Opinion



by NCR Staff

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In a commentary for NCR, Rebecca Bratten Weiss wrote about Bishop Robert Barron's recent piece that used the term "beige Catholicism" to refer to the faith of liberal or progressive Catholics. Following are letters to the editor responding to that commentary. They have been edited for length and clarity.

The fact that a bishop of the Roman Catholic Church refers to any member of the church who is in good standing with their priest by a derogatory name as Bishop Robert Barron does in referring to those in the church who do not agree with him as

"beige Catholics" is insulting and not appropriate for a bishop. We are the Holy Roman Catholic Church — and by its very name, universal.



I am a cradle Catholic who has been taught that the church is big enough for everyone from Dorothy Day to Pope Benedict XVI. Barron and both the "moderate" and the "radical traditionalist" bishops obviously do not adhere to this belief and that is sad. Unfortunately, it is not unusual in the history of the church.

The Holy Spirit speaks through the church and those who close their ears to his teaching — as those who seek to deny the teachings of the Second Vatican Council have done — hold the church back and blaspheme the Holy Spirit which our Lord himself said was unforgivable (Matthew 12:31).

Increasingly, the Catholic bishops in the United States espouse beliefs that are not of Christ and are becoming disenfranchised from their flock — which is their job.

Thank God for Pope Francis who keeps the universal church heading in the right direction.

May God bless these bishops with wisdom and revelation so that their hearts may be converted to his truth.

PAUL L. JONES

Miami, Florida

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Rebecca Bratten Weiss's defense of liberal Catholics against Bishop Robert Barron's characterization of "beige" — too willing to fit in with today's culture, without coloring their stance with distinctly Catholic hues — rings true. There is nothing blah about a Dorothy Day or a Daniel Berrigan.

But please don't paint centrists synonymous as lukewarm. I picture myself viewing the Rockies from the peak of a Colorado mountain — a full 360-degree view, every river valley connected with every other. It all fits together into one picture.

Taking this image to the church, I want to be able to look at all sides from the pinnacle of the Gospel — from a Tabor or Sinai; and to come down with new zeal for the justice Jesus and the prophets call us to; and a true vision of what God is calling us to in the world.

The climb to that mountaintop isn't easy. It takes every ounce of energy, demands the utmost of the heart and lungs, requires sure-footedness. There are precipices and chasms to avoid. It's not an easy place to stay, either. Winds are strong in those exposed places, and a storm can come up without warning.

The center takes a lot of work. You have to do the research, look at both sides, understand the Gospel, take action. Maybe moderates could take the rap as the accommodators; but please, take a closer look at the center.

FRANCES ROSSI

Denver, Colorado

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I agree with almost everything Rebecca Bratten Weiss says here. I am an artist who happens to also be a Catholic priest, and I want to add an additional insight. Bishop Robert Barron presents himself as a champion of the arts in the church and world, but his understanding of beauty in painting, sculpture, and architectural is very limited, both culturally and chronologically.

All the examples he presents are of pre-Impressionist western painting, and Gothic or Renaissance architecture. Does the Holy Spirit not inspire today's artists? Is the beauty and deep spirituality of the Jewish artist Marc Chagall not worthy of our attention? What about Sagrada Familia church in Barcelona? This is to say nothing of

all the beautiful work, much of it explicitly Christian, to be found in the non-Western world and the global South.

A couple years ago, I was associate pastor at a suburban church. From time to time, a parishioner would remark how beautiful our large traditional crucifix or our large divine mercy painting are. As an artist, I know that these works were of little if any artistic merit.

Meanwhile, virtually no one in the parish understood or appreciated the modern faceted glass windows in this church, which are among the best I have seen anywhere. Unfortunately, most Catholics have been poorly educated about what constitutes good religious art, or art in general. So, I wrote a couple of articles in the parish bulletin about these windows, and they appreciated this.

What these same parishioners did not appreciate however, is when I preached about social justice, or questioned the wisdom of the pro-life movement attaching itself to President Donald Trump.

These topics are not unrelated. A poor understanding of art encourages bad theology, which leads to spiritual blindness.

So, while I appreciate the fact that Barron is trying to recover an appreciation of art in our church, he is unfortunately doing so in a way that reinforces existing prejudices rather than challenging us to live the gospel more faithfully.

(Fr.) MARK GEORGE, SJ

Detroit, Michigan

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Wow! This article is comprehensive in pointing out the different categories of Catholics. At our baptism, we were proclaimed " prince, prophet and king." Where did all of these ideologies come about? We profess one Lord, one faith, one baptism.

Must we identify with being "beige" or any other color? Jesus Christ founded this church. He made clear his wishes that we love the Lord and our neighbor.

We are a very divided church because, in my less than humble opinion, we must categorize people. Our bishops are most responsible for this, including Bishop Robert Barron.

We live in 2021. It is high time we listen, learn to be less judgmental, and learn to love more.

JANE FRANCISCO

Charlotte, North Carolina

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What a great article! Congratulations to Rebecca Bratten Weiss.

Wasn't Jesus a radical? Was the saying about being "lukewarm? from Revelations 3:16 — "If you are neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth" — attributed to him?

I am proud to be called a "radical feminist for the gospel" because of my work for an on behalf of victims of human trafficking.

Can one be "moderate" and live the gospel of Jesus?

(Sr.) M. PATRICIA MULHALL, CSB

Windsor, United Kingdom

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