Opinion



by NCR Staff

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January 22, 2021
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In a Jan. 7 editorial, the day after the attack on the Capitol by supporters of former President Donald Trump, NCR writes that among those with some culpability for the failed insurrection are more than a few leaders in the Catholic Church. "This is the culmination of what this presidency has been about from the beginning — and some Catholics have remained silent, or worse, cheered it along, including some bishops, priests, a few sisters, right-wing Catholic media and too many people in the pro-life movement," we write. Following are letters to the editor responding to our editorial. They have been edited for length and clarity.

The shuddering and sickening fact is that millions of Americans have embraced a white supremacist society over an inclusive one "with liberty and justice for all." They have given up, knowingly or not, on our democratic way of life and republican form of government for an authoritarian society where they are in control under a self-chosen dictator.

Over 60% of the Commander-in-Chief's party claim he did nothing wrong Jan. 6 effectively affirming this coup attempt. That means millions of our fellow citizens are abandoning democracy. Also shocking is that eight senators and 139 representatives voted to overturn a legitimate election; other leaders are equally complicit with their deafening silence.

This betrayal of our democratic society rips apart our flag of freedom, our rule of law, our government of, by and for the people. These leaders have broken their oath of office to "support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic."

To right the ship of state is the challenge to every democratic minded citizen. It will take time, persistence, truth-telling, example-setting and sacrificial actions to demonstrate what we believe is the best form of government ever devised by our fellow human beings. Are we up to this challenge?

(Fr.) MARTIN DEPPE

Chicago, Illinois



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As the heart shattering events continue to unfold, one cannot help questioning the wisdom of New York Cardinal Timothy Dolan and the rest of the well-intentioned church leadership regarding their support of former President Donald Trump in this past election.

The hate and violence perpetrated by this cultish leader flooded our living rooms and our lives in shocking realities. While some of the marauders upheld the Bible and others wore Jesus T-shirts, and some people who responded to the violence were quick to defend the righteousness of their leader in Christian terms, it was impossible to link the images with anything close to respecting life or anti-abortion arguments.

What if we step back and realize that all this hate imbued rhetoric, the electing of immoral leaders who exploit the Gospel, and separating this issue from the total respect life issues, Jesus called us to a different way? What if we stop addressing abortion in the political arena where it has been exploited and twisted, and we start living and acting according to what Jesus specifically asked of us?

Only then will we really be respecting life beyond birth. Only then will all children be fed, educated and loved, will all single mothers be assured of economic survival, will all men involved in procreation be held accountable for the lives of their children, will immigrants be welcomed into our communities, will health care be assumed, not portioned to those who qualify, the list goes on.

Perhaps then people of goodwill will not feel obligated to vote for a dishonest, corrupt person whose leadership hardly inspires respecting life in all its forms?

CARRIE KEMP

Lilydale, Minnesota

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The editorial "Catholics need to confess their complicity in the failed coup attempt" flatters the outgoing administration by imitation. Something drove those people at the Capitol to risk arrest, injury, and/or imprisonment. Calling it a "coup attempt" by "a right-wing mob" is the kind of dishonest exaggeration the author complains about.

Rather than arrogating to ourselves the wisdom to identify sinners whose sins are different than ours and blaming them, maybe we should listen to the anger that drives the people to burn stores or march into public buildings to confront politicians. Maybe we should look at our fellow Americans and ask why. Maybe there should be editors for a Catholic publication that seeks to understand rather than pick up stones.

I confess that I'm really getting tired of Catholic voices trying to tell me that if I express my Catholicity differently than they do I need repentance and confession. Insult is not going to change a heart or actions, at least not for the better. The Jesus I read about invited a demon-possessed woman, a tax collector, and a terrorist into his inner circle, and look how they made out. Maybe there's room for a Supreme Court justice and an attorney general who have a different point of view than mine, and a group of citizens who get upset enough with politicians to confront them? Maybe even editors who think they can judge others?

(Deacon) FRANK LAWS

Fallston, Maryland

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Thank you for saying this publicly.

I can't explain so many Catholics are blind to dangers of Donald Trump. Especially the American bishops.

I pray they save the church and that history doesn't show the death of the Catholic Church was caused by American bishops.

WILLIAM VEDRA, JR.

Grove City, Ohio

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You nailed it! Wonderful.

Some of my first thoughts upon seeing the Capitol overrun by Trump supporters were so what will Cardinal Timonhy Dolan, Archbishop José Gomez, and Cardinal Daniel DiNardo have to say about this? There will probably be a tsk, tsk, then something preached on non-violence on Sunday; but since they have supported violence in and through the military and against everyone except the unborn in the U.S., they will try to make it disappear ASAP. No surprise since they and too many others in the U.S. bishops' conference voted against Pope Francis' proposal to include all life, not just the life of the U.S. unborn as being 'pro-life' in November.

