

## **On the Admonitions of Titus 3:10:**

An analysis of Catholic history, laws, and teachings  
which illustrate the true nature of the "admonitions" referenced in Titus 3:10:  
“A man that is a heretic after, the first and second admonition avoid”

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SS. Paul and Titus holding the island of Crete.

“For this cause I left thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and shouldest ordain priests in every city, as I also appointed thee.” (Titus 1:5)

## On the Admonitions of Titus 3:10

In his Epistle to Titus, St. Paul tells him, “A man that is a heretic after, the first and second admonition avoid: Knowing that he, that is such an one, is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned by his own judgment” (Tit. 3:10-11). As with any scriptural passage, to understand the import of this passage requires understanding the context, and, most importantly, the teachings and laws of the Church. Without doing this, any passage could be interpreted any number of ways. Is, for instance, Titus 3:10, a Divine command obliging each and every person to avoid a heretic after *they’ve personally* admonished them? Is a person violating a Divine law, thereby sinning, if they have further communications with a person that holds a heresy after *their own personal* attempts to correct them? The truth is that this interpretation would be the result of a superficial reading of the passage. It could only be held if the verse was interpreted in a vacuum devoid of all internal and external context, while ignoring the teachings and laws of the Church and disregarding any Catholic commentary and authoritative writings. In essence, it would be a completely private interpretation without any backing from the Church - *sola scriptura* in practice. However, when the essential tools and sources aren’t disregarded, it becomes clear that the previous interpretation is false, and obvious that the *admonitions* mentioned in Titus 3:10 are the admonitions of Church authorities, not the admonitions of each and every person.

First, it’s important to understand that besides canon laws, there are three cases in which heretics are to be avoided. The great and highly esteemed Jesuit exegete Cornelius à Lapide (1567-1637) explains this in his commentary on the Second Epistle of John.

Observe, not only by human and canon laws, as since the time of S. John they have been enacted by Pontiffs and Councils, heretics are to be avoided in three cases. The first is, when there is danger lest you or yours should be perverted by them, which is a thing which ordinarily happens. For, as S. Paul saith, “Their word doth creep as doth a cancer.” (2 *Tim.* ii. 17.)

2d. When, by receiving, you would seem to favour his heresy, and tacitly profess or encourage it. As, for example, if you were to receive to your house and table a recognised Calvinistic minister, who came for the purpose of propagating his heresy. In the same way it would be wrong to be present at his preaching, or eucharists, or to communicate with him *in sacris*.

3d. When you give scandal to others, so that they, thinking you to be a host and patron of heretics, should be by your example emboldened to do the same.

**These cases being excepted, intercourse with heretics is not forbidden by the Divine and natural law, especially if necessity, or mercy, or grave benefit counsels it.**

(Lapide, p.525)

As Cornelius à Lapide explained, apart from canon laws and the three cases he mentioned, there is no Divine or natural law obliging the faithful to avoid heretics. The words of Titus 3:10 are not, therefore, a Divine law obliging all of the faithful to avoid a heretic after *their own* two attempts at admonishing them. Rather, as this essay will show, the words of Titus 3:10 are instructions for the Church in the development of canon laws; and the *admonitions* mentioned in Titus 3:10 are the admonitions of Church authorities, not the admonitions of each and every person.

### **Ecclesiastical Officials**

It is obvious to all that St. Titus and the other Apostles were early authorities in the Church. As bishops, they were responsible for governing and pastoring the Church. Their successors, all future bishops, would have that same responsibility. It's also clear that much of St. Paul's writings were specifically directed to them in their capacity as officials in the Church. For instance, St. Paul tells Titus, "For this cause I left thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and shouldest ordain priests in every city, as I also appointed thee." (Tit. 1:5). Instructions like this one, addressed to Titus in his capacity as a bishop, can be found all throughout St. Paul's epistles and the rest of the New Testament. Now, no Catholic laymen in their right mind would think this was a Divine command intended for them; one they would be violating if they didn't start ordaining priests in every city. As another simple example of this, St. Paul tells Titus, "send forward Zenas, the lawyer, and Apollo, with care, that nothing be wanting to them" (Tit. 3:13). How many Catholics are searching for a lawyer named Zenas out of fear of violating a Divine command; or, perhaps, naming their first-born son Zenas, training him to be a lawyer, and then sending him in search of St. Paul?

