Opinion
Culture

by NCR Staff

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A few weeks ago, NCR published a four-part series by national correspondent Heidi Schlumpf looking into television network EWTN. The series is part of NCR's dive into the effect of money, largely making its way through the expanding and uniquely American non-profit system, on the Catholic narrative both inside the church and beyond. Readers are commenting below on Part One, Part Two, Part Three and Part Four. Letters have been edited for length and clarity.

Thanks for your feature series on EWTN. It is crucial this enterprise be covered, analyzed and encouraged to read the documents of Vatican II.

EWTN is not helpful; and it is not an issue of conservative vs. progressive, it is a matter of balance.



Apart from the apostles, the management and on-camera "talent" at the network appear to believe they have been authorized to interpret and convey revealed truth, thus correcting the errors in Catholic life as many of us lead it. What EWTN actually communicates is a confusing mixture of undocumented superstition (sort of a problem), personal piety (generally not a problem) and antagonism toward the primacy of conscience (a really big problem).

Bishops seem to muster up the "courage" to remove Catholic accreditation from individuals, universities, high schools, politicians and probably local hardware stores and delis, if they thought they could get away with it, that do not support authentic teaching.

Do the math, fellas: it is way overdue for you to pull the "Catholic" plug on EWTN. Do you really not understand you too are in the crosshairs?

(Fr.) EDWARD G. LAMBRO

Paterson, New Jersey

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Years ago, when I first saw EWTN, my reaction was that it was the most outrageous satire that Norman Lear had ever come up with!

Yet, EWTN has become very successful in a way that NCR has not.

NCR might be better off by finding out why EWTN is so successful rather than wasting its time being jealous of it.

JOHN BARBIERI

Delray Beach, Florida

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When I was able to get satellite TV in the late '90s I was happy that I was able to receive the station EWTN. After my parents and brother died, I was searching for spiritual renewal. However, the few times I turned on the daily Mass, I was upset because of the use of Latin. I e-mailed and wrote to the organization but never

received a response. I soon realized that the news part was very slanted and quickly stopped watching.

This huge organization is responsible for pushing the election of the present president.

They are doing severe damage to the church.

MARGARET MEEKER

Williamstown, West Virginia

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Given the documentation by Tom Roberts, Michael Sean Winters, and Heidi Schlumpf in this magazine to even suggest that Tim Busch, Frank Hanna III, Legatus and EWTN association with the neo-libertarian network of the Koch brothers and other multi-millionaires whose business practices clash with all Catholic social teaching as well as most Catholic moral teachings could be anything other than intentional is simply disingenuous.

I am disappointed such a statement made it past the editors.

As I have mentioned previously you need to be linking into any exposure of this so called Catholic network with Jane Mayer's 2016 *Dark Money* expose.

YVONNE ZAROWNY

Qualicum Beach, British Columbia, Canada

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I used to enjoy watching EWTN when Mother Angelica was alive and in charge [as far as I knew]. After Mother Angelica's death, the tone of certain shows seemed to morph into something less than spiritual and more pragmatic, particularly the news shows. I grew to dislike the speech and manner of the news anchors. They were barely distinguishable from any of the major network news shows.

It wasn't long before I stopped tuning in altogether. Occasionally I take a peek at "The Journey Home" but even there, they spend an inordinate amount of time

dwelling on the prior religious experience of the guest and little on the conversion story and its impact on their new life in Christ inside the Catholic faith.

BARBARA NORTON

Honolulu, Hawaii

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Heidi Schlumpf's piece on EWTN is right on the money (literally). Wealthy libertarian capitalists are doing their utmost to purchase the church and influence the body of Christ.

While I used to enjoy some of the devotional offerings on EWTN, I became disgusted at Raymond Arroyo's sneering comments about Pope Francis and stopped patronizing the broadcasts and their increasingly partisan programming. I owe allegiance to Christ and his church, not right-wing politics.

DIANA WEBER

Anchorage, Alaska

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Thank you so very much for this article. You name the names of all the players in this terrible fight that is going on in our wonderful Catholic Church. This is huge. This feels like a struggle to the death, almost.

