Opinion



by NCR Staff

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NCR received quite a few responses from our readers to Phyllis Zagano's column titled "Why not have a woman run a diocese?" Below is a sampling of those responses. They have been edited for length and clarity.

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I'm afraid there's way too much common sense in Phyllis Zagano's suggestion for women to run vacant dioceses for it ever to happen in my lifetime. But great that she wrote it and great that you printed it.

If we're lucky, over the millennia, sensible ideas like these may finally percolate back to the Vatican and get acted upon. (If there are any women left in the church by then.) Keep up the good fight!

PAULA BUTTURINI

Bridgeport, Connecticut



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With regard to the column suggesting that a woman could run a diocese I remembered that Bishop Thomas Wenski, when in Orlando some years ago, had a woman who ran the diocese.

He brought her from Miami and when he was transferred back to Miami she went with him. The big advantage was her personal loyalty to the bishop and her familiarity with his outlook. The problem was her lack of familiarity with the diocesan culture and power structure which was very different from Miami.

This of course could be avoided by choosing someone more familiar with the local diocese.

BILL KEANE

Leesburg, Florida

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The Greek word *diakonos* means "servant."

Giving credence to Orthodox Churches who are thinking of "reinstituting the 'office' of 'deaconess' (my terms) is sad. They reject our Catholic Church in practices and doctrine, so why "follow their lead" in this non-scriptural endeavor.

"Deaconesses" in the early church were either wives of deacons, or, women who assisted deacons in baptism. Since baptism in the early church was administered to naked men and women, priests and deacons (all were males) rightfully did not want to "scandalize" the sacrament and had women helpers to help in the administration of the sacrament.

These "deaconesses" were not ordained in the true sense of the sacrament of holy orders. In these times, there was not a fast way to communicate, so some bishops (many were "political appointments" to begin with) may have "laid hands, prayed over and anointed" women to be deacons, but they were as illicit as such things being done today, and no sacrament was administered.

Just as the early church had other recognized non-ordained ministers (from musicians, down to grave-diggers), it had these women (servants/helpers) that served as "deacons" but, as other situations in these ancient times, one word often had more than one meaning and might be misinterpreted by modern "scholars" —

the Gospels talk of Jesus' "brothers" and non-Catholics say, "Wee, Mary did have other children besides Jesus, so she was not a 'perpetual virgin!' "

Proponents of women in the diaconate are wrong.

TOM GRIFFITH

Little Elm, Texas

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For over 35 years I held a professional position in several churches in the Diocese of Richmond, Virginia.

My pastors always treated me with respect and appreciated my input during staff meetings, encouraging my participation in discussions and asking for my suggestions. In this way, I was able to represent and to have input for the female half of the congregation.

That is what is needed in out universal church! Where is the input of women, who make up at least half of the Catholic congregations? As women, we do not assume to be able to represent all the ideas and suggestions of men, but that does not seem to be the case for religious men. Their assumptions seem to border on grandiosity — a far cry from the church of Jesus Christ!

If the church wants to regain its respect among the faithful, she needs to include in its decision-making bodies representatives from the whole church, men and woman in equal positions of power. Only then will the faithful return the respect to those in power.

MARGRIT BANTA

Norfolk, Virginia

Below are some other reactions to pieces published at NCRonline.org. They have been edited for length and clarity.

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Donna Schaper reflects on several interesting polarities in her Nov. 6 blog.

In addition to telling an interesting story about elves in Iceland, she poses a fundamental dilemma: Is it environmentally ethical to live in New York State, a state that bans fracking, and then benefit from the proximity of cheap gas from Pennsylvania, which allows fracking?

The availability of cheap and plentiful hydrocarbons from the fracking boom muted the backlash against President Barack Obama's decision to block development of the Keystone pipeline — one could not point to an economic hit nor 'job loses' because natural gas and oil were readily available. The (temporary) environmental "win" on Keystone was built on a foundation of fracking.

The discussion brings to the fore the core ethical issue concerning fracking. Let us accept that our goal is to have renewable energy contribute, say, half of the total national energy budget.

This achievement is, by most estimates, still a generation away if we continue to push renewables as we had been during the 2012-2016 period.

At issue is this: natural gas has a significantly smaller carbon footprint that oil (about 40 percent smaller), and smaller yet than coal (about 60 percent).

So ethically one may ask: is fracking gas a reasonable stopgap along the path to a fully renewable economy?

