

Theological Debate with a Roman Catholic Monsignor #1: Anything Goes Faith?

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Part One

By Larry Wessels

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Website: www.biblequery.org

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Debate with a Monsignor
with Rob Zins (ThM)
with Monsignor Ed Jordan
and Moderator Dale Delony

Dale Delony. Today we'll be discussing Roman Catholicism and biblical Christianity. I'll be your host, Dale Delony, and with us today we have Monsignor Ed Jordan who will be representing the Catholic faith from St. Theresa's Catholic Church, and Rob Zins representing the biblical Christianity side and he is with the organization Christians Evangelizing Catholics. Welcome to our show, gentleman.

Rob Zins. Thank you.

Dale. Great. With that, I would like, why don't you start, Monsignor, and tell us a little bit about yourself and your church.

Monsignor Ed Jordan. Okay, well, I'm pastor at St. Theresa's Catholic Church in Northwest Austin. I've been there for about five years and I've been a priest in Central Texas for 30 years come next June, and basically do what a pastor does which is answer the phone and respond to people's needs as they come across, along with regular worship services, weddings, funerals, and all that. I'm glad to be here this morning and to visit with you.

Dale. Great. Were you, have you always been Catholic? Were you raised Catholic?

Monsignor. Yes, I've been Catholic all my life. Went to parochial schools, that sort of thing.

Dale. Okay, and now Rob Zins. Why don't you tell us a little bit about your background and your ministry and for the viewing audience.

Rob. Okay, I did my theological study at Dallas Theological Seminary where I majored in historical theology and I currently reside in Vermont, in Rutland, Vermont where I'm a teacher at Reformed Bible Church and I do spend a great deal of time on the road giving conferences, symposiums and on some occasions debating with Roman Catholic scholars on issues pertaining to Scripture, and it is my privilege and pleasure to be here this morning.

Dale. Well, it's great to have both of you. Well, with that, why don't we start off with the topic: the way of salvation. What do each of these beliefs say is the actual way to heaven or to salvation? So with that, why don't we start with you, Monsignor, and according to the Catholic faith, what must you do to be saved?

Monsignor. Okay, according to the Catholic faith you get a certain breadth of answer there. Fundamentally, since we believe that everyone on earth can be saved whether they're Christian or not, it depends on living according to one's conscience and to making even if you have an erroneous concept by truly following your conscience.

Now we believe much more than that that God has given as revelation about himself and about the means of salvation particularly through Scripture and so that journey begins with baptism and [unintelligible] through the sacraments through the preaching of the word, through the support of the community, but that there's nothing, you know, magical about the sacraments. Basically salvation would simply be for the Catholic, once I accept Christ as Savior and friend and then you try to carry out the great Christian commandment of love and love of neighbor and all that that implies in living out the 10 Commandments and living out the Gospel.

Dale. What is your definition of being saved, when you said that we'll all be saved?

Monsignor. About being saved? Well, I think it consists on earth to being in friendship with Christ [unintelligible] Christ's grace and then, of course, living forever with Christ in heaven as being saved.

Dale. I see. Okay.

Monsignor. And we believe that there is absolutely nothing lacking in Christ's saving action on the cross, so salvation from God's point which is for all mankind, was, is totally secure and I accept that through faith and through baptism and the only thing that can happen from thereon is that since God has given every man and woman the gift of freedom, there exists the possibility for a man or a woman to reject that gift of salvation. There is nothing lacking on God's part but it's possible for a person to reject that.

Dale. It is?

Monsignor. [indicates assent]

Dale. And then they would not be saved?

Monsignor. [indicates assent]

Dale. Okay, and then lastly you mentioned the Gospel, what is your definition of the Gospel?

Monsignor. Well, I'm thinking of the four Gospels in the New Testament and Paul's teaching and Peter and the rest of it and using the Good News, but that's our basic source of knowing about God and of knowing how to live, that plus reflecting on it since obviously a few things have changed in the last 2,000 years in terms of societies in which we live and some problems that have come up that weren't in Jesus' time and we needing to use all knowledge. I think basically as a Catholic, we see God revealing himself in a very special way through the Scriptures, in a unique way through the Scriptures, but we also believe that God reveals himself through all of creation but there's only one God and that these two sources are not the same and they're not equal, but nor are they antagonistic or hostile one to the other. There is no contradiction within God certainly.

Dale. That's true.

Monsignor. And so we read Scripture and we study Scripture and then we also learn a lot about the world.

Dale. God is not a God of confusion....

Monsignor. No, God isn't but that doesn't guarantee us preachers immunity...

Dale. Doesn't save people. Immunity doesn't save people, then. Well, so this is more or less would be the view of the entire Roman Catholic Church? This is their view?

Monsignor. [indicates assent]

Dale. Okay. Well, Rob, what is according to biblical Christianity or Christian faith, what do you believe is the way of salvation?

