Opinion



by NCR Staff

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Less than three months after the formation of a controversial working group to deal with President Joe Biden, the nation's Catholic bishops have disbanded the group, which produced a public rupture among the U.S. hierarchy in its approach toward the nation's second Catholic president. The disbanding, according to NCR political columnist Michael Sean Winters, shows that the leadership of the conference recognized that their stance was ill-considered. Following are letters to the editor responding to the working group disbanding. They have been edited for length and clarity.

It was interesting to see the reference in Michael Sean Winters' column to an article by George Weigel about the need for "Eucharistic coherence."

Weigel's use of this term actually reveals his desire for the church to deny Communion to pro-choice politicians, especially now that Joe Biden has assumed the presidency. Perhaps the Catholic laity should be glad that such arguments to deny Communion no longer invoke the reason of "scandalizing the faithful." We Catholics sadly have been scandalized beyond all sensibility from the clerical sexual abuse so the term now is almost meaningless.



Maybe the culture warriors in our church could more reverently work to eliminate abortion by following the words of Pope Francis who said "the Gospel should be proposed and not imposed. The Church does not need apologists for her causes nor crusaders for her battles but rather humble and confident sowers of the truth."

So, rather than deny Communion to targeted individuals, we could alternatively instill a greater reverence for life — and eventually curb abortions — by assisting pregnant teenagers to keep their baby for adoption, increasing public funding for unwed mothers, and intensifying charitable outreach to single parents. In other words, forget the condemnation and work to remove the reasons promoting abortion.

LARRY SEDLEMEYER

Hershey, Pennsylvania

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Mark's Gospel shows us a leper approaching Jesus directly, neglecting to cry out "Unclean! Unclean!" Can't you just imagine some righteous Pharisees stating solemnly that "integrity requires a leper not to approach the Messiah while acting in a manner incoherent with fundamental Jewish teaching"?

Luckily for us, Jesus seems concerned with healing first and observation of the law later. Would that our bishops followed his example instead of their own obsession with "doctrine."

JUDITH M. DAVIS

Goshen, Indiana

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The bishops proposing withholding the Eucharist from President Joe Biden have a losing hand if even one priest refuses to withhold it. The backlash will be palpable.

That the U.S. bishops acted as they did shows they have learned nothing in the past 40 years of sexual abuse revelations costing billions of dollars forcing cutbacks across the board. They've lost the younger generation so they can't pick a fight with them so they go after the president of the United States. If the Eucharist is denied to Biden how many others will walk away?

MICHAEL J. McDERMOTT

Tyler, Texas

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What utter nonsense for some American bishops to be threatening to refuse President Joe Biden the Eucharist because he supports a woman's right to choose, which by the way, happens to be the law of the land. These men are not pro-life.

As Pope Benedict XVI and now Pope Francis have repeatedly stated: being pro-life is so much bigger than merely being anti-a woman's right to choose whether or not to carry a pregnancy to term. As both these popes have repeatedly stated: our actual teachings are "life with dignity from conception to natural death."

That means any cuts to health care or lack of social assistance for the less advantaged are against our Catholic teachings. By increasing people's access to these, Biden is actually decreasing the demand for abortion.

It is long past time these men stop using abortion to achieve their partisan ends.

YVONNE ZAROWNY

Qualicum Beach, British Columbia

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The stand taken by many bishops on the denial of Communion to President Joe Biden is not fair. The Eucharist is a shared meal of joyful thanksgiving and not a reward for doctrinal purity. Christ included Judas at the Last Supper.

Has the Eucharist become the private property of the bishops for them to admit or deny access to? This is an unchristian stand to take and is unacceptable.

LIONEL FERNANDES

Richmond Hill, Ontario

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The issue here is the hypocrisy of church officials who have allowed the church's "pro-life" teachings to devolve into just one thing: "anti-abortion." They are all for presidents and politicians who promote and expand capital punishment; are OK when programs are cut that devastate the poor; are fine with eliminating healthcare to tens of millions of the poor; support of initiatives to deny fundamental human rights to immigrants; see no problem with promotion of laws that incarcerate minorities at vastly disproportionate rates; and are OK to turn a blind eye to sexism,

discrimination and misogyny as long as those officials say that they are anti-abortion.

