Opinion
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May 3, 2025
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(NCR graphic/Angie Von Slaughter)

Rome is bursting at the seams with cardinals and Catholic leaders as the city and the world prepare for next week's conclave to elect a new pope.

And then there's Bishop Robert Barron. Barred from the conclave because he lacks a red hat, Barron was summoned to the White House for a very different sort of meeting.

Barron was invited to give the invocation in the Rose Garden for a National Day of Prayer celebration, and to celebrate his appointment to the Commission on Religious Liberty on May 1.

As you can imagine, Barron was positively giddy.

"Friends, yesterday, I had the extraordinary opportunity of delivering a prayer in the Rose Garden of the White House," he captioned his post on X that shared the text of his prayer.

Barron begins his prayer by waxing poetic about the benefits we are enjoying in this country today. The implication, of course, is that Americans enjoy these freedoms

under our new leader in the White House. Barron then goes out of his way to punctuate that we are "one nation under God" and to praise religious liberty as our "first freedom."

It's worth noting that Catholicism was heavily discriminated against throughout the U.S., with the exception of Maryland, until the establishment of the U.S. Constitution and subsequent Bill of Rights. America has a long and storied history of Catholic discrimination.

The most objectionable comment, though, was his prayer specifically for Trump, the text of which Barron posted on X.

"O God, to whom every human power is subject, we beg you to bless our president as he exercises the prerogatives of his high office. May he strive always to please you in what he says and does, and may he govern under the direction of your providence. And may he, in his deliberations and decisions, always be particularly mindful of those who suffer and who are most in need."

In a vacuum, perhaps, this would be a milquetoast and appropriate prayer to compel a world leader to govern in a moral and just way, with an eye on the poor. But we do not live in a vacuum. We live in Donald Trump's 2025 America.

Related: Bishop Barron compares Trump's address to Congress to the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass



The White House X account posted this A-I generated image of U.S. President Donald Trump posing in papal regalia. (NCR screenshot/White House X account)

Barron's prayer came after Trump appointed Barron to be on a new Commission on Religious Liberty. He signed an executive order to that effect.

That's particularly strange because there already exists a U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom. That commission, established by Congress in 1998 and championed by Republican Rep. Frank Wolf of Virginia, consists of three members selected by the president, two by Republicans and four by Democrats.

It is bipartisan. Apparently we can't have that in Trump's America.

Sign up Bishop Barron. He's all in.

Barron posted that "I see my task as bringing the perspective of Catholic social teaching to bear as the Commission endeavors to shape public policy in this matter."

While embracing the presidency of Trump, Barron has thus far said nothing on his vast and powerful Word on Fire media empire (nearly 2 million followers on YouTube) to address this administration's wanton disregard for nearly every principle of Catholic social teaching. Deportation of migrants? Crickets. Cuts to Medicaid and food security? File not found 404. Gutting of health care research? Cntrl alt delete.

How can someone bring the perspective of Catholic social teaching to such a godless administration if they themselves seem unable or unwilling to advocate for it?

At best, his profession that he will take on the mantle of Catholic social teaching with this administration is disingenuous. At worst, it's negligent.

Rose on Pope Francis' tomb

A single white rose sits above the tomb of Pope Francisco in the Basilica of Santa María la Mayor of Rome on April 27, 2025. (CNS/Vatican Media)

Though he is unfortunately absent from the proceedings in Rome, Barron is in luck. His Rose Garden gathering this week included a pope.

President Donald Trump, who earlier this week told the media on the South Lawn of the White House that he'd make a great pope, took to social media to amplify his ambition for the throne of St. Peter, perhaps finally accepting that the U.S. Constitution bars a third term as president.

On the official White House and presidential X accounts, Trump shared an AI-generated image of himself in full papal regalia.

Maybe Trump thinks it is funny. Millions do not. Catholics around the world might have been less offended if Trump had spit on the pope's grave.

Contrast the image of a grimacing Trump, grasping for more power, gilded in papal majesty, with that of the humble servant, Pope Francis, buried in a wooden coffin, placed in a simple tomb of Genoan marble, wedged next to a Marian icon in an alcove that previously was a storage closet, in an immigrant neighborhood on the other side of Rome, 3 miles from the soaring Bernini trappings of Vatican City.

One image represents the Church of Christ. The other, the Church of Trump.

Bishop Barron must decide which church he serves.

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