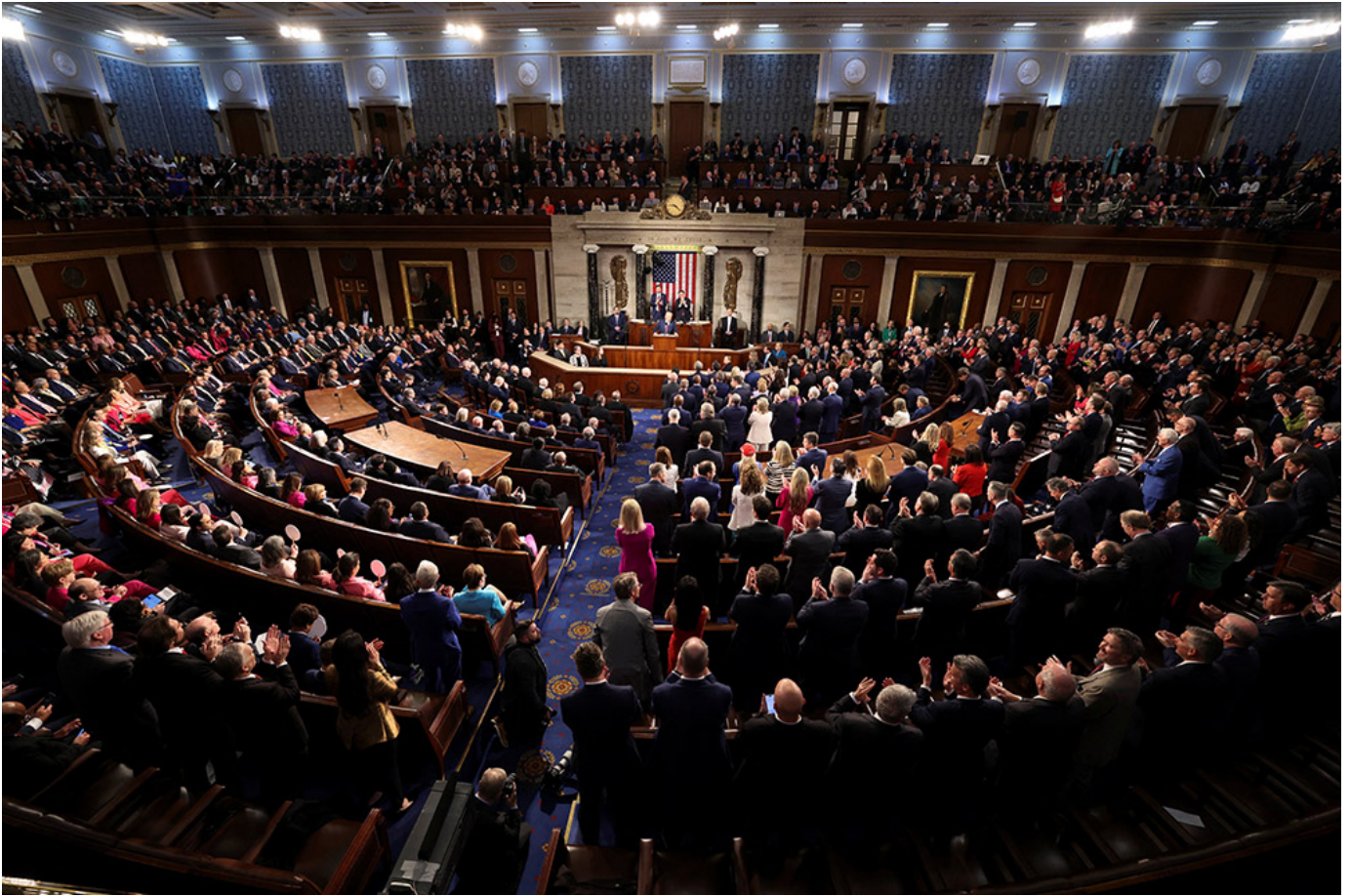




U.S. President Donald Trump addresses a joint session of Congress at the U.S. Capitol in Washington March 4, 2025. (OSV News/Reuters/Kevin Lamarque)



by John Grosso

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(NCR graphic/Angie Von Slaughter)

Bishop Robert Barron was invited to President Donald Trump's address to the Joint Session of Congress on March 4 by Rep. Riley Moore, Republican of West Virginia. Before the speech, Barron celebrated Mass for lawmakers and staff at the invitation of Moore.

