Opinion
Letters to the Editor

by NCR Staff

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Bishop Robert Barron's criticism of "dumbed-down" Catholicism ignores the reality that a sincere Christian witness is what's really attractive about our faith, said NCR columnist Michael Sean Winters. Following are NCR reader responses to that opinion with letters that have been edited for length and clarity.

While it is true that part of Bishop Barron's dialogue with Colm Flynn can be used by the opposition to boost their own talking points, one cannot fault the moments shared with Flynn at WYD in Lisbon. Barron's articulate enthusiasm for and with young people is so contagious that it is no wonder he is riding a wave of popularity wherever he goes. Many of us were happy that he was selected to play a prominent role in the upcoming Synod in October and expect him to represent ably the "Western Church" and the needs of Catholic young people and the "Nones" in Rome.

As for Barron's well publicized YouTube conversations with Jordan Peterson that seem to strike a nerve in Winters, we must remember the bishop's commitment to accompanying young people in their search for a realistic faith in God. What better way than to engage someone popular with many of them who share a desire to discuss tough questions about God, faith and religion? Where else are they going to ponder these complex issues? Not everyone has had the privilege of Dominican/Benedictine prep schools like Barron, nor the intellectual curiosity to delve into the deep theological tomes that he (and Winters) enjoy; but, listening to Jordan and Barron dialogue thorny theological issues could lead to life changing

conversions. It certainly beats reading "religious comic books!" or being addicted to dark places on social media.

NANCY MCGUNAGLE
Kalispell, Montana



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The letter on Bishop Barron and the dumbing down of Catholicism is a mark on his brand. He needs to care for his flock and I'm sure in Winona, Minnesota, he will find plenty of conservative Catholics. When he whips out Latin and most Catholics today have never heard a Latin Mass, he may as well be speaking ancient Greek. I'm the sacristan for the Latin Mass and most people there only know the pictures, like me too. The priest could say the Ordo and they wouldn't know because you can't hear anyway. That's how true Latin Mass is. I truly give up on the Pope bashers that I've listened to after Latin Mass. After summer I'm resigning my duties.

CINDY
Devils Lake, North Dakota

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Mr. Winter's essay about Bishop Barron's attitude toward those who are not among his fellow elite points out the major change for the good which our church has undergone since the Second Vatican Council. Barron is entitled to his opinion that our church is better reflected by those who read the works of Aquinas and Virgil rather than John O'Malley and John Crossan.

Our emerging synodal church appears to be following Pope Francis' vision of invitation and welcoming and to that end engaged Catholics are as likely to read many works of church history and theology by contemporary authors than we are likely to be receptive to historical works favored by some elitists. Reading the works of contemporary authors can illuminate our church's history and teachings in an approachable manner similarly to the manner in which the ordinary form of the Mass engages the faithful with familiar text.

Barron can pine for the pre-conciliar days and his belief that only a classic education forms enlightened Catholics. However, most Catholics, like our non-Catholic brothers and sisters, will continue to seek out relevancy and relatable teachings to promote our relationship to our church and to each other.

CHARLES A. LEGUERN
Granger, Indiana

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"Barron is not really a culture warrior, but he seems to have gravitated to that camp." This gave me a chuckle with my morning coffee. Let's call him what he is. With his Trumpian-style revisionist Catholic Church history Barron points the finger everywhere other than where it belongs — at the hierarchy where all the power resides, and has for centuries.

Barron et al need to be called out — firmly and often — every time they attempt to play the culture warrior blame game. This is not unlike the GOP not calling out Trump's blatant lies as he attempts to gain through any means what he lost. So too the bishops will lie, cheat and steal the Catholic narrative to make themselves appear blameless as they falsely claim to struggle under the yoke of liberal, secular forces. Barron et al want to be placed on a pedestal and admired for their Herculean efforts against so mighty a foe.

Synodality is the only balm that can begin to heal. It is painfully obvious the clergy need the laity more than the laity need the clergy.

MICHAEL J. MCDERMOTT
North Brookfield, Massachusetts