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by NCR Staff

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In an essay published Feb. 28, [Bishop Thomas Paprocki appears to accuse Cardinal Robert McElroy of heresy](#), citing the cardinal's views on ministering to LGBTQ people and Catholics who have been divorced and remarried. [Paprocki later defended his essay](#), telling NCR that he and McElroy exchanged emails after publication. [And in our editorial](#), we say that while we are all for open discussion and debate, childish name-calling reflects poorly on the U.S. church. Following are letters to the editor responding to these stories. The letters have been edited for length and clarity.

The miserable state of the hierarchical church laid bare. Argue that the U.S. should pour billions into weapons to slaughter the forces of a nuclear armed power that will never accept defeat? Collective applause! Speak up for LGBTQI Catholics? Damnable heretic!

The cathedras are empty. Proclaim it from the rooftops and the mountaintops, from the highways and the byways, in the town square and in Times Square — the cathedras are empty!

JEFFREY JONES

Hamburg, New York



It is embarrassing that NCR staff reporter Brian Fraga has to comment on this exchange. Perhaps McElroy will be sent the way of de Chardin or Bonhoeffer or von Balthasar, only to be recognized years later.

The egos and judgement exhibited by some of these men is suffocating. Open to the Spirit? Not till ego and righteousness are checked at the door. Synodality is like the Gumby character blowing in the wind. When these "shepherds" can get it together and act like Jesus, we may have a chance. Much to pray for!

JANE FRANCISCO

Charlotte, North Carolina

The divisive rhetoric which emanates from some clerics is political posturing which mirrors that of their chosen party. McElroy was elevated to cardinal particularly, in my view, because he mirrors Pope Francis' views that our church needs to become open to the changes in our culture if it is to retain relevancy. One could argue that Paprocki is making himself less relevant with his diatribe using McElroy as his proxy for his animus toward Francis.

Francis has elevated several bishops to the cardinalate who have shown an openness to groups and individuals who had been marginalized and made to see themselves as a second class of Catholics. Denied full Communion, these people; divorcees, the LGBTQ, and those with gender dysphoria among others, are not seen

by some of their pastors as children of God. Francis seems to wish to turn the page on that attitude and welcome all to the church. It is unfortunate, apparently, that the self-righteousness of some prelates has been manifest in a hubris which they feel gives them license to oppose our pope by dividing the faithful into conflicting camps rather than bringing us together.

Paprocki, like many of his fellow bishops who have not been elevated to cardinal, appears to be promoting himself to his fellow like-minded clerics. One can assume he has ambitions for his current and likely future roles in the U.S. bishops' conference which would give him a platform to continue to promote his ambitions. Maybe he feels if Francis is replaced by a pontiff who is more philosophically and politically attuned to himself then his elevation to the college will become more likely.

CHARLES A. LE GUERN
Granger, Indiana

It is a sad moment in our church when one prelate, Paprocki, tries to take on another, McElroy, for a statement made and construed, much like Vatican II was, to suit institutional needs. "Cancel culture" is at work in our church.

The clerical culture distances themselves from relationships unaware that Scripture is a manual for the good, the bad, and the ugly in our lives to apply those principles to our interactions. Jesus actively engages with us; Pope Francis relates to real people living real lives.

This can be contrasted to ideologues, like Paprocki, whose theology is dogmatic, rigid and uncompromising when compared and contrasted with lived experience.

JANET HAUTER
Zionsville, Indiana

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Paprocki is the embodiment of the reasons why millions of people have left the corrupt Roman Church, catholic in no way. As long as men like him represent the institution, it will continue on its path of clericalism, abuse and irrelevance.

JOHN CHUCHMAN
Scottsdale, Arizona

For Paprocki, questioning the church's policies of exclusion, which he insists represent settled doctrine or canonical originalism, so to speak, is to be legally responsible for one's heresy.

But his church is a contradiction. While certain its message of salvation is intended for all, that same certainty in his hands becomes a disposition to exclude and distance. It would have him exact conditions of acceptance that in the lived lives of so many, whether at present outside or within the church, are barriers impossible to overcome.

Paprocki would define this church by whom it excludes rather than by whom it includes — a sort of ecclesial upstairs-downstairs arrangement. If you are a woman, you are welcome, but at a distance. If you are a public official and recognize law enabling abortion, you are to be excluded from communion. Similarly, if you are divorced and remarried without an annulment, if you are gay, you will be expected to live a life in the exclusion of that identity. If you are transgender, there are directives to ignore you because otherwise you are an intractable problem.

And should you question any of this, you will be subject to excommunication since there is no such thing as doctrine under review with an expectation of serious amendment. But even if you are one of those included, it will be at the exclusion of your conscience, to be replaced by another, because informed with a Paprockean certainty.

Metaphorically speaking, Paprocki's church is a church of one who is of course right, to the exclusion of so many others who are of course wrong. Where wrong is suspected, there can be no inclusion, not even the benefit of doubt, only institutional intolerance.

T. PATRICK HILL
Winchester, Virginia

"It is worrying that more and more bishops seem to bring their quarrels with one another (or with the pope) out into public spaces."

"It is worrying." No it's not! It's a good synodal thing! In times past episcopal arguments about church law and proper spiritual practices were held behind closed doors while those who were most deeply affected (the laity) were relatively clueless and expected to continue mindlessly praying, paying, obeying and mass-producing future generations of the same.

Bishops and cardinals, whether accomplished theologians or not, are part of an academic community that has been playing these finger-pointing, name-calling games for years albeit in carefully veiled terms that only they themselves understand. These "colleagues" have learned to either flick off those arrows or allow them to fester into deep seated hurts that needlessly diminish reputations. Some would call it overzealousness for the Lord. But is that altogether a bad thing? Weren't some of the apostles guilty of the same? Enough so that Jesus took them to task for it?

Maybe the lesson here is to set aside the episcopal titles and pompous degrees that separate us from one another and continue public, synodal, McElroy/Paprocki type discussions, striving always to keep them centered on and under the loving gaze of our crucified Lord.

NANCY McGUNAGLE
Kalispell, Montana

One of the most uplifting aspects of religious services is the palpable yet often unspoken belief in the power of prayerful communal gathering. Against the backdrop of a larger society largely preoccupied with everything but spiritual uplift, the importance of such shared worship can hardly be overstated.

Yet, as a recent NCR editorial clearly suggests, Bishop Thomas Paprocki, by intimating Cardinal Robert McElroy may be guilty of heresy, seems intent on

deciding who is really welcome in the church — and it isn't women and LGBTQ members.

Sadly, such mindsets recall the formative years of the American republic when women and Blacks were codified as second-class citizens, pernicious characterizations still hounding our fraught "experiment in democracy." Of course, some will remind us the Catholic Church is hardly a political entity and has every right to determine who should be afforded full membership. Yet isn't Catholic practice and teaching based on Jesus' life and ministry, a ministry that featured warm, consistent regard towards those most marginalized? Moreover, particularly now as militant white supremacy gains dangerous traction, Paprocki's words are, at a minimum, tone deaf.

No one knows who will inhabit church pews in the future, or what kind of society they'll be seeking respite from. But when the recent NCR editorial pointedly asked, "How much further is the American Catholic right going to go?," it's a question none should ignore. Because history, not to mention the daily news, shows where collective demeaning of "the other" leads. And it is ugly, undemocratic and deeply unchristian.

R. JAY ALLAIN

Orleans, Massachusetts