No wonder the younger generations run screaming from "the church." So many of the hierarchy keep tripping over their tassels and phylacteries from plank in their eyes that it's no wonder there is blood on their hands.

Jesus looked at Jerusalem and he wept; no wonder.

CATHERINE FOLEY

Taylor Lake Village, Texas

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Those in the hierarchy of the church, especially Cardinal Timothy Dolan, were attracted by the power and reflective glow in the association of the office of the presidency, not the ideology of the person in charge.

This only furthers their shame.

As a former New Yorker, I was always startled by Dolan and his association with Donald Trump. Trump was from New York. Dolan has authority there. We've dealt with Trump's bigotry, mendacious behavior, sexism, cruelty and business faults for years. Trump received 15% of the vote in Manhattan in 2020, down from 20% in 2016. We knew what a horrible person and manager he was/is and did not want for the country to experience what we've lived with for so many years and Dolan should have been tuned into Trump's many faults, but here we are.

Your editorial was absolutely right. For shame on all those in the church who endorsed this horrible person based on one issue (a pro-life issue when this president will have the blood of 400,000-plus coronavirus deaths on his hands).

Dolan and I shared a common friend and spiritual director. He, while at the Vatican, I when at seminary in New York. As I wrote to Dolan months ago, Franciscan Fr. Roland Faley would have said to him and his association with Trump — shame on you. Roland would have been spot on. And that shame on you collectively applies to many clergy in our faith who preached a political stance in favor of Trump.

(Deacon) THOMAS F. REILLY, JR.

Naples, Florida

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I found this quote especially interesting: "While some prelates have spoken out all along, the bishops' conference, as a body, must publicly confess and atone for its complicity in empowering the president and the Republican Party in this violence and in denigrating the Democratic Party."

What can be done about these right-wing, one issue bishops? It's sad that the Catholic Church is involved in fomenting this kind of radical behavior by blindly following the lies of this president. I think they have forgotten that they are followers of Jesus!

LISA COLEMAN

Forney, Texas

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Many of our prelates appear to have been single issue advocates and who have taken their views to the extreme. When bishops deny communion only to Democrats while Republican Catholics commit egregious acts which church teaching expressly opposes and they are barely rebuked the hypocrisy of the bishops is all too apparent.

The division of the Catholic population into conflicting camps began many decades ago and some might point to the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council as a foundation. In the early '60s and beyond some Catholics thought the church was becoming too liberal. The reign of St. John Paul II inspired many conservatives that our church was reverting to what they believed was the better way which was the pre-Vatican II experience and was forsaking, to their satisfaction, the modernization of the church.

The subsequent reign of Pope Benedict XVI inspired many conservative Catholics including clergy who also seemed to want to return to the old days. However, Pope Francis' reign has seen the church divided to two camps. We all know clergy who are Benedict adherents and those who embrace the teachings of Pope Francis and these two camps very comfortably fall into our conservative ad progressive political camps.

Some bishops seem to welcome their opportunity to exacerbate that divide. Whether they think, wrongly I will add, they can reengage the progressives to return to the fold, which we never left, or if they are currying favor with individuals or groups of benefactors remains to be considered. I find it interesting that the bishops

appointed by Pope Francis, as well as some elevated to cardinal, are the only ones who are working to address the divide and are trying to bring us back together. Some of their brother bishops of late seem to have awakened to the fact that the divisiveness they instigated might have metastasized to infect the country as a whole. We are seeing the extreme expressions of that divide and the culpability of some prelates cannot be dismissed.

CHARLES A. LE GUERN

Granger, Indiana

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Did President Donald Trump intend for his call to action to be taken as rhetorical, verbal, and political action, or did he intend for his call to action to be physical destruction? How does this comport with Trump's previous declarations in favor of police, military, and patriotic monuments? Where do you think Trump's words are misinterpreted or taken out of context?

Per my personal analysis of this article in NCR, it does not match my recollection of Trump's actual expressed positions on patriotism, respect, and following procedure.

Perhaps you have to know something about business and political negotiations in order to understand what Trump is actually saying and trying to accomplish. Opinion news is not the place to learn this.

With my background in economics and construction, Trump's accomplishments are extremely impressive and he will be sorely missed.

DON KOZA

Frederick, Maryland

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Based on this past year, I have reached the conclusion that Christians, including Catholics, must be viewed as a threat to democracy. The U.S. bishops are interested solely in gaining power and enforcing their views on others. Evangelicals have tossed away any pretense of following Christ's teachings in favor of pursuing power and oppressing anyone who isn't one of them.

I've lost all interest in attending a church and do not give money to any church. The more outspoken a person is about their religion, the less I trust them. I suspect I am not alone in this.

NICHOLAS PARMA

San Antonio, Texas

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It breaks my heart to say this. What happened on Jan. 6 in Washington is but the culmination of so many unwilling to listen, to hear and to speak up. I have always been of the mindset that there should not be intermingling of church and state. Those days seem to be gone. What divides us politically now divides up morally and spiritually.

