

[Opinion](#)

[Letters to the Editor](#)

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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.

Vance idolizes "family"

At an event with Christian nationalist Lance Wallnau, JD Vance attempted to justify his dangerous misuse of the immigration issue by stating that "there is this Christian idea that you owe the strongest duty to your family, and then you owe the next duty to your community, and then to your country, and then to everybody else" (ncronline.org, [Sept. 30, 2024](#)). I'm not sure where Vance heard this "Christian idea", but it does not reflect Biblical principles. A follower of Jesus owes their strongest duty to God, as noted in the First Commandment and the Gospel passages about which commandment is the greatest. [Luke 14:26](#) should also be illuminating.

While Vance acquaints himself with these Bible passages, other suggested reading for him and Wallnau includes:

- "Thou shalt not bear false witness" (Exodus 20:16)
- "He has shown you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8)
- "Cursed be anyone who deprives an alien, an orphan, or a widow of justice". (Deuteronomy 27:19)

They also need to read Jesus's reply in [Matthew 12:48-50](#) to the question "who are my mother, and who are my brothers". One of the many terrible consequences of Vance's inflammatory rhetoric about the Haitian immigrants in Springfield is that it results in persecution of Vance's brothers and sisters in Christ. Many of the Haitians living in Springfield — legally and at the request of local government and businesses — are fellow Christians.

DAN BENBOW
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Abolishing diaconate unhelpful

Thomas Reese argues that if women cannot be deacons, then we should stop ordaining male deacons ([nronline.org, Aug. 27, 2024](#)). I suggest this is an overreach and is counterproductive. I think most Catholic laypersons would agree that the Church needs more clerics-priests, deacons and catechists. Vocations to the priesthood have decreased and an immediate response to that should be more, not less, deacons and catechists.

Although Pope Francis has expressed his opposition to female deacons, in May 2021, he created the new ministry of catechist which resulted in a change in canon law. Catechists can be either gender. We know the Church moves slowly, choosing to move in small steps rather than large leaps, but change does occur with time. Let us advocate for greater enthusiasm for women catechists which should provide a basis

for the acceptance of women deacons and ultimately female priests.

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Secular government benefits Church

In my understanding of the history of the Bill of Rights, James Madison, who is largely the author of the Constitution itself, was afraid of the influence of religion in government. Seeing how the Anglican Church had an influence on the British government, and the government, particularly the monarch, had a major influence on the practices of the church. Madison wanted complete separation of church and state and Thomas Jefferson reaffirmed that separation with his "[wall of separation" letter](#) in 1802.

When religion and politics intermingle the institution which is compromised is religion. People, particularly in a democracy, bear a certain cynicism toward our government wanting to see results before making judgments. If that attitude extended to religion then the influence of our clergy and religions generally would diminish more than it has already.

Our country is unique in that it is an entirely secular enterprise and religion influences individuals, as is expected. However, religion is not invited to influence the government directly, but only through the exercise of the will of the people. We have serving in all levels of government people of every faith. We interact on a daily basis with a broad spectrum of people from every faith, ethnicity, race, etc. Religious freedom must maintain the same paradigm. All our people are free to practice any religion or none at all but all people in our pluralistic society are a fundamental part of the political fabric of our country.

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