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by NCR Staff

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Each month, NCR gathers up a sampling of letters to the editor from our readers in response to articles and columns that appear on NCRonline. This week, we will focus on letters received in April 2020. To join the conversation, follow the guidelines at the end of this post.

I love what [Pencil Preaching brought to the fore](#) in the resistance to the Babylonians. However, this part of the article troubles me: "Early Christians faced similar pressures to go along to get along in the Roman Empire, to accept cultural dominance and even cosmic claims about divine rulers and gods who needed worship to hold the political order together."

When the church was accepted as the official religion of the empire, I'm afraid the empire influenced the church rather than the church influencing the empire. The church many times did "go along to get along in the Roman empire." Religion became more "me and God" to the almost elimination of Jesus' prophetic call to change society. It happened in Corinth and is happening now.

DAVID JACKSON

Edinburg, Texas



As a longtime reader of NCR, I offer my thanks after [watching the video conversation](#) with Joshua J. McElwee and Heidi Schlumpf. As always, NCR is on top of and in the midst of what's happening with the current pandemic.

I look forward to the views being rendered of what the church will look like after the pandemic. I also appreciate increased spiritual-based articles.

MARY ANN ERDTMANN

Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin

[In this column](#), Michael Sean Winters characterized the \$10,000 limit on the deductibility of state and local taxes as impacting only those with incomes over \$100,000. I want to point out, though, that property taxes are also included in that \$10,000 limit.

In my upstate New York area, the property taxes for the schools, town, and county on an average home can run between \$4,000 and \$5,000. When you add state income tax to that, middle-class earners easily exceed the \$10,000 cap.

Many folks in my area saw their federal taxes increase by thousands of dollars due to the tax reform and it was not due to their being wealthy. It has much more to do with living in a state that tries to provide good services to its residents, which are paid for by higher taxes than you see in some other states.

The federal government is penalizing us and our state for providing good health care, schools, infrastructure, etc. by not allowing us to deduct the full amount we pay in taxes to uphold the common good.

JOANNE COREY

Vestal, New York

I read the column by Michael Sean Winters and cannot help wonder if, as a conservative cradle Catholic, why I bother to read NCRonline.

Apparently, your publication does not wish to hear from or attract Catholics who do not share the socialistic bent of the publication. I, my wife, our children and their families strongly believe in the social justice teachings of the church but the publication utterly disregards an entire demographic and has nothing but distaste for those of us who have different ideas of what being a faithful practicing Catholic encompasses.

The Democratic Party that Winters so blindly touts is nothing but a group of special interests with no center.

JOHN MELIA

Wilmington, North Carolina

As I write, it is Holy Thursday. Already it has been a week like no other, with no Triduum services to attend or prepare for. Yet, the news from the Vatican has made this week worse. First, there was Pope Francis' intention for those unjustly imprisoned, only hours after the High Court of Australia [overturned Cardinal George Pell's conviction](#) on sexual abuse charges which looked like that he was defending Pell.

Then the pope appointed a second commission to study the issue of ordaining women to the diaconate, packed with people who either oppose ordaining women or [have little background on the subject](#).

I fear that Francis has become another Pope Paul VI, who was persuaded to keep the Catholic Church's ban on artificial contraception based on the argument that the church could not be seen as an institution that could change previous teaching. Child sexual abuse by clergy and its cover-up by the hierarchy continues to be a problem 35 years after the first case was uncovered by Jason Berry.

Women continue to be regarded as second-class citizens in their church and this attitude continues to drive away young people who have grown up in egalitarian societies. When church officials perpetuate injustice within the institution, their calls for justice in the greater society ring hollow.

I have lost hope that the church will start to shed its clericalism and its disparagement of women in my lifetime.

(The Rev.) MONIQUE GAMACHE VENNE

Burnsville, Minnesota

Regardless of his words on a poor church for the poor, Pope Francis is following the money of first world conservatives. That is clear from the make-up of the women deacons committee. Why is he bothering to waste people's time on an issue on which he disagrees? I hope I am wrong, but I predict the committee will only come out with what we see now, female eucharistic ministers distributing communion to the homebound.

