Opinion



by NCR Staff

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In our latest editorial, NCR tells the U.S. bishops to go ahead and consider and vote on a proposal for a teaching document about Communion that includes denying the sacrament to politicians who support pro-choice policies, including our nation's second Catholic president, Joe Biden. Following are letters to the editor responding to our editorial, which was headlined "Why we support the bishops' plan to deny Communion to Biden." The letters have been edited for length and clarity.

I almost fell off my chair when I read your headline on supporting the bishops plan. I hope you realize than many people never go beyond the headline? I still cannot believe you did that. I am deeply sorry you published it!

As the National Catholic Reporter, I think you have a heavy responsibility to help those truly interested to understand this serious situation with the U.S. bishops, especially with this dispute which has/will divide the church even further.

As a nationally recognized newspaper with high standards, I feel this was a stunt and a very misleading one at that. It is not worthy of your publication! I just have to write this to you as you have been for myself and many others a reliable source.

(Sr.) JEAN FALLON, MM

Maryknoll, New York



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I do fear in this age of sound bites, fake news and out-of-context quotations that the title of your editorial will be widely reported in the press, particularly in conservative outlets, without any acknowledgement of the intended irony or link to the editorial itself.

ROBERT MASSON

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

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Regarding the NCR editorial, the U.S. bishops' conference clearly lacks jurisdiction according to the Code of Canon Law. Canons 1401 and 1405 specifically reserve the judgment of heads of state (among others) to the pope in cases involving "the violation of ecclesiastical law and whatever contains an element of sin."

ANTHONY S. ERCOLANO

Flushing, New York

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While I am in total agreement with the substance of your editorial, I am appalled by your decision to support a vote by the U.S. bishops' conference to deny the reception of Holy Communion to President Joe Biden.

My sense is that while agreeing that the U.S. bishops' conference is a totally ineffective politically plagued organization, you are saying that a vote to deny Communion would be a vote to confirm that view. In other words, it would be a vote to call a spade a spade.

NCR's support for such a vote will not be construed as a condemnation of the U.S. bishops' conference and a position in support of non-denial of Holy Communion to the president. It will be quoted hither and yon in the exact opposite way — that you in fact "do" support the denial of Holy Communion to the president.

I believe this is a massive miscalculation on the part of the NCR editorial board. Rather, continue to be strident in your full-frontal non-support for denial of Holy Communion to the president.

WILLIAM R. EIDLE

Poughkeepsie, New York

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As a non-American, I am curious to know whether the bishops seeking to deny Holy Communion to President Joe Biden are planning to impose the same sanction on William Barr who, as attorney general, re-introduced the federal death penalty,

leading immediately to the execution of several people, in defiance of the church's prohibition of the death penalty. If not, why not?

(Fr.) ANTHONY KEEFE

Warton, England

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"Let's be honest: The bishops' proposal has little to do with theology and much to do with politics."

You hit the nail squarely on the head! Thank you for your comments on the upcoming meeting of the U.S. bishops and their rush to draft a document that would use the body of Christ as a weapon against our president.

I agree that the position is totally wrong, and especially harmful given the magnitude of the issue that hits at the very heart of who we are as American Catholics. I believe that it is the individual's pastor, in this case, Cardinal Wilton Gregory, who should have the final say in this issue of the denial of Holy Communion to Biden because of his "political" stance on abortion. For as the individual's conscience, affirmed at the Second Vatican Council (*Gaudium et Spes*), is sacred, I ask these "culture warriors" to look into their lives and ponder whether or not this stance, that is "politically correct," can be supported by our own theological and moral directives.

I would further ask the bishops to reflect on the fact that many Americans have "elected" a new savior — Donald Trump. Based on the current political climate, the bishops should consider this: "[that the] new 'MAGA church,' with Donald Trump instead of Jesus as its savior, has already divided U.S. Catholics."

In my opinion, history can teach us an important lesson. As soon as a church becomes closely aligned with a political system or party, it is all downhill from there — sliding inevitably into perdition. Further, I would request that, following the directions from the Vatican, these "culture warriors" take time to reflect on their lives, and discover who is the center of their lives — Jesus or Trump!

JERILYN E. FELTON

Tigard, Oregon

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What an outstanding and blistering article on the position of the U.S. bishops' conference on their interest in withholding the Eucharist from our president! I would love to see a list of the bishops and their vote on this issue should they actually go forward with the vote.

That would enable me and many other Catholics to make a decision re: the annual bishop's appeal and capital campaigns in our dioceses. The purse has a bigger voice than the Gospel among many of our clerical leaders.