The previous two examples, though obviously absurd, illustrate the point that not every passage, or instruction, in the New Testament is a Divine command directed toward all the faithful. Every passage could be taken this way, though, if it is isolated and read without regard for context. Though he wasn't named Zenas, Peter Burnett converted to Catholicism while a lawyer, and later wrote his famous book, *The Path which led a Protestant Lawyer to the Catholic Church*, which, among other things emphasizes the importance of context. Burnett, the Californian Supreme Court Justice and first American Governor of that state, wrote this book in 1860, wherein, according to a 1908 Catholic Encyclopedia article "he bases his conversion on clear-cut logical principles" (Spillane). This same article also points out that the famous Catholic, Dr. Orestes Brownson, had this to say about Burnett's book:

In writing his book, Judge Burnett has rendered a noble homage to his new faith.... Through him California has made a more glorious contribution to the Union than all the gold of her mines, for truth is more precious than gold, yea, than fine gold (Brownson's Review, April 1860).

What follows in the next two to three pages are portions of Chapter III, Section 7, of *The Path which led a Protestant Lawyer to the Catholic Church*. This section, in the chapter titled, *The Governing Power of the Church*, illustrates the authoritative, governing, powers given to the Church by elucidating the context of St. Paul's Epistles to Timothy and Titus; ultimately showing that these epistles were addressed to them in their capacity as teachers and rulers of the Church. All brackets and italics are in the original text. Regarding the words in brackets, Burnett explains, "these sentences being elliptical, I have put in brackets the words necessary to fill them up" (p.73).

...The Epistles of St. Paul to Timothy and Titus were addressed to them in their capacity as *Teachers*. The whole drift, spirit, and language of these Epistles show that Timothy and Titus had "*the rule*" over their respective churches.

...To his son Titus, the apostle says:

'For this cause I left thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee.'

'These things [do you] speak, and exhort with all authority. Let no man despise thee.'

'A man that is a heretic after the first and second admonition [do you] reject.'

...Speaking of certain proud and perverse teachers, the apostle tells Timothy, 'From such withdraw thyself.' Now it is plain that Timothy was to decide who these teachers were. The apostle gives him a description of such a class, in general terms, but leaves Timothy to decide the question whether a particular individual came within the definition. In other words, Paul, the inspired apostle, as such, laid down the law to Timothy, leaving Timothy to construe the law, and administer it in each particular case as it arose. 'Let no man despise thy youth.'

The apostle, after stating to Titus that 'there are many vain talkers and deceivers,' commands Titus to 'rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in *the faith*.' He further commands Titus: 'These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority.' Now here was the most explicit authority given Titus to 'rebuke sharply,' and then '*with all authority*;' and the object of these sharp and authoritative rebukes was, that those thus rebuked might 'be sound in the faith.' But the authority of Titus did not stop here. He was not only to 'rebuke, exhort, and speak with all authority,' that those thus rebuked, exhorted, and taught might 'become sound in the faith,' but he was expressly commanded to 'reject a heretic, after the first and second admonition.' These commands were given to Titus *as a minister*, having the rule over the church at Crete. *He* was first to decide who were the 'vain talkers and deceivers;' *he* was then to 'exhort and rebuke them sharply, and with all authority," that they might become 'sound in the faith;' but if they persisted after the first and second admonition, *he* was to reject them as heretics. Titus was the judge, who was to decide whether certain opinions were heretical, and *he* was to reject the heretic. *He* had the authority to rule or govern. Paul says to him, 'Let no man despise *thee*:' that is, in the discharge of thy duties. In other words, let no man despise thy authority. This is clear from the words going before, as well as from the fact that the whole Epistle is *addressed to Titus in his capacity of teacher*, and regards him in that capacity, and not as an individual, having no official authority.

