on the social order program of the Pope and its practical application to the labor problems that are confronting the nation and the world.

It is not enough to give the facts

about the news but what is more important is to give the right comment and interpretation of the news according to Catholic standards. Let us remember that the majority of our countrymen do not have enough spiritual insight and knowledge of Catholic philosophy to be able to interpret the news correctly by themselves.

All this results in the paper's not reaching the majority of the people precisely because it does not appeal to them, because they do not find it useful. Our Catholic paper seems to ignore that the crisis of our age is today and not tomorrow and that the decision rests not so much upon the youth as upon the Catholic adult.

And what are the causes of these shortcomings?

- (1) Lack of competent staff members.

It cannot be stressed too strongly that the editing of an important journal is a full-time job, a difficult and trying one.

The Sentinel, for instance, has to depend largely on incompetent amateur correspondents in the provinces for local news which is generally inadequate.

- (2) There are not enough reporters and writers on the staff to cover all news areas—reporters and writers, who, being imbued with the Catholic standards of values, will be able to give what the people need,

from the right point of view in an interesting and appealing way.

The Cross, a Catholic magazine of the Philippines has so far displayed the right fighting spirit with regard to its editorials. However, the articles are usually dry and uninteresting precisely because it is so handicapped by a lack of a regular competent staff that it often resorts to reprints and articles from amateur writers.

The Filipinas, the only Catholic Tagalog magazine is in the same straits.

The Mindanao Cross, a provincial Catholic weekly is fast gaining popularity in Cotabato. In my opinion, it comes nearest to the ideal Catholic newspaper. However, being a provincial weekly, its sphere of influence is limited.

What are some of the remedies which might be proposed to this deplorable state of affairs?

There is an urgent need for capable Catholic journalists who know what the people want and what the people would get in order to live up to their glorious name as Catholics.

We need, in fact, definite, clear-cut, brief, powerful and fearless editorials not only on religious matters but also on all the important issues affecting the church, the nation and the world. We need direct and powerful editorials to shock the people out of their indifference.

We need a paper that is Catholic—in direct competition with the secular press—free to comment on any issue, and cover all news areas, uncommitted to any party or faction, and dedicated to the presentation of an integrated Catholic viewpoint on the whole of life.

We need Catholic newspapers and magazines which will take the place of the Catholic education which the majority of our people miss.

Catholic newspapers and magazines need not be defensive and apologetic only, but they should maintain the offensive without becoming offensive. They should demonstrate the full force and application of the Catholic philosophy as a way of life and not as an isolated set of doctrines.

From all this it follows that the vocation of a Catholic journalist calls for intensive, vigorous, thorough and practical training. A Catholic journalist should be well grounded not only in the techniques of journalistic writing but also in Catholic history, philosophy and theology.

And this leads us to the conclusion that, in consideration of the principles which should govern Catholic journalism and the present condition of Catholic journalism in the Philippines—our country is in desperate need for better trained Catholic journalists; hence, the present need—the urgent need of efficient up-to-date Catholic schools of journalism in the Philippines.