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by NCR Staff

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Following are NCR reader responses to recent news articles, opinion columns and theological essays with letters that have been edited for length and clarity.

Church teaching for faithful, not civil society

I was reading the editorial by Rebecca Bratten Weiss regarding her opinion on the abortion issue facing us on the November ballot ([ncronline.org](#), [Sept. 20, 2024](#)). Her paragraph, "This is not a criticism of Pope Francis, who is not a policymaker. As the

head of the Roman Catholic Church, he is obliged to represent its teachings. Trump's extreme anti-immigration policies and Harris' permissive abortion policies put both of them firmly outside the parameters of Catholic orthodoxy. The church teaches that procuring an abortion is wrong. It also teaches that harming immigrants is wrong," resonated with me.

She hit the central issue of the abortion debate. For whom is the teaching intended? It is intended for the believers of the Church, not for those outside of the Church. If one is not Catholic or of any other faith group, the whole issue on abortion is mute. These are the people who will be most affected by our votes on November 5th.

In my opinion, the whole issue should be stated as "Do Christians or any group have the right to impose their beliefs on non-Christians or others?" In this situation, a faith group wants to impose their beliefs upon others that don't share their doctrinal views and have the government enforce it.

DAVID ARMSTRONG



Pope's U.S. election comments well-meaning

While I understand the logic behind ducking this difficult political question, I believe that Pope Francis was actually directing us all back to a foundational principle of moral theology called "primacy of conscience" (ncronline.org, [Sept. 18, 2024](#)). No matter what Church or state laws are passed or repealed, we are called to act, after reflection, consultation, and prayer, according to our consciences.

Imagine a world where we all did that! How the political bickering and accusations would plummet. Such is the Kin-dom of God. Such is the synodality of listening that Francis is inviting us to as we stand on the brink of the second session of the synodal process beginning next month.

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What of those who find God outside of the Church?

Thomas Reese writes, "I sometimes think that the hardest act of faith is not to believe a particular dogma but to believe that God loves us unconditionally" (ncronline.org, [Sept. 10, 2024](#)).

Hence, Reese contends that "a particular dogma" and "God loves us unconditionally" are both "acts of faith," equal on the "belief" spectrum. Herein lies a misconception. "Believing in church teachings" is not the same as "believing in God."

Reese equates human moral development with spiritual development. Again, they are not the same. Education about doctrines and dogmas is not "spiritual" per se. A child is "de facto" a child of God, their innate goodness is the light and love of God. Rather than celebrating divine origin and blessing, does the Church treat a child as a tabula rasa, a blank slate that needs information about religion (catechism)?

People desire what is good, even the ultimate good which is God — "Our hearts are restless O God, and they will not rest until they rest in you." Has the Church considered that the pews are empty because too many people don't feel the love of God through the Church's liturgies, prayers, and homilies? Through its teachings? Ask someone who has walked away: "Does the Church care more about religion or spirituality?" Then ask, "Is the Church necessary in order to know God's love?"

Is what Reese describes as a crisis of faith actually a Church crisis? He writes, "What they (people) really need to do is change their image of God." What if their image of God is exactly what the Church has taught them? Perhaps people feel the Church no

longer provides something they truly desire: a beautiful way to experience God.

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