

*Fr. Perozich comments —*

*I've never been the “smartest man in the room”, but I recognize those who think that they are such.*

*They expound in journals, articles, talks.*

*They quickly dismiss others' comments in favor of their own.*

*I even had a bishop tell me that something I wrote was not Catholic.*

*As he revealed himself more through his speech and writings, I came to understand that it was just the opposite. My Catholic teachings disagreed with his opinions and new morality that he was proposing and imposing.*

*In homilies, I encourage people, who might hear something that does not sound quite right from my lips, to go to the Catechism (before the new moralists change it to fit their new morality) and to go to the Bible. I might have misspoken, might have had an incomplete understanding, or perhaps might not have said things clearly.*

*This technique is to bring people into relationship with Jesus and with His Truth. I do not give a homily or write an comment in order to convince people of my thinking or to join them to me. I do not want a cult of personality around myself. I was ordained to bring them to Jesus and His Truth.*

*Unfortunately, I find myself giving a hearing to many in the church but listening to few of them because, using my own admonition to go to the Bible and to the Catechism, I do not find their teachings to be true, clear, or directed to Jesus. I don't want to be drawn into their circle of belief so that they can count me as one more person on their side in order that they feel better about their own sins. I want to be freed from mine through confession, repentance, and reparation by Jesus.*

*In the article below, I DO find truth and the path to Jesus. Thus I share it with you here, even though I know that many of you are already reading [The Catholic Thing](#).*

*With the influence of the devil, the world, and my own desires, it is easy to dismiss the gravity and consequences of sin as the New Moralists are wrongly giving us permission to do. Fr. Vaverek gives me a wake up call. I wish you all to “Be sober and vigilant. Your opponent the devil is prowling around like a roaring lion looking for [someone] to devour. Resist him, steadfast in faith, knowing that your fellow believers throughout the world undergo the same sufferings. The God of all grace who called you to his eternal glory through Christ [Jesus] will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you after you have suffered a little. To him be dominion forever. Amen.” 1 Peter 5:8-11*

# Of Sin and ‘Mitigated Culpability’

*Fr. Timothy V. Vaverek*

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Pope Francis recently had to clarify his affirmation that homosexual activity is a sin by recalling that, as with every sin, “one must also consider the circumstances which may decrease or eliminate fault.” True, but unfortunately, his reminder won’t help much. **For sixty years, proponents of the New Morality have misinterpreted this teaching to permit those with mitigated culpability to continue damaging and sinful behavior.**

**The New Moralists have a simple strategy. They retain orthodox terminology, but change its meaning in order to persuade Catholics that their new approach (or paradigm) doesn’t change the Gospel. They hope this will lead the Church officially to embrace notions of “conscience” and “acceptance” that fit the postmodern world’s distorted sensibilities.**

As their ecclesiastical influence increases (including leadership in coming synods), exposing and refuting their approach is an urgent task. The correction, however, must remain part of the larger evangelical work of deepening our life of faith in Christ. Those who know Him and the life He offers won’t easily be misled by word games and bureaucratic machinations.

What, then, does the Church actually teach regarding those who sin with “mitigated culpability,” and how can we help them live the Gospel?

**Sin is deliberate and so requires knowledge and freedom. Complete ignorance or total compulsion therefore removes guilt. Nevertheless, harm – as I argued in [an earlier column](#) <sup>[1]</sup> – may naturally ensue.**

Culpability obviously remains when innocent error or pressure are absent. If a fully culpable act is objectively grave (i.e., a mortal sin), then the sinner has personally betrayed God in such a way that God no longer dwells in him.

God and His people continue to love mortal sinners and to desire their return to communion. But while separated from Christ, they’re in danger of eternal loss and unable to participate fully in the life of Christ’s Body, the Church.

**“Mitigated culpability” usually refers to gravely evil actions committed with sufficient knowledge and freedom to constitute sin, but also with the significant presence of innocent ignorance or pressure. In such cases, the degree of a sinner’s deliberate malice in betraying God is lessened, perhaps so much that the offense may not constitute a withdrawal from communion with God.**

It’s essential to note that **lessened culpability doesn’t automatically make a mortal sin subjectively venial. It may still break communion with God.** For example, fornication freely committed under the sway of an unforeseen and powerful impulse of lust can render the act less culpable and malicious than when committed with premeditation. **But both are mortal sins.**

Objectively, venial offenses, too, can be committed with mitigated culpability, but they remain venially sinful. That’s because whenever knowledge and freedom are present there’s some degree of guilt.

