Opinion



by NCR Staff

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

September 17, 2021
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

In a recent column, Franciscan Fr. Daniel P. Horan writes about recent statements from two U.S. bishops that dismiss the reality of transgender persons and their lived experiences. "In both cases, these bishops — whose intentions I believe are sincere, but whose knowledge, expertise and pastoral competence in this area are sorely lacking — resort to the tired straw man of "gender ideology" as the catchall for everything that frightens or confuses them about transgender persons or those who are otherwise gender nonconforming," Horan writes. Following are letters to the editor responding to this column. The letters have been edited for length and clarity.



I could not even finish the article because the author committed the same fault he laid at the bishop's door. Franciscan Fr. Daniel Horan criticized the bishops by writing "What is striking about this alleged recourse to truth is the stark absence of facts or evidence invoked to support their concerns about the experiences and identities of actual human beings in the world."

How is that not the same concerning the slurs he made against the history of the church when investigation has often found the blame was truly someone else's who chose to ignore what the church told them was the Christian way to act?

We find that kind of elasticity in "truth" pervasive in the popular media. It is doubly egregious when found in what is supposed to be a Catholic source. I do not have a lot of spare time. I don't want to waste it weeding through garbage for the truth. I would love to know all sides of an issue, but employ writers who take an informed, ethical, and fair approach, please.

C.C. CONTRERAS

San Dimas, California

***

Throughout history, some leaders of our church were certain about the knowledge they possessed and refused to entertain any ideas, whether subjective or empirical, that questioned, let alone refuted, their understandings. The lessons of the church's treatment of Galileo is just one familiar exemplar of egregious treatment of someone

whose contributions to knowledge are today embraced but during his lifetime at the hands of the church were rejected.

The bishops do not have a monopoly on the idea that somehow their own knowledge base seems to be all inclusive and they do not need to examine other ideas which run counter to their own. Similarly, some individuals in politics and business who managed to rise to levels of power seem to believe that power comes with unbridled wisdom. Business failures, political scandals and incompetence, and a church losing members all point to the fact that some leaders have issues with reality.

Once the prelates learn to treat all people, regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, or any other superficial "difference" as co-equal with themselves in the eyes of God, they will mature and become credible leaders deserving of a large following. It is, however, all too apparent that the self-righteousness of some members of the clergy will continue to be masked in a pious facade and many people who might otherwise have realized their need for belonging through the church will instead look elsewhere.

We do not need either the Pew surveys or the Gallup polls to inform us of the direction to which the church's population is drifting. The rhetoric emanating from some of our leaders gives us the reasons, and in some cases the excuses, to no longer follow those whose moral compass falsely shows the direction in which they should be going.

CHARLES A. LE GUERN

Granger, Indiana

Advertisement

***

I really appreciated Franciscan Fr. Daniel Horan's opinion piece, especially his critique of the bishops holding views based in Platonic abstractions about reality, rather than in genuine knowledge about reality.

For the life of me, I cannot imagine why the bishops are backing themselves into a corner on this issue of gender identity and gender expression. The bishops,

seemingly, don't want to know the facts about differences in gender identity and expression. There is now a large body of science on these subjects that gives the lie to the simplistic view of these bishops.

The bishops should realize that they cannot teach and foster the image of the church as a mother and, then, turn their backs on some of their children. There are few groups more vulnerable than transgender children. The bishops are teaching the parents of these children to deny their identities and to refuse to support them.

Too many transgender and intersex people are ground down by the forces of ignorance and hate that are directed against them, from their childhoods. Before the bishops speak again, they should convene a conference where intersex and transgender persons can share with the bishops what our lives are like and where doctors and scientists can educate the bishops about the reality of gender identity and gender expression. They should recognize that they have a moral obligation to do so. There is no excuse for them to do otherwise.

KAREN MacQUEEN

Diamond Bar, California

***

I thoroughly enjoyed reading "Recent transphobic statements from bishops make truth claims without facts" because it was so well written. That it flowed from one clearly explained point to the next is a tribute to the writer's skill. More importantly, it was well written because it didn't attack. It simply laid out the facts as they are. I wouldn't have been as charitable.

The reason I wouldn't have been so charitable is this is not the first, or only, time the bishops and other church hierarchs have done this. It happens too many times in too many places over too many centuries. This is the unspoken "tradition" of the church.

It's also the modus operandi of cleaning up the mess left behind by prior generations causing the church to be, in effect, driving on a highway continually looking in the rearview causing needless accidents that cause damage in the present and, at some point, the wreckage will need to be cleaned up repeating the cycle.

A church operated in this manner is doomed. Why? Secondarily, the sins of the past dealt with in the present causes us to question the church's foundation — knowledge of the truth back to Jesus. Primarily, church managers scrambling to clean up the wreckage, while not learning from it, have no time to be in the present. If one is not living in the present there's no opportunity to develop a vision for the future. Hebrew Scripture prophets were able to read the signs of the times, with an understanding of the past, in a manner that gave them the ability, with divine inspiration, to make reliable statements about the near future.

Bishops without a grasp on reality can't make reliable statements about the present let alone the near future. Their lack of vision is well documented in their opposition to reformer Pope Francis. Their opposition to change and progressive ideas is a formula for disaster — hence, they have given us the church of today with little future. It didn't need to be this way.

MICHAEL J. McDERMOTT

Tyler, Texas

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts and ideas, reactions and responses to letters@ncronline.org. The editor will collect them, curate them and publish a sampling in Letters to the Editor in our print edition.

We cannot publish everything. We will do our best to represent the full range of letters received. Here are the rules:

- Letters to the editor should be submitted to letters@ncronline.org.
- Letters to the editor should be limited to 250 words.
- Letters must include your name, street address, city, state and zip code. We will publish your name and city, state, but not your full address.
- If the letter refers to a specific article published at ncronline.org, please send in the headline or the link of the article.
- Please include a daytime telephone number where we can reach you. We will not publish your phone number. It may be used for verification.
- We can't guarantee publication of all letters, but you can be assured that your submission will receive careful consideration.

- Published letters may be edited for length and style.
- Letters containing misinformation or misleading content without correct sourcing will not be published.

Letters to the editor are published online each Friday.

This story appears in the **Your thoughts** feature series. View the full series.