Opinion



by NCR Staff

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NCR recently profiled two prominent Catholic politicians, Attorney General William Barr and presumptive Democratic presidential nominee and former vice president Joe Biden. Following are letters to the editor responding to the profiles. The letters have been edited for length and clarity.

I think William Barr's posturing is intended to keep the U.S. bishops' conference on the same page as the Trump administration. Although the Republican Party is

anything but pro-life — as demonstrated by their cavalier attitude toward immigrants, the elderly, the ill — the U.S. bishops' conference fears calling out their hypocrisy.

Barr knows that in order for the bishops to obtain funding from their benefactors, which they believe is so crucial, they will encourage their flock to vote Republican. Their benefactors require it of them in return for their largess.

Barr and many of the self-identified Catholic members of Trump's administration use the label cafeteria Catholicism to disparage other Catholics who, for example, believe abortion is the wrong choice but believe in a woman's agency. Barr's Catholics will bristle when confronted by their own choices of teachings to ignore or to exploit. Barr's having facilitated three executions recently is a case in point.

The arguments from some prelates, certainly not the most vocal ones, were insufficient. Barr should be denied communion but we all know that sort of reaction is only limited to Democratic presidential candidates since it results in generous donations from some quarters.

CHARLES A. LE GUERN

Granger, Indiana



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John Gehring's excellent article really helps us to understand the values underlying William Barr's behavior. Barr is the most corrupt attorney general in American

history, behaving more like a mafia consigliere than the peoples' lawyer. His lies, distortions of the Constitution, and defense of presidential infallibility are without precedent. The why is suggested in his University of Notre Dame speech: Society is corrupt, and needs to be reformed.

Having been weaned on Jacques Maritain's *Man and the State*, I have tried to understand where Barr is coming from. His position appears to be akin to the views of the infamous Cardinal Alfredo Ottaviani, who believed that the ideal society was Franco Spain. This suggests that our country should be a Catholic theocracy, a view held by some Catholics, led by a few bishops.

The irony is that the means to achieve this for Barr is obtaining absolute power for the poster child for society's corruption. Those of us who believe in an open society need to stand up to its enemies.

WILLIAM E. McMAHON

Akron, Ohio

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William Barr is a reactionary, an extreme culture warrior. Barr was educated about the time Pope John Paul II was tightening the screws on the U.S. Catholic school system, particularly colleges with progressive theology departments. Barr is a religious rigorist following the footsteps of John Paul and Benedict XVI while against Pope Francis, hence the reinstatement of the federal death penalty.

He is correct in thinking the U.S. bishops' conference will remain silent due to their systemic complicity with the Trump administration. Giving the Catholic Church more than $1 billion in coronavirus relief in addition to multi-millions for program funding while claiming to protect religious freedom and supporting the "ministers" employment status demands loyalty at a high price.

Barr's University of Notre Dame speech was a disaster only serving to show his true colors. A pope has complete freedom to rule, so too a president under his interpretation of the Constitution. Barr is an example of a layperson off the rails. He's a cafeteria Catholic, labeled by conservatives as "liberals, progressives," he disdains. Barr is a product of Catholicism gone wrong. Sadly, he's not alone.

MICHAEL J. McDERMOTT

Tyler, Texas

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I just finished reading your article about William Barr. Having watched his actions since he became attorney general, I would not describe him as Christian. I see him as a member, as are many Southern Baptists, of the far-right political nationalistic movement that likes to pass Itself off as Christian. He acts as a henchman for this president, protecting criminal supporters from the law while attempting to punish his opponents, even if they are innocent. He is still searching for something with which to charge President Barack Obama. He even believes in the absolute power of this immoral and corrupt president. I think your article was far to kind.

Christianity, including Catholicism, will pay a heavy price for casting its lot with the most immoral and corrupt administration this country has ever known. It seems the teachings of Jesus don't matter if they do not easily fit into this administration's political agenda. While he claims to be pro-life, he separated refugee families at the border and incarcerated them. He also favors the death penalty.

