Opinion
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by NCR Staff

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In a vote that was both expected and defying the Vatican, the U.S. Catholic bishops advanced last week on plans to draft a document addressing Communion for pro-choice Catholic politicians. Sixty Catholic Democrats in the House of Representatives, including Reps. Rosa DeLauro and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, released a "statement of principles" the next day calling on U.S. bishops to avoid "weaponizing" the Eucharist. Meanwhile, NCR political columnist Michael Sean Winters says that the proponents of drafting a document may have won the ballot,

but they have divided the conference in ways it has never before been divided. Following are letters to the editor from NCR readers responding to these three reports. The letters have been edited for length and clarity.

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I'm writing to respond to news that a majority of the U.S. bishops decided to proceed with drafting a document to determine who should receive the body and blood of Christ at liturgical celebrations.

Their majority "motion to proceed" sounds very similar to legislation being passed in several Republican states by "majorities" to restrict minority access to the ballot.



It seems that many of the U.S. bishops by their actions are mirroring how deeply embedded they are in the culture wars, their hierarchical status, misogyny, patriarchy and "white male privilege." They seem to share many demographic similarities with Republicans in the U.S. Congress.

I'd be curious to know if there is a direct line and correlation between bishops who are choosing to weaponize the Eucharist to "protect the institution" and the ones who moved abusers around for the same reason. Also, if they're doing this to deflect our attention from continuing to clean up their own dioceses by trying to "change the subject."

The church founded by Jesus does not need the guidance of this vocal "majority" of bishops who refuse to follow the direction of Pope Francis or the directives of the Vatican encouraging them to have a dialogue about this matter. By suppressing the discussion about the Eucharistic disagreement at their meeting, they have

demonstrated that they don't have the ability to examine this complex issue, respectfully, among themselves. Their behavior is nothing short of scandalous, something Jesus warned us about in leaders.

**DEREK COELHO**

**Dublin, Ohio**

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I completely agree with the view presented by San Diego Bishop Robert McElroy to not weaponize the holy Eucharist for political agenda. The context of St. Paul's exhortation on not to receive the Lord unworthily in the Eucharist was precisely about causing division in the church. The theology of unworthiness causes such division and disunity in the church. No Catholic is worthy by himself or herself to receive Christ in the holy Eucharist. It is Christ's love and mercy that makes one worthy to receive him.

Will Jesus Christ offer his love, his body and blood, to Joe Biden? Definitely! I believe Jesus will.

**(Fr.) REYNALDO TREYES**

**Bloomingdale, Illinois**

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The bishops who want to bar politicians from Communion need a refresher course in the Baltimore catechism. Only "mortal sin" can bar a Catholic from Communion.

But the catechism tells us that three things are necessary for a mortal sin: (1) The matter has to involve a serious wrong; (2) The person has to know or believe it is seriously wrong; (3) The person, believing it is wrong, has to do it anyway.

The bishops would say that politicians approving of a public policy allowing women of all faiths to make their own decision about abortion without a legal penalty is seriously wrong. However, the politicians do not believe that in their own conscience. Therefore, they are not committing a "mortal sin" when they adopt a public policy that disagrees with the bishops and thus they can receive Communion.

The days are long gone when the bishops can simply decree "mortal sin" and be believed and followed by all Catholics.

**MARJORIE REILEY MAGUIRE**

**Milwaukee, Wisconsin**

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American bishops should not be a part of the political scene. Their move to deny the Eucharist to the president of the United States is an action that does nothing positive for the church.

We are all sinners and forgiveness is necessary. That is why we have confession and the Eucharist. Living in the past will not help the church to grow or be effective. The bishops need to take a lead from the pope.

**BOB MAGEE**

**Escalon, California**

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What can reasonable Catholics take from last week's U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops meeting and the bishops' public threat to deny President Joe Biden holy Communion other than that they are demonstrating yet again their obvious right-wing Republican partisanship?

For four years, many of these same bishops sat silently in the face of Donald Trump's long list of anti-life abominations — whether it was Trump's constant dehumanizing rhetoric, his anti-life immigration policies, his reprehensible system of separating thousands of immigrant children from their parents and then not recording where the parents were to permit reunification, his dreadful efforts to reduce food assistance for the hungry and even hungry children, his blatant rescinding of policies to protect drinking water from life-threatening toxins, his climate change denialism in the face of its devastating impacts, his reinstitution of the death penalty including rushed executions at the end of his term, and even his denial of the pandemic while hundreds of thousands of Americans died — all happening with the U.S. bishops looking the other way, pretending not to see, some

even cheering him on!

We can thank our U.S. bishops for taking the nation's politicization of everything, even a pandemic, to a new height — the holy Communion rail — bringing partisan conflict and their obvious right-wing Republican bias into the center of the church. How much more effective it would be for the bishops to instead be moral leaders and teachers, first by living moral lives themselves and then by demonstrating moral leadership, rather than taking partisan sides and once again alienating themselves from so many.

**MICHAEL J. GOFF**

**Baltimore, Maryland**

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I believe the damage to the church, the people of God, and the present damage in the U.S. is due to the sin of clericalism.

**KATHLEEN HOLMBERG**

**St. Paul, Minnesota**

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Catholics are witnessing bishops lacking a moral compass or pastoral heart. Like all people, bishops lie — to themselves and others. It would be interesting to compare those voting for/against the document with the health of their dioceses. Playing politics is playing with fire. Sooner or later, you're going to get burned.

The IRS is again focusing on religious-political organizations denying Christians Engaged its 501(3)c status for crossing the line between religion and politics. It's an interesting case worth following. A long known open secret is religious organizations being used for political activities. The IRS hasn't used its authority though seems ready.

This decline in church memberships and the disarray within the Southern Baptist Conference are ominous omens for the future of the illegal religious-political movement and the Republican Party. So-called conservative churches are losing a grip on the masses and their ability to propagandize them, especially the young. The GOP knows this so is rewriting the rules of the game trying to minimize their opponent's right to vote. The U.S. bishops' conference reflects the "secular" culture they often condemn.

**MICHAEL J. MCDERMOTT**

**Tyler, Texas**

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The American Catholic bishops are making a grave error in targeting President Joe Biden. Politicizing our beloved holy Eucharist, as the bishops are now doing, will only give rise to the anti-Catholicism of 150 years ago and the re-emergence of the Know Nothing Party's concern that American Catholics are dictated to by priests and bishops. We are not a monarchy, not a dictatorship, but have struggled for several centuries to be a democracy. Should conservative bishops get their way it will soon become impossible for Catholics who cherish the Eucharist to run for public office. Then what have we lost?

Biden has endured incredible personal hardship and now bears the enormous burden of resurrecting the American presidency. The support he receives from the holy Eucharist is his right and it is sinful for any bishop to deny him that.

For the first time in my 91 years, "the church" and "my Catholic faith," have become separate entities. The dollar sign has become the symbol of the Republican Party and consequently of the American bishops.

My only recourse, because I will be true to my Catholic faith until the day I die, in spite of the bishops, is to end financial support to the diocese and to all diocesan charities.

**GERRY JONES**

**Hudson, Ohio**

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