



# *How to Share Your Faith*

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Over the past several years, I have taught what it means to share the gospel, the “good news” of Jesus Christ. Proclaiming the good news has to do with announcing the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, declaring that Jesus is divine, celebrating the deep humanism of Christianity, and finally, insisting on the indispensability of the Church as the Mystical Body of the Lord.

Jesus told his disciples to proclaim the Gospel to all nations. This call went out, not simply to the leaders of the church then and now, but to all of us, to all the baptized, to every one of the people of God. Whether it’s at your office, gym, social circle, or even within your own home, I’m certain God has given you opportunities to share your faith with someone in need. The key is learning how to evangelize effectively in our increasingly secular culture.

To address this need, I have recently devoted a whole episode of my podcast, “The Word on Fire Show,” to helping people adopt what I consider to be the seven qualities of an effective evangelist.

Below you’ll find an edited transcript of the show so you can read it slowly, at your own pace, and reflect on how you can share the good news of our Lord with the people nearest and dearest to you.

Peace,

+ Robert Barron



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WORD  
*on* FIRE

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**QUESTION:** Today we are going to talk about the seven qualities of a new evangelist. Let's start with the first one. The first one is that somebody who carries out the new evangelization needs to be in love with Jesus Christ.

**BISHOP BARRON:** Yes, it's important to note that evangelization is much more than the sharing of information. Though you could never accuse me of being down on the church's intellectual life, an evangelist's first and foremost quality is about friendship. An evangelist offers friendship with the son of God. If you don't have that friendship you can't share it. You might have all kinds of information. You might be theologically astute but what you're trying to share finally is not information but a relationship. "Here's someone I'd like you to meet. Here's someone I know, in fact, this friendship is the most important relationship in my life and I want you to share in it too."

I'd like you to meet the Lord Jesus. *Nemo dat quod non habet* is the adage that means, "No

one gives what he doesn't have." If you, yourself, don't have a friendship with the Lord, you can't possibly share it with anybody else. Theology contributes to that, liturgy, prayer, et cetera, but it all contributes ultimately to a friendship. To evangelize is to share that friendship. Using all the means available, indeed, but finally it comes down to a relationship. If you don't have it, you can't give it: that's why it's the most important quality I think.

**QUESTION:** This might be a basic but very fundamental question; how does one cultivate a friendship with Jesus Christ?

**BISHOP BARRON:** It happens through the Church. Now, the Lord can reach out and establish friendship anyway he wants but I think from a catholic perspective the normal means is the church. It happens through the liturgy, through the mass, through the sacraments. It happens through prayer; it happens through the witness of other Christians. It happens through moral



instruction. It happens through correction. All the ways that you'd develop a friendship with your parents, with family members, with kids at school, think along those lines. How do you come to know somebody?

The Church today has come to know Jesus through all of these means given to us by the church over the centuries. The church is the mystical body of Jesus and we come to know someone by their body, just as right now you don't know me apart from my body. You know me because of my presence, the sound of my voice which conveys my deepest convictions and so on. We don't know Christ apart from his Church. All these different means provided by the mystical body, that's how we come to know Jesus.

**QUESTION:** So, the first key to sharing Christ effectively is to know him, to be a friend of Jesus. The second quality that you highlight is that the new evangelist must be a person of ardor. What do you mean by that?

**BISHOP BARRON:** Aristotle, the Greek philosopher, said that people only listen to an excited speaker. It's one of the really important lines for anybody involved in communication. What makes us sit up and listen? If the person is excited about what he's sharing it doesn't mean he's histrionic and necessarily waving his arms around and all that but you can sense not only this person believes what he's saying, he's excited about it. He wants me to know because he thinks I'll benefit from it as well.

I always go back to the advertising culture and when someone's advertising something as trite as a new exercise machine. He's so filled with enthusiasm that you say to yourself, "yeah, I'll get that machine too!" Isn't it weird in some ways that we can get more excited about a silly exercise machine than we can about the Lord Jesus Christ and eternal life. If you're putting yourself to sleep at the pulpit, you're not evangelizing very well. If you speak of Christ in a desultory way, like you can barely stir up any energy, that's not going to excite anybody else. You need ardor, fire, energy, and enthusiasm. And you need to let people see

that. If they don't see it, you probably won't evangelize effectively.

**QUESTION:** How about the fine line between being filled with ardor and being overzealous. I know a lot of Catholics are worried about that. I don't want to offend somebody. I don't want to come on too hard. Where do you draw that line?

**BISHOP BARRON:** There is a line. You're right. It's a matter of prudential judgment but I would say based on my own life experience, I think we so overdid the, "How about you decide. Who am I to tell you what to do? I'm not going to wear my faith on my sleeve," and all that. I think a little enthusiasm, and even being a bit over the top is not a bad thing. I like Catholics to show their fervor and ardor a bit more clearly and publicly and not to be ashamed of it. I think we can learn a lot from the evangelical protestants who aren't afraid to show their enthusiasm for the Lord. Yeah, there's a line. You can overdo it. But at this point, I would say just go for it, because I think we spent so many years underplaying it. I'd say let the fire show.

**QUESTION:** The first quality of a new evangelist is they have to be in love with Jesus Christ. The second one here is that they need to be a person of ardor. The third quality is that they have to know the great story or as you have called it before, the story of Israel. Tell us about that story.

**BISHOP BARRON:** It's so important. True evangelization means announcing Jesus as the climax to the great story. If you don't know the story, He will devolve in very short order into a religious teacher, a wise moral exemplar, that's fine as far as it goes. There's some truth to it but you won't get the passion, the whole truth. See, the passion or the ardor comes from knowing this great story of Israel has come to its climax. What's the story of Israel? Well, look to the Bible. It begins with creation, God made a good and beautiful world. Then with the fall of man sin enters the world. Sin has compromised our humanity. It's in many ways compromised the world. Just watch The Eleven O'Clock News and you'll see what I'm talking about.

Sin compromises the beauty and integrity of what God has created. Knowing those two things is indispensable. If you get one or the other wrong, the whole story goes off the rails. Then, what's God's response? His response is the formation of a people, Israel. A people formed after his own mind and heart who think as he thinks, will as he wills, who know how to worship him, to be properly aligned to him. What was the point of Israel? The point was to form a people that's so compelling in its thinking, its willing, its worship that they would draw the rest of the world. Israel will thereby become the magnet by which the whole world is drawn back to God.

Now, read the story of Israel in the Bible. What do you hear? You hear all of that. You hear the purpose, the reason for Israel but you also see that Israel falls short. Time and again, the prophets have to call Israel back. They're given the law but they don't follow the law. They're taught how to worship God but they worshiped false gods, et cetera. Israel falls short again and again. Its great prophets and seers and patriarchs began to dream of a mashiach, an anointed figure, a messiah, a

new David who would be Israel at its best, who would be faithful Yahweh meeting faithful Israel. The climax of the story is – and you hear it in every page of the new testament – the climax is He came. It happened.

It happened, the longed for messiah has come. He's taught Israel because he's aligned to Yahweh. He's worship aright. He cleanses the temple. He deals with the enemies of Israel. How? By his suffering on the cross. Faithful Yahweh and faithful Israel have in fact met and now in the resurrection of this messiah, of Jesus from the dead, we see the great victory. We see the reconciliation of divinity and humanity. In the resurrection they saw the story has reached its climax and now watch someone like Paul, a faithful Israelite who knew the story, knew the expectation, when he met the risen Jesus realized it's happened. I want all the world to know about it.

Hence, Paul going around the world saying, "Iesous Kurios, Jesus is he Lord. He's the king." That's evangelization. Not just that, "This guy had a lot of good religious ideas or he's taught us how to be good people." I mean, true enough but banal enough. Evangelization is announcing the

good news that the story of Israel has come to its climax and now, now, we're all part of it. We're all drawn into it. Come, become a member of His community, of His mystical body, the church. That's why knowing the story is so essential, is so indispensable.

It's like if someone just read to you the last chapter of *The Lord of the Rings*. You know nothing about the story, you never read it, you never heard of it and you read the last chapter. You go, "Yeah, I guess that's cool. I don't know what any of it means though." Tell the whole story and then you see how Frodo managed to get to the mountain in the heart of the wicked land, Mordor. He managed to get that ring thrown back into the place where it was crafted. If you don't know the story you ask, "So what?" When you know the story, you realize it's all been resolved. It's all been brought to its fulfillment. That's why knowing the Bible, knowing Israel is indispensable for evangelization.

**QUESTION:** Reading the scriptures, themselves, is the best way to familiarize yourself with the story of Israel but what other ways would you

recommend people pursue to learn more about the great story?

**BISHOP BARRON:** There are a lot of good things out now that give you the timeline, that give you the overview of the biblical narrative. I am wanting to say, “Sit down and read from Genesis through Revelation,” but there are a lot of good things to help people get through the extensive text. Scott Hahn has done some great commentaries and Jeff Cavins as well. Read someone like N. T. Wright, read Matthew Levering, a couple of folks who have put together that story in its basic form. I think that’s a really good way but, ultimately yes, get into the scriptures. Also, once you get the basic outline, the mass will begin opening up to you because we read the readings at mass. Most Catholics probably ask, “What does the prophet Isaiah have to do with Jesus? How do we link the first reading with the gospel?” I would say start with one of these overviews and then really pay attention at mass. Ultimately, be drawn into all of the detail and dynamic of the biblical story.



**QUESTION:** That was the third key to becoming a new evangelist, the knowledge of the story of Israel. The fourth key is to understand the culture. Isn't it enough just to know the Bible or know church teachings, why do we have to have our finger on the pulse of the culture too?

**BISHOP BARRON:** Let's go back to Karl Barth's great image of the preacher. Barth says the preacher should have the Bible in one hand and a newspaper in the other because the idea is to draw the world into the story of Israel. You have to know the story of Israel but also what's happening now. What is happening today? What is blocking people from getting into that story? Where are the opportunities? What's resonant with the Bible in the culture today? If you don't do that, you've given the answer but you've not stirred up the question. There are a lot of questions that are implicit in the culture today. What are they? What are the longings of human heart? What are the unresolved tensions today? Then if I can correlate those questions to the answers

of the Bible, now, I've really begun to preach or to evangelize. That's why I do a lot of work with films, books, and trends happening in the popular culture and the high culture because that's indispensable to the work of correlating question and answer.

**QUESTION:** I think a lot of people look at the culture specifically the world of movies and think it's all bad, we need to reject it, that's all counter Christian. Like you said, you spend a lot of time looking for the so-called "seeds of the word" in these films and you've said that secularism (as bad of an ideology as it is) can be an opportunity because it's produced a lot of people who are thirsty for the gospel. It prepared them for this allusion to Christianity. Saint Paul's visit to the Areopagus is where the faith and the culture first come to heads. Talk about that famous scene from the scriptures.

**BISHOP BARRON:** One of the great passages in the Acts of the Apostles is when Paul makes his way to the cultural capital of the time, Athens.

The Areopagus is this rocky outcropping. Right below the Acropolis, right below the great temple of the Parthenon, he's faced with the cultural, religious, intellectual center of the high culture of the time. Paul gets right in there. He goes to synagogues usually first because he figures Jews have a better chance of understanding the great story. He figured essentially, "I've got the climax of the story. You folks know it. I'll start with you." Yet, he wasn't afraid to go outside the Jewish world. What he did when he got to the Areopagus is he appealed to the implicit religiosity of the culture. He says basically, "I've been walking around your city and seeing all your temples and shrines and I realized what a religious people you are."

He compliments them but not just in an idol way or flattery way. He's noticing something in the culture, an aspiration toward God. Then he essentially tells them, "I got what you're looking for. I know the story of the true God. You're all interested in Him. You're implicitly searching for Him. In fact, I know you have a statue devoted to an 'unknown God'. The one that you don't really know clearly, I do know clearly. Let me tell you

His story.” It’s not a confrontational approach. It’s not I’m right you’re wrong or you’re all mixed up. No, instead Paul realizes there’s a lot in your culture that is implicitly Christian. I want to bring that to explicit expression.

I think that’s still a good strategy for evangelist today is to look around. What’s in your movies and books and songs that is read on the gospel that represents a longing. Let me tell you about that. You might not be real clear on what you’re doing but let me clarify it for you. That’s still I think a very good strategy and will be less likely to raise the hackles, to get people defensive. I’ve tried to use it. I’ll say a quick word about those who feel a lot of films are just morally objectionable, et cetera. I know a book that includes murder and rape and incest and masturbation and cruelty and murder, it’s called the Bible.

If you read the Bible all those things are in it. If you made a movie of the biblical stories, it would be at least an R rating. My point there is we can’t afford to be that fussy and puritanical. I can’t not watch a movie because there’s something immoral going on. Very often what the film maker

is saying is look what happens to these people when they engage in immoral activity. Look how sad and lost they become. They are very rarely in my experience saying, “Hey, we should all live this way.” No, most of them in my experience are saying, “Look at this. Here’s how not to live.”