If this president is using his office to enrich himself and his family, that is permissible because he has absolute power. Barr is complicit in such corruption. He is an embarrassment to the church.

GARY KNAPP

Waynesville, North Carolina

If Joe Biden wants to be consistent in practicing his faith, he needs to apply the same logic to abortion that he has no problem applying to Dred Scott. Abortion is an unmitigated evil, as is slavery. We can't not oppose it, irrespective of the political backlash, which, considering that both abortion and contraception are men's liberation, not women's, would be formidable. But he has expressed willingness to take the consequences of another virtuous act related in this puff piece.

How about it, Biden? Do you have the courage of your convictions?

HANNA KLAUS

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

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The article on Joe Biden shows him to be a traditional Catholic. His faith as he learned it from parents and Catholic school education is very much a part of his life. This is refreshing and a real contribution to our secular society.

The sad part is what has been lacking in his Catholic background, which is still the case. Catholic teaching on the problems of modern life takes a back seat to church dogma and individual morality. For the most part the church remains silent on issues of war, racism, climate change, inequality built into institutions and systems, and other social conditions that are part of modern life.

Pope Francis is trying to bring these issues into focus and make the church teaching on them more relevant to today with his encyclicals and other pastoral messages. Unfortunately, these teachings do not often get down to the parish level. Additionally, they often face obstruction by some traditional members of the hierarchy. Fortunately, they are welcomed by some clergy and thoughtful people of all persuasions.

So I think that Biden is representative of traditional Catholicism, but on issues like war, capitalism, human rights, sustainability, and other social issues, he is not up-to-date because the church itself is only slowly starting to update its teachings to

address these areas. The world cannot and will not wait while the church catches up to the needs of the present time, and joins with other Christian and interfaith leaders to influence the direction in which the world is heading.

Without a crash course it may be a little late for Biden to absorb the newer mode of Catholic progressive thinking, but a start might be for someone to give him a copy of "*Laudato Si*', On Care for Our Common Home."

SALLY McMILLAN

Iowa City, Iowa

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Several questions came to my mind after reading this article:

1. When does the canonization process start?

2. Is advocating for federal funding of abortion, a policy which will greatly increase the number of abortions, a good example of expressing faith through works?

3. In the past, Vice President Joe Biden has said that he doesn't believe he has the right to force people to accept his views on abortion as a matter of public policy, but he is now asking millions of people who are morally opposed to abortion to accept his view that abortion is essential health care that must be supported through federal funding. Is this a contradiction?

BRIAN FERGUS

Des Plaines, Illinois

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What is the biggest moral issue in the United States today? Is it climate change, treatment of immigrants, or abortion? Since 1973, over 61 million abortions have been performed in the United States. As a young third grader, I remember our parish priest speaking vehemently about the evils of abortion, even though I really had little understanding of it all at that time.

So here we are, almost 60 years later and we are still allowing this to occur in our country. But recently, I was really shocked when I saw an article shared on Facebook singing the praises of Joe Biden and his Catholic faith. What really upset me is that the article was shared by a Catholic nun and published on your website.

In the article, I get the impression that some people think it is acceptable to be a Catholic and turn your head the other way, so as to not impose your beliefs on others. But in the ensuing discussion/debate on Facebook, one person made a great analogy. We can say we are against slavery and think it is wrong, but it is OK for others to have slaves if that is their belief. Yet with abortion, we are talking murder. How can we turn a blind eye?

Some might say, "Oh, but there are other issues, like racism, climate change, etc." But after almost 60 years, isn't it time we stand up for the most important issue at hand?

Would Biden be the Democratic nominee if he said he was against abortion? No, but unfortunately, it appears that we have stronger Democrats in this country than we have strong Catholics.

Finally, it saddens me greatly that the National Catholic Reporter, which has Catholic in its name, will throw its support to Biden when President Donald Trump has done more to advance Christian causes than any president I can remember.

Please do not let your hatred of a man's personality cloud your judgment over what is really going on.

LAWRENCE WICK

Victoria, Texas

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