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In defense of 'America'

by Heidi Schlumpf

NCR Today

I've been pretty quiet while pope-alooza has been exploding around the Internet lately. What --I'm sure you are all dying to know -- does Heidi Schlumpf think about the pope's interview in *America*? (That's sarcasm.)

That will have to wait for another day. I've found it's taking longer for me to ascertain my thoughts and feelings about such complicated things these days -- and by then, it's all been said twice. Perhaps this need to pause before commenting is a good thing, though it's not a great quality in a blogger.

But I do have some thoughts on the controversy that has arisen around the missing sentences from the English translation of the pope's interview. First, I would like to applaud *NCR* columnist Phyllis Zagano for uncovering the mistake and bringing it to the world's attention. She is a top-rate scholar and deserves kudos for correcting this error.

However, I've been saddened by the assumptions and mudslinging that has followed Zagano's revelation, mostly in comment sections but also around social media, even after *America* Editor-in-Chief Jesuit Fr. Matt Malone apologized.

As a journalist, I'm skeptical -- some may even say cynical -- by nature, so naturally, I have an inclination to wonder how accidental this omission was. I mean, it was about women's roles in the church, one of the touchiest topics in Catholicism today.

But let's be fair: If it was about another topic, would the skeptics be any less suspicious? What if the editing error involved sentences about abortion, gay marriage or the need to focus on the poor? Or what if they accidentally left out a sentence about prayer? Would we then suspect the Jesuits of being anti-prayer?

Backstories about how this historic interview came to be describe how complicated the process was. There were multiple translations, tight deadlines, necessary approvals and a whopping 12,000-plus word text. I know I have made errors in less complicated projects, so I'm willing to give the editors at *America* the benefit of the doubt here. Let the editor who is without typos cast the first aspersion.

This is especially ironic, since many of these attacks come from like-minded Catholics (i.e., liberals or progressives). I know some of the editors at *America*, and they are certainly not conservative in their views on women. And they are reputable professional journalists (though it would help if they had a few more females on their masthead).

While I understand the need to ask the question, now that we've gotten their apology, let's give them the Christian charity that our pope has talked about so much. Otherwise, we start to sound like Republicans arguing amongst ourselves.

Now, what do I think about the pope's newfound words about women? I'm going to need a few days to figure that out.

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