Opinion

NCR Voices



A microphone used for podcasting is pictured. "Whether through podcasts, TikTok videos or Substack posts, a liberatory Catholic media landscape meets people where they are, especially those hurt by the very institution claiming to represent them," writes Maxwell Kuzma. (Unsplash/Jonathan Farber)



by Maxwell Kuzma

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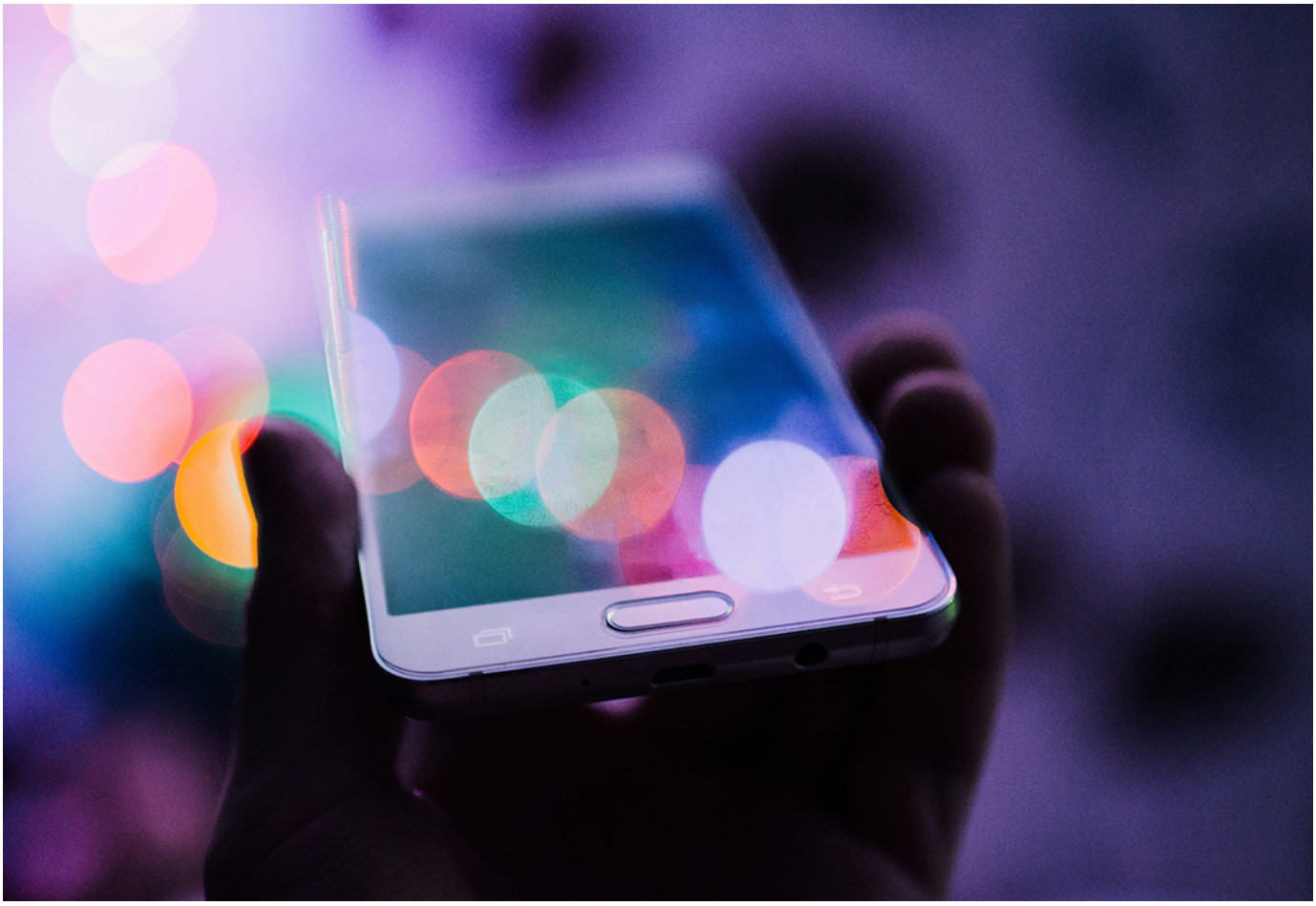
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In the online Catholic landscape, a near-constant churn of sensationalized clickbait stokes fear, cultivates exclusion and funnels viewers down a pipeline of opinion and misinformation that, in many cases, drifts dangerously far from the church's core teachings on justice, solidarity and dignity of the human person.

