News
Opinion



by NCR Staff

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

June 7, 2019
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

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 April 2019. If you want to respond to an article published in NCR, follow the steps listed at the end of this post.

As a lifelong Catholic, albeit a disgruntled cradle Catholic, I was very interested in Heidi Schlumpf's article on theologian Brian Flanagan's call for a "humble church."

I very much agree with the principle of Flanagan's view but, I am not sure how this would be accomplished in today's hostile environment.

The church is doing battle with itself. It seems to be the hierarchical leadership against the lay people of God. I'll be the first to admit that I am not always humble when it comes to clergy sexual abuse in the church. I get very angry when I hear survivors tell their stories. They are heartbreaking stories. I direct my anger at the bishops, cardinals and even the pope who have procrastinated long enough on making decisions that will bring about real, practical changes in the manner in which these abuses are addressed. I share the frustration of the lay survivors of the pope's commission that has disbanded.



But, I guess we are supposed to be building bridges. As an advocate for SNAP, I see it firsthand. The priests, bishop and many lay faithful think it is all about money. And if they don't defend the church in court, they will go broke. We need to find a way to sit down together and find a solution that works for both sides. Let's keep the lawyers out of it and act like Christians.

JIM McCONNELL

Weatherby Lake, Missouri

***

Thank you to NCR for publishing this speech. They are words we all need to hear — a call to the core of our church.

For Brian Flanagan, I say from my perspective as an 80-year-old Catholic, "Amen!" Your wisdom echoes that of Fr. Edward Joseph Flanagan in its timeliness and timelessness. His cause is in step one of the Roman phase. His work was only with young boys. He is diocesan priest with an impeccable record with youth; a model we certainly need at this time.

You have the gift of words of the great Founder of Boys Town who advocated such unheard of topics as the rehabilitation of prisoners in the mid-1940s, a program now being practiced in some prisons at least. Keep up the good work and may NCR continue to spread it.

SHARON NELSEN

Sorrento, Florida

Phyllis Zagano's article "Look up at the altar, where are the women?" hit the bull's eye! I have felt the same sickening feelings for so long. I'm the only member of my family still attending the Catholic Church. My sister joined the Episcopal Church. My husband, daughter and son just quit altogether over the treatment of women. They don't understand why I keep going. I avoid ordinations and special diocesan services for same reason: all the men are parading in their glory while the women are in the back or basement preparing the feast.

I find it hard to pray for vocations, because it's all focused on the men. I applaud those Easter homilists who dare to mention Mary Magdalene, the forgotten first evangelist.

Thank you Zagano for your brave journalism. Keep it coming!

GRETCHEN BETTS

St. Petersburg, Florida

***

"Testosterone-fueled [and infused] liturgical symbolism" is the best phrase I have yet found to describe my deep problem with much of Catholicism (and indeed much of the current expression of Christianity).

Beyond the scandals, beyond the magisterium, beyond the corruption, beyond patriarchy and hierarchy. Beyond issues — directly to the heart of my relationship with the divine.

ADRIENNE KELLER

Charlottesville, Virginia

***

I was bemused when Phyllis Zagano mentioned St. Francis having been called to renew the church. I have just completed Holy Week in Assisi and I can assure you the women are as missing in liturgies in Assisi as they are in my home town of Melbourne, Australia.

Not one woman had her feet washed on Holy Thursday in the Basilica. There were no women readers or special ministers — not even the nuns of which there are thousands in Assisi got a gig! Yes, even in Assisi they are invisible.

MARIE BROWN

Carnegie, Australia

***

Allowing women to be deacons does not go nearly far enough for women's inclusion in ministerial and leadership roles. In fact, if it comes to pass, it will be but a stopgap measure intended to bypass women's ordination to priesthood: a bone tossed to quiet them.

I find the whole issue to be demeaning of women and condescending toward them. I say, "priesthood or nothing."

REGINA SCHULTE

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

I read the first installment of the three-part series by Jesuit Fr. Thomas Reese on abuse.

