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

I have appreciated your publication a great deal over the last couple of years, especially its support and care for refugees and immigrants. It has seemed that you

and your readers have supported the Catholic teaching of preferential option of the poor, but the editorial on abortion laws and many of the responses show that is not the case.

The abortion problem is a problem of the heart, not of the law, that is true. Until people's hearts are changed, there will be abortions. But if in a few states the law is finally tilting toward protecting the weakest members of society, the poorest, who literally have nothing, then how can a Catholic protest that? One reader wrote we first need to stop violence against everyone with a heartbeat. Agreed! Let's stop it all, but let's not stop it for everyone but the poorest members of society.

In the editorial, you conflate the approach with the law. You could say the approach is not the best way to persuade people, but it seems a few elected leaders have been persuaded (or people have been persuaded to elect them), so a better editorial now would be to how to change the hearts of people so women in difficult situations won't be tempted to break the law and have an abortion. What could we do to help women and change society so no one would feel like that was their only choice? What can we do to show a law protecting the unborn is a good law?

ANGIE GUMM

Wichita, Kansas

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In all the letters published, not once did I see the word "contraception." It is utterly bizarre to me that when we live in a world with multiple ways to prevent pregnancy, the Catholic Church has failed to spend an ounce of energy on preventing unwanted pregnancy. Essentially the church's position is don't have sex if you don't want to become pregnant. Really?

If we do not tie this conversation to the church's confounding attitudes toward sex, we will never be able to capitalize on the opportunity that birth control presents. The church should be the biggest proponent of birth control everywhere, for women, for men (no one mentions them either), for the rich, the poor, the too young and too old for babies.

ELAINE McINTOSH

Leawood, Kansas

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When last I heard, "Thou shalt not kill" was not optional, and this poses a dilemma for any pro-choice adherent. The pro-choice position conveniently overlooks the reality that all abortions involve two parties: the mother and her unborn. The pro-choice attempt to deny the possibility of the latter's humanity, referring to it as a kind of disposable lab specimen such as a zygote or fetus — "a part of the woman's body."



But science contradicts this position in that the unborn bears a distinctly separate human DNA and merely dwells temporarily within its mother. Naturally pro-choice prefers to consider human only that which is viable, thus reducing humanity to a numbers game. Hence, the "compromise."

Compromise comes easy to any politician pandering to the progressive vote. However, unlike most politicians, people of strict moral conscience adhere to higher considerations. They may be troubled by the concept of an immortal soul. If so, when does God infuse the body with a soul?

It may very well be at conception. And this introduces some troubling moral principles that would be difficult, if not impossible, to compromise: first, the end does not justify the means; second, one must not act with a doubtful conscience. As long as we are uncertain about whether the unborn bears an immortal soul, how can we destroy it — and presume to compromise?

CHARLES BUTERA

East Northport, New York

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Perhaps if we knew the answers to the questions of who should be allowed to be born and who, for so many reasons will not, what a great world this would be. Whose decision should it be anyway? We all, in one way or another, have to be accountable for many decisions we make.

Perhaps it is not a question of legalizing or outlawing abortion but promoting the equality and rights of all regardless of gender.

When we empower women to know they have certain inalienable rights and are protected, supported and valued as equals, the decision about abortion should be theirs. Women's health has always been devalued in comparison to men.

Male entitlement and aggression are often the reason for many unwanted pregnancies. And, male responsibility and accountability is often missing.

Assuring support for families to live a more equitable life could be an answer.

Education from cradle to grave regardless of financial status empowers all.

ANNE HARTER

Belleville, Illinois

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I would like to add another important dimension to the many views your readers provided regarding your editorial.

My dear mother's perspective is a critical part of the discussion of abortion. Mary Carmelita Donohoe Lyons, mother of seven children, a granddaughter of Irish immigrants from Co West Meath, would climb over snow banks to get to daily Mass at her parish church up until two weeks before she died at age 93 in South Dakota.

Mother visited our home in Massachusetts in 1984 shortly after Bernard Law had been installed as archbishop of Boston. In his inaugural address, Law decried pro-

choice women as "the greatest evil of our time." I asked my mother what she thought about the archbishop's charge against women. She snapped her fingers and instantly replied: "Well, they can't have it both ways. You can't deny a woman the right to decide whether or not to conceive and then expect her to live with the consequences." And then, my mother, who not only knew her mind well, but could speak it well added: "I think it's time for those bishops to get off their high horses."

