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

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Regarding your opinion piece, "It's not about ethics, its about how we imagine God."

Fr. Bryan Massingale sets up a false dichotomy here that is dangerous. He first sets up a straw man of the church's teaching, and then proceeds to beat the stuffing out of it. Rather than defining idolatry as the church does in the catechism, as "divinizing what is not God" and that it is committed when a person "honors and reveres a creature in place of God, whether this be gods or demons (for example, satanism), power, pleasure, race, ancestors, the state, money, etc.," he introduces a novel definition: "I mean the pervasive belief that only heterosexual persons, loves, and relationships are standard, normative, universal, and truly 'Catholic.' That only these can mediate the Divine and carry the holy. That God can be imaged only as straight."

This, of course, is not a part of church teaching but is a caricature. Although the church does identify homosexual acts as one of a litany of sexual sins that are disordered and gravely sinful, the cathecism forbids us from any kind of unjust discrimination against homosexual persons. The Catechism of the Catholic Church doesn't even mention heterosexual persons or heterosexuality.



The church holds all of us to a high standard, and I would say that we are committing idolatry whenever we re-create a god in our own image, a god who allows us to redefine sexual ethics based on whatever is accepted in our own culture, who bids us abandon as antiquated the traditions that have been handed down to us.

Rather than dealing in terminology and precepts that are barely a century old, I would invite Massingale and all others who identify as part of the LGBT community of the church to discover their central identity, that ancient identity, the one that is

common to all of us who have been baptized into Christ, which is the identity as the adopted sons and daughters of God through Jesus Christ. Freedom is found in Christ, not in our sexuality, not in our ethnicity, not in our nationality, not in our political structure or any other "ism" of our age.

**JACK DisPENNET**

**Clinton, Indiana**

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We are taught that we are all creatures of God, and that we are made in God's image and likeness. Yet, the church apparently takes that position that this is not true, that some of us are "incomplete," or "not in God's image."

In my opinion, the people who are not in God's image are the Vatican's hierarchy. It is my understanding that the four people at the foot of the cross (two men, two women), one of the men was what today we would describe as gay. It is also my understanding that a major portion of modern scriptural research and thought holds that Paul, yes, St. Paul, was what today would be referred to as gay. Supposedly that is why he was executed upside down.

Yet the Vatican continues to present the image of God as white, straight, masculine.

In my opinion, nothing could be further from the truth.

**EUGENE McMANUS**

**Caribou Island, Nova Scotia**

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Thank you so much for this wonderful article. My older brother was gay. He was born in 1938 and told me he began to question his sexuality about the time he was 12/13 years old (he passed away in 2006).

For virtually his entire life, he suffered much emotional pain as he came to understand who he was and that the Catholic Church found it to be sinful.

My brother came out to me in 1974, after a serious illness. I had suspected he was gay for a while, and inside my own heart, I argued with God because I simply could not believe that my brother would be automatically cast into hell should he act out his sexuality in any way. So, when he found the courage to come out to me, I responded by taking his hand in mine in the hospital room, and saying, "You're my big brother, and I love you, and will always love you." We both cried.

In today's world, I often think how he suffered and that he must be rejoicing to know how the Catholic understanding of LBGTQ persons is changing (not to mention, the world's understanding).

God is love. God created all things, from the tiniest grain of sand, to the tallest mountain, and a tremendous plethora of humans, animals, plants, and more. God knows what God is doing. And God made my brother. And I will always believe that to my deepest soul.

**MARY WUDTKE**

**Chicago, Illinois**

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With regard to Fr. Bryan Massingale's July 4 talk at the 50th anniversary conference of DignityUSA, I came to the conclusion from my reading of other materials that God does not give us strictly nor simply an either-or choice. Rather, our choices are always a range of choices.

I am a male and heterosexual, but I have a female side and homosexual feelings in some circumstances. I have the further choice of acting out on these other aspects of my personality, which I have not done, but I cannot deny those feelings and identities any more than my basic male heterogeneity.

I have laid aside my earlier guilt for these feelings, and I thank God for it. Now let's get on with really living our full life, its goodness, its challenge, its promise and just avoid the doo-doo.

