Opinion

by Dennis Coday

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Welcome to our online letters to the editor column. It's online but based on the old-fashioned letters to the editor format: Send me your thoughts and ideas, reactions and responses. I will collect them, curate them, and every Friday afternoon, I will post a collection to the NCR Today blog.

Directions on how to join the conversation follow the letters.

Respect the office of president, yes

Letter writers Nancy J. McGunagle and William T. Keane seem to be of the opinion that Donald Trump should be respected because he is the president of the U.S. Why?

U.S. presidents aren't "ontologically changed" on their election, like the church claims priests are at ordination. Granted, I live in a parliamentary democracy, where badly preforming prime ministers can be (and recently have been), removed from office mid-term.

It makes me wonder if the reverence of people in the U.S. for the president — no matter who it is — is a folk memory derived from the many 19th-century immigrants from places with autocratic rulers like Tsarist Russia, Imperial Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

In fact, the current improving trends would have happened regardless of who was elected. For example, the rate of decline in Afro-American unemployment has been consistent since 2010, the middle of Barack Obama's first term. Indeed, the rate of unemployment decline generally has been dropping since 2010. The number of new jobs created in Trump's first year, however, is the lowest since 2011. Don't forget the decline in the "soft power" of the U.S. because of Trump. He's poorly regarded outside of the U.S. No Australian government is likely to invite him; it would be political suicide.

Bruce Stafford,
Tascott, NSW, Australia

Trust has to be earned

While I agree with much of what Sara Boehk says, (See "Failures offer opportunity to improve protection efforts, expert says"), I also think she's missed something really big. Yes, real change is a long, arduous journey. What's missing in this analysis is that this journey needs more than one or even a handful of people to make it a real journey.

This is the core of the problem facing the church's leadership. Their actions have utterly failed at convincing the laity that they are sincere in even taking that journey, much less wanting real change as the destination of the journey. No doubt, they want it all to go away. But that's different from real change.

Church leadership can continue to impose all manner of constraint on priests, on laity, etc., but they can *not* impose trust in their leadership. That must be earned. Francis has shifted from being a hopeful beacon, drawing the church to join that journey, to but one more in a long string of bureaucrats who do not understand what the sexual abuse of children means to every parent alive, across the globe.

The laity won't be pushed down a path by their bishops: They need to be led. To allow oneself to be led requires one trust the leadership. Once trust is established, then the inevitable failures can be understood. But without that trust, there won't be many on that journey with the bishops.

Fred Kempf
Dallas

Winters has no balance on Israel

The is the first time that I have written to complain about a column, but "Palestinians are choosing their self-defeating way" by Michael Sean Winters is beyond the pale. Mr. Winters is not an objective opinion writer when it comes to issues around Israel and Palestinians. I will confine this letter to a couple of points to illustrate my point.

Winters goes on about the founding of Israel and its religious background. Unfortunately, he distills a complex history into a couple of soundbites. "Most of the Jewish refugees who arrived in Israel subsequent to 1948 were driven out of Arab lands," he writes. While roughly 56 percent came from Arab lands, the reasons for migrating were complex, and not just Arab nations drove them out.

Winters writes that Israel is victim because it is surrounded. 2018 is not 1948 or 1967. He completely ignores the facts that the Israeli Defense Force is one of the world’s strongest military forces, that Israel is a nuclear power (no Arab nation is), that the U.S. financially and politically backs and supports Israel year in and year out to the tune of billions of dollars.

He ignores United Nations sanctions and resolutions (more than 50 since 1948) and majority world opinion that currently views Israel as all but apartheid in its behaviors. Winters completely skips over complaints against Israeli policies made by current Israeli media, historians and experts.

In short, he takes things out of context, his citations are overblown, and he does not reference a balanced view of the issue.

William deHaas
Dallas

Priest shortage

Shouts of hurrah for Nicole Sotelo's perspective: "Seeing is believing: Why Catholics need women deacons," and I hope that although she is moving on from her previous assignment that we will continue to read her insights.

For 27 years, I have worked in some capacity for the church, the last 11 being as support staff in parish offices. It is my belief that until the priests of the world decide to become more vocal on the shortage problem and actually acknowledge that perhaps women could do this job as well, or acknowledge that just perhaps some women may have an actual vocation to do priestly work, they will continue to be overworked and the church will continue to stay in its current sluggish state.

Our priests are stressed and over criticized, but until they decide to get on board with the women's cause, nothing will change. I still love them and pray for them but no longer feel sorry for them.

Martha Horvath
Indianapolis

Advertisement

Money and church

Tom Roberts should be in line for some sort of trophy for his piece entitled "Conservative donors aim to shape Catholic narrative for the wider culture." It is investigative journalism at its best.

In the article he has presented some hard-hitting Catholics with lots of bucks and smarts; Timothy Busch, Thomas Monaghan, Sean Fieler, Frank Hanna, Fr. Robert Sirico, Stephen Schneck, Bill Simon, Fr. Richard Neuhaus and, finally, Michael Novak as the ninth member of this line-up card. (Novak and I were classmates at the Gregorian University in Rome while in the seminary. This was prior to his making

that 180-degree turn to become a leading conservative voice in Catholic circles.)

This group of luminaries and nonprofits are a sign of church vitality that provides an alternative structure to the church, as Schneck claims. The growth and surge of this group appears to be a reaction to the U.S. bishops' pastoral from 1986, "Economic Justice for All." It made me scramble to my shelves for a re-read of this important document.

