

**COMMANDMENTS ARE NOT MERE “IDEALS” FROM WHICH SOME
PEOPLE ARE EXCUSED BECAUSE THEY’RE HARD!
WHEREIN FR. Z RANTS.**

by Fr. John Zuhlsdorf

Look. I’m the first one to admit that I am a sinner. I sin and I go to confession with a firm purpose of amendment. When I fall, I get back up, again with a firm purpose of amendment. I go to confession. I keep trying.

I do *not* think that, just because I sin and fall, God’s commandments are only “ideals” which some other people may be able to keep, but that I – poor wretch that I am – cannot and, therefore, I’m a *special* case whom the Church must tell, “There there, John, you *don’t* really have to change your ways. Go ahead and receive Communion anyway! (cf Gen 3:1)”

Since I am a priest, the whole sin v. state of grace thing is officially a Big Deal™ which I must monitor on a daily basis, especially after reading the news, my email and writing this blog. It’s not like I can go to Mass (as *celebrant*) and *not* receive Communion, like a lay person. If I don’t receive, *it isn’t Mass*. So, the pressure is on.

That said, let’s learn something from St. John Paul about the possibility of living in the state of grace.

This is from the 1993 encyclical Veritatis splendor, seemingly contradicted by the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Amoris laetitia*, chapter 8. In fact, of the famous *Five Dubia* sent by the Four Cardinals to the Holy Father (the signer of *Amoris laetitia*) two Dubia concern *Veritatis splendor*.

Grace and obedience to God’s law

102. **Even in the most difficult situations** man must respect the norm of morality so that he can be obedient to God’s holy commandment and consistent with his own dignity as a person. [*This has to do with our dignity.*] Certainly, maintaining a harmony between freedom and truth **occasionally demands uncommon sacrifices**, and must be won at a **high price**: it can even involve martyrdom. But, as universal and daily experience demonstrates, man is tempted to break that harmony: “I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate... I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want” (Rom 7:15, 19).

What is the ultimate source of this inner division of man? His history of sin begins when he no longer acknowledges the Lord as his Creator and **himself wishes to be the one who determines, with complete independence, what is good and what is evil**. “You will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Gen 3:5): this was the first temptation, and it is echoed in all the other temptations to which man is more easily inclined to yield as a result of the original Fall. [*This is the danger inherent in the cant that people can go to Communion if their “consciences” allow. Conscience...formed how?]*

But **temptations can be overcome, sins can be avoided**, because together with the commandments **the Lord gives us the possibility of keeping them**: “His eyes are on those who fear him, and he knows every deed of man. He has not commanded

any one to be ungodly, and he has not given any one permission to sin” (Sir 15:19-20). Keeping God’s law in particular situations can be difficult, extremely difficult, but it is **never impossible**. This is **the constant teaching of the Church’s tradition**, and was expressed by the Council of Trent: “But no one, however much justified, ought to consider himself exempt from the observance of the commandments, nor should he employ that rash statement, forbidden by the Fathers under **anathema, that the commandments of God are impossible of observance by one who is justified**. For God does not command the impossible, but in commanding **he admonishes you to do what you can and to pray for what you cannot, and he gives his aid to enable you**. His commandments are not burdensome (cf. 1 Jn 5:3); his yoke is easy and his burden light (cf. Mt 11:30)”.

103. **Man always has before him the spiritual horizon of hope, thanks to the help of divine grace and with the cooperation of human freedom.**

It is in the saving Cross of Jesus, in the gift of the Holy Spirit, in the Sacraments which flow forth from the pierced side of the Redeemer (cf. Jn 19:34), that believers find the grace and the strength always to keep God’s holy law, even amid the gravest of hardships. As Saint Andrew of Crete observes, the law itself “was enlivened by grace and made to serve it in a harmonious and fruitful combination. Each element preserved its characteristics without change or confusion. In a divine manner, he turned what could be burdensome and tyrannical into what is easy to bear and a source of freedom”.

Only in the mystery of Christ’s Redemption do we discover the “concrete” possibilities of man. **[NB!] “It would be a very serious error to conclude... that the Church’s teaching is essentially only an “ideal” which must then be adapted, proportioned, graduated to the so-called concrete possibilities of man, according to a “balancing of the goods in question”. [Did you get that?] But what are the “concrete possibilities of man”? And of which man are we speaking? Of man dominated by lust or of man redeemed by Christ? This is what is at stake: the reality of Christ’s redemption. Christ has redeemed us! This means that he has given us the possibility of realizing the entire truth of our being; he has set our freedom free from the domination of concupiscence. [NB!] And if redeemed man still sins, this is not due to an imperfection of Christ’s redemptive act, but to man’s will not to avail himself of the grace which flows from that act.** God’s command is of course proportioned to man’s capabilities; but to the capabilities of the man to whom the Holy Spirit has been given; of the man who, though he has fallen into sin, can always obtain pardon and enjoy the presence of the Holy Spirit”.

