Opinion



by NCR Staff

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NCR readers are welcome to join the conversation and send us a letter to the editor. Below is a sampling of letters received in the month of December 2018. If you want to respond to an article published in NCR, follow the steps listed at the end of this post.

So, if a deacon speaks up about wrong doing that has been for years, and continues to be, handled totally inappropriately and wrongly, that deacon is silenced and ousted from his ministry. (Nashville deacon removed from ministry for speaking out about sex abuse)

The church is acting just like our president. Hide the truth. Lie. The message is that it is ok for criminals, i.e. priests who abuse children to remain in the ministry and not serve time for their crimes. That is the message the church is giving.

As a clinical social worker, obliged to report crimes of sexual or other abuse, I know that these priests are also mandated reporters and many of them should be the ones to be reported. But the church plays games. This deacon tried to shed light on an ongoing issue that is continuing to be hidden as those who committed the crimes remain hidden and never serve time or even have to face a court hearing. This is just so wrong and it is just more of the same dysfunction and crime.



As a clinician, I spent years helping those sexually abused as children and teens and to see their attacker go free is sickening. And it is one of the reasons I, a former nun, have left the church along with thousands of others. The church is under great scrutiny and has become a mockery. Yet when one person tries to make something right, he is not only silenced (as is traditional) but he is ousted. Not what Jesus intended for sure. These men need more than help from professionals, they need to face their crimes and do time. They are sexual predators. I do not care what kind of collar they wear. I am far from alone with this. Thousands, if not millions, are fed up with the way sexual abuse is handled in the Catholic Church. This is a perfect example of it.

MARY FRIEDEL-HUNT

Spring Green, Wisconsin

I admit — Pope Francis is not 'perfect' in any way. For example, I am very disappointed he doesn't say more about how authentically sustainable development is the "new word for peace."

On the other hand, he is one of the few popes that admitted the impossible position of being pope and asked for our prayers.

That he needs our prayers is evident in Jamie L. Manson's article on Francis' radical clericalism — without even mentioning that it was under St. John Paul II who established the policy of protecting the institutional church over living out the good news of Jesus when clerical sexual abuse and its scope started to come to light.

John Paul II was the one who didn't want Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger to go after them in any sort of real way.

However, it was Ratzinger who started to have all the accusations funneled through his office — so he did know the global scope. As Pope Benedict XVI he was unable to do anything.

To not put what Pope Francis is doing in this context is unconscionable.

YVONNE ZAROWNY

Qualicum Beach, British Columbia, Canada

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I find Jamie L. Manson's accusation of clericalism launched at Pope Francis a little harsh.

Despite Cardinal George Pell's guilty verdict delivered unanimously by a jury of 12 people after the same case resulted in a hung jury, is clearly disturbing, the cardinal is entitled to the presumption of innocence until all his appeal possibilities have been exhausted. Pleading not guilty, though proving nothing, enhanced this presumption since, if found guilty, his punishment will presumably be harsher.

The church is a human institution like any other; those endowed with responsibilities of public service must like Caesar's wife be above suspicion. Therefore, not renewing his mandate to the Council of Cardinals is a reasonable decision. Going further at this stage seems to me to be premature especially since the guilty verdict is out of character with the positions taken by the cardinal in matters of sexual misconduct by the clergy.

The case of Cardinal Francisco Javier Errázuriz Ossa, also not reappointed to the Council of Cardinals, is different. He seems to have mislead the pope, resulting in public humiliation of the latter. I think Pell is entitled to a bit of charity from fellow Christians and from the pope, who all ought not to yield to a lynching mob mentality. Of course, ell could be a liar and a hypocrite but, at this stage, I'll hold fast to his presumption of innocence and so should the pope.

PHILIPPE CRABBÉ

Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

I read Michael Sean Winters' articles when I can, even though I disagree with many. (Puppet media claims Christian identity; it's wrong)

Without getting into verbose discussion, Jesus himself told us: "Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's, and unto God what is God's."

The law is the law. If you do not like the U.S. immigration law, such as it is, then take appropriate and legal action to modify or change it.

Too many of our Catholic bishops seem to be actively agitating and encouraging people who seek to enter our country illegally into violent action.

