Opinion
News



by NCR Staff

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

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

September 6, 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 July 2019. If you want to respond to an article published in NCR, follow the steps listed at the end of this post.

While I concur wholeheartedly with the assertion of the headline, "Cupich: Ending clericalism central to church really being 'field hospital,' " I have to ask "How?"

1) Since the 1980s, Catholics have come to link clericalism with abuse and the real meaning becomes lost in most conversation.

2) Most Catholic magazines, news outlets, blogs etc., address a single element or harm flowing from clericalism, without first setting the stage with a coherent definition — this contributes to the confusion.



3) Draft definition: Clericalism is the presumption and exercise of authority by clergy over laity without foundation.

Reasoned people all agree clericalism results in great harms to both church and laity, especially impacting active Catholics seeking to follow Christ as they practice of their faith.

How to change clerical culture? Is a given that nature abhors a vacuum, to get rid of clericalism there must be something at hand to replace it. Might it be lay leadership?

We laity, especially writers among us, should promote moving decision-making in the Catholic Church out of the shadows, bring in, develop, mentor lay leaders at every level selected from the community, by the community, not by the bishops or even at parish level, the pastor. Many bishops and pastors are more concerned of image than welcoming, encouraging and bringing people to Christ. Examples abound.

JOHN HALLINAN

Anchorage, Alaska

The article, "German church needs spiritual, not just structural, renewal, pope says," brings into sharp focus my main concern regarding the church's response to the abuse/cover-up scandal, namely that we are whistling past the graveyard if we believe that credibility and trust can be restored independent of structural change.

Reform must indeed include the spiritual aspect, an interior realignment toward Gospel values and away from the mindset of privilege, inscrutability and ontological superiority that gives oxygen to our firestorm of a clerical culture. But that alone is insufficient. The communal rage against hierarchical betrayal of Gospel values is not confined to the German church. It now exists universally. The church has placed itself at the threshold of global irrelevance.

We have come a long way in atoning. The creation of new policies and procedures are a welcome sign of accountability and transparency. But policies, procedures and protocols are not enough. We also need structural reform. One area where we need to achieve this is in governance and to do so by adopting a paradigm of co-responsibility between laity and clergy. Such a model was promoted by Pope Benedict XVI in 2012. He was unambiguous that co-responsibility involved much more than cooperation and collaboration. If the will exists at all for bona fide structural change, then adopting such a model will enable and empower the laity to participate in the governance of the church beyond passive deference and toward active ownership.

Are we so entrenched in our present hierarchical understanding of church governance that we fear the whole edifice will crumble if we share authority and decision-making with the laity? If we do so fear then perhaps the whole structure is no sounder than a house of cards.

(Deacon) ROBERT F. COLEMAN

Sydney, Nova Scotia, Canada

With respect to your article, "Napa Institute expands to provide legal, organizational resources to nonprofits," I would suggest that the designation "traditional Catholic" is both misleading and inappropriate for this organization. A better term might be "Catholic in the mold of Vatican I," or, although it is rather technical, "ultramontanist Catholic."

I understand that the term has evolved to refer to movements and organizations that are opposed to Vatican II, Pope Francis and much of contemporary theological speculation. But "traditional Catholic" is a term that should not be used in such a restricted fashion.

BRIAN J. CUDAHY

Bluffton, South Carolina

A thousand thanks for Charles Camosy's robust defense of Pope Francis' faithfulness to Catholic social teaching in the context of the pan-Amazon synod.

For our church to stand anywhere but with the Amazon's endangered people and the extraordinary region they inhabit would be to deny Christ.

I'm deeply concerned about the insidious connections between the Roman Catholic hierarchy and the powerful individuals and corporations that profit mightily from the exploitation of the Earth and her people.

I greatly appreciate NCR's willingness to speak the truth about corruption in the church. I applaud Camosy's piercing observation about German Cardinal Walter Brandmüller's heretical opposition to our good pope.

MARY ELLEN SINKIEWICZ

Boston, Massachusetts

As I read the Bible, Jesus holds us to individual and church body responsibility for care of the poor. What is to stop our churches from creating housing for illegal immigrants and their families? Or renting their own homes to them? It is not a government's role to feed and clothe everyone. It is nice, but not what Jesus teaches.

Not as popular to create one's own church-led programs, is it? Confusing biblical imperatives with feeling bad for people is not where God wants us to be.

