News
Opinion



by NCR Staff

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

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

January 10, 2020
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

Two recent NCR Connections columns by executive editor Tom Roberts highlighted thoughts on the culture of clericalism from Thomas Doyle, who said the clergy sexual abuse crisis "is evidence of a profound contradiction that reaches to the foundational core of the institutional church," and from Jesuit Fr. James Keenan, who proposes an alternative "culture of vulnerability as a path to a "servant priesthood" and a "servant episcopacy." Letters to the editor are edited for length and clarity. Find out how to submit your thoughts here.

Thank you for the interesting article about Thomas Doyle's analysis of the current Catholic Church structure.

Some future iteration of Catholic Christianity will be one without clergy. The present structure is inherently corrupt and will not hold.

Judaism and the Bahá'í faith do very well without clergy. There is no reason to think that the Catholic Church cannot do so as well. Only the clergy need the clergy. Their days are numbered.

JOHN BARBIERI

Delray Beach, Florida

***

I appreciate NCR's voice as that of the intended "loyal opposition." However, Thomas Doyle does not impress me as a prophet to be followed, but rather a sad, disaffected, angry man who has a score to settle with his old institution.



His careful couching of the abuse as between adults and young men is an intentional dodge of the fundamental issue in the church. Yes, Doyle is absolutely correct and on target in laying the blame at the feet of the bishops. However, he assigns blame for the wrong crime. The bishops have protected the homosexual subculture which they created, groomed and engaged (in many cases). Under their "shepherding," the church became not only a societal step-up into the educated middle class for

working class immigrant children (and their mothers), but also a sheltered haven for men with homosexual tendencies and attractions in a society and culture which found such tendencies repugnant and the acting out on such proclivities to be immoral.

Meanwhile, the darkness of sin in one area, as it often does, enabled sins in other areas such as fiscal impropriety and a callousness toward victims. In the age of surveillance and with a country in the clutches of tort lawyers and the cult of victimhood, the bishops and their culture will face the figurative firing squad of embarrassment, disgrace and the eventual end to the royal lifestyle that is so contrary to the message of Jesus Christ.

PATRICK A. FLANAGAN

North Grafton, Massachusetts

***

Thank you for the link to Thomas Doyle's talk at Gonzaga University. It is New Year's Eve, I am 66-years-old and I just finished listening to Doyle describe his experience providing a home and assistance to his niece, a single mother.

The injustices and lifelong abuse directed toward many Catholic girls is only beginning to be spoken about. I heard Tom — he asked to be called Tom — speak at All Saints Parish in Syracuse, New York. At that time, he was the only Catholic man other than my father who spoke to me about how Catholic girls and women were abused and treated, often for long periods of time, behind the closed doors of Catholic facilities, some known as Magdalene laundries or Magdalene programs.

Abuse happens in secrecy and there are still many in the church who want victims to stop talking about having been victims. I wish that most of the Catholics I know could hear Doyle's talk. Doyle's knowledge and understanding are much needed in any discussion of what the church teaches and has taught about the human body and human consciousness.

DEBRA HARRINGTON MERRYWEATHER

Syracuse, New York

***

The editorial so well illustrated the adage that "the church must always be reformed."

Imagine "what would Jesus do" should he learn that his apostles had supposedly been "ontologically" changed when he called them to follow him!

Imagine "what would Jesus do" should he learn that his apostles had been abusing and molesting children?

Imagine "what would Jesus do" should he learn that his apostles had been covering up for others of "the twelve" who had been abusing and molesting children?

How far our current successors of his apostles have fallen!

PAUL J. ACKERMAN

Columbus, Mississippi

***

We read with interest Tom Roberts' editorial as regards the end of clerical culture. Thank you for your eloquent articulation of such monumental yet painful aspects of the faith that we laity love so well.

It did leave us wondering when we laity will find our voice and honestly ask ourselves why we allow our clergy to exercise that singular element of the clerical culture, namely the financial control of the our church.

First, we laity provide all of the money. Therefore, we might reasonably also have the authority to husband those funds. Second, while clerics may have some special spiritual capabilities, we would have no reason to consider them to have any expertise in financial matters. Quite the opposite might be a much more logical presumption. For example, would you let your local ordinary or parish priest handle your 401k or real estate portfolio?