Among the powers conferred upon Timothy and Titus were the following:

1. The power to command and teach, rebuke and exhort, with all authority.

2. To ordain elders.

3. To reject heretics.

And these powers were given them by the laying on of the hands of the apostle, and were to be exercised by them, and not by the members of the church at large. These powers were most full and ample. Putting all these passages together, as well as taking the general drift and spirit of the whole system, how readily we can see the *manner and the means* by which the members of the church were brought to 'the unity of the faith.'

...In this way 'the unity of the faith' was kept pure in the church. As often as a member became infected with improper opinions, he was rebuked, exhorted, and admonished twice, and if he still persisted, he was rejected. And this process was pursued towards others as often as occasion might require. It is obvious that there could be left *in the church* nothing but 'the unity of the faith' spoken of by St. Paul. There could be no process more simple and efficient than this. It accords with all the laws of reason, with human nature, and with the first and most essential principles whereon all governments of law must be based.

The power to expel for heresy is a necessary incident to the power to teach, given by Christ in the commission; and the power to expel for heresy necessarily includes the power to determine what heresy is, and what it is not. It is one of the plainest principles of law, that when power is given to the agent to do a certain thing, the *means* necessary to accomplish the end are inseparable incidents; otherwise, the grant of power would be idle. To say to the agent, 'Do this,' and yet give him no means wherewith to do it, would be wholly useless. *Titus* was commanded to admonish and to reject the heretic; and whatever may be the definition of heresy, it was a crime against the law of Christ, and must be *judged by that law*. If *Titus* was to reject the heretic, *he* must, of necessity, decide what was heresy, as defined by *the law* making it criminal. In other words, *he* must construe the law, and determine authoritatively the question arising under the law.

Now those who were commanded to admonish and reject heretics were those whose faith the early Christians were commanded to follow. And from the Scriptures alone, the mode of teaching, the powers of the teachers, and the duties of the members taught, may be stated concisely thus:

1. The lay members of the church were to 'obey,' 'submit to,' and 'follow the faith' of their teachers who had 'the rule over them.' This secured unity of faith between the teachers and the persons taught.

2. In case of any serious difference among the teachers themselves, as to any point of faith to be taught, a council was called, and the question therein settled, both by *argument*, and the aid of the *Holy Ghost*. This secured unity in the college of teachers.

3. The united effect of both these was unity in the entire body, the church.

...It must be evident to the most casual reader of the New Testament, that the larger portion of the instructions given by Christ were given in terms *personally* addressed to the apostles.

...The apostle, after stating that 'there are many unruly' and vain talkers and deceivers," commands Titus to 'rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith.' He further commands Titus: 'These things speak and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee.' 'A man that is a heretic, after the first and second admonition [do you] reject.' Here was the most explicit authority given to Titus to do certain things in the church, and with *all authority*. The persons mentioned as unruly, and vain talkers and *deceivers*, were heretics, because not '*sound in the faith*;' and as to *these* Titus was first to rebuke and exhort with all authority, and if these rebukes did not have the proper effect, he was to reject the heretic. Unless he had the power to reject or expel the heretic—the vain talker and deceiver—from the church, the right to rebuke would have been wholly idle, because the evil would have still remained *in the Church*, without any efficient remedy.

These directions were given to Titus as a minister. He himself was first to determine who were the 'unruly and vain talkers and deceivers;' *he* was then to 'exhort and rebuke them sharply;' but if they persisted, *he* was to reject them as heretics. Titus was to decide the question whether certain opinions were heretical. This being *his* right, it was the corresponding *duty* of the persons rebuked and admonished, to obey him who had the rule over them, and to submit themselves.

(pp.73-93 - Brackets and italics in original.)

