Opinion



by NCR Staff

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Panelists for Villanova University's "Taking Measure of the 'Biden Effect': American Catholics and the President" joined the intensifying debate within the U.S. church about whether President Joe Biden should be barred from Communion over his support for legal abortion. Letters to the editor from NCR readers responding to this report follow. The letters have been edited for length and clarity.

Denying Communion to the president? How does the church justify denying Communion to anyone?

Is there any evidence that Jesus refused to share a meal with anyone? He was condemned for eating with sinners. He fed thousands but there is no suggestion that he first checked on their worthiness.

And last but by no means least, he shared his last meal with people he knew would abandon him, one of whom would deny him, and one who would betray him to his death.

Such exclusivity is a denial of Christianity. It is scandalous.

VIRGINIA NORTON

Davenport, Iowa



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The Eucharist is neither a weapon nor a reward. Using the Eucharist as a weapon suggests that bringing a gun to the table is an acceptable way of dealing with disagreements. Making the Eucharist a reward denies its nutritional benefit to those who are hungry and insists that Jesus is only food for those who have made themselves worthy, which, if we are honest, is an impossible pursuit.

The morality and legality of abortion calls for intensive discussion of choice. As human beings we acknowledge that we have free will, and if we are believers in a

Creator-God we recognize that this God allows us to make choices. In other words, God permits us to make wrong or even sinful decisions. And because only God knows the heart, only our maker can judge.

There are better ways to promote pro-life demands in the fullness of the definition of pro-life rather than condemn the president for supporting the legality of abortion. Even changing the law will not stop abortions.

For the sake of the common good, I pray that the leaders of the church value the spiritual integrity of the people of God, who are the church, and who are more than capable of distinguishing between moral and legal choices.

(Sr.) CHRISTINE KRESHO, CSJ

Silver Spring, Maryland

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I am glad that my Catholicism and my spirituality do not rely on promulgations by the episcopacy. I am able to keep my faith life separate from the bureaucracy in the church.

I support Pope Francis, 100%. My Catholic spiritual life is very important to me. I have spent years nurturing it.

I have very little respect for most of the Catholic bishops today. Abortion seems to be the only issue that they speak out on. When they talk about bringing scandal to fellow Catholic Christians about the president's political view on abortion, I almost laugh out loud.

These are the gentleman that have allowed ordained men to violate children/adults for years and years and years. They are not the ones to talk about presenting scandal to fellow Catholic Christians.

FLORENCE DEANER

Winter Haven, Florida

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As a six year graduate of Villanova University and a great supporter of the Augustinians,

I am appalled at the choices for this conference. Granted this dealt with law but whose law?

There was nothing mentioned about Jesus' laws. Canon law is manmade and archaic in many regards. Have we now moved from the Second Vatican Council to a politicized church? Jesus had much to say about the Pharisees and their myopic view of law.

Hey Villanova, open the doors to a more balanced perspective next time you choose speakers. Jesus' church hopes for more!

EUGENE M. FRANCISCO

Charlotte, North Carolina

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I am embarrassed by the conservative, legalistic and distinctly unchristian tone displayed by most of the Villanova participants in calling for President Joe Biden to be denied Communion for his support for legal abortion. Do they not realize that in our diverse, pluralistic, and spiritually underweight country, one cannot govern with a monochromatic approach that is based on exclusive thinking rather than Christ-like love?

These "experts" are putting law above faith relationships. They are pushing a Sisyphean approach that emphasizes orthodoxy over orthopraxy. To me, this approach is based on fear, not faith. There is no invitation or welcome here to the Gospel message of Jesus Christ; there is only the threat of condemnation. These "Christian" scholars are quick to speak for Christianity, but they are like the foolish virgins who have no extra oil for their verbal lamps.

I recommend these people spend more time getting to know Jesus in prayer, scripture, sacrament and reflection. The love of God is transformative, familial and creatively inviting everyone of every religion and no religion. If Christ becomes the center of our hearts, our thoughts and actions will become more Christic and less jugular and critical.

Biden carries and uses his rosary daily. Along with God's sacramental embrace, the grace of God will keep him on a level spiritual keel. It isn't a question of money, politics, or control. Imagine trying to rebuild a vast city the last four years have devastated in a hurricane-like manner. Offer solutions that unite and not divide.

