

AMERICAN LIFE LEAGUE

CANON 915

**A matter of critical concern:
Enforcement of Catholic Church law
regarding pro-abortion public figures**



Canon 915

Canon 915 of the Catholic Church's Code of Canon Law states:

Those who have been excommunicated or interdicted after the imposition or the declaration of a penalty as well as others who obstinately persist in manifest grave sin are not to be admitted to communion.

Father James Buckley, FSSP, an American Life League advisor, has clarified why American Life League is asking the Church's bishops to enforce Canon 915:

Prior to Vatican II priests were more conscious that the obligation of preventing public sinners from receiving communion rested on them. Today they hesitate. Further, Canon Law 915 clearly prohibits public sinners from taking the Eucharist. Priests are not disciplining pro-abortion legislators when they enforce this Canon law; they are protecting the Eucharist from sacrilege.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION:

Pope John Paul II's encyclical letter, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, issued in April 2003:

The two sacraments of the Eucharist and Penance are very closely connected. Because the Eucharist makes present the redeeming sacrifice of the Cross, perpetuating it sacramentally, it naturally gives rise to a continuous need for conversion, for a personal response to the appeal made by Saint Paul to the Christians of Corinth: "We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God" (2 Cor 5:20). If a Christian's conscience is burdened by serious sin, then the path of penance through the sacrament of Reconciliation becomes necessary for full participation in the Eucharistic Sacrifice.

The judgment of one's state of grace obviously belongs only to the person involved, since it is a question of examining one's conscience. However, in cases of outward conduct which is seriously, clearly and steadfastly contrary to the moral norm, the Church, in her pastoral concern for the good order of the community and out of respect for the sacrament, cannot fail to feel directly involved. The Code of Canon Law refers to this situation of a manifest lack of proper moral disposition when it states that those who "obstinately persist in manifest grave sin" are not to be admitted to Eucharistic communion. (Canon 915; Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, Canon 712.)

(Entire document available at www.ewtn.com/library/ENCYC/JP2EUCHA.HTM)

Letter from the Congregation for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments issued in July 2002:

In view of the law that “sacred ministers may not deny the sacraments to those who opportunely ask for them, are properly disposed and are not prohibited by law from receiving them” (Canon 843.1) there should be no such refusal to any Catholic who presents himself for Holy Communion at Mass, except in cases presenting a danger of grave scandal to other believers arising out of the person’s unrepented public sin or obstinate heresy or schism, publicly professed or declared.

(Entire document available at www.ewtn.com/expert/answers/cdw2002.htm)

Declaration by the Pontifical Council for Legislative Texts

Any interpretation of Canon 915 that would set itself against the canon’s substantial content, as declared uninterruptedly by the Magisterium and by the discipline of the Church throughout the centuries, is clearly misleading. One cannot confuse respect for the wording of the law (cfr. Canon 17) with the improper use of the very same wording as an instrument for relativizing the precepts or emptying them of their substance.

The phrase “and others who obstinately persist in manifest grave sin” is clear and must be understood in a manner that does not distort its sense so as to render the norm inapplicable. The three required conditions are:

- (a) grave sin, understood objectively, being that the minister of Communion would not be able to judge from subjective imputability;

- (b) obstinate persistence, which means the existence of an objective situation of sin that endures in time and which the will of the individual member of the faithful does not bring to an end, no other requirements (attitude of defiance, prior warning, etc.) being necessary to establish the fundamental gravity of the situation in the Church.

- (c) The manifest character of the situation of grave habitual sin.

(Entire document available at www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/intrptxt/documents/rc_pc_intrptxt_doc_20000706_declaration_en.html)

St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, III:q 80: article 6

I answer that, “A distinction must be made among sinners: some are secret; others are notorious, either from evidence of the fact, as public usurers, or public robbers or from being denounced as evil men by some ecclesiastical or civil tribunal. Therefore Holy Communion ought not to be given to open sinners when they ask for it.”

Reply to Objection 1: “Holy things are forbidden to be given to dogs, that is, to notorious sinners....”

(Entire document available at www.newadvent.org/summa/408006.htm)

Father Buckley comments on the above: “It is from evidence of fact and not from the denunciation of an ecclesiastical tribunal that all men know that some Catholic politicians are obstinate in the manifest grave sin of formal cooperation in abortion. These are notorious sinners who should not be given the Eucharist.”



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