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 . Part two of the responses can be found here.

Friends, now our national conference of bishops has voted to produce a document that, as proposed, will offer me guidance on the place and value of the Eucharist in my life. This leads me to some questions that I hope such guidance will offer me.

1. Will I grow in my understanding of Jesus fully present in the bread and wine we consecrated?

2. Will it speak to the fullness of Catholic social teaching or will we choose particular aspects as focus for why one would be able to present oneself for reception of the greatest gift God offers the faithful?

3. Will it acknowledge the abject failures for which we are to share responsibility to effectively engage our political system and to limit all aspects of moral actions to which our teachings call us to stand in witness to over the last 50 years?

4. Will we form guidance that acknowledges sinners seeking healing or will it present judgement over and against healing?

5. Will we all acknowledge that we are a community of believers not a community who shuns members?

6. Will it put greater strictures on those who present themselves for public office than the rest of us?

7. If we are to engage the role of the Catholic in the public arena, will we apply the same standards to our behavior within our Catholic community?

8. Will we consider that scandal applies to all of us and if we will hold politicians to a higher standard will that standard apply to all of us?

10. Are we modeling what we learn from Jesus' actions in the Gospel for all to see today?

PATRICK B. FOX

Rochester, New York



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If anything was learned from the Theodore McCarrick case, it should have been that prelates don't always tell the truth. They also do not always behave appropriately. Indeed, NCR political columnist Michael Sean Winters, in several articles, suggests that the U.S. bishops' conference "is drowning in bad blood and failed leadership," and lacking the kind of polite protocol one should expect from "brother bishops" engaged in dialogue.

The lack of respect and disunity in the U.S. bishops' conference may not be edifying, but it will not affect any bishop's life on a personal level. Indeed, their meetings (even virtual) are more like the heads of individual fiefdoms, who know they will be unaffected at home no matter how filled with vitriol their meeting may be, for bishops are untouchable kings in their home territory.

Bishops have become irrelevant to a large proportion of Catholics precisely because some bishops treat their priests and their faithful as irrelevant. Whatever is presented to the U.S. bishops' conference in November will only exacerbate the terrible divisions in this country and within our church, and unless Pope Francis dies, it faces a very uncertain possibility of ever being published.

Further, it is unlikely that any relegation of President Joe Biden or Nancy Pelosi to the virtual ranks of the excommunicated will diminish any push by anyone for an expansion to the existing laws regarding abortion in the United States. The only thing that can do that is a genuine change of hearts and minds, and that can only happen with genuine dialogue and not condemnation.

(Fr.) CHRISTOPHER SENK

Fort Myers, Florida

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In this time of deep division, I am appalled that there are bishops who are in favor of politicizing the Eucharist. Jesus established the sacrament to be shared among believers to be celebrated in remembrance of him. He did not place restrictions other than faith and love.

Have the bishops read the New Testament? Jesus taught tolerance, love and forgiveness. President Joe Biden is a practicing Catholic. He believes and acts on the Beatitudes, equality and justice. This will prove to be a very divisive move and will do harm to the unity of the church in the United States.

CHERYL KEENAN

Lexington, Kentucky

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Why does the U.S. bishops' conference believe that, as a conference, it has credibility? Certainly, many of its bishops are pastoral men who are loved, trusted and respected by the people of their dioceses, but the public image presented by the conference is an embarrassment for many U.S. Catholics who wonder why the conference, in the face of so many societal and world problems, publicly focuses almost exclusively on abortion and sex. We also wonder why U.S. bishops can so self-assuredly act against the cautions of Pope Francis and Vatican officials.

We are just recovering from the presidency of a man who lied, cheated, and, by his inaction and dismissal of the seriousness of the coronavirus, was at least partially responsible for the death of thousands of people. Why did we not hear from the U.S. bishops then?

While our pope famously asked "Who am I to judge?", many of our bishops evidently have no such reservation. They're acting as if judging President Joe Biden's worthiness to receive Communion is a matter on which they have competence. Is this pastoral care or is it, instead, a power play? And to what end?

CHRISTINA SPAHN

Albuquerque, New Mexico

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Please ask someone to write an article about the right of a politician to follow the Constitution and the amendments, the laws of the land, and not go by personal faith beliefs. After all, these aforementioned politicians are not representing the church/clergy, but the people of the U.S.

Why should they follow the "church" and not U.S. law? I do not understand.

Besides Communion is no longer the term we use since Vatican II, but rather the Eucharist. Why are you so sloppy with terminology? I don't understand what the National Catholic Reporter is trying to say or do to the people of God.

I am so disgusted with what is happening to us, the people of God, by the press and the leaders of the U.S. Catholic Church, the bishops.

Please make clear where you stand and not what makes it possible for you to get the money from rich people and those who want to please the bishops.

ELIZABETH AVERILL

Madison, Wisconsin

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It's downright shameful that these men prefer to be Trumpets rather than shepherds.

RICHARD L. CRANK

Lawrence, Kansas

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I was a devout Catholic once. I attended a Catholic school, went to daily Mass and entered the convent after high school. Though I was sent home for being gay, I still practiced my faith, started folk masses at my parish and taught four teenagers how to play the guitar and write songs that gave praise and thanks.

It was at that parish that I was refused absolution and denied the sacraments for being homosexual. Without my church, I created a faith on my own, living as closely as I could to the values Jesus encouraged. I have maintained a spiritual practice for 35 years and, with no authority but my own, help people celebrate the sacramental passages of their lives.

If I was a practicing Catholic, I would leave today in protest over your invasion into President Joe Biden's spiritual life. Our politics are not your business and you have no authority to make them so. I wish you would show some leadership in ending racism, eradicating poverty, ordaining women.

You are not in positions of authority to be political. You are there to be lights in the dark, leaders of consequence. Shame on you for failing all of us with your meddling mediocrity and limited vision. Shame on you for not responding to the real crises in your midst — hunger, racism, social disparities.

I pray that the Spirit opens your minds and ignites your imaginations so you will be better guided in your roles as shepherds and leaders.

JAN PHILLIPS

San Diego, California

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American bishops show a lack of moral leadership. With their singular focus on abortion, they enter into an unholy alliance with far more destructive forces.

Supporting the Republican Party in an attempt to end safe, legal abortions, they lend support to the NRA. Do we see the bishops call out the 10 Republican Catholic senators and conservative Catholic justices on the Supreme Court who fight any reasonable attempt to curtail gun violence? No! Do we see the Catholic bishops of the United States chastise the Catholic senators in the Republican Party who support the fossil fuels industry and the destruction of the climate? No! Do the bishops criticize the Republicans hostility to immigrants who constitute the majority of their flock? No!

As, the bishops enabled predator priests to ruin the lives of so many innocents, they display the same lack of courage when it come to the aforementioned destructive policies of Republican Catholics. Every act of gun violence rips out into the wider community of family, friends and neighborhoods. The act of burning fossils fuels is creating a path of destruction that will harm billions!

Call out your Republican allies for their much more destructive voting records. When you do that, perhaps your flock will turn to you as a voice of moral authority. As of now, the petty act of calling out President Joe Biden merely exposes your profound lack of moral clarity.

TIMOTHY H. DALTON

Arlington, Massachusetts

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I wonder if some of the frenetic activity to try to deny President Joe Biden Holy Communion by Republican-leaning bishops might be due to envy of him and also feelings of guilt.

Envy because he has accomplished so much in his short presidency to truly bring about God's kingdom on this earth (and they so little). And guilt because of their active support of the evil-doing Donald Trump. Could that lie behind their activity?

Just wondering.

MICHAEL PETRELLI

Westfield, Indiana

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