That was very strong language from a devout Catholic mother. I told her that I thought she was a better theologian than any bishop. If my good mother were alive today, I am quite certain she would repeat the same charge to the bishops. It is time to "get off your high horses" again.

ROBERT F. LYONS

Kennebunkport, Maine

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There are so many demonstrations, writings and debates about the abortion issue, but I don't see chastity mentioned.

Fixation on the overwhelming intensity and potentially addictive force of the sexual pleasure has derailed human behavior, making such behaviors as the following to be considered possible, and even desirable — promiscuity, prostitution, fornication, adultery, incest, rape, human trafficking, and many other abuses.

These have resulted in a horrendous train of unhappiness and suffering to such an extent that killing an unborn baby, the most vulnerable and defenseless of all creatures, can lead some people to see it as a good thing to do.

All our actions have consequences and responsibilities. It is wondrous miracle and awesome honor to be a father or mother and together to create and raise a loving family. But it takes integrity and courage to live with a clean conscience.

I hope and pray that more people will be willing to choose to accept and live that challenge.

(Sr.) PAULINE GIRODAT, SSND

Waterdown, Ontario

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Believe it or not, most individuals who identify as pro-choice are not cold-blooded baby killers seeking to advance a culture of death. And guess what? Most individuals who identify as pro-life are not religious bigots and misogynists hell-bent on oppressing women.

Indeed, people of good will are on both sides of this critical issue. After over 40 years of emotional rhetoric and demeaning euphemisms, abortion remains one of, if not the most divisive issues in our nation. Both sides of the debate demonize and dehumanize the other. We prefer to label rather than listen. We prefer to condemn rather than converse.

Pope Francis often talks about "tearing down walls" and "building bridges." Perhaps it is time for pro-choice and pro-life advocates to tear down the wall of derision and build a bridge of dialogue; to tear down the wall of contempt and build a bridge of civility; to tear down the wall of hate and build a bridge of love.

Jesus' command to "love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us" is not some sappy slogan or pious platitude. It is a radical mandate to change our hearts; for only in changing our own hearts can we ever hope to change the hearts of others.

KEITH KONDRICH

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Heidi Schlumpf's article that states that half the U.S. bishops watch Fox News is a bit of a stunner. Bishops are supposed to be aware of the world and watching Fox News, a network which is contrived to present a false picture of what is actually happening in the world, doesn't begin to meet their need.

It is difficult for me to understand how any Catholic bishop, as a person who is supposed to be guided by the Holy Spirit and the Gospel of Jesus, could view receiving their news from Fox News as aiding in that role. I understand that the majority of the U.S. Catholic bishops are conservative, but I really stumble about their commitment to the Gospel when I read that nearly half of them have chosen such a bias source for their news.

JIM COLLINS

Roseville, California

Talking about the Trinity is always an iffy proposition. However, one sentence troubled me. It had to do with pronouns.

Not all "persons" of the Trinity are designated male. The first time the Spirit is mentioned in Genesis, the ending for ruah is feminine. When the spirit is spoken in Greek the name is Sophia. This is 2019. Isn't it about time we begin to recognize the diversity of gender in the Trinity?

PATRICIA J. PICKETT

Ashland City, Tennessee

Pat Marrin's reflection for Trinity Sunday was powerful, an excellent summary of the church's teaching on the Trinity, scriptural and easy to understand without getting caught up in the mathematical formulas of neo-scholasticism.

I have loved that Christmas preface for many years and also used it, proud that I am imitating him, wondering whether perhaps I got the idea from Pat Sanchez, I am sure my genius wasn't original!

(Fr.) NICHOLAS PUNCH, OP

Webster, Wisconsin

I applaud St. Joseph Sr. Christine Schenk's article, "When it comes to church reform, despair is not an option." While acknowledging the crisis in which the church finds itself, Sister Christine rightly turns to the word of God and the power of the Holy Spirit, very aptly showing what it is to have "the mind of Christ," trust in and dependence on God alone.

