

Glossary

Doctrinal note: a clarification of a dogma or dogmatic teaching of the Church.

Excommunication is an ecclesiastical censure for a particularly grave offence. Apostasy, heresy and schism are examples of such grave offences. Excommunication excludes the person who is excommunicated from the juridical communion of the faithful.

It does not have any effect on the fact of the person's Baptism, which can never be annulled.

This rootedness in Baptism, at the very heart of the communion of the faithful, has a dual dimension.

The mystical or supernatural dimension, which implies God's sanctifying grace and charity, is lost partly through sin and is fully lost through loss of faith. In other words, one's relationship with God ceases to exist when one ceases to believe in God and one's relationship with God is partly lost when one knowingly and deliberately refuses to do what God asks or commands.

The juridical dimension of the communion of the faithful unites the individual faithful to the Church as a visible society. This juridical dimension is embodied in rights and obligations and is lost by means of an act of lawful authority depriving the excommunicated person of the rights expressly indicated in canon 1331.

Excommunication presupposes – without prejudging – the existence of a mortal sin that breaks, at least partially, the supernatural communion.

The following three definitions are directly from canon 751 of the Code of Canon Law.

Apostasy: the total repudiation of the Christian faith.

Heresy: the obstinate denial or doubt, after one is baptized, of a truth which must be believed by divine and Catholic faith.

Schism: the withdrawal of submission to the Pope OR the withdrawal from communion with the members of the Church subject to the Pope.