Burnett demonstrated that Titus 3:10 was addressed to Titus as a Church authority; and that the admonitions mentioned in Titus 3:10 are those official admonitions that come from Church authorities, with no relation to the admonitions given by the non-authoritative laity. This is also shown by the original annotations of the Rheims New Testament. The Rheims NT was first published in 1582 and combined into one book with

the Douay Old Testament many years later to form what we know as the Douay-Rheims Bible. The Douay-Rheims Bible that most Catholics are familiar with is Bishop Challoner's revised version, which first appeared in 1749. The Rheims NT originally had many extensive and thorough annotations, but they had to be omitted in order to make the Rheims NT fit into one book with the Douay OT. According to the original annotations of the Rheims NT, in St. Paul's Epistle to Titus, "he instructeth him, and in him all Bishops" (p.545), affirming that the purpose of the Epistle to Titus is to instruct the Church hierarchy. Then, in the specific annotation for Titus 3:10, it is explained that the admonitions mentioned therein are given by our "spiritual governors and pastors". If, after these admonitions, the heretic does not yield to our spiritual governors and pastors, then the faithful must avoid the heretic.

These admonitions or corruptions must be given to such as err, by our spiritual governors and pastors, to whom if they yield not, Christian men must avoid them.  
(Rheims New Testament, p.549)

Though a layman might attempt to admonish or instruct a heretic in some way, the Rheims New Testament annotation shows that the admonitions that could effectively result in having to avoid, or shun, a heretic are those that come from the authorities in the Church. The layman's admonition is obviously not the same as the admonitions of Church officials mentioned in Titus 3:10. Those admonitions of a layman, therefore, have no bearing on the instruction of Titus 3:10 and who ought to be avoided. Though there may be other reasons to avoid a heretic, the instruction of Titus 3:10 does not oblige the faithful to avoid anyone if only a layman has admonished them, since the passage is referring to authoritative, or official, admonitions. These official admonitions in Titus 3:10 are, in other words, canonical admonitions.

### **Canonical Admonitions**

The only article of the Catholic Encyclopedia with the word "admonition" in the title, the 1907 article, *Canonical Admonitions*, defines these as, "A preliminary means used by the Church towards a suspected person, as a preventive of harm or a remedy of evil" (Burtzell). According to this article, an Instruction directed by Pope Leo XIII states that, "Among the preservative measures are chiefly to be reckoned the spiritual retreat, ad-

monitions, and injunctions." This Instruction also says, "the canonical admonitions may be made in a paternal and private manner (even by letter or by an intermediary person), or in legal form, but always in such a way that proof of their having been made shall remain on record." It is then explained that these admonitions are founded, "after an investigation to be made by one having due authority, with the result of establishing a reasonable basis for the suspicion." The first admonition is a paternal admonition, by which "the prelate either personally or through a confidential delegate informs the suspected person of what has been said about him, without mentioning the source of information, and without threat, but urges amendment." If the paternal admonition, and other measures, are ineffective; then a legal admonition is resorted to, and this is, "to a great extent akin to the summons to judgment."

Canon 2143 of the 1917 Code of Canon Law prescribes the way in which admonitions are to be administered.

*Admonitions, if necessary, may be made orally or in writing. If they are administered orally, this must be done by the Ordinary in the presence of the chancellor, or some other official of the diocesan court, or two witnesses. If by letter, the latter should be registered and receipted by the post office...*  
(Augustine, p.405. 1921)

That the admonitions mentioned in Titus 3:10 are canonical admonitions is obvious from the fact that, as was previously shown, St. Paul's Epistle to Titus, including the instruction in verse 3:10, was addressed to him in his capacity as a Church official. The 1910 Catholic Encyclopedia article on heresy also explains that this instruction to Titus was an early piece of legislation in regards to the way the Church dealt with and excommunicated heretics.

The spirit which animates the dealings of the Church with heresy and heretics is one of extreme severity. St. Paul writes to Titus: "A man that is a heretic, after the first and second admonition, avoid: knowing that he, that is such a one, is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned by his own judgment" (Titus 3:10-11). **This early piece of legislation reproduces the still earlier teaching of Christ:** 'And if he will not hear the church, let him be to thee as the heathen and the publican' (Matthew 18:17); **it also inspires all subsequent anti-**

**heretical legislation.** The sentence on the obstinate heretic is invariably excommunication. He is separated from the company of the faithful, delivered up 'to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ' (1 Corinthians 5:5).  
(Wilhelm)

Affirming what the 1910 Catholic Encyclopedia article said above and further showing that the admonitions in Titus 3:10 are what would be called canonical admonitions, the 1932 book, *The Delict of Heresy*, by Rev. MacKenzie, states that St. Paul's order to Titus in this verse indicates part of a "more or less formal process of trial."

