

Who or What Does Bishop Barron's "X" Message Serve?

Robert Barron, the Catholic Bishop of Winona-Rochester, MN, recently wrote¹, not a Pastoral Letter for the sake of the salvation of souls in his Diocese, but rather a diversionary opinion piece of cleverly disguised moral half-truths to the whole world on "X." This of itself gives what he says exactly the same weight as everything else on "X," namely, its truth and validity depend on purely secular processes of evaluation. The authority of his episcopal office is null and void on "X."

The first thing that should be noticed is that to prove his case Robert Barron completely bypasses the objective teaching of Jesus in the Gospels and goes immediately to the Catechism. One would think that a Bishop's or Christian's best option for determining how he or she should relate to killing and maiming thousands of innocent civilians would be the very words of

the Person he or she says is God. If the author does not do this, rationality and sanity would instantly inquire why he by-passed the words and teachings of who he says is God Incarnate and go non-stop to a document written two thousand years later by ordinary people like ourselves to figure out how to morally respond as a Baptized disciple of Jesus to the mass homicide of innocent children, women and men in Iran or anywhere else. This decision to go to the Catechism instead of the Gospels to find an answer of itself does not pass the smell test that is part of the ordinary evaluation process of everything on "X." Certainly, if Jesus by His words and deeds had communicated that His disciples could morally kill people, innocent or not innocent, in war or at any other time, Robert Barron would have gone non-stop to the Gospels for ratification that what he was saying was authentic Christian truth. The "X" readers rational assumption must here be that there was nothing in the teaching of Jesus that could be employed to even suggest that His Apostles, the

first Bishops, should keep their mouths shut if those they Baptized were participating or planning to participate in what the Apostles discerned to be an unjustified war.

So instead of the Self-Revelation of God and His will in the Gospels, the author makes a myopic dash not to the entire Catechism, but to one section only, #2309. #2309 is probably the most poorly composed piece of writing in the entire Catechism. It is a work of planned conceptual ambiguity without any concrete empirically verifiable content capable of definitively saying that any war is unjust or just, and then throws the door wide open to the warring state to decide if it meets these murky and amorphous just war standards!

Robert Barron in his "X" posting tries to mask the intrinsic moral contentlessness of what is presented in 2309 by calling it a "heuristic device." A heuristic device is a mental shortcut, "rule of thumb," or practical method used to solve problems or make

decisions quickly and efficiently. It prioritizes speed over accuracy, offering a "good enough" solution when finding an optimal answer is too time-consuming or impossible.

As said, Barron does not build his case for a Bishop or Bishops not judging a war to be unjust on the basis of the Gospels or the entire Catechism. He revolves his entire argument around section #2309, leaving out for example sections #2242 #2256 and #1903. These three sections of the Catechism state with maximal clarity that a Catholic citizen, *“is obliged in conscience NOT to follow the directives of civil government when they are contrary to the demands of the moral order, to the fundamental rights of persons or to the teaching of the Gospel. Refusing obedience to civil authorities, when their demands are contrary to those of an upright conscience finds its justification in the distinction between serving God and serving the political community. ‘Render to Caesar the things that are Caesars and to God the things*

that are God's. 'We must obey God rather than men.'

A state must and will decide if an action taking place within the state or by the state is just and legal by some interpretation of some human philosophical jurisprudential standard. The state cannot determine if an action by it or within its domain is good or evil. The supreme law of the state is that it continues to exist on this earth as long as it can. The ethics of the state are the ethics of survival. The means that the state employs are means thought to insure its earthly survival, and are not the means to eternal salvation as articulated by Jesus in the Gospels. The state is not and cannot ever be the supreme arbiter of what is good and what is evil.

The Church, however, that says its "*supreme law is the salvation of souls,*" cannot and may not leave the determination of good and evil to the state, which has neither the competence nor authority to discern good from

evil and has no interest in the eternal salvation of John's soul or Mary's. State propaganda across the millennia has universally attempted, with great success, to obfuscate the difference between legal and good and illegal and evil. Rulers being perceived as a god, the Divine Right of Kings, theocracies of all shapes and forms are all efforts to imbue mere human constructs called state laws as extensions of God's will and way.

The Jews in the Old Testament revolted against the idea that Rome or other states, which had subjugated them, had any authority to make laws governing them that contradicted what God commanded they live by in the Old Testament. In the New Testament from the earliest moments of Christianity, Acts 5:29, the Apostles and the Church are proclaiming, "*We must obey God rather than men,*" when a conflict between state law and Jesus's teaching arose. God, His Will and His Way for

the Apostles and early Church was Jesus and what Jesus said because He was God Incarnate.

