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Church has experienced a number of schisms

According to the Code of Canon Law (751), a "schism is the refusal of submission to the Roman Pontiff or of communion with the members of the Church subject to him." Any schismatic person "incurs automatic (latae sententiae) excommunication" (1364).

In Roman Catholic teaching, schism (pronounced "sizz-im") is distinct from heresy, which means denial of a defined religious teaching of the church. But in practice the difference between the two can become quite murky: Separations often are occasioned by disputes over doctrine, or they soon result in explicit doctrinal divisions.

A number of schisms have occurred in the history of the church. Three major schisms stand out:

- The East-West schism of 1054, resulting in the major division that remains today between the Roman Church and the Orthodox churches. The Union of Brest in 1596 restored the unity of Rome and some Orthodox. But today there are, depending on various estimates, between 125 million and 200 million Orthodox separated from Rome.

- The Great Western Schism of 1378-1417, when there were two, and sometimes three, rival claimants to the papacy. Unity was restored when the Council of Con-



Fr. George A. Stallings

stance elected a pope acceptable to all factions.

- The Anglican schism, when the Church of England formally severed all ties with Rome in the mid-16th century. Today the

Anglican Communion has about 70 million members worldwide.

The first major schism from Roman Catholicism in modern times is that of the Old Catholic movement, a loose international association of autonomous bishops that claims a total of about 250,000 adherents. It began primarily in 1870 in Germany, where a number of priests and laity rejected the Vatican I decrees on papal primacy and infallibility. In a related schism, the Polish National Catholic Church was formed in the United States in 1897. It has its own hierarchy, and its highest governing power is a synod. Since the 1960s its stated membership has been some 280,000. In recent years it has been



Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre

engaged in rapidly advancing ecumenical conversations with the Roman Catholic Church. It has agreements of intercommunion with the Old Catholics and the U.S.

Episcopal Church. The origins of this schism were not doctrinal, but based on administrative and property disputes between Polish immigrant parishes and non-Polish bishops in parts of the United States.

Perhaps the best known of the more recent schisms are those of Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre of France, and Father (now Archbishop) George Stallings of the United States.

Archbishop Lefebvre formally separated himself from Rome in 1988 when he ordained four bishops in defiance of papal orders. He and his followers objected to the teachings of the Second Vatican Council on such issues as liturgical reform, ecumenism

and religious liberty. Although he died in 1991, his group, the Priestly Society of St. Pius X, continues to operate a number of churches. The movement at one time claimed 100,000 followers, and as many as 500,000 attending services at Lefebvrite churches. Because some of his followers have sought reconciliation with Rome, exact numbers are currently difficult to gauge.

Meanwhile, in 1989 Stallings — then a Roman Catholic pastor in the Washington Archdiocese — formed his own congregation after he was denied a request to establish an African-American rite within Roman Catholicism. He was excommunicated in February 1990 when he formally declared the African-American Catholic Congregation independent from Rome, and three months later he was ordained a bishop by a bishop whom Catholic authorities do not consider validly ordained in the apostolic succession. He said he has temples in Washington, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Los Angeles, Richmond, Va., and five places in Louisiana — New Orleans, Lafayette, Opelousas, St. Martinville and Breaux Bridge. His movement has suffered several splits, but Stallings claims his followers number in the tens of thousands.

Compiled from Catholic News Service reports.

Questions

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Rather than denying the person Communion, it could be appropriate for the pastoral minister who is aware of the facts to discuss it separately with the person who has incurred that penalty.

STRONG: In terms of the former Corpus Christi parishioners involved with the new church, what conditions are necessary for excommunication?

FATHER McKENNA: One has to knowingly, willingly, formally decide that they want to belong to this church and don't want to have an association with the Roman Catholic Church. All indications given to us are that they consider themselves to be separated from the Catholic Church.

STRONG: What of people who attend both the new church and a Catholic church?

FATHER McKENNA: They are not necessarily excommunicated. People who are wondering if they have incurred the penalty or not need to talk to a pastoral minister. I think one of the advantages of this situation is it is not a declared penalty. It is an encouragement to be in contact with a pas-

toral minister.

STRONG: So although the diocese did issue a statement about this situation, Bishop Clark did not formally excommunicate the members of the new church?

FATHER McKENNA: That is correct. I think the bishop felt, however, he had to make clear the seriousness of this action. We needed to make sure that to the people of this diocese and the people of this new church that belonging to this church has serious consequences.

STRONG: What of employees of Catholic institutions or schools: Would becoming formal members of the new church be grounds for losing their jobs?

FATHER McKENNA: It would seem that they have placed themselves in an untenable situation. But their employers should not take any rash actions. School officials should contact the Catholic schools office. Parish officials should contact the diocesan human resource office.

STRONG: What is needed to remove the excommunication from an individual who has joined this new church?

FATHER McKENNA: Normally within the context of the sacrament of reconciliation, the priest can offer absolution for the cen-

sure.

STRONG: How does joining this new church differ from being a member of a Protestant church?

FATHER McKENNA: The difference is, we are talking about people who until recently were active members of our Roman Catholic family who, for whatever reason, decided to leave the Roman Catholic Church. They have left their Catholic family to establish a new church. That is not the case with Protestants. They did not choose to leave the Catholic Church recently. They were very often born and raised in their own faith community.

STRONG: Will the diocese offer any guidelines or workshops to help pastoral ministers deal with this situation?

FATHER McKENNA: Pastoral staffs this week are going to be sent a Legal Update in a question and answer format to address some of the concerns pastoral ministers will face.

STRONG: Regarding Father James B. Callan's status, he has been suspended but not laicized (officially returned to the lay state), so in the eyes of the diocese he is still a priest, correct?

FATHER McKENNA: That is correct.

STRONG: Has the diocese begun actions to laicize him?

FATHER McKENNA: There has been no action taken, but it certainly continues to be a consideration.

STRONG: If Father Callan performs weddings at the new community, would those marriages be recognized by the church and the state?

FATHER McKENNA: The church would not accept them as valid due to his status as a suspended priest. In all likelihood, the state would accept them as legal, though.

STRONG: What of other sacraments, such as baptism or confirmation?

FATHER McKENNA: Baptisms would be valid but illicit at this time. But they would have to be celebrated according to the forms of the church's rites. Father Callan has not been given the faculties to perform confirmations.

STRONG: Can a member of the new church be denied burial in a Catholic cemetery?

FATHER McKENNA: Notorious schismatics are deprived of ecclesiastical funeral rites. But because the people have not been formally excommunicated by a decree, I would rather err on the side of mercy.

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