Opinion
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by NCR Staff

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Bishop Robert McManus, who has publicly criticized gay and transgender rights, said Black Lives Matter and gay pride flags at a Worcester, Massachusetts, Catholic school symbolize values contrary to church teaching. The bishop requested the school to remove the flags, which are now flying at Worcester City Hall. A group of alumni from College of the Holy Cross later held a protest outside the Worcester Diocese's chancery. Following are NCR reader responses to these stories, edited for length and clarity.

With respect to the NCR's report "Worcester bishop requests Catholic school remove BLM and pride flags, sparking criticism," Bishop Robert McManus has affirmed that the phrase "episcopal leadership" is officially entered into the "Book of Oxymorons."



Under the helm of Archbishop José Gomez, the ship of the U.S. bishops' conference, with its stout crew of culture warriors, is heading for its new home port, docking at the Council of Trent. It would appear that the bishops' formation did not include the Gospel passage relating Jesus' encounter with the woman at the well (John 4:1-42), and the Lord's persistent rejection of the Pharisaical insistence of adherence to dogmatic "law." The hierarchical Catholic Church is proving itself irrelevant.

JOHN C. TUFFY

Endwell, New York

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I must admit to a grudging "admiration" for a significant number of U.S. bishops, this time Bishop Robert McManus of Worcester, for their creative way of inflicting needless pain on the most vulnerable of our citizens. I would expect the likes of Governors Ron DeSantis and Greg Abbott to express their indignation toward anything related to Black Lives Matter or the LGBTQ communities because attacking these citizens scores political points and opens the way to higher political office for them. This type of behavior seems to be ingrained in their DNA.

But shouldn't we expect the DNA of a Catholic bishop to be more geared to compassion or at least the sense to mute his criticisms on issues related to vulnerable people who already are being scapegoated by ambitious politicians and some of their impressionable followers, not to mention a far too numerous group of religious leaders?

It is fashionable for New York Cardinal Timothy Dolan and other bishops to rail against "secularism" as a main reason why so many are shunning religious practice in today's society. With activities like those of McManus, the church in the U.S. needs little additional help in emptying out its churches.

BILL KRISTOFCO

Parkville, Maryland

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As far back as I can remember in catechism classes, we were told catholic means universal. It is unfortunate that lesson is lost on Bishop Robert McManus. Threatening the catholicity of a Catholic school because it displays symbols of inclusion belies the concept of universality.

Granted the two symbols in question speak of political movements. However, our own history as a religion in this country teaches us we were once not part of the mainstream and we needed to convince the larger culture that we belonged. I can still remember anti-Catholic sentiment, as well as anti-immigrant sentiment, when I was a schoolboy. Some of it was subtle and sometimes overt but in all cases it was intended to marginalize those of us whom the dominant culture considered "the other."

Bishop Robert McManus refers to what he believes are the divisive philosophies behind Black Lives Matter and LGBTQ community and that these are not consistent with Catholic moral teaching. If discrimination, or more subtlety marginalization, against any minority whether due to race, ethnicity, or gender attraction are his excuses to not embrace all people as our brothers and sisters then he is recreating the atmosphere of which I remember.

CHARLES A. LE GUERN

Granger, Indiana

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The bishop of the Worcester, Massachusetters, diocese has criticized the Nativity School in Worcester for displaying flags with Black Lives Matter and gay pride emblems because, with respect to the Black Lives Matter emblem, it "has at times been coopted by some factions which also instill broad- brush distrust of police and those entrusted with enforcing our laws."

If that is the standard, should the American flag also be removed from the Nativity School grounds because that emblem, too, has been coopted by some who promote disrespect and contempt for the rule of law, as was the case at the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021?

Despite misuse by some, displaying symbols intended to signify the dignity and value of every person is consistent with the Gospel and "our Catholic identity."

PATRICK FOX

Sterling, Massachusetts

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I know Bishop Robert McManus to be an honest and righteous man and bishop, but I disagree with his decision to require the Nativity School to take down its Black Lives Matter and gay pride banners.

Though the bishop rightly states that the church teaches "that everyone is created in the image and likeness of God," thus equal in dignity and value in God's own eyes, he objects to these banners because they have sometimes been misappropriated to signal "distrust of police" or the support of gay marriage.

The irony here is hard to swallow. Perhaps the bishop should have his Catholic schools remove the crosses from their classrooms because that symbol has been so often co-opted to commit, condone and justify a host of sins over the past two millennia, including Crusaders' pillages, colonialist oppression and white supremacist racism.

I urge McManus to reconsider his position. These banners stand for inclusion, equality and the dignity of the human person regardless of race or sexual orientation. The abuse of those symbols by others should in no way obscure the truth of their intended message any more than the sins of those who abuse the cross should obscure its truth.

Instead of criticizing, we should all be congratulating the Nativity School community for so publicly living out our Lord's command to stand for justice and to love one another as he has loved us.

BRUCE DAIGLE

Woonsocket, Rhode Island

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