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

Heidi Schlumpf's article titled "Head of liturgy commission criticizes Amazon synod on social media" invites a few chuckles.

The article — though in the interests of accuracy it can be labeled only a simple Facebook page "review" — canvasses the recent social media postings of Msgr. Andrew Wadsworth, especially those that address the homage rendered to the Pachamama idol in Rome at the synod on the pan-Amazon region, which in its working document inexplicably designated the region as a "particular source of God's revelation."

It is somewhat baffling why the monsignor's understandable horror at the violation of the first commandment warrants attention. Another Englishman, and head of an Oratorian community to boot, scooped him long before by voicing remarkably similar views.



"Suppose certain bishops and priests at this day began to teach that Islamism or Buddhism was a direct and immediate revelation from God, she would be bound to use the authority which God has given her to declare that such a proposition will not stand with Christianity, and that those who hold it are none of hers; and she would be bound to impose such a declaration on that very knot of persons who had committed themselves to the novel proposition, in order that, if they would not recant, they might be separated from her communion, as they were separate from her faith."

His name? St. John Henry Newman.

LAWTON KING

New York, New York

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Your very detailed article on Msgr. Andrew Wadsworth's comments regarding Pachamama reads like a hit piece. Many priests have spoken against Pachamama. Why would you single out Wadsworth?

As I have been told, Pachamama is seen as a deity by many but has never been recognized as Catholic in nature. While it has some similarities to Our Lady, it is my understanding that Pachamama has been distinctly differentiated from the Virgin Mary. If we can conclude that Pachamama is a non-Catholic, non-Christian deity, then why would anyone allow it to exist within a church?

As a priest, Wadsworth serves Christ before anything else, including the pope. I don't see a problem with his defense of the faith against a non-Christian deity. Your article is vindictive and serves only to tear down faithful priests rather than build up the Catholic faith. You should apologize to Wadsworth and any other faithful priests mentioned in your article.

MIKE MURRAY

Washington, D.C.

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The pope's message is very confusing. He says on Dec. 4 not to do practices of the occult which is the realm of Satan, but he allowed a desecration in the Vatican gardens and the Basilica of St. Peter with a worship to Pachamama. I am Colombian, we know in South America that that is demonic.

I know that previous priests faithful to the teaching of Jesus and obeying the command to take the gospel to those in peril, had been in the jungle helping and teaching a new way with Christ.

Our Indians know firsthand about the spiritual realm; they experience the presence of spirits invoked by their shaman. They are taught of a different spirituality, one that comes from the creator, father of the Lord Jesus Christ.

They experience the protection that the name of Jesus and the Holy Spirit gives them against the curses spoken over them. There are many cases of conversions in the regions of South East of Colombia and in the Colombian Amazon region.

They wait for hours for a priest who has to travel up to eight or more hours through the most horrible trucks to sing hymns, to have teaching, to have communion, to have a meal together. The priest stay with them a few days and they love the fellowship. They understand our Catholic faith, they understand very well the stories in the Bible.

What is going to happen if now they are told that they need not give up their practices? Did the priests lie to them? Who are they going to trust now?

LIGIA RANDALL

Bucaramanga, Colombia

I don't think the priorities of the seven Kings Bay protestors will be for their own welfare but for the communities they serve so well.

From afar, as an unbeliever, I admire and respect their dedication and love for their fellow human beings and their principled stand against nuclear weapons, the great polluter of minds and bodies on our planet.

While they continue to serve the poor and homeless within the Catholic Worker movement, could I request your readers to offer a similar service of love and compassion to themselves as they face long prison sentences in the new year?

I am asking your readers to send thousands of emails to the judge who will be sentencing them to show the extent of our admiration and concern for these brave and honorable people.

Mark Colville, Clare Grady, Martha Hennessy, Fr. Steve Kelly, Elizabeth McAlister, Patrick O'Neill and Carmen Trotta are not criminals except in the sense that Jesus, Rev. Martin Luther King and Gandhi were criminals.

JUSTIN MORAHAN

Dublin, Ireland

The article by Jesuit Fr. Thomas Reese, "Will the world end with a bang, a whimper — or Christ?" echoes the wonderful view of reality found in the writings of his fellow Jesuit, Fr. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin.

