

**Objection 1.** It would seem that sentence of excommunication can be passed on a body of men. Because it is possible for a number of people to be united together in wickedness. Now when a man is obstinate in his wickedness he should be excommunicated. Therefore a body of men can be excommunicated.

**Objection 2.** Further, the most grievous effect of an excommunication is privation of the sacraments of the Church. But sometimes a whole country is laid under an interdict. Therefore a body of people can be excommunicated.

**On the contrary,** A gloss of Augustine\* on Mat. 12 asserts that the sovereign and a body of people cannot be excommunicated.

**I answer that,** No man should be excommunicated except for a mortal sin. Now sin consists in an act: and acts do not belong to communities, but, generally speaking, to individuals. Wherefore individual members of a community can be excommunicated, but not the community itself. And although sometimes an act belongs

to a whole multitude, as when many draw a boat, which none of them could draw by himself, yet it is not probable that a community would so wholly consent to evil that there would be no dissentients. Now God, Who judges all the earth, does not condemn the just with the wicked (Gn. 18:25). Therefore the Church, who should imitate the judgments of God, prudently decided that a community should not be excommunicated, lest the wheat be uprooted together with the tares and cockle.

The Reply to the First Objection is evident from what has been said.

**Reply to Objection 2.** Suspension is not so great a punishment as excommunication, since those who are suspended are not deprived of the prayers of the Church, as the excommunicated are. Wherefore a man can be suspended without having committed a sin himself, just as a whole kingdom is laid under an interdict on account of the king's crime. Hence there is no comparison between excommunication and suspension.

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\* Cf. Ep. ccl