Opinion



by NCR Staff

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With Catholic News Service slated to cease U.S. operation at year's end, some Catholic media observers are raising questions about conflicts of interest, the U.S. bishops' plan to evangelize, and journalistic standards. The decision "strengthens the very anti-Francis ideological forces that the bishops decry," says David Gibson in a commentary for NCR. And NCR political columnist Michael Sean Winters says the decision was a terrible because of its ecclesial significance, which strikes at a deeper issue for the nation's bishops. Following are letters to the editor responding to these pieces. The letters have been edited for length and clarity.

With this excellent article by David Gibson, my own frustration with Catholic media is validated. The diocese I live in now has a very poor diocesan newspaper. So, I subscribe to a large diocese's newspaper in a larger city where I previously lived. When I put the two newspapers side by side, the lack of professionalism in the one and journalistic standards in the other are glaringly obvious.

Before I read Gibson's article and before Catholic News Service was closed, I was thinking to myself that the bishops have no standards or measuring sticks for improvements. Sadly, I use my current diocese's newspaper to line the bottom of cardboard boxes used for recycling.

ANDREW JOHN DILIDDO, JR.

Canton, Ohio



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The opinion piece by David Gibson is informative yet sad commentary on the state of the U.S. Catholic Church hierarchy. We know the bishops get what they want even if it means the death of the U.S. Catholic Church by 1,000 cuts, some deeper than others.

Consider the major news articles over the past 25-plus years. They are full of clergy missteps, half-steps and outright tripping and falling flat on their faces. Frankly, the bishops have lied and been caught in them by honest journalists. The time when journalists were under their thumbs had gone along with their moral authority.

Journalism, in effect, gained the upper hand. The curtain of secrecy was pulled back and a bright spotlight shined on their closeted secrets. This is an unforgiveable sin in bishop's eyes. Something needed to be done.

What is seen happening to Catholic News Service is one more cut, a deep one, to the church. The visionless prelates prefer spending millions of dollars on a Eucharistic revival sure to fail when more than 75% of Catholics don't believe what the church teaches! Has a national effort ever been successful?

When this fails, what are the bishops left with? An anachronistic religion with an increasingly aging clergy has little future. It maybe the bishops see the writing on the wall and are circling the wagons. Sacrificing Catholic News Service to preserve their lifestyle for a bit longer is a simplistic answer to a larger problem. They reap what they sow.

MICHAEL J. MCDERMOTT

Tyler, Texas

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I too regret the unfortunate decision made by the U.S. bishops' conference. It's another example of their lack of understanding of the true needs of the people, their flock. It is education, including current events that are not politically motivated to divide the people into "camps."

Now it's Catholic News Service they come after. In the past, they closed schools and churches under the guise of low attendance, rather than finding out a way to reverse the pattern. Many American bishops need to be replaced with men of character and drive.

ANTOINETTE MERENDA CARBONE

Riverhead, New York

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Why? It sounds like the bishops are trying to take control of any and all information about our church from a professional organization that has done fairly for over 100 years.

ROBERT MARZULLO

Shoreline, Washington

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Michael Sean Winters is correct, but equally correct is Catholic News Service editor Tony Spence.

Largely, the U.S. bishops, increasingly far too many priests, are rightwing, reactionary, culture warriors who are only too happy to disengage from the concerns and realities of the broader community and the world. Too many of them are focused on nitpicking their own little diocesan kingdoms, enriching themselves via their wealthy donors and benefactors, if not outright collection theft, and living a comfortable, even luxurious, life doing little to nothing that would make them go outside their comfort zone and struggle with the difficult and dangerous issues of our day, which could sorely use the guidance of Catholic social teaching and thought.

Few bishops and priests appear to have any theological understanding of the church's rich and deep social teaching, tradition and history and how to center it in the life of church and the broader community, and no sensibility for pastoring to communities and individuals who must struggle through a world that is divisive, disruptive, marginalizing and leaves them without a vision, without hope. Getting rid of Catholic News Service is but one more example that the U.S. bishops and their hierarchy is a failed institution.

BARBARA ROSS

Jefferson City, Missouri

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After reading Michael Sean Winters' article on the closing of Catholic News Service coverage of church news in the U.S., I am writing my archbishop and urge others to do the same.

The failure to fund Catholic News Service reporting in the U.S. is a serious penny-wise pound-foolish move that threatens the further politicization of U.S. Catholic

news. Laity, clergy, religious and bishops need the careful reporting of Catholic News Service. Academics and their students teaching religious history and theology need Catholic News Service. The secular and religious press needs Catholic News Service.

While I realize that financial resources are in limited, those bishops who live too comfortably should be willing to sacrifice to fund this essential service. Too few have followed the example of Pope Francis.

ANNE KLEJMENT

St. Paul, Minnesota

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If by the concept of civic engagement Michael Sean Winters suggests an ongoing dialog then the bishops, from my perspective, ceased having an interest in dialog years ago. The closing of the Catholic News Service, insofar as domestic news coverage is concerned, is only the latest morsel of evidence.

Pope Francis appears to wish to hear from the laity as much as from the clergy and the synod on synodality was a step toward that goal. However, very few bishops engaged the laity in this scenario thereby limiting any input from them. The seeming lack of interest in the laity's views, if not outright disdain, is just an example of some bishops believing themselves less to be teachers or servants of the people but their superiors.

Many Catholics, like our non-Catholic peers, are consumers of news from various media. The prevailing stereotype about such consumers is we seek sources of information which mirror our own tastes and sometimes to the extent that we limit contrarian views. However, most individuals will in addition seek out neutral sources in order to obtain unfiltered information to add to that which feeds our personal preferences. The Catholic News Service was one such neutral resource and we were able to obtain their contributions by reading not only independent journals but diocesan resources as well which relied upon Catholic News Service as one of their sources.

CHARLES A. LE GUERN

Granger, Indiana

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I appreciate the story "As Catholic News Service closes, ideological and evangelical outlets stand to fill the void."

It is well-written, reflects problems in journalism more generally and touches on some of my own frustrations with FAITH magazine.

I would have liked to have heard NCR's perspective in the context of the same news analysis.

While this may be an opportunity for FAITH and for the Catholic News Agency, is it not also an opportunity for NCR? At a minimum, it is a seismic shift in Catholic media that increases NCR's need to provide an independent voice.

Can NCR meet that challenge? Will it try?

It is awkward for leaders of a news organization to be sources for a story that they publish. And NCR's independence makes it a different publication than one financed by the church.

That's an important distinction, but NCR is a significant player in this realm. While its voice weighs in on editorials, this news analysis also needed it. It cites key sources that declined to respond to requests for comment.

Did NCR get the same request?

That said, I'm a fan. Keep up the good work.

DAVID POULSON

DeWitt, Michigan

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Catholic News Service is a conservatively partisan outlet. I offer as evidence the failure to report any positive thing Pope Francis has said about LGBTQ+ persons,

and the failure to highlight that, in naming the bishop of San Diego as a cardinal, he passed over the archbishops of Los Angeles and San Francisco, sees that traditionally have come with a red hat.

Many times over the years Catholic News Service has revealed a conservative tilt by omitting relevant facts in reporting a story.

JOE McCAULEY

Lexington, Kentucky

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