**DON HENDERSON**

**Frederick, Maryland**

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I find it absolutely disgusting that Cardinal Joseph Tobin of Newark, New Jersey, and his followers would show disdain — even if inadvertently — for law enforcement officials who are only doing their duty and following laws written by U.S. Congress or state lawmakers.

Let the cardinal and company march on the U.S. Capitol to have lawmakers rewrite laws, while also showing concern for the men/women in uniform who follow the laws written by Congress.

I, among many and usually silent citizens and Catholics, am sick and tired of clergy being politically correct at the expense of men and women who risk their lives for our well-being. If I were an officer in Newark, I would most definitely not attend the Annual Blue Mass so long as Catholic leadership exhibits such disdain for all law enforcement men/women by attacking ICE or any other keepers of the law.

I believe the cardinal has means in which to express his opinion on border issues. First, stand up for our law enforcement, especially as there is an increase of physical attacks, some violent, upon these brave men and women. Such displays as the march in Newark, in my opinion, only reinforce the breakdown of civility and law in our land.

**F. H. REARDON**

**Boca Raton, Florida**

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How refreshing! A cardinal publicly demonstrating against the corrupt, mean spirited, unholy Trump Administration could start a movement. The clear and influential voice of Catholic leadership on matters of social justice is essential if we Catholics are to be truly catholic, and not missing in action.

**DON MILLER**

**Bethlehem, Pennsylvania**

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I have read with hope so many articles on immigration. Finally, God has heard my prayer for one of these bishops to do something other than offer prayers and support.

God bless Bishop Tobin. The next thing I pray for is that one of the bishops will have the same courage the sisters have had to be taken away in handcuffs. That visual will have more impact than prayers and support.

**JANE FRANCISCO**

**Charlotte, North Carolina**

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Dear Cardinal Tobin:

Kudos for leading protests against ICE now, but please take on your own house first, like those clergy who claimed it was a "mortal sin' to vote Democratic" (according to a San Diego Catholic church flier, linking Hillary Clinton to Satan) or the nationwide EWTN radio that strongly and continually urged voters to "vote for Trump because Hillary was 'pro-choice,' " among other egregious church and clergy behavior.

In those pivotal states where Catholics turned out in large numbers reluctantly to vote for Trump because they were urged on by the rightwing clergy and EWTN radio, President Donald Trump took the electoral votes that won him the White House, even though, as was charged then, and as we have seen proven beyond our wildest fears, Trump and the administration he would bring into power stood against every single thing the Catholic Church stands for — the only exception being anti-abortion.

Now apparently our Catholic leadership is appalled by things that this right-wing, anti-Catholic government is doing and is now urging us faithful to protest all those things — things that Trump and his supporters told us they would do — and that the Catholic leadership failed to come out strongly against in the election.

**GARY MAKOWSKI**

**Bellevue, Washington**

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While Catholics should applaud Pope Francis' observing Season of Creation, an element of hypocrisy exists in church "stewardship" of planet Earth.

This hypocrisy stems from Pope Paul VI's cowardliness after Vatican II. The leaked report of his hand-picked commission of 15 cardinals and 60 theologians to study lifting the ban on contraception revealed 60% of its cardinals and 94% of its theologians recommended lifting that ban. Sadly, in 1968, Pope Paul caved to conservatives and issued *Humanae Vitae*, reaffirming the ban.

Tragic to many? Yes. Hypocrisy regarding Christian stewardship? Also, yes!

Global population in 1968 of 3.5 billion is now 7.7 billion (+120%). Even a stable genius should realize our planet can support only a finite number of humans in anything beyond squalid conditions. E.g., over this same period, Brazil's population increased 138%. Any surprise this burgeoning population is burning down the Amazon, the lungs of our planet?

We have only a few decades to take drastic actions to control increasing greenhouse gases or otherwise face severe degradation in life quality on Earth. Having an exploding global population simultaneous to needing drastic reduction in fossil-based energy use is like throwing gasoline on a fire.

If the church is serious about stewardship, it must accept and promote contraception. There has never been a theological reason (other than excessively narrow views of human sexuality) to justify the church's ban. The time for comprehensive stewardship is now!

