Opinion



by NCR Staff

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Amid the growing calls among conservative Catholics to deny President Joe Biden Communion, San Francisco's Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone released a letter May 1 calling for public figures who support abortion to be barred from the sacrament. Following are NCR readers responses to Cordileone's letter. The responses have been edited for length and clarity.

It is my understanding that the president and the vice president of the United States both took an oath to uphold the Constitution of the United States. The Supreme Court has upheld the legality of abortion.

It is, therefore, the obligation of the president and vice president to respect the right of people to seek abortion under the conditions outlined by the law. This does not mean that they must believe that abortion is right but only that it is legal.

I think that the president and the vice president should make it publicly clear they will uphold the Constitution and put this issue to rest.

JIM AND CYNTHIA WHITE

Colusa, California



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Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone and other "pro-life" archbishops should pause and reconsider before withholding Communion, which can be seen as a political weapon.

As church leaders, they are called to promote Catholic men following the example of Joseph in dealing with a problem pregnancy. And they are called to promote all the faithful following the example of Jesus and the apostles in pooling resources and meeting others' needs before satisfying our own wants. Of course, those on the right have another label to discourage us from doing that: "socialism."

Lord help us be a church that prays and worships together — and that resolves differences in a spirit of love, patience and understanding.

JIM LEIN

Minot, North Dakota

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This is infuriating on so many levels:

- Denying then advocating the primacy of abortion as a moral issue;
- Equating supporting women's right to choose with advocating abortion;
- Using the Eucharist as a weapon (perhaps the saddest of all); and
- Singling out public figures arbitrarily

I'm left wondering how the bishops would respond to a simple question, "To what end?" Do they think this is the way to restore credibility? Or do they still not understand that the days of "father knows best" are long past? Do they not realize the gift to the church of a leader like President Joe Biden, one well versed in and dedicated to the principles of Catholic social teaching?

MARIE CONN

Hatboro, Pennsylvania

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There must be something in the California air that causes Catholic bishops to take leave of their sanity.

Now Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone has joined those recommending that our president, and I assume all other elected officials who honor the law on abortion, should be denied Communion. It's not sufficient that privately, in his personal Catholicism, Joe Biden does not support abortion.

It is a quagmire in which he's joined by thousands (if not millions) of elected, public officials. If I were a public official required to take a position on abortion, it would sound exactly like Biden's. Privately, abortion horrifies me; publicly, I would have to say to those similarly caught in the trap, move over, I'm coming in.

No bishop, not even one from California, has a right to deny the Eucharist.

Even the pope, if asked, would likely respond as he did when questioned about LGBTQ Catholics: "Who am I to judge?"

TOM LYNCH

Oak Park, Illinois

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I thank God every day that we are blessed with a person in the White House who is stable, intelligent, compassionate, and experienced in political leadership. I am also heartened that he openly discusses his faith and seems to have a strong moral compass. That doesn't seem to be enough for some of our church leaders. How much stability, intelligence, compassion and moral integrity are they willing to forego in exchange for an elected official who "says" they are "pro-life"?

Our current president treats everyone with respect. He is striving to bring equal justice under the law. He is working to help people rise out of poverty. He is honest. This is quite a change from the last president.

I would ask our church leaders to show respect and understanding for President Joe Biden and other Catholic politicians. They represent people of multiple faiths, ideologies and backgrounds. They have to figure out how to balance their own beliefs with those of the people they serve. It's a daunting task. No one will be perfect.

MARGARET DONLAN

Yarmouth Port, Massachusetts

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I have been following the debate and discussion over whether President Joe Biden should be allowed to receive Communion and now I read that Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi has been added to the list. Is anyone going to be safe from this gang of pious autocrats whom we, the faithful, continue to support in some very elaborate life styles?

Let me be clear; our church teaches that Jesus was crucified and died for our sins, contemplating this gift can overwhelm a person in its magnitude. It is surely the central tenant of our faith. Jesus was crucified for our sins, and now we are going to crucify Biden and Pelosi for our sins, not their sins. Both of these politicians have publicly stated their personal opposition to the evil of abortion. And yet we want to publicly crucify them. If that is the attitude of our church leaders we are going to be in for a very sad way of the cross.

