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by NCR Staff

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In a recent column, [Franciscan Fr. Daniel Horan says](#) that many Catholic leaders, politicians, academics and ordinary people alike are part of an anti-religious-liberty movement, oftentimes claiming without irony to do so in the name of "religious freedom." Following are letters to the editor responding to that column. The letters have been edited for length and clarity.

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I agree with everything Franciscan Fr. Daniel Horan writes in "US bishops pioneered self-serving invocation of 'religious liberty.'" I just want to highlight one sentence: "Since at least the social and political battles over the Affordable Care Act, the US

bishops' conference has invoked 'religious liberty' to justify its personal objection to certain policies such as medical contraceptive coverage through insurance for employees."



This is so ironic because it was that precise issue where the church's hierarchy has trampled the most on the lives of the faithful. Pope Paul VI's *Humanae Vitae* encyclical famously went directly against the recommendation of the committee he had formed to study the issue; this was the beginning of the hierarchy's backpedaling away from the spirit of the Second Vatican Council. It is well documented that the bulk of the faithful never has bought into that teaching at any time since then.

For the bishops to cry "religious liberty" over that, of all issues, is so precious! The liberty being infringed upon here is not the liberty of God's people; it is simply the "liberty" of the hierarchy itself to impose their will on others.

**(Fr.) MARK GEORGE, SJ**  
**Detroit, Michigan**

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In much the same way that the moniker "pro-life" was deliberately used to define only an anti-abortion stance to the exclusion of the spectrum of other true pro-life issues, the moniker "religious freedom" likewise has a limited perspective. As Franciscan Fr. Daniel Horan describes in his essay, too many clerics have used religious freedom to define and thereby exclude some of the faithful from

acceptance in the larger communion of the church as well as condoning their marginalization from the community.

The Second Vatican Council, in my understanding, embraced religious freedom for all people where the pre-conciliar church did not recognize that right. In fact, the belief that error has no rights was a definition that pertained to those who did not subscribe to Catholicism and therefore they were not to be considered as having religious freedom. Catholics who married through non-Catholic marriages, which at the time were not considered licit, were not considered Catholics in good standing.

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If religious freedom is actually to become a cogent argument to enable individuals, in the exercise of their consciences, to hold to certain beliefs and allow certain options in their actions and encounters with others, or with the state, then it must be universally applied and not selectively permitted only by those who hold that they themselves can be the interpreters of what religious freedom entails.

**CHARLES A. Le GUERN**  
**Granger, Indiana**

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In two NCR articles, published a day apart, the same moral issue was raised and different conclusions drawn.

First, Franciscan Fr. Daniel Horan reflected on The New York Times piece written by Fr. Steven Paulikas, an Episcopalian priest whose marriage to another man was blessed by his Episcopalian bishop and embraced by that religious community. Horan supported Paulikas' concerns that forbidding gay marriage based upon the teachings of other religious entities would intrude upon his American and Christian right to be an Episcopalian. Choosing one's religion is religious freedom. Horan noted that Catholic bishops champion the right to religious freedom more when the believer favors Catholicism.

The next day, NCR published Michael Sean Winters' piece titled "[What role should abortion play in the midterm elections?](#)" Winters bemoaned the "libertarian position: You can't tell a woman what to do with her body" which, to my ears, sounds like a

significant discounting of feminist concerns about agency and the wide variety of issues that often arise with pregnancy.

Winters doesn't recognize Horan's point nor does he apply it to abortion. Many Catholics don't want to pass laws telling Episcopalians, Jews and other religious believers that they must follow Catholic, Baptist and Mormon moral theology regarding abortion especially when other religions, bishops, rabbis, ministers and priests support abortion care.

Both the same-sex marriage and the abortion debates are about religious freedom for all religions. We need to recognize that.

**BOB MATTHEWS**  
**Cincinnati, Ohio**