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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.

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You said it all

Thank you, Rebecca Bratten Weiss, for yet another absolutely on target and wonderful article, — "[Catholics need to stop blaming all sexual ills on contraceptive](#)

[use](#)" — in ncronline today, January 26, 2024. You said it all. Well thought out and concisely expressed, but covered all bases. Fantastic article! Keep up the good work!

**ANGELA MARCZEWSKI**  
**Schenectady, New York**



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### Fire and brimstone

Fully cognizant Catholic Christians who lean heavily on the teachings and promises of Jesus inevitably find that they must keep a polite distance from fire and brimstone cult groups in their midst ([ncronline.org](http://ncronline.org), [Jan. 18, 2024](#)). It's not that they don't believe in hell or purgatory, Marian apparitions or the hellish experiences of past mystics. They simply believe that their Lord does not want them to obsess fearfully about them.

In the gospels, Jesus repeatedly warns of the reality of the demonic, hell and even hints of a place of purification for those at death who do not yet meet the necessary standards of holiness to enter the kingdom (Matt 5: 26). Believers seeking true holiness know they must dismiss their own fears by always staying focused on Jesus, trusting him completely just as Mary did and urged his disciples to do.

Pope Francis' rumination on hell and its contents is perfectly normal and healthy for one his age and highly recommended from time to time for everyone.

**NANCY MCGUNAGLE**

**Kalispell, Montana**

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Extraordinary means

That Michael Sean Winters considers, without qualification, abortion and physician-assisted death to be, like capital punishment, barbaric is irresponsible (ncronline.org, [Jan. 24, 2024](#)). There comes a point in both when the life in question as human life ceases to have meaning or purpose. What comes of ignoring such cases and their implications is what exposes us to barbarism.

But Winters is also mistaken in what presumably is his understanding of the relevant Catholic teaching here. Having drawn a distinction between ordinary and extraordinary medical means, with no obligation to pursue extraordinary means to preserve human life, Roman Catholic moral teaching has conceded that death can be pursued when mere existence is the only alternative. Choosing to refuse extraordinary means is to choose to pursue the consequences of this refusal. In the case of anencephaly or intractable pain, however, there is not the possibility of refusing something, since in neither case are there the means to secure human life other than, paradoxically, the human ability to take leave of it. Hardly barbaric.

**T. PATRICK HILL**

**Winchester, Virginia**

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Where is everyone?

Only 18 bishops out of 99 call for the U.S. to cut military spending (ncronline.org, [Jan. 22, 2024](#))? Not all of them plus auxiliary bishops, abbots and abbesses? What about priests and deacons too? Shame on them. It seems only a small segment of the church is interested enough to rid the world's richest country of poverty to put pen to paper. Of course, this was done sitting at a desk so no heavy lifting required. The number would likely be significantly smaller if they would be asked to hold a

sign on a picket line in front of the Pentagon.

This is a good article mentioning those who did not sign, especially Archbishop Timothy Broglio, and a few surprises. The article correctly states bishops hide behind false statements when it suits their purposes: "I don't sign statements," or "I don't sign statements the USCCB doesn't approve." Really? Sounds more like a CEO considering the political fall-out than a shepherd laying down his life for his flock, some of whom could benefit.

**MICHAEL J. MCDERMOTT**  
**North Brookfield, Massachusetts**

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Religion without religion

Thank you to NCR for introducing me to John Caputo and his writings and for Fr. Horan's excellent interview with him (ncronline.org, [Jan. 25, 2024](#)). Caputo's concept of "religion without religion" offers a response to the failings of most religions — their love of rules rather than championing the rule of love. By expanding the concept of God and stressing our need to engage with some part of that larger God, Caputo gathers us together and excludes no one. A true rule of love.

**EILEEN SULLIVAN**  
**Binghamton, New York**