Rob. Well, I think that we must start out with an understanding that to say biblical Christianity is not to dismiss the idea that Roman Catholic religion does not see in the Scriptures revelation of God. What we mean by biblical Christianity is that the Bible alone is our source of authority and we derive our understanding of Christ and of God's revelation from the Bible and the Bible alone. And so if I were to arrive at a definition of what is salvation and what is the Gospel and if I'm going to arrive at terminology to describe salvation, I want to make sure that that terminology is cemented within the words of Scripture and I find in reading Scripture that there is only one way in which a person can go to heaven. There's only one way of salvation. Our Lord said that he was the way, the truth and the life and nobody can go through the Father except through him. But "through him," what does that mean? Well, it means a trust in his finished work on the cross. It means a trust in his atonement alone, a forsaking of our own righteousness and

appealing to the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith in Jesus Christ. However, it is faith alone.

Now I might add that biblical Christianity believes that all other religions on the face of the earth are in error. They're wrong. They may be sincere, you may have a Muslim, or you may have a Buddhist, or you may have a Mormon, or you may have a Roman Catholic, and we feel they are sincerely wrong because they do not have at the heart of their understanding of the Gospel the simplicity of one, being able to have access to God through Christ by faith alone, and also they do not understand that the Gospel itself is not inclusionary of the entire world but it is only inclusionary of those who have exhibited faith in Christ alone.

So when we talk about biblical Christianity, we have to juxtapose it with other systems of thought, otherologies, as it were. And as far as the Roman Catholic religion is concerned, while they do hold on to some elements of biblical truth, they believe in one God, they believe in Jesus Christ as the only begotten Son, they believe in the Spirit of God, third person of the Trinity, they also have an understanding that there is truth in the Scriptures, what they don't have is they don't have the Gospel itself in that one can have the assurance of salvation, the assurance of heaven based upon faith and faith alone in the finished work of Christ. They have brought alongside a sacramental system which they rely on.

I have with me a citation from an organization entitled, "Keep the Faith, Inc." This is a Roman Catholic organization that is, actually they are advertising cassette tapes for Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen, who was a well-beloved Roman Catholic, and in this letter written by one Howard J. Walsh, who is the Director of "Keep the Faith, Inc." he says this, "Keep the Faith is a lay apostolate dedicated to the defense of orthodox Roman Catholicism. We would like to express our concern about one of the most serious threats to the faith today, the evangelical Bible Christian movement. As you are no doubt painfully aware, Catholics are leaving the Church in droves to join nondenominational Protestant Bible chapels where they are indoctrinated in the heresy of salvation by faith alone without need of the Church, the priesthood, or the sacraments." And I think that that says it better than I could ever say it, that the position of the Roman Catholic Church historically and this letter was written in July of 1991, has been that to say that we can have the assurance of salvation, that salvation is by faith and faith alone is a heresy and that one must go through the Church, the priesthood and the sacraments in order to have a relationship with God, and we reject all that and find it to be grievous error and there is where we draw the line. But I have not drawn the line, the line has been drawn for a long time and this particular Catholic writer is just reiterating that line. So therein we have the difference.

Dale. I see. Well, with that, why don't we just make this an open forum. I'll let you two...

Rob. Food for thought, huh?

Dale. Yeah, it is. Let's discuss, let's discuss this. I'm sure after what Rob said you have something to reply.

Monsignor. Sure. That letter can hardly be a spokesman for the Roman Catholic Church. I think that ad comes out and I would consider it kind of a reactionary Catholic magazine, and it appears that way, but that's beside the point.

Roman Catholicism has no problem with people, faith alone as distinguished from what? I mean, lots of people have faith alone. We certainly believe they're gonna be saved and I believe you're gonna be saved, Rob, and I believe many people, even many Roman Catholics who have gone for years and much of their life without any priest or any sacraments beyond baptism, most Christians baptize whether they call it a sacrament or not, it's an important moment. They like to relate marriage to Christ and to the church whether you call it a sacrament or not. They have some kind of form of celebration of the Lord's Supper if for no other reason than Jesus said to do this which I think is fine. But we're not saying that people must even be baptized for salvation which may indeed be a difference.

Rob. Okay, now when you say that we are not saying it....

Monsignor. The Roman Catholic Church.

Rob. Okay.

Monsignor. Today.

Rob. Today, Roman Catholic Church today. Okay, I want to get that straight.

Monsignor. Yeah, and you can go back to the Middle Ages and you have whole different cultures involved there.

Rob. Okay. If I were to try to understand the Roman Catholic religion, the best way that I could understand it would be go to the source of authority. Now I know that you are a Roman Catholic priest and as I understand it, the Roman Catholic religion does have sources of authority whereby they have expressed clearly and I think what I'm hearing from you and you can correct me if I'm wrong, is that you might disagree with the source of authority over your own religion. For instance, do you adhere to the doctrines of the Council of Trent? Are they binding on your conscience and are they part of the doctrine that you embrace and would indeed teach to your congregation?

Monsignor. Sure, except that it's been 400 years since Trent and so there's development that takes place. It's a living Church and some of the, you know, you have certain exaggerations in Trent because you had a big fight going on at the time of the Reformation and that tends to skew...we don't always do our best thinking when we're fighting.

Rob. Could you tell me what has materially changed since Trent insofar as the doctrine of justification?

Monsignor. The doctrine of justification? What's Trent's doctrine? That you believe in Christ and that you live your life in accordance with that belief.

Rob. Well, that's not precisely Trent's doctrine. Trent's doctrine is that justification is based upon the infusion of grace that occurs at the baptism of the person coming into the Catholic religion or the infant, and that justification is an ongoing process wherein one continues to improve in justification and God takes into account the good works that are done in faith for that justification. That's Trent. Do you agree with that?

