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Where Catholic Women are Heard -- and Not

Ken Briggs | Mar. 19, 2010 NCR Today

The latest "Room for Debate" in the *New York Times* pays an indirect tribute to the *National Catholic Reporter.*

All five of those asked to comment on what the Vatican should do about clerical sexual abuse of children are men.

Every one of them is worthy. Each has something valuable to say. By not including a single woman in the mix, however, the *Times*reflects a widespread absence of women's voices in the media's coverage of critical church debates.

Excluding women from official church councils has, of course, been standard practice in the hierarchy's exercise of rule. When the Vatican decided to investigate American nuns, for example, nuns weren't consulted in any formal sense. It was done, as usual, by fiat.

For the mainstream media largely to repeat this pattern of neglect has been irresponsible, lending credibility to a bias against women (my interpretation) and furthering it. Occasionally women are asked to join in, but not nearly often enough.

That's where the role of NCR is so significant. It is a forum where women with stature such as Sandra Schneiders, Rosemary Reuther, Demetria Martinez, Joan Chittister, Elizabeth Johnson, Maureen Fiedler and others too numerous to mention have an honored place. It is not the only outlet for these valuable perspectives -- *America and Commonweal* are among others that are open to women as editors and writers -- but NCR has been more inclusive by sheer volume.

This openness has much to do with NCR's stance as a an advocate of liberal-progressive Catholicism. Tranditionalist publications take women seriously in standing for their own theological views.

But in my eyes, at least, NCR deserves special recognition in light of the secular media's tendency to imitate the church's pattern of marginalizing women.I suspect it isn't so deliberate as an unexamined mimicking of church behavior.

NCR has something to offer them.

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