MELISA GUNYON

Eagan, Minnesota

I am a daily reader of NCR and have been for many years. I am writing to address "Kamala Harris has big problems in her way to the nomination" by Michael Sean Winters.

I am very disappointed that Winters doesn't seem to care at all about Harris' foreign policy. One would think that one of the very first questions a Christian would ask is how many people around the world would be at risk of having their lives and countries destroyed by the foreign policy of Harris as president or any other prospective candidate.

Of course, this question also affects Americans, since the lives, limbs, and psychological health of our troops may be at risk. Defense spending also impacts us. Yet as Christians we cannot prioritize American lives over the lives of foreigners. Foreign lives matter just as much as the lives of Americans, therefore foreign policy and how it will impact foreign lives ought to be a preeminent concern of any Catholic political commentator.

JEFFREY JONES

Hamburg, New York

***

U.S. Sen. Kamala Harris is not Catholic. She is probably not religious at all. Has President Donald Trump ever been truly religious? How many U.S. presidents have

been Catholic? Does it matter? Can't a non-Catholic and non-religious person be good?

Who is better qualified to truly lead this nation, supposedly a democracy, Trump or and one of the many Democrats looking for that job?

What is the NCR attitude toward Pete Buttigieg, an admitted homosexual, ex-Catholic, now-Episcopalian, because of the Catholic attitude toward homosexuals?

Isn't the NCR trashing the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution by inserting religion over democracy in a supposedly free nation? Just like its current president who is so friendly with dictators like Russian President Vladmir Putin and North Korea's Kim Jong Un and obviously bitterly opposed to all genuinely non-dictatorial leaders?

GILBERT CANTLIN

Berea, Ohio

***

I don't consider Sen. Kamala Harris' questions "anti-Catholic." I am a cradle Catholic, a longtime associate member of the Sisters of Saint Dominic of Tacoma and a Democrat.

I have absolutely no use for the Knights of Columbus. In a neighboring parish, the Knights demanded that a Democratic state senator leave her position as lector because of her support for marriage equality. She happily joined my Jesuit parish where the Knights have never had a branch.

I would be quite happy to volunteer on a Harris campaign and so would most of my friends from St. Leo's.

MARY W. PLANTE

Lakewood, Washington

***

All of the Democrat/socialist candidates have several big problems. They are all abortionists, giving wonderful excuses for murder by pandering to women's rights of control over their bodies. How about women's responsibility to exercise control over their bodies? They already have the right.

None have a plan for creating economic growth other than stealing the wealth of a few and then create more government jobs which in the end simply creates more welfare. Not one of them can explain what they will do when they run out of everyone else's money, or the expected wealth leaves the country. None address the fact that because of their giveaway programs (redistribution of wealth) they have nearly destroyed an entire race of people.

They espouse that the new socialist way of life is a reflection of what Jesus would do and nothing could be further from the truth. Jesus said it is your responsibility to love your neighbor and care for their needs. It is also their responsibility to do the same for you which strengthens your relationship and the community. Jesus never said that Caesar should tax you into oblivion, steal your wealth, and give it to anyone they please without a reciprocal responsibility on the part of the receiver. The state is then responsible for my neighbor and I am not personally responsible for anything except producing for the state which has no soul or conscience.

The givers decrease and the receivers increase and human dignity becomes a thing of the past. What they don't understand or understand all too well: Liberalism = socialism = Marxism = communism.

RICHARD L. WALTERS

Phoenix, Arizona

***

As a black Catholic, I found Michael Sean Winters' rebuke of U.S. Sen. Kamala Harris' alleged "anti-Catholic bigotry" preposterous. The Knights of Columbus may have been a wholesome civic organization once-upon-a-time, but today they are a shrewd political machine, intent on subverting women's moral autonomy surrounding pregnancy and overturning LGBT rights.

The Knights brazenly use their 501(c)8 status to pour money into political contests and influence policy debates, spending more than $10 million in direct anti-choice

and anti-LGBT lobbying since 2014. They divert tax-free resources to advance a political agenda — under the guise of religious freedom — and yet have the gall to cry persecution in response to a straightforward question about their position on key social issues.

Winters conveniently omitted mention of other prominent Knights like Scott Lloyd (who couldn't manage to track migrant adolescents separated from their families but could manage to track their menstrual cycles and lie about it to Congress) and Brett Kavanaugh (enough said).

