Opinion



by NCR Staff

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

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

December 11, 2020
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

Public opinion over statues of St. Junípero Serra — and the church's legacy toward Indigenous people of the West Coast — is divided, but Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone has been holding exorcisms at the sites where Serra's statues were toppled. The prelate called the acts blasphemous and sacrilegious. He also demanded that the local district attorney press felony and hate crime charges against the Native women who felled the statues. Letters to the editor responding to our reporting have been edited for length and clarity below. If you would like to join the conversation, follow the guidelines at the end of this post.

Mark Day has once again contributed to important critical analysis of the controversy around St. Junípero Serra as he did with his April 2019 obituary article on Bishop Francis Quinn.

It is Quinn's 2006 homily of apology at Mission San Rafael, with members of the Miwok tribes present, that stands tall over against the demonization via exorcism performed by the San Francisco Archbishop at Mission San Rafael, on Oct. 12, 2020 — and made worse by the very this-worldly pursuit of the protestors who are now facing serious criminal charges.

The Catholic Church needs to develop a deep culture of apology rather than pandering to the self-righteous cult of demonology. Over the last 75 years, the German nation has made powerful moves in this direction to atone for the Third Reich's sins. Would it not be appropriate to move from arguing over the veneration of Serra to building a memorial, on church property, to the precious Native lives lost and damaged, something approaching the scale and intent of Berlin's Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe? Then our discussions of Serra's legacy, in the context of the church's role in the New World can begin again.

JIM McGARRY

Pacifica, California



***

Thank you for your excellent article by Mark Day. I believe the "exorcisms" are a smoke screen to avoid working towards reparation and healing of our Native people who have been so brutally treated over the course of history.

Seeing photos of the archbishop "exorcising" these sites reminded me of President Donald Trump grandstanding with a Bible recently in front of a church. It proved of no value and only added to the great divide and obstacles to healing our country.

VINCENT PEREZ

Pasadena, California

***

Regarding the controversy over St. Junípero Serra, I don't think it is a case of comparing the colonizing mindset of his time with our present facing of our past enslavements. What we should be examining is what Catholicism and Christianity have done to the message Jesus gave to his disciples to take to the ends of the earth, to love God and one another as Jesus demonstrated.

Ever since Catholicism became legitimized by Constantine as the law of the land and became associated with power, prestige and wealth it has increasingly become corrupted to the point we see today with the sexual abuse scandal and clericalism as the latest identified corruptions. The Catholic Church must be cleansed of this sin through public repentance and penance.

PEGGY HEBERT

Salina, Kansas

Advertisement

***

As a white Christian priest who has stood with Native American protestors of St. Junípero Serra's canonization, let me say that the first task of a Christian leader

ought to be to sit down and listen to the stories of the Native peoples. In doing so, bishops might have learned to say, as I did, that if Pope Francis canonizes Serra he will be making war on indigenous peoples everywhere. And that Serra statues are to indigenous memories what confederate statues are to African American memories. They might read three-time Pulitzer prize winning author Elias Castillo's important book, *A Cross of Thorns: The Enslavement of California's Indians by the Spanish Missions*, and learned that the first outsider to visit one of Serra's missions was a French sea captain, who compared the sounds of the whips and other mission activities to the slave plantations he had visited in the Caribbean.

What needs exorcism is the sins of the marriage of empire and church whose traumatic invasions and toppling of indigenous cultures has haunted indigenous peoples the world over for centuries. Francis should burn the Doctrine of Discovery documents in St. Peter's Square as a public act asking for forgiveness. They don't teach these things in Opus Dei seminaries, however, so no doubt Archbishop José Gomez has some further study to do. Such study should precede hate-filled, ignorant-filled and silly exorcisms of statues. Since when is a statue worth more than a human life — and tens of thousands of human lives?

(Fr.) MATTHEW FOX

Vallejo, California

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.