Sharing Christ’s life requires sinners to reject the evil we culpably commit and to honestly intend never to sin again (mortally or venially). In light of our fallen nature we aren’t expected – or permitted – to swear we won’t sin again. Instead, we must entrust ourselves to God and firmly intend to sin no more.

Catechesis and spiritual guidance too often overlook that without this all-encompassing repentance and trusting resolve, none of our sins are forgiven. We can’t deliberately cling to some and be pardoned for others.

The reason is simple: it’s impossible to share Jesus’ life at all if we refuse to accept His call to *metanoia*, to the on-going transformation of our heart, mind, body, and soul. That’s why the penitent’s “Act of Contrition” explicitly rejects all past sins (even forgotten ones) and resolves to avoid all sin in the future.

To withhold this repentance or resolution, knowingly and freely, *even in an otherwise venial matter*, is to deliberately reject Christ and His call. Such obstinacy can constitute a mortal sin. This highlights a central truth of the Christian faith: our greatest danger isn’t past or future sins but the refusal of God and His mercy. That’s the only thing that can eternally separate us from Him.

Like all sinners, those with mitigated culpability must acknowledge what they already know: to some extent they deliberately refused Jesus and need now to return to Him wholeheartedly. Consequently, they’ll seek a deeper knowledge of Christ and his life. And they’ll persevere in facing pressures and repeated failures rather than normalize behavior they know

violates God's love. Sexual sins are no exception – regardless of one's "orientation."

Those walking this path need a companionship rooted in charity and truth that guides them in carrying the Cross with Jesus, finding ways to remove ignorance and pressure where possible, and trusting Him to see them safely home. Otherwise they'll become overwhelmed and disoriented, likely to falsely blame or excuse themselves.

A vital part of this pastoral "accompaniment" is to confirm that a sinner's action and intention were indeed culpable (although mitigated). This affirms and strengthens conscience and moral agency, reassuring sinners that they're able with Christ to know and follow His path.

The goal is to bring them to admit their known guilt, repent of their sins, and deepen their intimacy with Jesus.

This isn't "Pharisaism" It's a truly compassionate response that takes seriously the admitted culpability of sinners, helps liberate them, and journeys with them in the Lord.

The New Moralists, on the other hand, permit people to remain in their mitigated guilt by treating it as mere veniality. They falsely reassure with words like "conscience," "affirmation," and "inclusion." They're silent about the damage done or the malice that eats at the heart of all who sin (even without full culpability).

Thus, they cozily misdirect admitted sinners' attention away from Christ and his freedom by *not* repeating his call to *metanoia*, fidelity to the Gospel, and the observance of all his commands.

**That's not the Gospel. And it's not new. It's the very stratagem the Serpent used in tempting our first parents. May God protect and deliver his sinful flock from such "affirming" shepherds.**

*Fr. Timothy V. Vaverek, STD has been a priest of the Diocese of Austin since 1985 and is currently pastor of Assumption parish in the city of West. His studies were in Dogmatics with a focus on Ecclesiology, Apostolic Ministry, Newman, and Ecumenism. His new book is [As I Have Loved You: Rediscovering Our Salvation in Christ](#) (Emmaus Road Publishing). [Click here](#) to watch Scott Hahn interview Fr. Vaverek about the book.*

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URLs in this post:

[1] an earlier column: <https://www.thecatholicthing.org/2023/01/29/accompanying-those-innocently-in-error/>

[2] The Parable of the The Prodigal Son: Received Home by his Father: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Luca\\_Giordano\\_\(1634-1705\)-\\_The\\_Parable\\_of\\_the\\_Prodigal\\_Son,\\_Received\\_Home\\_by\\_His\\_Father\\_-\\_138258.1\\_-\\_National\\_Trust.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Luca_Giordano_(1634-1705)-_The_Parable_of_the_Prodigal_Son,_Received_Home_by_His_Father_-_138258.1_-_National_Trust.jpg)

[3] Mercy and “Metanoia”: <https://www.thecatholicthing.org/2016/09/11/mercy-and-metanoia/>

[4] To Change Often: <https://www.thecatholicthing.org/2020/01/26/to-change-often/>

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