Bishop Robert Barron, the well-known founder of "Word on Fire Catholic Ministries" and an auxiliary bishop of the archdiocese of Los Angeles (appointed by Pope Francis in 2015), recently gave an interview to Ben Shapiro, editor-in-chief of *The Daily Wire* and an Orthodox Jew. Shapiro summarized the themes of their discussion on Twitter as follows:

> .@BishopBarron joins me to discuss the best response to sex scandals in the Catholic Church, his possible concerns with the rise of Protestantism, and we seek to answer the age-old question: Who gets to go to heaven?
>
> WATCH the full episode this Sunday => https://t.co/qWSK2rHgDC pic.twitter.com/l59Y7CdO2I
>
> — The Daily Wire (@realDailyWire) December 15, 2018

The embedded interview clip begins with Shapiro asking, "What's the Catholic view on who gets into heaven and who doesn't?" followed by an apparent list of reasons why he, an observant Jew and all-around decent guy, should be admitted:

> "I feel like I lead a pretty good life, a very religiously based life in which I try to keep not just the Ten Commandments, but a solid 603 other commandments as well. And I spend an awful lot of my time promulgating what I would consider to be Judeo-Christian virtues, particularly in Western societies. So, what's the Catholic view of me? Am I basically screwed here?"[1]

Note that Shapiro asked for "the Catholic view" of salvation. What he got from Bishop Barron, however, was something radically different:

> "No. The Catholic view—go back to the Second Vatican Council [which] says it very clearly. I mean, Christ is the privileged route to salvation. 'God so loved the world that He gave His only Son so that we may find eternal life' [paraphrase of John 3:16], so that's the privileged route. However, Vatican II clearly teaches that someone outside the explicit Christian faith can be saved. Now, they're saved through the grace of Christ indirectly received, so I mean the grace is coming from Christ, but it might be received according to your conscience. So, if you're following your conscience sincerely, or in your case, you're following the

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> commandments of the law [of Moses] sincerely, yeah, you can be saved."

Thus ends the teaser clip, but in the full interview Bishop Barron goes on (17:27-18:08):

> "Now, that doesn't conduce to a complete relativism. We still would say that the privileged route, and the route that God has offered to humanity, is the route of His Son, but no, you can be saved. Even Vatican II says [that] an atheist of good will can be saved. Because in following his conscience, if he does—John Henry Newman said the conscience is 'the aboriginal Vicar of Christ' [*Letter to the Duke of York*, sect. 5] in the soul. That's a very interesting characterization; that it *is*, in fact, the voice of Christ. If He's the Logos made flesh [cf. John 1:14], right, He's the divine Mind or Reason made flesh, then when I follow my conscience, I'm following Him, whether I know it explicitly or not. So even the atheist, Vatican II teaches, of good will can be saved."

(Not sure how this last part squares, for example, with Hebrews 11:6: "But without faith it is impossible to please God. For he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and is a rewarder to them that seek Him.")

What Would Saint Paul Say?

In the brief span of about a minute and 15 seconds, Bishop Barron managed to mangle the simple truth of salvation nearly beyond recognition. The chairman of the USCCB's Committee on Evangelization and Catechesis said not a word about Original Sin, its consequences for human nature (including spiritual death and separation from God), our resultant need for a Savior, or the necessity of faith and Baptism in order to be saved (cf. Mark 16:16). Instead of exhorting his Jewish hearer with the words of St. Peter – "Do penance, and be baptized…in the Name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of your sins" (Acts 2:38) – Bishop Barron confirmed Shapiro in his error and gave him a false hope of being saved by "following his conscience" and keeping the law of Moses.[2]

What would St. Paul, the former Pharisee of Pharisees, have said in this situation? Let's see:

- "For we account a man to be justified by faith, **without the works of the law.**" (Rom. 3:28)

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- “But knowing that **man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ**, we also believe in Christ Jesus, that we may be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: because **by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified**.” (Gal. 2:16)

- “I cast not away the grace of God. **For if justice be by the law, then Christ died in vain.**” (Gal. 2:21)

- “**For by grace you are saved through faith**: and that not of yourselves, for it is the gift of God. Not of works, that no man may glory.” (Eph. 2:8-9)

- “But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and **strivings about the law**. For **they are unprofitable and vain**.” (Tit. 3:9)

And as for Our Lord being “the privileged route to salvation,” this contradicts the very words of Christ Himself, Who said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No man cometh to the Father, but by Me” (John 14:6). He is not the “privileged” way; He is the *only* way! “Neither is there salvation in any other. For there is no other Name under heaven given to men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