The next day, Barron, the bishop of Winona-Rochester, Minnesota, and founder of the Word on Fire media empire, shared a nearly 7-minute video reflection about his visit to Washington, D.C., the gatherings he attended, and his disdain for the Democrats who interrupted Trump's joint address to Congress, which the bishop called "a kind of a high liturgy of our democracy."

NCR digital editor John Grosso went through the [video](#) line-by-line to fact check and analyze. The bolded transcript is below with critical components underlined. NCR's analysis is italicized.

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Barron: Hey everybody, it's Bishop Barron. I'm still here in Washington, D.C., the day after witnessing the president's speech to the joint session of

Congress. I want to tell you about the whole day. It was an extraordinary experience. I came first over here to one of the House office buildings. We had a Mass for members and for staffers, and it was a wonderful Mass. About, I don't know, 60 or so people came, and it was very moving to see these people dedicated to their government work, but also dedicated to the church.

NCR: We don't know anything about this Mass other than it was private. NCR asked to attend, but we were rebuffed despite noting that our executive editor wanted to join the government officials in praying for our country. We are not sure if Democratic Catholic lawmakers were invited.

The [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) says in regards to private or semi-private Masses: "rites which are meant to be celebrated in common, with the faithful present and actively participating, should as far as possible be celebrated in that way rather than by an individual and quasi-privately."

After that, I went out for dinner with Rep. Riley Moore, very grateful to him. He's the congressman from northern West Virginia, and he invited me. Every member is allowed to invite one person to the State of the Union. So he invited me, and I was just delighted to accept that. We had a great conversation. He's on the House Appropriations Committee. We talked about a lot of different things. He's a very ardent Catholic. And I was, you know, honored to be asked.

Riley Moore is on record in favor of mass deportations, and has [lauded](#) the Department of Government Efficiency (which slashed USAID's budget) for doing a "tremendous job identifying billions in American's tax dollars that are being wasted each year." He also [retweeted](#) a "deportation valentine" shared by the White House. In spite of these policies being at odds with the teaching of the Catholic Church and Pope Francis, Moore [has used his X account](#) to call for prayers for Francis' health on numerous occasions.



Bishop Robert Barron of Winona-Rochester, Minn., speaks at the Star of the North Eucharistic Congress at the Sanford Center in Bemidji, Minn., May 18, 2024. (OSV News/Courtney Meyer)

We then made our way over to the House, and we went to the speaker's reception, which is quite extraordinary. So the Speaker of the House has a reception before the speech. And there were hundreds of people there. Everyone who was anyone was there. I worked my way through the crowd, and I found myself face to face with RFK Jr. [Robert F. Kennedy Jr.] and then I'd see Ben Shapiro was there, and then representatives that I recognized, and kind of in a huddle, you know, greeting people. Finally made it to the speaker's office, and Speaker [Mike] Johnson, very gracious guy. So all that was thrilling, just to be kind of behind the scenes.

Barron speaks gleefully about his insider access — by his own admission — to be counted among the people who mattered. [Robert F. Kennedy Jr.](#), who he specifically cites here as "someone," is a divorced and remarried Catholic, and has been panned

by his own family members and close contacts as a "[predator](#)" and "[drug dealer](#)." More recently, as Secretary of Health and Human Services, Kennedy has peddled dangerous and incorrect [conspiracy theories](#) about vaccinations, as well as citing out of context data to suggest [unconventional therapies](#) to combat the measles epidemic in West Texas.

Ben Shapiro, a divisive conservative media personality, is a strong advocate for capital punishment, does not believe climate change is a global emergency, and is [currently advocating](#) for the release and pardon of Derek Chauvin, the man convicted in the murder of George Floyd. Shapiro and Matt Walsh (a self-defined theocratic fascist) were both guests of Speaker Mike Johnson.

And then we made our way up to the gallery, and I was brought into the section of the gallery kind of early. We got there quarter to eight. The speech didn't start till about 9:15 [p.m.]. We were stripped of our cell phones. Everybody up there in the gallery said that was, you know, challenging, but it also compelled us to speak to each other.

And then here's what I found really interesting. I'd been in that chamber before, but never up in the gallery, never for an event like this, and I'm speaking now as a Catholic bishop, I know about ritual. I know about processions. I know about organizing an ordered body of people, and that's really what was going on. It was a kind of high liturgy of our democracy, as the senators and representatives gather, and then, you know, the gavel is sounded, and in come the joint chiefs, and then in come the Supreme Court justices, and then in comes the president's cabinet in a kind of stately procession. And I'm like, yep, I get it. This is a liturgy of democracy.

