Opinion
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by NCR Staff

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Former Vice President Joe Biden attended the 9 a.m. Mass at St. Anthony Church Oct. 27 and when he presented himself to receive the Eucharist was refused by the pastor. That snub has stirred up a recurring debate in the church on Catholic politicians and their stances on abortion. In other words, the "wafer wars" are back. Below are letters to the editors responding to this story. Letters are edited for length and clarity.

There is only one judge and thank God it is not Fr. Robert Morey. Pope Benedict XVI or anyone else is not the judge of former Vice President Joe Biden nor can he or Morey discern Biden's conscience.

"Judge not lest you be judged and you will be judged in the same manner you have judged others." To deny the body and blood of Christ to one who yearns to receive him? Be careful!

JANE FRANCISCO

Charlotte, North Carolina

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It is so disheartening and unjust to see the refusal of communion to nearly anyone and especially in this year and in this time. It is terrible if the bishops allow "communion wars" to once again influence the electorate.

Besides the hypocrisy involved and the violation of the spirit of canon law and of the Eucharist itself, this plays into the hands that could possibly re-elect a president whose moral turpitude has been defined by lies, insults, and deception.

If the bishops permit this, there will be greater attrition and further alienation from many, many thoughtful Catholics — myself included.

DAVE PASINSKI

Fayetteville, New York

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Quick question for Fr. Robert Morey — what would Jesus do? Did Jesus refuse Eucharist to Judas or Peter at the last supper? Oh, I am so sorry he didn't follow the Code of Canon Law Canon 915.



Why is it only abortion? Seems that time and time again, Jesus had a problem with the cerical class while he continually advocated for the poor and disenfranchised, the immigrant and orphaned and widowed. When is communion refused to all those who advocate for the death penalty, war, racism, or against immigrants?

When are all those who profit from pharmaceutical sales that drive the poor to the point of death or bankruptcy because of profits refused communion? When is communion refused to all those who are destroying Mother Earth and human life by all the profitable chemicals in our food supplies?

Really, for how many decades have these canon lawyers, clerics, bishops, cardinals and popes covered up and moved around all the clerical molesters who have destroyed millions of lives or those who raped nuns and forced them to have an abortion? Are those clerics, bishops, cardinals and canon lawyers refused Eucharist?

How very hypocritical — "let he who is without sin cast the first stone!

E. NEZLOH

St. Louis, Missouri

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This has to be a new low for the church. We are not deputized as God's judges. Jesus did not deny communion to Judas. All should be welcomed. Are church rules more important than Christ's compassion? I think not.

KATHRYN BARRY

Middlebury, Vermont

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Sad and outrage sum up my feelings concerning Vice President Joe Biden being refused communion. I am sad for him and for all Catholics and I am outraged at many of the clergy.

Have the following been denied communion? Priests who have abused. Bishops who have covered it up. Bishops and priests who have followed canon law instead of the gospel.

Communion is not a reward; it is food for the journey. Obviously, anti-abortion seems to be the only criteria of a "good Catholic." I don't wonder at the number of "nones." I am wondering if Jesus is weeping.

RITA COTTERLY

Fort Worth, Texas

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Hooray for Fr. Robert Morey! It's about time a Catholic priest or bishop finally stood up for the beliefs of our church.

To allow any politician of either party to promote abortion, which is a sin according to our church laws, and to then present themselves to receive our Lord in the form of his body, blood and divinity in the most holy Eucharist is in itself a sin against our most holy savior and our church.

How dare Joe Biden be such a hypocrite! How dare he pretend to be a practicing Catholic when he knows full well he is not. He is no more deserving of receiving our Lord at this time than the devil himself.

Is this being judgmental? No, Biden has made his sin public for all to see. As Morey has said, our lord Jesus is one of infinite mercy and forgiveness and he will certainly

forgive Biden if he just confesses his sin and sins no more. But it is a choice only Biden can make. What is more important to him, his political career or his relationship with Jesus?

C.B. "CORK" MOTSETT

Jacksonville, Florida

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Fr. Robert Morey is to be supported by our Catholic vote, also. I admire his courage. Thanks for your excellent Catholic publications to keep us in the knowledge of truth.

WILLIAM G. DUGAS

Baton Rouge, Louisiana

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In Peter Feuerherd's well-reported piece, "Pastor's denial of Eucharist to Biden stirs up recurring debate," he makes the same assumption that most other writers about this story have made the past week: that Vice President Joe Biden "advocates for abortion," and that the Democratic position on abortion is immoral.

Under President Barack Obama (and Biden), the abortion rate fell faster than ever before, to a level lower than at the time of the *Roe* vs. *Wade* ruling in 1973. This was due largely to provisions in the Affordable Care Act that made more effective, expensive, long-acting contraception widely available. My own data have shown that abortion rates fell significantly faster under Democratic administrations than under Republicans. The idea that reversing *Roe* vs. *Wade* is the only moral position on abortion conveniently serves the interests of one political party, but is fundamentally flawed.

PATRICK WHELAN

Los Angeles

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Who's worthy to receive? The connection between the communicant and Christ is direct. The minister merely delivers the host. To place himself in the transaction is presumptuous. As one of my favorite Franciscans is fond of saying, we must be "present to the presence."

Withholding the Eucharist is a clear example of the kind of clericalism that Pope Francis warns against. Of course, if one believes he has been "ontologically changed" by virtue of ordination into the Roman Catholic priesthood and therefore has become a superior being, he might presume that to withhold the host is his call. It isn't.

DON MILLER

Bethlehem, Pennsylvania

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Thanks to Michael Sean Winters for pointing out that pro-choice politicians are not pro-abortion. They are just a lot clearer than the Father Moreys on the difference in their roles as private citizens and as public servants, following the law as determined in *Roe* vs. *Wade*.

He also points out that pro-choice people, including politicians, are generally motivated by human compassion for the dilemmas, feelings and thoughts of a pregnant woman. Perhaps that's because almost all of them have been in long-term conjugal relationships, and have some idea of the human reality of the other sex.

On the other hand, Morey and his ilk are heirs to a 2,000-year tradition of renouncing a normal sex life. Almost none of the magisterium nor its theologians have any personal experience of active, normal human sexuality. That's why the church's teachings on abortion, birth control, and sexuality in general are so screwed up. They are simply ignorant on a human level. Lots of book learning, darn little empathy.

PATRICK NAGLE

Olympia, Washington

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The scandal of the reception of Eucharist issue was not that Vice President Joe Biden attempted to receive communion in good faith, but that he was denied communion. He was a government official and is now a candidate for the office of president and thus knows about the oath to support and defend the Constitution. The federal government has accepted *Roe* vs. *Wade* as law. Is Biden expected to pick and choose which laws he will support without going through a formal change process in Congress to alter or eliminate that law? I think not.

The priest who denies a visitor to his church community the Eucharist is guilty, in my mind, of judging another's heart and relationship to God in Jesus and of picking out a very well-known public figure to shame for his "sin" before the world. The priest's decision to refuse Eucharist only indicated to me that he does not understand the gospel well. Does he forget that even Judas shared in the last supper? Does he forget that Jesus did not humiliate the women caught in adultery, but asked "he who is without sin to caste the first stone?"

Did a political "itch" cause the priest to humiliate Biden? Did he not understand that the press would have a hay day with his choice to deny Biden's request to receive? Whose opinion was he worried about in his congregation when he made that decision? How many communicants would have noticed anyhow? Hopefully they were all occupied with what they were doing.

MARY JAEGER

Geneva, Illinois

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This cleric, Fr. Robert Morey, should be censured by church authority with a public exposure equivalent to that of his refusal of Eucharist to Vice President Joe Biden.

Equally, our "legitimate teaching authority" should explain the censure along with an official apology to Biden. That's not going to happen, is it?

I am not pro-abortion. I believe that the legitimate right of women over their own bodies is conditioned by their reciprocal relations. One cannot really conceive of "right" without the inherent responsibility. Primary here is for the life within but even that is not absolute. Degrees of responsibility and the biology, ideology, theology, can be debated ad nauseam but the essence is that criminalizing abortion is not an appropriate response, nor is rendering safe abortion impossible.

My position may be wrong; others will differ. However, Morey, for you to publicly condemn Biden and people like me is indefensible. Worse, your condemnation of women agonizing over their pregnancy is abominable.

DENNIS MacDONALD

Bedford, Nova Scotia

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Michael Sean Winters writes that "the church's teaching [on abortion] is well-known and decidedly clear."

As a woman who understands how her body works, I respectfully disagree.

The church's definition of abortion is overly broad. Women who use hormonal birth control, IUDs, or morning-after pills are told that these are abortifacients when they are not. All of these prevent conception. If there is no embryo, there can be no abortion.

The church should also consult science before asserting that life begins at conception. The majority of fertilized eggs do not implant properly in the uterus. Are all those cycles miscarriages? Invitro fertilization, although against church teaching, is still commonly used. Are the resulting frozen embryos, few of which will ever successfully implant and produce a child, still considered alive? Is it just for the church to insist a woman with an ectopic pregnancy risk death for the sake of an inviable embryo? The definition of when life begins should at least be predicated upon successful implantation in the womb.

I understand Winters' wish for a world in which abortion is unthinkable, but abortion does not exist in isolation. Without full equality for all people, without universal health care, without protection from abuse, and without all parents and society accepting responsibility for the well-being of children, such a world cannot exist.

JOANNE COREY

Vestal, New York

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It strikes me that I have never heard of any priest anywhere refusing the Eucharist to any one of the many bishops, archbishops or cardinals who covered up or committed the felony crimes of sex abuse of children.

For all the words about protecting the life of a fetus, the church still seems to have little care for the life and souls of children when those children are criminally victimized by a priest.

MARYANN PICARD

Brecksville, Ohio

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