The Conciliar Culprit

From where, then, is Bishop Barron getting his “profane novelties” (1 Tim. 6:20), which contradict both Scripture and Tradition? The Second Vatican Council, he says, without citing a particular document, although I suspect he had in mind the following passage from *Lumen Gentium*, the Council’s “Dogmatic Constitution” on the Church (oddly classified, since it refrained from actually defining any dogma):

> “Finally, those who have not yet received the Gospel are related in various ways to the people of God [cf. *Summa Theologiae* III, q. 8, art. 3, ad. 1]. In the first place we must recall the people to whom the testament and the promises were given and from whom Christ was born according to the flesh [cf. Rom. 9:4-5]. On account of their fathers this people remains most dear to God, for God does not repent of the gifts He makes nor of the calls He issues [cf. Rom. 11:28-29]. But the plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator. In the first place amongst these there are the Muslims, who, professing to hold the faith

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> of Abraham, along with us adore the one and merciful God, Who on the last day will judge mankind.[3] Nor is God far distant from those who in shadows and images seek the unknown God, for it is He who gives to all men life and breath and all things [cf. Acts 17:25-28], and as Savior wills that all men be saved [cf. 1 Tim. 2:4]. Those also can attain to salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the Gospel of Christ or His Church, yet sincerely seek God and moved by grace strive by their deeds to do His will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience [cf. Denz. 3869-3872]. Nor does Divine Providence deny the helps necessary for salvation to those who, without blame on their part, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God and with His grace strive to live a good life. Whatever good or truth is found amongst them is looked upon by the Church as a preparation for the Gospel." (*Lumen Gentium*, art. 16)

Wrenching Aquinas Out of Context

This passage, like Bishop Barron's explanation, is a deceptive mixture of truth and error. For starters, notice how St. Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae* is cited as proof that "those who have not yet received the Gospel are related in various ways to the people of God." The implication, of course, is that being "related" in some way "to the people of God" secures one's salvation, but is that really what the Angelic Doctor taught? Here is the cited text of the *Summa*:

> "Those who are unbaptized, though not actually in the Church, are in the Church potentially. And this potentiality is rooted in two things—first and principally, in the power of Christ, which is sufficient for the salvation of the whole human race; secondly, in free will." (*Summa* III, q. 8, art. 3, ad. 1)

Just prior to this statement, in the main body of his answer to the question, "Is [Christ] the Head of all men?" Aquinas lists the five ways by which souls are united to Christ the Head: **1)** "by glory" (those in Heaven); **2)** "by charity" (those baptized and in a state of grace); **3)** "by faith" (those baptized yet in mortal sin); **4)** by "potentiality, which is not yet reduced to act [i.e. not yet baptized], yet will be reduced to act according to Divine predestination"; and **5)** by "potentiality, which will never be reduced to act [i.e. those who die without Baptism or the desire thereof]…"

"Potentiality," Aquinas observed, "is rooted in…the power of Christ," but also "in free will." And while it is true that God desires "all men to be saved" (1 Tim. 2:4), it is equally true that

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not all men choose to cooperate and actually are saved – in particular, those who reject the "one Mediator of God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, Who gave Himself a redemption for all" (1 Tim. 2:5).

Ironically, Barron states later on during the interview, "Aquinas says that faith is the door of the spiritual life. Without faith, you can't get into the spiritual life—that means a trust in the divine love." Does he not see the contradiction on his part? In other words, if faith in Christ is absolutely necessary – and it certainly is (cf. John 3:18) – then why is he unwilling to point out that fact to Shapiro? And yet Barron refers to himself during the interview as an "evangelist"!

Does Invincible Ignorance Save?

Going back to *Lumen Gentium*, we also see that Denzinger's *Enchiridion* is cited to justify the statement, "Those also can attain to salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the Gospel of Christ or His Church, yet sincerely seek God and moved by grace strive by their deeds to do His will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience." The passages in question (nn. 3869-3872 in post-1963 editions of Denzinger, typically identified as "D.S.") provide the text of a letter of the Holy Office (Aug. 8, 1949) addressed to then-Archbishop Richard J. Cushing of Boston concerning the dogma *extra Ecclesiam nulla salus* ("outside the Church there is no salvation"). Here are the first two numbered passages:

> "**3869** In His infinite mercy God wills that the effects, necessary for one to be saved, of those helps to salvation that are directed toward man's final end, not by intrinsic necessity, but only by divine institution [i.e. the sacraments], can also be obtained in certain circumstances when those helps are employed only through desire and longing. This we see clearly stated in the sacred Council of Trent, both in reference to the sacrament of regeneration and in reference to the sacrament of penance [cf. D.S. 1524, 1543].
>
> **3870** The same in its own degree must be asserted of the Church, insofar as she is the general help to salvation. Since, in order that one may obtain eternal salvation, it is not always required that one be incorporated into the Church actually as a member [through Baptism], but it is necessary that at least one be united to her by desire and longing.
>
> However, this desire need not always be explicit, as it is in catechumens [i.e. those preparing for Baptism]; but when a person suffers from invincible ignorance, God accepts also an implicit desire, so called because it is included in

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> that good disposition of soul whereby a person wishes his will to be conformed to the will of God."[4]

Perhaps at face value, this seems to corroborate Barron's claim about souls being "saved through the grace of Christ indirectly received," but within the letter's larger context, such is not the case. For example, in an earlier section of the letter (the reference to which was conveniently omitted from *Lumen Gentium*) we read:

> "**3867** Now, in the first place, the Church teaches that in this matter [of *extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*] there is no question of a most strict command of Jesus Christ. For He explicitly enjoined on His Apostles to teach all nations to observe everything that He Himself had commanded. Now, among the commandments of Christ, that one holds not the least place by which we are told to be incorporated by baptism into the Mystical Body of Christ, which is the Church, and to remain united to Christ and to His Vicar, through whom He Himself in a visible manner governs the Church on earth. Therefore, no one will be saved who, knowing the Church to have been divinely established by Christ, nevertheless refuses to submit to the Church or withholds obedience from the Roman Pontiff, the Vicar of Christ on earth.
>
> **3868** Not only did the Savior command that all nations should enter the Church [repeat: *all nations* – this includes Israel], but He also decreed the Church to be the means of salvation, without which no one can enter the kingdom of heavenly glory."[5]

Moreover, the final cited passage clarifies:

> "**3872** Nor must it be thought that any kind of desire of entering the Church suffices for one to be saved. *It is necessary that the desire by which one is related to the Church be animated by perfect charity* [i.e. selfless love of God and neighbor]. *The implicit desire can produce no effect unless a person has supernatural faith*."[6] (Emphasis added)

Considering that Shapiro prefaced his initial question about salvation with the statement, "I don't really care about this question particularly much," he certainly does not appear to meet the criteria.

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The Rest of the Interview

After watching the teaser clip on Twitter (the primary focus of our investigation up to this point), I decided it would only be fair to watch the entire interview and see if Bishop Barron perhaps redeemed his erroneous statements on salvation. Sadly, he did not. In fact, throughout the remainder of the interview he compounded the problem by spouting further errors on various subjects, for example:

- When asked if he thinks the Church has ever failed in her role as "the general help to salvation" (D.S. 3870), Barron referred to the Latin dictum *Ecclesia semper reformanda est* ("the Church is always in need of reform") and said that "when Luther picked that up *as a great reformer*, that's a Catholic principle" (29:08-29:32).

  Perhaps Bishop Barron should (re)read Pope Leo X's condemnation of Luther's errors (*Exsurge Domine*), and of Luther himself (*Decet Romanum Pontificem*), and reconsider his gross mischaracterization of the arch-heresiarch.

- When Shapiro asked, "How does Catholicism make room for other religions…?" followed by, "Is the rise of Protestantism seen by Catholicism as a bad thing…?" Barron responded: "To the degree that modernity, as we know it politically, emerged out of Protestantism—which I think it did in many ways, many important ways—the Church has found an awful lot of good within modernity and doesn't advocate now, certainly, this sort of 'altar-throne' relationship sort of thing. We don't advocate, you know, taking over the government and the Church running political affairs. There's a legitimate independence, a legitimate integrity to the political reality, so the Church wouldn't want that by any means. To that degree, I think it embraces very much the modern sense of pluralism and a certain separation between the Church's preoccupation and that of politics…" (31:08-32:10).

  Clearly, Barron subscribes to the same view as Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, who wrote in the 1980's that Vatican II's *Gaudium et Spes* (Constitution on the Church in the Modern World) "serves as a countersyllabus [opposing Pius IX's Syllabus of Errors] and, as such, represents, on the part of the Church, an attempt at an official reconciliation with the new era inaugurated in 1789."[7] Where, exactly, does the Social Kingship of Christ fit into this "modern"(ist) paradigm?