Monsignor. No.

Rob. Okay.

Monsignor. I don't agree that that's Trent either.

Rob. I would, I could have a citation if you don't mind from the Council of Trent?

Monsignor. No, there's confusion that's been thrown at us for 400 years that the good, the human good works save us. We do not believe that. There's nothing all mankind combined, all the good works you have ever done could not redeem us without Christ's redeeming action and Catholics have never taught that.

Rob. Catholics have never taught that good works done in faith are the ground of justification, is this what you're saying?

Monsignor. Yeah.

Rob. I would disagree with that.

Monsignor. That's absurd that you can dispense with Christ. We've never taught that and that's a caricature of Catholicism.

Rob. No, you wouldn't dispense with Christ but you would add good works done in faith to what Christ has done for the verdict of justification.

Monsignor. False. I don't believe that. I don't believe we've ever taught that.

Rob. Okay. The....

Monsignor. Good works are the fruit of being justified and being a friend of Christ obviously. You can't go out and be a murderer and an adulterer and say that, "I'm doing this as a Christian."

Rob. Oh, I agree with you wholeheartedly that you couldn't say that.

Monsignor. But, Rob, we have never taught that any human good works save people.

Rob. Let me give you a quotation from Dr. Karl Keating who is the head of Catholic Answers, an apologetical organizational wing of the Roman Catholic religion based in San Diego. "For Catholics, salvation depends on the state of the soul at death. Christ has already redeemed us, unlocked the gates of heaven, as it were. He did his part, now we have to do ours by cooperating. The Church teaches that souls that are objectively good and objectively pleasing to God merit heaven." Now if that's not justification based upon merit or good works done in faith, then I've missed it as far as Karl Keating is concerned. Trent says, "Hence to those who work well unto the end and trust in God, eternal life is to be offered both as a grace mercifully promised to the sons of God through Christ Jesus and as a reward promised by God himself to be faithfully given to their good works and merits." That's the Council of Trent, "to be faithfully given to their good works and merits," and yet you as representative of the Catholic religion deny all this. Now the question I have is who speaks for Rome? You can't have it both ways. You can't embrace Trent and then deny Trent. This is a direct citation.

Monsignor. Oh, I'm not stuck by any bunch of words at any time and not like Trent. It's common sense that if you're baptized, you explain to me, can you have an evangelical Christian who is breaking the 10 Commandments? How do you describe that? Have you ever met a human being who was baptized and accepted Jesus Christ as his or her Lord and Savior at some point in their life, and then at some other point in their life, they did something we would say is objectively evil whether adultery, embezzlement whatever, okay, what's the explanation? That they were not saved really who they thought they were?

Rob. And that's not the question. We're not on the question of whether those who are saved can sin, we're on the question of what is the ground of our justification. When God determines to justify a person, when God determines to accept a person into heaven, what's the ground of that acceptance?

Monsignor. Okay.

Rob. Trent says the ground is the death of Jesus Christ on the cross plus good works done in faith whereby we merit our salvation. And incidentally, anybody that doesn't agree with that is considered to be anathema. Now that's Trent.

Monsignor. I know, but 400 years later we don't anathematize.

Dale. Have they amended that unofficially from 400 years ago, have they amended that what he just read?

Monsignor. Who is "they"?

Dale. The Church. I mean, is it still...

Monsignor. I don't know and I don't care. I'd rather talk about the issue that I do not believe that there's salvation without Jesus Christ and I don't think you do either, Rob.

Rob. Right, the question is what does that mean.

Monsignor. And I think anybody... Well, okay, what that means is Jesus won salvation. I accept it, if I know about Jesus, first of all, I have to be preached to and you have to hear the word, because I believe that somebody who has never heard of Jesus Christ can also be saved.

Rob. How can they be saved?

Monsignor. Because Jesus was the salvation of all mankind and why should he condemn somebody to hell who's never heard of him? It doesn't make sense.

Rob. So therefore it is your opinion that those...

Monsignor. Because God is not limited to the church, God is bigger than the church.

Rob. Let's get back to this point of justification and I want to cite to you another quotation from the Council of Trent. "For God does not forsake those who have been once justified by His grace unless He be first forsaken by them, wherefore no one ought to flatter himself with faith alone, thinking that by faith alone he has made an heir and would obtain the inheritance even though he suffer not with Christ that he might also be glorified with Him." No one ought to flatter himself with faith alone. That's Trent. Do you disagree with that or do you agree with that?

Monsignor. That's Trent arguing against Luther in the 16th century. You certainly need faith and your own personal good works do not save you. They are a response to anybody who really has faith. It's one indication of what kind of faith we're talking about, is it verbiage? I mean, anybody who really believes in Jesus Christ and accepts his Gospel is going to live accordingly and if they're not, they're sinning, and it's not the good works that save anybody but it is evidence. If you have bad works, what kind of faith is it?

Rob. I think it would be safe to say that you are at odds with the Council of Trent's teaching on justification.

Monsignor. I don't think my own Church would find me that way, but anyway.

Rob. Okay, according to the citations I have. But perhaps we could move on to a different topic. I'm interested in your understanding of what baptism performs or what it does. What is your understanding of baptism?

Monsignor. Baptism makes you a member of the body of Christ and takes away sin if you have any sin.

Rob. Could you cite for me the reasons for your belief in that particular concept of baptism from the Scriptures?

Monsignor. No, not chapter and verse but Jesus directed to go and baptize and Paul's talking about if you're buried with Christ, you rise again the new man.

Rob. Isn't that true that Paul said, "I came not to baptize but to preach the gospel," in 1 Corinthians 1?

Monsignor. Yeah, he said that.

Rob. How would you respond to that in light of your understanding of baptism?

Monsignor. Well, he didn't mean nobody baptized. He was talking about the argument about some were baptized by Apollo and others by somebody else. He was glad he hadn't baptized anybody because of that controversy in Corinth but he doesn't say any statement against baptism.

Rob. Is baptism essential for salvation?

Monsignor. No.

Rob. If one is not baptized, can he still go to heaven?

Monsignor. Yes.

Rob. According to the Council of Trent, baptism remits or washes away original sin. If they are not baptized, how then can original sin be washed away or do you disagree at this point with the Council of Trent also?

Monsignor. I'm not disagreeing but there's been development in our whole understanding of original sin since the Council of Trent, just as there was development between Trent and the earlier councils in the 3rd and 4th centuries. Original sin is not sin in the same sense as personal sin, deliberate choices. Original sin is a way of describing that sinful state and all those influences that are in the world the moment we're born into the world.

Rob. Do you believe that baptism is one of the sacraments of the church?

Monsignor. Sure.

Rob. Although you say it is not necessary for salvation?

Monsignor. Right.

Rob. Then why do it?

Monsignor. Because I'm a member of the church, because that's part of Jesus' revelation. He says at the end of Mark's Gospel, "Go forth and baptize."

Rob. What does baptism do?

Monsignor. It makes you a member of the body of Christ.

Rob. In what sense does it make you a member of the body of Christ? Does it really remove sin?

Monsignor. Ah, yes, if you have any personal sin which an infant wouldn't have but an adult can have.

Rob. So it's not necessary but yet it removes sin? Could you be a member of the church without being baptized?

Monsignor. Potentially, certainly you could be a member of the church in heaven but we don't have the church in heaven....

Rob. Okay, so you don't see baptism as essential at all.

Monsignor. I think it is very very important but I can't see condemning to hell all the men and women who have lived since Christ on continents that never even heard of Jesus because nobody preached to them, and I don't feel comfortable with that. When Paul says in Romans, "Where sin did abound, grace did more abound."

Dale. Does that mean other religions such as Islam...

Monsignor. Sure.

Dale. ...and they worship Allah, since they haven't heard about Christ they would still go to heaven?

Monsignor. Yeah.

Dale. Pagan, ah, pagan worshipers also that worship idols and stuff like that that haven't heard about Christ they would...?

Monsignor. [nodding] That are living in good faith....

Dale. ...to their idols?

Monsignor. To whatever.

Dale. Now we talked about the Council of Trent and....

Monsignor. I just can't, I have no vision of heaven for Christians only.

Dale. Right.

Monsignor. It doesn't make sense to me but I understand that's where we differ. I've heard Pat Robertson say Muslims aren't going to be saved.

Dale. Well, universalists, so are you saying you're kind of a universalist that believes all people are going to go to heaven?

Monsignor. No, I believe all people who live good lives according to their conscience.

Dale. Ahh, let your conscience be your guide.

Monsignor. Well, that's all you have ultimately. You have revelation but you've never heard of revelation and you have to go back to your conscience.

Dale. Is this in the church teachings of Catholicism or is this in the Bible?

Monsignor. [nods yes]

Dale. Is this in the bible?

Monsignor. It's in, certainly it's in our church teaching. The Bible says things in Timothy about Christ wills the salvation of all men.

Dale. But you're really getting this from the Church, not strictly from the Bible though, so therefore....

Monsignor. Sure.

Dale. ...the Church is superseding the Bible? That's a good question. Does the Church itself have authority over the word of God? You do believe the Bible is the word of God, right?

Monsignor. Yes.

Dale. Okay.

Monsignor. And the church has the mission to interpret it and we don't, everything is not included in the Bible. The church came first and then came the New Testament.

Dale. Okay, that's, that is, that's the difference, I guess, right, that we're discussing right now. Rob?

Rob. I'm just briefing through the Church's understanding of the sacramental system and I'm finding a lot of terminology here that you seem to be shying away from: baptism washes away stain of original sin and any actual sin and makes a person a child of God, an heir to heaven, it is the gateway into the church of Christ; without baptism none of the other sacraments can be validly received; it is the sacraments that make a person a Christian. I think you would agree with that, would you not? Sacraments make a person a Christian? Infant baptism is a gateway into the church?

Monsignor. Well, adult baptism [unintelligible].

Rob. Yes, but what I'm hearing you say, then, is that even though your own Catholic religion teaches that infant baptism is a gateway into the church and that, or for adults, baptism is the way of becoming the church, you're wanting to say that those who have never been baptized, those who are outside of the Roman Catholic religion, those who deny the sacramental system and those who think that the Roman Catholic religion has not read it right, so to speak and so far as that, you're willing to say that they are still saved, that they are still....

Monsignor. Can go to heaven?

Rob. They'll still go to heaven.

Monsignor. Sure.

Rob. So this, this I would think would be somewhat of a radical departure from historical Catholicism that absolutely immerses itself not only in modern....

Monsignor. No, 1947 when I was, Leonard Feeney, a Jesuit in Boston, claimed outside the Church no salvation, meaning Catholic Church, he was condemned by Rome and the Second Vatican Council said the same thing.

Rob. Ah, where in the Second Vatican Council does it say that those who do not embrace the Roman Catholic understanding of salvation can go to heaven? Could you cite that for me?

Monsignor. Not chapter and verse but I'm sure the doctrine on humanism.

Rob. Okay. I would....

Monsignor. Because it speaks about other churches.

Rob. Yeah, I would differ with you at that point. I have read the Articles of the Second Vatican Council and what it really says is that if the sacraments are performed with the

intention that the Holy Church of Rome understands them to contain or to hold, then that person performing that sacrament, baptism for instance, is really ipso facto taking part in the Roman Catholic religion and thus drawing closer to the true church and they're insisting that separated brethren have a portion of the truth but not the fullness of the truth and they've gone no further in defining it than that. You seem to be willing to want to take a step farther and say, "Oh yeah, so those who deny Roman Catholicism are still welcomed by God and welcomed by the Lord in heaven."

Monsignor. Oh, definitely. No question about that.

Rob. Now that's interesting to me that you would say that because in all of the Catechisms and literature that I have been able to read on Roman Catholicism, I find, I find a different story and the letter that...

Monsignor. That only Roman Catholics are in heaven?

Rob. No, that salvation is in the Roman Catholic Church and that the way to God is through the Catholic religion. The letter I read from the organization...

Monsignor. Not the only way.

Rob. ...you called reactionary and you said that that represents a fringe element of the Roman Catholic religion. Well, that may be but this is what makes it so difficult. I have here the Apostolic Digest. This is complete, unabridged, authentic teaching of the Catholic Church, certified in 3,150 fully indexed quotations drawn from Scripture, the decrees of 83 popes, 36 councils, 100 early church fathers, 32 doctors, 300 saints, on and on it goes, and in their section on the Church and the portion on salvation: there is no salvation outside the one true Church; salvation is found only in the Catholic Church; those outside the Church are lost forever." Thirty pages devoted to citations beginning on page 56 of your own Church's literature explaining that there is no salvation outside the one true Church quoting Pope Pius IX, Pope Leo XII, Pope Pelagius II, the early church fathers, Clement of Alexandria. I could cite these citations on and on and on but yet...

Monsignor. It doesn't have Pius XII to Archbishop Cushing in 1947 saying you can't interpret it that way?

Rob. No. There's no mention of that here.

Monsignor. The book is not complete.

Rob. Well, you see...

Monsignor. No. But all my life, over 50 years, I've never understood that heaven's only going to be populated by Roman Catholics. I even believe evangelical Christians will be in heaven.

Rob. Okay. "Neither sanctity nor salvation can be found outside the Holy Catholic Apostolic Roman Church," Pope Pius IX. "Rome has spoken, the case is closed; would that the error too might some day be over and done with," Augustine. "Before everything else fidelity to the Church, One Holy Catholic and Apostolic. Jesus did not found several churches but one single church," Pope John XXIII. All your life you've felt opposite. Have you ever read this?

Monsignor. I mean, I've read documents like it but, ah, no I have no problem with that, Rob.

Rob. Okay, you disagree with it?

Monsignor. I know as a Roman Catholic, I know the bishop would say the same thing if he was here this morning, that we do not limit salvation to Roman Catholics.

Rob. Okay.

Monsignor. There's no question about that.

Rob. Okay.

Monsignor. We do not condemn Jews to hell, Muslims to hell. An individual Christian can choose to either lead a deliberately evil life, on that basis they can reject God.

Rob. Okay.

Monsignor. But, no, just because they don't fit into a denomination, that doesn't make sense.

Rob. Do you feel that a person quite apart from the Roman Catholic question, do you feel that a person can go to heaven apart from a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ on any place on this planet?

Monsignor. Definitely.

Rob. Could you cite the book or chapter or verse or just generally anywhere, and I have a Roman Catholic Bible that I'll loan you that you can use to show me where it teaches that in the Bible.

Monsignor. I'm not limited to the Bible, Rob. We knew that before we even started the show.

Rob. Okay, let's talk about that for a minute, if we could, okay? You say that you're not limited to the Bible. What, then, is your source of authority?

Monsignor. The Bible, tradition, common sense, reason.

Rob. Okay. Which would take preeminence? Which would have, sway...

Monsignor. Together.

Rob. Pardon me?

Monsignor. They all work together.

Rob. Okay, in what sense can the statement that a person can go to heaven apart from a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, where does the Bible fit into that statement, its logic, reason, history, tradition, all that?

Monsignor. The Bible teaches that God is good, that God loves all men and women, and that it goes against God's mercy and justice to condemn somebody to hell who has lived a good life.

Rob. Where does it say that in the Scripture that it goes against God's justice?

Monsignor. Scripture says that God is good.

Rob. Yes, he is. He is...

Monsignor. And just and merciful.

Rob. Right. But in order to jump from God as good to God wouldn't send anybody to hell who is living a good life, wouldn't we want to support that with some intervening scriptural basis? And I would ask you to do that, if you could. I might say, "God is good, therefore the devil himself goes to heaven. God is good, therefore the worst mass murderer in the world finds mercy and goes to heaven."

Monsignor. No, but you're equating the worst mass murderer or the devil with an innocent 3 year old child.

Rob. No, I'm not. Let's just...

Monsignor. You are in what you just said, yeah, and that's nonsense.

Rob. Let's equate "God is good" with the average person who is working in America today and he's involved in the religion of his choice, let's say a Buddhist and he chants three times a day and he holds a job at the local industry, do you feel that he would find peace with God and go to heaven?

Monsignor. Yes.

Rob. Could you tell me how Scripture informs you of this along with common sense, reason, history...?

Monsignor. Because Scripture says God is good and just and merciful.

Rob. Okay.

Monsignor. And then reason says, then why should God send them to hell, somebody who has been good?

Rob. Could you show me where the Scripture treats the person that we're speaking of as being good? Show me one place in Scripture where God describes people as being good.

Monsignor. I don't have to.

Rob. Why?

Monsignor. Because I'm not limited to Scripture.

Rob. Okay, I think for...I'm going to turn my attention to this camera, if you don't mind, and you correct me if I'm wrong but I'm trying to summarize the differences that biblical Christianity has with other religions which we would call aberrant religions. One of the primary differences we have is that we really don't believe we're on safe footing and on safe ground unless we can substantiate all that we are saying about God from his word, and Ed here has stated openly and fairly and honestly, I think, that he is not limited just to the word of God; that he has going for him logic and common sense and history and tradition and perhaps even feelings. I think you mentioned, "I just think," or, "I just feel that he wouldn't," at one point. And I would say that this primarily is a humongous difference not just with me and the Roman Catholic community but with me and any other religion out there that would try to arrive at a relationship with God apart from the Scriptures for the Scriptures are very very clear in their portrayal of what we call objectivized truth.

And I'd just like to maybe have you react to the words of our Lord in John 14, which I think is critical to this point in our discussion where he says in verse 14, "I am the way and the truth and the life: no one comes to the Father but through me," and yet you're willing to say that men and women on this planet can go to the Father apart from having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ whereas he...

Monsignor. Well, because some have never heard of Jesus Christ.

Rob. How about those who have heard of Jesus Christ but do not consider him to be the only way to heaven such as the Buddhist I mentioned or a Muslim?

Monsignor. Or a Jew?

Rob. Or a Jew? Do you feel that they have access to God and can be, even though Jesus Christ has said that "no one comes to the Father but through me"? You see, what you're really saying is you can reject Christ and still go to the Father.

Monsignor. If you're doing it erroneously like some people would be doing in good faith.

Rob. Could you elaborate....

Monsignor. That's different from somebody who has heard of Christ and has been a person in the faith and rejecting Christ. It depends on how you reject him.

Rob. If I were.....

Monsignor. I mean, some have scarcely heard of him. They've heard the word. Everybody in America knows Christmas is coming but everybody is not a believer in Christ in America.

Rob. If I could ask you, have you ever gone to, let's just take a Jew for instance, and talked with the Jew and said, "Now look, if you don't believe on the Lord Jesus Christ you can't go to the Father," have you done that?

Monsignor. Not that I can recall.

Rob. If you had done that and the Jewish person had said, "I'm sorry. I don't believe that Jesus is the Messiah," would you say that's okay, I believe he can still have access to the Father?

Monsignor. Oh, definitely.

Rob. Okay. Mark it for the difference, I guess, that herein lies the tension point where I would say there's not a possibility that that person would have peace with the Father and would be able to go to the Father because he has, in fact, rejected the Son of God. He has declined.

Monsignor. But he's [unintelligible].

Rob. Pardon me?

Monsignor. He's relative.

Rob. Pardon me?

Monsignor. He's Jewish [unintelligible]. That doesn't make sense that you're saying that Jesus Christ is rejecting his own people if they are good and caring and kind and generous.

Rob. God has not rejected his own people for he saved many of them. He saved, in fact, 100% of the entire early church, as you well know was Jewish so he certainly did not reject his people, rather his people rejected them, him, rather, and the question is can I have a relationship with God if I reject his Son and it seems to be the clear testimony of Scripture that all those who reject the Son, reject the Father. "If you reject me, you are rejecting the Father." But yet you say they can still have a relationship with God based upon what?

Monsignor. Just the fact that people do have relationships in God and people do pray. Muslims pray frequently. Buddhists pray.

Rob. So in your opinion if you pray, you must have a relationship with God?

Monsignor. Yeah.

Rob. Okay. Could I...

Monsignor. [unintelligible] to God.

Rob. Could I move on to maybe a different topic?

Monsignor. Yeah. Because fundamentally....

Rob. Okay, unless you have some....

Monsignor. I am, it really isn't my task to say who's in heaven and who isn't. You know, that's a judgment but some preachers love to say, "This person's in hell and this one's in heaven." That's God's job. My job is to talk about the Scripture, preach what God has revealed, but not in an incredibly judgmental way of dividing up peoples and cultures.

Dale. Okay, before we go to the next topic, I just have a few questions in my mind. Now you believe that the Bible is the word of God and so you would not disagree with what the Bible has to say? Is that true?

Monsignor. Well, Dale, it depends, you have to interpret the Bible.

Dale. Okay, but if it's something clean and clear like you must be born again or you cannot enter the kingdom of God, something like that, would you agree with that?

Monsignor. It depends how literally you're going to take it. I'm not going to agree with it if you're going to say that no non-Christian or non-Catholic can be saved.

Dale. Okay, then, anyway with that said, now you know the fallen man, Adam and Eve's sin and we are all born, would you agree we're all born sinners, we're all born with a sin nature which is the reason Christ died?

Monsignor. Well....

Dale. I mean, that is in the Bible. That's what it says, that a fallen man, that sin entered the world through Adam and is passed on to all mankind so we all have a sin nature and that is the whole reason...

Monsignor. No, I absolutely disagree with Luther in the 15th and 16th century. Man is fundamentally good as he comes from the hands of God.

Dale. But in Romans it says "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"? Well, okay, so you don't agree with that?

Monsignor. [unintelligible]

Dale. Okay, you don't agree that all men are born sinners?

Monsignor. We're born influenced by sin because the world, that's what we mean by original sin.

Dale. Then why did Christ die?

Monsignor. To fight against....

Dale. Their sins?

Monsignor. Our personal sins, right.

Dale. I mean, he said, "I've taken on the sins of the world."

Monsignor. Right.

Dale. He's talking about our sins that we're born with, right?

Monsignor. No, he's talking primarily about the sins that we, the choices we make.

Dale. Okay.

Monsignor. What I would call personal sin.

Dale. Right, they used to put the sins on the lambs and it was, of course, a foreshadowing of the Messiah. You do believe that God in the flesh, Jesus Christ is God in the flesh? He lived a perfect life and died on the cross for the sins of men and rose from the dead and whoever would receive him has the right to become a son of God. That's what 1 John, I mean, that's what the first chapter of John says. So would you agree with that?

Monsignor. Yeah.

Dale. That whoever receives him has the right to become a son of God and that would logically mean that whoever rejects him does not have a right to be a son of God.

Monsignor. Disagree.

Dale. Okay.

Monsignor. Because that assumes that they've heard of him. Many have not heard of him and you're condemning to hell all those people who have never heard of Jesus Christ.

Dale. Well, let's say you're in Islam, you worship Allah which, as we know, Mohammad picked him out of 300 demon gods and he has different characteristics than Jehovah, the God of the Bible. They're worshiping a false god. They think Jesus Christ is a prophet and we tell them Jesus Christ is not a prophet, he is God in the flesh, he is the Messiah and if you'll turn your life to him, you'll have eternal life and they say, "No, I don't want that." What happens to those guys? What would happen?

Monsignor. Depending how they lived their lives.

Dale. If they live a good life, they'll still go to heaven?

Monsignor. Sure.

Dale. Okay. I just wanted to clear that up.

Rob. I'd like to ask you perhaps a little bit about your understanding of the afterlife, your understanding of heaven, your understanding of hell.

Monsignor. I know very little about it, anyway.

Rob. Well, insofar as your understanding of it. Do you believe that there is a literal hell?

Monsignor. What do you mean by literal, Rob? In fire and all that?

Rob. A place of torment, suffering and pain of eternal...

Monsignor. I believe that hell is a separation from God [unintelligible] comes from that.

Rob. Will there be pain in hell?

Monsignor. Well, yes but I don't know if it's physical or whatever.

Rob. Okay. Do you believe in a literal heaven, a place of joy and contentment and peace and...

Monsignor. Total security.

Rob. ...with God? Now do you believe that there is an intermediate place whereby a person may go between heaven and hell?

Monsignor. No.

Rob. Do you believe in the doctrine of purgatory?

Monsignor. Yes.

Rob. What is it?

Monsignor. In 20th century terms. It's to explain the phenomenon of a good Christian person who nonetheless up to the time of death has some minor sins that don't seem compatible with heaven, say, very commonly, racial hatred. I can think of a wonderful woman who died at the age of 93 who was outstanding both in her church and in her community in terms of what she did for people all of her life, but she had some prejudice against black people which was not uncommon given her time she lived and in Central Texas and so on. I can't imagine people walking down the streets of heaven with prejudices on race or anything else and so I am willing to accept that something happens, a purgation, a cleansing, a special grace from God that changed that woman's attitude.

Rob. Okay.

Monsignor. But I do not see purgatory as a temporary hell or anything else. There were plenty of errors about purgatory at the time of the Reformation, that's what triggered the Reformation. I would agree with Luther on that.

Rob. Has anything....

Monsignor. It was manipulating people.

Rob. Okay. I'd like to just define with you some terminology of the Catholic religion on purgatory and work our way up from Trent to Vatican II, okay, and get your response to it, if I could? First of all, the writings of Trent say this, "Whereas the Catholic Church instructed by the Holy Spirit has in the sacred writings an ancient tradition of the fathers taught in sacred councils and very recently in this ecumenical synod that there is a purgatory and that the souls there detained are helped by the suffrages of the faithful, but principally by the acceptable sacrifice of the altar. The holy synod enjoins on bishops that they diligently endeavor that the sound doctrine concerning purgatory be believed, maintained, taught and everywhere proclaimed by the faithful of Christ." Do you disagree with that?

