

EXCOMMUNICATION AND RELIGION

A religion is a unit and for the sake of boundaries - knowing what is or is not of the religion - you need to maintain unit integrity. That is where the need to excommunicate doctrines and even people comes in. It is reasonable in itself.

Excommunication is a form of separatism. First degree separatism among fundamentalists hold that you keep away from liberals and heretics. Second degree means you keep away from other Christians simply because THEY do not keep away from them. Fundamentalism is classified and characterised by separateness. There is no doubt that the New Testament does command Christians to engage in some kind of separation from others who are considered to be a bad influence or of another religion.

Matthew 18:7 has Jesus say to treat the brother who won't give up sin after warnings from the Church as a tax collector or Gentile but it has been pointed out that Jesus did mix with such. However Jesus only had social contact with tax collectors and Gentiles who were rethinking their sin. There is no evidence that he sought their company otherwise. Jesus did advocate separatism of some kind. It could be a case by case thing as no two situations were alike.

Pope Leo X at the time of the Reformation rejected the proposition "Excommunications are only external penalties and they do not deprive man of the common spiritual prayers of the Church." He did this in his Bull *Exsurge Domine* which was written to counteract Protestant "errors". The teaching is clear. The Church is a community of prayer united by the faith God gives through prayer and fed by the love God bestows through prayer. Thus excommunication means that you are abandoned to the world and the Devil and have no protection from your own prayers or anybody else's. This is an extremely malicious teaching.

A religion needs to have membership rules - one of which is that it has set teaching that must be supported by members. There is nothing inherently sectarian about that. The local atheist society cannot accept a good Christian as a member. The teaching, "If you don't like the heat then get out of the kitchen", is correct in principle even though it could be worded a nicer way. It is not arrogant. There is nothing wrong with disagreeing with your religion and deciding to leave it for another religion or for to form a new one. What is wrong is encouraging people to stay in a religion that they know or think is wrong in its official and set teaching.

Pope Eugene IV, Council of Florence, 1441: "The Holy Roman Church condemns, reproves, anathematizes and declares to be outside the Body of Christ, which is the Church, the heretic for he holds opposing or contrary views."

The Church in the past used to make a doctrine and then add that if anybody denies it then let him be anathema - greatly accursed. The anathema accompanies excommunication. The Church claims this curse is not given in malice but is given in the hope that the heretic and blasphemer will suffer and through this suffering see the light and reform and believe in the word of the Church. If you really believe in the supernatural you will never find it necessary to curse. Surely blessings can bring a sinner back to God and the Church! What gives you the right to assume that calling evil on them is going to help? The Church is being vindictive and malicious. The Church has never revoked or corrected the curses it has called down on people. That Vatican II did not use curses does not help. It only shows the Church knows they are vindictive but does not have the decency to stop its incitement to hatred. Its like a rabid husband who tells his wife that he loves her as he insults her and uses words to wound her. What would you think of a dentist who used less anaesthetic on a patient on the grounds that a bit of pain would train the person to deal with toothache better in the future? Even that situation is not as bad as the curse!

Religion is a kind of united society. Excommunication is putting a person out of their religion. The Catholic ceases to be a member of the Church when he or she is excommunicated. Excommunication is an official declaration that some people have cut themselves off from the soul of the Church and their God by committing a very grave sin (Question 1037, Radio Replies Volume 1, Fathers Rumble and Carty, Radio Replies Press, St Paul Minnesota, 1938).

A member of something is a part of it, an associate or an affiliate.

The Church says that baptism puts a seal on you that makes you belong to the Church forever. But belonging to the Church means it has the right to have you as a member. It does not mean you are a member. Membership is a two way thing.

Suppose you have a gold watch that you inherited from your uncle who gave it to you on the condition that you would never sell it or give it away. You go and sell it. You are obligated to keep the watch. But once you sell it, it is no longer your watch. In the same way, belonging to the Church is not the same as being a member.

The notion that your DNA makes you a member of your family thus baptism gives you spiritual DNA making you a member of the Church is absurd. Your DNA makes you share something with your parents and brothers and sisters etc. But a family has to be built independent of that. DNA does not make a family - love does. The Church itself would reject the notion of spiritual DNA as the soul is immaterial - that is it is not made of matter. If baptism really puts a seal on you, the seal indicates, "Obligated to be a member." Whether you really become a member is up to you.