It was this brilliant scientist and philosopher, cosmic theologian and mystic whose ideas gave me pause many years ago to consider where I stood regarding my understanding of reality. I became captivated by Teilhard's vision in large measure because it was optimistic. His vitalist idea of the evolution of matter toward human consciousness within an unfolding and directional cosmos was an epiphany for me.

Even though the monitum unfortunately still exists on Teilhard's writings it is refreshing to witness, from time to time, individuals like Reese and even Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis incorporate his thought into their writings and speeches, even if done without mentioning Teilhard by name. These constitute small but important steps toward rehabilitating Teilhard and making his vision relevant for today's people of faith.

In fact, Teilhard's vision is so expansive and hope-filled that it is more germane today than at any other time. In spite of all that we see in this world that can drag us into pessimism there is still much room for optimism but only if one can see reality through the eyes of Teilhard.

(Deacon) ROBERT F. COLEMAN

Sydney, Nova Scotia

The direction of the editorial "If a little Catholic confusion exists, maybe it is a blessing" is right on target in that those who seek to keep their place of privilege and power are on a mission to discredit as well as question the legitimacy of Pope Francis' election.

I applaud Francis' outreach to those who are on the margins because if those in power could return to the Gospel, they would see that Jesus was to be found with the outcasts of society and not in the halls of power. He was not afraid to get his hands dirty healing the sick and comforting the grieving. While governance of the church needs a structure to accomplish her mission, it also needs to look toward Jesus to find the way that governance should be executed — not in privilege and wealth but

in personal sacrifice and humble willingness to join the "sheep" in the middle of their messy lives.

JERILYN E. FELTON

Tigard, Oregon

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I really wanted to believe your editorial was revealing something I cannot see. But this one line stung my eyes:

> *Catholic identity, once a calculus of rigid rule-keeping, has shifted more to a practice of mercy and accompaniment.*

While I want to believe that Francis has ushered in some level of NCR's statement on identity, the other aspect, as described in the same article, is telling as well:

"What's different, however, is that this is organized, and it is well-funded, and it is prominent in social media. I think it's scandalous, personally. I don't think Francis is afraid of criticism. He's a Jesuit. What does cause him headaches is the insidiousness of the opposition."

This is not about a little confusion. This is hard core. Vatican II supposedly opened a window with fresh change and renewal. Then, almost without any warning, it was slammed shut. While vestiges (remnants?) remain, I'm doubtful enough to believe when Francis is gone, look for the windows to shut again.

If today is "how we have come" since the days of Jesus, if we are still wrestling with a Catholic identity, if the 'fishermen' still live in their gilded world, Francis may be only a moment of catching our breath before the next wave.

And maybe NCR is right. Compared to the vitality and dynamism of Vatican II now long forgotten, maybe the best we can hope for is a little confusion.

DAVE MURRAY

Cedarville, Michigan

It should not surprise anyone that the public disclosure of the crimes committed by sex predator priests has made being a priest more difficult and less pleasant for their non-predator colleagues.

Nevertheless, the "turmoil" caused by the public's knowledge of these criminals and their crimes vanishes when contrasted with the lifelong damage that is inflicted on the innocent children who have been raped and otherwise used for the sexual gratification by men who are said to be the servants of God.

We should save our sympathy for the raped children and let the non-predator priests resolve their own "turmoil." Perhaps the solution is for the priesthood to rid itself of the sex predators among its members and see to it that more predators are prevented from joining.

Please consider reporting how many of America's 17,000-plus Catholic parishes were not "served" by a sexual predator priest between, say, 1951 and 2000. I picked the last five decades because of the very long time between (a) the average age of the victim at the first rape (11) and (b) the average age of the victim when such rapes are reported (44).

ROB BLIGH

San Antonio, Texas

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These are the men (priests mentioned in article) who should be running our archdioceses. They know the real heartbeat of the parishes that make up the archdioceses are not the cardinals and bishops that parishioners rarely encounter.

I am tired of receiving "My dear brothers and sisters" letters from someone who doesn't know who is part of their archdiocese and stays behind a partition of staff to fend off questions!

MARY WALLACE

Emerson, New Jersey

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I empathize with U.S. priests who feel the pressure and turmoil. The situation in Ireland is not dissimilar.

A factor unnecessarily adding to the pressure is a failure to recognize how much has changed in the understanding of child sexual abuse in the past 40 years. The article refers to "This cover-up … a lot are angry at bishops and the institutional church for screwing up."