I'm saddened by the absence of a much needed fourth part. We must focus on the abused and I understand that. And the leadership's inability to adopt accountability and transparency remains an ongoing scandal.

But there's one more part to all of this that save for some generic statistics, I think remains under reported. That's the effect of this whole scandal on the faith of Catholics (and frequently, ex-Catholics). I think that in many ways, it's this piece of the overall story that bears the biggest threat to the future church. In fact, I would argue that this is ultimately that point on which the future of the church hinges.

There would be precious few parents, worldwide, of all faiths (and no faith) who don't know almost instinctively that the innocence, and vulnerability of children must be protected. In an era where society is arching it's back against sex trafficking of minors, the perception of the bishops is pretty easily thrown into a mental bin very close to the bin where we place sex traffickers.

It's not lost on many of us that bishops continue to keep women from ordination and relegated to relatively minor positions in the church, even as they apologize to them for abuse of their children. A crack has broken that seamless faith and we're left to ask ourselves how many other things the church wants us to believe can be trusted?

FRED KEMPF

Dallas, Texas

***

Popes Benedict XVI, John Paul II and like-minded might argue that the decline in abuse results from a return to more rigorous regulation and "holy" fear of exposure. Benedict's response to the report on abuse in Ireland was a return to the "traditional markers" of Catholicism. While "rosary" and sacraments were referenced, the underlying edict is a rigid adherence, guilt, fear and the mutually reinforcing "virtues" of control/compliance.

This is not only the solution to sexual abuse according to the ultra-traditionalist and the compliant, it is, to them, the very core of Catholicism.

Sadly, Jesuit Fr. Thomas Reese's three dimensions of the crisis seem to be consistent with "that" kind of medieval Catholicism.

Let's face it, the church has always placed "child" at the center: "suffer the children"; "childlike" observance and subservience; the "child" Jesus, even a "children's crusade." Inappropriate use is abuse, sexual and otherwise.

Number two, bishops have always been "accountable." It's the "how" and "whom to" of institutional self-service that has allowed and fostered a collaborative blind eye and tolerance of sexual and a wide-range of abuses.

Let's face it three, "transparency" is whatever the controlling cadre decrees. Hierarchy, clergy and parishioners knew. It was no secret. So, "transparency" is an absurdly analogous term that can fit the perspective of those who exercise control.

It might just be that Reese, like so many of us, is doing the new math with an old math mind. Without a fundamental reformation, the quilt will simply be turned over again.

DENNIS MacDONALD

Bedford, Nova Scotia

Thirty-three thousand words in Pope Francis' exhortation on the youth without a significant proposal!

Ask what is being done about the crisis the church is in and this document will be cited. As usual, pretend to do something while actually doing nothing.

This whole thing is about keeping the hierarchy out of jail while waiting out the laity. More people will see the futility of hope for reform and walk away.

JOHN BARBIERI

Delray Beach, Florida

In his recent comments on anti-Semitism, Michael Sean Winters returns to his idea that anyone criticizing the government of Israel must be anti-Semitic. He has reiterated this when the criticism is directly linked to Israeli-Palestinian and BDS issues. I question his knowledge of historical Judaism in Europe, the reasons and violence that went into the creation of Israel causing the displacement of thousands of Palestinians. The name Palestinians was a relatively new name for the Arabs, both Muslim and Christian, who lived there from the beginning of Christianity and from the foundation of Islam.

I am a retired associate professor of Middle East history at a small liberal arts college. Over 90% of my students knew nothing about Judaism or Islam. It's impossible to teach the history and culture of the Middle East without knowledge of Islam and Judaism.

Israel was founded as a democracy. Little free speech was given to the Palestinians. Yes, there are the old anti-Semitic tropes which now are totally turned against Muslims. There is nothing anti-Semitic about divesting from Israel when it violates international law. The blockade of food, medicines and other necessities to the Gaza Strip punishes those who are forced to live under Hamas who can be brutal to their own people.