This theological departure has real-world consequences: political campaigns mobilize the Christian right to reduce the freedoms of marginalized groups, deny climate change, reject vaccine science – the list goes on. Pope Leo XIV has addressed this impulse: "Where there is love, there is no room for prejudice, for 'security' zones separating us from our neighbors, for the exclusionary mindset that, tragically, we now see emerging also in political nationalisms."

So, the question becomes: How can left-leaning Catholics fight against online content designed to outrage and radicalize?

One answer is the creation and consumption of media that actively challenges disinformation with truth, compassion and justice. By offering thoughtful, values-driven alternatives, progressive media can disrupt the cycle of fear and polarization — and build something better in its place.



(Unsplash/Rodion Kutsaiev)

This work must be accessible, for truth shouldn't be limited to dense theology books. Whether through podcasts, TikTok videos or Substack posts, a liberatory Catholic media landscape meets people where they are, especially those hurt by the very institution claiming to represent them.

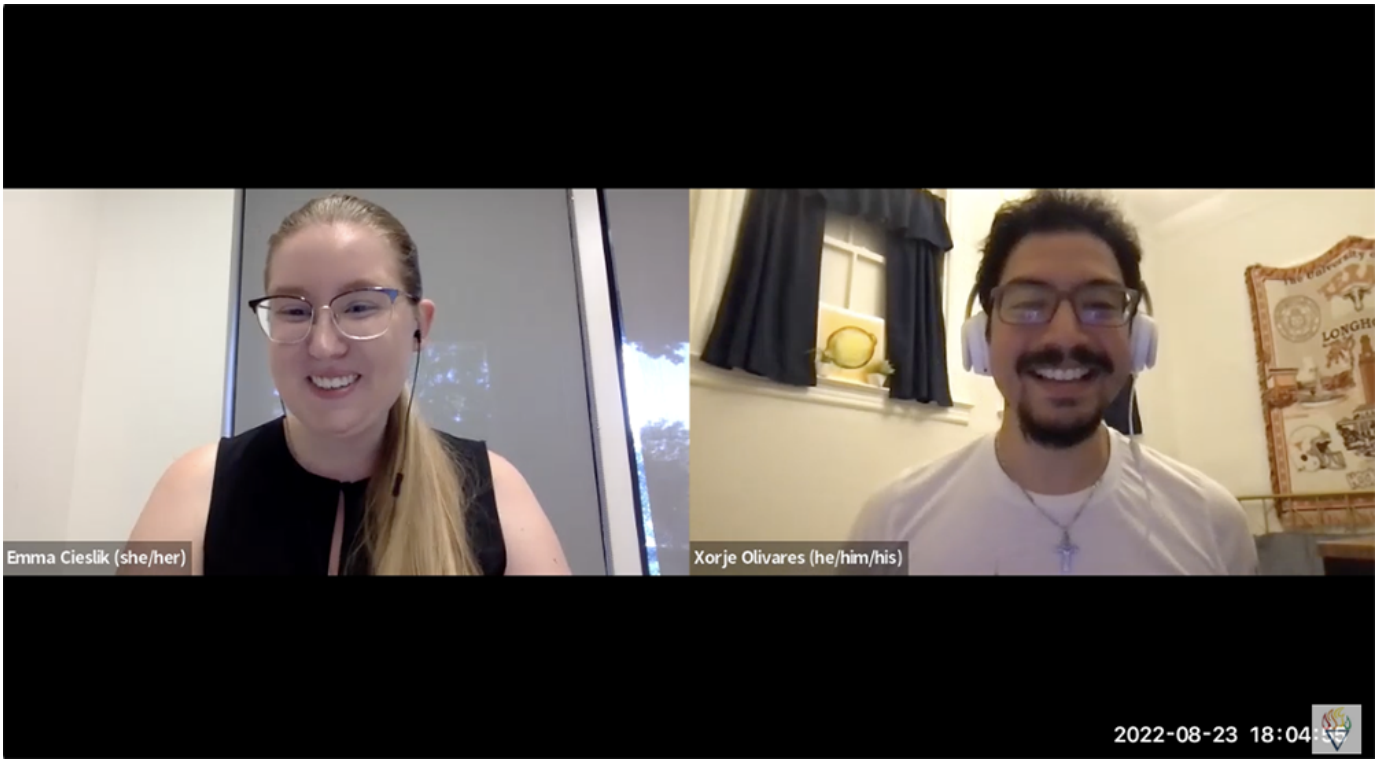
A compelling example is "Disordered: Responding to Catholic Teachings on Gender and Sexuality," a limited Spotify podcast series by a creator who goes by Theo. Drawing on both rigorous research and lived experience, Theo carefully unpacks the messaging of figures like Jason Evert, Matt Fradd and Fr. Mike Schmitz, exposing how their rhetoric fails to uphold human dignity and can harm LGBTQ+ people specifically.



