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by NCR Staff

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Bishop Joseph Strickland of the Diocese of Tyler, Texas, has become well-known for challenging advocates for abortion rights and those who want to make the COVID-19 vaccines mandatory. And in January, [he took a step that defied usual protocol by challenging his fellow bishops](#). Following are NCR reader responses to Strickland's messages. The letters have been edited for length and clarity.

Previously obscure politicians Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene of Georgia and Rep. Lauren Boebert of Colorado got the memo. Be loud and outrageous with little interest in the truth and reap the rewards. Money will flow in as will local and national publicity. Folks will hang on their every word and become followers.



In the hierarchy of American bishops, Joseph Strickland is akin to the punter on the Jacksonville Jaguars football team. Unless he is loud and outrageous and bothers not with the truth who will know he even exists? What better way to call attention to himself and, who knows, maybe even rake in some additional funds than to call out the quarterback of the team, Cardinal Blase Cupich?

Sadly, this approach works. Here I am talking about the obscure bishop of Tyler, Texas.

BILL KRISTOFKO

Parkville, Maryland

Not only does Bishop Joseph Strickland test the limits of conservative Catholic dissent, but he also exemplifies what is wrong with the U.S. bishops' conference and bishops' conferences everywhere —there are no checks and balances on bishops' behavior at all!

While most annual meetings of bishops are examples of perfect behavior, it is inevitable in today's climate that men who are overly filled with a sense of their own

self-importance are going to begin to behave badly on the public stage. Indeed, personal experience tells me that that is surely the way they behave in their own dioceses where no one is watching.

Without the press present to record moments of public impropriety, we would have no idea of Strickland's outrageous behavior, behavior that is surely just as outrageous on the home front. If any of his priests entrusted to his care are abused by his enormous ego, they will find that they have nowhere to turn. No nuncio or metropolitan has any jurisdiction over Strickland, no fellow bishop is courageous enough for "fraternal correction."

They could write to Rome of course, who also is adept at protecting its own mistakes. In Rome, they can experience a new kind of suffering — being mired in the weight of enormous red tape. I know. I have been there for more than five years now!

(Fr.) CHRISTOPHER SENK

Fort Myers, Florida

I wholeheartedly disagree with Bishop Joseph Strickland. I think we had best start looking at canon law and the accountability this law does not lay at the feet of bishops. This man is a human being as well as a bishop and subject to mistakes. We do not need division at this time.

Pope Francis is breaking his Jesuit, papal neck to bring the church together and not to divide us. My dad used to tell us, "little said is easy mended." An excellent platitude for Strickland!

JANE FRANCISCO

Charlotte, North Carolina

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The examples used to describe liberal priests and bishops in the past being rebuked by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith for their views underscores the hypocrisy rampant in the church today. It is that hypocrisy which has galvanized the opposition to some prelates and divided the church's membership into opposing camps.

One of the additional faults of Bishop Joseph Strickland is his hubris thinking he should have any influence on the judgement of any of his fellow bishops on the vaccination issue or on any political issues. It is the responsibility of each bishop to manage his diocese and the priests and the congregations they serve. Strickland has his own staff to manage and he needs to limit his influence. He also needs to refrain from discussing the political rhetoric of priests in other dioceses particularly if they speak in opposition to their own bishop.

That conflict within any diocese would be problematic enough but when the rhetoric extends beyond one's own diocese to affect others that should require a rebuke by the body of bishops. The church needs to maintain comity among the Catholic population and respect for all the bishops. Their failure to address inter-diocesan conflicts will only further polarize the church making it another political institution.

CHARLES A. LE GUERN

Granger, Indiana

In the article, Bishop Joseph Strickland is quoted as stating in one of his podcasts that:

"When there is conflict, it's usually between something that is true and something that is false," he said. "Some people are embracing the truth and some people are embracing what is not true ... In that way, conflict is necessary. We need to separate darkness from light."

"If it's a question of truth and falsehood, we need the conflict."

What Strickland fails to explain is how one is to go about distinguishing between what is true and what is false. The fact that he rejects the validity of science, papal authority and the determination of the Papal Academy for Life regarding the ethical use of COVID-19 vaccines, leaves him with little basis for determining the truth outside of himself. He simply makes himself the chief arbiter of what is true and what is not.

The other problem he creates for himself by contradicting the pope and other bishops, is that he not only weakens the moral authority of other bishops but also weakens his own. If other members of the hierarchy, including the pope, cannot be trusted to make truthful determinations of what is right and wrong, where does his moral authority come from?

THOMAS SEVERIN

Connellsville, Pennsylvania

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