That being said, I offer this caveat. The Catholic Church in the United States is on a path in the same direction. There will be no insurrection in Rome — it will take place in the pews where the cancer of clericalism germinates.

Bishops, wake up. Learn to listen. Encourage dialogue. Listen to the message of Pope Francis and not just his words and stop pretending all is well. It is not, or you will soon be preaching to empty churches.

JANE FRANCISCO

Charlotte, North Carolina

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The editorial, "Catholics need to confess their complicity in the failed coup" deserves to be published and communicated across every Catholic communication medium. This is the honest and responsible statement that we had expected from the highest leadership of American Catholic platforms, like the U.S. bishops' conference, and which we are still awaiting. It names the ills, the sins of complicity that have contributed to the destruction unleashed at the heart of our identity.

As concerned Catholics, let's ask for forgiveness for our part and make this Lenten season a time to examine our personal and collective consciousness.

Without owning up to responsibility and making humble confession, Easter renewal is delayed.

Thanks to the words of the editors, history will remember your honesty during this time of violent crisis.

LARRY AND CATHERINE HALVEY GOODWIN

Shepherdstown, West Virginia

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To my white Catholic sisters and brothers, if after Eric Garner, George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and countless more, and if we still needed a mirror to be moved to metanoia, to gaze upon our accumulated privilege within the United States — behold the entitlement of whiteness on full display on Jan. 6 at the U.S. Capitol.

Even though there's no way to have a full accounting of all the security failures of the day, many can argue that no failure at play was more underpinning and necessary for this terrorism to happen than the role of whiteness to organize and ordain such egoic entitlement — from reducing Catholic social teaching to one issue and one party, or to remaining silent and dormant in its wreckage. The breach that day won't be the last image or reflection, nor the last reminder of this unmitigated disease whose dormancy is as deadly as its outbreak to countless sisters and brothers of color.

Much of white America might have been shocked by the images they saw, but the truth is that the real shock is how unaware we white folk are of their true origin. Unless whiteness is systemically diagnosed and addressed, there will be endless episodes to gaze upon its terrorizing toxicity. May we not hide from our wreckage nor our reflection, but with the grace and mercy of God repent and repair our humanity.

(Br.) MIKE DORN, OFM Cap.

Chicago, Illinois

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It is truly sad and disturbing that so many who are "Catholics" are so far from what can reasonably call "Christian." The hatred filled thoughts of the "right-wing Catholics" fills me with disgust. Have they never looked at Jesus' words and his attitude to "less than holy" people he met and loved?

GENE SWAIN

Calgary, Alberta

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Thank you, thank you for giving voice to the complicity that so many individuals and groups are guilty of for the Jan. 6 violence in Washington, D.C. I totally agree with your summary of the situation and I have had the same opinion of Catholic leaders and lay persons all along.

I just do not understand how anyone (esp. the Catholic hierarchy) can say that they are following Christ's teachings and still support President Donald Trump. I am so saddened by this state of affairs.

Let's hope and pray that your suggestions at the end of the editorial will sway those misguided Catholics to speak up for what is right.

PATRICIA McKAY

Greenfield, Wisconsin

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Your editorial "Catholics need to confess their complicity in the failed coup" is among the most brilliant you have ever published.

It should me mandated reading for every Catholic and then on to everyone else.

I have never been more proud of the National Catholic Reporter.

You deserve the Pulitzer for many things, this among them.

(Fr.) EDWARD G. LAMBRO

Paterson, New Jersey

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"In less than two weeks, our nation's second Catholic president — a decent man — will take over and begin the long, arduous task of rebuilding our democracy."
This absurd, outrageous assertion appears at the end of your recent editorial.

Joe Biden is "Catholic" and "decent"? Surely you know that he has, only to gain politically, betrayed essential Catholic teaching? More than a few members of the Catholic hierarchy have asserted that he has effectively excommunicated himself and should not be permitted to receive the Eucharist. When is the last time they did any such thing?

Your trashing of President Donald Trump is equally absurd and outrageous. In focusing so narrowly on his less-than-elegant style, you simply ignore his very real accomplishments!

Your editorial is simply biased and dishonest propaganda. Shame on you.

PAM KEATING

Flushing, New York

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What you wrote needed to be said but then you contradicted yourself by calling Joe Biden "a decent man." Wasn't Biden the vice president whose secretary of state, Hillary Clinton, and whose president, Barack Obama, helped overthrow the democratically elected government of José Manuel Zelaya of Honduras in 2009?

That anti-democratic coup shed the blood of hundreds of civilians, including 300 LGBTQ persons and 60 journalists. Would it be asking too much for Biden to confess his complicity in in that successful coup?

DAVID-ROSS GERLING

Huntsville, Texas

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