As I understand it, even the Holy Family obeyed the law on their trip to register.

FRANCIS J. TEPEDINO

San Diego, California

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I know you are aware of this but Michael Sean Winters is an absolute treasure for NCR and for us progressive Catholics. Anyone who can take on Bishop Robert Barron , Russ Douthat, Supreme Court originalism, disloyal cardinals and critique EWTN and FOX News is a writer of enormous education, theological understanding and a true universal Catholic.

Please make sure he stays with you. He is so good I sometimes forget about the other wonderful writers you have.

BRUCE SEGALL

Nutley, New Jersey

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We live in an era of multiple developing crises. We're facing difficulties on a scale humanity has never faced before — globalization, environmental degradation, climate change — and nobody knows quite what to do. It could be the end of the world for humans and the Last Judgment — but Michael Sean Winters has reminded us of the Second Coming. Nothing in the Bible says the Second Coming would be the end of the world!

Jesus came the first time when Jews were becoming terribly divided. Rome had invaded and was completely disrupting Jewish way of life. People didn't know what to do. Then Jesus came — not the military leader men expected to expel the Romans. He gave us no commandment except "to love one another as I have loved you." A servant leader. We needed the foresight of God to find a new way. Jesus gave us a new paradigm — a close relationship with a loving God and a church that could go out to the whole world.

Today we're facing an even more difficult future. Revelations is filled with troubling images of destruction — except for one thing — that Jesus will return.

Revelations 19:7 gives us a new paradigm — one that begins in the Old Testament in Isaiah. Jesus accepted women as no man of his time did. They were essential to the survival of the early church. The silencing of women in the church for nearly 2,000 years was foretold and now is ending. Through love we will find the way to peace.

DAISY SWADESH

Farmington, New Mexico

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Michael Sean Winters seems to enlighten any subject he approaches. This piece on coal mining in Appalachia not only clearly presents the tragedy to human life and the planet, but shows the wonderful work being done by priests and religious in the area. He is a joy to read, even on the most sorrowful of subjects!

LYNNE MILLER

Oakland, California

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I certainly hope the documentary "Magisterium of the People" will be available soon here in the U.S. for use by parish social justice groups and others. How energizing to hear from people who are struggling to live the Gospel, not just preach about it.

Climate change is the gravest problem we face today because if we do not change our ways the earth will become more and more unlivable. Coal as a source of energy needs to be phased out as quickly as possible. At the same time, coal miners and their families should receive all the support necessary to sustain dignified and productive lives while Appalachia transitions to an economy independent of the coal industry. They provided the coal which powered our industries and provided electricity and heat for our schools and homes for decades. They deserve our support now.

ED DILGEN

Glenmont, New York

Shifting assets to avoid compensation for victims is outrageous! (Parish roundup: Detroit Archdiocese shifts assets)

How can the church possible do this? Does this sound at all like something that Jesus would do?

No wonder the pews are empty and we can't get young people interested in the church.

ED FLAHERTY

Tewksbury, Massachusetts

Advertisement

Recently, a priest of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee was heavily criticized for a funeral homily in which he purportedly questioned a young suicide victim's eternal salvation.

My guess is that most people failed to read Fr. Don LaCuesta's homily. I did. It is a balanced homily on the truth of the gravity of suicide and the comprehensiveness of God's mercy to the one who ends his life and his or her family. It is nearly impossible to understand how anyone, let alone a veteran journalist like Jesuit Fr. Thomas Reese could come to any other conclusion. It is equally disappointing that the Archdiocese of Milwaukee failed to adequately support their priest.

Funeral preaching is more art than science. Ideally, the preacher will address the specific pastoral needs of the family and their guests. This requires a level of sensitivity which not all possess by nature but which can be learned. Perhaps LaCuesta needs to do so. However, based on the words of his actual homily it is clear that he knows the seriousness of suicide and God's mercy and compassion to the victim and their families.

(Fr.) DAVID P. BEGANY, SSJ

New Orleans, Louisiana

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Jesuit Fr. Thomas Reese is right. But only if real religion is practiced. If it is unifying, healing, and uplifting to the human spirit, it is real religion.