Monsignor. We've moved beyond it.

Rob. Okay. Let's see how far we've moved beyond it. In pre-Vatican II from the Baltimore Confession we read, "Purgatory is the state in which those suffer for a time who died guilty of venial sins or without having satisfied for the punishment due their sins." Do you agree with that? That's the Baltimore Catechism.

Monsignor. Catechism. That's basically Trent. That nothing happened between then.

Rob. Okay, do you agree with that? It doesn't sound like what you were just saying. I see the words "suffering for a time, guilty of venial sins, without having satisfied for the punishment due their sins," so it's a place where....

Monsignor. We don't use that language anymore.

Rob. Would you disagree with that language?

Monsignor. Yeah, I don't think it's very helpful or appropriate.

Rob. Okay. Fundamentals of Catholic dogma. "The souls of the just which in the moment of death are burdened with venial sins or temporal punishment due to sins enter purgatory." More language that you would find unacceptable?

Monsignor. We're talking metaphors, Rob.

Rob. Okay.

Monsignor. Not the place in the sense that Austin is the place or Vermont's a place. We're talking states, whether it happens in an instant or you can, you know, it's hard for us to contextualize time outside of time.

Rob. Okay. Alright, let's read post-Vatican II. It brings up the modern times. This is from "Instructions in the Catholic Faith."

Monsignor. Look, I can tell you what I believe....

Rob. Okay.

Monsignor. ...and if you want to play against books, I don't really care.

Rob. So you wouldn't hold....

Monsignor. I know what I believe and what I teach.

Rob. Okay, could you show me, then, from your own Catholic Bible the doctrine of purgatory and substantiation?

Monsignor. No. It's from reason.

Rob. Okay. I just want to make a comment that on the doctrine of purgatory, it appears that there is some difference between the Monsignor's understanding of purgatory and the historic doctrines, but be that aside, once again the difference between biblical Christianity and any other religion or philosophy is that we want to see the data, we want to see the proof, we want to see the substantiation of the philosophy or the doctrine or the dogma from the Scriptures and if it cannot be proven from the Scriptures, then we want you to question it and treat it as suspect, and I think that's what, I think that's where our difference is. It's always going to come back to authority. If we can find it in the Bible and if it can be proved from the Bible, then we really do want to hang onto it, but if we can't then it becomes a matter of one man's opinion, frankly, versus another man's opinion because we wouldn't have a source of authority to go to.

Monsignor. Well, you're still talking about how one man or another man or woman interprets Scripture and that's been going on for 2,000 years.

Rob. Right. Well, that's why I wanted you to find your rationale from Scripture so that we could all look at Scripture together and find out....

Monsignor. We begin, though, by saying, Rob, not everything that we believe and teach is in Scripture.

Rob. Okay.

Monsignor. Explicitly.

Dale. Okay, our time....

Monsignor. That's nothing new.

Dale. With time running out, it's been a pleasure having you and I can't believe that the hour has gone by but I would just like to give you both a couple minutes to close maybe with the, you know, your, just your response of what we've talked about as far as the, you know, the Bible and the church or your faith, and then in two minutes possibly for you, Rob. Go ahead, Monsignor.

Monsignor. Well, thank you, Dale. We cherish Scripture and I read it every day and I look forward to meeting biblical Christians in heaven along with a whole bunch of other people with great confidence and joy and I think it would be a caricature to say that as a Catholic I don't really cherish Scripture. I find tremendous inspiration in the teaching, but I find that in all of God's creation and I don't find any antagonism between all the rest of the discoveries of creation that comes from the hand of God and the Scripture that comes from God.

Dale. Rob, with time remaining....

Rob. I'd just like to say that we are warned by the apostle in Galatians 1 that if anyone comes to you presenting a Gospel contrary to the Gospel that he presented, then that person was to be accursed and anathema. Paul repeated himself twice within a span of four verses and the idea presupposes an objective truth, a true Gospel, a Gospel that can be found in the Scriptures, and that Gospel centers around the person of Jesus Christ and by his own words we learn that nobody can go to the Father unless they go through Christ and it is by faith and faith alone. This eliminates all other ideologies, all other philosophies, and all other arena of thoughts, and as Paul said in another letter it was his goal to take every thought captive and obedient to Jesus Christ and to cherish the word and find our source of authority in the word itself. That Gospel which emerges from that word is contrary to existentialism, it's contrary to Buddhism, it's contrary to Hinduism, Judaism and it's contrary to historic Roman Catholicism. It's also contrary to the philosophy of men. We're warned in Colossians 2 that we're not to be held captive by the philosophies of men and I think what we've seen today is a good representation of the philosophy of men and how different aspects of truth can be intertwined and in so intertwined they can be wedded to error and wedded to humanistic philosophy to the point where there is confusion and obscuring of the Gospel. We don't think that's necessary and we would ask you to go to Christ, read John 14:6.

Dale. With that said, we're out of time. It's been a very enlightening discussion and I would just like to say to the people out there that I hope that you would take to heart things that were said today and perhaps, not perhaps, your eternal soul depends on what you do with Jesus Christ. I would like to thank my guest, Monsignor Ed Jordan, for being here.

Monsignor. You bet.

Dale. And Rob Zins. Thank you for watching and we'll see you next time.