They are against anyone supporting all the rest of Catholic social teachings — including a ban on the death penalty — if they aren't strident anti-abortionists. Worse, they wield the faux power of eternal damnation over Catholic voters who want to further the vast majority of Catholic social values but know they have to accept "pro-choice" candidates in order to do so.

GARY MAKOWSKI

Bellevue, Washington

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While I applaud the cessation of the bishops' working group, which was to address President Joe Biden's relationship to the conference, I am disturbed that it was empaneled in the first place. The U.S. bishops' conference can be characterized as having had a relationship with the Trump administration that can only be described as submissive at best and fawning at worst. Arguably, some bishops' posturing was more one sided than others but collectively they did not seem to care to rebuke Trump or anyone in his administration publicly, Catholic of otherwise.

Washington Cardinal Wilton Gregory is entirely correct, in my estimation, that dialogue is the best approach to bring the concerns of the bishops to Biden and share with him his concerns as well as theirs to address abortion as it must be addressed — a legal right which reflects a wrong choice. The reasoning behind that choice is what must be addressed in order to bring an end to this social calamity. Threats, such as withholding Communion, directed at an obviously committed Catholic who happens also to be a Democrat while these past several years show how reticent the bishops can be in enforcing church teachings against Republicans.

If the U.S. bishops' conference takes the position that Biden should be denied Communion even though his personal belief is that abortion is wrong, but the Constitution decides the extent and limits of his powers, then the bishops will have proven they are short sighted at best and hypocrites at worst. The reaction from the people in the pews will be certain. Expect only those who agree with their bishop to occupy the pews. Others, who do not appreciate this opportunistic posturing, will leave the remaining places empty.

CHARLES A. LE GUERN

Granger, Indiana

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As an Irish person, I'm used to our local Catholic hierarchy falling repeatedly under sexual and social scandals. Painful as this sorry litany is to hear, at least it has had the benefit of curbing the more arrogant pronouncements from the bishop class. And we have been fortunate to have had a good leader in recently retired Dublin Archbishop, Diarmaid Martin, who has owned the shame and the darkness that shadowed much of 20th century Irish clericalism.

Alas no such penitence is visible in the antics of the U.S. bishopric. What's with these guys? They have a Catholic president — and by all accounts a decent man and a compassionate man who bears witness in his own life to his faith — and they talk about refusing him the sacraments!

There's only one response to such astounding arrogance. It's time for these boys to get a grip. Go down into the real world and serve the people who are suffering, follow the example of Dorothy Day and share your very life with those who have nothing, go like Pope Francis and rebuild the church on the place of execution and quit the palaces and the power hugging, go inwards to the soul's blood, go downwards to where all the ladders start: "the foul rag and bone shop of the heart."

Or would they prefer Donald Trump?

CONALL Mac RIOCAIRD

Dublin, Ireland

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I was shocked to read that a U.S. bishops' conference committee is studying whether President Joe Biden should be allowed to receive Communion. This after we have had bishops and priests for years celebrating the Mass while abusing children and/or covering it up.

If we now have to consider whether our public sharing in Communion during Mass confirms our stance with the U.S. bishops' conference, the Communion lines may

become much shorter.

JEAN SCHAFER

Citrus Heights, California

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When will the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops stop fighting the culture wars and begin to tend to the needs of its followers? The conference's continual embrace of the radical right-wing, and the disrespect shown toward our new Catholic president place them further into the pasture of irrelevance and divisiveness.

With the tumultuous Donald Trump presidency finally over, it's a perfect time for the church leadership to be a source of healing, truth, kindness and generosity. I pray that the bishops, individually and collectively, follow the saintly example of our pope and truly try to bring unity to the flock — and peace to the world.

JOHN DINUZZO

Trumbull, Connecticut

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I was educated by the Dominicans in Ireland and the Dominican motto is "veritas," the truth. We were always taught to search for the truth with our conscience.

I am appalled by the negligence of the U.S. Catholic bishops standing with Donald Trump and his lies. He constantly lied for the past four years and look at the damage he has done to our country. The bishops have supported him in his lies especially that the election was stolen from him.

However, the past has shown us just what some of those bishops are made of. They are very quick to criticize President Joe Biden who is trying to unite the nation and help the poor. Instead they should fix their own houses and lead by example and truth as Jesus Christ would.

Shame on them if they don't act on the truth, they are no better than Trump. Their credibility is at stake.

ANNE BOUCH

West Bloomfield, Michigan

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