And then, of course, at the very end, just as the bishop or priest comes last to lead the prayer, well, then finally, you know, the president of the United States comes into the chamber. So all that it was, you know, very interesting to see. And having watched these things for many, many years, to be there in the place was interesting.

Barron is comparing the President of the United States to a bishop or priest, and a joint address to Congress to a Mass. In Trump's joint address to Congress, the president bragged about: withdrawing from the Paris Climate Accord; ending environmental restrictions that protected land, air and water; freezing foreign aid

that among other things delivers food to the starving of the world; ending diversity, equity and inclusion programs; and taking over two sovereign nations, Panama and Greenland.

Barron, a bishop of the church, compared all of that to what Catholics consider the most important and sacred act of worship: the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.



U.S. Vice President JD Vance and House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., look on as President Donald Trump addresses a joint session of Congress at the U.S. Capitol in Washington March 4, 2025. (OSV News/Reuters/Kevin Lamarque)

Now at that point, here's what I first noticed. So as the president came in the room, the Republican side were on their feet, cheering and clapping. I look over to the Democratic side, everybody was simply seated, hands in their laps, not saying anything, not acknowledging the president's arrival.

And I must say, it struck me as very strange, and I say having watched a lot of these things on TV over the years. Typically, when the president

comes in, well, the whole chamber, you know, would greet him, and sure, there's disagreements, but people would say, I'm recognizing the Office of the President. So it was the first indication of something that was kind of off.

Barron's take here is surprising — partisan jockeying during a joint session of Congress is nothing new. During the [2024 State of the Union](#), it is clear that many Republicans are not applauding Joe Biden during his procession into the Capitol.

Then the speech began, and things got you probably know this by now, if you watch the news, things got pretty raucous, and I watched some replays, and it's true that you don't get the same impression on TV as you got in the chamber.

Right after Trump began his speech, one of the members got up in a very aggressive way, just began shouting at the president. And first, people were kind of shocked, because, as they say, it's something of a liturgy. And you know liturgy, you kind of follow the rules and follow the rhythm of the event.

So this guy is shouting, and then he was warned several times by the Speaker of the House. And finally, it got so bad, the speaker had to call the sergeant at arms to remove him. Well, I think I read correctly this morning, it hasn't happened at a State of the Union. I had never seen it in my lifetime.

While it is true that Rep. Al Green was the first person in modern history to be removed from a joint address to Congress, the bishop's comment is misleading because it omits salient historical facts.

Republican representatives (and one guest) booed and heckled President Joe Biden during the [2023](#) and [2024](#) State of the Union Address. Rep. Majorie Taylor Greene repeatedly interrupted Biden during both addresses. The Speaker of the House was a Republican in both of those years, and opted not to dismiss the interrupters. And in 2009, a Republican [Congressman famously shouted "You lie"](#) at President Barack Obama during a joint address of Congress.



Rep. Al Green, D-Texas, gestures as U.S. President Donald Trump addresses a joint session of Congress at the U.S. Capitol in Washington March 4, 2025. (OSV News/Reuters/Win McNamee)

And unfortunately, it was just the beginning of a long process of this jeering and cat calling and just watching, I had a perfect vantage point to see this. You know, the Republican side standing up, cheering all the time. The Democrats never acknowledging anything.

The bishop is no doubt aware that a well-formed conscience is the cornerstone of Catholic identity and the animus for actions informed by faith. Democrats not cheering for policy decisions that they fundamentally oppose — and happen to be antithetical to Catholic teaching — seems like the moral thing to do. As the Catechism states, "In all he says and does, man is obliged to follow faithfully what he knows to be just and right." Cheering for anti-Christian policies is wrong.

Even, as many have pointed out — and this was shocking to people in the room — the point when the president acknowledged the young kid who had

brain cancer, and he made him an honorary member of the Secret Service. It was just kind of this touching moment. His dad lifted him up on his shoulders, and he wasn't far from where I was sitting, and, you know, he was cheering, and then I look over at the Democratic side, and not one reaction. And I thought, alright, we're not even talking politics anymore. We're just talking about a kid that's being, you know, acknowledged."

It was indeed a touching moment — and our prayers for the recovery of that young boy.

Perhaps Democrats saw the moment as a spectacle meant to distract from the new National Institutes of Health policy that is endangering [pediatric cancer research](#). House Democrats said that policy, which imposes a 15% cap on indirect costs for research grants, could result in cuts of billions of dollars to research for cures and treatments of cancer and other deadly diseases. Many organizations have spoken up about how disastrous these cuts would be, including the Pediatric Cancer Research Foundation and the [Leukemia and Lymphoma Society](#).

