

## THE CATHOLIC "UNTOUCHABLES"

The Church believes in using the vitandus excommunication. This form requires that the excommunicated person be treated as invisible and non-existent except when in serious danger of death. It requires that the family cut the person off. The vitandus excommunication is not bothered with today. The reason is not that the Church has repudiated it - the Bible and Jesus themselves decreed that it must be used. The reason is that in today's society it is not workable. In other words, the Church does not bother with it for attempts to enforce it will only be met with defiance and howls of laughter. Its a splendid example of disobedience being rewarded. Why not allow contraception when hardly anybody believes the Church teaching that it is wrong? Nobody has the right to call themselves a Catholic if they don't believe in God and the Church's authority to issue a vitandus excommunication. The Church should have the honesty to tell them they are Protestants not Catholics.

The Roman Catholic Church says its laws of excommunication and Church rules only apply to Catholics. But Protestants are treated even worse than excommunicated Catholics. Protestants are barred from the Catholic sacraments except marriage and the anointing of the sick under strict conditions. The Protestants might not have got a decree putting them outside the Church but they are essentially excommunicated nevertheless. They are treated as if they are excommunicate. The Church works harder to get excommunicated Catholics back to the fold and encourages them than it does Protestants. Protestants are subject to prejudice as well.

Jesus Christ gave instructions for the disfellowshipping of obstinate sinners in Matthew 18. Sinners who did not repent after a warning by the Church were to be treated like tax collectors or Gentiles - cast out and ignored. He then added that whatever the Church binds on earth is bound in Heaven. This has to mean that he and the saints and God and the angels will ignore and ostracise the sinner as well. Otherwise why not just say, "I will respect what you bind on earth but that does not mean I will necessarily approve".

Matthew 18 says nothing about personal sin against you. It simply speaks about what you do if a brother sins. Whether the sin is or is not against you is beside the point. Matthew 18 requires the person to be spoken to by the Church meaning the leaders if he proves stubborn. Does that really sound like personal sin is meant? How does this fit Luke 17 where Jesus seems to command unconditional forgiveness? The difference is that you forgive personal sins all the time when the person repents but if they won't obey the Church you ostracise them.

2 John 7-11 states on apostolic authority that many deceivers have gone out to the world who do not believe Jesus came in the flesh. He warned that the people must not become so progressive that they are no longer rooted in the teaching of Jesus. So whoever does this loses God (verse 9). He said that if anybody comes who does not bring the teaching of Christ, that person must not be accepted into the house or greeted for whoever greets him shares in the evil he is teaching. The note on this command in the New American Bible page 276 states that the command is about the life and death struggle between Christianity and Docetism (the doctrine that Jesus was not a man but a phantom acting like a man). There was a danger Docetism would win so the Church found it necessary to have nothing at all to do with the Docetists. But the epistles of John are confident that the Holy Spirit is the best teacher and so powerful (1 John 2:20). The Church never indicates that the struggle was the reason for the command. Indeed, a plan would have been set up so that missionaries and ministers of the Church could counteract the Docetists and to inoculate believers against their claims. The New Testament expected all believers to be missionaries. So the Church went out of its way then to keep believers from listening to Docetists or having any contact with them. But if we read the letter we see that Docetists were condemned first and then it was anybody who was so progressive in Christianity that they started corrupting the teaching of Christ by adding to it or changing it who were condemned. Then the letter bans associating with such and even greeting such. It is the progressives more than the Docetists that the apostle is worried about. The letter then plainly indicates that you are not to welcome or associate with or greet any believer who wishes to add to or change the gospel of Christ.

Some insist that the ban on greeting reflects the social custom of the times that greeting took a long time. They think that to greet the heretics was a bad idea for since greetings were long and personal it meant the heretic would have to try and inspire you with their heresies. This is rubbish. The Christians and pagans would have greeted each other all the time. Also the letters were written to people in Ephesus. They didn't use the long greeting custom. Christians were missionaries so greetings being long would be a reason to greet! The apostle banned Christians speaking to heretics. Wishing a heretic well on a mission to a Christian would mean, "I hope you see the light and come back safe". It would not imply disloyalty to Christianity. Christians and probably Christian heretics used the custom of greeting with a "holy kiss".

WHEN CRITICS ASK, Norman Geisler and Thomas Howe, Victor Books, Illinois, 1992 page 544, 545 tells us that the epistle is banning believers from giving food and shelter to heretical preachers for that helps them to do their job of drawing people from the faith. Others say the epistle means a church greeting by greeting. None of that is even hinted at in the letter.

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They have nothing to do with interpreting it. Besides the heretics who were Docetists and libertines would have been very welcome among the pagans anyway so the Christians giving them food and shelter would hardly have registered on the Christian issues scale. Most heresy back then was about Christians trying to mix their religion with pagan ideas.

The apostle is forbidding one to speak to any heretics at all - friendliness towards them is forbidden. He simply says greeting is banned and the one who greets shares in the evil of the heretic. He means people feel good when people are friendly to them so greeting the heretics is helping to make the heretics more devoted and happier in what they do. This is the simplest and therefore the correct interpretation.

Christian scholars are puzzled how the apostle could ban greeting and say that being nice to the heretic is encouraging their evil when the apostle writes so much about love. He writes only about loving your brethren in the Church - he never mentions loving outsiders. He says as well that if people truly belong to the Church they will never leave it meaning those who adopt forbidden beliefs do so in bad faith (1 John 2:19). One cannot lose or change one's authentic Christian faith without sin. Such an attitude does not bode well for those who wish the apostle to teach that we must love everybody! Anyway, it is possible that the apostle sees the not speaking to heretics as tough love. But we must remember 1 John chapter 5:16. It says that you should pray for sinners but not for sinners who you see committing a deadly sin - meaning there is no point in praying for them. The letter wants them abandoned to the Devil. It is thought to mean suicide, dying without turning to God or apostasy - leaving the faith or any number of these sins. The context is about praying and winning sinners back so it probably means apostasy.

The vitandus has fell into disuse today mainly because the Church knows the people would ignore it and the media would have a field day. But in principle it is still honoured.