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by NCR Staff

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Some big news came out of the Vatican this month. First, Pope Francis issued new laws for the Catholic Church on the investigation of clergy sexual abuse May 9, mandating that all priests and members of religious orders worldwide are obligated to report any suspicions of abuse or its cover-up. The very next day, Francis met with members of the International Union of Superiors General, handing over the report of the Vatican commission studying the history of women deacons in the

Catholic Church. Commentary followed from NCR's Jamie Manson and Phyllis Zagano , one of the members of the commission. Following are letters to the editor from NCR readers regarding both events. The letters have been edited for length and clarity.

As I believe it is important to consult the traditions of the Roman Catholic Church in regard to an issue like allowing women to become deacons, I also believe there is another perspective to consult. That is what is taking place in the church today and the lack of women in leadership positions in the church.



Women are leaving and others are not coming because of this. Vatican II invited us to read the signs of the times. This call for women to be in leadership positions in the church is a crying need. Let's do it before more women leave!

MARK T. SCANNELL

Minneapolis, Minneapolis

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If the pope is infallible, I cannot understand why this issue has to wait so long. I am sure that Jesus' teaching is all that is necessary for making that decision.

The alternate orthodoxy of the Franciscan order seems to be the best essence of Catholicism. The church is in trouble today because it is so rule bound that it forgets the flow of divine love to every part of creation.

The pope took the name Francis because of his devotion to the saint. Maybe now, he needs to take on the persona of St. Francis.

JULIE DAMERON

Greensboro, North Carolina

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Ordinary intelligence suggests that when options are equally valid, the choice of which to follow is determined by a "toss of a coin" or impelled by a series of considerations summarized as: "what is the right thing to do, here and now." Or, it might be by ideological bias that renders integrity irrelevant.

Assuming that it is "unclear," the "antecedent" argument is actually liberating to "do the right thing." Right? Moreover, if "antecedent" were determinant, there would be no priests, only wandering former fishermen speaking doggerel Latin, shaking dust from their sandals as they declare the end of time.

Every item of rationale for the exclusion of women from full sacramental and institutional participation is contrary to reason, is unjust, unethical, uncivil and is, from a dispassionate observation, the expression of a perversion called misogyny.

If the likes of Burke, Bannon, Benedict and the alt-right allied pseudo traditionalists insist on twisting fidelity to Jesus into a neo-medievalism, what more appropriate time for the papacy to declare the church as more fully faithful to Jesus in the real and needy world.

DENNIS MACDONALD

Bedford, Nova Scotia

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Societies used to accept as natural the sexual division of important social organizations. Today, now that education and freedom from housework have given women time, health and energy, we have all kinds of opportunities to flourish on the world stage. We can sit on the Supreme Court or become America's president. We can fight in wars and play national sports. We can wash the feet of the poor and feed

the hungry without anyone's permission.

So why do Catholic women scream at Pope Francis because he won't include women in his failed, mitred organization of preening and self-importance? I mean, look at what a perverted sexual tragedy those vaunted male egos have visited on so many helpless youths. Surely we women can do better than that. God created us, male and female, as co-equals intended to live in very different psychological realms.

MARGARET MOORRE

Portland, Oregon

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Phyllis Zagano seems to ignore (or be ignorant) of the evidence that the "widows and virgins" rituals are continued among the Carthusian Nuns for reading the Gospel and some of the Cistercian/Trappist abbeys of women, and also some historically old Benedictine abbeys. The modern ritual for the Consecration of Virgins found in some dioceses usually leaves out the relics of the past but it does still strongly insist on the Divine Office. It is a worthwhile study to find and see the historical developments over the centuries of these rituals.

Another interesting clue is in the pontifical from before Vatican II where the consecration/coronation of a Catholic monarch has a ritual — the present Queen of England was crowned using a variant of this

ritual at Westminster Abbey. She was anointed, prayed over and clothed as a deacon in the service of the church — in her monarchical role. Of course, nowadays she is the only ruler alive to whom this was

done — even in its Anglican historical variant. But it did happen.

(Fr.) PHILIP SANDSTROM

Brussels, Belgium

Cardinal Daniel DiNardo's welcoming of the papal norms on clergy sexual abuse as a "blessing that will empower the church … to bring predators to justice [regardless

of] rank" is a sad commentary on the state of the American church.

The norms simply require church officials to adhere to civil law and moral principles forbidding sexual abuse. For the bishops, in particular, to feel the need for special directives from Pope Francis to comply with human decency suggests a deep-seated insensibility. The absence of determination of the hierarchy to understand and wipe out all forms of their abusive actions and inactions is often evident.

For example, one bishop has been under siege in his own diocese. Five years ago, 10 priests in this bishop's diocese wrote a letter to the papal nuncio stating that this bishop rules by fear, intimidation, shaming, bullying, blasphemous language, and despotic demands that have repeatedly scandalized clergy and laity. This letter has had no impact in stemming this abusive behavior; continuing public outcry is ignored. The U.S. bishops, however, did respond ironically by electing this brother bishop as their chairman of the Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development. It is difficult to imagine that the frequent pronouncements of this bishop on justice issues would be given consideration by any public officials in light of his personal record of unjust action.

The church has lost its moral leadership in the public forum by its failure to act forcefully against all forms of abuse unless faced with overwhelming pressure.

WILLIAM G. GRAY

Sanibel, Florida

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Where is the mandatory involvement of the laity? We should have mandated reporting to civil authorities, unless such do not exist as remedies.

Since October, my husband and I and a few parishioners at our church have been wearing white to Mass to symbolize the need of the church to purify itself of sexual abusers and their protectors now. The white also symbolizes our intention to insist that our church finally stop clerical sexual abuse.

Looks like this wearing of white, and perhaps much more kinds of involvement will be necessary for years to come.

As Catholics, we do not choose to walk away, but we cannot rely on the clergy to police itself.

REBECCA HURST

Hanson, Massachusetts

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