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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.

Synodal seminaries

Reading Rafael Luciani's article calling for seminaries to inculcate the value and practice of synodality rings a bell for me ([NCRonline.org/node/339966](https://www.ncronline.org/node/339966), Sept, 22,

2026). In my 50 years of lay ministry, I have seen a steep decline from our post-Conciliar vision of the role of the laity.

We see it in younger priests coming out of seminaries into thriving parishes only to chill the people's involvement with rigid policies. Conflating holiness with cult and creating a self-referential priesthood lead to a pastor's will being done, no matter what the parish wants or needs. Parish councils, finance councils, staffs become rubber stamps for pastors. The irony of this is that in many cases the parish has encouraged and supported ongoing training for lay ministers, only to have their ideas disregarded by the pastor who knows better. Or yet, some voices are heeded; others ignored.

As Luciani points out, the responsibility lies with seminaries, and, I would add, with bishops. When bishops develop policies restricting the chalice, as mentioned in Karen Park's article, or otherwise create new barriers between clergy and laity, their seminarians learn that they have no need to take parishioners seriously ([NCRonline.org/node/339536](https://www.ncronline.org/node/339536), Sept. 15, 2026). Authoritarianism in the liturgy doesn't end with the final dismissal.

FRANCES ROSSI
Windsor, Colorado

Sheen relics

I am a baby boomer who grew up mesmerized by the presence and rhetoric of Archbishop Fulton Sheen. So much so that I sent him my high school class ring to meltdown to help lepers somewhere in the world! (I would love to know how the mail room reacted to opening that one and reading my devout and bizarre note!)

More appropriately, he helped me in developing some appreciation of the missions so that later I spent five years as a Maryknoll Associate priest in Bolivia and Venezuela and that continues to be a wonderful blessing in my life. So, I am all for his beatification – but not for revering his jawbone ([NCRonline.org/node/340811](https://www.ncronline.org/node/340811), Oct. 2, 2026)!

I know well the history of relics and certainly went through a period of appreciating those from the great collection at Notre Dame and various other shrines, but I think

our theology and anthropology has evolved and that we are — or should be — past that era of dissecting cadavers for various first class relics!

I don't think that does honor to the message of Jesus or respect for human life and the human body which most other teachings of our faith tell us is to be regarded as a temple of the Holy Spirit.

Beatify Sheen, but bury his jawbone!

DAVE PASINSKI
Fayetteville, NY



Abortion attitudes

The dichotomy of pro-life versus pro-choice labels were misapplied deliberately by not only the political class through their chosen media but by the Catholic hierarchy as well. Those who consider abortion to be the wrong choice but defer to the women affected were labelled as pro-abortion and that idea was alluded to in Shannon Evans O'Brian's article ([NCRonline.org/node/339651](https://www.ncronline.org/node/339651), Sept. 18, 2026). Her report illustrates how galvanic labels serve to undermine dialog rather than provide clarity.

Most individuals, when asked to consider the idea of abortion, will struggle to reduce their view to either pro-life or pro-choice. Knowing something is wrong but allowing for nuanced circumstances does provide for an empathetic response such as when a woman's pregnancy can prove fatal if not addressed. When the nuances are

considered the responses are likely to become more fluid as people relate to egregious circumstances.

Abortion has waned as a galvanizing issue likely due to being preempted by news of political scandals and the financial stresses experienced by many households. When people are worried about their own financial survival, social issues take a back seat. The hierarchy did much to keep the confusion aloft during prior elections.

CHARLES LE GUERN
Mount Holly, North Carolina

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Barron and empathy

Bishop Robert Barron's latest diatribe pits empathy against love ([NCRonline.org/node/339636](https://www.ncronline.org/node/339636), Sept. 17, 2026). He reduces empathy to its narrowest meaning, feeling the feelings of others, and if that is true, a desire not to hurt their feelings.

Barron's thesis that empathy has become the supreme value is based on the false assumption that it has replaced objective values such as love and truth. His examples are specious, easily refuted "straw men" — the professor, not wanting to hurt his student's feelings for turning in C work, is not doing the student any favor by giving him an A. I couldn't agree more.

The bishop states that this loss of objective truth and love has morphed into "wokeism," a dead giveaway where he is headed: standards replaced by DEI, etc. By invoking wokeism, Barron has opened the political door of serious issues facing our country. Biblical love spoke out against the oppressors of the poor, the marginalized, the outcasts and the foreigners. The prophets spared no one's feelings.

Given his position today as an advisor to the administration, I hope the bishop will address the fair treatment of the poor, the recovery of medical coverage for the needy affected by reductions in Medicaid, the just treatment of immigrants, and the protection of people's constitutional rights. At stake is the bedrock of Catholic

biblical truth, the dignity of the human person.

So, here's the bishop's choice: speak with biblical love and truth or show empathy and spare the oppressors' feelings?

PATRICK DARCY
Columbia, Missouri

Leo, Augustine and sex

If Pope Leo XIV is urging a "frank reckoning with Catholic teaching on sex and marriage" ([NCRonline.org/node/341221](https://www.ncronline.org/node/341221), Oct. 7, 2026) then he must begin with the teachings of his own spiritual "father," Augustine, and his deficient theology on what it means to be human and sexual. While there is much to honor in the legacy that St. Augustine has left us, there is also much that to this day continues to linger like a shadow over that legacy. It would be good to examine this denigration of our sexual nature that Augustine set in motion and bring healing to a world still suffering the effects.

ALICE MacDONALD
Santa Barbara, California