MICHAEL J. MURPHY

Shawano, Wisconsin

Advertisement

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Thank you for hiring Christopher White and for funding and publishing his work. I was often critical of his articles at Crux, but he has shined at NCR and his reporting is a blessing.

"Villanova conference elevates calls for Biden to be denied Communion" is a fine example of the great work he's been doing for NCR. Thank you for having him.

JEFFREY JONES

Hamburg, New York

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I have been Catholic all my life, though shaky at times. One thing I have never understood is why we deny anyone Communion if Jesus is the healer we have been taught to believe he is. Didn't he say that he comes for the sinners?

Stop this ridiculous debate on whether President Joe Biden or anyone else should be denied access to Jesus and spend that energy trying to fix the problems of the poor and marginalized. That's what Jesus would do.

SHAWNEE BALDWIN

Glastonbury, Connecticut

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The Villanova conference appeared to made up of Donald Trump supporters, people able to look the other way when a man with no moral compass led the country into chaos. Further, his newly found pro-life position was purely convenient from a Republican standpoint, and no personal depth whatsoever.

In any case, who are these people who can make deacons about what is in President Joe Biden's heart? The is something only God can do — not others, not the church. While the panelists seem to view the reception of Communion by Biden as a grave injustice, perhaps it should be better viewed as an opportunity for conversion, bringing Biden closer to the author of all life.

To begin having any litmus test that challenges those coming forward for communion is a very dangerous move. Perhaps the panelists need to be reminded that all those who come forward for Communion are unworthy of receiving such a precious sacrament, since all of us are sinners. As a priest, I do not want to be placed in a position of deciding who among those approaching the rail are the most sinful.

(Fr.) CHRISTOPHER SENK

Fort Myers, Florida

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To use the Eucharist as a weapon for selective punishment is abominable. I cannot imagine a scenario in which Jesus Christ would deny himself to anyone. He didn't do that to the woman at the well, nor to the thief crucified with him.

What we ask of Christ in the reception of the Eucharist is a personal act. As Pope Francis has already stated, it is a sacrament of healing, not a reward for a life well lived.

We finally have a man with a moral compass, a dedicated Christian, a Catholic who shows compassion and the struggle to be human after four years of pain and suffering at the hands of someone who was proud of his lust, greed, egotism and lies. What in the world are these bishops thinking? They are the source of shame and scandal, not President Joe Biden.

Another example of choosing the letter the law over the spirit, and too many have suffered terribly because of this standard. For God's sake, it's time to grow up.

KATE O'KULA

North Kingstown, Rhode Island

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Can I be a practicing Catholic and at the same time accept the legality of abortion in this country? Yes I can because I do not believe that persons who do not agree with my moral beliefs should be legally forced to abide by them. Nor do I believe that we should make contraception, or eating meat on Fridays in Lent, or not going to church on Sundays matters of civil or criminal law. They are matters of conscience, and if the morality of those issues is so important, then church leadership needs to inform and educate the consciences of their members so that they agree to their morality.

A poll conducted by the Pew Research Center and published on August 29, 2019, found that 61% of all persons polled, and 56% of Catholics polled, believed that abortion should be legal. Clearly, the leadership of the Catholic Church in the U.S. has failed to gain the support of the majority of Catholics for the official Catholic position on the immorality of abortion.

It is in this light that a person can be a politician, even president of the United States, and resist making abortion illegal. Moral beliefs should not be forced on others by converting them into laws. And the Eucharist should not be used as a political weapon against Catholic politicians who are opposed to making abortion illegal.

CARL SHY

Efland, North Carolina

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I read with interest the article about some at the Villanova conference wanting to forbid President Joe Biden from Communion because he is "pro-abortion." Is he really

pro-abortion or pro-choice? Being pro-choice is not necessarily pro-abortion. I am pro-choice in that I believe I do not have the right to tell someone else how to handle their pregnancy.

Do we automatically deny Communion to those who use birth control? No.

Do we automatically deny Communion to LBGTQ+ people just for being LBGTQ+? No (although many parishes and bishops refuse to allow Communion for those in a same-sex marriage).

Jesus says that he come for sinners, not for saints. It's about time that the church follows what Jesus intended.

MARK WUNDER

Topeka, Kansas

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