We insist today on the highest standards of dealing with allegations of abuse. It is unjust, and anachronistic, to judge the actions of those dealing with allegations 40 or 50 years ago as if they had our knowledge. The wisdom and best-practice of those times are the folly and outrage of today. They did not have our knowledge of how widespread abuse is, nor of the effects on those abused, nor how to deal with abusers. This is true of priests and of legal, medical and social professionals.

PADRAIG McCARTHY

Dublin, Ireland

***

This excellent article described well how hard it must be to be a good priest in the midst of a severe shortage of ministers.

There is a simple solution: Ordain women. Give parishes to women who have already been ordained as Catholic priests. I have been to two of these ordinations. As I see these women, in vestments at the altar proclaiming the gospel, performing the Eucharist, my first thought is: what is the church afraid of?

A man says, "I have been called to the priesthood" and everyone rejoices. He then works to pass the requirements of the seminary and enhance his spiritual life. A young woman says, "I have been called to the priesthood" and the church says, "No, you haven't."

From the beginning, with the great women saints, until today when sisters are at the border and women are running schools and parishes, what more do we have to do prove that we are the equal of men in our love for the message of Jesus? The church would rather close parishes than share priestly power with women. One might say that the church has brought this burden of overworked priests on itself.

MARGUERITE DELACOMA

Evanston, Illinois

I was delighted to read Mark Pattison's article ("Film examines whether papal message could have saved Europe's Jews") about Holy Silence and the panel discussion I participated in at the Holocaust Museum in Washington.

It is significant to note that National Catholic Reporter published (December 15, 1972) the first major look at Pope Pius XI's "Hidden Encyclical," as it came to be known. It was not Jews, however, but NCR that was first to discuss publicly the idea that *Humani generis unitas* might have changed history.

As I note in my book, *The Pope's Last Crusade*, NCR editorialized at the time:

> *Considering that Hitler had only begun to move into full-scale persecution of the Jews, and had not yet begun planned extermination; considering that Italy had only begun to copy Germany's racial laws; considering the persecution of Jews throughout history; considering the difficulty, especially in Europe, of launching a similar wide-scale attack on Catholics; and considering the moral weight of the papacy, especially at that point in history--considering all this, we must conclude that the publication of the encyclical draft at the time it was written may have saved hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions of lives.*

I end the book saying that this can never be known. "It was only clear that Pope Pius XI took a stance in favor of absolute morality and defended to his last breath his principles of decency and humanity, nothing more, nothing less."

PETER EISNER

Washington, D.C.

"Preparing the way for the Black Christ" is a fine article, but I suspect that most readers will guess that in writing about the Blackness of Jesus, Alex Mikulich is referring to anthropological Blackness. Was Mikulich not writing about ontological blackness instead? If so, it would have been helpful if he had explained the

distinction.

JEFFREY JONES

Hamburg, New York

I am writing in response to the article "Parishioners object to firings of laicized priest and inactive priest." As a former priest and now president of a Catholic university, I found the bishop's cultural warrior behavior reprehensible. I wonder how loud his voice was in holding his brother bishops accountable for sexual abuses and their cover-ups.

I am confident that canon law does not permit men to remain in office as bishop or priest for such abuses and rapes. Yet the bishop's silence is deafening only surpassed by his moral duplicity. Thank you for exposing this injustice.

JOHN J. PETILLO

Fairfield, Connecticut

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The article "Parishioners object to firings of laicized priest and inactive priest" presents the readers with a modern day instance of clerical pharisaism. The bishop's adherence to the letter of canon law in the firing of two formally active priests within the diocese belies the kind of actions on the part of the hierarchy that has been the cause of Catholics leaving the church in droves.

It is simply a matter of the bishop putting adherence to manmade laws ahead of the good or well-being of the parishioners of St. Patrick parish in Scottsdale, Arizona. Both men were beloved by the parishioners and were doing exemplary work within the parish, in one case for numerous years. I doubt that any of the parishioners are really all that concerned about their status according to canon law.

When we consider how difficult it is to find competent people to fill positions like the two men were occupying, it doesn't make a whole lot of sense to remove these men from their positions based upon what many Catholics would consider a technicality of canon law. Hopefully other bishops in similar circumstances will make prudential judgements that uphold the good of lay parishioners over strict adherence to the

letter of the law.