Paul's orders to Titus have already been quoted, requiring that there be a first and second warning, and then avoidance of the heretic. He also wrote to Timothy decreeing that there must be two witnesses before certain punishments be inflicted, and **this text has been thought to indicate a more or less formal process of trial even in these earliest days of ecclesiastical organization.**  
(MacKenzie, p.4. 1932)

The following quotes also illustrate that the Church officials are those that determine, by their admonitions, who is to be avoided.

"A fortiori, therefore, must the faithful have been obliged to shun the company of those **whom the Apostles found necessary to separate** from the communion of the faithful."  
(*Excommunication*. Francis Hyland, J.C.L., p.36. 1928)

"Those who voluntarily separate themselves from the Church are (a) *heretics*, i.e., those who profess a doctrine declared as heretical by the Church, and *infidels*, who entirely reject the Church's teaching. Fore whosoever publicly departs from the unity of the faith thereby ceases both inwardly and outwardly to belong to the Church. Therefore St. Paul admonishes **the pastors of the Church**: "A man that is a heretic after the first or second admonition, avoid" (Tit. iii. 10). If such a man still belonged to the fold the Apostle would not **admonish the pastors** to shun him."  
(*Handbook of the Christian Religion*. Wilmers, Wilhelm, S.J., p.381. 1891)

"The heretic, St. Paul **instructs Titus**, shall be admonished a first and a second time of the grave character of his offense; if he will not

heed, he must be avoided by Christians as a man in evident bad faith, who stands self-condemned... a heretic was a person who deliberately taught a doctrine he knew to be false, in contradiction of the infallible teaching of the Church. Heretics were consequently cut off from all association with the faithful, who must hold no relations with them so long as they obstinately refuse to heed the **official remonstrances of the Church authorities.**"

*(The American Catholic Quarterly Review, vol.24. "Church and State in the Fourth Century." Rev. Maurice M. Hassett, pp.301-302. 1909)*

"The external enforcement of laws against heretics as heretics, always involves some **judicial process**. This process may have various stages, marked by the judicial sentences imposed: a declaratory sentence that excommunication has been incurred by a delict of heresy; a sentence of juridical infamy; deprivation of offices, benefices, etc.; deposition and degradation. The issuance of any of these sentences (save the declaratory sentence),

requires **canonical warnings** and trials, with full observance of the criminal code in all details of the process."

*(The Delict of Heresy. Rev. Eric MacKenzie, A.M., S.T.L., J.C.L., p.98. 1932)*

"And in matters spiritual, **a bishop, by virtue of his office**, is an inquisitor of the same kind. It is **his duty**, laid down in the plainest language of Holy Writ, to watch over those who are entrusted to his charge; and where he sees any going astray, to "reprove," to "rebuke sharply," and "with all authority," and **if necessary, "after the first and second admonition to reject," that is, to cut off from the society of the church, or in other words, to excommunicate** (2 Tim. iv, 2. Titus i, 13. ii, 15. iii, 10). This, I say, is contained in the very idea of a bishop, or overseer "of God's flock. He is bound to maintain the integrity of the faith, and to keep his people from being corrupted by teachers of false doctrines; and he has authority given him for this special purpose."

*(The Catholic Missionary, "The Inquisition." Andrew Kim (first Korean-born Catholic priest), Martyred, p.5. 1853)*

"Moreover, so far from wishing to tolerate such persons in the Church, St. Paul warns the faithful to avoid them (Romans 16:17),

calls upon **those who are set over Churches** to cast out the recalcitrant heretic, as one who is "subverted and self-condemned" (Titus 3:10-11), and, in a particular instance, tells St. Timothy that he has "delivered" two such heretics "to Satan" – that is, cast them out of the Church – "that they may learn not to blaspheme" (1 Timothy 1:20)." (*The Catholic Encyclopedia*. "Union of Christendom". Sydney Smith, S.J. 1912)

