Opinion
Vatican



by NCR Staff

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Pope Francis warned Sept. 10 that ideology is "infiltrating" the religious teaching of some quarters of the U.S. Catholic Church, and said that in past centuries such infiltrations have led to schisms. Columnist Ken Briggs wrote in response that the pope's edgy remarks to reporters, warning about "ideology" infecting theology and saying schism could happen, indicate that the drumbeat of criticism is angering and preoccupying him. Letters to the editor about both pieces follow. They have been edited for length and clarity.

I must admit that I have some sympathy for those who are still waiting.

Distinguishing between critics he appreciates and those he does not, the pontiff gave the example of someone who honestly says: "This thing from the pope, I do not like. I will make a critique and I'll wait for the response. I'll visit with him, speak with him, write an article, ask him to respond."



This is loyal," the pope said of that kind of criticism. "This is loving the church."

There are some criticisms that the pope, rightly in my opinion, decided were not worth responding to personally. While I agree with the pope, I still empathize with the critic.

DON HENDERSON

Frederick, Maryland

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A conservative political ideology that trades support on issues with the Catholic Church is growing. The trade has increased support on abortion but not on mass murders with assault weapons. When a deacon can present a sermon that includes the example of him owning a gun and carrying it, all Catholics should be able to question the direction and intent of that sermon. Is the deacon proselytizing for the Gospel or for guns?

In other capacities, the trade is bent on ultra-right wing issues about government either increasing the support for the right wing issues or decreasing support for what are considered "left wing" issues such as labor issues, human rights issues, and the stewardship for climate.

Prison reform is yet seemingly another "trade" issue along with public education.

Pope Francis is speaking to the real issues and to the possibility that the Catholic Church is being compromised for political power and gain. The danger is that some conservatives may trade on reducing focus on issues like sexual abuse in the Catholic Church.

MICHAEL E. DURHAM

Phoenix, Arizona

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I love Pope Francis, but something is missing from discussions, and that is the female voice. He uses the word "snobbish" to describe different opinions. I submit that the church has been snobbish to women for 2,000-plus years. Let us remember that men were even more misogynist than now while the Bible was written and understood, and while doctrine was being created.

I am not interested in women becoming priests because I think that women could do more with the church than men are doing, but I realize that even Catholic women are not ready to hear that. We could be reaching out to each other, interacting with each other, the way that Jesus did.

We could be studying the Bible together, in small groups. There are more schools of knowledge now than there were in the early days — sociology (Fr. Andrew Greeley), psychology, and group psychotherapy (Irvin D. Yalom), my special interest, training, and teaching experience. Also insightful writers who point to the future such as Bishop Remi de Roo, the youngest priest who attended Vatican II, who lives right here in Nanaimo.

MADELINE A. BRUCE

Nanaimo, British Columbia

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I think there's more important things for the pope to worry about then this. I can think of one.

How about he get serious about solving the abuse scandal and also not divide the church with his talk of mercy then turn around and cut down people who are traditional in the church?

JEANNE BERGERON

Lafayette, Louisiana

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I believe it's quite ridiculous and hypocritical that Pope Francis calls the U.S. church ideological when all he's about is ideology. His.

Francis hardly ever talks about Jesus Christ. Francis is a politician and a societal engineer with a serious anti-American bent.

DONALD B. MCKIEGAN

Las Vegas, Nevada

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It would appear to me that Pope Francis trusts in God very deeply, so perhaps he is not so terribly troubled by opposition from a specific segment of the Catholic Church. Those who have been embracing the teachings of Vatican II for 50-plus years are generally welcoming the insights of Francis. Can he ever really doubt his apparently strong belief that love, compassion and acceptance for all people is the Gospel message?

Toward his well-meaning opponents perhaps he is simply praying for all of us, would not ever be in favor of a schism but may well recognize that some things need to be left in the hands of God. This particular attitude could be a source of peace within his soul, not a cause for turmoil.

The supporters of Francis are numerous and are visible to the ends of the earth.

MARIE MacCHESNEY

Toronto, Canada

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Every cardinal will tell you that the election of the successor to St. Peter is guided by the Holy Spirit and each promises to faithfully support the elected pope. It is evident, however, that some cardinals believe they are the direct representatives of not only the Holy Spirit, but of God. No sooner are the conclave doors closed, that these "princes" begin to undermine the credibility of Peter's successor and far more seriously they turn to find mouthpieces in social media and ultra conservative organizations.

I find it incredulous that certain bishops and cardinals expect unquestioned acceptance of their pronouncements and simultaneously feel free to criticize in open forums the very person to whom they pledged their loyalty. These bishops should be utterly ashamed of their conduct and the example they display to the laity and public.

There is a proper time and place and dialogue to discuss differences and concerns. Confusing and misleading the laity is not one of them.

ADRIEN DE RUYCK

MacGregor, Manitoba

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I just read Ken Briggs' article "Humanized Francis speaks as a leader whose movement is falling apart," and my reaction as I read was sorrow and compassion for our dear Pope Francis.

I am devoted to Francis, pray for him daily, and believe with everything in me that he was put in place as our pontiff by the Holy Spirit.

And by the way, Jesus faced the same stringent, hardline criticism from many people, had people complaining about him, plotting against him, even was betrayed by one of his inner circle of apostles, and it seems to me that Francis is following in Jesus' "shoes" with all his heart, mind, and soul.

I pray his has a long, healthy life so he can continue the Lord's work for our church and its people.

MARY WUDTKE

Chicago, Illinois

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It saddened me greatly to read this article. I personally believe Pope Francis is the most Jesus-like of any recent popes. Francis seems to talk/walk most closely in the way of Christ. He is himself, intimately close to the Father and he speaks the truth simply and straight-forwardly and lets "the chips fall where they may" — as Jesus did.

He cares not for public opinion but he cares deeply for the poor, the outcast, the suffering, the marginalized — just as Jesus did. He has not tried to please those in powerful situations whether in the church or in government or business. Doing the will of the Father is all that matters and he tries to show us that Jesus expects us to live this way also.

This is what it means to be a Christian — to be like Jesus. Being Catholic/Christian means striving to think, act, and speak as Jesus has taught us by his word/teaching and his example. So much of the political and selfish consternation present in the church today has to do with externals, personal opinions, fear, lack of real understanding of the truths of the church due to poor teaching.

Those with the money to promote special causes within the church are undermining all that Jesus came to Earth to accomplish.

And our good pope is bearing the brunt of it. How sad. I pray for him and the church daily.

MARY JO HALL

Guthrie, Kentucky

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I think elements in the church under estimate the influence of Pope Francis.

Many I am familiar with have become more active in their Catholic and exhibited more Christian behavior to our whole community.

Sometimes I wonder if Jesus would even be rejected by some current elements of the church for being too radical, too Christian.

The early church expanded by being exemplary in its interaction with the rest of society and by focusing on the example of Christ as he showed us in his life.

I shudder if I would have to explain how some Christians hold themselves up of the perfect example of Christianity when they don't respect other people, they ignore the poor and hungry, try to pass laws to enforce their interpretation of Christ's example.

I think Francis is trying to get us to realize the basics of Christianity and not be swept up in all the pomp and circumstance involved with the city/state at the Vatican.

Do we really think Christ would allow one person to go hungry or one person to be denied needed medical care when there is a fortune of art it the Vatican museums, while there was an ounce of gold available to serve humanity?

The church is not buildings and possessions, it is a caring respectful community try to live the life that is in sync with Christ's example.

JIM LYTLE

Berkeley, Illinois

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