Opinion
News



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 January 2020. If you want to respond to an article published in NCR, follow the steps listed at the end of this post.

Something such as explained by in "Pro-Trump group targets Catholic voters using cellphone technology" by Heidi Schlumpf has control of many Mass-attending

Catholics in the Greensburg, Pennsylvania, Diocese.

A one-page flyer quoting a news story of Nancy Pelosi saying she always prays for President Donald Trump brought a deluge of phone and email responses of outrage, mostly saying no way can Pelosi be considered a Catholic because she supports abortion, whereas Trump is anti-abortion and has done so much good for our country. Several said they were reporting the flyer to the bishop's office as an affront to Catholic belief.

BERNARD SURVIL

Olean, New York

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So are you saying that Democrats would never stoop this low to harvest this information? Are you saying that the government should decide who can be killed in the womb? Do you think the Democrats never heard of this kind of stealing private information or have used it? That it is only wrong to steal our phone's information if the Republicans do it?

If you are truly a news agency, please take off your blinders regarding the Democratic party.

GAYLE WITTMANN

Harmony, Pennsylvania

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This article is without doubt one of the worst left-wing hit pieces I've yet to read anywhere, let alone in a Catholic publication. If I didn't know better, I'd swear Michael Sean Winters was a member of the Democratic Party, he's so far to the left.



I certainly hope future articles are vetted to rid them of this anger, bombastic language and scurrilous attacks on legitimate Catholic organizations. Especially one trying to gain support for votes in line with Catholic values. Something our bishops and priests should be doing.

If you don't like this type of data gathering, fine, that's understandable. But keep to the story line without the scurrilous attacks.

CB "CORK" MOTSETT

Jacksonville, Florida

Benedictine Sr. Joan Chittister's call to be Christian extremists ("Be you either hot or cold: Jesus' words, not mine") reminded me of a similar call made by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in his Letter from Birmingham Jail.

> "Was not Jesus an extremist for love … Was not Paul an extremist for the Christian gospel … So the question is not whether we will be extremists, but what kind of extremists we will be. Will we be extremists for hate or or love? Will we be extremists for the preservation of injustice or for the extension of justice? ... Jesus Christ was an extremist for love, truth and goodness, and thereby rose above his environment. Perhaps the South,

the nation and the world are in dire need of creative extremists."

These words ring as true today as they did then. It is up to us to choose what kind of extremists we will be. The number of those choosing hateful extremism is rising as evidenced by an increase in hate crimes, hateful language and the resurgence of hateful symbols like swastikas. In such a climate, the call to be Christian extremists for love becomes more urgent.

Thank you, Sister Joan, for your cogent exploration of what it means to be a Christian extremist for love in our current climate. May God grant all of us who call ourselves Christian the fortitude to creatively answer the call.

NANCY SMALL

Worcester, Massachusetts

In regards to Michael Sean Winters' article on the appointment of bishops, if we cannot trust the U.S. Catholic bishops with the care for our children and for commitment to a fully faith-filled reading of and conformity to true Gospel values, how can we (and why should we) trust them with the formation of our consciences and their directed choices for exercising our citizenship in a diverse democracy?

MARY HINES

Timonium, Maryland

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I feel certain this will not occur in my lifetime, but I will rejoice when I read the heading — no impending bishop appointments! The word appointment disturbs me more than most words. I would love to see each parish or dicastery or communities of faith be able to nominate and vote for whom the bishop will be.

This person would typically be a part of and well known to the communities he will serve, emphasis on the word serve. I would love to see a younger man, open minded and a true shepherd who "smells like the sheep."

If we could all get out of the way of the Holy Spirit, perhaps this would become more than a dream.

JANE FRANCISCO

Charlotte, North Carolina

Michael Sean Winters' opinion on changing the rules for the making of saints was very disturbing to me. While I agree with his basic thesis that canonizations should not be made prematurely and only with great care, I completely disagree with his arguments for his position because I find them — strangely — out of touch with the ecclesiology of Vatican II and with most of 20th century theology on grace.