Finally, a concept that most of our Catholic laity fail to realize is that we seem to be the only major religion in the world that has a clergy handling money. That alone should give us pause to reflect on why that situation exists. Remember, the Reformation began with an imprudent gambit by the then-controlling clerics to monetize the grace of God. Did similar imprudent financial concerns affect our current clerics' judgment during our so-called sex abuse crisis?

Many reflective Catholics think that we are at the beginning of a new Reformation. Perhaps so. But the likelihood of that happening while our clergy controls our church finances would seem unlikely.

JOHN S. SANTA

Southport, Connecticut

***

Jesuit Fr. James Keenan thinks he has discovered a new theology but one half of the church knows and has known vulnerability from birth.

Women — a constituency the other half never explores because Catholic theology classically avoids examining female potentialities. If we need a theology of vulnerability, why not start a dialectic that embraces woman's experience of vulnerability. But then again, that might open that clerical Pandora's box.

I'd like to see a dialogue between Keenan and Benedictine Sr. Joan Chittister. Or Keenan and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza.

LINDA ORELL

Albuquerque, New Mexico

***

Jesuit Fr. James Keenan's reflections so mirror the image of Christ. How much more vulnerable can you be to be born in a stable and die naked on a cross?

The clericalism in our church is in direct opposition to that which we are called by a vulnerable God. He never set himself above others but reaches down to draw us up. All of the Roman seminaries, Latin rubrics, chanceries and male domination set before us a notion of superiority. It is not inclusive but exclusive. He comes to us each day in the simple form of bread and wine transformed into his body and blood. He does not come to us wrapped in lace, brocade and a white collar.

If he humbled himself to come as a baby and leave us as a convicted criminal why can we not get rid of this holier than thou attitude and follow his example?

JANE FRANCISCO

Charlotte, North Carolina

Advertisement

***

If you've read *In the Closet of the Vatican*, by Frédéric Martel, then Jesuit Fr. James Keenan's article talking about vulnerability as the solution to "hierarchical allurements" sounds like batting at windmills.

Martel says that if the faithful knew what was going on in the Vatican, the whole church would collapse. It may not collapse but it sure would schism itself into more denominations. Fortunately, Pope Francis seems vulnerable. Popes Benedict XVI and John Paul II were not.

The Vatican is out of touch with society and its needs, not only theologically, but administratively, legally, psychologically, rationally and culturally. I wasn't sure I wanted to read Martel's book much less Keenan's paper. It all seems hopeless. Privilege is addictive, power is addictive, sex is addictive and anger is addictive. I didn't want more evidence that the church is human.

Without justice there can be no organizations or political structures. So how can we protect the vulnerable or be vulnerable? We are all called to law and order and to a political structure where there is separation of powers: the legal, the legislative and the judicial. Yet one is left out, maybe the most important: a vibrant press. Without those four political structures, together with justice, we are batting at windmills.

Vulnerability cannot change anything without justice. Justice is the soul of vulnerability. If we can acquire justice maybe we will be forced into being humble and vulnerable?

DAVID THIBERT

Minneapolis, Minnesota

***

Thank you for noting the separate, pre-ordination grooming of likely bishops which, like other clerical career steps, has nothing to do with talent, merit, or holiness. Many of our present bishops entered the clerical system in early or late teens and their entire lives, personal, social, professional, financial, residence and place of employment, depends on their relationships with their superiors and peers. Performance is almost irrelevant and success is undefined. Connections, perhaps through influential parents or priest relatives originally, are everything. Poor pastoring, presiding, preaching come back to this lack of accountability.

A frequently unmentioned underpinning of this situation is the very idea of linking ordination to employment which is totally unnecessary. Small congregations are more effective faith communities. Worker-priests follow the pattern of Paul. Training in presiding and facilitating the study of scripture do not require graduate degrees. Local leaders do not need to be either apologists or canon lawyers. Look to the real needs. Dare to think of dismantling the organization, selling the properties and empowering the faithful.

End clericalism by ending the employment of clergy. The Constantinian and feudal patterns do not fit the modern world with widespread education and communication and mobile populations.

TOM POELKER

St. Louis, Missouri

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.