How many times in Scripture are we told, "Do not fear, do not be afraid"? It is right that we mourn and repent as in the days of Nineveh, for we all have sinned, but that we also believe and rejoice in the love and mercy of our God with whom nothing is impossible. As we face the reality of human weakness in the church and in ourselves, let us commit ourselves to prayer and expectant faith, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.

As in the time of Esther, who knows but that this "crisis" may be used to open the door for a regenerated church to receive untold blessings, becoming ever more refined into God's divine image?

Thank you, Sister Christine, for the second part of your hope-filled and inspiring message that relies on the intervention of the Holy Spirit to effect a radical change within the church.

JOY LALOR

Rush Creek, Queensland, Australia

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Thank you for publishing this encouraging article.

I have one serious disagreement with Sister Christine. She writes:

"What is blasphemy against the Spirit? Simply explained it means refusing to believe in the saving power of God. It is a denial of the very principle (God's power to save) by which sin is forgiven."

While this is an aspect of the sin against the Holy Spirit, it is not the whole. Simply put it would be truer to say that naming what is good evil, and what is evil good is a more accurate interpretation. The reason why such sin cannot be forgiven is that the person/group/community does not recognize the sin and therefore sees no reason to change and promotes/teaches/encourages what is a denial of the very nature of God and goodness. This is far more serious.

However, the grace of God is indeed far greater than human evil and change is possible — herein lies our hope: the God of mercy and compassion wants our transformation whatever our status. The sin of hierarchy needs to be recognized for

what it is (a direct denial of what the Christ taught us and demonstrated to us). Leadership is a very different issue as Pope Francis is focused on demonstrating for those who have eyes to see and ears to hear.

MAEVE RACE

Kenilworth, England

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Despite herculean efforts to the contrary, the cascade of revelations signals that the dark is an incubator for evil and that the sun is beginning to shine. What we are seeing is not new; the light is. So too is the more general attack on values, civility, law and decency.

The light also reveals that dependency on tradition risks losing that very tradition. Even Pope Francis' well intentioned — and maybe strategic — attempt to squeeze a modicum of change within a dominating tradition seems to be failing at best. At worst, its reliance upon pietistic reference is fueling its antithesis.

Defense of "value" based upon sectarian revelation or piety and submission to authority ignoring intelligent discourse on the foundation within a common humanity and reason is devoid of credibility. It yields no platform for dialogue, fosters divisiveness and radical fundamentalism.

Where does hope emerge from then? I can only describe it as in the challenge to re-discover the perspective of the creator. Religion must take a break from preoccupation on its ineffable or, pretending to rule as if it were the ineffable, towards incarnation. The tradition encapsulated in the "war on secularism" — which fuels clericalism and its many abuses — is really a rejection of incarnation, regardless of rhetoric to the contrary.

The hope for the Catholic Church is that it will have sufficient faith to reverse its detachment and, like the creator, embrace humanity and reason based on reality to become their champion. For me it is also the hope for humanity.

DENNIS MacDONALD

Bedford, Nova Scotia

As a concerned Catholic, reader of National Catholic Reporter, and a graduate of Villanova and Georgetown Universities, I read the article by Massimo Faggioli with great interest. It is overflowing with important observations which must be thoughtfully considered by those who love and revere "the church," the people of God.

I applaud NCR for publishing this provocative statement and I ask that you continue to bring such competent intellectual discourse to your readers, who are concerned, though not adequately competent, to enter into the debate. We have a vested interest in the outcome.

JOSEPH H. KEFFER

Murphy, North Carolina

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I appreciate the publication of Massimo Faggioli's talk given at the Catholic Theological Society of America. I substantially agree with him, but hesitate to accept the suggestion that academic theology did not respond quickly or forcefully enough to the sexual abuse scandal. What Faggioli forgot to mention was that around the same time the scandal escalated Catholic moral theologians were being monitored, investigated, called to task, and in a number of cases, dismissed from their teaching positions.

I expect that most Vatican II inspired moral theologians knew that one of the reasons why the church was so inept in dealing with the scandal was because the official teaching about sexual ethics badly needed to be overhauled and completely rewritten. A different, more humane sexual ethics would also unmask the myth that celibacy is some kind of a trademark of holiness. That is (one of the things) that we needed in the post-conciliar church, but it was never allowed to happen after *Humanae Vitae* was forced upon us and became a touchstone of orthodoxy during the pontificates of Pope Paul VI's successors.