Also, a person can be Catholic by initiation through baptism but not a Catholic by faith. Without faith you are not a real member of the faith community.

Who are members of the Catholic Church?

Tradition in the form of Church Father St Cyprian states: "If someone does not hold fast to this unity of Peter, can he imagine that he still holds the faith? If he should desert the chair of Peter upon whom the Church was built, can he still be confident that he is in the Church?" (The Unity of the Catholic Church 4, 251 AD). This is the idea that one must hold true to the faith of Peter and states that the Church was built on the chair of Peter as teacher. It does not however imply that the bishop of Rome is head of the Church and infallible only that he safeguards the faith.

The Church teaches that those people are members of the Catholic Church who have been validly baptized, and who have not been excluded from the Catholic Church by means of heresy, schism, or excommunication. Pope Pius XII teaches in his encyclical *Mystici Corporis*: "Actually only those are to be included as members of the Church who have been baptized and profess the true faith, and who have not been so unfortunate as to separate themselves from the unity of the Body, or been excluded by legitimate authority for grave faults committed. 'For in one spirit' says the Apostle, 'were we all baptized into one Body, whether Jews or Gentiles, whether bond or free.' As therefore in the true Christian community there is only one Body, one Spirit, one Lord, and one Baptism, so there can be only one faith. And therefore if a man refuse to hear the Church let him be considered - so the Lord commands - as a heathen and a publican. It follows that those who are divided in faith or government cannot be living in the unity of such a Body, nor can they be living the life of its one Divine Spirit." Therefore in the eyes of the Roman Catholic Church, which is the one, true Church, there are only the following categories of people:

- (1) Catholics, i.e., those who are members of the Roman Catholic Church;
- (2) heretics, that is, validly baptized people who have left the Church because they adhere publicly to false teachings and/or non-Catholic sects;
- (3) schismatics, that is, validly baptized people who have left the Church because they refuse to recognize the primacy of the Roman Pontiff, or belong to sects which profess the same;
- (4) excommunicates, those who have been ejected from the Church by declaratory sentence of excommunication;
- (5) infidels, that is, the unbaptized, who fall into two subcategories: (a) Jews, whose error of resistance to the true Messiah has a special name, that of perfidy, and (b) heathens, that is, pagans, idolaters, and people who have no religion at all.

The Old Testament ordered certain sinners to be expelled from the community (Leviticus 17:10). a person can be expelled from the Catholic community without being expelled from the Catholic Church. For example, if Catholics were forbidden to speak to A that would not mean that A was no longer a Catholic. In the New Testament texts that support excommunication there is no trace of the notion of putting a person out of the Church (1 Corinthians 5; Matthew 18; 2 Thessalonians 3:14,15) but they are put out of the community or recognised as not having really belonged to it anyway.

The Church says that when Peter called Jesus the 'Christ the Son of the Living God' Jesus told him that whatever he binds on earth will be bound in Heaven meaning that whoever he excommunicates on earth will be excommunicated in Heaven.

1 Corinthians 5 has Paul ordering that a man must be excluded from the community for living in sin with his stepmother. He says he is handing the man over to Satan. He says he does this so that the man might be destroyed and be saved in the end. That implies that Paul uses the Devil to make the man fit for Heaven.

If this truly refers to excommunication, then Paul is putting the man out of the Church and thereby handing him over to Satan. Then the implication would be that all who are in the Church and put out are under the reign of Satan. Some theologians try to soften this by saying he is merely saying that the man is handed over to Satan in the sense that he is at risk of belonging to Satan. Paul says nothing about a risk of belonging to Satan. The man is given to Satan.

The Church says that whether or not a person is a member depends on whether or not they intend to be members. If Catholic Johnny considers himself to be no longer a Catholic then he is out of the Church, he has left it. So it seems to us that if a person does something that expels from the Church in good faith that person cannot incur excommunication. For example, if a Catholic bishop thinks Masons are running the Church and decides to make new bishops without papal mandate to protect the faith, the pope will excommunicate him but it will not be a true or binding excommunication. If the excommunicated are in the wrong and think they are in the right, the excommunication cannot work validly for they are not separating from the true Church for they don't intend to.

