News



by NCR Staff

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May 1, 2020
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Each month, NCR gathers up a sampling of letters to the editor received to our inbox relating to our articles and columns. This week, we will focus on letters received in March 2020. Letters have been edited for length and clarity. To send your own letter, follow the guidelines at the end of the post.

I always come away better informed reading Michael Sean Winters. But his reference to identity politics in his article "A step back to look at 'Christ and Culture' for a week

" is problematic. His assertion that "the left's obsession with identity politics demands an assertion of self or group, an assertion that finds no warrant in the Gospels," ignores the history of oppression in our society and culture. To lump people struggling to end that oppression with the "culture warriors" he wants to reform is to ignore great injustices and how those struggles come right out of the Gospels.

This "obsession" grew out of the historical suppression of groups of people. People of color, women, members of the LGBTQ community and others seek to be seen and valued as human beings with the dignity and worth we all have as children of God. They fight against attempts to silence and marginalize them, attempts, sad to say, often perpetrated by members of our church.

I believe that the present emphasis on identity politics by members of these and other historically marginalized and suppressed groups will lessen as they are accepted as a normal expression of the mystery of Christ. That depends on us, those who are not members of these groups. Until we see them and treat them as truly brothers and sisters in Christ, beloved by God just as they are, they will of right continue to disturb our domestic tranquility.

JOSEPH GAINZA

Plainfield, Vermont



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Praise for this series on the H. Richard Niebuhr book *Christ and Culture*. Michael Sean Winters has packed his columns full of information and observations about the book, which, sadly, I will probably never read, not being any kind of theologian.

I'm grateful for his insights, and, as always, in awe of his great writing. How wonderful to have found, in one person, someone so knowledgeable about both the church and culture. Thank you so much for his always welcome writing.

LYNNE MILLER

Oakland, California

As a subscriber to National Catholic Reporter since the mid-1960s, apart from a few years living abroad, I have been deeply saddened by the tone of your recent articles bearing on the abortion issue such as that of Michael Sean Winters.

Obviously, Catholics for Trump can only be an organization of lay people who agree that, as he states, "pro-choice Catholic is oxymoronic." On the other hand, his thesis that a Catholic and indeed "any sentient being" should increasingly feel compelled to vote against Trump seems ridiculous to me.

Such a stance would imply that President Donald Trump's continuing efforts to save millions of unborn human lives could be outweighed by other issues. It seems to me that my long following of NCR is coming to an end.

LOUIS CLAVELLI

Dedham, Massachusetts

I read with interest Jamie Manson's column, "The church's treatment of LGBTQ people is killing its future." As a Catholic who has been let go from two different Catholic schools for coming alongside and mentoring and protecting LGBTQ students, I see the harm the church is doing daily. I'm glad attention is being paid to this issue.

Yet, I would like to offer one idea — let's stop talking about the future of the church and talk about it now. Let's talk about the person who is LGBTQ and their personhood. They exist, they are good in their existence, they were created in the

image of God. Yet, the church as a whole is often treating them as if they are nonhuman, to be corrected and divided up between orientation and action. This is deeply flawed.

I suggest we have conversations about the normalcy of being gay and how the church might choose as an institution to turn away from conversion therapy.

M. CATHY HARMON-CHRISTIAN

Brookhaven, Georgia

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Bishops like Archbishop Charles Chaput of Philadelphia, one of the most strident warrior bishops in the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops who forbid the more moderate Catholic movements for LGBTQ (Dignity and First Ways Ministry) and only allowed the more conservative organization, Courage, which advocates only extreme modality treatments including so-called conversion therapy have blood on their hands for pushing vulnerable LGBTQ Catholics to the brink of depression and in some cases even suicide. They will be held accountable at judgment: "Forgive them Father for they know not what they do."

(Fr.) DANIEL E. DOYLE, OSA

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

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" One student questioned whether or not he could return to school. "It makes me feel really dirty," he said." Reacting as a non-Catholic, with a gay family member, the proper action would be a boycott of every school that behaved like Kennedy, not a brief strike.

From Jamie Manson's description of her own experience (from an earlier time), the "fire all gay teachers" approach to staffing isn't universal. There might be other Catholic schools that would be better, for a student who follows his conscience to discern good from evil.

I know these problems also exist in non-Catholic parochial education. Each family must do its own balance: "Is the benefit of religious training, greater than the harm it does to my child?"

CHARLES COHEN

Richmond, British Columbia

No, Jamie Manson, we have to watch "Tiger King." We have to acknowledge that these kinds of people exist, interact, some make lots of money, have power and influence beyond their numbers. They not only "buy" exotic animals, they buy guns.

Whatever else they might be, many are very smart, shrewd and see the world and everyone else through a lens that would scare the ordinary. Many go the "churches." They also vote. Yes, vote!

DENNIS MacDONALD

Bedford, Nova Scotia

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Where is NCR's follow-up and leadership?

NCR printed San Diego Bishop Robert McElroy's talk at Harpst Center at the University of San Diego. As the editor's note rightfully says, "McElroy's talk looks at the moral act of voting in original and incisive ways and lays the groundwork for development of "Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship." I couldn't agree more.

Michael Sean Winters' article on November 18, 2019 ("US Bishops are not really interested in forming consciences") calls the bishops to task for focusing on "telling us what their priority is this election (preeminence of abortion) cycle, does not help me form my conscience." I couldn't agree more.

Since the bishops could not even give us the full text of Pope Francis' thinking on the sacredness of many social teachings of the church, I would think that McElroy's

outstanding talk would provide NCR with a beautiful foundation for beginning the renewal and development of the U.S. bishops quadrennial document on voting. We need your follow-up and leadership now. This would provide the opportunity to give Francis thinking in a more complete way. NCR has a great opportunity to provide the leadership that the bishops failed to provide at their fall meeting. This election is too important to wait to give Catholics and all Americans the guidance they need to support their moral act of voting.

Finally, we are in the primary season and in November we will have one of the most consequential elections in our lifetime. Doesn't this provide an additional reason for NCR to provide what the bishops could not at their fall meeting, namely, proper guidance for the moral act of voting. We need your follow-up and leadership now!

BRUCE SEGALL

Nutley, New Jersey

Kudos to the McGrath Institute at Notre Dame for the recent conference on co-responsibility in the church as reported by Heidi Schlumpf.

The article referenced many significant and positive ideas. However, I would caution against neglecting the dynamics of power in the church as some speakers apparently suggested. The church is both human and divine and as a human organization it is not exempt from power dynamics. Whether the word is co-responsible or collaborative or collegial, etc., one of the fundamental issues for any organization is how power is shared and another fundamental issue is who decides how power is distributed and shared.

Women in the church experience its power dynamics every day. And I am not just talking about not being ordained as deacons or priests. Just ask them.

JIM PURCELL

Los Gatos, California

[Jim Purcell is chair of NCR's board of directors.]

With all due respect to the victims of clerical abuse, it is time for church leaders to start proposing specific changes. The countless victims will always be a tragic chapter in church history, but we must resume the process of reform and get beyond talking about the need for it!

Pope Francis is waiting for bishops' conferences to make specific requests — women deacons, optional celibacy, liturgical freedom and diversity, etc. More and more of us are tired of waiting for the obvious to begin.

MIKE RICCI

Rosemount, Minnesota

I was pleased to read your selection of films we could watch during this period of home confinement.

You mention "library" films, but be more specific. There is a library service titled "Kanopy," which I frequently use. Most big libraries offer it, certainly my own Kansas City public library. With your library card it's absolutely free and includes tens of thousands of films, old and new.

CHARLES HAMMER

Shawnee, Kansas

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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.

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