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- When asked to compare/contrast Popes John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and Francis, Barron characterized the latter as "a prophetic-type voice, so he's critical. He does what the prophets often do. He criticizes what he takes to be all these excesses within the capitalist system. He's not so much a constructive thinker there, like what's he proposing as the way forward. He's in, you know, this sort of 'Jeremiah mode', I think, of putting his finger on excesses" (34:20-35:11).

No commentary necessary (and no, this is not satire).

The Last Straw – Old Covenant "Has Permanent Validity"

And finally, during the last 10 minutes or so of the interview, the discussion came full circle. Shapiro asked, "What do you think are the significant philosophical differences…between Judaism and Catholicism?" Instead of answering directly, Barron focused his reply on his conviction that "it's the 're-Judaizing' of Catholicism that is evangelically so important. Precisely when you divorce Catholicism from Judaism, you get these distortions of Jesus so common today: Jesus as 'teacher of timeless spiritual truth,' Jesus as guru, Jesus as Gnostic, you know, 'master.'"

Barron went on to emphasize that "Jesus is, as Paul said, the 'Yes' to all the promises made to Israel," paraphrasing 2 Corinthians 1:20. Indeed He is, but instead of using this truth as a springboard for calling Shapiro to conversion, Barron said:

> "I want to 're-Judaize' Catholicism. Because, you see, the thing is, in many parts of the Protestant movement, there's a desire to 'de-Judaize' the operation, right, that we've overcome that and we kind of left that behind. Catholicism lifts it up. It doesn't want to leave it [Judaism] behind. *That's why the permanence of the covenant made to Israel is so important to us. This covenant's not been violated. God can't say no to the great covenant He made. It has permanent validity.*" (49:00-49:28, emphasis added)

Shapiro wasted no time capitalizing on a golden opportunity. He immediately brought up what he calls "replacement theology" – "the idea that the Jews had sort of been left behind and that the New Covenant had been made" – and asked Barron, "What does the Catholic Church think of the idea that the Jews have sort of been superseded in history?" Barron replied, "Yeah, no, we're against supersecessionism."

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I was not surprised to hear him utter those words – again, based on Vatican II[8] – but they are nonetheless offensive to pious ears, not to mention contrary to the Word of God (Old and New Testament, alike):

- "Behold the days shall come, saith the Lord, and I will make **a new covenant** with the house of Israel, and with the house of Juda: **Not according to the covenant which I made with their fathers**, in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt: **the covenant which they made void**, and I had dominion over them, saith the Lord. But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel, after those days, saith the Lord: I will give My law in their bowels, and I will write it in their heart: and I will be their God, and they shall be My people." (Jer. 31:31-33; cf. Heb. 8:6-12)

- "Not that we are sufficient to think anything of ourselves, as of ourselves: but our sufficiency is from God. Who also hath made us fit ministers of **the new testament, not in the letter, but in the spirit. For the letter killeth, but the spirit quickeneth.** Now if **the ministration of death**, engraven with letters upon stones, was glorious; so that the children of Israel could not steadfastly behold the face of Moses, for the glory of his countenance, **which is made void**: How shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather in glory?" (2 Cor. 3:5-8)

- "Now in saying a new [covenant] [cf. Jer. 31], **He hath made the former old.**[9] And that which decayeth and groweth old, is near its end." (Heb. 8:13)

- "And therefore He [Jesus] is the Mediator of **the new testament**: that by means of His death **for the redemption of those transgressions which were under the former testament**, they that are called may receive the promise of eternal inheritance." (Heb. 9:15)

Conclusion – Barron Failed to Evangelize

While much more could be said about this embarrassing episode, the bottom line is this: Bishop Robert Barron, a successor of the Apostles who is internationally known for his evangelization efforts, *failed to evangelize Ben Shapiro*. He had a prime opportunity to reach a notable "lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 10:6), but instead he spent much of the discussion focusing on the "deep congruence" of Judaism and Christianity.

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In the last segment of the interview (50:48-55:16), Shapiro even raised the question of what is lacking in Judaism (according to Christians) that only Jesus could fulfill, making reference to sin and the need for atonement ("very often I hear that man is a sinful creature and that we need Jesus in order to take on our sins"). How difficult would it have been for Bishop Barron to say, for example:

You're exactly right, Ben. Because of the Fall of Adam and Eve, man is a sinful creature and in absolute need of a Savior, One Who is capable of repaying the infinite debt of love and reparation for sin that we owe to God. Yet who but God Himself could repay this debt? That is why we need Jesus, because He is Emmanuel ("God with us"), the promised Son born of a Virgin (cf. Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:20-23) and the prophesied Suffering Servant Who "was wounded for our iniquities, He was bruised for our sins: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and by His bruises we are healed" (Isa. 53:5).