A larger problem is political. If fracking is allowed to proceed — in New York and elsewhere — as a way of reducing carbon pollution while the nation develops renewables, is it reasonable to expect to shut down that industry when we reach the time that renewables can serve and penetrate the market more fully?

E. BRUCE PITMAN

Amherst, New York

Advertisement

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I fully support the ideas and proposals in the article by Ken Briggs. I was a seminarian for 10 years in the 1970s. I attended up to the third year of philosophical studies, then quit

I felt exactly what Briggs suggests that the environment was not participatory. Some seminarians played too much powerful and I saw this as a consequence of their being closer to the hierarchy.

In relation to the laity, we seminarians felt and enjoyed the special status, and that's because we realized being prepared to be leaders of the church. Seminarians are highly respected among church communities. And, this is exactly a very grave cultural environment for the future leaders of the church. Respect means power saving, but it entails weakness.

Later, when seminarians became priests, they brought this culture to their parishes. They think they are the only ones who know the answers of the problems of the church. The laity, including women, are involved in groups to discuss issues facing their parishes internally and externally, but always in the position of subordinate. It's okay as far as the priest in charge is knowledgeable, competent, responsible and dedicated, while it's not always the case. To challenge a wisdom of a priest is something that lay people used to try to avoid. That's a very serious cultural environment for our church as a whole. It opens a wide gate to the practice of power abuse, in any way.

My conclusion is the local church has to be more democratized, beginning with implanting more democratic minds of future leaders of the church, more especially seminarians. Democratic leaders will tend to act democratically among their followers, always practicing participatory approach in handling their church. Democratic leaders tend to be more humble, more inclusive, more tolerant to different views in the church.

DALLE DANIEL SULEKALE

Indonesia

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I feel compelled to address several of the points made in the article by Colman McCarthy about acting like a saint and not eating flesh. I was reared on a family farm that had various kinds of livestock and have been a beef producer for 43 years.

The most telling counter argument is the statement from the rule of Benedict; namely, except for the ailing, no eating of animal flesh. In his vision and wisdom he is recognizing the healing aspects of the consumption of meat. Perhaps only anecdotal but so many stories of individuals having healthier lives after leaving vegetarianism.

A few of many possible points: 1/3 of ice-free land used for animal production. Much of this land has no other productive use. One-third of grains for animal feed, humans can eat only a fraction of the corn and soybeans produced. Sixteen percent of available water used for animal production. Our several hundred head use only rainfall, either for growing grass or drinking water that would otherwise drain to the ocean.

DANIEL DIERSCHKE

Austin, Texas

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I am conflicted by Ken Trainor's excellent (and beautifully written) reflection on the council class reunion in Chicago. I am encouraged and my spirit is lifted by their continuing faith in the viability of the spirit of the Second Vatican Council.

At the same time my dark, pessimistic, side worries that the brilliance of the moon that Pope John XXIII pointed toward will be eclipsed by the shadow of *semper idem* traditionalists. I worry, too, that the spirit of Vatican II is wandering in a kind of darkness at noon. Was Vatican II "too much, too soon"?

I worry also that the council class' trust in Francis is anchored in moving earth. "In Pope Francis, the Holy Spirit is alive and well," one reunion participant proclaims while another admits "the one thing he still doesn't get is women in the church."

The elephant in the room, of course, is that the "one thing" affects more than half of us. Francis' initial boldness seems now tempered by caution; his refreshing truth speaking replaced by obfuscation.

JOHN C. TUFFY

Morganton, Georgia

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Upon reading your readers' reaction to the editorial, it quickly became evident, that at most, this piece galvanized the thoughts of the disenchanted in our church.

That is, it motivated those who have distanced themselves from the orthodox teachings of Christ as expressed by the church for more than 2,000 years. They, as with your editorial board, are misguided in their thinking that the church's Christocentric teachings should be subverted to the "wants" of the world.

There is no question that those who have any authority in the church need to be held accountable for any evil perpetrated on any member of the flock. Justice needs to be rendered!

However, editorial commentaries serve no helpful purpose in correcting the present evil in the church when they fail to meet the standards of truth and honesty. For example, when attempting to source the causes of sexual activity in the community of priests and bishops, no mention was made of the fact that 80 percent of these actions were homosexual in nature. That truth has its own legitimate consequences in terms of finding solutions.

It's time to seriously reflect on 1 Corinthians 2: "There is a certain wisdom which we express among the spiritually mature."

EUGENE MALO

Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

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