Winters himself invokes "a commitment to the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council" for effective popes and bishops, and I think a theological writer at NCR should have it, too. The whole chapter five of *Lumen gentium* is entitled "The universal call to holiness in the church." This was substantial progress at the time and means that every Christian is called to holiness: even a politician, or a butcher, or a mechanic — also a pope or a bishop.

Now Winters argues that the "skill set" to be a good pope or bishop disqualifies one from being a saint. It seems that qualifying to be a saint means being otherworldly and helpless in worldly matters. This seems to be corroborated by his juxtaposition of "skill sets" with "gifts," as well as of human agency with divine agency. The theology I know is well past these kinds of false oppositions. Don't we know that God acts through human acting and that our skills are God's gifts to us? Why not view it like Ignatius of Loyola and act as if everything depended upon us but pray as if everything depended upon God? And why should this not be possible for a bishop?

I agree that Pope John Paul II should not have been canonized on the fast track. But if it is true that "a saint can be excused for overlooking other's faults, but not a pope," this then is an argument against making Karol Wojtyla pope but not against making him a saint. I cannot help suspecting a bias against this pope when arguments are used that support the very contrary from what they are used for.

Finally, Winters wants to abolish the criterion of outstanding moral character because he thinks it is Pelagian. To me this stance shows that the author has not left behind himself the dichotomy of the Augustinian-Pelagian debates and the

reformation and counter-reformation struggles. But what if an outstanding moral character is viewed as an indicator of God's grace being operative in a person? This does not mean that he/she must be without reproach because saints are also sinners, and the more we are aware of that the better for a healthy understanding of sainthood. But that is not an argument against this criterion. It is an argument against a moralizing and static interpretation of it.

NIKOLAUS WANDINGER

Innsbruck, Austria

It has always been my belief that killing another human being for any reason is very difficult to justify, but I do have some questions for the moralists and ethicist that contributed to article.

1. Is it moral to give $150 billion to a regime that used the funds to support terror around the world killing thousands of innocents?
2. Is it moral to allow one terrorist leader to continue his Muslim reign of terror against Christians, Jews and his own people?
3. Is it moral to support an entire regime in their quest to gain nuclear power to vaporize all their enemies and non-Muslim neighbors?
4. Is it moral to allow a regime to continue to brutalize and murder its own civilian population because they might be of a different sect?
5. Is it moral to cut the throats of hundreds of Christians simply because they are non-Muslims and therefore infidels?
6. Is it moral to stand by and watch the slaughter of thousands simply because you do like the current president of the United States?

As in most socialistic nonsense coming out of the NCR, I saw no concrete suggestions of how to fix a nation where for hundreds of years only the man with the biggest sword wins. I would like to have this little group of moralists go to a couple locations here within the United States and walk down the street wearing an open crucifix and carrying a Holy Bible. Maybe that would give you a better understanding of who these people are and their intent for your future. Feel good platitudes and shipping them money will not fix the problem.

RICHARD WALTERS

Phoenix, Arizona

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While I am relieved your Catholic ethicists all concluded President Donald Trump's ordering the drone strike on Qassem Soleimani does not fit with Catholic just war theory, I am appalled with the lack of indignant response by the U.S. and Canadian Conference of Bishops as well as from the Supreme Knight of the Knights of Columbus given Karl Anderson's full throttled support for Trump as a "pro-life" candidate.

The escalation of the use of assassination as a means of bullying foreign powers into submitting to a development mode that benefits global corporations based in the U.S. over the common good for all goes against not only Catholic ethics but all of our Catholic social teaching.

The bishops' conferences of the world should all be raising their voices in condemnation of this escalation.

YVONNE ZAROWNY

Qualicum Beach, British Columbia

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After you read "An eyewitness to the horrors of US 'forever wars' speaks out," I have a question for you. As your "pro-life" leader leads this country to a possible war with Iran, you know, the kind where innocent men, women and children are killed and maimed, do you realize who is going to the Middle East and fight this war?

It will be your children and grandchildren, your nieces and nephews, your friends and neighbors. Just as it was with Iraq. You do realize, I hope, that the rich and powerful send the rest of us out to fight their wars while they stay comfortably at home. What if you find out it really is your ox who is being gored?

