



Written by [Selwyn Duke](#) on October 16, 2012

Politicians, Catholicism, and the False Equivalence

You've got to hand it to that Joe Biden. He certainly has chutzpah. After all, what do you call it when a man who was [banned from receiving Communion](#) diocese-wide by a bishop chastises an apparently more faithful Catholic for a lack of doctrinal purity? I'm of course referring to the vice-presidential debate and Biden's comment that Paul Ryan had an "issue" with "Catholic social doctrine."



Biden's approach is nothing new; it's a copout frequently used by liberal — or, as they used to say, heretical — Catholics. It goes like this: self-conscious that they're being criticized for violating definitive Church teaching and accused of being in a state of grave sin, they hang their hats on the idea that they make up for it by going heavy on "social teaching." Furthermore, they lean on the notion that no one should point fingers at them because, by their lights, conservatives fall terribly short of the glory of that social teaching. It's the theological version of "Oh, yeah?! But look at what Bush did!"

The most obvious problem with this is that it's like saying your theft is okay because Tom commits adultery, a callow appeal of the kind mature people leave in childhood. Obviously, we're responsible for our own walk with righteousness, our own sins, not others'. Why, do you think the attempt to justify bad behavior by citing other (supposedly) bad behavior will pass muster when we meet our maker any more than it would before a judge? Imagine saying, "Yes, Your Honor, I broke my wife's jaw. But, look, I'm tellin' ya', there's this guy down the street who beats up his wife *and* his girlfriend." In the same way that courts judge us based on the law and not other criminals' behavior, a person of faith understands that he is to measure himself with the Perfect Law from above, not the imperfect and flawed next to us.

But even this misses the point here, because the reality is that these liberal Catholics can only claim moral parity with (or superiority to) those they criticize by putting Church teaching, and their own minds, through the durable-press spin cycle. And the proof is in the pudding: Neither Paul Ryan nor any other conservative has been denied Communion, unlike some liberal politicians.

Before examining why, I should explain for those not conversant in Catholic teaching that denial of Communion is a very serious matter. It means that the individual in question is in a state of "mortal sin," which is sin grave enough to separate him from God. And, of course, if a bishop has gone so far as to forbid priests in his diocese from dispensing Communion to the person, it means that the violator's defiance of definitive teaching is overt and consistent.

But what does this teaching say? Is there actually an equivalence between advocating abortion and opposing big-government social programs?

Any such implication is ridiculous. The Church teaches that direct abortion is always wrong, as it is the murder of innocent human life. In contrast, while Catholic social doctrine dictates that we must help the less fortunate, there's no specificity as to how this must be done. There is no injunction to create government social programs — or not to do so. The Church does, however, state how it mustn't be done. As Pope Pius XI [put it](#), "Socialism ... cannot be reconciled with the teachings of the Catholic Church because its concept of society itself is utterly foreign to Christian truth," and "No one can be at



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the same time a good Catholic and a true socialist.”

So while Catholics have a lot of latitude in deciding how to best administer charity, they may not disagree on abortion and remain in union with the Church — hence the aforementioned denial of Communion. So, it’s ironic, but the “personally opposed, no values imposed” argument pro-abortion “Catholic” politicians love so much could only rightly be used by those they criticize. We could truly say, “Personally, I believe in giving to charity, but I don’t want to impose this on others through government.”

Lastly, there’s something else Biden should know about Catholic doctrine. The Church teaches — and this was [reaffirmed by the Pope](#) several years ago — that politicians who publicly support abortion automatically excommunicate themselves.

If I have chutzpah for saying that, then we have something in common, Mr. Biden. The difference is that I place mine in the service of Truth.



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