

Should Catholics participate in Non-Catholic Religious Services?

Communicatio in sacris

1. The traditional teaching of Catholic theology on whether Catholics may participate in non-Catholic religious services is summed up by St Alphonsus Liguori in his *Theologia Moralit*. This doctor of the church writes, ***‘It is not permitted to be present at the sacred rites of infidels and heretics in such a way that you would be judged to be in communion with them’***.¹ The reason for this teaching is clear: religious commitments are naturally manifested by outward acts; and to perform an outward act expressive of a false religious commitment is a sin against the true faith. This is true even if the man in question retains the true faith in his heart. So to take the classic example, Christians in the Roman Empire realised that they must not throw incense before a statue of the Emperor, even if they had no belief at all in his divinity – for the act was *of itself*, in their context, expressive of such a belief, and hence sinful.

This teaching does not imply that the simple presence of a Catholic at a non-Catholic religious service is a sin. Thus moral theologians prior to Vatican II, following the lead of St Alphonsus, acknowledge that there may be a good reason for a Catholic to attend such a service, as when friendship leads one to attend a non-Catholic wedding. This is called by some theologians ***‘passive communicatio in sacris’***. It is *active* participation in a non-Catholic religious service which is forbidden by the traditional teaching on *communicatio in sacris*, for example joining in with psalms and hymns in the course of a Lutheran Eucharist. The following examples may serve to show the unanimity of pre-conciliar theologians on this point.

<http://www.christendom-awake.org/pages/thomas-crean/praying-with-non-catholics.htm>

Non-Catholic event

Brothers,

Has the Church ever infallibly defined that it is sinful to go to a non-Catholic wedding or funeral? If it has not been infallibly defined, where have Popes taught about this issue? Thanks so much and keep up the good work!

-Anne

MHFM: It wouldn't be, strictly speaking, the subject of a dogmatic definition, but rather disciplinary laws or instructions which are tied up with faith. In the years prior to Vatican II, the idea of "passive attendance" developed whereby one could attend non-Catholic services as long as one didn't actively participate; in other words, the liberal idea was taught that one could go to Protestant churches, schismatic churches, and perhaps even Jewish synagogues, etc., for the funeral or wedding of a relative or friend, as long as one didn't "actively participate." This was clearly a bad and compromisingly development. To refute it, we will cite Pope Pius IX's encyclical, *Graves ac diuturnae*. Speaking of the "Old Catholic" heretics and schismatics, Pius IX says:

Pope Pius IX, *Graves ac diuturnae* (# 4), March 23, 1875: **“They [the faithful] should totally shun their religious celebrations, their buildings,** and their chairs of pestilence which they have with impunity established to transmit the sacred teachings. They should shun their writings and all contact with them. They should not have any dealings or meetings with usurping priests and apostates from the faith who dare to exercise the duties of an ecclesiastical minister without possessing a legitimate mission or any jurisdiction.”

(This is a new quote which comes from our new book, *The Truth about What Really Happened to the Catholic Church after Vatican II*.) Obviously if one must “totally shun”

their religious celebrations and their buildings, then one cannot attend non-Catholic services, funerals or weddings for any reason, let alone to pacify friends, relatives or co-workers and give non-Catholics the false impression that non-Catholic lives can lead to salvation or that non-Catholic weddings are pleasing to God.

Also, one definitely should not go to the wedding reception or the funeral events after the services. To do so is to give the non-Catholics the same false impression: that their marriage is pleasing to God or that people can be saved as non-Catholics. A true Catholic should completely shun all events associated with non-Catholic funerals and weddings, including the reception events afterward.

Pope Pius XI, *Mortalium Animos* #9, Jan. 6, 1928: “Everyone knows that John himself, the Apostle of love, who seems to reveal in his Gospel the secrets of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and who never ceased to impress on the memories of his followers the new commandment ‘Love one another,’ **altogether forbade any intercourse with those who professed a mutilated and corrupt form of Christ’s teaching: ‘If any man come to you and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into the house nor say to him: God speed you’** (II John 10).”

The above post by the way is from a place considered extremist:

<http://www.mostholyfamilymonastery.com/catholicchurch/passively-attend-non-catholic-funerals-weddings/#.VMBY73J0zmg>