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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.

'Hillbilly' not pejorative

I was very disappointed to see the title choice and pejorative comment within "While refuting JD Vance's hillbilly theology, Pope Francis chastises US bishops" by Michael Sean Winters (NCR, [Feb. 13, 2025](#)). I am a Catholic who was born and raised in

Eastern Kentucky where Vance's grandparents lived. Many people don't realize that Catholics even exist within the central Appalachian region. Sadly, we're all too accustomed to being the punchline of jokes. Although I now reside in a large city, I can tell you that Appalachian Catholics have a strong sense of pride in our hillbilly heritage. My people are honest, sincere, members of the Catholic faithful, and many are poor. Please do not blame us for Vance's bad theology. I find it hurtful that one of your writers would use the term "hillbilly" as an insult -- especially considering that Vance isn't truly central Appalachian and has himself co-opted central Appalachian identity for his own selfish ends. Poor, rural people are not the enemy. My people are part of a beautiful regional culture and do not deserve your ridicule.

SARAH SPARKS

Washington, District of Columbia



Bishops' complicity

Michael Sean Winters' column "While refuting JD Vance's hillbilly theology, Pope Francis chastizes US bishops" demonstrates how once again our U.S. Catholic bishops are generally sitting on the sidelines and silent on the major moral issues of our times (NCR, [Feb. 13, 2025](#)). As the Trump Administration disassembles foreign assistance to fight hunger and disease, even causing Catholic Relief Services to halve its staff and programs, and as immigrants who are a significant Catholic population are demonized and persecuted, our Catholic bishops are compliant to the Trump Administration's callousness and cruelty. Moreover, some Catholic leaders

such as Cardinal Timothy Dolan of New York are cheerleaders for Trump, applauding and back-slapping him in public. Even as Pope Francis speaks with courage and devotion to the Gospel, the USCCB and almost all of the U.S. bishops are mute in the face of Trump's atrocities against the homeless, the hungry, the sick, and immigrants. Overwhelmingly our Catholic bishops in the U.S. are a disgrace to the Gospel they are supposed to preach.

MICHAEL GOFF
Baltimore, Maryland

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USAID freeze 'heartbreaking'

I quote Vice President Vance when I say that I am "heartbroken" when I see children die (NCR, [Feb. 5, 2025](#)). In the five years I was in South Sudan, 2011-2016, I experienced the death of many children and adults. I also saw aid workers travel on bicycles to administer lifesaving polio vaccines. Seeing how polio affected adults who had gotten polio was heartrending. USAID and Catholic Relief Services were there to help save the lives of both children and adults from the effects of drought, famine, and lack of education. I just want to ask, do those victims in poor countries "break our hearts" or is it only those in the United States that matter? As my mother used to say, "When it's all said and done, they're all God's children." Why can't our government acknowledge we have a collective responsibility for our brothers and sisters in the Global South?

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