

## THE GOOD WITNESS OF NOT RECEIVING COMMUNION

*To receive or not to receive?*

*The following comes from a December 7 [Catholic Stand](#) article by David Roney:*

Last year, I found myself in a terrible position. It was a Sunday morning and I was preparing to take my kids to Mass. The problem was that I believed I needed to go to Confession prior to receiving the Eucharist. That was cause enough for anxiety, as no one wants their soul outside a state of grace. Add to that the fact that my kids had never seen me skip Communion before, and I was doubly stressed.

As a dad who wants to provide excellent Catholic witness to his then 12 & 14-year-olds, I was deeply conflicted about what to do. Do I receive the Eucharist and avoid having to tell my kids I have sinned, and of course avoid the relentlessly judging eyes of my fellow parishioners – few of whom I had noticed ever skipping Communion? Or, do I listen to my little voice, albeit one with a zealous scrupulosity meter, and skip Communion until I have been to Confession?

### **Who Is Worthy of Communion?**

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops states on its [website](#) about sin and the need for Confession:

*Before one steps forward to receive the Body and Blood of Christ in Holy Communion, one needs to be in a right relationship with the Lord and his Mystical Body, the Church – that is, in a state of grace, free of all mortal sin.*

*While sin damages, and can even destroy, that relationship, the sacrament of Penance can restore it. St. Paul tells us that “whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will have to answer for the body and blood of the Lord. A person should examine himself, and so eat the bread and drink the cup” (1 Cor 11:27-28). Anyone who is conscious of having committed a mortal sin should be reconciled through the sacrament of Penance before receiving the Body and Blood of Christ, unless a grave reason exists for doing so and there is no opportunity for confession.*

Further, it is understood that the graces received from consuming the Eucharist are appropriated according to our reverence and worthiness. Thus, if one does not believe in the real presence, or is knowingly in a state of sin, the graces received will be limited.

Having been a cradle, yet mostly cultural Catholic until about 5 years ago, when I actually started to dig into my faith, I can sadly think of many times I probably received Jesus unworthily. I simply did not understand the importance of being worthy and in a state of grace for Communion. Nine years at “Catholic” schools did not teach me about presenting myself worthily, as I recall; it breaks my heart to think of the mistakes I made when I was younger.

Thankfully I have since confessed those errors and learned from them. And thus on this particular Sunday, I knew better. Honestly, for a moment, I wish I had not known better. But I did. I had become an educated and informed Catholic and had

decided to follow my faith, which includes doing the difficult and sometimes uncomfortable things.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church say this about grave matter:

*CCC 1859 Mortal sin requires full knowledge and complete consent. It presupposes knowledge of the sinful character of the act, of its opposition to God's law. It also implies a consent sufficiently deliberate to be a personal choice. Feigned ignorance and hardness of heart do not diminish, but rather increase, the voluntary character of a sin.*

### **Did He Present Himself for Communion?**

So I fretted during Mass about what to do. Receive or not receive? Receive or not receive? “Dear Lord please tell me what to do,” I prayed. The Church does not require that we receive the Blessed Sacrament at each Mass, so not doing so would not be a sin, which provided some solace. In the end, I had convinced myself, rightly or wrongly, that Jesus would forgive me for what I was still unsure was actual grave matter, my willful participation in it, and for receiving while unsure about being worthy.

Yet, when the time came just a couple minutes later, I did not present myself for Communion; I just could not. Being uncertain, and wanted to err on the side of being worthy of my Lord and Savior. I dreaded explaining it to my kids, but I knew that was a part of my penance. You screw up and sin, you have to make amends and get it right before the Lord, and before receiving the Lord.

When the time came for Communion, I got up and let my kids out as I usually do. They saw me kneeling when they came back to the pew. Both had puzzled looks on their faces, and I told them I would explain later. Not surprisingly, I prayed for a proper way to share with my kids why I did not receive, and I think God delivered on that request. I explained to my kids in the car that because I believe in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, as all Catholics should, and believed I had done something for which I had to clear my conscience and soul in Confession, I thought it best to not receive Communion that day. To my kids’ credit, and to the credit of their authentically Catholic grade school, neither asked me what I had done. While both were still a little surprised, both accepted my explanation and dropped the matter.

### **The Lasting Impact of Good Witness**

That Sunday both of my kids and I learned something new. They experienced their father admitting a mistake for which he needed Confession – not something of which one should be proud, of course – but perhaps an important revelation to growing kids about the true fallibility of parents. More importantly, they witnessed that their dad had such reverence for Christ, he simply could not present himself to Him in a state of unworthiness. Essentially, I unwittingly at the time, underscored, bolded, and italicized my belief in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. And as He always does, the Lord took a bad situation and made something good out of it.