104. In this context, appropriate allowance is made both for God’s mercy towards the sinner who converts and for the understanding of human weakness. **Such understanding never means compromising and falsifying the standard of good and evil in order to adapt it to particular circumstances.** It is quite human for the sinner to acknowledge his weakness and to ask mercy for his failings; what is unacceptable is the attitude of one who makes his own weakness the criterion of the truth about the good, so that he can feel self-justified, without even the need to have recourse to God and his mercy. An attitude of this sort corrupts the morality of

society as a whole, since **it encourages doubt about the objectivity of the moral law in general and a rejection of the absoluteness of moral prohibitions regarding specific human acts, and it ends up by confusing all judgments about values.** [*“Encouraging doubt” about those thing is, apparently, BAD. As a matter of fact, it is scandalous, isn’t it? As Killick would say, “Which it’s millstones ain’t in it!”*]

Oh yes... that’s right. I forgot. *Veritatis splendor* came out in late 1993. That’s 23, almost 24 whole years ago! That’s *really old!* Surely *VS* isn’t relevant today, is it? Imagine paying attention to something that outdated!

If you were looking for the promised rant, look no farther.

Everyone, don’t be overly discouraged if you fall into sin, even something that is repetitive and truly hard to root out. *Sense* the prevenient grace that God is extending to you! Be truly sorry for your sins, resolve to sin no more, get up off your sorry backsides, go out the door and ...

GO TO CONFESSION!

One of the effects of the Sacrament of Penance is a strengthening against sin.

We can do this. We have to encourage each other and not make excuses. We have to look at the truth straight on and not get mired in sloppy sentiment. Truth doesn’t short-circuit compassion, but compassion doesn’t usurp truth.

Here’s a dose of truth.

One of the important things to know ahead of time about amending your life is that, when the temptations come, you have to be willing to suffer.

A firm purpose of amendment means embracing the Cross. It means being willing to *stay up there on your cross* and suffering. Saying “No!” to yourself, saying “No!” to a temptation is the hard path, but it is the path that leads to heaven. As soon as you say “No!”, the suffering will begin, especially when it comes to more carnal matters. The cross will be laid upon you. Then you will carry it. You might fall! Then you will be nailed to it. Then you will thirst and cry to God. This is how we must face temptations and root out sins. We face them with a plan and the foreknowledge of the suffering to follow.

On our own, we can’t do it. With God, we can. It is not impossible with God’s help. It is impossible only if we are alone, and we are *never* alone.

God offers the crosses and the graces every time. The cross, your daily cross and suffering is the road. Suffering is bad, but it is good. Suffering corrects us and tests us. Suffering purifies us and strengthens us. It’s all a question of what you love. If you love God and want heaven enough, then with love you will stay up on that gift of a cross and you will suffer in sorrowfully joyful pain. It will be bad. But know also that it is, without question, suffering’s easy yoke. It is the easy yoke because you are exactly where you ought to be in God’s plan for your rescue from sin into heaven.

Christ is already victorious. We must live His victory in our bodies and souls. His victory was through the Cross. Our victory is through the Cross. Reject the Cross and you cannot be saved. Reject your crosses and you imperil your salvation.

The Church teaches with Christ's authority. The Church, faithful to Christ her spouse, wants your salvation, just as Christ wants your salvation. Christ offers crosses to help you. Therefore, some of the Church's teachings will be occasions of crosses which you *must bear* for the sake of your salvation.

The Church isn't trying to ruin what might otherwise be a good time in life. She is trying to help you to Heaven, and that means saying "No!" to a lot of things, because there are a lot of things that can drag us to Hell if we are not careful. Hell's road is deception, to which we are led by ease. The road to Heaven is arduous, steep, long, fraught with challenges. But Heaven's road is the happier, even though it is the harder.

If someone comes along and tells you that you don't need to stay up there on your cross... that's from Hell. It certainly is not from God.

