When you see a priest hugging a little boy, what is the first thing that crosses your mind? Are these images of priests as pedophiles warranted or are they the creation of an overzealous media? Much has been written about the recent controversy with the Catholic Church and pedophile priests. The media has devoted unprecedented coverage to any possible abuses that have taken place. All of this exposure causes the Catholic Church to become an easy target for humor and criticism. In fact, it has almost become expected to make fun of the church. The cartoon below uses this current exposure to set up a surprising counterpoint for the Catholic Church and its priests (see figure 1). The cartoon employs visual rhetoric to make both an emotional and rational argument that, despite the media's distorted coverage, priests are doing far more good than harm.

**Figure 1 - Chuck Asay, Colorado -- The Colorado Springs Gazette April 2002**

The cartoon surprises the reader by making a logical and emotional argument in support of priests in a time when almost all media is engaged in priest bashing. Chuck Asay illustrates this argument primarily through the comparison of the number of children. The first frame displays a few victims huddled together on one side of the picture, but in the second frame the children overwhelm the picture. The children fill up the whole picture and appear to go on forever even past the church that is set off in the distance and that strikingly resembles St. Peter’s Basilica (the center of the Catholic Church). Through this comparison in the size of the groups, Chuck Asay is making an
appeal to the reader’s logical side. This picture appeals to the reader's sense of logic in order to argue that if priests have saved so many children, then they must fundamentally be a force for good regardless of the small number of people that some bad priests have harmed.

The artist is also making an appeal to the reader’s emotions by making the children in the second frame appear much younger than the children in the first frame. People’s emotions cause them to naturally feel more warmth and empathy for younger children than for older children and teenagers. The children in the second frame appear younger not only because of their demeanor and faces but also because of their disposition. Some are sprawled on the ground and others are crawling around, compared to the first frame where the children are just standing up straight. Our society also naturally favors those younger children who appear helpless and innocent, and is less sympathetic to older children, who are viewed as trouble makers and who are expected to be able to take care of themselves. Another subtle message in the cartoon comparison is that the children in the second frame appear to be more international than those in the first frame, which suggests that pedophile priests are an isolated American problem and the larger truth is that priests do noble deeds world-wide. In short, the comparison of the children in both frames creates an appeal to the audience's logical and emotional sides by displaying how priests have helped save so many innocent young children compared to the very few older children who have been hurt.

The juxtaposition of the two frames reveals the difference in the media’s coverage of the priests’ failings versus their successes. In the first frame the media is surrounding the people abused by the priests like a mob around a car accident. Numerous cameras and microphones are focused on the huddled group. Cameramen and reporters appear to be stretching forward to get even closer. The media appears to be exploiting the children
and younger adults because they are standing there with slumped shoulders and gloomy faces, but the media continues to “go live to the world” with them at their lowest most embarrassed moment. The group of abused people is also huddled together as if by banding together as a group that they will be protected from the media. The first frame depicts the all-too-common media frenzy around children going through tumultuous times.

Now compare this media frenzy to the second frame, where the media is paying no attention at all. The cartoonist displays the media as utterly indifferent to the people who the Catholic priests have rescued. One of the reporters is even yawning while the cameraman is packing up all his equipment. It is evident that the message here is that in the media’s eyes the numerous people the priests have “rescued” are unimportant compared to the few people that have been “damaged” by some priests. By doing this Chuck Asay is creating a negative ethos for the media while at the same time giving the Catholic Church more credibility. By displaying this lack of media attention to the saving of all the children, Chuck Asay provides a boast for the priests because he is saying that although the media does not bother to cover them, the priests are involved in many good works. The media’s lack of attention in the second frame illustrates the artist’s point that the media is creating a frenzy out of smaller negative issues while ignoring larger positive issues that affect people across the whole world.

Another very effective way that Chuck Asay creates an emotional and logical appeal for the priests is through the language that is used to describe each picture. Both frames have exactly the same titles except the first one carries the words “damaged” and “pedophile” versus the second’s “rescued” and “pro-life”. The words pedophile and pro-life, which seem to describe the types of priests presented also forces the reader to realize that although a few priests are pedophiles almost all of them are pro-life and thus have
helped save so many innocent children. However, the artist is making an even stronger
equal emotional appeal through the words “rescued” and “damaged.” The word “rescued” has
a stronger connotation and makes someone think of saving lives, while the word
“damaged” brings up negative feelings, but damage is ultimately repairable. Another
way that the artist highlights this difference is by bolding the words “pro-life” and
“rescued” causing the reader’s focus to fall on these words even more. The comparison
of the words in each frame helps create sympathy for the priests that appear to be victims
of the media’s coverage.

This artist also manages to use the current problem of pedophile priests to create a
dramatic case for the good that priests have done in the world through their pro-life
stance on the issue of abortion. Through his display of the young innocent children who
were saved due to the priests’ pro-life stance he shows actual examples of numerous
children that could have been lost to abortion. He shows thousands of cute innocent
children in the act of playing without a care in the world. In doing this, he is appealing to
people’s emotions because no one would ever want harm to come to any of these cute
little children because it is human nature to protect them. In addition, by showing these
children the artist is making the children the focus of the abortion issue instead of the
parents. Furthermore, through the comparison of the embarrassed children affected by
pedophile priests to the happy children saved by pro-life priests, it is evident that the
author intends for the church's pro-life belief to be an extremely positive facet of priests’
work today.

This comic is even more powerful in the context of its time and environment. It
was published in April of 2002 in Colorado during the middle of the Catholic Church
scandal at a time when people could not even turn on the TV without the media’s “new
developments” being jammed down their throats. However, Chuck Asay uses this to
surprise the reader with his cartoon by presenting the opposite side of the coin. In his cartoon he presents the media and the priests in roles flipped from what people have been constantly exposed to, and he makes an appeal to ethos by displaying the media’s lack of empathy and compassion, while showing great deeds that the priests have accomplished. Another advantage of the artists audience being Colorado is that the issue of pedophile priests is not as prevalent there as in other parts of the country like Boston. This allows Chuck Asay’s audience to be able to approach the issue with an open mind and to be able to take a third-person view on the situation and easily see the media’s mistreatment of the average priest. Thus, the audience can easily relate to the media’s over-coverage of the issue and unjust harshness towards the priests who have accomplished so much good.

Through his comic Chuck Asay is able to take a current negative situation regarding Catholic priests and turn it into a positive point illustrating the contributions that priests have made to society. He uses the persuasive appeals of pathos, logos, ethos to argue that priests have accomplished more good than harm and thus don’t deserved to be crucified by the media. Further, he is commenting on the nature of the media today and how they focus exclusively on the negatives of our world. This comic illustrates how priests should be viewed as benevolent and compassionate people who have accomplished great things, as opposed to the view that the media presents of them as wild wolves roaming free in a henhouse. By pointing out a positive contribution that priests have made, the artist is also making a strong point for the pro-life position. Thus, through the use of visual rhetoric and captions the artist is able to both criticize the media and make a strong persuasive case for priests, the Catholic Church, and its teachings on abortion. This cartoon illustrates that while the media has caused more harm than good, priest have accomplished more good than harm.
List of Works Cited:
