

## The Mind of Francis: Denying Communion

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Pope Francis

When Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger was elected pope, there was very little we did not know about his views on theology and church practices. He was a prolifically published theologian and, at the time of his election, the prefect of the Congregation for Doctrine of the Faith, where his actions were well reported.

The election of Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio, S.J., on the other hand, has put into the papacy a little-published, low-profile Latin American archbishop who was a surprise and mystery to most people in the church. So far, his simple pastoral style has received almost universally positive reviews. In the next few weeks, I will try to go deeper into the mind of Pope Francis by examining the limited writings, interviews and homilies that are available. While this material will help us understand Pope Francis, he can, of course, modify his views in the future.

In an earlier posting, I examined his views on [optional celibacy](#) [1]. Here I will look at another controversial practice: denying Communion to Catholics.

In *On Heaven and Earth*, the book he co-authored with Rabbi Abraham Skorka, Cardinal Bergoglio wrote, "One could deny communion to a public sinner who has not repented, but it is very difficult to check such things."

One should note that he said, "could" not "must." And as an experienced pastor, he stressed the difficulty of checking whether a person is "a public sinner who has not repented." Many American bishops, like Cardinals Francis George and Donald Wuerl, have taken similar positions.

At the same time, Bergoglio said it would be wrong for someone to receive Communion who "rather than uniting the people to God, warps the lives of many people." Such a person "cannot receive communion; it would be a complete contradiction."

In the book, the Communion issue came up not in the context of abortion, but of injustice. He referred to those "who have not only killed intellectually or physically, but also have killed indirectly through the poor use of resources by paying unjust wages." He called them hypocrites because "in public they may form welfare societies, but they do not pay their employees a wage corresponding to their work or they hire them 'under the table.' "

So if you are paying your employees off the books with no payroll taxes, Pope Francis would consider you a "pretend" Catholic suffering from spiritual hypocrisy and schizophrenia. He acknowledged that there are many such people "who hide within the Church and do not live according to the justice that God proclaims." If you are such a person, he would want you to ask yourself whether you are ready for Communion.

Archbishop Bergoglio was especially suspicious of "pretend" Catholics who were public figures looking for a photo op at the Communion rail. In such circumstances, "I do not give communion myself; I stay back and I let

the ministers give it because I do not want those people to come to me for the photo op."

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