WHEN CARDINALS CLASH

By Fr. Gerald E. Murray

It was easily predictable that the *Amoris Laetitia* (particularly footnote 351), would lead to jarring assaults on the Church's doctrinal unity – even by some of the Church's own shepherds. Cardinal Francesco Coccopalmerio, President of the Pontifical Council for Legislative Texts, has just joined the ranks of prelates who say that Pope Francis has authorized giving Holy Communion to those in adulterous second "marriages." Coccopalmerio even extends this permission to others living in sexual relationships apart from marriage in his newly published booklet, *The Eighth Chapter of the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Amoris Laetitia* (which some think authoritative since it was issued by the Vatican's own publishing house, the *Libreria Editrice Vaticana*).

Coccopalmerio writes:

The divorced and remarried, de facto couples, those cohabiting, are certainly not models of unions in sync with Catholic Doctrine, but the Church cannot look the other way. Therefore, the sacraments of Reconciliation and of Communion must be given even to those so-called wounded families and to however many who, despite living in situations not in line with traditional matrimonial canons, express the sincere desire to approach the sacraments after an appropriate period of discernment. . . . it is a gesture of openness and profound mercy on the part of Mother Church, who does not leave behind any of her children, aware that absolute perfection is a precious gift, but one which cannot be reached by everyone.

What do we find here? **Slogans and euphemisms.** A slogan is meant to stop discussion. Euphemisms intentionally steer the reader away from precise and accurate descriptions of reality. A seminary professor of mine once noted that **verbal engineering always precedes social engineering.** In this case, it's doctrinal engineering

Slogans such as "look the other way" and "not leave behind any of her children," and euphemisms such as "so-called wounded families" and "situations not in line with

traditional matrimonial canons” show a decision not to present a carefully reasoned and precise defense of what is being endorsed. Rather, Coccopalmerio tries to sweep the reader along with emotional appeals and misdirection.

“Not looking the other way,” means that the Church should simply ignore the sinfulness of certain behaviors. In the case of unions involving adultery and fornication, the question is not about healing “so-called wounded families” but warning sinners that their behavior gravely offends God.

When he says that the Church should “not leave behind any of her children,” he means that the refusal to give Communion to those publicly living a seriously sinful life would be an unjust abandonment. Adulterous unions are now simply “situations not in line with traditional matrimonial canons.” God’s law on the indissolubility of marriage and the immorality of adultery is now a mere “tradition” embodied in a canon. Violating that law is only a “situation not in line” with that canon, which was written down somewhere, at some time, by someone. How important is a canon compared to actual people who “express the sincere desire to approach the sacraments after an appropriate period of discernment”?

Cardinal Francesco Coccopalmerio

Coccopalmerio describes observing the Sixth Commandment as “absolute perfection [that] is a precious gift, but one which cannot be reached by everyone.” But the Church has never taught that observing the Sixth Commandment is a state of “absolute perfection,” beyond the capability of any of her sons and daughters. It’s an error to consider marital fidelity as an ideal not reachable by many Christians. The grace of the sacrament of marriage is given by God to strengthen married persons in fulfilling their obligation to marital fidelity. Infidelity is a choice against one’s obligations to God and one’s spouse. It is not an authorized alternative for those who “cannot” reach “absolute perfection.”

Coccopalmerio further states: ““The Church could admit to the Penitence and Eucharist the faithful who find themselves in illegitimate unions [who] want to change that situation, but can’t act on their desire.”

God does not permit, let alone oblige, anyone to commit a mortal sin. And He does not authorize anyone to publicly enter a union that contradicts His law on marriage. A person who has placed himself in an adulterous union must for the good of his soul get himself out of that situation. The Church has the duty to uphold the sanctity of the Holy Eucharist. Those who publicly reject the Sixth Commandment, in various ways, cannot be admitted to the reception of Holy Communion until they have put an end to their sinful acts.

In contrast to all this, Cardinal Robert Sarah has published a second book-length interview with French journalist Nicholas Diat, which will soon appear in English: *The Power of Silence, Against the Dictatorship of Noise*. In this profound dialogue about the need for believers to recover a love for silence in our agitated world, Cardinal Sarah addresses the burning questions raised by chapter eight of *Amoris Laetitia*:

Christ is certainly afflicted in seeing and hearing priests and bishops who should protect the integrity of the teaching of the Gospel and of doctrine multiplying words and writings that dilute the rigor of the Gospel by their deliberately ambiguous and confused affirmations. To these priests and these prelates who give the impression of taking up the exact opposite of the traditional teaching of the Church in matters of doctrine and morality, it is not out of place to recall the severe words of Christ: "Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. And whoever says a word against the Son of man will be forgiven; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come." "He is guilty of an eternal sin", Mark adds. (My translation)

The rigor of the Gospel is what will save souls. The dilution of that rigor by anyone in the name of false compassion does great harm by reworking the Gospel into something it is not. © 2017 The Catholic Thing.