Opinion



by NCR Staff

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In a recent commentary, John Gehring discusses the summer conference of the Napa Institute, in which it announced plans to expand its work to include programs on priestly formation and a lecture series at the University of Notre Dame. Following are letters to the editor responding to the commentary. Speakers also rallied participants to fight the culture wars, reject the Black Lives Matter movement, debunk what they called the lies behind gender ideology and defend the church's teachings in the face of what organizers view as an increasingly hostile secular society. The letters have been edited for length and clarity.

I greatly appreciate John Gehring's comments on the latest gathering of the Napa Institute. While Gehring makes some interesting observations, there is one particular paragraph that stood out for me. He states:

> Conference speakers also repeatedly warned about "the homosexual lifestyle" and "gender ideology."
>
> ... Mary Rice Hasson ... lamented that "we have a whole generation of children who are being brought up with this idea that their feelings decide reality."
>
> Human beings are "created either male or female," Hasson said. "Sex cannot change. Your feelings are really irrelevant to that conversation. You can't change a single cell in your body. You can't change your fundamental identity."

I still wonder what the science says. Is it possible, based on science, that one's gender is determined at the "genetic" level, regardless of the "body" identity and feelings do play an important role here? What do current genetic studies seem to support?



I question this because in my own field of ministerial studies, I have found that often our historical interpretation of scripture has been limited by our science. Thus, Pope Francis called into question our historical justification of the unjust exploitation of earth's resources based on an interpretation of Scripture that, "man has dominion

over the earth." This, as Francis notes in "*Laudato Si*', On Care for Our Common Home," no longer works as the very planet is at risk. Thus, those companies who indiscriminately use earth resources to improve their bottom line are to be held accountable for their crimes. Our recent discoveries (i.e. studies on global warming) support our "reinterpretation" of Scripture that puts limits on man's "dominion" over the earth.

In the final analysis, just like in the discussion of the earth's resources, I want to see the science that can possibly help us to understand how God "made them male and female." This can lead us to a clearer understanding of the terms.

JERILYN E. FELTON

Tigard, Oregon

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Whenever I read anything related to the Napa Institute, including John Gehring's commentary, two things immediately strike me.

First, I can't recall a single article I have read in which the speakers at the institute quote the words of Jesus. They are more likely to praise Donald Trump as "pro-life" and rail against "pro-Marxist" President Joe Biden than they are to invoke Jesus and his words of healing and loving. Jesus seems to have been phased out because his words don't fit their agenda.

Another thing that strikes me is these folks have all the money, power and influence anyone could hope for. And yet they rail against those (Black Lives Matter, LGBTQ community) who only want their fair share of justice in this country. So much anger and so little compassion. And so much whine!

BILL KRISTOFCO

Parkville, Maryland

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I'd like to suggest the Napa Institute invite the pope to their 2022 gathering. I'm not sure he smokes cigars, but I'm sure he has a sip of wine every now and again.

FLORRIE DEANER

Winter Haven, Florida

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Napa Institute's co-founder, Timothy Busch, does not speak for all Catholics. This new "voice of the church" uses the Napa Institute to spread his "prosperity Gospel." He prides himself on being a tax attorney who specializes in "protecting the assets of the wealthy" and providing them with the comforts of his numerous luxury resorts managed by his firm. Meanwhile, he has been quoted as saying he does not believe in a minimum wage. Busch glorifies an extreme form of capitalism that does not have compassion for the poor while courting the Koch Foundation for their substantial donations to his business school and expansion projects

Every year, the Napa Institute's summer conference, hosted by Busch, repeatedly fails to address problems facing the country. This year's lack of concern for the damaging effects of COVID-19 was especially offensive. Busch's "blistering resentment toward racial justice activists" was an added insult to our church and the Black community. Contrast that to the pride we felt when Georgetown University students voted to provide reparations to the descendants of university owned slaves.

The Napa Institute does not represent the church I know. How can we stop wealthy businessmen from taking Jesus' teachings out of Catholicism? Why are these businessmen now leading our church? No amount of money should give them the right to determine the church's future or "influence priestly formation." If this trend continues, we will no longer be a Jesus church — the one that serves the poor and loves their neighbor.

KATE GREENE

Berkeley, California

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Cash, strictly cash. When I was a student at Stone Hill College, and for a brief time a candidate in the Congregation of Holy Cross, some of us had an expression for their nationals. "CSC" we used to say stood for "cash, strictly cash."

Perhaps this is how I felt when I read that the University of Notre Dame has decided to start hosting Napa Institute conferences. A group of wine-tasting individuals who sit around sipping wine and mocking the Black Lives Matter movement. Really?

I thought Notre Dame was the land of justice and peace, of teaching the social gospels of the church. What's gotten in to Holy Cross Fr. John Jenkins? First, he goes to the White House, doesn't wear a mask in the height of pandemic and now is inviting Eucharistic weaponizers and Black Lives Matter mockeries.

What message does he want to send to potential students of color who wish to enroll at this fine institution? And where is the Congregation of Holy Cross? Is this what they want or is this about cash, strictly cash?

DENNIS POLSELLI

Fall River, Massachusetts

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