To criticize the Knights is not to criticize the entire Catholic faith, as Winters would have you believe. Most Catholics reject their extreme stance on abortion and LGBT issues. Harris did the right thing, exercising necessary due diligence to ensure that our jurists can separate hardline religious views from judicial practice. For men like Buescher and Kavanagh seeking lifetime appointments to the branch tasked with safeguarding the religious freedoms of all Americans — not just those of a rich and powerful minority — that's "Constitution 101" and, thanks to Harris, they got schooled.

GLENN NORTHERN

Washington, D.C.

[Glenn Northern is the domestic program director of Catholics for Choice.]

Congratulations to NCR for publishing the superb report of St. William parish in Louisville. Joseph Martos, the author, is a respected theologian, and authority on the sacraments from whom we hope to hear more in these pages.

This article is a "how to" on establishing an active laity with meaningful participation in the responsible operation and decision-making of a Catholic parish. It follows a recent related article advocating the same.

It is our prayer and hope that NCR continues to report on this trend which may well reflect the presence of the Holy Spirit that is sometimes doubted.

JOSEPH KEFFER

Murphy, North Carolina

While I'm sure both the headline, "The Vatican's next Synod of Bishops should focus on women" and the intent of the author is good, I find it striking and quite condescending to women to once again, being considered the object, rather than the subject of any convening such as a synod which is fully in control of men. One would think that a lesson would have been learned by the U.S. bishop's attempt to write a pastoral letter on women, for example.

Has it ever crossed the mind of the fathers of the church that any such effort to bring a true sense of justice and equality to the role of women in the church would be determined by women, with one another, and for one another? It seems that perhaps several centuries of such activity might bring a semblance of balance to the male-only rule of the fathers for the past millennia.

(Sr.) DAWN M. NOTHWEHR, OSF

Chicago, Illinois

***

The idea that the church should focus on women is an excellent one. However, the suggestion of a synod as a means of doing so is shortsighted. Why use a traditional format that by its very composition demeans and excludes women?

We need a new meeting format where women are at least 50% of the voting and working members. Resorting to a synod is just another way of confirming male hegemony over women and our role in the work of salvation.

Also, lay women and not just politically correct religious superiors should be involved in the governance work of the church at all levels if we truly believe that by baptism we are all the same in the eyes of God.

PATRICIA RYAN RECUPERO

Providence, Rhode Island

***

I recently re-joined the church after an absence of 30 years. I knew it was a sick church; what I have since realized is that it is a dying church.

- Daily Mass attendance in our 400-seat church is 12-15 elderly regulars.
- The priest has recently been given charge of two more parishes, with a new priest to help.
- The bishop is requesting parishes find ways to revitalize their congregations.
- Many have left due to the ongoing revelations of scandals within the larger church.

I am told these issues are playing out similarly in parishes across the country. It seems time to institute both ordination of women and voluntary celibacy for clergy.

The crisis in the church is significant, and needs a radical response. I am in hopes that the bishops will give prayerful consideration to how best to ensure the future of this glorious institution, which could truly become vibrant, dynamic, and a light to all people.

JUDITH BALDWIN

Montpelier, Vermont

Thank you for publishing the article on the church workers helping to keep indigenous languages alive. While Fr. Ron MacDonell is interested in the community understanding the scriptures and the sacramental rites of the church, I am not sure that is where one starts in preserving or reviving an indigenous language. We know what Greek culture did to the Aramaic sayings of Jesus, and how scribes interpreted the wholeness of the Jewish scripture into the duality of the Greek culture. Isn't making the scripture clear what the homily is supposed to do: give the community the essence of the gospel and Pauline readings in a language that people understand and can relate to?

I am also a linguist who has worked with indigenous communities to save and strengthen native languages. It is only among the younger generations, the children using the indigenous language in their play, that languages can truly be saved. If he has not seen it, I suggest that MacDonell read Joshua Fishman's (Yeshiva University) speech which was given at the first Stabilizing Indigenous Languages symposium in 1994. Fishman cautions about what to do in restoring indigenous languages, and

when to do it.

ALLENE GROGNET

Washington, D.C.

I am grateful for the journalism of Dan Morris-Young in his coverage of the 2019 Napa Institute conference.

