Opinion
Letters to the Editor



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.

Conservative communication

Responding to Charlie Kirk's assassination, Phyllis Zagano doubles down on division, accusing conservatives like President Trump of fomenting hatred (NCR, Sept. 16,

2025).

She then zeroes in on her real target: Catholics who refuse to reflexively support the liberal line. Trump's reaction to Kirk's death, she claims, is being exploited by the "harshest of Catholic commentators," calling me out by name. She cites my appearances on CatholicVote's LOOPcast as evidence of my "hatred," adding that my colleagues and I—along with others on what she condescendingly dubs the "Catholic right"—are "nominally Catholic."

Yet, she couldn't manage to include even a single "hateful" quote from me.

That's because there's nothing there for her to use.

She notes that I view Black Lives Matter, DEI, and dangerous soft-on-crime cashless bail for contributing to the recent murder of Ukrainian immigrant Iryna Zarutska. Here, I am guilty as charged.

North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper's 2020 task force for Racial Equity in Criminal Justice reduced the use of cash bail, expanded "restorative justice" alternatives, and downgraded certain criminal offenses to infractions. Decarlos Brown, Zarutska's alleged killer, had 14 prior charges and was recently released without bond.

After two brutal and senseless killings, Zagano comes out swinging not against the perpetrators but against me and my co-hosts, accusing us of the worst possible motives without engaging any of our arguments in good faith.

If Zagano wants to lower the temperature of political rhetoric, maybe she should look within.

JOSHUA MERCER
Petoskey, Michigan

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Church reform

Tom Fox proposes that Pope Leo XIV has an opportunity to "reform" Catholic teaching on sexuality and on roles of women, including ordination (NCR, Aug. 19, 2025) . He summarizes developments in the decades since the 1968 contraception ban, including disagreement by a majority of lay Catholics, and by respected theologians and ethicists.

Based on the past half century, such a change is unlikely. Paul VI's refusal to accept the recommendation of his commission was largely motivated by the fear that doing so would indicate that the existing papal teaching had been wrong. In science and scholarship, correction of errors is understood as inherent in the pursuit of truth, and does not diminish respect for authority, but that is not the case in official Catholic teaching.

Perhaps what church authorities, including Pope Leo, could do would be to acknowledge the existence of pluralism in Catholicism—certainly on contraception, but also on sexual ethics more generally, including same-sex relations, and yes, even on abortion. That pluralism exists among well-informed practicing Catholics, including ethicists. It presumably exists among church authorities, but if so, they cannot acknowledge it. Honestly recognizing that pluralism would be stating fact, and it might be a step toward the reform advocated by Tom Fox.

PHIL BERRYMAN
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

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Advertisement

Bishop Barron

What is in Bishop Barron's mind in extolling Charlie Kirk and citing him as an "apostle of civil discourse" and as a "lover of Jesus" (NCR, Sept. 18, 2025)?

Obviously, his murder must be decried and all political inspired violence condemned by all people of good will. Deep sympathy should go to his wife and children and a plea for toned down dialogue should be promoted.

But, in my view, he was not an "apostle of civil discourse" as I would define the word.

I could never judge whether or not he was the "lover of Jesus. He said that he was, and I'll take him out his word.

However, the vituperation he issued, the positions that he supported about different marginalized people and in general proposing what was a brand of Christian nationalism would not be the manifestation of being the "lover of Jesus" that I would be attracted to.

It is no surprise, but extremely disappointing, nevertheless to see Bishop Barron ally himself with those who are promoting the apotheosis of Charlie Kirk.

May his life be honored; may his death be mourned; may those who most loved him feel his presence; and may we commend him to God! But do not celebrate his style or his message.

DAVE PASINSKI
Fayetteville, NY

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