

OF EXCOMMUNICATION

CCCLXXX.

The ungodly have great power, riches, and respect; on the contrary, we, the true and upright Christians, have but only one poor, silly, and condemned Christ. Temporal things, money, wealth, reputation, and power they have already; they care nothing for Christ. We say to them: Ye are great lords on earth, we, lords in heaven; ye have the power and riches on earth, we, heavenly treasure, namely, God's Word and command; we have baptism, and the sacraments of the Lord's Supper, which is an office celestial. If any man among us, with the name of a Christian, will exercise unjust power, insolence, and wickedness, wilfully, then we excommunicate such a person, so that he shall not be present at the baptizing of children, nor shall be partaker of the Holy Communion, nor have conversation with other Christians. But if he abandon and forsake the name of a Christian, and give up his profession, then we are willing with patience to suffer his tyranny, insolence, and usurped power; we are content to let him go like the heathen, or Jews, or Turks, and so commit our cause to God.

CCCLXXXI.

Our dealing and proceeding against the pope is altogether excommunication, which is simply the public declaration that a person is disobedient to Christ's Word. Now we affirm in public, that the pope and his retinue believe not; therefore we conclude that he shall not be saved, but be damned. What is this, but to excommunicate him? Briefly, to put Christ's Word in execution, and to accomplish and execute his command, this is excommunication.

CCCLXXXII.

I will proceed with excommunication after this manner first, when, I myself have admonished an obstinate sinner then I will send unto him two persons, as two chaplains, or two of the aldermen of the town, two church wardens, or two honest men of the assembly; if then he will not be reformed, but still runs on in stubbornness, and persist in his sinful life, I will declare him openly to the church in this manner: Loving friends, I declare unto you, that N. N. has been admonished, first by myself in private; afterwards also by two chaplains; thirdly, by two aldermen, or two church wardens, as it may be, yet he will not desist from his sinful kind of life; wherefore, I earnestly desire you to assist, and advise you to kneel down with me, and let us pray against him, and deliver him over to the devil, etc.

Hereby we should doubtless prevail so far, that people would not live in such public sin and shame; for this would be a strict excommunication, not like the pope's money-bulls, profitable to the church. When the person were reformed and converted, we might receive him into the church again.

CCCLXXXIII.

Christ will have that a sinner be first warned and admonished, not only once or twice by private and single persons not in office, but also by them that are in office of public preaching, before the severe sentence of excommunication be published and declared. But while the ministry of the Word calls to the Lord's Supper all such of the faithful as repent of their sins, and admits them to the bosom of Christ's church, it must justly reject the hardened impenitent, and abandon them to the judgments of God, excluding them here from the society of the faithful, and, should they die in their sins, from Christian burial.

CCCLXXXIV.

Nothing would more hinder excommunication than for men to do what pertains to a Christian. Thou hast a neighbor whose life and conversation is well known unto thee, but unknown to thy preacher or minister: When thou seest this neighbor growing rich by unlawful dealing, living lasciviously, in adultery, etc.; that he governs his house and family negligently, etc.; then thou oughtest, Christian-like to warn and earnestly admonish him to desist from his sinful courses, to have a care of his salvation, and to abstain from giving offence. Oh, how holy a work wouldst then thou perform, didst thou in this way win thy neighbor! But I pray, who does this? for, first, truth is a hateful thing; he that, in these times, speaks the truth, procures hatred. Therefore, thou wilt rather keep thy neighbor's friendship and good will, especially when he is rich and powerful, by holding thy peace and keeping silence, and conniving, than incur his displeasure and make him thy adversary.

Again, we have less excommunication now, forasmuch as in some sort we are all subject to blaspheming alike, and therewith are stained; so that we are afraid to pull out the mote we see in our neighbor's eye, lest we be hit in the teeth with the beam that appears in our own.

But the chief cause why excommunication is fallen, is that the number of upright and true Christians in every place is very small; for, if from our hearts we loved and practiced true and upright godliness and God's Word, as we all ought, then we should regard the command of Christ our blessed Saviour for above all the wealth, welfare, or favor for this temporal life. For this command of Christ, touching the admonishing and warning a sinning brother, is even as necessary as this: "Thou shalt do no murder, thou shalt not commit adultery, not steal," etc., seeing that when, either out of fear or for some other worldly respect, thou omittest this admonition, there depends thereon, not thy neighbor's body and goods, but the salvation of his soul.

CCCLXXXV.

Take heed, I say, that in any case thou condemn not the communication of the true church; a contempt certainly involving the displeasure of God; for Christ says: "Verily I say unto you, what ye bind on earth, shall be also bound in heaven," etc. The pope, however, in his tyranny, abuses the power of excommunication. If a poor man, at a certain appointed day, cannot make payment of the taxation the pope imposes upon him, he is excommunicated; and in the same way he thunders his bulls and his excommunications against us, because we avow the all-saving doctrine of the Gospel; yet our Saviour Christ comforts us, saying: "Happy are ye when men revile and persecute you for my sake, and speak all manner of evil against you," etc. And again; "They will excommunicate you or put you out of the synagogue."

Most assuredly the pope's bull is not Christ's excommunication, by reason it is not done or taken in hand according to Christ's institution; it is of no value in heaven, but to him, who thus abuses it against Christ's command, it brings most sure and certain destruction, for it is a sin wherewith God's name is blasphemed.

CCCLXXXVI.

Like as this external and visible excommunication is used against those only that live in public sins, even so the hidden and invisible excommunication, which is not of men, or done by men visibly, but is of God himself, and done by him only, often excludes from the kingdom of Christ, invisibly, persons whom we take to be fair, upright, good, and honest Christians. For God judges not according to outward works or kind of life, as men do, but views the heart; he judges hypocrites whom the church can neither judge nor punish; the church judges not what is hidden and invisible.

All are not stained so grossly with open offences, that we can tax them in public, as were fitting, with any one particular sin and transgression. For although many covetous persons, adulterers, etc., are among us, yet they proceed so craftily, and in such sort act their sins, that we can not detect them. Yet although such be with us in the church, among the Christian assembly, hear sermons and God's Word, and, with upright and godly Christians, receive the holy sacrament, yet, *de facto*, they are excommunicated by God, by reason they live in sin against their own consciences, and amend not their lives. Such sinners may deceive men, but they cannot deceive God; he at the day of judgment will cause his angels to gather all offenders together, and will cast them into unquenchable fire.

CCCLXXXVII.

Christ says: "Receive ye the Holy Ghost, whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained." And "If thy brother shall trespass

against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee, and him alone; if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more," etc.; and "If he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church. But if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man, and a publican." And St Paul: "If any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolder, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner, with such an one, eat not, etc.; put away from you that wicked person." Also: "If there come any to you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not unto your house, neither bid him God speed; for he that biddeth him God speed, is partaker of his evil deeds."

These, and such like sentences, are the unchangeable will, decrees, and ordinances of the high Majesty of God; we have no power to alter or omit them, much less to abolish them; but on the contrary, have earnest command, with true diligence to hold thereunto, disregarding the power or reputation of any person whatsoever. And although excommunication in popedom has been and is shamefully abused, and made a mere torment, yet we must not suffer it to fall, but make a right use of it, as Christ has commanded, to the raising of the church, not to exercise tyranny, as the pope has done.

[HOME](#)

[TABLE TALK INDEX](#)