Opinion



by NCR Staff

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In a vote that was both expected and defying the Vatican, the U.S. Catholic bishops advanced on plans to draft a document addressing Communion for pro-choice Catholic politicians. Following are more letters to the editor from NCR readers that have been edited for length and clarity. You can read part one of the responses here .

One has to ask the question "What would Jesus do in this situation"?

From my reading of sacred scripture, it appears that he does not establish any guidelines as to who can partake of the bread and wine. At the last supper, where the Eucharist was instituted, seated at the table were the apostles including Judas. The bread and wine were shared among all without any restriction. In his own words, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (Mark 2:17).



My concern is also with the overreaching effects that may follow. Will women who have undergone an abortion not be allowed to receive the Eucharist? How about medical personnel who have been involved in performing abortions or husbands or other family members that might have recommended or supported having an abortion? Should governmental members who have supported the women's rights movement or those who have supported various bills and legislation that have supported abortion also be excluded from receiving the Eucharist?

Judas was seated at the table and yet Jesus included him in the partaking of the bread and wine. Who are we to judge?

Let God be the judge.

JIM FULTON

Streator, Illinois

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What some have described as conservative Catholic bishops' "Communion wars" bring to my mind then-candidate John F. Kennedy's September 1960 speech to the Southern Baptist Convention clergy in Houston, Texas, when he felt compelled to argue: "I am not the Catholic candidate for president. I am the Democratic Party's candidate for president, who happens also to be a Catholic."

Getting ready to vote in my first national election, I, a Catholic seminarian at the time, saw the wisdom of Kennedy's declaration in the face of widespread fears that he would do the bidding of the pope as president of the United States, not the work of protecting our Constitution. Thus, he faced anti-Catholic bias and questions about his loyalty to the U.S. Constitution vs. his loyalty to the Vatican and Catholic Church teachings.

The Catholic bishops who are proposing banning Catholic politicians from receiving Communion because they don't toe the line of Catholic Church teachings are dividing Catholics but more importantly are dividing Americans on the basis of religious litmus tests. These conservative bishops of the American Catholic Church don't seem to recognize that they have already lost a significant level of moral authority due to their failure to deal effectively with the crisis of sexual abuse within some Catholic clergy.

Their proposed action to assert Catholic religious authority over the president of the United States will just add to that loss of moral authority as the Catholic Church's social justice teachings on many issues are being sacrificed to the political expediency of conservative politics around the issue of abortion and birth control. In the future, these same bishops will question why they are not listened to, why so many younger Catholics are abandoning the Catholic Church and why secularization seems to be growing in America. They will find the answer to that question, at least partially, in their misguided "Communion wars."

DAVID W. GAGNE

Minneapolis, Minnesota

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One cannot have failed to be cognizant of the excuses made for Donald Trump and the Catholics in his administration these past four years and not be incensed by the pivot of the U.S. bishops' conference to marginalize and demean Democratic

office holders since the election of 2020.

It appears a few prelates are themselves incensed that their champion, Trump, succumbed to an ignominious defeat in an election which set records for turnout. I'm certain those same bishops, who likely thought of Trump as a God-send, were perplexed that the greater number of voters preferred a genuinely religious candidate who actually empathizes with the people over a con artist who completely lacks empathy for anyone.

The people in the pews, with few exceptions, regard social justice as an overarching plan to meet the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable of our brothers and sisters. Those same Catholics expect our prelates to be champions of social justice not wall flowers like they were under Trump, barely seen nor heard, while egregious harms were perpetrated. President Joe Biden's work to address the needs of our working families is a case in point of enacting programs entirely consistent with Catholic social teaching and which will have the effect of reducing abortions.

If the U.S. bishops' conference believes social justice, like primacy of conscience, is just another slogan but the culture warrior tactics are preferred since they raise revenue, the bishops will find themselves revealed as hypocrites. I would expect the decline in church membership to accelerate further until the Catholic population becomes too small to be relevant to the people who underwrite the bishops' budgets. At that point it will be too late for those same bishops to continue to enjoy the political influence they currently believe they wield.

CHARLES A. LE GUERN

Granger, Indiana

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The vote of the bishops to advance the Communion document is disappointing, embarrassing and hypocritical. Further, to allege that it has nothing to do with a specific person, to wit, President Joe Biden, is laughably disingenuous.

If the reactionary wing were honest in its rush to support church doctrine, it would propose a document forbidding all Catholics who have practiced birth control from

receiving the Eucharist. If so, the pews would immediately empty, donations would cease and they would have to get a real job.

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No wonder people didn't want a Catholic for president before or now. They feared Rome running the country, only now it is the American bishops. Like it or not, the president's job is not to Catholicize the country. His job is to seek freedom for all, including the right to make medical decisions between a woman and her doctor.

When I hear men discussing women's reproductive rights, I'm often left with the thought that they have zero interest in stopping abortion. If you want to prevent abortion, you need to prevent unwanted pregnancies.

What's next? Perhaps we pass laws that no meat is sold on Friday in America?

Keep it up and the Catholic Church will deserve to lose the tax-free status.

PEG GAWNE-MARK

Dothan, Alabama

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During the discussion by the bishops on President Joe Biden and other Catholic pro-choice supporting-political figures, no other life issues have been mentioned that I can tell. I think that is one of Pope Francis' concerns, that other life issues are minimized.

I think the death penalty should be given some attention. Our Catholic governor Pete Ricketts, for example, not only has a pro-death penalty position but he is the person

most responsible for maintaining a death penalty in Nebraska. And yet, an important part of his self-image and public image is his Catholicism.

The Nebraska legislature passed a law abolishing the death penalty in 2015. Ricketts vetoed it, but the legislature overrode the veto.

With his personal fortune, Ricketts funded an initiative petition and as a result, the death penalty was overridden and remains active.

As far as I can tell, the three Nebraska bishops have not called him out although they agree that the Catholic position on the death penalty is to oppose it. Certainly, I've seen nothing in the national press reportage on the U.S. bishops' conference that suggests other bishops would consider receipt of Communion to be contingent on position and actions supporting the death penalty.

Is the death penalty a life issue or not?

MARY ANN LAMANNA

Omaha, Nebraska

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Do the bishops realize that the logical corollary of their decision about pro-choice politicians and Communion is that no Catholic can run for public office? Officials take an oath to uphold the Constitution, and access to abortion is protected by that Constitution. Apparently, the bishops want politicians to violate their oaths of office.

When this sort of question came up with John F. Kennedy, the bishops were perfectly happy with the idea that he would follow the Constitution and not church law. But at that time, the issue wasn't abortion.

ANN PLOGSTERTH

New York, New York

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Now that the U.S. Catholic bishops have decided to write something on the meaning of the Eucharist, I wonder which theologians they will consult in the process of

drafting such a document. Or will they consult any theologians?

As someone who studied theology during the four years of the Second Vatican Council, I remember how the bishops at the council routinely consulted with reputable theologians over those four years. And those theologians represented a healthy diversity of background and theological perspective.

As a recent letter to the editor reminded us: Jesus shared the first Eucharist with Judas. Maybe this is another time for the question: What would Jesus do?

JIM PURCELL, NCR Board Chair

Los Gatos, California

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