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Kansas City bishop says NCR undermines the faith

Thomas C. Fox | Jan. 27, 2013 NCR Today

Kansas City-St. Joseph, Mo., Bishop Robert Finn wrote Friday the *National Catholic Reporter* is undermining church teachings. He cited coverage of women's ordination, artificial contraception, sexual morality in general, and the "lionizing" of dissident theologies.

His remarks appeared in a column [1] titled "The Bishop's Role In Fostering The Mission Of The Catholic Media." It was posted in the online edition of the official diocesan newspaper, the *Catholic Key*.

The bishop praised the work of the *Key* and went on to write:

> In a different way, I am sorry to say, my attention has been drawn once again to the *National Catholic Reporter*, a newspaper with headquarters in this Diocese. I have received letters and other complaints about *NCR* from the beginning of my time here. In the last months I have been deluged with emails and other correspondence from Catholics concerned about the editorial stances of the Reporter: officially condemning Church teaching on the ordination of women, insistent undermining of Church teaching on artificial contraception and sexual morality in general, lionizing dissident theologies while rejecting established Magisterial teaching, and a litany of other issues.
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> My predecessor bishops have taken different approaches to the challenge. Bishop Charles Helmsing in October of 1968 issued a condemnation of the National Catholic Reporter and asked the publishers to remove the name "Catholic" from their title -- to no avail. From my perspective, *NCR*'s positions against authentic Church teaching and leadership have not changed trajectory in the intervening decades.
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> When early in my tenure I requested that the paper submit their bona fides as a Catholic media outlet in accord with the expectations of Church law, they declined to participate indicating that they considered themselves an "independent newspaper which commented on 'things Catholic.'" At other times, correspondence has seemed to reach a dead end.
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> In light of the number of recent expressions of concern, I have a responsibility as the local bishop to instruct the Faithful about the problematic nature of this media source, which bears the name "Catholic." While I remain open to substantive and respectful discussion with the legitimate representatives of NCR, I find that my ability to influence the National Catholic Reporter toward fidelity to the Church seems limited to the supernatural level. For this we pray: St. Francis DeSales, intercede for us.

Finn seems to imply *NCR* has had bad relations with its local bishops since 1968. This has not been the case. Helmsing's successors -- Bishop John Sullivan and Bishop Raymond Boland -- had cordial relations with *NCR*. Once, Boland came to our Kansas City, Mo., office and blessed our building as we consulted with him about use of new emerging media technologies. Later, Boland spoke at *NCR*'s 40th anniversary ceremony in Washington, D.C.

In an email, former *NCR* publisher and Sister of Saint Anne, Rita Larivee, who was publisher at the time of

Finn's early years as diocesan bishop, remembers having respectful meetings with Finn. She wrote:

> I personally visited with him in his office to welcome him to the diocese. We had a fine conversation. But during his first year, he made many significant changes within the diocese that caused many concerns for various groups. Because of these shifts in previous policies, *NCR* wrote a story about this period of transition [2] -- Dennis Coday (now *NCR* editor) wrote the story. Again, I visited with Bishop Finn in his office to assure him that this was a story about the changes that had taken place, as *NCR* does with other dioceses, but that it was not an article about him personally. ...
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> Throughout my time at *NCR*, Bishop Finn was assured of direct access to me, and I remember always responding immediately to any of his concerns. We always had a very cordial relationship. We agreed on the role of journalism and the accountability of institutions.

NCR is proud to call itself a Catholic publication. We report and comment on church matters, including official teachings. We also report and comment on those who call into question some of these official teachings. Meanwhile, we are a part of the Catholic Press Association of the United States and Canada*****, an independent membership association comprised of Catholic media organizations and individuals. The CPA is an approved Catholic organization listed in The Official Catholic Directory, commonly called the Kennedy directory. The chairman of the Committee of Communications of the U.S. Catholic bishops? conference, currently Bishop John Wester of Salt Lake City, is the honorary president of the CPA. CPA judges have repeatedly cited us with awards for our coverage of the church.

As *NCR* editor-at-large (and former *NCR* editor) Tom Roberts recently wrote: "*NCR*'s bona fides rests on its nearly 50 years of professional journalism in service to the church ... That both hierarchy and laity would find us, variously, a boon to faith and an annoyance, is to us a certain confirmation that we are fulfilling our intent to report the activity of the church as widely and deeply as possible."

After a local judge found Finn guilty last year of failing to report suspected child abuse involving a local priest, *NCR* published an editorial [3] calling on Finn to either resign or be removed from his position. *NCR* and other local news outlets, including *The Kansas City Star* [4], provided ongoing coverage of the incident.

NCR was established in the diocese in October 1964.

[***Editor's Note:** This sentence originally stated that the Catholic Press Association is "sanctioned" by the U.S. Catholic bishops' conference. The sentence has been edited to better reflect the the CPA's officially standing as spelled out in the association's constitution and bylaws.]

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Links:
[1] http://catholickey.org/2013/01/25/the-bishops-role-in-fostering-the-mission-of-the-catholic-media/
[2] http://natcath.org/NCR_Online/archives2/2006b/051206/051206a.php
[3] http://ncronline.org/news/accountability/editorial-kansas-citys-bishop-finn-must-resign-or-be-removed
[4] http://www.ncronline.org/www.kansascity.com/2013/01/27/4034179/bishop-finn-airs-frustration-over.html