My reaction to one of Morris-Young's highlights from the conference — "We will not attract others to Jesus" unless "manifest in our lives" are "service to the poor and marginalized and the walking wounded in our decadent culture" as well as rigorous sacramental practice." This spoken by George Weigel at the 2019 Napa Institute conference which, as Morris-Young notes, with its "$2,600 per/person registration fee, limits attendance to the 1%" (wealthy elite non-poor and non-marginalized — my emphasis) "who already wield undue influence in the U.S."

Weigel's words seem equivalent to offering a starving person who has no home a happy meal and summer sweater on a wintry night of sub-zero temperatures. Important but, ultimately, vacuous sentiments that regrettably serve only to demean the beauty and sacredness of a deeper sacramental practice rooted in our Lord's teaching in Matthew 25:31-46 and Matthew 19:16-24.

DANIEL FLYNN

Wilton, Connecticut

Advertisement

***

With three other members of the Thomas Merton Center of Palo Alto, on July 25, I drove up to Napa, California, to witness outside the Meritage Resort where the Napa Institute was holding its annual summer conference.

On the street corner outside the resort (escorted off the private property by Meritage security fellows), we engaged with a few participants who were intrigued by our signs: "I smell money not sheep," "Francis, the Pope of Hope," "Celebrate

people priests, not power priests," "Who am I to judge? - Pope Francis," "Unite, don't fight, Support Francis," "Napa Institute gives imprimatur to clericalism."

We heard from one participant that Cardinal Raymond Burke, who gave the luncheon keynote, received a standing ovation for his address that outlined the 40 "Declarations of Truth" released in June by a consortium of cardinals and archbishops "to rein in current widespread confusion concerning Catholic Church teaching."

I am an old lady who came of age during Vatican II and have lived my Catholic life enlivened and sustained by the vision of a welcoming, ecumenical, prayerful church reaching into the margins of society where Christ is found. The Napa Institute is looking backward, closing off those who don't adhere to the "truth" as preserved by the magisterium. Our protest was a tiny effort to shine light into that dark corner.

KAY WILLIAMS

Redwood City, California

***

On July 25, I joined a handful of people, mostly from the Thomas Merton Center in Palo Alto, California, to demonstrate our support for Pope Francis in front of the Meritage Resort & Spa in Napa, California, where the Napa Institute was having its summer conference.

The Institute invites Catholic business and church leaders to participate in "a new renaissance for God and his people." It felt pretty pre-Vatican II to me, including nuns in full habit. We held our signs as Cardinal Raymond Burke was giving his keynote address inside on the clear teaching of the church, which, according to a report from one attendee, was definitely not my kind of church.

I see myself a faithful Catholic even though I support women's ordination, inviting LGBTQ+ persons to share the Eucharist, and do not feel other faiths are a threat to mine. This is not what the Napa Institute espouses. It's not everything that Pope Francis supports either, but when he says that priests should "smell like the sheep," I believe he is supporting a dialogue between the hierarchy and lay people, not a list of mandates that determine who can be called true Catholics.

The registration fee was $2,600 for the four-day conference, waived for bishops. Our signs all supported Francis, but the one that said "I smell money, not sheep," seemed the most apropos.

MARCIE DAHLEN

Santa Rosa, California

***

As a priest and bishop, Cardinal Raymond Burke should be ashamed to attend the Napa Institute, "staged at the elegant Meritage Resort and Spa." What about our preferential option for the poor? As a leader of the Catholic Church, who is supposed to give the rest of us a good example, he should avoid allowing himself to be entertained in such luxury.

CAROL GOODSON

Carrollton, Georgia

***

I always get a healthy chuckle whenever I read Cardinal Raymond Burke's latest screed. It sounds as if he is saying: "Damn it! I got stuck with celibacy and you're not going to be any different. It may make you repressed, angry, bitter and old. Well, welcome to the club!"

BILL KRISTOFCO

Parkville, Maryland

Recently I read an article published by NCR, "Britain votes to legalize abortion, same-sex marriage in Northern Ireland."

I then emailed my following comments: "Well, I suggest you people get your act together before Oct. 21, 2019, and the situation will take care of itself. You are in this position because you are unable to handle your own responsibilities."

"I apologize for my attitude as I am not Northern Irish, but that doesn't change reality. In spite of the fact that it's complicated it is still the bottom line."