**KENNETH R. JONES**

**Silver Spring, Maryland**

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If human life, created in the very image of God, does not matter to the people in this world, why would anyone bother with climate change or care for the earth, water and air we breathe? This is the fundamental problem we face.

**MARGE BANACH**

**Newington, Connecticut**

***

I have spent over the last 30-plus as a front line environmentalist for the state of Washington. As such I have been both a strong advocate of sustainable forest practices and the legitimacy of commercial forestry as a legitimate land use. I have issued enforcement actions in the hundreds of thousands of dollars and been the impetus of the change of a handful of environmental laws in the state of Washington. I have been personally attacked with demands for my resignation by some conservative elements within the state, which I find rather amusing.

In short, my long career in protecting water quality gives me some element of legitimacy in my opinion.

I urge people to remember two things. First, we have something to save, we still have the tools and building blocks for success. We have orcas in the Puget Sound to save, not just morn at a watery funeral. We have elephants in the Sudan to save, we have lions in South Africa to save, we have wolves in the states to save. If we have a population to save, we have a position to build on, using the best available science, not an emotional position.

Secondly, that many of the challenges we face may be driven by big business, however the fact is much of the challenges we face are driven by the small communities and families that are living in context and friction with those goals, and that provides the opportunity for a spiritually based approach for some success in maintaining our home planet.

**BOB PENHALE**

**Seattle, Washington**

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Sure, the climate on earth changes. It has for centuries. Can we do something about it? Is it something that is life and death critical? Is it a panic situation as some would suggest? I don't think so.

The enormous forces at work affecting the climate like oceans, the sun and its spots, the seas and their movements make it doubtful that humans can do much to change things. It's not to say we shouldn't be responsible earth tenants and do our part to

keep things clean. I just don't agree with the hysteria sometimes accompanied with doubtful climate data.

We Americans are in the forefront of being ecologically responsible as it is. Pressure should be put on China, India, and other nations to match our best business practices. Thousands of years ago, our Great Lakes were covered with a thick glacier. It melted long before there were SUVs and coal-fired energy plants.

My opinion is that the weather and climate will continue to change despite any human efforts to affect it. I don't see much sense in sacrificing our quality of life in a futile attempt to influence something like worldwide climate.

**MIKE COLLINS**

**Coldwater, Michigan**

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I have become aware of how much I am healed by nature through working with refugees in urban settings. The awareness of the environment people possess when they are thrown into a foreign context by force is enough to make you stand up and take notice of their prophetic voice.

A Syrian refugee in Amman tells me how much he misses the trees in his neighborhood, which lovingly gave him shade in his little outdoor garden. A refugee in Kampala retells of his journey through the forests of Northern Congo which gave him the cover of safety as he fled unspeakable violence. A refugee from Darfur describes the different types of succulent fruits and vegetables in his hometown that he farmed himself.

Home now is a bit different. Instead of farming their daily meals, these friends now have to navigate concrete jungles filled with bureaucracy and often unwelcome faces. "Where is the breeze?" one person asks me as they sit by the window in their fourth floor apartment. "I worry about the food we eat here, in Darfur, we farmed and worked off the sugar, here we are stuck in our apartments."

I now see my environment with new eyes, the eyes of the refugees I walk with in this life. I give thanks for the small breezes, the delicious fruits, and the shade a lone tree might be able to offer me. Then, I offer a prayer to those who gave me the

grace to see with new eyes.

**ELENA HABERSKY**

**Cairo, Egypt**

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Thanks for Krista Kihlander's excellent article, "Can one meatless day out of the week make a difference?" It can — and while it can be any day of the week, I'd like to suggest Christians choose Friday.

Friday as a day to abstain from meat has deep roots in the spiritual practice of Orthodox, Roman rite, Anglican, Methodist and Lutheran Christians — if not others. Of course, Friday is the day of the week on which Christ suffered and died, so abstaining from meat is a small act of penance in honor of Christ's passion. The same Christ who stilled the sea, and of whom scripture says, "even the wind and waves obey him," surely must mourn the suffering of creation due to our decisions, systems, and behaviors.