Without reform of its institutional and clerical structures, the Catholic Church will continue to decline. Francis is allowing the church to decline by promoting the clerical structure, money and self-created rules over the preaching and following of the Gospel. Bold action of reform is needed and it safe to say it is not coming from him. I fear anyone who later appears to reform the church will be way too late. The hubris of Matthew 16:18, which does not protect the church from folly, will be its downfall.

His not wanting to clericalize females furthers male clericalism. See what he does, not what he says. If the church had female clerics perhaps it would not be the intransigent, corrupt and moribund institution it now is. It is hard to believe that female deacons, or clergy for that matter, could have put the church in any worse position than it finds itself.

THOMAS HOVEL

McFarland, Wisconsin

[Massimo Faggioli writes:](#)

... his establishment of a new study commission on the female diaconate that does not appear in favor of ordaining women deacons

This statement has been voiced by a number of writers. This is strange! On that matter, if Pope Francis didn't want to move, all he had to do was what he did with the report of the first commission: let it rest.

Most of the members of this new commission are not known to favor the female diaconate, but this was the only way to lend credibility to the commission. If its members were known to have a progressive agenda on this question, they would have been immediately disparaged.

As it stands, my feeling is that 1) the commission will take its time; 2) we will all be happily surprised by its decisions when they come. But patience is the order of the day!

PAUL CADRIN

Montreal, Quebec

Advertisement

I can't thank you enough, Dan Schutte, for the work you put into the [Easter Vigil service](#). As a pastoral associate, I think I miss this service most of all.

I especially enjoyed your uplifting music during this time of being at home during the pandemic and with sorrowful hearts at being away from the Eucharist. I shared your music selections with our pastor and music director in the hope that we might use some it when we are all together again.

Won't it be glorious. We will rise again!

SUE HOWARD

Rochester, New York

Thank you so much for the outstanding materials you provided for this year's Triduum. I want to thank Dan Schutte for the wonderful commentaries as well as his beautiful sacred music.

This was a real treasure as we prepared services here in our small community chapel here at St. Brigid's Convent in San Antonio.

(Sr.) TERESA CARTER, CSB

San Antonio, Texas

[Mary E. Hunt's opinion piece on the church in extremis](#) is neither timely nor helpful. To get the measure of the vigor of the Christian Church, Roman and otherwise, is to seek beyond broadcasts from the Vatican. My opinion, for what it is worth, is that faith communities are doing the best they can with what they've got, and that means dealing with the needs of people and laying aside for now arguments.

Yes, I watched the papal broadcasts conducted in an empty, rainy piazza, and in the apse of the basilica. My reaction was not to predict anything, but live in the moment. In my case, be aware of my own aloneness and loneliness and take in from those broadcasts what sustenance that mitigated isolation and anxiety.

The COVID-19 crisis is not precipitating an enormous transformation of the church, or of the churches. When this is all over and we're finding our way through a restarting of the economy and individuals entering once again into a social mix, we'll return to the ways familiar to us. Much as many of us will welcome women as deacons, priests, and bishops, identifying this plague as the doorway to such a transformation is just macabre.

ROBERT M. ZAHRT

Fort Wayne, Indiana

I can't help but wonder that Mary E. Hunt chooses to call herself a Catholic theologian. If she rejects the doctrine of the priesthood and of the Eucharist, why she finds herself bound to the Roman Church or its pontiff at all is beyond me.

Surely that hierarchical assembly of "male ordained celebrants" serves no role at all if we take Hunt's arguments to their natural conclusion. To say that there's a conversation to be had about the role of women and the laity in ministry is one thing; to suggest that the priesthood is irrelevant and vestigial, as she unmistakably does, is another.

The Christianity that she is advocating already exists, but it's not Catholic, and I'm frankly flabbergasted that she can't see the incongruity of her ideas.