May God be with Pope Francis and give him the strength to continue bringing our church back (forward) to Jesus. Thank God for Pope John XXIII for starting the ball rolling. And NCR. You are the one shining light in all of the media.

BILL JENNINGS

Simi Valley, California

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I started foaming at the mouth while reading this twisted, nuanced piece of sophistry. The shock value just doesn't seem to wear off for me — whether it's Demacraps or liberal Catholic dissenters. The tone throughout this piece of rubbish is a sly intimation of corruption among wealthy, white, privileged, neoconservative Catholics. Terms such as "manifesto," "wealthy Catholic business leaders," "conspiracy theories," "anti-Pope Francis extremists." The author also hints that Catholics adhering to the faith are "sedevacantises."

NCR's overarching attempt to connect shadowy money, a corrupt catholic non-profit system, EWTN, the Trump White House, puppet publishing companies and a mafia of neoconservative Francis haters would be truly laughable but for the sheer diabolic cunning.

KATHLEEN MECCA

Vestal, New York

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Reading Heidi Schlumpf's article attacking EWTN, I feel I must defend the many good conservative Catholics she has attacked. Likening criticism to schismatic intentions is absurd, as both Church Militant (a radical right-wing Catholic group) and Taylor Marshal (the author of an absurd book which the author uses to legitimize her critique) have both affirmed Pope Francis' legitimacy. What I find more schismatic is calling Pope Benedict XVI's letter a "screed" (he was supportive of Francis and remains in communion with him) and the theology of a canonized saint controversial. While the latter may be true in some camps, I know of no saints whose central theological writings are not accepted by the Holy See.

If the most radical mainstream wings of Catholicism accept the papacy, why is your paper publishing content that stokes the fires of schism? This readiness to rid the church of these critics directly contradict Francis' message of mercy (unless his unconditional love is selective).

Neither side understands that there are malcontents in the church. Church leaders, uncomfortable with the traditionalist leanings of John Paul and Benedict, elected Francis. Prominent Catholics who feel abandoned in their walk of faith now critique him. Despite virtues, Francis has abandoned good people. They entered Francis' papacy seeking guidance but found themselves attacked in the form of thinly-veiled

straw men, and like hurt children, have thrown a fit. Is it not judgmental to call wounded, searching, faithful Catholics blanketly racist, using traditionalist as a dirty word? These people need compassion. Shame on you for withholding it.

E. C. WYSE

Ypsilanti, Michigan

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The papal posse would be better named by that other great U.S. contribution to the administration of justice, the lynch mob. As a British cradle Catholic in my 70s, I am appalled that a TV network lets Raymond Arroyo spill out its immoral vitriol in the name of the eternal word. He displays not only his blatant extreme right-wing bias but also ignorance in latching on to any pretext to justify even torture of prisoners and opposition to any organized response to prevent the destruction of the natural environment as well as to attack the British National Health Service which he has traduced in his vile programs on several occasions.

Of course, only conservative Republicans get a look in on the program and the grossly immoral President Donald Trump got a prime-time interview on it during the presidential campaigns without Hillary Clinton getting a look in. He personally criticized the Vatican even in Pope Benedict XVI's time for seeking some measure of regulation of global financial speculation dismissing it as ridiculous with his trademark smirk. That was the only time I saw him make a retraction of his ignorant remarks. It seems that the whole area of Catholic social teaching which has saintly exponents in Pape John Paul II and Pope Paul VI is anathema to Arroyo and all of the right-wing brigade whom he selects to give the anti-Christian opinions he wants to push.

MICHAEL THOMAS WALSH

Middlesex, England

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Thank you for exposing this right-wing rebellion within the Catholic Church in the U.S. which has been allowed to grow by many Catholic priests. They are now so powerful and wealthy that they will be difficult to deal with. The bishops must act.

