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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.

Invoke real science, please

In his piece, The Problems with Criticisms of 'Dignitas Infinita', Michael Sean Winters cited the [Cass Review](#) for the UK's National Health Service that recommended counseling, not puberty blockers, for adolescents (ncronline.org, [May 6, 2024](#)).

He continues, "Anyone who invokes 'the science' without reference to the Cass report is not being serious."

Dr. Cass herself is only serious about science that supports her views, and disparages or discards the rest. Her review did not follow [best practices in systematic review methodology](#).

In fact, Dr. Cass has amended that recommendation that counseling alone be provided to adolescents. Her team [clarified](#) in April that age 15 is too late to begin puberty blockers. Instead, "a different approach is needed, with puberty suppressing hormones and gender affirming hormones being available to young people at different ages and developmental stages."

Importantly, the Endocrine Society [states](#): "We stand firm in our support of gender-affirming care. . . the Cass Review does not contain any new research that would contradict the recommendations made in our Clinical Practice Guideline on gender-affirming care... Medical evidence, not politics, should inform treatment decisions."

Dr. Cass invites politics into the conversation though. In the May 13 New York Times, she [accuses](#) the American Academy of Pediatrics, which strongly supports gender-affirming care, of being a "left-leaning organization," of "misleading the public" on the scientific evidence (which the AAP flatly denies), and of letting "political duress" influence their stance on health care for trans people.

ANNE KIEFER

Penn Yan, New York



Bishop Barron more charlatan than apostle

One of your readers calls Bishop Robert Barron "brilliant, with an unsurpassed grasp of Scripture" (ncronline.org, [May 10, 2024](#)). Your star columnist says Barron is "the most effective apologist for the Catholic faith in the U.S. church" (ncronline.org, [May 3, 2024](#)).

Barron has always struck me as a clever charlatan. His legal threats against a prominent independent Catholic magazine and a distinguished theologian at a venerable Catholic university should tell us all we need to know about this vain media personality.

His pose as a holy man with the common touch and a (more or less) covert political message is an old stunt with fake evangelists, though aside from Fr. Coughlin reactionary Catholic clergymen haven't been very good at it. Barron, however, though unlike Donald Trump in many ways, shares a key characteristic: a talent for conning otherwise intelligent and decent people.

If Barron really understood the Gospel, he would know that Christopher Rufo and Leonard Leo are no friends of Christian social justice. If he were a truly effective defender of the faith, he wouldn't be making his pitch at Leo's so-called "National Catholic Prayer Breakfast" or at Lary Arnn's Hillsdale College — an incubator for an emerging fascist movement.

Barron's frivolous threats present an opportunity for a legal response that will expose him. Let's hope that smart lawyers who are committed to defending a free press will come forward to seize it. And meanwhile let's renew our subscriptions to Commonweal to show our support for its editors and its contributors.

HENRY KELLEY
Arlington, Virginia

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JFK, Biden, and the bishops

Mr. Millies makes several points which are, in my view, germane to what we are experiencing today with Catholics in public office, some of whom seem to tout their fealty to the bishops when fundraising is a matter of concern (ncronline.org, [May 7, 2024](#)). The bishops, for their part, would likely treat President Kennedy in the same way they treat President Biden. Expecting fealty and the imposition of their own preferences in place of Constitutional Law. The bishops seem not to want to understand the nuances of a democratic republic seeming more desirous of an autocracy wherein their own views may be imposed rather than accepted through persuasion.

In any case, the tendency of many of our prelates to support, in both overt and covert ways, the candidacy of someone whose moral vacuity is legion and which has led him to become the first presidential candidate who was subjected to two impeachments, multiple indictments and numerous felony charges does not lend credibility to their criticism of President Biden. Like most Catholics, he relies upon his conscience when his personal beliefs seem to not dovetail completely with the wishes of some clerics. I have no doubt President Kennedy would similarly place his fealty to his oath of office before his fealty to his bishop.

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