You're not this gullible, are you?

BILL KRISTOFCO

Parkville, Maryland

In Michael Sean Winters' article "The religious left is busy but small," I would like to suggest that one of the reasons it appears small is because of existing silos between liberal groups.

From my experience, liberals would be far more effective if they would break down the walls that appear to separate them and seek to work together to achieve what are actually common goals, often expressed in different words.

For example, in Minnesota, the organization, "Every Church A Peace Church" has common goals with "Twin Cities Nonviolent" but few members of either group know much about the other and, therefore, fail to support each others' interventions and programs. Hence, they both appear smaller and, perhaps, are less effective than if they made the effort to support each other and work together.

(Fr.) HARRY J. BURY

St. Paul, Minnesota

Regarding "Homilists weigh the pros and cons of preaching to the headlines," Jesus told us to pick up our cross and follow him. Our savior, whom we claim to follow, showed us the way to speak truth to power. Hiding from the dangers of speaking up, out of fear of repercussions, was not the way for him, nor should it be for us today.

To do otherwise is to hide our light under a bushel in cowardice, hoping to avoid attacks from those who disagree, to try selfishly to preserve our own "peace."

You don't need to look very far into history to see how prelates past and present have ended up becoming entangled in the tentacles of tyrants by trying to "protect" the church from political and cultural blowback.

Grow some and say what is daily screaming to be said. It's relevant to every word and act of Jesus.

To all clergy: Take up that cross and follow the savior you daily claim to serve. That is your function, your duty, and your salvation. Otherwise, your cowardice will keep you from even running the race.

INGRID HARRIS

Hamilton, Ontario

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I read with much interest your article because I have felt for years that so often our priests find safe haven in the Holy Spirit and the whole biblical contingencies, and that in so doing, have demonstrated either their lack of talent for being able to apply the gospel message to our current status or their real cowardice in that said lack of ability, lest confrontation would issue from that interaction of the "then and now."

Whatever, the fact remains that many priests are boring and are seen as increasingly irrelevant in their safe pious utterances. If ever there was a need for truth, it is now.

Give it a shot, guys, before all our churches become spas or restaurants.

JOAN MARTIN

Yonkers, New York

Here's another solution to add to "Four Catholic solutions to toxic politics" by Jesuit Fr. Thomas Reese:

Catholics could become familiar with the 40 logical fallacies presented in *How to Think Like Aquinas* by Kevin Vost and thereby recognize and reject arguments based on faulty reasoning. No one wants to be considered unreasonable, so if more people (especially in the media) recognized and pointed out arguments based on faulty reasoning, perhaps those arguments would begin to disappear. Unreasonable arguments used against a person or position only add to the toxicity, heightening divisions and clouding real issues. Catholics should follow Aquinas and calmly seek to be reasonable because truth cannot be found through unreasonableness.

However, if you're going to do this, it's best to remove the plank from your own eye before addressing the splinter in your neighbor's eye. In that vein, I suspect one could find examples of faulty reasoning on basically any Catholic news website. Take yours for instance: one of the 40 logical fallacies presented in the book is hyperbole — exaggerated statements or claims not meant to be taken literally. Did Michael

Sean Winters really mean for the headline to his article "For next census, expect every dirty trick in the book from GOP" to be taken literally? If so, please let me know where I can get this book so I can become familiar with every one of the possible dirty tricks to expect.

Examples abound. Toxic politics could be greatly reduced by replacing unreasonable with reasonable arguments.

RUSSELL BRUMM

Menasha, Wisconsin

Regarding "New year, new decade and a new chance for church renewal" by Franciscan Fr. Daniel P. Horan, as a recently down-sized, life-long, Christian formation minister, I would hope the 2020s would see a recognition of the need for well-funded, professional formation for the vast majority of Catholic, adults, youth and children who do not attend Catholic schools.

The current practice in parishes of out of proportion attention given to schools leaves little or nothing for addressing the evangelization needs of non-school parishioners. Studies have shown that Catholic school alumni are no more connected to faith communities than non-alumni. So why so we continue to pour funding into schools, while neglecting clear Gospel mandates?