If Ben Shapiro ends up losing his soul (God forbid), Bishop Barron will no doubt be called to a strict account by Our Lord for failing to speak "the truth in charity" (Eph. 4:15) when he had the chance.

UPDATE: As a friend reminded me after reading my article, Bishop Barron is a devotee of the infamous Hans Urs von Balthasar (1908-1988), the Swiss Jesuit and advocate of the *Nouvelle Théologie* ("New Theology"), which was rightly identified as a return to Modernism by the renowned Fr. Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P. in the mid-1940's and censured by Pope Pius XII (e.g. Encyclical *Humani Generis*).

Balthasar published a work shortly before his death entitled *Dare We Hope "That All Men Be Saved"?* in which he claimed it is legitimate to believe that hell is empty of human souls and shall never be occupied by them (tell that to the three shepherd children of Fatima, who were shown otherwise by Our Lady herself on July 13, 1917). In 2014, Ignatius Press published their second English edition of Balthasar's book with a foreword by none other than Fr. Robert Barron. Therein, Barron claims it "is so much nonsense" to say that belief in so-called "universal salvation" is detrimental to the Church's missionary zeal. His own lack of zeal to evangelize Ben Shapiro, however, suggests otherwise.

Notes

[1] The short answer, of course, is *yes*, unless he converts: "If anyone says that, without divine grace through Jesus Christ, man can be justified before God by his own works, whether they be done by his own natural powers or through the teaching of the law: let him be anathema." – Council of Trent (1545-1563), Canons on Justification, Can. 1 (Denz. 811; D.S. 1551).

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[2] Here is what the Church actually teaches about keeping the Mosaic law in light of the New Covenant: "[The Holy Roman Church] firmly believes, professes, and teaches that the legal prescriptions of the Old Testament or the Mosaic law, which are divided into ceremonies, holy sacrifices, and sacraments, because they were instituted to signify something in the future, although they were adequate for the divine cult of that age, once our Lord Jesus Christ Who was signified by them had come, came to an end and the sacraments of the New Testament had their beginning. **Whoever, even after the Passion, places his hope in the legal prescriptions and submits himself to them as necessary for salvation, as if faith in Christ without them could not save, sins mortally.** She does not deny that from Christ's Passion until the promulgation of the Gospel they could have been retained, provided they were in no way believed to be necessary for salvation. But she asserts that **after the promulgation of the Gospel they cannot be observed without the loss of eternal salvation.**" – Council of Florence (1431-1445), Bull *Cantate Domino* (Decree for the Jacobites, emphasis added) (Denz. 712; D.S. 1348)

[3] For a detailed refutation of the false claim that Muslims worship the one true God, see the booklet *Fatima, Islam, and Our Lady's Coming Triumph* by this author.

[4] Heinrich Denzinger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, 43rd Latin-English edition (ed. Peter Hünermann) (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012), p. 796. At the risk of stating the obvious, the "good disposition" mentioned in Denz. 3870 clearly excludes atheists, who by definition are not "of good will" because they deny the existence of God so evident in creation, which St. Paul says is "inexcusable" (Rom. 1:20).

[5] *Ibid*.

[6] *Ibid*., p. 797.

[7] Joseph Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), p. 381.

[8] Nearly half of the Conciliar Declaration *Nostra Aetate* (On the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions) is devoted to eulogizing "the bond that spiritually ties the people of the New Covenant to Abraham's stock" (NA, art. 4) and emphasizing, "Although the Church is the new people of God, the Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God, as if this followed from the Holy Scriptures" (*ibid*.). This document no doubt led John Paul II to make his infamous reference to "the people of God of the Old Covenant, never denounced by God" (in Italian, *"il popolo di Dio dell'Antica Alleanza, da Dio mai denunziata"*) (Nov. 17, 1980 in Mainz, Germany). And Pope Francis repeated the same in *Evangelii Gaudium* (n. 247): "We hold the Jewish people in special regard because their covenant with God has

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never been revoked, for ‘the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable’ (Rom. 11:29).”

[9] The Greek word used is παλαιούμενον (*palaioúmenon*), from the root παλαιόω (*palaióō*), which means “to make (passively, become) worn out, or declare obsolete” (Strong’s Definitions).

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