Friday, the sixth day in the Genesis count, is also the day that land animals and human beings were created by God, bringing creation to its fulfillment. So, what better way to honor this day than by giving animals a "reprieve," and eating less so more of the descendants of Adam and Eve can share fully in Earth's bounty? "Meatless Monday" is wonderfully alliterative, but Friday sure has powerful meaning.

**DAVID PHILIPPART**

**Chicago, Illinois**

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I was reading the article "Synod for the Amazon about more than married priests," and I came across an error in the article.

When the article says "the Amazon jungle has been referred to as the lungs of the Earth, but while human lungs change oxygen into carbon dioxide, the rainforest converts CO2 into oxygen. The use of fire to clear land in the Amazon is not only adding more carbon dioxide to the atmosphere, it is also mortally wounding the complex ecosystem capable of reversing the process on a massive scale," it is

actually incorrect.

While the Amazon rainforest does in fact convert a massive amount of CO2 into O2, almost none of that converted O2 actually leaves the rainforest. It instead is used by the organisms of the rainforest, most notably the microorganisms that decompose the dead matter on the forest floor. The net effect of the Amazon rainforest on the world's O2 level is 0, or so close to 0 that it is negligible.

**JOSHUA TROUY**

**Wasilla, Arkansas**

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"I thought there would be more time." So said my intelligent, organized, competent, wise, funny, faithful-Catholic mother at age 89 when she was receiving treatment for multiple myeloma. We had talked about end of life issues over the years, one of my mother's gifts to us.

Jesuit Fr. Thomas Reese's article "Choosing to die well" neatly summarizes Catholic teaching, and end-of-life issues in an age of technological medicine. When we are feeling well, we may have the illusion of control about our future health. But when we are ill, or in pain, or have sustained a sudden accident we may not be able to think clearly about what to do. Even praying may be reduced to a single, repeated word.

Give up the illusion of control. Gather information; ponder; talk with health professionals and family about end-of- life preferences. That is realistic control. Start now. There is not "more time."

**R.F. COYNE**

**Silver Spring, Maryland**

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Thank you for sharing about the life of Sister Fran. She sounded like a beautiful person inside and out and lead many to Christ in her own way.

I do find a couple of parts of the article disconcerting as a Catholic. Namely: "But God is good, the Spirit knows what S/he is about" and the part about sexism in the church.

I seriously doubt that God is confused or ambiguous about what gender he is. As Jesus taught us to pray, "Our Father." By the grace of God, and as a Catholic and spiritual director within the church, I have never had a problem with the order that God created within his church. It is our society, the world, and our own human frailty that would cause us to question what God has put into order in the hierarchy of the church.

I am afraid that as a culture we are straying into dangerous territory with a lack of understanding our sexual identity and/or our identity in Christ. And by saying our God could either be a woman or a man only further distorts the lines. Jesus is our way, our truth, and our life. He is not about ambiguity, confusion, or the questionable.

**CHARLOTTE SACCO**

**Katy, Texas**

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I always enjoy reading Jesuit Fr. Thomas Reese's columns. Indeed, the new cardinals will attempt to implement Francis' message. However, there needs to be some of that going on in the seminaries, too.

The rectors and those who teach seminarians can form new priests who will come forward, understand and implement that message from the bottom up. There are seminaries that are mired in the pre-Vatican world and are producing a church that is arrested in time. No doubt that this movement has started in the U.S. because of political meddling in Christian churches, especially the American Catholic Church.

What I have been taught that what most pleases God is doing his will. That includes obeying his commandments, loving one's neighbor as oneself, helping the marginalized people of society, visiting the sick. If both ends of top-down and down-up movements aren't covered at the same time, it will be harder for Francis to accomplish his changes.

**C. DOMINGUE**

**Flushing, New York**

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In your article on the 10 new cardinals, lots of soft soap is slung but no substance.

Yes indeed, these new princes of the church embody Francis' vision for the church.

That's a problem for faithful Catholics of a more traditional bent, and the pope's constant disparaging remarks about millions of his own flock give him away.

He is not intent on bringing people together for the good of Christ's bride on earth.

He is interested in his vision, liberation theology, globalism and socialism.

It's for and very much of this world.