In conversations since with my kids, I have explained to them that they too should do the same if they find themselves outside a state of grace. I have promised to take them to Confession, and not ask any questions. I think it is important for parents to both stress the importance of receiving worthily while offering their kids an

opportunity to regain their worthiness through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. And they should do so absent any prying into their children's sin(s). They need to Confess to Christ, through their priest, not their parents.

I have since that one Sunday come to believe that people who do not receive Communion at Mass offer a valuable witness to the rest of their congregations about the importance of receiving while worthy. While I am sorry for their situations and pray they are temporary, I appreciate the respect and reverence they show to our Savior. And, of course, I never judge nor speculate about the reasons for their not presenting themselves before Christ, as the reasons may be personal, and not involve grave matter.

Perhaps if we all offered such witness regarding the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, as myriad opportunities arise in our lives, others might learn from us and come to believe as we do, and deepen their faith. That can only please our Lord.

# Two prominent professors ask Pope to address ‘The Misuse of Amoris Laetitia to Support Errors against the Catholic Faith’

[Amoris Laetitia](#) [Catholic](#) [Pope Francis](#)

December 9, 2016 ([LifeSiteNews](#)) — In the following letter, renowned philosophy and ethics professors John Finnis and Germain Grisez ask Pope Francis to renounce eight errant positions that "find support in statements by or omissions" by *Amoris Laetitia* and "are or include errors against the Catholic faith."

The “misuses” of the pope’s exhortation that Finnis and Grisez list and refute are similar to the concerns raised by the 45 theologians who wrote to the College of Cardinals about the matter.

Finnis and Grisez argue that proponents of positions contrary to the Catholic faith will be emboldened by *Amoris Laetitia*’s ambiguities, seeming contradictions of Catholic moral teaching, and failure to adequately affirm key Catholic teaching.

Such positions contrary to the Catholic faith include:

- the possibility of absolution of penitents who lack a firm purpose of amendment

- the notion that some people are incapable of following God's commandments or sometimes ought to choose sin over the commandments
- the idea that there are exceptions to every general moral rule
- sexual standards out of line with Catholic moral teaching
- an understanding of indissoluble marriage as sometimes dissoluble
- the argument that a "Catholic need not believe that many human beings will end in hell."

Using Sacred Scripture and the Church's magisterial teachings, Finnis and Grisez lay out the case for Pope Francis to publicly clarify the most controversial parts of his exhortation.

Here is the letter:

***The Misuse of Amoris Laetitia to Support Errors against the Catholic Faith: A Letter to the Supreme Pontiff Francis, to all bishops in communion with him, and to the rest of the Christian faithful***

In this letter, John Finnis and Germain Grisez request Pope Francis to condemn eight positions against the Catholic faith that are being supported, or likely will be, by the misuse of his Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*. They ask all bishops to join in this request and to issue their own condemnations of the erroneous positions, while reaffirming the Catholic teachings these positions contradict.

The eight positions are these.

**Position A:**

A priest administering the Sacrament of Reconciliation may sometimes absolve a penitent who lacks a purpose of amendment with respect to a sin in grave matter that either pertains to his or her ongoing form of life or is habitually repetitive.

**Position B:**

Some of the faithful are too weak to keep God's commandments; though resigned to committing ongoing and habitual sins in grave matter, they can live in grace.

**Position C:**

No general moral rule is exceptionless. Even divine commandments forbidding specific kinds of actions are subject to exceptions in some situations.

**Position D:**

While some of God's commandments or precepts seem to require that one never choose an act of one of the kinds to which they refer, those commandments and precepts actually are rules that express ideals and identify goods that one should always serve and strive after as best one can, given one's weaknesses and one's complex, concrete situation, which may require one to choose an act at odds with the letter of the rule.

**Position E:**

If one bears in mind one's concrete situation and personal limitations, one's conscience may at times discern that doing an act of a kind contrary even to divine commandment will be doing one's best to respond to God, which is all that he asks, and then one ought to choose to

do that act but also be ready to conform fully to the divine commandment if and when one can do so.

**Position F:**

Choosing to bring about one's own, another's, or others' sexual arousal and/or satisfaction is morally acceptable provided only that (1) no adult has bodily contact with a child; (2) no participant's body is contacted without his or her free and clear consent to both the mode and the extent of contact; (3) nothing done knowingly brings about or unduly risks significant physical harm, disease transmission, or unwanted pregnancy; and (4) no moral norm governing behavior in general is violated.

**Position G:**

A consummated, sacramental marriage is indissoluble in the sense that spouses ought always to foster marital love and ought never to choose to dissolve their marriage. But by causes beyond the spouses' control and/or by grave faults of at least one of them, their human relationship as a married couple sometimes deteriorates until it ceases to exist. When a couple's marriage relationship no longer exists, their marriage has dissolved, and at least one of the parties may rightly obtain a divorce and remarry.

**Position H:**

A Catholic need not believe that many human beings will end in hell.

*The letter is copyright © John Finnis and Germain Grisez; Notre Dame, Indiana; 21 November 2016.*

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