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by NCR Staff

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September 11, 2020

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As we creep ever closer to the presidential election, one party issue is always of contention among voting Catholics — abortion. In late July, executive editor Heidi Schlumpf wrote a column about New York Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and her Catholicism, to which many readers responded that since AOC is a Democrat, she can't be Catholic because she supports abortion. Other rebuttals to Schlumpf's piece on AOC demonstrated a heartening ability [to disagree without being disagreeable](#). NCR columnist Jamie Manson also weighed in, writing that AOC embraces reproductive justice, [and so should other Catholics](#). NCR reader responses to both commentaries are below. They have been edited for length and clarity.

Yes, it was the twice-cited martinis in Heidi Schlumpf's Connections column that got me thinking. In her column, Schlumpf told of the civil interchanges she had with longtime colleagues Mary FioRito and Gloria Purvis. Both focused on AOC's support of abortion, and one was fueled with martinis.

Might martinis help a Democrat firmly opposed to abortion civilly confront the party's lockstep adherence to women's right to choose? Similarly, might martinis help Black Lives Matter adherents decisively and, when necessary, militantly confront those in their marches who enact or support violence?

I'm a lockstep martini adherent. I would love responses from any of your readers to one or the other of these questions. Especially if the answer requires martini consumption.

For instance, did Pennsylvania Gov. Robert Casey ever make dents in the Democratic Party with his opposition to abortion? Did he ever "loosen up" the party's hypocrisy by means of a couple of martinis?

Tough, confrontational issues. Magic ... maybe grace, or, might it maybe be grace, yes, but with a martini?

THOMAS A. CAFFREY

New York, New York



I am giving you another chance in my inbox but I am not impressed. Several years ago now you shut down responses and interchange of ideas. I found that to be frustrating and then downright disrespectful. Someone in your organization couldn't handle the remarks. Some were good. Some were bad. Some were pitiful. But all were "opinions" and taken as such.

I am giving you another chance and now I'm reading the controversy about AOC and am thoroughly disgusted with the lack of opportunity for readers to retort. You're starting to look like every other catholic (with a small c) papers which I do not read.

In order to get any "printed" responses now, I have to subscribe to your printed paper.

I don't want a printed paper. It's a waste of paper in this time of climate change and conservation. Likewise, not all you print (or email for that matter) is of interest to me. So, 80% of the paper would be wasted ink and paper. But in order to "enjoy" the controversy stirred up, I would need to subscribe.

Now I don't know what I don't know and you are keeping any "letters to the editor" under ransom.

What the heck are you afraid of?

MICHELE MATUSZEWSKI

Westland, Michigan

I just read Heidi Schlumpf's piece, "Disagreeing without being disagreeable." I was glad that there can be an occasion where we can have differing opinions without going to war. I was sad that there was no mention of the episode of AOC and the statue of St. Damien of Molokai.

If anyone was disagreeable in her disagreement over the life of the missionary depicted by the artwork, it was AOC. Despite the good he sought to do, when no one else would do it, she just ripped his intentions apart. No better than St. Junipero Serra, as she saw it. And you all think that she should be our standard for what a Catholic is about today.

I believe that Catholics should do research before debating the issues (and non-issues) of the day. Damien received no other help. But because he was a Belgian, and white, that speaks against him? She was way off on this one, and never apologized for her hurtful remarks (which were balanced by President Barack Obama's words about the Hawaiian's devotion to Damien). I don't think ignorance and arrogance should be aspects of a Catholic's life.

Do you?

(Fr.) DAVID LUPO, SSCC

Fairhaven, Massachusetts

As I read the multiple columns on reproductive issues, it becomes ever more clear to me that the focus needs to be on the deeper issue of life. Being pro-life is so much more than being anti-anything. To act in favor of life evokes thinking more broadly and deeply about who we are as people who are begged by God to choose life.

Life for all in every instance of their existence may mean denying ourselves the luxury of waving banners or marching in parades while ignoring those whose lives are in constantly in jeopardy. Action without contemplation and continued communication is dangerous. Our freedom to choose cannot abort another's freedom to live.

Now we get to talk about how and why we come to our decisions and conclusions about others. Having recognized our insidious biases and prejudices, we can more clearly see the painful needs of others. We can feel their pain and hear their pleas, instead of shouting our personal desires and labelling them divine.

