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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.

Oscars 2025 series

I thought it unlikely that NCR would cover "The Substance", so Rebecca Bratten Weiss' review is a pleasant surprise (NCR, [March 1, 2025](#)). Often I find that many of the films that impress me the most each year don't receive much attention and are

overlooked in awards season, so I'm happy to see "The Substance" doing so well. Like "Babygirl" (Reijn, 2024), it is one of those very rare films that I simply had to see twice during its theatrical run. It's a bold work of art.

I'm also grateful for your interview with Gregory Maguire (NCR, [March 1, 2025](#)). NCR published a piece on him years ago that had a very positive impact on me, the kind of impact that I hope this new interview will have on another generation of queer Catholics. Thank you.

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Simplistic parallels

I certainly agree with Michael Sean Winters that we would do well to give up "prophetic contempt" for Lent — and, for that matter, throughout the liturgical year (NCR, [March 5, 2025](#)).

I'm less enamored of his simplistic parallelism: "Liberals read [Cathleen] Kaveny's indictment of 'prophetic contempt' and probably think of the effort to deny Joe Biden [Communion](#). Conservatives think of Episcopal Bishop Mariann Budde's [sermon](#) the day after President Donald Trump's inaugural address."

I don't think I am being tribal as an Episcopal priest in contesting this deviation from Winters' typical cogency. Bishop Budde asked the president to show mercy. The

humility of her words and demeanor contrast with the approach of her peers in the Roman Catholic hierarchy, and are the opposite of contempt.

What a different tone culture warrior bishops such as Salvatore Cordileone and Thomas Paprocki would offer if they spoke with similar humility. But they do not ask or invite, they demand, threaten, and intimidate. That's contempt — and it isn't prophecy.

STEPHEN MARTZ
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Barron's grandstanding

Kudos to John Grosso for his piece, "Word extinguished: Bishop Barron's digital silence" (NCR, [Feb.17, 2025](#)). When I first encountered the bishop's media outreach, I sized up his slick act and grandstanding. When we write for publication we're pushing an agenda. I understand that. Some write in a subtle and more balanced way, but this prelate's strident pitch screams for attention. Though he offers simplistic certainty about many things, I find his work shallow and depressing in its lack of nuance and balance. It's the familiar restoration playbook. He selects topics and voices alarm as a culture warrior but is blind (and keeps quiet) regarding more pressing issues, as the article notes. I fault him for many of his opinions but mainly for avoiding those that don't suit his agenda. As for his theology, Saginaw's late Bishop Untener put his finger on what I think Bishop Barron is missing; he pointed out, "The Pharisees saw life as simple and made religion complex. Jesus saw religion as simple and life as complex."

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