I am a survivor of clergy sexual abuse when I was a young adolescent. I have been in and out of the Catholic Church and been a contemplative practitioner of Zen Buddhist meditation and Christian contemplation. At age 70, what I understand is the inner experience of Christ which real religion can open us to, is the authentic healer of the human soul.

Now more than ever the Catholic Church is needed as a vessel for the healing power of the touch of Christ in the human soul, personally and collectively in our world. The preoccupation with power and control and obsession with rule making and rule imposition gets in the way of this mission. Pope Francis understands this, the Jesuits understand this. Let's make it happen.

BILL RYAN

Salem, Oregon

***

I always look forward to Jesuit Fr. Thomas Reese's columns. And I invariably agree with what he has to say. But in his column where he lambasts Fr. Don LaCuesta for his reported homily at a funeral of a young man, Reese blundered. Badly.

Based on "news reports," Reese labels LaCuesta a bad priest. He asserts that "(p)riests like LaCuesta show why Pope Francis is having such difficulty in reforming the church." It seems to me that this judgement is both baseless and grossly unfair.

Reese notes that "suicide is clearly against Catholic teaching" and quotes the following passage from the Catholic Catechism: "We should not despair of the eternal salvation of persons who have taken their own lives. By ways known to him alone, God can provide the opportunity for salutary repentance."

I have read online the purported text of LaCuesta's homily. Based on that text his message was *precisely* in accord with the catechism, as quoted by Reese. In his homily, LaCuesta identified with the pain and anguish felt by the family of the deceased young man, and time and again he insists that God is merciful and that he shows his mercy and love in ways beyond our understanding. Contrary to Reese's assertion, LaCuesta was not in error vis-vis the catechism.

The loss of a life by suicide causes profound grief and sorrow, and our sincere and deepest sympathy goes out to the family and friends of the deceased young man.

And we join LaCuesta in commending his soul into the care and protection of our almighty and merciful God.

But I fear that Reese has unjustly and grievously wounded his fellow priest, unwisely relying only on unconfirmed news reports. LaCuesta is not a bad priest. If, in hindsight, Reese agrees, he may wish to publicly apologize to LaCuesta so that at least that wound may begin to heal.

CHRIS VENNIX

Melbourne, Australia

I just finished reading the article "The sky is falling and media help it fall" by Phyllis Zagano. I'm completely in agreement with the author and have been aware of this negative media for some time now.

I think a "counter reformation" is the best defense for the times. Media could write about the small-town America Catholic parishes' good works, but I'm not sure if the biased public would be interested in reading a "good" story. If the secular public knew about the positive wonderful works of the Catholic Church right in their own neighborhood, they may have a shift in perception.

I belong to a very busy parish in a small upstate New York town. When I first started to volunteer for the Christmas program five years ago, I was amazed out how many gifts were given out to the community. On the Facebook page for our parish at St. Joseph Catholic Church, you can read about the Christmas program — "Thanks to the incredible generosity of our parishioners, 92 families (230 children and 15 parents) and 93 nursing home residents received gifts through St. Joseph's Christmas Presence program. Nearly $5,000 in gift cards and cash were also donated, which enabled us to purchase all missing items and to give each child $10 in gift cards in addition to their present."

That is just one example of a "good" story. So many people are jaded these days because of the media and our political atmosphere, the people need some refreshing new energy to help them though this time. Maybe NCR can lead the way?

RITA TOOHEY

New Paltz, New York

Thank you for this uplifting article. (A rabbi and a sister suggest a Judeo-Christian New Year's resolution) What a wonderful and down-to-earth way to begin a New Year. Instead of resolutions for weight loss and more exercise or other promises for the body, we are encouraged to make an effort — one that is very doable — to embrace a way that will be a spirit of positiveness using the Word.

Your descriptive sample of how negatively words are used in our society lately should be enough for anyone who is tired of social media, media in general and face to face people's ugly conversations written or oral, to seek and want a change to this effect.

I will make this a daily promise and encourage others to do this also.

Thank you again because though it sounds simple, an honest effort and consistent will is needed. God bless.

(Sr.) CELESTE HUPERT, CSFN

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

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