DAVID HALLENGREN

Warwick, New York

I will remember the article "Catholic progress in extremis" by Mary E. Hunt as the saddest report of the damage done to us by COVID-19. It puts into words our nightmares and it shall long live in mine, this laudatory elegy to the deformation of

the faith made necessary temporarily by plague and wished into permanence by this wicked pen and poison tongue. It is an attack on the priesthood. It is an attack on all we hold precious.

You must really take the word Catholic from the title of this piece. Please. In the name of God. For truth's sake.

JANET BAKER

Galveston, Texas

Ever since the virus has torn us from our shared gift of the Eucharist, I've been praying and hoping for inspiration as to how our faith may benefit from this time of challenge and grace. Jesuit Fr. Thomas Reese's article, "[How social distancing may change the way we do church](#)," brought to mind a number of percolating ideas not only to open up the Mass again, but to increase attendance, as shared with our pastor.

The thorny issue that remained was how to enable a hygienic distribution of the blessed Eucharist to the congregation. An option that came to mind this very instant (drawn from the way boarding passes are downloaded from home) is to bring our own bread/cracker in our own sanitary containers for sanctification into God's body. This method assists those with gluten-free diets, who could bring their own hosts. For families and individuals who wish to consume traditional hosts, they could buy them online from the companies that sell them currently. Thoughts?

ELIZABETH McGEAN WEIST

Arlington, Virginia

I was surprised not to see a mention of Black Catholics in Mark Neuhengen's commentary, "[Progressive and conservative Catholics find their own saints](#)." In my essay, "black saints waiting outside the pearly gates," I note how Venerable Mother Mary Lange and five other African Americans are suitable for sainthood in the face of there being no African Americans to date canonized by the Catholic Church.

We African Americans are a minority with a minority — 3-5% of the 75,000,000 Catholics in the United States. We have endured slavery, segregation, mass

incarceration and mass poverty in America's history and yet not one of African American has qualified, including Lange, the foundress of the Oblate Sisters of Providence.

Please remember Black Catholics. We have been faithful to the church with the lingering hope that one day the Catholic Church will be faithful to us. We urge *santo subito* as obtained by Pope John Paul II and Mother Teresa.

RALPH E. MOORE, JR.

Baltimore, Maryland

The author seems not to realize his own bias in identifying Mother Teresa and Pope John Paul II as conservative. Really? She left her Sisters of Loretto to wander the streets looking for and caring for the discarded human beings to help them die with dignity. That is progressive, not conservative. John Paul was an aid to the overthrow of a Communist government and the author thinks this to be conservative?

Sometimes we fail to see our own biases. If our liturgies define us, then the author is faulty in narrowing some into his chosen categories such as Latin Mass. The church is more broadly accepting of folks than perhaps the author realizes.

FRANCIS REARDON

Boca Raton, Florida

[Gail Grossman Freyne's article](#) is precisely the sort of writing that sows doubt and raises innuendo, all without really concluding on the doubt or the innuendo. I do not understand what point she seeks to make in her article. I do not think this sort of writing contributes to informed discussion.

Grossman Freyne refers to accusations against Cardinal George Pell. So what if there are? I have never met Pell. I do not know if he has committed crimes or not. How can I?

But I do know that every individual is entitled to his or her good reputation and this ceaseless casting of unsubstantiated innuendo, this ceaseless repetition of "other

people say that he did wrong" serves no purpose other than to besmirch an individual who has ultimately been exonerated of the accusations against him by the highest court in the land.

JOSEPH PHILLIPOS

Mount Waverley, Australia

Regarding Franciscan Fr. Daniel P. Horan's [article on imagination in the church and world](#): The church is full of people with imagination. I think that many are afraid to voice their imaginative thoughts because those in authority might censure them.

The bishops need to be open to listen to people who are brainstorming. "How would the church benefit if there were married priests and women priests or no priests at all?" "What would be detrimental if that would happen?" The mere act of offering opinions and ideas should not threaten anyone. Many of the bishops seem to be threatened when they hear such things.

PAUL VINCENT REITHMAIER

Shrewsbury, Missouri

Has NCR ever considered whether it is appropriate in your columns to describe people as "non-Catholic"?

(Fr.) LISTER TONGE

Newport, Wales

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