JIM GILL

Greendale, Wisconsin

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I am left saddened and still with my "faith seeking understanding" as I read Franciscan Fr. Daniel P. Horan's imagining of the church in the 2020s. While he addresses many of the injustices and shortcomings of the church in his article, and does refer to women deacons, noticeably missing is reference to the issue of women banned from ordination to the priesthood.

For me, women not being allowed ordination is an offence to God. It is not about being equal or able, as we all know in our hearts that women are as equal and able as men. No, it is about fear and power. And I believe God is offended because God

calls women to priesthood, and it is men who have the audacity to say "no."

I admire the courage of the women, for example like those who are Roman Catholic Women Priests, who have the courage to answer the call from God and not wait for permission from the men in charge of the church. They are among the prophets of our time.

I feel sorry for Horan that he did not feel safe enough to raise this issue in his column.

KATHERINE CAMERON

Regina, Saskatchewan

Jamie Manson's article, "The church must confront its own role in violence toward women," reminded me of an incident when I was a young priest.

I had been ordained about 18 months, was teaching full time in a high school and living in a parish and helping out on weekends. One morning after one of the masses, a young woman asked me if we could go somewhere private to have a conversation. I said that we certainly could, and we went into the rectory into a small office that was assigned to me.

She told me that her husband of six years had been abusing (verbally and physically hitting)her since they had been married.

What complicated things more for me is that I knew her brother-in-law quite well and had some connections to her husband as he was a parishioner. After she spoke for a few minutes she rolled up her right sleeve and showed me a nasty bruise on her forearm.

I was at a loss for what to say. I expressed sympathy and asked her if she had gotten help from a counselor or if she had sought any kind of help at all. (In those days, 1967, marriage counseling was not as accessible as it is now.) I asked that conscious of the fact that she had come to me for help; probably the only place she knew where to turn. She said that she dared not seek help for fear that her husband might discover it. Being so inexperienced, I took the easy way out. I told her that since I have so little experience in these matters, I am not sure whether I could help very much other than to listen. So, I said that I thought she should see the pastor

because he is much more experienced in these matters than I.

I could not bring myself to plead with her to find ways of being submissive, obedient, respectful and pleasing to the point that he would stop — which was the only training and instruction about these cases that we were given in the seminary. We even had one professor of moral theology recommend that we advise the abused to "offer it up." It is hard to imagine all the implications of that phrase in this situation. She thanked me, we exchanged a few pleasantries and she left. I didn't follow up and don't know whether she saw the pastor or not.

I am so glad that you wrote this column. This is a very fundamental problem. This problem is so fundamental that I understand and mourn the firestorm over *Amoris Laetitia*. I sometimes wonder that there are any women left in the church at all.

(Fr.) CHARLIE PFEIFFER

Portland, Oregon

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I very much respect and like Pope Francis. However, despite having taken some positive steps to increase women's equality in the church, much more needs to be done. We need to be accepted as equals to men and we need to be accepted in ministry such as the diaconate.

Having seen the pope get so agitated by the woman in St. Peter's Square, I recognize he is human and was likely tired and worn out. However, I am thinking of the poor woman who was so enthralled by being near the pope that she overwhelmed him. Can you imagine the shame she must feel as being the one the pope lost patience with? She may even be facing harsh criticism from those who know her. I cannot stop thinking about how upset she must be after what happened.

Given the power imbalance between the two of them I think she deserves healing and I believe the pope needs to meet with her personally and ask her forgiveness for his response. He would also modeling for others his respect for women as equals.

ELIZABETH MALONEY

Pine City, New York

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Calling Pope Francis' reaction to the person violating his person cannot blithely be termed violence against women, any more than physically resisting a "pick-pocket" who happens to be a woman.

Jamie Manson's article is a valid example and all too common instance of how the church violates women and their integrity as persons equal among men and before God. Our church exclusion of women supports and reinforces all forms of misogyny not only in our church but is society generally.

It is amazing to me that clergy and practicing Catholics either don't care, agree, or simply tolerate the position. Doing so reinforces misogyny, not only within but actually retards social advancement and justifies other sects, cultures and societies and sick persons who abuse women.

