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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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#### Democrat insurgency

As a 72 year-old JFK Democrat, I enjoy and have appreciated Michael Sean Winters' political insights over the years. And while I agree mostly with the substance of his

latest article, I fear the Democrat Party has been woefully hijacked by insurgents to such a point no degree of persuasion can or will turn the ship around today (NCR, [Aug. 17, 2026](#)).

A similar thing happened to the Republican Party with the insurgent hijacking of Trump's cultish MAGA movement. No matter his proven faults, failures, lies or broken promises, his millions of cult followers will never abandon him. Call it pathological or what have you, they've become so intoxicated on his Kool Aid that they are unable to discern what is truth anymore.

As the media touts the pendulum slightly swinging back toward the left, the truth is an impotent Congress on both sides of the aisle has been held hostage by an insurgency that constrains its effectiveness. This is as a result of both sides pandering to the insurgencies in order to keep their cushy spots in Washington.

Thus the failures of Congress on both sides have birthed what some today label socialism, especially among the younger generations disappointed with the promises of capitalism as proven by the rise and influence of the most fervent panderers Bernie Sanders and company. I fear any attempt at "balancing progressivism" will only result in capitulation to the screaming crowd setting back once again the goals and policies that were once foundational in the Democrat Party.

With this, I believe it is delusional to hope things get better once the Democrats take over one or both houses in Congress. I don't believe they will. I believe the nation will become further divided, on many fronts. What is lacking in the Democrat Party today is a national leader figure who shines and stands out, who can gain the respect of the electorate and effectively communicate what needs to be done to turn the country around. Someone like a JFK if you will. No one on the list today comes to mind. No one. Therefore, regardless of which party takes control of Congress in the midterms, sadly I believe the nation will continue to be mired in the muck unless and until that special person rises to the fore.

**JR NEWMAN**  
**Bethel, Maine**

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Use of the word 'conservative'

How many of the bishops mentioned in Justin McLellan's story "During summer lull, conservative bishops call for more Latin Mass, less synodality" actively worked to undermine the papal magisterium of Francis (NCR, [Aug. 10, 2026](#))? Trying to undermine the pope is not "conservative."

This is an issue I've been raising for years. Specificity in terminology is important here because we must avoid grouping actually conservative Catholics like Dr. Robert Fastiggi with Catholics who have unrepentantly worked against the pope. More importantly, there are fresh converts, reverts and younger Catholics who may self-identify as conservative because they assent to everything in the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

We're inaccurately telling these authentically conservative Catholics that Burke is their guy, that Gänswein is their guy, and in doing so we're placing leaders before them who are not in fact conservatives. Ergo, we need to begin describing these bishops as "liturgical conservatives" or something along those lines.

**JEFFREY JONES**

**Hamburg, New York**

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## Florida religious liberty

As a Catholic convert, father of seven, nurse, member of the Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee's Diocesan School Advisory Council and an admitted DrPH student at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, I am concerned by Florida Attorney General James Uthmeier's actions on theological, legal and public-health grounds (NCR, [Aug. 4, 2026](#)).

Vatican II's *Dignitatis Humanae* teaches that religious liberty protects believers not only as individuals but also "when they act in community," and that religious communities "rightfully claim freedom in order that they may govern themselves according to their own norms." The First Amendment protects the free exercise of religion, and Florida's Constitution likewise forbids government from prohibiting or penalizing it.

Catholic memory includes Henry VIII's confiscations, Bismarck's *Kulturkampf*, and Plutarco Elías Calles' persecution of the church. Florida is not Tudor England, Prussia, or revolutionary Mexico. But the logic is familiar: conform to the state's preferred account of Catholicism or face material ruin.

Our bishops will be criticized whether they defend migrants subjected to degrading treatment at "Alligator Alcatraz" or maintain a consistent life ethic by opposing abortion and the death penalty. That this pressure comes from the far right, rather than the far left many Catholics long feared, is a sobering surprise.

The state may enforce clearly enacted law. It may not require bishops to kiss Caesar's ring, pinch incense before political idols, or prove to a civil official that their prudential governance is sufficiently Catholic.

**JARAH JACQUAY**  
**Pensacola, Florida**

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