The Church preaches that she can't throw anybody out – people do that themselves. She only decrees that a person has quit. But this contradicts her new doctrine that she cannot judge anybody for what is in the mind and heart of another cannot be known. A religion that claims the right to declare somebody excommunicated must also claim to be infallible in everything when it is able to know who has heartily divorced themselves from it. Thus, the Church must accept heretics and other offenders to be on the safe side for she is not allowed to judge in case she is wrong. The Catholic Church cannot say that the true Church is a society united in professing the one creed and in government for it makes no sense. It contradicts her concept of the Church as invisible. Rome, make up your mind about what kind of true Church you are!

The Church excommunicates people for heresy. Heresy is believing something that contradicts your religion or philosophy, it is what you are not allowed to believe.

An insincere heresy is no heresy at all so heretics have to be sincere. The Church is throwing people out for being sincere! This is not fair so her excommunications are invalid.

You can reject one principle of your religion or school of philosophy and accept the rest. But suppose a religion claims to be revealed by the Lord and that you believe that the reliability of the whole thing depends on everything being true. To hold that even one doctrine it has is untrue is to say that it is not revealed by the Lord and accordingly, it is abandoning faith in the whole lot. To deny or doubt one doctrine is to deny or cast doubt on the rest.

Both the Catholic Church and the Protestants agree that unity of intention to belong to God's Church is what makes the Church one not visible unity. So two people in different denominations can belong to the one true Church.

A person who is sincere but wrong belongs to the true Church implicitly. If she or he wants to be in the religion that is right then she or he is in it because of this desire because that is the best she or he can do. Schism – in canon law, this is breaking with the pope and the true Church – is impossible when you think you are right. Canon law in Canon 1323 actually states that anyone who does something that carries a sentence of excommunication while thinking that he is right does not incur the sentence. If you do it mistakenly thinking that the pope is wrong or a fraud then you are not breaking away from the pope but from your false perception of the pope. If you know he is right but won't admit it and break away then you have left the Roman Church. And if there is no schism without conscious unjust defiance then the unity proof – that the true Church is a visible and real unity - is meaningless for all Churches are really one Church in which there are differences. They are no more schismatic than two Roman priests who fall out are.

If the Church excommunicates anybody who is not in the wrong and should not be excommunicated then she is breaking away from him and not him from her. He becomes the true Church while she becomes a false one and ceases to be the true Church.

Incidentally, the Church says that God wants Christians to be all in one Church and would never sanction schism for he said he wouldn't (John 17:20,21). Jesus wanted no one to leave or divide the Church of the truth though if that Church departed from the faith he would have approved of the loyal sheep coming out of it to continue the right religion. That is not schism on the part of the sheep because they are the right religion. Those responsible for the apostasy are the breakaways. The fact that one tiny divine intervention would have averted or forestalled the Great Schism between the Western and Eastern Church and that it didn't come proves that Christianity is untrue. This massive schism arose over a simple misunderstanding.

It is unfair for a Church that rejects its own through the evil of excommunication to create ecumenical relations with other religions. The result can only be the appearance of unity but not real unity. Unity cannot thrive where discrimination does.

Excommunication is as much nonsense as Church membership. It depends so much on labelling. For example, some silly old men who are irrelevant to normal life decide what makes a Christian and exclude anybody that doesn't fit the bill.

Canon 1323, The Code of Canon Law

The following are not subject to penalties when they have violated a law or precept:

- (1) a person who has not yet completed the sixteenth year of age;
- (2) a person who without any fault was unaware of violating a law or precept; however, inadvertence and error are equivalent to ignorance;
- (3) a person who acted out of physical force or in virtue of a mere accident which could neither be foreseen nor prevented when foreseen;
- (4) a person who acted out of grave fear, even if only relatively grave, or out of necessity or out of serious inconvenience unless the act is intrinsically evil or verges on harm to souls;
- (5) a person who for the sake of legitimate self-defense or defense of another acted against an unjust aggressor with due moderation;

(6) a person who without any fault felt that the circumstances in nn. 4 or 5 were verified.

It is safe to assume that most Catholics, perhaps even princes of the Church, are in fact excommunicate in the eyes of God and the law of the Church. Heresy for example is epidemic.

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Is Christianity a Cult?