Period.

**NOELLE DePAULA**

**Brooklyn, New York**

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I am completely and utterly disgraced to read your report on "Those who dismiss Pell verdict ignore integrity of legal process." This report is no better or truthful then the hard-left propaganda and lies. I can't believe that a Catholic news source would report in such a manner.

Have any of the editors at NCR even investigated the facts about this unfair trial of his eminence? Of course, there are many who think the legal system in Victoria is corrupt and therefore have little respect for their findings. We do not think the Victorian legal system (or most of the government for that matter) has much integrity. This whole trial of his eminence proves the fact that they have no integrity.

NCR is promoting fake news. Literally. Give the cardinal (and us) a break. Completely disgusting.

NCR will certainly not be getting a good word from me anymore. I'll go elsewhere, such as Lifesite, to get my news from now on.

Pull this fake news down.

**JOSEPH HEMPEL**

**Queensland, Australia**

Advertisement

Thank you for your memorial to Cokie Roberts. I had the opportunity to meet Roberts when she came to Texas Tech University to speak about five years ago. Her talk on how America has become so politically polarized was by far the most cogent analysis I have heard on the subject. One could almost hear the sadness in her voice at the fracturing of America and how, even though most Americans are moderates, that voice has been largely silenced. It was as if she were making a plea for moderation and conversation across the aisle.

Afterward, during the reception, we talked a bit about Dorothy Day. It was nice to have a conversation with a strong Catholic woman about another strong Catholic woman. I could not help but notice in your remark that Cokie "never treated anyone as undeserving of her time and attention" a strong similarity to the description that Robert Cole gave of Day. Although both women were in the national thick of things, they always had time for the people right in front of them. Putting them at ease, with graciousness and charm.

That sense of humility, of service, and being genuine indeed made Roberts the kind of "real deal" that Jesus will welcome with open arms as a good and gracious servant.

**DOMINICK CASADONTE**

**Lubbock, Texas**

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I was greatly saddened by the death of Cokie Roberts. I was especially moved by her love and openness to openly gay married persons as well as her openness to the ordination of women.

I have been challenged by persons that love me dearly and whom I love dearly to look into my heart, put aside for a moment what my Roman Catholic Church has taught "or mistaught" me and come to a greater understanding, love and respect for all the wonderful diversity especially as regards to LGTGQ persons deserving respect, love and fair treatment everywhere and in every way.

For this, besides her charming intelligence, I will sorely miss the voice of Cokie Roberts.

**(Fr.) THOMAS MICHAEL DEELY, CSsR**

**Philadelphia, Pennsylvania**"

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Tying leadership to ordination hinders the church from making the best decisions and carrying out its mission." Possibly. As a male, maybe I have no competence to disagree, but as a person I do, strenuously.

One might pursue that tactic as a political strategy but it is wrong. "Leadership" is intrinsically dependent upon the context, the organization or community within which it is exercised. Kerry Robinson virtually admits to this context in her referring to "carrying out its (the church's) mission." Think! Words have meaning and define functions within a community or organization.

Now consider the "mission": completion of the incarnational inclusion of all creation in Christ, bringing all within the sacramental person of Christ. Women are not only excluded from the core sacramental role but the rationale for the exclusion is that their intrinsic nature, their created purpose and Jesus himself, preclude them.

To accept her position is to agree with the dictate that women are excluded and necessarily with the foundational rationale articulated anew (2004) by the former prefect of the CDF and pope emeritus that God created women to serve men, independent of "original sin" both "in the church and in the world."

**DENNIS MacDONALD**

**Bedford, Nova Scotia**

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As a longtime admirer of Sr. Ilia Delio's work, I found her essay on science and theology frustrating. Her conclusion is correct, of course: "An integrative vision of science and theology is not an option but essential in the 21st century." But her broadside against academic theology for its alleged failures to undertake this work seems to me about 30 years old, as if no academic theologians anywhere, to say nothing of Pope Francis, have sought to forge a more holistic vision of theology in dialogue with science. That impression is unjust to a litany of her peers in the

academy. Just as concerning, Delio's apparent refusal to admit any critique of Teilhard de Chardin risks creating new hierarchies, in which certain favored thinkers or fields of inquiry lay beyond all reproach.