To my mind the most pernicious dimension of the church position is encapsulated in the 2004 "Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World." This document revived and "translated" into contemporary language, biblical primitivism, literalism and rendered into contemporary social terminology the medieval damning of women, relegating their role as satisfying the sexual and reproductive needs of men.

This document by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger affixed a seal of renewed legitimacy to the old minds. Though it is infrequently referred to directly, it has provided a rhetoric for misogynists to ignore the reality of social and religious progress "in the church and in the world."

DENNIS MacDONALD

Bedford, Nova Scotia

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I agree 100% with Jamie Manson's take on this issue. Catholic women are continually an "at-risk" population as long as the Roman patriarchal hierarchy continues to give only lip service to equality and equity.

While I think this pope has done many laudatory things (and should be given credit for doing so), it is still not OK to continue to devalue females across the globe.

TERI CORSO

Newton, New Jersey

Thank you for questioning the "noble purpose" of U.S. foreign policy. You might be interested in the perspective of this immigrant from El Salvador in an almost 50-year marriage to John an immigrant from Indonesia.

My husband's family fled Indonesia during a political upheaval in his homeland. John strongly believed in U.S. democratic principles and volunteered to serve in Vietnam to combat what he saw as the evil of communism. You can only imagine this U.S. combat veteran's disappointment to learn a few years ago that it was the U.S. government who worked with the Indonesian military to kill one million of its own people.

My story is similar. I was very angry in the 1980s when my U.S. tax money was being used to finance a horrific civil war that killed and displaced one third of the Salvadoran population.

I agree that it is time to question the "noble purpose" of U.S. foreign policy. We should instead lead by example. Rather than try to change the "evils" in foreign countries, we should further develop the "good" in U.S. democracy. Let us also go back to our immigrant roots to enrich the beauty and uniqueness of American values.

CARMEN HARTONO

Oakland, California

Advertisement

Thank you for the article "On abortion, young Catholics express frustration with terms of the debate." My hope is that our young Catholics will encourage all Catholics to change the focus of the abortion discussion in the United States away from legal vs. illegal and a woman's right, to the real issue.

As fierce protectors of life within them and newborn life, female animals, birds, fish and humans do not naturally seek to destroy but to protect their own and to propagate life.

The question we might ask ourselves is, "Why does a human female turn to such a violent solution?" Many reasons have been put forth — social circumstances, lack of support, lack of money, and as caring people we are addressing those kinds of issues.

However, there is perhaps a deeper more universal issue/question we as leaders of morality are called to address, as did our fellow Christians centuries ago who founded monasteries, centers of hospitality, hospitals, and schools as the Christian response to a prevalent need, needs not being addressed by their political systems.

"How do we address, on a broad social scale, the nurturing of life? What do we need to establish to realistically implement structures and programs that will make a difference?"

Perhaps God is calling us to be leaders for programs that truly address needs, rather than reactors against a law. We need to expand our mission and our perspective and unite in multiplying the good we already do, so eventually all will honor and delight in the wonder of life.

SHARON NELSEN

Sorrento, Florida

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You hit the nail on the head with your quote from Melissa Cedillo, "I see abortion as a deeply intimate topic that has been made abundantly public." She went on to say that focusing on abortion through a legal lens leaves out discussion of root causes, like the costs of child care, health care, the accessibility of affordable housing and social programs, that can lead women to consider the procedure at all.

Today the right to life movement has become a right to birth movement, after which the mother and child can be left to starve, be exploited, live on the street, or simply fade away into the morass of poverty. What worries me is the focus on legal points and the opportunity to overturn *Roe* vs. *Wade* opens up the discussion of whether it

is even moral to vote against the current majority government and Donald Trump. Could our bishops really be thinking like this?

It is not *Roe* vs *Wade* that causes abortion; in fact, this ruling simply made abortion safer for a woman who felt she needed one. The real issue is our culture and the conditions that leave her thinking there is no other acceptable choice. What if we focused on the value of life, especially that of an unborn child? What if there were not a stigma attached to an unwed mother? What if we actually honored the pregnant mother, provided support, health care, affordable housing, and whatever else the woman needs to have this child and either raise it or allow someone else to raise it through adoption? Can we really convince ourselves that we need to support a regime that would deprive anyone who is poor or ethnically diverse of the means to a decent life?

