The letter the Irish Examiner
DIDN’T WANT YOU TO SEE?

Martin Long Director
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Dear Editor

Recent coverage by The Irish Examiner concerning the right to life of the unborn seems to indicate a bias in favour of abortion in Ireland.

Your lead headline on 20 November last bishops: Cherish the ban against abortion reduced the significance of the preceding day’s statement by the Catholic Bishops which focused on the equal and inalienable right to life of a mother and her unborn child.

Crucially the bishops’ statement reaffirms the Catholic Church’s teaching on the equal right to life of a mother and her unborn baby. It also highlighted the distinction between direct and intentional destruction of an unborn baby, and, medical treatments which do not seek the end of the baby’s life. The bishops’ statement reiterated the innate dignity of the life of the unborn child. To simply reduce the bishops’ statement to just this headline is not a good example of fair or balanced journalism.

In addition, your editorial of 19 November entitled Abortion Legislation completely avoids any acknowledgement of the deep pro-life sentiment and support which exists in Ireland. For your leader writer not to reflect the pro-life view as part of an overall analysis of this complex issue is not becoming of a national quality newspaper. Tellingly, this lengthy editorial did not once mention the words ‘unborn’ or ‘baby’, and this speaks volumes in my opinion.

Yours sincerely,

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The ‘Curran’ state of affairs!

“BUT people need to trust the source of their information. They need to know there is no agenda except the public good. Most importantly, they need to know that the provider of information is one governed by rules and standards, without an agenda and ultimately answerable to the people. This is what RTÉ has to continuously strive for” (emphasis added)

— Noel Curran, Director General RTÉ, Keynote Speech, TV50 Conference University College Cork, School of History, 8th September, 2012

So is it just words?
What’s the evidence?... Notwithstanding a fleeting “Moment of Truth” (Sun 25th Nov), and a certain amount of creative reporting on Prime Time, RTÉ’s abortion coverage remains very biased. Even before the generation of the Savita Halappanavar controversy, there were already ominous signs of an apparent determination within RTÉ to hold fast to the type of “cheerleaders with typewriters”’ groupthink’ journalism which has dogged the Irish media for years.

A case in point was an RTÉ DRIVETIME feature on Wed 29th August. Fergal Keane’s report drew significantly on the theme of the-legislature-is-lagging-behind-the-people.

This is a theme often repeated on RTÉ, with regard to abortion, following the launch of John Bowman’s Battle Station/Window and Mirror, social engineering project, earlier in the year:

One might ask, if Bowman’s thesis is true, that RTÉ has merely mirrored and revealed public opinion, then why, despite 30 years or so of pro abortion broadcasts, why has there been remarkably little change in the pro life position of its viewers, over that period, and this, despite a corresponding waning in the influence of the Church. No, the mirror that RTÉ holds up is more like a magician’s ‘crazy’ mirror, when it comes to reporting on Life and family issues, a mirror which distorts what the magician chooses it to reflect, that is, the true image of man, who is, himself, the image of God.

Media mould (a resistant bug)!

We sometimes talk about the media moulding public opinion. Seldom has this expression been more literally true than in the Savita Halappanavar controversy. The original report and the reporting of the report were misleading. The report was misleading in that it failed to draw attention to apparent inconsistencies in Praveen Halappanavar recounting of events (on Coleman At Large, Newstalk, Wed 28th Nov, Kitty Holland stated, “I mean, he said to me, at one point, that she was given paracetamol ... and not given antibiotics at any point”). The reporting of the reporting — the meta-reporting — was also misleading (see below). So the story served only as the mould around which a change in public opinion was fashioned. As with any mould, once it has served its purpose, it can be safely destroyed without, alas, affecting the object it had been used to produce.

Abortion: Some of the media’s failings

- Unbalanced panel discussions on high profile broadcasts by RTÉ, in particular, with pro abortion campaigners falsely represented as being “pro life”. (Marian Finucane 25th Nov RTE Radio 1)

- Preying on the confusion surrounding Kitty Holland’s Savita Halappanavar report to try to advance an abortion legislation agenda, and in so doing, failing, utterly, in their public duty to enlighten.
Truth and Beauty!

IF YOU VISITED the Family and Media Association at last June’s Eucharistic Congress, you may have seen the expression ‘Truth & Beauty’ with respect to the media. This was meant, of course, to be a reflection, not of what the media generally is, but of what it is called to be — the media’s vocation, as it were.

On 11th October, this year, during his homily for the opening of the Year of Faith, Pope Benedict used this same expression, “truth and beauty”. “During the Council”, he said, “there was an emotional tension as we faced the common task of making the truth and beauty of the faith shine out in our time” ... “Therefore I believe that the most important thing, especially on such a significant occasion as this, is to revive in the whole Church that positive tension, that yearning to announce Christ again to contemporary man”.