"Moreover, we determine to subject to excommunication believers who receive, defend or support heretics... If however, he is a cleric, let him be deposed from every office and benefice, so that the greater the fault the greater the punishment. If any refuse to avoid such persons **after they have been pointed out by the Church [postquam ab ecclesia denotati fuerint]**, let them be punished with the sentence of excommunication until they make suitable satisfaction. Clerics should not, of course, give the sacraments of the Church to such pestilent persons nor give them a Christian burial..." (*Fourth Lateran Council, Constitution 3, On Heretics*. Pope Innocent III. 1215)

The admonitions that Titus is instructed to give are clearly official admonitions, or those that come from a Church authority; and they relate to the Church's official process of excommunicating and separating heretics from the faithful. This fact is also drawn from the works of St. Thomas Aquinas.

### **St. Thomas Aquinas on Titus 3:10**

St. Thomas Aquinas speaks of Titus 3:10 in a few of his major writings. In doing so, he clearly refers to the passage as the method the Church uses in excommunicating. To fully understand his writings on heresy and excommunication, however, it's important to note that in St. Thomas' time, the faithful were bound to avoid all those under major excommunication, with few exceptions. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the Church limited this, so that the faithful were generally only bound to avoid those excommunicated by name (*vitandus*); but this will be covered later.

In his *Summa Theologica*, St. Thomas only references Titus 3:10 two times. In Part III, Q.64, Art.9, Obj.3, St. Thomas uses the passage in a hypothetical objection to the fact that faith is not required for the validity of a sacrament. Other than that, it provides little, if any, insight into the words of Titus 3:10. However, his other reference to Titus 3:10 in the *Summa*

provides a great deal of information regarding the meaning of "admonition," as used in that verse.

In his section on whether heretics ought to be tolerated (*ST*, II -II, Q.11, Art.3), St. Thomas' begins his response by quoting the words of Titus 3:10-11 in "On the contrary", and goes on to explain:

On the part of the Church, however, there is mercy which looks to the conversion of the wanderer, wherefore she condemns not at once, but "after the first and second admonition," as the Apostle directs: after that, if he is yet stubborn, the Church no longer hoping for his conversion, looks to the salvation of others, by excommunicating him and separating him from the Church, and furthermore delivers him to the secular tribunal to be exterminated thereby from the world by death.

(*ST*, II -II, Q.11, Art.3, s.c.)

St. Thomas states, here, that the "first and second admonition" mentioned in Titus come from the Church, which "condemns not at once." St. Thomas' use of "the Church" is clearly a reference to the Church hierarchy, not individual lay members of the Church, as these reasons show:

1. St. Thomas says "on the part of the Church," instead of "on the part of a person," or "on the part of the Christian."

2. He says "she" condemns after the second admonition, but the individual lay person has no power to condemn another person.

3. He says that after the second admonition the Church excommunicates the heretic and separates him from the Church, but the individual lay person has no power to excommunicate another person.

4. He says that after the second admonition the Church delivers the heretic to the secular tribunal to be exterminated by death, but the secular tribunal would have only recognized an official determination by the Church that a person was a heretic, and would not have recognized an individual layman's determination that a person was a heretic.

St. Thomas' *Commentaries on the Epistles of St. Paul* also affirm that Titus 3:10 refers to Church officials and the process of excommunication. In his *Commentary on the Epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians*, St. Thomas says,

Now it may be asked whether all heretics are thereby excommunicated. And it seems not, because it is said: "A man that is a heretic, after

the first and second admonition, avoid" (Tit. 3:10). I answer that a person might be called a heretic either because he errs solely from ignorance, and then he is not on that account excommunicated; or because he errs through obstinacy and tries to subvert others, and then he falls under the canon of the sentence passed.  
(Gal. 1:8)

At the conclusion of the prologue of his *Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to Titus*, St. Thomas shows that St. Paul was instructing Titus how to govern the Church. St. Thomas says, "it is easy to gather from the foregoing that the aim of this letter is to instruct Titus how to govern his Church." Then, in the body of the same commentary, St. Thomas specifically addresses the admonitions mentioned in Titus 3:10.

