Opinion
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by NCR Staff

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In a recent commentary, NCR contributor David E. DeCosse writes about changing his mind on criminalizing abortion after reflecting on the full implications of the dignity of women. "I have never doubted the right to life of the fetus," he writes. "But two implications of the dignity of women have been especially formative in expanding my understanding of the range of values at stake in matters of law and abortion: women's full moral agency and their right to bodily integrity." Following are NCR reader responses to this commentary that have been edited for length and

clarity.

Self-determination and self-affirmation. What about God's will? Jesus went to the cross because his choice was the will of the father. If God is the giver of human life, and human life is found in the womb by whatever means, it is not an accident.



No, God does not approve or rape or incest or any act of violence. But the human life in the womb does not know its origin. Sometimes we are asked to bear the cross for the sins of others. And from that acceptance of God's will comes new life.

We were all baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus. Dying to our own plan to be immersed in the wisdom (cross) of Jesus is our saving grace.

(Fr.) BRUCE H. FORMAN

St. Louis, Missouri

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Thank you for this breath of fresh air on this highly emotionally-charged subject. I have come to a similar conclusion. Abortion must be seen as ultimately a woman's choice to make, with full respect to the right to life of the fetus. If we all are made in the Image and likeness of God, full recognition of the wholeness of women must be given. We are all made in the trinity of mind, body and spirit. That's one's whole self. On the matter of abortion women have been relegated to the simple category of body alone.

A male-dominated institution with women excluded from primary leadership roles is, in my estimation, a significant part of reason for an uncompromising position on abortion. It's time for the Catholic Church to end its opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment. A more rational and respectful position on abortion would naturally follow, as would opening the priesthood to women.

DONALD MILLER

Bethlehem, Pennsylvania

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In his piece about how he changed his mind about making abortion illegal, David DeCosse states the traditional Catholic argument as succinctly as possible: "Abortion is a violation of the universal, exceptionless moral law against the direct taking of innocent life." DeCosse then outlines his path to discovery that this position is not correct although he thought it was earlier in his life.

I would add a different but complementary point. Because Episcopalian bishops, Jewish rabbis and the United Church of Christ synod all disagree that abortion is always wrong, Catholic teachings are clearly not universal. By definition universal means "obvious to all."

Catholic bishops want their specific but non-universal view of the truth to be forced on every citizen, even those whose competent religious authorities teach otherwise. Taking away freedom of religion is a serious matter. Whether they agree or not, Catholics must permit others to follow their own consciences and choose their own religious authorities. Force in these matters is unethical, immoral, un-Catholic and un-American.

BOB MATTHEWS

Cincinnati, Ohio

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The opinion piece could be written by 1,000 others who "popped the bubble" in which they comfortably ensconced themselves until a personal crisis shook their world out of its complacency causing them to look around and re-examine core beliefs. The author stated voting for Ronald Reagan as a single-issue, pro-birth, not pro-life as stated. Reagan was pro-death penalty and anti-social welfare programs. This is the jumble most Catholics haven't yet "unknotted" as Pope Francis urges.

The pro-birth issue in the Catholic Church runs much deeper than the author's piece can cover. The church's writings/teachings on women are otherworldly because they describe a pristine being akin to Mary whose purpose on earth is to accommodate her husband via complementarianism. I've never read where this matrix of knots has been untied.

Reality shows us women are not as the Roman Catholic Church defines. This same church teaching absolutely excludes women from ordained ministry and, until recently, every significant office in the organizational church structure. These are manmade rules to a select group of men raised to the level of God's revelation. This is not how the followers of Jesus and later "the way" understood being a Christian community.

Why do people need their "bubble popped" in order to truly see the world around them? Did the author not watch or read the news to understand what others experience? Or was the author discrediting the reality of others elevating church teachings to a "they're wrong, we're right" mentality? The saying "trust but verify" belongs to church teachings. If lies are told in one area they can be told in others. The task before us is to critically think through what the church presents.

MICHAEL J. McDERMOTT

Tyler, Texas

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For many Catholics, the anti-abortion issue has become a black and white issue without much consideration for why so many women decide to get an abortion.

The world that I have ministered in over the years is a world that many people know little about — people living from day-to-day, not knowing how they are going to pay their rent or pay for their medications. Many poor pregnant women with one or two

children have to decide how they are going to support another child. Going to work isn't always an option when their bill for childcare would eat up most of their minimum wage salary.

Now that the Supreme Court has overturned *Roe* v. *Wade*, we, as Catholics need to support those state and federal programs that address the reasons why so many women choose to get an abortion — otherwise, we are addressing the problem without addressing the cause and history shows us that that has never worked very well.

(Deacon) STAN GRENN

Jacksonville, Florida

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Another basic principle of our Catholic faith put on public display: the criminalization of abortion. So much for love.

BUD BRETSCHNEIDER

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

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