PAM SLOANE

Old Greenwich, Connecticut

Advertisement

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It seems to me that the anti-Biden bishops have been shell-shocked by the election by a large majority of a progressive president of a very progressive Democratic Party who was transparent about the policies he wanted to introduce. And who was normal in the practice of his Catholic faith.

They sniped and snarled about self-selected moral social issues during the campaign but never mentioned (to my knowledge) the core of morality — a citizen's individual conscience.

Psychologically, they are in a state of denial. Their prestige is shot to pieces. In the view of millions of Catholic voters their moral leadership is irrelevant.

JOSEPH P. QUIGLEY

Tomakin, Australia

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You undoubtedly have chosen to ignore the enlightened directive of then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger on this very issue in 2004. Why?

JOHN A. DONNELLY

Middletown, Delaware

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Though I certainly agree with your bulk and body of your editorial on the upcoming virtual bishops' conference, I think your intro and conclusion are negative and, frankly, childish.

I read your lengthy editorial but I doubt many would. What a shame that most who follow this paper would stop at the headline: "We support the bishops." That is certainly not what you support.

JIM WHITE

Colusa, California

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My first reading of your headline made me catch my breath. However, reading the text I found some comfort as well as concern that everything you said is what I believe but my concern is how will the everyday Catholics, like myself, react going forward.

All that you have stated; largess from their funding sources, political posturing, false piety to conceal self-righteousness, all these and more characterize a far too large number of the shepherds for our common flock. In light of the Gallup poll which shows a declining trend in affiliation with churches, let alone the historical decline in attendance, one would think the leaders of our church would show some discretion and curtail their own excesses. If they believe they will bring about an end to abortion by their posturing, they will only bring about an end to the influence of the Catholic Church in the United States.

Many church attendees ignored the excesses of the Trump administration and overlooked our bishops deliberate ignorance of those excesses through their reticence to engage and point out what the Trump administration was doing and the

harm it was causing. A few prelates, certainly not the more vocal group, raised concerns but those concerns did not gain much traction. It would appear that in focusing their ire on President Joe Biden while ignoring Donald Trump, some prelates want to divide the church along political lines. Their insincere pious arguments about trying to bring our president back into the fold will instead motivate many otherwise in the fold to seek a less politicized church.

CHARLES A. LE GUERN

Granger, Indiana

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I found this editorial mean-spirited and divisive; the phrase, "just do it," is provocative. Whatever happens as a result of the bishops' meeting regarding coherence and integrity in reception of the Eucharist, the effort to live in peace and harmony will continue or not depending on the way we choose to enter into dialogue.

The presumption of a blanket statement denying reception of the sacrament to anyone in particular may be just that, a presumption.

Those bishops who favor holding the June meeting seem to be committed to a clear, uncomplicated articulation of the disposition required in approaching the altar to receive the body and blood of Christ; any further action is at the discretion of each bishop in his particular diocese.

It saddens me to read such rancorous words from fellow Catholics.

MAIRE O'RIORDAN LUNDY

San Francisco, California

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I am not Catholic, but I don't need to be to recognize the failure of the editors of the NCR to grasp basic Catholic theology. Your claim that denying the body and blood of Christ to politicians who support abortion is "contrary to a proper, traditional theology of the sacraments" is a blatant lie. It either represents a gross ignorance of the sacramental theology of the Catholic Church or, worse, is a willful deception of

the Catholic faithful.

And like all good lies, you include just enough truth to make your lie sound reasonable. Yes, the Eucharist is "not a prize for the perfect but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak." That part is true. The lie lies in the claim that to refuse the gifts to someone who unrepentantly denies and violates the teaching of the church is treating the gifts as a "prize for the perfect" and not "as medicine for the weak."

To partake of the Eucharist, which is intended to unite you to Christ, while you consciously and willfully refuse union with Christ, is an ontological contradiction. To deny Communion to someone in that condition is far from inappropriate; it is the most appropriate thing in the world. It is simply a recognition of the state they have put themselves in.

As for your claim that President Joe Biden "has said he is personally opposed to abortion," as if that somehow brought him within the teaching of the Catholic Church, well, this is simply absurd. The act of opposing the restriction of abortion is an act of support for abortion. It is the exact opposite of opposition to abortion, personal or otherwise.

You're right also that this action demonstrates how ineffectual the bishops have become. That they have to vote on this should be an embarrassment. It should go without saying that anyone who lives outside the teachings of the church cannot partake of the Eucharist, or any other sacrament, until they repent. That is basic Catholic sacramental theology.

JIM FILLER

Wheeling, West Virginia

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