(Fr.) JOE MCVEIGH

Enniskillen, North Ireland

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Honestly, must you criticize EWTN? We certainly agree that it carries some programming that doesn't appeal to more liberal/contemporary focused Catholics but our church is big enough for all of us.

I hope you focus on how Mother Angelica was able, with others, to accomplish what even the U.S. bishops' conference was not able to accomplish — a global Catholic network. Our other than Catholic friends do the same, appealing to many approaches to Christianity. I, for one, am proud that our tradition has something as well.

Have you watched? I find that programming on EWTN has grown from its early days and has some Vatican II programming as well and certainly brings us coverage that no other station does.

Let's try to be more positive, NCR. Many of our patients are comforted by having EWTN on our in-house cable TV.

(Sr.) CAROLYN CAPUANO, HM

Canton, Ohio

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I wanted to compliment you and Heidi Schlumpf on the excellent article on Mother Angelica and EWTN. There is one part that I would disagree with, and that is the blanket comparison of Mother Angelica with Fr. Charles Coughlin. It is particularly disturbing in that the comparison is blanket, without any noting of the differences between Coughlin and Mother Angelica, i.e., Coughlin was a vocal pro-fascist anti-Semite, while Mother Angelica decidedly was not.

If you think the portrayal of Catholics in the '30s as suffering masses is in error, I

would suggest a quick review of American Catholic history from the '20s and '30s up to the '60s might be in order, beginning with the murder of Fr. James Coyle on his front porch by E.R. Stephenson for the offense of marrying his daughter to a Puerto Rican in 1921. In the 1930s in some places you still might find the notice in ads for workers "Irish need not apply." In the early parts of World War II, there were members of Congress who pushed the Army to ensure that, when the invasion of Italy took place, that Catholics would be prohibited from fighting there. Everyone knew that once the Catholics reached Rome, they would throw down their weapons, swear allegiance to the pope, and fight against their former comrades.

When you consider how liberal people in power continue to view Catholics, I don't think Mother Angelica's view was and continues to be far off the mark.

JAMES CARROLL

Dubuque, Iowa

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EWTN backing the Trump administration shows they are one issue Catholics, blind to the real world. Now I'd like to see them do a story on what the Bible says about refugees, thuggery, adulterous behavior and the sewing of hatred between parties, countries, allies and enemies.

JACK GOODWIN

Bradley, Illinois

Advertisement

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As a Catholic and Democrat, EWTN, and specifically, the National Catholic Register, have done more to drive a wedge between myself and the church. Democrats are demonized and threatened with excommunication because of their "pro-choice" position on abortion.

This one issue, EWTN programming and National Catholic Register articles continually emphasize while paying lip service or completely ignoring the plight of asylum seekers, the rise of white nationalism, anti-Semitism, gun violence, racism and the results of executive orders eliminating regulations to protect our environment, consumer and employee rights.

Like conservative Fox News, they stand by a narcissistic president with no moral compass, no empathy/decency and that places a monetary value on everything in life. A president who rarely attends church, continually lies, pays for sex and probably cares less about abortion, yet the conservative evangelicals praise and glorify him as the next best thing since Jesus Christ.

I'm glad NCR and many Jesuits, are providing a voice of decent for a church that is more and more influenced by money and extreme religious and political conservatism. This is why I no longer watch EWTN or subscribe to the National Catholic Register and may leave my church.

ROSS R. DAMANTE

Maple Heights, Ohio

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Thank you, Heidi Schlumpf, for bringing to light what is a growing phenomena in the Catholic media world. Your article highlights the increasing infiltration of the right-wing political agenda into the Catholic media.

I suggest you take a peek into the world of Relevant Radio. Before the 2016 election, the station talked incessantly about voting for the candidate who was pro-life. People who called in and were "on the fence" as to who to vote for were guided by the good hosts toward the "correct way" of thinking/voting.

When our current president was elected, I was convinced it was (in part) due to the conservative Catholics and had to stop listening. EWTN and Relevant Radio should

stick to faith and spirituality issues. They certainly don't speak for this Catholic.

PAULA KOWALKOWSKI

Chicago, Illinois

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