Let me also be clear that I am opposed to abortion and for years have supported the pro-life movement in a monetary way. Yet there are many women who feel they have a right to choose, and the law in the United States upholds their right to do so. If we are going to exclude every Catholic and every pro-life person from elected office, or forbid them to receive the Eucharist, this will end very badly. I like to feel that some of my beliefs are present in any elected official, surely this is better than making it impossible for them consider running for office.

Whatever happened to "judge not lest ye be judged"? We have endured enough humiliation from the horrendous sexual abuse scandals in our church, let us not judge harshly a man or woman who quote prayers when they give speeches, for who call on God to bless the United States. Let them do their work, these acts of judgment and false piety just don't cut it anymore.

BERNADETTE JORDAN

Salmon Arm, British Columbia

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Let the bishops buy the children new shoes. The world is in chaos, people are dying in a pandemic, children are left without parents, and all these guys do is sit down and act as if they have the privilege of special insight into God's will.

To the Catholic Church and those who dismiss and denigrate the pope's call for us to care for God's people and his planet — I say (after 80 years as a faithful Catholic) *ciao* for now.

PEGGY ANN HIGGINS

Woodstock, Georgia

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I have, on occasion been critical of your positions. However, I must compliment you for accurately reporting the archbishop's position expressed in his May 1 letter on abortion, and without presenting your usual leftist editorializing.

JOHN A. DONNELLY

Middletown, Delaware

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Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone says "correction can also take the public form of exclusion from the reception of Holy Communion." It seems to me "correction" is a euphemism for "punishment."

Nevertheless, what is it exactly he wishes Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi to do? Say she would never have an abortion herself or encourage anyone else to do so? Or is she expected to single-handedly make legal abortion illegal? It has never been clear to me what any bishop is demanding of these public figures, who are required to uphold the law as it is (except, apparently, for former president Donald Trump).

Cordileone goes on to talk about public figures that "promote abortion." Where and who are these public figures? I have never heard anyone, either publicly or privately, promote abortion. He claims abortion is the "preeminent priority" for the church but that the church is, among other things, fighting for economic equality. I bet if the U.S. bishops supported affordable, quality day care, a living wage, a social safety net and universal health care for mothers and infants, they would realize their preeminent priority.

MARCIA L. MELDAHL

Powell, Tennessee

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It's interesting to me that in all the discussion I have heard about public figures and abortion, critics assume that people like President Joe Biden and Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi actually support abortion. This is open to question. Perhaps they, as I do, do not support abortion but also do not support making it illegal.

There is a difference between our personal, moral position opposing abortion and a public position supporting the government's power to forbid it. Supporting a woman's right to choose is not the same as supporting abortion. This, in my opinion, is not a decision that the government should make, but rather, a very difficult decision for the woman and her doctor to make.

A trite old way to think of this problem goes like this: if you give the government the power to forbid abortion, you give the government the power to require abortion. In neither case does this power belong with the government.

ROSE BARRY

Gilroy, California

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The hierarchy of the Catholic Church takes public vows very seriously. Priests must petition Rome to be released from vows and divorce is not permitted because of the marriage vow.

But what about the vow that every president must take? The Constitution specifies the wording for the presidential oath of office: "I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will faithfully execute the Office of President of the United States, and will to the best of my ability, preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States." The oath members of Congress must swear is also to the Constitution.

The oath is not to one's own beliefs, but rather, to the Constitution. A Catholic president must enforce all Supreme Court decisions, including abortion decisions, and must ensure that women receive all of their rights under the law. The only way of changing abortion law is by direct amendment to the Constitution, but no bishop is leading such an effort.

The issue is whether the presidential oath of office is valid. If not, the bishops should say so. And further, that a Catholic may not take this oath. But if the oath is valid, then bishops should regard it in the same way that they regard priestly and marital vows.

RICHARD LANG

San Francisco, California

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