Consider this passage also from Acts 17:6-8:

"They dragged Jason and some other believers before the city officials, shouting: "These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here, and Jason has welcomed them into his house. They are all defying Caesar's decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus." When they heard this, the crowd and the city officials were thrown into turmoil."

Do these passages from original Christianity sound like the Apostles (first Bishops) and Christians were simply sitting by passively and obeying any and all state decisions about what was a just governmental law and accepting it as moral according to Jesus' teachings? Do these passages record the leaders of the Church being silent and not teaching their flock that this law

that the state says is just is evil by the Divine truth revealed to us by our Resurrected Lord and Savior Jesus? Do these passages sound like they are compatible with the kind of episcopal leadership Robert Barron is trying to foist on the Catholic Church in 2026. Or, do they not echo the type of teaching prevalent in the German Church between 1933 and 1945.—the kind of teaching that got Franz Jagerstatter decapitated in Brandenburg Prison on August 9, 1943 because he saw what Hitler was doing was evil and refused to participate in it, even though he was told by his Catholic Bishop that such moral matters as whether this war is just or not was an issue beyond his competency. (I ask parenthetically, but with maximal moral seriousness, what exactly is the determinative moral difference for the Catholic who is a follower of Jesus between what Hitler and Goering did and their justification of it and what Netanyahu and Trump have done and are doing in Gaza and Iran, and their justification of it?)

Robert Barron is not a Nazi. But the moral quietus that Robert Barron proposes today for the U.S. Catholic Bishops is fully in line with the general Catholic thought that was spread throughout the German Catholic Church during Hitler's tenure in office and with which most of the German Bishops fell in line. It is a form of sown confusion that subtly make the state in the average Catholics eye the final determiner of good and evil, that is, it imbues the state with a power that only God possess, thereby making it literally an idol and its Catholic citizens into obedient idol devotees and acolytes.

Exclusively leaving the morality of a war to the state, because, say, we do not know enough to make such a judgement, was the refrain of most Catholics and Christians, regardless of their rank in the Church in Germany between 1933 and 1945. See, Dr. Gordon Zahn's seminal and superb scholarly history on this subject, *German Catholics and Hitler's War*.

In Jesus' final words to His Apostles (Mt 28:20), He presents His Great Commission to the Church through the Apostles and commands them to "*teach them to obey all that I have commanded you.*" Are the legitimate successors of the Apostles in the Twenty-First Century out of place, are they acting beyond their scope of ecclesial Christian authority when they tell those entrusted to their spiritual care, that while the state has made abortion legal and considers it a just and justifiable law, it is grave evil and therefore they should not, must not, participate in it, because it is the morally unjustified killing of an innocent human being? How does the destruction of the innocent child in the womb differ from the destruction of the innocent child in war? If a Bishop can and must teach His flock not to participate in the legal and just activity by state standards for called abortion, why should a Bishop as the ultimate spiritual leader of his flock, except for the Pope, not be equally "compelled by the love of Christ" to speak out and teach his people not to

participate in a war that the state says is legal and just, but which is not morally compatible with the teaching of Jesus in the Gospels or with the teaching of the Church regarding war?

Bishop Robert Barron is dead wrong in his “X” message. Its muddying of the moral waters of Catholic consciousness and conscience serves neither Jesus and His teaching nor the *Supreme Law of the Church*. So who does it serve?

-Emmanuel Charles McCarthy

Appendix

1. Bishop Robert Barron’s complete “X” statement:

“There is a way past the absurd and deeply divisive ‘war’ between the President and the Pope, which has been enthusiastically ginned up by the press. And it is indicated in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph 2309 to be precise. After laying out the various criteria for determining a just war—proportionality, last resort, declaration by a competent authority, reasonable hope of success, etc.—the Catechism points out that ‘the evaluation of these conditions for moral legitimacy belongs to the prudential judgment of those who have responsibility for the common good’. The assumption is that the just war principles function, to use the technical term, as heuristic devices, designed to guide the practical

decision-making of those civil authorities who have to adjudicate matters of war and peace. The role of the Church, therefore, is to call for peace and to urge that any conflict be strictly circumscribed by the moral constraints of the just war criteria. But it is not the role of the Church to evaluate whether a particular war is just or unjust. That appraisal belongs to the civil authorities, who, one presumes, have requisite knowledge of conditions on the ground. The posing of those questions—indeed the insistence upon their moral relevance—belongs rightly to the Church, but the answering of them belongs to the civil authorities.”