



Freedom to probe

Seeking the truth means looking beneath the surface of the story

I sat in the meeting room of a large hotel with a number of men and women, all leaders in the charismatic renewal.

It was one of those "Ask-me-anything-you-want" meetings. I had spoken earlier in the day on the need for leaders to be transparent. Some of the men had nodded in agreement. Others responded as though I had called for glass doors on the church rest rooms.

Now we were into the question and answer session—throwing questions at the panel of well-known leaders. But we all knew there were certain questions no one was going to ask. It's always that way. The things we really want to know, the things we whisper about over dinner, we never ask in public—where we might get answers.

I really wanted to know, for instance, if one of the panel members had, as I had heard, prophesied that the divorce and remarriage of a certain Christian leader had been granted a special dispensation by God. I wanted to know if the divorced man's ex-wife, had confirmed the prophecy.

Such prophecies, it seemed, needed to be judged by a wide spectrum of leaders—not just by the divorced man's friends or persons who were on his payroll.

It wasn't my intention to prove anything—and certainly not my intention to discredit anyone. But everyone in the room had heard the rumor and it would have been good to get a straight answer.

However, the mere asking of the question was too embarrassing for anyone—including me—to voice it. If the rumor was false it would have sounded as if we had believed the man capable of it. If it were true . . . ?

We left the meeting still not knowing if the prophet had used God's name to bless a questionable situation.

I determined, if I was ever in a similar situation, to raise my shield against the fusillade and, jawbone swinging, attack the enemies of nuance, innuendo and rumor.

That opportunity came several months later in another leadership meeting.

A group of us were meeting in a Catholic retreat house when the subject of the recent marriage of Fr. Francis MacNutt came up. It was a legitimate discussion since Fr. MacNutt, who had met with us in past years had not been invited to this session. The men—all of whom loved the

former Catholic priest—were entitled to an explanation.

Some of the men in the group said they knew all the "facts"—but were not free to share them with us.

All that did was intensify our curiosity.

Ever since his marriage some months before, there had been nasty rumors. It was time to put an end to them. The only way I knew to do that was by asking honest questions of those who said they knew "the facts."

I picked up my jawbone and headed for the nearest "Philistine."

"Was his wife pregnant when he married her?"

What I got in return were blank stares, gulps, and finally a rebuke from one of the senior members who said the questions had reached a new low.

"We should not allow ourselves to speculate on such matters."

It was the same answer my father gave me when I was 10 years old and I asked him questions about my sex thoughts. "Just don't think such thoughts," he said—as though that settled everything.

My question to these responsible leaders was not a "low" question. It was designed to bring out truth.

Later in the meeting I confronted the senior member personally. He confessed that he, too, had wondered if it had been a "forced" marriage. But, he contended, it was none of our business.

I disagreed. I am my brother's keeper. If I am denied access to the truth about him, how can I defend him to his enemies?

Later I visited with Fr. MacNutt and his beautiful bride. I discovered there were no secret facts. The marriage was not forced. It was a beautiful relationship, and as far as I could tell, blessed by God.

Armed with truth I could now defend my brother against the rumormongers. But the earlier withholding of truth had caused much damage to this man of God and his precious wife.

Facts condemn. Truth frees.

Remember, Jesus did not say "Ye shall know the facts and they shall make you free."

That's one of the differences between secular and the Christian media. A magazine like *Charisma* is commissioned to print not just facts—but truth.

On some occasions facts would cause

harm if published—so they are omitted. But to refuse to write about an event simply because it is painful—or even offensive to some—binds rather than making us free.

Occasionally in our editorial meetings the question arises: Should this magazine print that story?

There are certain criteria which should always be applied.

- Do we have all the facts and can they be substantiated?
- Do we know the truth behind the facts?
- By publishing the story, which may reflect negatively upon some individual or institution, do we bring greater glory to God and His Kingdom?
- Will the story strengthen the body of Christ, or does it merely satisfy morbid curiosity?

• Are we willing to brave the onslaught of people who are threatened by truth—even lose some subscriptions—in order to warn, point out dangerous trends, or bring a corrective word?

• Are we willing to kill the story, even though it is factual, if we are convinced it will do more harm than good by publishing it?

The secular media believe, for the most part, that the only reason for not publishing a story would be the threat to national security. (Yet the recent publication of instructions on how to make an atomic bomb in your garage makes one wonder if even that restriction has now been lifted.)

The Christian media operates on different—higher—standards. They operate on the basis of truth, not fact.

The Bible is our guide. Here we find the story of David's adulterous affair with Bathsheba, but the story is told redemptively. Millions have been helped by reading it.

I am grateful for a free press. It has its origins in the Judeo-Christian faith. We do not have to look beyond Watergate to see how a free press helped save our nation.

But the Christian media has an even greater responsibility, to go beyond facts to truth—always for the purpose of redemption and edification.

Some people always will be offended by truth. I am offended by rumors. That's the reason honest questions between brothers and sisters are never out of order in the Kingdom of God. ↵