Such a person should be warned, and if he does not desist, he should be avoided. And he says, *after the first and second admonition*, for that is the way the Church proceeds in excommunicating. The reason for this is that the number three suggests that everything has a beginning, a middle, and an end. Consequently, it is taken as expressing all things: *this is the third time I am coming to you* (2 Cor 13:1), and also because of the perfection of the number three.

But the reason for avoiding a heretic is that one must start from the beginning, if a heretic is to be corrected: *those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick* (Matt 9:12). Therefore, he should not be dismissed, until it is obvious that he cannot be cured, but if he cannot be cured, then he should be dismissed: *I will condemn you out of your own mouth* (Luke 19:22).  
(Tit. 3:10)

St. Thomas' comments on the Epistle to Titus and the admonitions of Titus 3:10 affirm that the "first and second admonition" are official admonitions of the Church, dealing with excommunication procedures. This is consistent with the fact that St. Paul was instructing Titus in how to rule the Church as a bishop of the Church.

Now, it was mentioned earlier that the faithful were bound to avoid everyone under major excommunication, with few exceptions, during St. Thomas' time. However, even St. Thomas acknowledged that some exceptions existed to this.

The other is major excommunication which deprives a man of the sacraments of the Church and of the communion of the faithful.

Wherefore it is not lawful to communicate with one who lies under such an excommunication. But, since the Church resorts to excommunication to repair and not to destroy, exception is made from this general law, in certain matters wherein communication is lawful, viz. in those which concern salvation, for one is allowed to speak of such matters with an excommunicated person; and one may even speak of other matters so as to put him at his ease and to make the words of salvation more acceptable.  
(*ST* Suppl. Q. 23, Art.1, co.)

## History of Avoiding Excommunicates

Even the exceptions to avoiding excommunicates that existed during St. Thomas Aquinas' time did not always exist. This is explained in Rev. Francis Hyland's 1928 book, *Excommunication: Its Nature, Historical Development and Effects*.

Originally all persons under ban of major excommunication were to be shunned by the faithful not only in religious affairs, but also in the ordinary and civil affairs of daily life. The Apostles themselves taught the faithful to avoid gravely sinful brethren in all matters. Saint Paul warns the Corinthians "not so much as to eat" with a brother who is a fornicator, or covetous, or a server of idols, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner. In his epistle to Titus he writes: "A man that is a heretic after the first and second admonition, avoid." Saint John, in one of his epistles, writes: "If any man come to you and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into the house, nor say to him, God speed you. For he that saith to him, God speed you, communicateth with his wicked works." It would seem that in these cases the Apostles have reference to persons, who, if not formally excommunicated, were practically regarded as such. A fortiori, therefore, must the faithful have been obliged to shun the company of those whom the Apostles found necessary to separate from the communion of the faithful. This same obligation was confirmed by the Fathers, and repeated by many councils.  
(Hyland, pp.35-36. 1928)

During the middle ages, however, the Church began mitigating the laws on avoiding those under major excommunication. What follows is

the history of this from the middle ages to the 1917 Code of Canon Law, as can be found in Rev. Hyland's book.

**1079 AD:** Gregory VII first mitigated the laws to avoid all excommunicates. He made exception in favor of wives, children, servants and subjects of excommunicated persons. He admitted necessity and utility, both spiritually and temporally as excusing causes. He also excused those who were ignorant of the law forbidding communication, or of the fact that a person with whom they held intercourse was excommunicated. (Hyland, p.40)

**1089 AD:** Urban II confirmed Gregory VII's exceptions to the general rule. (Hyland, p.40)

**1227-1244 AD:** The decretals of Gregory IX ratified the exceptions of Gregory VII.

**1418 AD:** Pope Martin V's Constitution "*Ad Evitanda Scandala*" of 1418 introduced the distinction between the *tolerati* and *vitandi*, though those terms were not employed in the Constitution itself. By virtue of this Constitution a distinction was made between excommunicated persons. The faithful were no longer obliged to avoid the majority of them, which became known as the *tolerati*. Those that the faithful were obliged to avoid became known as the *vitandi* (to be avoided). Only those were *vitandi* whose excommunication had been published or made known by the judge in special express form, by being excommunicated by name with a public denouncement, such as affixing the publication of their *vitandus* status in a public place. The only other *vitandi* excommunicates were those that incurred excommunication by reason of sacrilegious violence against a cleric, so notoriously that the fact can in no way be dissimulated or excused. (Hyland, p.41)