JIM HEMSCHOOT

Stratford, New Jersey

Letter regarding: "Methodists may set agree-to-disagree model for churches in strife."

I am a bit confused by the process that is being used to hopefully settle this disagreement. The church in February of last year, at its general conference voted to maintain its long-held doctrine prohibiting same-sex marriage and the ordination of openly gay and lesbian pastors.

Subsequently, a group of church leaders held another, much smaller meeting, in which a proposal was approved to allow a split within the church over the issue. However, even though the majority of members of the United Methodist Church were in favor of the long-held doctrine (as documented in last year's conference vote), the proposal to be voted on later this year calls for the majority view (the Traditionalists) to be the ones who have to leave and form their own new denomination.

In fact, the ones who want to change the Book of Discipline to allow for same-sex marriage and the ordination of gay and lesbian pastors don't have to even vote to do that. They will get their new doctrine by default because according to the proposal, the Traditionalists will be required to vote to leave the church and adopt a

new name —and they are the ones who want no change to the existing doctrine.

Usually it is the dissenting group that must leave an organization — especially when the dissenting group is in the minority, which it is in this case. Am I missing something here?

NOEL HYDE

Punta Gorda, Florida

The concluding statement of the article on the German bishops' conference says that the issues of priestly celibacy and the ordination of women could only be "addressed and clarified" by the whole Catholic Church.

This statement contradicts the very fact of the German synodal process and the set of its preparatory works, which address and seek to clarify, among other topics, the themes of celibacy for priests and the ordination of women.

And this is correct because history has shown that any dogmatic or theological problem must be addressed and discussed by individual theologians and local churches before it can be addressed and decided by the whole church.

Furthermore, the subsidiarity principle requires that the deliberations that can be decided at the lower level must be decided at this level and the correct interpretation of the same principle is that the lower level must also decide why and who should deliberate on its behalf.

The terms "lower" and "higher" are incorrect when used for a hierarchy of power. They erroneously imply that empowerment is a descending path from top to bottom, according to the traditional image of a mythical absolute power.

The reality is that the powers in a society are a cooperative network of multiple branches of that society in order to achieve the best results.

GIUSEPPE BADINI CONFALONIERI

Sheffield, United Kingdom

As I read the article, "Trump seals his Catholic deal," I was reminded of the state of things just before our country got involved in World War II. At the time, there were many people, both clergy and lay persons, who saw with horror what Adolph Hitler was doing — and what he planned to do — as he ruthlessly pursued the extermination of countless human beings, Jews and non-Jews alike.

One of those sounding the alarm was Fr. H.A. Reinhold, who was forced to leave his native Germany because his outspokenness had put his life in danger. When Reinhold attempted to tell the editor of the diocesan paper, The Brooklyn Tablet, about the atrocities Adofl Hitler was committing, he was told, "But father, he's not a bad man; he's opposed to Communism, isn't he?"

With his blatant exploitation of the abortion issue to persuade naive Catholics and, tragically, their leaders, that he's "not a bad man," President Donald Trump has taken a page out of Hitler's playbook. Who will stop this amoral man, who himself will stop at nothing?

THEODORA BRIGGS SWEENEY

Monroe Township, New Jersey

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Yes, President Donald Trump's endorsement by pro-life Catholics is disconcerting and misleading. It is also a dangerously troubling manifestation of the church's failure to provide ongoing education and formation to our members, especially in the complex and nuanced area of social ethics.

A well-formed conscience, once a hallmark of Catholicity, requires a recommitment today by the church to provide its members access to competent theologians and relevant resources so that the complex issues of our day can be considered in the light of faith and reason.

Anything less leaves Catholics with limited literacy, and vulnerable to those whose self-interests and cunning will exploit our church for purposes that are ultimately antithetical to the Gospel message and Catholic tradition, especially Catholic social teaching.

(Sr.) ARLENE FLAHERTY, OP

Blauvelt, New York

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