There were outstanding examples of courageous scholarship in the field, such as Mercy Sr. Margaret Farley's *Just Love* (2006) and Todd A. Salzman and Michael G. Lawler's *The Sexual Person* (2008). Authors like these attempted to lead the way, but the Vatican's negative response to publications like these served as a warning to others not to question the status quo. The need to rewrite the whole of theological

ethics is still before us.

JOSEPH A. SELLING

Brussels, Belgium

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Massimo Faggioli writes about institutional church and Catholic theology and theologians as separate entities.

Institutional church is failing for many non-theological reasons, (abuse, governance, clericalism, etc.) but ultimately, I believe, because its theology is outdated and irrelevant.

To survive, they both must change.

JOHN CHUCHMAN

Central Lake, Michigan

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The article by Massimo Faggioli calling Catholic universities and their theological faculties to become more engaged in the life of the church begs the question as to who has a real voice that matters in the Catholic Church today.

The rigid orthodoxy of the papacies of John Paul II and Benedict XVI put a halt to any doctrinal development. The need for new insights into our read of the natural law (how we define our human nature and right conduct) has been obvious since the overwhelming rejection of the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* in 1968. Yet, it was not until 2009 that the International Theological Commission took up a consideration of the natural law, only to restate it unexamined. But contraception and homosexuality cannot be evaluated as to their mortality by the standards that appeared pertinent more than 75 years ago.

I agree with Faggioli that our Catholic universities must speak up for what is our true faith conviction, that we are all children of God and are called to love (and care) for each other as we seek to know the truth.

SYLVESTER BRETSCHNEIDER

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Your editorial "Francis treats church's internal 'sickness' " is on point. It seems Pope Francis is aware that the immutability of God does not filter down to the all-too-human hierarchy of the church. The church needs constant reform through self-critique. He invites disagreement through respectful dialogue, a synod's true purpose.

In college I learned that groupthink is a theory of communication espoused by psychologist Irving Janis in which people seek to conform and achieve consensus while believing in the righteousness and invincibility of their group.

Thankfully, our church, in spite of all its problems, professes a come one, come all approach to community. All are welcome. However, the minute we start fostering an equality in which some are more equal than others, such as a hierarchy, we have thrown the spirit of Jesus' message out the window.

Could the poor we'll always have with us mean the sinners? Could that be part of the poverty Jesus was talking about? May I respectfully suggest to Francis a hermeneutics where the Good Samaritan was a capitalist? After all, he footed the inn's bill.

Francis describes himself as a sinner. As a servant he welcomes dissent. Could it be he knows about the horrible consequences of groupthink?

PETE SUAREZ

Miami, Florida

Advertisement

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All I can say is thank you for this amazing editorial.

I grew into adulthood during Vatican II studying in a Catholic high school as Pope John XXIII was elected and inspired to call the Ecumenical Council and graduating from a Catholic college just months after the conclusion of Vatican II.

I intensely studied the documents of the council for the next 10 years of my life. I was dismayed beyond belief during the years of Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI as the reforms of Vatican II were systematically dismantled, and repudiated. This was so profoundly disturbing to me that I spent 20 years as an "unaffiliated Catholic" — praying with my pain and dismay at this betrayal perpetrated by these two popes.

I kept trying to find a Vatican II Catholic community where I could belong in integrity. It was only when I read Matthew Fox's article published in NCR just before the election of Francis, in which he dared to declare Pope John Paul II and Benedict XVI as "schismatic" — because they were working at reversing the teachings and practices of Vatican Council. In this article Fox reminded me of what I knew: an Ecumenical Council constitutes the highest authority in the Roman Catholic Church — and anyone who is not in communion with the declarations and teachings of the Ecumenical Council is "out of relationship" with the church and contributing to a "break off" church.

This brought me to my senses. This is why I have been unable to participate fully and with a clear conscience in the Catholic Church under these two popes who were proudly and systematically reversing the teachings and practices discerned, decided upon, and promulgated by the Second Ecumenical Council. Weeks later, when Pope Francis was elected, I knew I was being invited to come home to my spiritual home.