What looks like an immoral movie often has a deeply moral purpose. Even let’s say it’s a movie that doesn’t have a lot of serious moral purpose. We might be able to find something in it that’s still worth using. I say this to evangelist. Not everything works for everybody. If you’re trying to evangelize someone who is very puritanical, very squeamish about sex and violence. Maybe you wouldn’t want to use that method. Use another method with them. You have to be rangy too about the culture. You have to be able to respond to different personalities. That’s why the culture has to be central in this endeavor.

**QUESTION:** To recap, we’re looking at Bishop Barron’s seven qualities of a new evangelist, what it takes to share the gospel in today’s world. We’ve looked at four of these so far. The first

quality is your love with Jesus Christ. The second quality is that you have ardor – you’re a person of passion and enthusiasm. The third quality is that you know the great story, the story of Israel. Then the fourth quality, which we just talked about was that you have to understand the culture. The fifth quality is that you need to have the heart of a missionary. What does that mean?

**BISHOP BARRON:** It means that the faith grows when you give it away. The purpose of being a Christian is not simply to rest comfortably in your Christianity and say, “I found the answer. I understand that Jesus is the climax, the great story. I’ve given my life to him, and that’s it.” No! Every Christian by virtue of baptism is a missionary. You’ve been sent forth by baptism as priest, prophet and king. You’ve been sent forth to share the faith. There’s no exception to that rule. In the Bible, no one is ever given an experience of God without being sent on mission.

Find an example of that where someone encounters God, God addresses someone’s life and God doesn’t send that person on mission.

There's no exception! Biblical religion is not like a contemplative program whereby you've come to know the truth and the good and the beautiful and now you simply rest in it. That might be people like Plotinus, it might be Gnostics. It's not biblical religion. Anyone that's given a sense of Christ is sent out on mission. Who evangelizes? Everyone does. Everyone's supposed to. That's what I mean by having a heart of someone who's been sent. Mary proceeds in haste to the Hill Country once she's received the message from the angel. Simon Peter says, "Lord leave me, I'm a sinful man," and the Lord forgives him and then says, "From now on you'll be a fisher of men."

When Paul encounters Jesus he is subsequently baptized and sent. He knows he's a chosen vessel. Time and time again, Old Testament and New, the chosen ones are missionaries, they are sent. Same is true today. No one gets the experience of God without being given a mission. I love how Hans Urs von Balthasar says that according to the Bible we don't really know who we are till we find our mission. We could be identified by our family and by our society when we are given a

name and so on. You don't really know who you are until you've been given your mission, which is why often people get new names in the Bible when they understand their mission, when they embrace it. Saul becomes Paul. Simon become Peter. Jacob becomes Israel, et cetera. That's good. Abram becomes Abraham. Once you know your mission you know what your real name is.

**QUESTION:** Many of our protestant brothers and sisters have a great missionary zeal and I think part of it is driven by their concern for the eternal life of their friends and family. They say, "If I don't tell this person about Jesus then after they die they might end up in hell or something." You've emphasized that a zeal for missions for sharing the gospel is driven not only by the eternal destinies of people but by their lives right now. By the dismal life of being separated from God right now. Tell us why there's an urgency for having this heart of a missionary.



**BISHOP BARRON:** You really said it there. Hell as you suggest, is a separation from God. Not being rooted in God. I mean, hell begins here. We've all been there in some way. When I drift into what Augustine called the "land of unlikeness". When you're not likened unto God, when you've wandered into alienation from God it hurts. It's dreadful. It has terrible consequences for your life and the life of those around you. I want people out of that even now. Therefore, I'm eager to share what I found even now. The ultimate trajectory of that is what the church calls hell, eternal separation from God.

Of course I want to get people out of that state and I'm eager to share the message to accomplish that end. As you rightly suggest, I want to get people out of this state of being right now because it leads to such unhappiness. Look around the secular world. That's where you see a lot of deep unhappiness, a flattening out of life. I want people out of that now. I've got a missionary enthusiasm to do that even now.

**QUESTION:** The sixth quality of a new evangelist is having a knowledge and a love for the traditions of the Church. We don't necessarily mean the traditional devotional practices. Those are good. You're talking here about all of the artistic and literary and architectural gems found throughout our tradition. Why is it important? Why can't we just say have the Bible and our personal relationship with God? Why do we need the tradition of the Church?