Creator Shannon Vavich is pictured in a screengrab from a short on her YouTube channel. (YouTube/The Flying Kitchen by Shannon Vavich)

Through her project The Flying Kitchen, creator Shannon Vavich blends cooking and hospitality with sharp political critique, cleverly using the domestic arts as a platform to expose the rise of far-right Catholic extremism and its ties to broader authoritarian movements. Through livestreams, short-form videos and other social media–friendly formats, Vavich reaches an audience of tens of thousands. By weaving food, music and conversation together with political witness, she offers both resistance and solidarity for Catholics seeking a more liberatory faith.

On the podcast "Queer I Am, Lord," openly gay Catholic writer and storyteller Xorje Olivares interviews fellow queer Christians, exploring their spiritual journeys, hopes for reform and the painful reality of exclusionary church policies. Raised on the Texas borderlands in Eagle Pass, where Sunday Mass and machismo often went hand in hand, Olivares brings his Mexican and Tejano heritage into dialogue with his Catholic faith, revealing how identity, culture and belief intersect in both tension and harmony.



Xorje Olivares, a gay Catholic writer and storyteller, is pictured in a screengrab from an 2022 interview with Emma Cieslik for a roundtable of the Center for LGBTQ and Gender Studies in Religion at the Pacific School of Religion. (YouTube/CLGS)

Kaya Oakes' *Not So Sorry: Abusers, False Apologies, and the Limits of Forgiveness* might be one of the most important Catholic trade books of the last few years. In the book and on her Substack, Residuum, the Berkeley professor examines the pressures and pitfalls of forgiveness in American Christian culture, asking whether it is always virtuous — or is it a mechanism that protects abusers and institutions rather than victims?

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Kaya Oakes is pictured at a symposium in 2019 at Fordham University in New York City. (CNS/Fordham University)

Drawing on cases of large-scale abuse and theologies, Oakes interrogates how forgiveness is often demanded prematurely. She reframes healing through the lens of restorative justice, emphasizing repair, amends and communal care over performative apologies.

In my own work, I have used media ranging from short form video, to "deep dive" Substack essays, to a podcast. Much of this content has been co-created with queer Catholic historian Emma Cieslik, blending personal stories and lived experience with theology and history to unpack harmful teachings and promote a faith rooted in justice and inclusion. Our goal is to offer accessible, honest conversations that help reclaim Catholicism for all people.

In a church as rich and diverse as Catholicism, polarization only weakens the witness to its core social teachings of justice, solidarity and human dignity. Instead of retreating into opposing camps, there is a pressing need (modeled in the call from Pope Leo XIV) for Catholics to come together across differences and amplify the values that unite us. By focusing on compassion, truth and inclusion, we can build media and communities that heal rather than harm, that educate rather than exclude. That's the type of faith — and church — that we all deserve.

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