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by NCR Staff

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Pope Francis, who made headlines in the first months of his papacy by responding, "Who am I to judge?" when asked about gay priests, [signed off on a Vatican decree](#) that priests cannot bless same-sex unions since God "cannot bless sin." This announcement sent shockwaves through the Catholic Church and many readers responded with letters to the editor. Following are a selection of those letters that have been edited for length and clarity.

The church's official teaching authority will continue to back itself into a corner, dance around the issue and shoot itself in the foot regarding human sexuality, until it seriously re-examines its methodology and vehicle for interpreting both Scripture

and natural law.



Basing its teachings on the static understanding of what is "natural" found in scholastic philosophy's worldview is what continues to make the church's teachings irrelevant to contemporary society which has moved on using a dynamic, evolving, view of "nature" gleaned from the contemporary sciences, which are another avenue to discovering the truth regarding the God-given mysteries of the universe and especially human nature.

The church's teaching authority has too often dismissed or ignored the insights of the contemporary sciences, not viewing them as having sacred value like theology, philosophy and scriptural hermeneutics. The current dance we're watching is just a continuation of the same old, same old inability to face the issue of what is natural to human sexuality.

(Fr.) PASCAL IPOLITO

West Seneca, New York

Having lived through the horrible years of hearing about the sexual abuse of children by Catholic priests one wonders how the church dare to stand in such unfathomable judgment of those in same-sex marriages. Obviously the church did a terrible job teaching their clergy about sexuality as their rape of children must not have been part of the curriculum.

Were any of the guilty priests "blessed?" Perhaps working for years to cover up these "sins" and sinners was some form of blessings. After all no one was supposed to attack any priests. They were somehow higher up in the ladder of perfection than the ordinary lay person. They were due respect we were told. I am sure there were many, many bishops and cardinals who saw them as "blessed" until the rape charges were made known throughout the world. I hope every one of those priests are ex-communicated from the Catholic Church as you could not bless sin.

CAROL SOBECK

Wentzville, Missouri

Pope Francis has pulled out a page from the Pope John Paul II playbook by cutting off the German synod debate on blessing of same-sex unions.

A few ideas come to mind. First, it is not only about the Germans. The Vatican needs donations to offset its large budget deficit, and maybe Francis lacks sufficient credibility on doctrine for large donors to step up.

Second, what is surprising is that there are actually gays and lesbians still attached to the church. Third, it seems to me that in 20 years there will be a smaller, more doctrinaire church that Pope Benedict XVI desired, and a poor church that Francis wants. I cannot say a poor church for the poor, because many poor have been abandoned and are moving to evangelical churches. Francis sits idly by and asks for more prayers.

By stifling debate, it appears that the Vatican lacks confidence in the professed doctrine. Francis is assuring the church continues its downward spiral which has been hastened by the COVID-19 pandemic. In 20 years, this pontification will ring hollow as who will really care what a marginalized institution has to say? The church is very good at emptying pews, and in so doing it is failing in its broader mission.

THOMAS D. HOVEL

McFarland, Wisconsin

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Pope Francis not too long ago took the position that same-sex unions need to be formally and civilly recognized. He argued from the fact that they are God's children and as such must not be ostracized by mankind or their own natural families.

But now he says that same-sex unions "civilly recognized unions" cannot be blessed by the Catholic Church because God does "not bless sin."

Here's my predicament. If the pope supports the creation of same-sex civil unions, has he not endorsed what he now says is sinful?

The Jesuits have a history of giving with one hand and taking with the other. Undoubtedly, they can tell precisely how many angels can sit on the head of a pin. Are you not as befuddled now as are many Catholics and I?

JOHN A. DONNELLY

Middletown, Delaware

Regarding the inability of priests to bless same-sex unions, the document states, "only those realities which are in themselves ordered to serve those ends are congruent with the essence of the blessing imparted by the Church. For this reason, it is not licit to impart a blessing on relationships, or partnerships, even stable, that involve sexual activity outside of marriage (i.e., outside the indissoluble union of a man and a woman open in itself to the transmission of life), as is the case of the unions between persons of the same sex."

Logically, this means that heterosexual couples living together before marriage are also incapable of getting married in the church (the sacramental blessing) since they are partaking of a sexual activity outside of marriage, and according to church teaching administer the sacrament to themselves. Or as we used to say, just like same-sex couples, they are living in sin.

What a mess! Do you know how many marriages there would be in the Catholic Church if priests refused to bless couples living in sin, "a union not ordered to the creator's plan"? Is there a reason the church is even in the marriage business in the

first place?

(Fr.) DOUG KOESEL

Cleveland, Ohio

To me, what is so ironic is that a church which, in its early centuries, was so creative in adapting and changing in order to spread Jesus' message of love and acceptance, should be so hidebound today.

What I find "inherently disordered" is the Vatican's teaching that LGBTQ persons are somehow less than other human beings; this has more to do with the church's desire for power and control than it does with the ministry of spreading the gospel.

We are all G-d's children, and those of us created with a differing orientation are no less made in G-d's image than anyone else. I guess Pope Francis wishes to share Pope Benedict XVI's title of "greatest recruiter" for the Episcopal Church.

WILLIAM STEWART

Arlington, Virginia

The Vatican has banned the hierarchy from blessing same-sex couples because the church "cannot bless sin." I have been in a faithful 40-year old gay relationship with my husband and it has brought me closer to him and to God. God has blessed my same-sex union, even if the Vatican will not.

In my faith community, most priests, church ministers and many in the laity do bless our union and that of others. That is good enough for me. I do not look to the Vatican or church teaching on the morality of homosexuality or our relationship.

Years ago, a Trappist abbot told me that the pain that the LGBTQ community suffers is like the blood of the early martyrs and is bringing about the change in the church, although not in my lifetime. Someday I believe the church will change its teaching.

My sexual morality is between God, my husband, and myself.

JOSEPH GENTILINI

Hilliard, Ohio

I was saddened to learn of the pope's decision regarding LGBT Christians, yet I understand the situation he is in trying to keep the ship of Christ from tilting or sinking. It seems to me that if you are baptized, then you are a child of God, inheritor of the Kingdom of God, and have received forgiveness of sin. This should be enough to include the gay man among those worthy for priestly ordination.

Also, we Catholics "bless" everything: crops, police cars, rosaries, crosses, animals. Actually, I don't think there is anything that we don't bless. So, really, there should be no argument.

Also, it has to be very hard to be living with Pope Benedict XVI who is the total opposite of Pope Francis and who probably shares his opinion whenever he speaks to someone. I think, due to Francis' hospitality, his own papacy is being hurt. May the gay priests within the church understand what the pope is up against, and continue to work for full membership within the church.

(Fr.) WILLIAM THOMAS MARTIN

Williamsburg, Virginia

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