THOMAS SEVERIN

Connellsville, Pennsylvania

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This is in reference to the article on the firing of two former priests in Arizona. This is another example of how people in the church continue to shoot themselves in the foot.

Here are two good men doing fine ministry and we quibble about a rule which continues to exclude qualified people from ministry.

(Fr.) TOM ZELINSKI OFM CAP

Washington, Michigan

Advertisement

Kudos to NCR for the truth in the editorial "Finally, the Legion's terrible truth." How sad that so many in our church refuse to hear the truth and continue to associate with these righteous thoughts.

Many new seminarians are being formed in the same likeness. How our church could canonize Pope John Paul II is beyond my powers to understand although he did do many good things.

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, perhaps some will come to recognize truth when it hits the in the face.

JANE FRANCISCO

Charlotte, North Carolina

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As a survivor of abuse as a young teen by a family member, as a former religious and priest for 25 years and now married for 15 years, my heart and prayers go out to the victims/survivors.

When, as a religious, I met young members of this community, I noticed (as well as others) and was concerned about the immaturity of them, a concern now noticeable with the evidence presented in this article.

ROBERT MARZULLO

Shoreline, Washington

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While providing much-needed transparency to the public and especially the victims of sexual abuse, the elimination of legitimate confidentiality to protect the rights and reputations of both the victims and the accused is a dangerous erosion of fair due process.

I am amazed at the one-sidedness of most articles and commentaries and the casual overlooking of the importance of fair due process for both victims and accused. In order to provide fair due process, it is essential to provide a system of canonical jurisprudence that protects the rights and reputations of both the victims and the accused. Our current system of canon law is too weak and nebulous in its criteria and standards for acceptable evidence to provide this fair adjudication of these cases.

Falsely accused clergy find themselves especially vulnerable to a miscarriage of justice in the current atmosphere which offers the shrill cries of victims' advocates groups, greedy lawyers and of course the "unbiased" media.

If the church, society, victims, the accused and everyone and anyone who has been touched by the scourge of sexual abuse, is to find healing and wholeness, then a good beginning would be for the church to reform its Code of Canon Law. Right now, too much of the current code is stuck in the Middle Ages using a heavily inquisitorial and star chamber approach to adjudicating cases.

Let real reform, (which should have been done immediately after Vatican II), begin.

(Fr.) PASCAL IPOLITO

West Seneca, New York

Greetings, I fully appreciate Franciscan Fr. Daniel Horan's article, "Christmas is for all God's creatures," but I offer the following reflection to help to fill it out more fully.

For me, God really and profoundly dwells within all of creation for all time. Jesus is/was a fuller manifestation of that reality. And you and I are also fully part of that creation and its ongoing trajectory.

Thus, everything we do and say and think and pray, down to our every seemingly innocuous and inconsequential act or thought, is within that trajectory and influences its direction for better or for worse. Essentially, we contribute to and are part of God's ongoing creative act. That is, we are co-creators with God.

Thus, I am a "product" of everything and everybody that has gone before me, including my own choices. In this way, it may be stated that I am a manifestation of the universe, as are you and every other creature and thing.

This, then, is the confluence of free will and determinism. Be assured, I don't think of this as a metaphor nor is it a contemporary form of pantheism. This is reality at its core and thus everything and everybody influences all else in the most profound and essential ways.

We live and move and have our being within the web of life, within God.

(Fr.) BOB BOSSIE, SCJ

Chicago, Illinois

It is not surprising to read the poignant but candid statement about the rampant predator priest problem voiced by the head of the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith's discipline section, Msgr. John Kennedy: "I suppose if I weren't a priest and if I had a child who were abused, I'd probably stop going to Mass."

This concerning angst is shared by many in the clergy and among practicing Catholics, who feel totally abandoned by the church hierarchy for not applying Pope

Francis' zero tolerance policy for predator priests. Many of them are repeat offenders who have been protected by the church hierarchy via cover-ups — an even more heinous sin.

The above situation is not only an affront to society but also to the outstanding contributions made by the great majority of Catholic priests, religious and many within the laity, who strive to follow in the footsteps of Christ.

RUDY FERNANDES

Mississauga, Ontario

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