**BISHOP BARRON:** Why limit ourselves in that way? Of course the Bible stands at the heart of it. All the traditions you referenced from architecture to art to lives of the saints to liturgy and so on, they go back ultimately to the Bible. That's true. The Bible is the soul of theology. We hear that at Vatican II. But, why limit our ways of encountering God to only the Bible? Why leave behind Chartres Cathedral, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Chesterton's essays, C.S. Lewis' writings, Thomas Aquinas' writings, Michelangelo's masterpieces? In fact, wouldn't you fall in love with all these pieces of the tradition because you

realize all of it has come from Jesus Christ?

It's flowed from Him and so you love what He's inspired. You love what speaks of Him. If you love a person, you love pictures of that person. You love photographs. You love stories about that person. Same thing here. At the heart of the *Divine Comedy* is Jesus, that Dante was grasped by him, saved by him. He tells us great story about it. The ceiling of the Sistine Chapel is all about the Bible and Michelangelo's living encounter with Jesus. Why would you leave it behind? There might be elements, intrusion that have wandered too far away or they've become corrupt, I'm sure that happens. The corruption of some should not lead you to reject the whole tradition. I love it. It's good, it's true, and it is beautiful.

The tradition is also very effective for the evangelical enterprise. It's silly in my mind not to use it. Then watch how the great evangelists have used it. In sermons they have used the lives of the saints. They've used the various works of art to announce Jesus. To me that's a no brainer. I understand throughout the intrusion there have been corruptions and that can lead people to say, "Get rid of all of it and go back to the beginning."

See, I'm with John Henry Newman who claimed that the beginnings of things are often the least interesting like a seed vis-à-vis a tree. The tree that's come from that seed is so much more compelling or Newman's example of the river.

I can leap over the beginning, the source of the Mississippi River. Then there's the mouth of the Mississippi. The thing has gone through thousands of miles, and taken on tributaries and so on. It's been deepened and broadened by the time you get to New Orleans. I would say the Mississippi is far more compelling and beautiful and wonderful and dangerous and strange and all those great things as it develops from its source, so with the Catholic tradition. It's the broadening and deepening of the river that began with Jesus' disciples. It's like the tree now that's grown from that acorn, that seed. That's the tradition and I think why we should use it.

**QUESTION:** The seventh and final quality of a new evangelist is that you need to be adept at using the new media. Why is that important?

**BISHOP BARRON:** As I've said, before this is a revolution comparable only to the Gutenberg revolution in terms of communication. Paul used the cutting edge communication's time which was letters on parchment that were communicated through the Roman roads. To us it seems primitive but that was "cutting-edge technology" at the time. If Paul were here would he use Facebook and YouTube? Would he use podcasting? To me those questions answers themselves. He wanted the whole world to know the Jesus Christ is Lord. He got on boats and he walked the Roman roads. He wanted to go to Spain which meant the end of the world to him. He spoke, he wrote, he used whatever he had in front of him.

Of course he would use the new media. I think new evangelists today should be, as John Paul said, "new in ardor." New in expression but also new in method. What are the new methods we have? Gosh, even someone as recent as Fulton Sheen would have loved to have the methods we have today. Put something on YouTube and it's available globally around the clock instantly. Do a podcast that allows preaching to be heard all over

the world. To my mind it would be just completely counter-intuitive not to use the new media because Jesus says, “Go and announce to all the nations.” What’s the best way to do that? Using the Worldwide Web. It also gives individuals a chance to proclaim the gospel. You don’t have to go through NBC or the local radio station. You can do something evangelical right now, on your own with the internet.

God knows the new media can be abused like anything can. Can the gospel be presented in a superficial manner and all that? Sure, of course, but I think again to reject something wholesale because of the possibility of corruption is ludicrous. Learn the technology and use it. I speak now as an old man. Young people today who grew up with all these technologies at their fingertips, have it in their bones and blood, so of course they should use it. Let it be undergirded by a strong intellectual grasp of the tradition. Yes, indeed, books ought to undergird the whole thing but to abandon the new media completely would be counter-intuitive.

**QUESTION:** Those are the seven qualities of a new evangelist. Let's recap them quickly. The first one is that you have to love Jesus Christ, you have to be in friendship with him. The second one is that you have to be a person of ardor, you have to have passion and enthusiasm. The third is to know the great story of Israel and know how Christ fits into it. The fourth is to understand the culture around you. The fifth is to have the heart of a missionary, to have zeal for drawing people into a relationship with God. The sixth is to know the traditions of the church. And the seventh, as we just heard, is to be savvy with the new media.

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