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.

The state of confession

The article on the death of confession caught my eye, and after reading it, I could not help but reach out (NCR, Jan. 2, 2026) The premise is fascinating: is a core part

of the Catholic experience about to be gone for good? However, there were a few unaddressed questions that could have been included in the explanatory paragraphs to give context to the interview.

First, what is confession, and why does it exist? A reader who has never or rarely gone to confession could benefit from a review. Second, are there any places where confession is flourishing? I am from St. Paul, Minnesota. There are at least three parishes I have been to in the last couple of years where confession lines are consistently 20-30 people at any time, with two priests at a time. Who knows how many more are out there? Even if numbers are down, which I do not dispute, the lack of context can obscure the reality in the pews.

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Dolan and Hicks

Dr. Millies' remark that Cardinal Dolan was a culture warrior (NCR, Dec. 28, 2026) was on target. He was also a Trump supporter and did not mince words in his praise of Trump nor of his criticism of Biden or Obama. If Dolan had any second guesses about Trump he was reluctant to make those known.

It is easily understood that replacing Dolan with a pastoral moderate like Archbishop Hicks would invite a reaction intended to at least embarrass Pope Leo XIV and Cardinal Cupich if not actually derail the appointment. Dolan was a spokesperson for

the right-wing of our church and his voice as the prelate of the most prominent diocese in the United States carried a great deal of influence in the national media. However, it remains to be seen whether that media will give similar weight to the voice of Archbishop Hicks.

The conservative elements in the domestic church will want a national spokesperson to echo their political views and use the church's influence to magnify their impact. None of the current collection of conservative bishops in the USCCB has the ability to fill Dolan's shoes as the "official" conference's Trump supporter.

Perhaps our church needs to refrain from involving itself inconsistently in political policies. That is particularly true when some bishops choose to criticize by name those presidents who augment the social safety net and implement policies which are reflective of church teachings. Their passive criticism of egregious and harmful policies by their preferred political party without calling out the perpetrators by name only demonstrates their political alignment. That obvious alignment fails to take advantage of the influence which the church otherwise might hold in effecting necessary changes to malignant policies.

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Truth more vital than ever

The editorial "With Venezuela, Trump dares us to confront what we've become" highlights the extent to which American Catholics are at risk of losing their integrity as followers of the Gospel (NCR, Jan. 7, 2026). "I am the way, the truth and the light." Truth is a non-negotiable dimension of evangelization. When the President lies, when his lies are reinforced on social and traditional media, Catholics are subject to political manipulation, which compromises the Church's clear teaching on social justice. The Catholic bishops conference has placed "doctrinal truth" at center stage, defending only a narrow, partisan selection of "truths" — about abortion, the Eucharist, or the civil rights of the Church. But where is their defence of human truth integral to discerning the signs of the times? Or their denunciation of "alternate

truths" and political propaganda? American Catholics are divided, depending on what "truth" they follow. This begs the question captured aptly by Richard Lennan: "What might it mean, for instance, for members of the church to witness to the God of truth and liberation in the world of social media, a world distorted regularly by disinformation and misinformation?" The Church's shepherds have a duty to defend their "flock" against the lies and distortions that fuel positions clearly against the Gospel. They have to move beyond selective moral evaluations of Trump's actions and policies and respond boldly to the proliferation of lies emanating from the White House. The religious freedom of Catholics is not compromised by "woke" intellectuals. It is under mortal threat from Catholics who are awash with the propaganda being consumed across America and justifying the most unacceptable of injustices.

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