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## Substance Abuse

"Thank You, God, for Newt Gingrich" by Carl M. Cannon, and "The New Congress & the Old Media" by Terry Eastland, in *Forbes MediaCritic* (Spring 1995), P.O. Box 762, Bedminster, N.J. 07921.

"Today," anchorman Tom Brokaw announced, introducing a story on the NBC evening news last September 27, "GOP congressional candidates were summoned to Washington and given a battle plan. However, as NBC's Lisa Myers tells us tonight, it is long on promises but short on sound premises."

And that's the way it was for the mainstream news media last fall, argues Cannon, who covers the White House for the *Baltimore Sun*. The national news media gave short shrift to the House Republicans' now-famous "Contract with America" and thus missed the story of what the elections of 1994 were all about: a choice between two competing visions of government.

"*USA Today*, in an advance story on September 27, quoted none of the 367 Republicans who would sign the contract," Cannon notes, "but did report the White House view that the contract was a 'gimmick' that would cut Social Security and Medicare and shower tax cuts on the rich." The *Boston Globe* the next day quoted three Democrats—including the White House chief of staff, who called the contract "a fraud"—but no Republicans. In general, Cannon says, the press served up the Democratic version of the GOP contract and failed to explore the document's contents or its signifi-

cance in the 1994 elections.

Why? One reason, speculates Eastland, editor of *Forbes MediaCritic*, was simply lack of familiarity with the players and politics inside the Republican Party. After decades of Democratic control of Congress (except for the six years during the 1980s when the GOP held the Senate), journalists were not in the habit of taking pronouncements by members of the minority party very seriously. As Steven V. Roberts of *U.S. News* said in an election post-mortem, "the press treated the Republicans with the same disdain for many years that the Democrats treated the Republicans: they didn't pay much attention to them." The press, however, does follow the election returns, and it has become very attentive. In fact, Eastland notes, "after the election, news organizations hustled to do in-depth pieces on the contract."

Washington journalists can be counted on to educate themselves about the Senate and House Republicans, Eastland believes, and their reporting will be more accurate as a result. He is less confident that, in covering the 104th Congress, the press will overcome what conservatives have long seen as its liberal bias. An even greater obstacle to fair, balanced, and comprehensive coverage may be the news media's inclination to be relentlessly negative and to relish conflict for its own sake. Cannon suggests that perhaps journalists should consider offering their own contract with America: "It could include a promise to look beyond the spin for the substance."

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## RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

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### *The Future of Priestly Celibacy*

"Numbers Don't Lie" by Richard A. Schoenherr, in *Commonweal* (Apr. 7, 1995), 15 Dutch St., New York, N.Y. 10038.

If demography is destiny, then the Roman Catholic Church in America seems almost

sure to experience before long a head-on collision between two cherished traditions: eucharistic worship and mandatory celibacy for priests. So argues Schoenherr, a sociologist at the University of Wisconsin, Madison.

Ever since the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), the supply of ordained priests in the United States has been shrinking. From about