I suggest Winters educate himself on the late 19th and the entire 20th century history of this conflict and on America's refusal to allow Jewish refugees to enter our country during World War II. We turned back their ships and a great many ended up back in Europe to face death. Winters is selectively conflating criticism of the government of Israel with anti-Semitism — nothing could be further from the truth.

MARY JO MURRAY

Tiffin, Ohio

Thank you for your coverage of the tragic meeting at Star of the Sea school and parish.

I am a parent of children at a neighboring school, St. Anne's. At the recent St. Anne's talent show, some parents from Star of the Sea were there to check out the school for their kids. They said they were devastated by the recent events and took issue with some of the coverage of the meeting and surrounding events.

One thing they mentioned was that they were unhappy that NCR's extensive quotation of Marcus Quintanilla on people's behavior at the meeting, since Quintanilla himself was not present and they judged his quoted statements to not be true. All of the parents I spoke with were present at the meeting.

I suggested they write NCR to request a correction of the coverage, but they said they were too sick at heart to write.

All the parents said they were fine with the curriculum changes, but that it was the pastor's leadership style that drove them away, particularly his "scare tactics" and obsession with prestige and purity. The quick decline of such a flourishing school will have many terrible consequences, but they were most saddened by the impression the pastor's actions would leave on both Catholics and non-Catholics involved. One said, "People will think this is what God wants or what the Church wants. But this is not what God or the Church want. It's what the pastor wants."

I hope and pray the school may be saved in the coming years.

MARK MILLER

San Francisco

Wow. A real no-holds-barred article on our outgoing Archbishop Wilton Gregory.

We in the archdiocese of Atlanta have had our prayers answered. We do pray for the faithful in the Washington, D.C., area though.

The complaints about Gregory or Notre Dame University's bowing to President Barack Obama have zero to do with race, zero.

Their policies, particularly where they bang up against church teaching are the problem. "Race" is the red herring dragged out with these guys in lieu of actual debate.

J. MURRAY TARTER

Blairsville, Georgia

In Michael Sean Winters' article, "May the renewed religious left avoid the religious rights' mistakes," he states "focus on sexuality has resulted in a deeply regrettable and disproportionate fixation with homosexuality, a fixation found on both sides of the partisan divide. (Abortion, also a central focus of the U.S. church, is an issue of human rights for most Catholics, not a sexual fixation.)"

I suspect Winters and I agree on much but this statement, at best, is confusing; at worst, it is misleading. He has only reinforced his very point — that many start with partisan ideology rather than Catholic social justice.

For almost 50 years, U.S. Catholic hierarchy have pursued a failed campaign aligned with the Republican Party and Evangelical Christians that most experts would call pro-birth rather than anti-abortion. It is more a fixation than any principled stand on human rights.

The public overwhelmingly want consistent and humane laws dealing with abortion (reject either extreme).

Yes, as Winters repeatedly states, Democrats have become pro-abortion in reaction — I would argue that without the Republican partisan push, this would not be happening.

I suspect that for significant parts of the U.S. Catholic Church, abortion is neither a sexual fixation nor a human rights question.

WILLIAM DeHAAS

Dallas, Texas

Advertisement

***

I have been reading for some time the NCR. Amongst the reasons why I read your articles, is that you normally have a very fact-based view about many matters. One of them has been abortion. Although your editorial line is clearly against abortion, I have not read in your pages some of the rabid nonsense I have seen elsewhere ... until now.

Michael Sean Winters, and others, have been misrepresenting the recent Reproductive Health Act in New York as one which allows abortion up until the moment of birth. This is a specious interpretation of the law, and for what? If one wants to debate the meaning of "health" within the law, one should do exactly that — debate the facts — and not conjure up scenarios where an obstetrician would kill a 42-week fetus. One can (very fairly) debate whether the law is written reasonably, and if it addresses some of the criticism. As a pro-choice person, I am very open to this. What I cannot accept is lying. These misrepresentations are lies.