JULIE MURRAY

Cincinnati, Ohio

I read with interest "Bishops to discuss married priests." Seems like Jesuit Fr. Thomas Reese covered a lot of ground.

I remember reading an article in the Alaskan Shepherd (publication of Fairbanks, Alaska, Diocese) a few years back that the Native Americans males are willing to be deacons but not priests as being celebrant is so contrary to their culture.

Of course, having met several women who feel certain they have been called to the priesthood, I wonder if the Holy Spirit doesn't have more inclusivity in mind.

ADELAIDE LOGES

Bothell, Washington

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What about using the same model for married priests that is used for permanent deacons in the church? A married priest would be assigned to a parish but would support his family by means of a secular job.

Just as the permanent deacon serves the people of his assigned parish, the priest would do the same with the added benefit of being able to say Mass and perform the sacraments limited to a priest.

(Deacon) JOSEPH KEST

Maumee, Ohio

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I am glad to see that the bishops of the Amazon are putting more importance on pastoral need for the sacraments and the needs of their people rather than tradition. Are you listening bishops of the United States?

ROBERT MARZULLO

Shoreline, Washington

I am disappointed in Ken Briggs' review of the Frank Fromherz biography on Archbishop Raymond Hunthausen.

He misconstrues how the archbishop approached his commitment to peace. He pejoratively imputes motives for the extent of that commitment. He mentions virtually nothing of how the archbishop implemented Vatican II's call for shared responsibility and his support for lay leadership in the church.

He summarily dismisses how effective he was in his retirement, falsely stating it was spent "sequestered in a Montana cabin." He attributes the archbishop's wish that Fromherz withhold publishing the book while he was alive to the archbishops "controlling spirit." He makes little reference to the archbishop's effective collaboration with local Protestant and Jewish leaders.

Briggs seems to have an axe to grind: that the archbishop was not more of what Briggs wanted him to be.

The archbishop was who he was. Fromherz's meticulous research amply validates that in every source he cites from our local church and beyond. Too bad Briggs didn't live in the northwest when Raymond Hunthausen did.

We in Seattle are grateful for Dutch, warts and all, and for his humble, straightforward vision, and indefatigable energy that made us the vibrant church we are.

(Fr.) ROGER G. O'BRIEN

Lynnwood, Washington

Regarding the article "History of slaves sold for Georgetown detailed in new genealogical website," about Georgetown Jesuits selling 272 slaves to Louisiana plantations in 1838, this was one of the largest recorded sales of slaves in U.S. history.

Over a five-year period, 1838-1843, the Georgetown Jesuits sold 314 men, women and children slaves, comprising 49 families. As an additional note — my PhD alma mater, St. Louis University, was started by Jesuits using the labor of slaves in 1823.

In 1865, the 13th Amendment eventually resulted in the end of slavery in the U.S. In 1866, in response to criticism of the Catholic Church's ownership of slaves, Pope Pius IX proclaimed, "It is not contrary to the natural and divine law for a slave to be sold, bought, exchanged or given."

Arguably, the Catholic Church was more involved in human trafficking than any other organization in history.

DANIEL J. KORTENKAMP

Stevens Point, Wisconsin

Jesuit Fr. Thomas Reese is so right that we need to establish trust again in each other. Since there are so many areas where trust has been destroyed, there are some that are very important.

One of these areas is the way we address a priest. We no longer can tolerate that priests are addresses as "father." They are not fathers and have often taken away the important place that real fathers have and should have in families. If we gave that immediate attention, lots of people would be relieved and think about the importance of this change.

We could say reverend priest, but we need not say that. We say mother or father or lawyer or teacher and give a name. We could gladly give you the recognition that you deserve, provided you do a bit of thinking as to how and in what way you represent Jesus's message. As a baptized person, I also represent Jesus in a special way and can do the things that you can do, maybe even better in some areas.

We are not going to change the culture of the priesthood, and clericalism, if we do not do away with the salutation of "father" for priests.

It seems this might be a good place to start to build trust.

ELIZABETH AVERILL-WINTER

Madison, Wisconsin

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