In support of her characterization of "the academy" as "a coded club through and through," bent on the exclusion of r/evolutionary thinkers, Delio refers NCR readers to John Haught's Commonweal article, but includes no reference to the thoughtful rejoinder in Commonweal by John Slattery, the target of Haught's piece, and by no means, in my view, a reckless scholar. The inability to admit of any serious cracks in the Teilhardian edifice — his sustained espousal of racial eugenics, for example, as Slattery's research documents — hardly advances the "open systems" approach to theology for which Delio rightly argues and that Haught has championed so beautifully for decades.

More importantly, as Slattery cautions, it risks obscuring the "beautiful paradox" of Christian revelation that holiness is found not in anthropogenically engineered strength, as assumed by eugenics, "but in the suffering of the world," above all, in solidarity with "the broken, the poor, the outcast, the marginalized, and the oppressed."

I have been deeply inspired by Teilhard's witness and I am grateful to those who have brought his vision alive for new generations. I continue to teach his theology in my classes. But I would also urge, as I would say of any revered thinker, that we must not be afraid of critiquing Teilhard if we wish to build upon what is life-giving and revolutionary in his thought.

**CHRISTOPHER PRAMUK**

**Denver, Colorado**

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In her article, "Theology Needs Racial Revisioning," Sr. Ilia Delio states, "An integrative vision of science and theology is not an option but essential." Yes, it is. But how does Christian theology move beyond the following basic differences?

Whereas belief says the all-spiritual God created all matter and remains ontologically distinct from it, science says the universe began spontaneously or had no origin and has no discernible spiritual dimension. Whereas belief says all people

descended from one, original pair of humans on Earth, science says we probably descended from several, different, original couples.

Whereas belief says the Earth will be transformed or destroyed by God in the near future, science says it will last a few more billion years under its sun. Whereas belief accepts the purely supernatural cause of miracles, science says they have extraordinary natural causes not yet fully understood by physics.

Where, indeed, to begin?

**HARVEY BOLLICH**

**Cedar Park, Texas**

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The article by Rhina Guidos from Catholic News Service: "Notre Dame releases study on sexual harassment among U.S. seminarians" contains a false statement that if corrected changes the entire slant of the article and the conclusions that can be drawn. Does the National Catholic Reporter have the integrity to admit a serious reporting error?

I'm referring to the statement: "The survey was emailed to 2,375 seminarians from 149 seminaries and houses of formation around the country with a 65% response rate." In actual fact, based on the executive summary of the actual report, although 149 seminaries were invited to participate, only 72 of the 149 seminaries actually chose to do so. If this fact was reported it would raise the question: why did more than half of the seminaries choose not to participate? Was it because they had something to hide, or because they aren't taking the sexual abuse crises seriously? Was it something else?

Any good researcher knows that if one takes a sample (in this case, of the population of U.S. seminaries) that clearly isn't random, the results drawn from that sample cannot be used to make conclusions about the entire population (of seminaries). All that can be said is that the results apply to the seminaries that chose to participate.

I hope and pray that you as editors have the courage to correct this reporting error and perhaps even explain how such an error could impact the conclusions to be drawn from the report.

**RUSS BRUMM**

**Menasha, Wisconsin**

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I was upset by the report which said that "just" 6% of seminarians reported experiencing some form of sexual harassment or misconduct. That's like saying, "just" .015% of U.S. deaths in 2017 were due to opioid abuse. That .015% equates to 42,120 people. Just one seminarian harassed is too many.

On a similar issue, the U.S. bishops' conference commissioned the John Jay College of Criminal Justice to conduct a study analyzing allegations of sexual abuse in Catholic dioceses in the United States. In the period 1950-2002, the John Jay Report found that 4% of clergy molested children. This 4% equates to 4,392 clergy members. Some say that percentage mirrors the U.S. population in general.

My point is that we're not talking about ordinary citizens, we're talking about ordained clergy who represent Jesus Christ and are supposed to live the gospel message. Just one clergy member who abuses is too many.

**MIKE BRINKAC**

**Charlottesville, Virginia**

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