Opinion



by NCR Staff

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After the June meeting of the U.S. bishops' conference, in which the prelates voted to move forward in creating a document on Communion, former NCR editor Tom Roberts responded with an essay saying that whatever words on Communion the bishops come up with in November will not address the deeper wound, the loss of moral authority they brought upon themselves. NCR responded with an editorial saying that the bishops may be the leaders of our church, but it's not *their* church. Following are letters to the editors reacting to both pieces. The letters have been edited for length and clarity.

The article, "US bishops' latest display of desperation has roots in years of dysfunction" hits salient points. Rather than "years of dysfunction," why not decades of dysfunction?

The seeds of dysfunction were planted with the likes of Cardinal Raymond Burke and his ilk and grew with time. Their objective was never to move forward, only to look back to a pre-Vatican II church. I can't recall a successful national campaign the U.S. church has had to pull it together such as the 2010 "Come Home" or the 2013 "The New Evangelization" campaigns. Why? The bishops have "no vision" of what it means to "be" church. All they know is what they know remaining in the comfort zone of their little box while reformer Pope Francis struggles to bring them along to a new reality-based vision of what it means to be church.



Today the U.S. church is a mere shadow of its former self. Unlike the author, I believe this is fatal to the life of the U.S. church. As a megalith, it will implode upon itself. Vocations are lost, churches are closed, what next? Will dioceses go bankrupt needing to merge to survive? What then? There's no hope where there's no vision. The bishops have proven they are hopeless. Pope Francis is a prophet calling out in the wilderness beckoning men with no ears to hear or eyes to see. The youth too are lost and with them the future. It didn't have to be this way.

MICHAEL J. McDERMOTT

Tyler, Texas

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This is an "out of the box" extraordinary piece of journalism.

I'm not big on awards, but I hope that NCR will submit this editorial for recognition by the appropriate reporting organizations.

If you don't, I will.

Illigitimus non carborandum.

GENE ROMAN

Bronx, New York

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When reading the referenced article by Tom Roberts, this line, along with many others, caught my attention: "Pope Francis has changed the image for the community from an encampment behind well-defined barriers, with border-control bishops checking credentials of those coming and going, to a community of journey and accompaniment." Thanks to Francis for this beautiful image and Roberts for reminding us of this!

The article by Roberts also brought to mind something I read years ago by Fr. John McKenzie, a biblical scholar. What McKenzie essentially said — this is not an exact quote — was that one of the criticisms of Jesus was that he associated with sinners (I believe he may have actually used the phrase "low company") but many of his followers have risen above that criticism.

That critique by McKenzie is certainly applicable to many of our U.S. bishops' conference "border control bishops," men who will never be found guilty of smelling like the sheep.

ROBERT STEWART

Chantilly, Virginia

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The positions of the bishops of the U.S. bishops' conference are similar to that of CEOs of closely-held corporations. Many of those corporations, although family businesses in many cases, employ people familiar to the chief executive and those most likely to agree with any decisions the principal makes. Although a diocese is not a family run business those who work directly with the principal, in this case the bishop, likely will not refute or even question the decisions he makes.

The lack of supportive feedback is one of the reasons the bishops, in many cases, seem reticent to accept restraints from their fellow bishops. They seem to feel they are entitled to being the decision makers for their diocesan corporation. Like many CEOs who gather to boast of their accomplishments they embrace a certain herd psychology not wanting to stand out in some cases as iconoclasts or naysayers but still keeping largely their own counsel and relying largely upon their own understanding of issues with skepticism of other members' judgements.

We see that psychology displayed mostly among the bishops elevated by Pope St. John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI. They tended to be more conservative and therefore less likely to question their own judgement if it seemed to be reflective of like-minded members. This herd psychology is likely the basis for the fear the bishops have with their loss of influence.

Their loss of influence, which has been ongoing at least since the 1970s, has resulted in a decline in active church membership. When the people in the congregation relate more to shepherds from other dioceses than they do their own then the influence of the local shepherd in greatly diminished and the relationship of the person to his church becomes more passive. That passivity will only result in fewer Mass attendees as well as fewer active members. The bishops need to attend to the needs of the people in their own diocese or their own divisions as a body will be reflected in divisions at the parish level.

CHARLES A. LE GUERN

Granger, Indiana

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May God bless you for providing wisdom and guidance in your editorial, "Don't put your faith in the bishops' conference."

As you know, many of us have considered leaving the church. I went so far as resigning from the Catholic Church and becoming an Episcopalian. But it just did not take for me. I am a Catholic, again and always.

I love my church, which has made it all the more horrifying to see it possibly being hijacked by those who judge, hate, and sell out for political or even monetary purposes. But as your editorial makes clear, such people — even bishops — are imposters. They may lead some kind of group, but they are not the leaders of Christ's church.

Thank you for saying "It is our church, too." I am grateful to share our church with you.

JENNIFER SYMONS

Green Valley, Arizona

Advertisement

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This article again brings light to the lack of transparency these bishops insist on. They were hell bent and determined to get that letter out from Archbishop José Gomez one day after the election and place the bishop up for canonization. No problem with names there.

One reader's suggestion was simple in asking your bishop how he voted. Really? In our diocese, I really wonder about that. I believe some of our clergy need some brushing up with how to tell the truth. Years ago, I was instructed that we can obfuscate by commission and omission.

JANE FRANCISCO

Charlotte, North Carolina

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In other words, too many of the bishops learned nothing from the scandalous secrecy obscuring the clergy (sexual and financial) abuse scandals. How can they expect the laity to learn anything?

RICHARD L. CRANK

Lawrence, Kansas

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