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On this March for Life day, a reasoned discussion on abortion

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NCR Today

In questions of abortion in the Catholic church, it sometimes seems as if there's no room for civility. Most of us are familiar with the rhetoric. You're either pro-life or pro-death, for us or against us.

As the annual March for Life takes place today in Washington, it was refreshing to notice a blog post this morning that didn't fit the paradigm.

On his popular blog "Dating God," Franciscan Br. Daniel Horan posted the reasons he doesn't support the annual march. The surprising thing? He did so calmly and reasonably, and showing respect for those who might disagree. And, to a large extent, those disagreeing with Horan are leaving comments that are calm and reasonable too.

Horan, whose first book (also named *Dating God* and focused on slowly building a relationship with God through a process akin to a notion of romantic discovery) goes on sale next month, titled his post "Why I Do Not Support the (so-called) March for Life."

Horan gives three main reasons for his lack of support for the annual pilgrimage to Washington: That the March for Life is inappropriately titled as it is set up more as an "anti-abortion" march, that its mode of protest has "proven ineffective," and that it is "a self-serving exercise in self-righteousness, self-congratulatory grandstanding and disinterest in the most pressing matters of human rights and dignity in our world today."

The third point is perhaps the most interesting. Horan laments that the march has become a "Who's Who" of the "a sector" of the church:

"I have heard numerous people, even those who avidly support the march, lament that the Vigil Mass has become more a 'Who's Who' of a sector of the American Catholic Church than it has the Eucharistic celebration it alleges to be. What amounts to a veritable 'party convention,' with its requisite and seemingly endless congratulatory introductions and 'thank you's' to all the US churchmen, the event takes on a sense of the spectacle over and against the sense of the sacred it might otherwise elicit.

What strikes me as most egregious in this whole extravaganza is the simplistic distillation of an incredibly complex moral and political issue into the binary 'good vs. evil' construction. It is not that simple. Furthermore, as stated above, anything in the Catholic tradition that claims to be 'pro-life' or 'pro-person or event' must also include those other important issues of life and dignity, issues that most of these marchers would otherwise prefer to forget: war, poverty, torture, capital punishment, economic inequality, and the like."

Horan ends his post by writing that he looks forward to the 'day when we do assemble thousands of young people and old people alike to march through the streets of the nation's capital in order to support a movement *for life and for human dignity.*'

As of this writing, there have been 29 responses to Horan's blog. The unique thing about them? So far, each and every one has been respectful. Some have disagreed with Horan's analysis -- indeed, more than a few have voiced major concerns with his viewpoint -- but each has done so in a reasoned and thoughtful way.

And Horan has taken the time to thank each for their clarifications and to respectfully express disagreement.

Take this comment string for example. In response to Horan's posting, one commenter said that while the piece was 'very well written,' he thought Horan could have been more effective if he considered 'taking a less antagonistic approach.'

Horan responded by writing that 'while I know we disagree about many things,' he appreciated the comment.

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In an age marred by political extremism, it's refreshing to see a reasonable and calmly articulated approach to an issue which has sometimes led to divisive intra-church arguments.

Take a look at Horan's piece. But please follow the lead. Be civil and respectful. If nothing else, discussion just works better that way.

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