You are an excellent publication, with a great deal to offer to those who either remain Roman Catholic, or who have decided to depart the church for another denomination. You are better than this. Don't fall for facile lies and misrepresentations.

ANDREA ALBERT

Brooklyn, New York

NCR's piece by Mark Piper, "The church that raised me rejected me," fails to distinguish the difference between people and behavior. The church officially welcomes and embraces all LGBTQ people and teaches its members to respect and include them.

At the same time, the church teaches that all sexual activity — thoughts, words and actions — not exercised within a valid Catholic marriage and not open to the possibility of procreation is forbidden. I believe that eliminates just about all of us. So, if straight Catholics and hetero-married Catholics have been categorically ignoring the church's teachings and in good conscience managing to find a comfortable, active spiritual home in the church, it seems to me that LGBTQ Catholics can do the same.

They just may have to shop around a little.

PAUL BOUDREAU

Portland, Connecticut

I was moved by Christian Mocek's resurrection stories. They speak to each and every Catholic in these chaotic, divisive times. We've been living one Good Friday story after another on abuses from our church.

Pope John XXIII had it right; we must be constantly mindful of the changing times because change is here to stay. We are a people dominated by rules and laws steeped in control rather than the love preached by Jesus. Pope Francis is cognizant of the hurt emanating from an institution presumably built on a foundation of love one another. If ever there was a time to build a resurrection story for and by the people of God, it is now.

Our times, enveloped in negativity, blame seeking, violent rhetoric inevitably becoming violent behaviors, challenge the common good. We are in a global explosion on a cosmological level as we learn it is bigger than we ever knew. These times challenge us everywhere: socially, politically, educationally, legally, medically, scientifically and morally.

I dream of a time when Catholics view these transformative times through a new lens, a lens of faith, intention and love where they understand their Baptismal rights

and responsibilities to recognize our faith as our connectivity, our lifeline to discernment, peace and community. I dream of a time when Catholics recognize that their salvation is in their own hands obedient to Gospel teaching and Jesus' example.

We are indeed an "Easter people and Alleluia is our song"; what a world we have the potential to create for our children and theirs by seeing these times as a catalyst to become new creations.

JANET W. HAUTER

St. Charles, Illinois

I would respectfully caution Franciscan Fr. Daniel Horan about politicizing Good Friday with homilies about the death penalty. I fully support the church's teaching on the right to life — from conception to natural death — but I would be offended and even angry if I heard this discussion at church on Good Friday.

For many, social doctrine is so firmly cemented with their faith that it is not only one but sometimes supersedes it in importance. If that is who they are, if that is who God made them to be, I not only accept it, I am grateful for it. That fire, determination and commitment is so needed in keeping important social teaching front and forward.

However, Good Friday for me (and I think most Christians) is a day of deep sorrow, reflection and personal commitment to Jesus. Although there are communal services, most of us also look for an hour or two spent in quiet meditation, silent listening to what God would tell us. To hear a homily about the death penalty and our responsibility as Catholic Christians to oppose it would profane the day.

There are special days in our spiritual lives that we treasure for the traditional spiritual meaning that we are given: Christmas, Good Friday, Easter; I would even add Thanksgiving. Not only do I think it a mistake to mess with those traditions, I believe it would actually counter the intent.

MARY FLANAGAN

Arlington Heights, Illinois

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts and ideas, reactions and responses to letters@ncronline.org. The editor will collect them, curate them and publish a sampling in Letters to the Editor online or in our print edition.

We cannot publish everything. We will do our best to represent the full range of letters received. Here are the rules:

- Letters to the editor should be submitted to letters@ncronline.org.
- Letters to the editor should be limited to 250 words.
- 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.
- If the letter refers to a specific article published at ncronline.org, please send in the headline or the link of the article.
- 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 submission will receive careful consideration.
- Published letters may be edited for length and style.

This story appears in the **Your thoughts** feature series. View the full series.