The Pope’s Twitter account, which he opened on 3rd December, and intends to make use of to answer questions on 12th December, the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, can be seen as an instrument in this task of making the “truth and beauty of the faith shine out in our time” (emphasis added).

But why Twitter and not another social network? Probably, Twitter can be very useful for referencing verses of scripture, for example, and, unlike other sites, doesn’t do much in the way of redefining, and emptying, basic social concepts such as ‘friendship’, for example — see our article ‘Get Real’ in the June 2011 Media Report. To follow the Pope on Twitter, it’s @Pontifex. The Family and Media Association account is @familyandmedia

150,000,000,000 texts later!

The 3rd December was also the 20th anniversary of the sending of the first text message. Upwards of 150,000,000,000 texts have been sent since then and the Family and Media Association has contributed its share too. If you are not already Receiving free text updates and alerts from the Family and Media Association, just ‘text’ FREE UPDATES to 086 859 36 76.

Year of Faith!

RTÉ (The John Murray Show) marked the opening of the year of faith by interviewing 3 former seminarians/religious who had lost their faith! This was like a wedding guest reminding the bride and groom about marital breakdown

Adolescent Faith?

The Director of the Catholic Communications Office, Martin Long has complained to RTÉ about a Mario Rosenstock sketch, in which a man is seen spitting into a bucket, held up by an altar server before, apparently, receiving Holy Communion in the hand ...

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Adolescent Faith? Continued from Page 3

Mr Long said, “Any objective viewer would certainly see the offence caused in ridiculing the reception of Holy Communion, the Eucharist, which is the Body of Christ. To make fun of this sacred act is sacrilege and is offensive to the core belief of every Catholic.”

Mario Rosenstock has said in response that the sketch was done in good faith and that the Church is not due an apology.

Interestingly, When asked by Today FM’s Anton Savage (Sun 2nd Dec), “Are you allowed to do things in relation to the Catholic Church that you couldn’t do with minority religions?”, Mr Rosenstock seemed unsure how to answer (“Ooo.. That’s an interesting question”) but again drew attention to the fact that “the majority of people in Ireland are Catholics.”

The hesitation and answer may betray a reality which the Family and Media Association, first, drew attention to on Newstalk’s Coleman At Large, last year, something also discussed by Archbishop Diarmuid Martin, around that time.

The relationship of many in Ireland, at the moment, to their Faith seems to be similar to an adolescent’s relationship to his or her parents. Just as the prototypical adolescent may feel safe to criticise, often unreasonably, his or her parents, in what can be experienced as a sudden almost incessant fault finding exercise, in a similar way, many Catholics seem to unleash their frustration on the Church, and, in some way, feel justified in doing this precisely because the Church is their family, and part of their identity. Seen this way, much of anti Catholicism, in Ireland, is almost a form of self-hatred which paradoxically betrays a level of trust in the Mother that you can say almost anything to or about, in the security that she will not reject you.

The challenge is whether to advance to a more mature Faith or remain fixated in the past.

Bishops on Expert Group Report

IN THEIR INITIAL RESPONSE to the Report of the Expert Group (5th Dec), the Bishops have pointed out that “of the four options presented by the Report, three involve abortion – the direct and intentional killing of an unborn child. This”, they say, “can never be morally justified.”

The Bishops also draw attention to other aspects of concern: 1. Some options permitted by the ECHR are not offered in the Report. It contains no ethical analysis
2. “The Report takes no account of the risks involved in trying to legislate for so-called ‘limited abortion”

Neglecting to report, or otherwise admit at the time — when it could have made a difference — that there were major discrepancies between the different statements given by Praveen Halappanavar (Kitty Holland, Irish Times).... Then, failing to follow up on reports and interviews strongly indicative of a problem with the reliability of Praveen Halappanavar’s accounts. ... Possible discrepancy between a Galway Pro Choice account and that of Kitty Holland... Complete lack of journalistic inquisitiveness where it could derail the abortion agenda.

Bizarre and inappropriate conspiratorial-style 'subtext' of an RTÉ main evening ‘NEWS’ report about the Vigil for Life (Tue 4th Dec), referring to the group being apparently “well funded”, to the presence of bishops at the Vigil, and, finally, to the Knights of St Columbanus. Ham-fisted propaganda, of a type associated with war time!

“I think that future generations will look back and condemn us for allowing this to happen just as we look back and condemn what happened in Nazi Germany and Communist Soviet Union"

- Bishop of Kerry, Bill Murphy

Even neglecting reports from India supporting Galway hospital and obstetricians.

Vigil for Life! Tue 4th Dec, Dáil Éireann—
The Family and Media Association was delighted to have been able to help promote this event.