Opinion
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by NCR Staff

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To paraphrase one of Jesus' teachings, you cannot serve both God and guns, says Franciscan Fr. Daniel P. Horan. "To those trying to square the circle of their demonstrated love of guns and alleged love of God, I ask: What is your true religion?" he writes. And NCR political columnist Michael Sean Winters says that the U.S. bishops need to argue that Americans idolize their guns and that offends God, and the church's pro-life witness needs to engage gun control with the ferocity it has engaged abortion. Following are letters from NCR readers responding to these

columns. The letters have been edited for length and clarity.

As always, much of what Franciscan Fr. Daniel Horan writes in this opinion piece is valuable, but it's what he doesn't say that has me frustrated.

"To paraphrase one of Jesus' own teachings, you cannot serve both God and guns."



How does this principle apply to federal, state and local police forces in the U.S.? How does it apply to the proliferation of U.S. weapons throughout the world? How does it apply the U.S. armed forces?

Americans cannot talk seriously about "children's bodies disfigured, ripped apart, killed and identifiable in some cases only by DNA testing" without talking about the countless children abroad who have received that exact fate from U.S. weapons. Neither can we seriously discuss false religion without discussing the false imperial religion of the U.S. armed forces.

JEFFREY JONES

Hamburg, New York

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I couldn't agree more with Franciscan Fr. Daniel Horan. He writes far more clearly what I have tried in many ways to say, and I am grateful for his clarity and to National Catholic Reporter for publishing his column.

The hypocrisy of the GOP leaders is astonishing when they can't end legal abortion everywhere and, in all cases, fast enough — in order to save babies lives — but they will do nothing to end access to weapons of war in civilian hands. In fact, they work hard to make such access easier with no restrictions at all. It is disgusting and I along with millions of Americans am sick of it.

I am also highly offended by anyone weaponizing the Eucharist, no matter their rationale.

KATHLEEN KELLY

Crossville, Tennessee

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I believe what Franciscan Fr. Daniel Horan has written is absolutely on target wherein he describes the egregious hypocrisy of many in the self-described "pro-life" movement. The exclusion of all the myriad culture of life issues to favor only the anti-abortion stance and the extremist attitudes which that is now entailing are evidence that many in the pro-life movement are only interested in galvanizing a voting block and raising money.

The same politicians who profess to want to save the unborn are the same ones who will argue against even the simplest steps to limit the availability of semi-automatic weapons. To these political players it seems children in the womb are sacrosanct but children in schools are targets. It is beyond time to come to our senses as a republic and have our elected leaders follow the will of the people. The vast majority of our population wants sensible gun control; age minimums for firearms purchases, comprehensive background checks, limits on the caliber of guns that may be sold, limits on the number of rounds of ammunition that may be purchased, etc. None of these steps is favored by the underwriters of the Republican Party so the steps that could be taken are avoided.

I do not expect, as Horan alludes, that our hierarchy will take any pains to address this as a pro-life issue. They failed to support the programs which President Joe Biden enacted earlier to support and expand the social safety net, largely because he is a Democrat. I do not expect our more vocal prelates to place themselves in opposition to the Republican Party on this issue either. They will maintain their normal silence as the carnage continues. They certainly will not call to account the

politicians who support the NRA, even the Catholic politicians who belie the very idea of a culture of life with their support of this anti-life posturing.

CHARLES A. LE GUERN

Granger, Indiana

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It seems that today's golden calf for people with or without faith in the United States is a cool looking assault weapon of mass destruction. The Second Amendment is not even needed to justify having such weapons with hundreds of rounds of ammunition, rapid re-loading capability, body armor, etc.

More time is spent worshiping such weaponry than relationship with God, prayer, and working to preserve human life, dignity and justice.

Since elected leaders are not able to get to root causes of the issue, perhaps the U.S. bishops can initiate study of why this happens in the U.S. and hardly anywhere else in the world.

ROBERT J. TORRES

Colleyville, Texas

Advertisement

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Thanks to Franciscan Fr. Daniel Horan for so clearly articulating what it means to be a loving member of the body of Christ. Anti-abortion is not necessarily pro-life and has nothing to do with loving all our brothers and sisters. In our often-dark world, we need all the love we can find in our hearts.

ANNE BOUSCAL

Calgary, Alberta

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I always look forward to Franciscan Fr. Daniel Horan's essays, but this one knocks the ball out of the park. There is a creepy parallel between the two halves of the article that shines a light on the great danger we face in the church and in the nation. The refusal to see the proliferation of guns as a pro-life issue and the weaponization of the Eucharist demonstrate that the core of the Gospel is being ignored. The message comes directly from the red-lettered text of Jesus in Matthew's Gospel: "Go and learn the meaning of the words, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' I did not come to call the righteous but sinners" (Matthew 9:13). It is time for those of us who claim to follow Jesus — prelate and pew potato — to "re-tie" ourselves to the heart of the Gospel.

CULLEN W. SCHIPPE

Albuquerque, New Mexico

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I am a lifelong practicing Catholic; a product of 16 years of Catholic schools, eight of them Jesuit.

Franciscan Fr. Daniel Horan opines how religious beliefs influence modern behavior, and how those beliefs might create different expectations and sometimes unacceptable consequences.