There is no "one size fits all" except the largesse of charity and mercy that must underscore justice. Let's expand our understanding of life and what it really means to be pro-life.

FRAN SALONE-PELLETIER

Shallotte, North Carolina

Keep up the excellent work on this issue. Thanks to Jamie Manson and Heidi Schlumpf. It might be interesting to introduce the phrase, "pro-death" as a contrasting thought experiment to "pro-life."

What are the characteristics/associations that follow being pro-death? I can offer a few: breaking up families at the border, ignoring climate change, endless spending on "defense" in a country that has not won a war since World War II, nuclear proliferation, spending money on refurbishing St. Patrick's Cathedral rather than directing that money to pregnant women facing great difficulty in bringing a child into the world, cutting taxes to directly reduce health, social and educational programs. The list continues and the list is very long.

I think there is some possible relevance to this experiment. Allowing pro-life to be indiscriminately associated with the good, without contrasting it to its opposite, pro-death, concedes the moral high ground to which no position, in a complex world filled with ambiguity has right to occupy alone. It fails to ask a logical next question. If not the opposite of pro-death, what can a standalone reference to pro-life really mean, other than a truncated purity? Truncated because it narrows the discussion to only one life, not the minimally two lives actually involved.

When one explores positions on both sides, one uncovers an association with a desperate lack of purity in the pro-life line.

JOHN SALVATI

Evergreen, Colorado

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I am disappointed that Jamie Manson did not mention the concept of delayed hominization in "AOC embraces reproductive justice, and other Catholics should, too."

The basic pro-choice/pro-life divide in the church is over personhood. If AOC supports a legal right to kill innocent persons, that is monstrous. How can a Catholic describe the defense of a supposed "right" to kill innocent persons as "justice"? Yet perhaps it may sometimes be moral and justice to kill a human organism that is not yet a person. The issue then is at what stage of their development the human organism becomes a person. It seems that Catholic pro-lifers almost unanimously believe either that personhood begins at conception, or at least that it is probable that personhood begins at conception and so we should behave as if it does.

Meanwhile, pro-choice individuals and orgs often appear reluctant to address the matter of personhood, but pro-choice Catholics should attack this central question boldly. We can start by looking at what Catholic theologians have had to say over the centuries about delayed hominization.

It is as unsurprising as it is saddening that in three articles on AOC no one thought to address whether or to what extent the congresswoman is supportive of or complicit in the U.S. government's violent, hegemonic foreign policy, with its endless bombings, brutal sanctions, destabilization campaigns, regime change wars, support for rogue states such as Saudi Arabia, and other such immoral methods and tactics aimed at enhancing and preserving American unipolarism.

JEFFREY JONES

Hamburg, New York

I hope this letter finds you well in these rather difficult times! I'm reaching out to express my appreciation and support of NCR's choice to publish Jamie Manson's "AOC Embraces Reproductive Justice, and other Catholics should, too."

Beyond Manson's excellent historicization of reproductive justice and her persuasive argument, I appreciated the fact that she was able to express a form of Catholicism that many practice but that few are given the opportunity to articulate in a serious forum. While (as Manson highlights) over half of U.S. Catholics believe that abortion should be legal, it often feels that excruciatingly few pro-choice Catholic critics and intellectuals are given any sort of platform, with the discourse instead being caught in a binary between extremists who care more about abortion than about the lives of the poor and outcast and "seamless garment" Catholics who often skirt the issue of

abortion and the injustices imbricated in oppressively regulating it.

For this reason, I found Manson's article to be a breath of fresh air, not just interesting in its own right but also socially meaningful: it articulates a form of practice that is rarely given credence, but that is quite common nonetheless. Even beyond the case she makes, there are a number of compelling arguments for pro-choice Catholicism, and I hope that NCR will continue to publish such articles, if only to reflect that there are a great many Catholics who hold that stance.

RYAN CARROLL

Rockville, Maryland

It is amazing to me that in Jamie Mason's pro-choice article there is not a single word about the innocent human life being ended. Her simplistic statistic purporting to show that the majority of Catholics want abortion kept legal doesn't reveal that only a small minority want unrestricted abortion on demand to kept legal.

The editors seek to distance themselves from her extreme views, but since she is more than just an occasional columnist and since no criticism of her view is provided, this article really calls into question whether the National Catholic Reporter is any longer Catholic.

NEIL JENSEN

Baltimore, Maryland

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