Attacking Democrats for declining to applaud a president slashing cancer research funding seems misdirected. Wouldn't it be better to spend energy urging support for funding research to combat diseases?



Democrats hold protest signs as U.S. President Donald Trump addresses a joint session of Congress at the U.S. Capitol in Washington March 4, 2025. (OSV News/Reuters/Win McNamee)

So, it was, I'll say this, everybody, it was a little bit disquieting to me to see and you know, my view, I'm not here as a cheerleader for Republicans or Donald Trump. I'm a cheerleader for Catholic social teaching.

I'm chair of this committee of USCCB [U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops] on youth, marriage and laity and family life. I've issued two statements in support of two of Trump's executive orders, I issued a third statement attacking one of his executive orders. I'm a member of the Minnesota bishops, and we issued a statement that was supportive of certain elements of the president's immigration policy, critical of others. My point is, I'm not an apologist for Donald Trump, but I am an apologist, I guess, too, for American democracy.

This is disingenuous. The bishops' committee on Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth issued statements exclusively related to transgender Americans and in vitro fertilization (IVF). On Jan. 29, Barron [praised Trump in a statement](#) for prohibiting the promotion and federal funding of gender-affirming care. On Feb. 6, Barron issued a [nuanced refutation](#) of the Trump administration's protection of IVF — calling the executive order "fatally flawed" but still praising the "promising pro-life actions" of the administration issued in January.

Finally, Barron's committee issued a statement [blasting the U.S. Senate](#) for not passing a House bill that would prevent federal funding for sports programs that allow trans athletes to participate in women's sports. There [are at least three](#) other bishops' conference statements from other committees praising the administration's work in areas of school choice and anti-abortion actions.

[The bishops' conference did issue a statement](#) on Jan. 23. Though they [filed a lawsuit over](#) the [U.S. Refugee Admissions Program](#), the bishops have been noticeably silent on the issue since Francis' [unprecedented letter](#) to the U.S. bishops encouraging them to stand up for immigrants and refugees and condemning mass deportations.

The [Minnesota Catholic Conference](#) issued a lengthy statement on Feb. 7 that criticized both the Biden and Trump administration's actions on immigration. Barron cosigned along with his brother bishops in the state.

[Barron also has been strikingly silent](#) and we are unable to find anything on his powerful digital media apparatus — with more than 1.8 million followers on his YouTube channel — to defend Catholic social teaching in any way despite administration actions causing [irreparable harm](#) to Catholic Relief Services, the treatment of immigrants and refugees and the environment. At no point, that we have seen, has Barron defended American democracy in the face of executive overreach, nor has he raised his voice in opposition of Catholic Vice President JD Vance's [challenge](#) to the 200 year old practice of American judicial review and separation of powers.



U.S. Vice President JD Vance and House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., applaud as President Donald Trump addresses a joint session of Congress at the U.S. Capitol in Washington March 4, 2025. (OSV News/Reuters/Win McNamee)

And this high liturgy was going on, and it was, it was interrupted in a way that I found disturbing, and the sharp division was so on display. You could see it, you could hear it in the room. By the end of the speech, now granted, it was a long speech. I think I read this morning the longest ever. I think he spoke for an hour and 45 minutes. So, granted, it was a long speech, but I think about half the Democratic side have left the chamber before the speech is over, which I thought, again, was a sign of disrespect.

A [number of Republicans left](#) during then Biden's State of the Union in 2024. Curiously, the bishop did not share his frustrations with Republican lawmakers then.

So, you know, I'm trying to sum up the experience. I love that, and I'm so grateful again to Rep. Moore for inviting me. It was a splendid evening just to be part of it and to see this thing that I watched on TV for many years,

and to see the whole government display there.

But at the same time, I saw something that disturbed me, this division, this trouble within the body politic. It's a kind of wound that I hope you know we can all work together to heal, but God bless you and keep praying for us.

In the video, Barron never criticizes Republicans, implicitly blaming Democrats' lack of decorum for the division that has invaded our political landscape.

Once again, Barron missed the opportunity to speak out on behalf of the marginalized. And once again, he chose instead to echo partisan talking points. [NCR published an editorial](#) before his clandestine Mass at the Capitol wondering if he would speak truth to power. It appears we have our answer.

This story appears in the [Trump's Second Term](#) and [Digital Dunces](#) feature series.