In rereading what I had emailed to you, I realized that I had responded to what I had read more as a "knee jerk" reaction rather than as a thoughtful response. First, I thought I was writing to a Northern Ireland organization who felt they were being mistreated by the British government.

It is true that I am not close enough to the situation to know the realities of the situation, and I do again apologize for my assumptions.

would like for you to know my feelings concerning abortion are not solidified in my mind. On the other hand, I do whole heartily endorse the right for same gendered people to marry the one they love. I see it as an act of commitment to a high level of behavior. I believe Jesus taught us to seek the "higher road."

LEN SHELTON

Bastrop, Texas

As an immigrant from El Salvador, a nation named after the savior of the world, I grew up believing our Lord came to save the world; not just "us" in the U.S. but every human being on the planet. With that understanding, my mother brought me to the U.S. at the tender age of five. She truly believed it was God's will that we move to San Francisco, the city named after St. Francis of Assisi.

"Que sea la voluntad de Dios," was my mother's daily prayer. She felt that to follow will of our Father in heaven, I needed to grow up free of my earthly father's influence. So in 1959, my mom left me in the loving care of my godparents (my mother's sister and brother-in-law). Months later, she was able to send for me. I remember the kindness of my fellow passengers as I made the trip north alone. I cannot imagine the horror children are suffering now under President Donald Trump's cruel family separation policy.

I disagree with Phyllis Zagano's view of our immigration problem as an "us vs. them" phenomena where there isn't enough for "us" in order to include "them." By comparing Trump's deportation numbers with Barack Obama and Bill Clinton, she is betraying her political intentions. Deportation statistics are not related to Trump's unique inhumane and illegal treatment of children at the border. And worse, by normalizing Trump's evil behavior, the U.S. is working against the will of El Salvador del Mundo, the savior of the world.

CARMEN HARTONO

Oakland, California

It's about time National Catholic Reporter published a rounded picture of Mayor Pete. Michael Sean Winters' columns have been almost vitriolic.

Whether he wins the nomination or not, Mayor Pete deserves to be treated as a true person of faith who acknowledges who he is: a child of God who happens to be gay. His appeal to me and to the younger (30ish) members of my family are these: He speaks boldly but with humility, he is intellectual but never proud, he is in love with his partner and hopes you are too whatever your sexual orientation. He strives to do good but never hesitates to admit his shortcomings. Pretty Christ-like, I would say.

LYDIA LOMBARDO

Tampa, Florida

***

Mayor Pete seems honest enough and bright enough to get jobs done.

However, much of the Anglican church can be a democracy. God, the Trinity is not a democracy.

The invitation to the Christ I know is through a narrow road indeed. Sometimes even people like Mayor Pete can be fooled and give in to the wider road and say it is OK, too. The narrow road is very hard indeed. Not at all a democracy and not a democracy which can move itself to deny the truth.

Let us agree to disagree when it comes to the morality of sexuality because morality in truth is not democratic either.

ROSE GALBRAITH

Hamilton, Ontario

***

From 2012 to 2016, Pete Buttigieg's first term as South Bend's mayor, he doubled the city's eviction rate — the rate became three times the national average.

Buttigieg's "1,000 Houses" initiative that sought to tear down 1,000 so-called dilapidated houses in 1,000 days is what he called a success. He even bragged about completing the destruction of 1,000 homes two months early. Most of the affected neighborhoods were on South Bend's low-income Black and Latino northwest side.

This sort of "slum clearing" hasn't been seen since the race based urban renewal of Black neighborhoods in America's cities in the 1950s and 1960s. The so-called urban renewal of Black neighborhoods back then at least involved replacement with what became neglected housing projects. No such replacement housing was ever envisioned by the Buttigieg administration.

This is great difference between the so-called past urban renewal and South Bend's "1,000 Houses" initiative with no replacement housing.

"1,000 Houses" was successfully accomplished by aggressive and discriminatory code enforcement by city officials that also resulted in the loss of the little capital that poor and working families had in their inherited properties in northwest South Bend.

Our fundamentalists and evangelical brothers and sisters do the lion's share of housing and feeding the dispossessed. The liberal church is hardly present in America's poor neighborhoods. The liberal Buttigieg's answer to the unhoused seems to be anti-panhandling districts and the taking of their property (tents, sleeping bags, pallets and bicycles) and wholesale destruction of homeless

encampments.

ROBERT PEPPEY

Los Angeles, California

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.