I wonder what Jesus of Nazareth thinks relative to his preaching to the poor about the Kingdom of God as it stands in contrast to this alternative structure built on the foundation of the Koch Industries, Monaghan's Domino's Pizza empire, and Sean Fieler, the hedge fund philanthropist.

Thank you, Tom, for shedding light on this intriguing interface.

(Fr.) Joe Mattern
Omro, Wisconsin

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Did I miss something? Was anything in this article about wealthy men seeking power and position in the Catholic Church about any of them acting as Catholics are expected to act? Did I read anything about caring for the sick, visiting the incarcerated, providing health care, helping immigrants, housing the homeless, feeding the hungry?

What kind of Catholics are these appalling and greedy men? Nothing about the message of Jesus appeared in any of their comments. The comment of Timothy Busch that President Donald Trump's election would bring us a new "time of light" is beyond belief. What does he think now of this person in the White House who is destroying our democratic society?

Patricia L. Moore,
Los Angeles

Reform needs team work

While Michael Kelly's article "Irish priests told: Reform takes working with bishops, parishioners" certainly offers sound advice, there is one aspect I have never — ever! — seen considered since the sex scandal surfaced publicly in 1985.

I know that if I went to a confessor again and again with the same "besetting" sin (as we used to call it), he would point out that I was just doing the same bad thing over and over again and should a take a really hard look at myself and see why this was happening.

Say it was the sin of anger. Again and again, losing my temper and blowing up at somebody. Why? Why did this happen again and again? And what must I do to prevent it?

From 1985 on, the bishops' response has been in step-by-step- sequence:

- "Shhh! Don't even say such thing."
- "The child is lying."
- "The parents are making this up to get money from the church."
- "The lawyers are pushing the parents to make a big deal of nothing."
- "The media are making a big splashy deal of nothing to win awards."
- And then, finally, painfully, grudgingly: "Well, yes, it is happening."

But when will they turn around and look in the mirror and ask themselves: "How did we let this happen? Why did we let this happen? What is wrong with the culture of the church that this went on for so long, in so many countries around the world, hurting so many children?

Nancy Dwyer
Valley Stream, New York

Missal translations

Two excellent articles resonate: the first, by Peter Feuerherd on the Australian bishop Vincent Long Van Nguyen's call for an end to clericalism; and the second, by Sarah Mac Donald, reporting on Fr. Gerald O'Collins' and John Wilkins' call to bring back the 1998 missal translation.

Among other things the bishop suggests "rethinking of clerical titles." Good idea. Let's exchange the title "Father" for "Brother." That title would go nicely with the servant/leader model of the priesthood Pope Francis favors. (My wife, her career as a pastoral associate has known many priests, and I would agree that the best pastors fit the servant/leader model and would not be a bit offended at the change. Also, traditionalists might be more easily reconciled to the idea of women priests if they

are addressed as "Sister" rather than "Mother.")

Another good idea is bringing back the Missal translation of 1998, as suggested by Gerald O'Collins and his co-author John Wilkins in their book Lost in Translation. I always bridle a bit at the word "chalice." Chalice comes from the Latin calix, true, but in Latin, calix simply means cup, not the fancy vessel that our English word chalice brings to mind, something unlikely to have been used at the Last Supper.

Eric Von Brockdorff
Westport, New York

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I pray every time I go to Mass for this 2010 missal to be rolled back. What hurts is not only the archaic, flowery language and poor English sentences. What hurts the most is the poor and outdated theology being served to us at every Mass.

Our liturgy should be a simple, beautiful, uplifting experience of God's great love and mercy and our thanksgiving. The priests, brothers, sisters and educated laity will have to be the ones to speak to our bishops. Someone, please, organize a petition!

Jane MacAfee
Harwich, Massachusetts

Join the Conversation

Just like the old-fashioned letters to the editor, I will not be posting everything sent to me, and submissions will have to conform to the rules, but I pledge to do my best to represent the full range of letters that I receive. Here are the rules:

- Letters to the editor should be submitted to comments@ncronline.org.
- Letters to the editor should be limited to 250 words.
- First consideration is given to letters written in response to an article that has appeared on NCRonline.org.
- Letters must include your name, street address, city, state and zip code. — We will publish your name and city, state, but not your full address.
- Please include a daytime telephone number where we can reach you. — We will not publish your phone number. It may be used for verification.

- We can't guarantee publication of all letters, but you can be assured that your comments will receive careful consideration.
- Published letters may be edited for length and style.

These are the same rules that have guided the letters to the editor column in our print edition for 53 years, so I hope they work here, too.

Today's conversation starter

In her coverage of the Catholic Social Ministry Gathering (See Catholic Social Ministry Gathering aims for diversity, bipartisanship and more stories at Catholic Social Ministry Gathering 2018), NCR national correspondent Heidi Schlumpf writes:

> Aside from [a] panel on polarization, overt references to politics were relatively rare from the speakers at the event.
>
> Event organizer Jonathan Reyes, assistant general secretary for integral human development for the U.S. bishops, told NCR: "We try to stay out of this as a partisan fight and go by issue: What do we care about, and how do we best advance that issue?"

Thinking about your local situation, how successful do you think church leadership has been at staying out of partisan fights? Have you seen the local church take a leadership position on a local issue?