Horan calls it hypocrisy to advocate gun rights while decrying the tragedies caused by guns. He similarly criticizes the actions of San Francisco Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone and others over the distribution of the Eucharist. However, he fails identify as hypocrisy the conduct of politicians, who, while exploiting their Catholicism (religion), advocate and encourage, as a "right," the power of a mother to terminate a pregnancy at any stage for any reason. By calling religious beliefs "basic and personal," Horan might conclude that adopting an individual untethered understanding of Catholic doctrine, influenced by one's politics, makes it easy to dismiss a hypocrisy.

The nuance appears to contradict church teachings. If Catholics are obliged to following the church doctrine, as explained to me since first grade, is it within the individual's prerogative to recast or ignore those principles when they do not conform to contemporary mores? May a politician sponsor the proposition that abortion is a woman's right, irrespective of any temporal or divine authority, and still

profess to be Catholic? Or, is an official change in the church's doctrine about abortion now necessary to accommodate them? Horan's opinion on these would be welcomed.

Whatever is the answer, neither the Eucharist nor one's religion should be used for political expedience.

MICHAEL F. MINCHELLA

Rolling Hills Estates, California

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Would that more clerics spoke out in various formats in opposition to the evils of American culture and the Catholic Church's role in it. First, let's clarify that pro-birth is not pro-life and pro-choice is not pro-abortion. The author states, "The irony has not been lost on me that many of these same self-identified Christians have also been some of the most vocal proponents of a narrowly defined "pro-life" movement."

Rather than "irony," "religious hypocrisy" is the term one can consider. Pro-birth more accurately describes the movement because after the birth the child sometimes becomes a burden. The GOP is known as the "religion" of the wealthy who don't want to be taxed so children born are permitted the standard of care suitable to the richest nation in the world.

Religion is less pure from politics in America than ever. The *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship* pamphlet published by the U.S. bishops' conference almost dictates who a Catholic can vote for. The vote among bishops for much needed updates incorporating the teachings of the Pope Francis pontificate fell largely along political party lines. As the author states, a prelate's position on social positions can be determined by behavior patterns.

The lessons learned from all this is: 1) religion is tainted and 2) clerics intentionally deceive speaking half-truths and lies. They reap what they sow.

MICHAEL J. MCDERMOTT

Tyler, Texas

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Thank you so much for this column (and Michael Sean Winters' column) on the topic of the adoration of guns and the wrong use of the Eucharist.

These two things alone, out of so many, are topics that should be preached from the pulpits of Catholic Churches throughout the country. I am so heartened by reading these offerings.

LYNNE MILLER

Oakland, California

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NCR political columnist Michael Sean Winters is being a prophet by calling out the idolatry of guns in the U.S. The Second Amendment arguments for complete freedom to bear arms for everybody by gun worshipers are clearly false for those of us who see the clear truth that the founding fathers were only talking about the right of patriot militias to bear arms in defense of liberty against tyrants.

It is so stultifying to see gun worshipers talk about "originalism" as the exact original intent of the founding fathers, when it is obvious from the words of the Second Amendment that they mean militias, and not any person of any age or occupation to own a weapon of war.

SAL UMANA

Tampa, Florida

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Michael Sean Winters is one of NCRs more nuanced and thoughtful writers. There is one topic, however, where Winters misses the point substantially — abortion.

Winters opposes abortion. As a Catholic writer, this makes sense. Catholic morality opposes abortion and it is indisputable that the Roman Catholic Church has the right to teach in accordance with its own authorities and theology.

Winters is also critical of Catholics like House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, who refuse to use their governmental powers to forbid abortion. Winters opposes San Francisco Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone's actions but he still judges Pelosi as in error on the topic.

Whether Winters agrees or not, a significant number of competent religious authorities — the Episcopalian bishops, the United Church of Christ synod, Jewish authorities — specifically recognize abortion as health care and decry its illegalization.

Pelosi's refusal to use her power to force other religions to follow her bishop is moral, ethical and Christian. Coercing believers in other religions to submit to the Catholic bishops is not right, it is fundamentally misguided. Cordileone is the moral outlier here, not Pelosi. Whatever Winters thinks of abortion, he and the other Catholics must recognize the rights of believers who differ.

BOB MATTHEWS

Cincinnati, Ohio

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The idea of a "sacrament" is, of course, a traditional Christian one, especially favored by Roman Catholics and Orthodox, but also affirmed by Protestants, and found in different ways in most other religions. At root it expresses the belief that certain rituals (like baptism and communion) are sacred ways whereby we are opened to God's healing presence.

Yet it is also painfully evident to most of us that contemporary cinema and television (not only the advertising), as well as much fiction, is filled with repeated and ritualized presentation of what I am calling "anti-sacraments." For if sacraments are objects and actions that evoke real healing and protection, anti-sacraments are objects and actions which, while pretending to protect and heal, actually achieve the opposite. They mislead our fears, misdirect our hopes, and actually increase our hurt and insecurity.

What, then, does understanding the gun as an anti-sacrament tell us about the passions manifest in the present gun control debate?

It tells us that people have important fears about real dangers — the danger of crime and violence; the danger of strangers in our midst; the danger of political and economic systems over which we have little control; the danger of change happening too fast and also beyond control. It tells us that people rightly resent forces that intrude with great power, yet with too little care. It tells us, most fundamentally, that we fear hurt and death.

Yet the idea of "gun as anti-sacrament" also reminds us that legitimate fears and resentments too often grow beyond all relation to reality. Fear alone can do this, but the disproportionate and illusory effect happens mostly when our imaginations are manipulated – by sensational news and propaganda, by deliberately distorted and exaggerated stories and cinema and television.

JOHN F. KANE

Denver, Colorado

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