**1867 AD:** Although the faithful were no longer obliged to avoid the *tolerati*, the *tolerati* were, up to this point, not allowed of their own accord to hold intercourse with the faithful. In 1867, the Sacred Penitentiary under Pius IX decreed that the *tolerati* themselves were no longer obliged to abstain from communicating *in humanis* with the faithful. (Hyland, p.45)

**1917 AD:** At the promulgation of the 1917 Code of Canon Law, the legislation of Pope Martin V no longer remained in force as the legislation of Canon 2258 and 2267 of the 1917 Code was now in force. Under the 1917 Code, other than a notorious beater of the Pope, no one is *vitandus* unless these four conditions are met:

1. *Nominally:* He must be excommunicated by name.
2. *Apostolic See:* The excommunication naming this person

can only come from the Apostolic See.

3. *Publicly Declared*: This excommunication must be publicly declared by the Apostolic See.

4. *Vitandus*: This sentence or decree must expressly state that the named excommunicated person must be avoided.

Rev. Hyland explains this in more detail:

In Canon 2258, §2, the Code lays down the conditions which are required to constitute a person a *vitandus* under the present discipline. The canon states that no one is *vitandus*, unless he has been nominally excommunicated by the Holy See, unless the excommunication has been publicly declared and unless in the decree or sentence of excommunication it is expressly stated that he must be avoided. Hence, four conditions are required to constitute a person *vitandus*. In the first place, he must be *nominally* excommunicated, that is, he must be excommunicated by name, or, at least, in such a manner that he cannot be confounded with others. Secondly, he must be excommunicated by the Apostolic See. By the term *Apostolic See* in the canon is to be understood not only the Pope, but also the Congregations, Tribunals and Offices through which the Holy Father is wont to transact the business of the universal Church. Hence, no authority inferior to the Apostolic See can render a person a *vitandus*: the Holy See alone can do so, and, it may be added, very seldom resorts to such a drastic measure. Thirdly, it is required that the excommunication be *publicly declared*. This could be done by publishing it in the *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, or by affixing notice of it in some public place, in a word, by any means, according to the circumstances of time and place, that will bring knowledge of the fact to the faithful. Finally, it is necessary that it be expressly stated in the decree or sentence of excommunication that the excommunicated person must be avoided. All four conditions must concur in one and the same case to constitute a person a *vitandus*; if any one of them be wanting, the excommunicate is not a *vitandus*.

(Hyland, pp.45-46. 1928)

An example of the type of excommunication decree just mentioned can be found in John Daly's article, *Heresy in History*. In this article, Mr Daly explains that Fr. Alfred Loisy was a notorious Modernist excommu-

nicated by name as a heretic by the Inquisition under Pope St. Pius X in 1908. Mr. Daly says, “the decree excommunicating the heretic Loisy was promulgated 7th March 1908 and appeared in the 19th March issue of the French theological review *L'Ami Du Clergé* for the same year...” As provided in Mr. Daly’s article, here is the text of this decree of Pope St. Pius X:

It is already known everywhere that the priest Alfred Loisy, currently resident in the diocese of Langres, has taught orally and published in written form many things that overturn the most essential foundations of the Christian faith. However there was some hope that he had perhaps been deceived rather by love of novelty than by depravity of mind and that he would submit to the recent declarations and prescriptions of the Holy See in these matters. That is why hitherto grave canonical sanctions have been abstained from.

But the opposite occurred, for, despising everything, not only did he not abjure his errors, but he also, by new writings and letters to his superiors, had the hardihood to confirm them obstinately. As his entrenched contumacy after the formal canonical admonitions is therefore now clearly established, this supreme congregation of the Holy Roman and Universal Inquisition, in order not to prove unfaithful to its task, and by express mandate of our holy Lord Pope Pius X, pronounces sentence of major excommunication against the priest Alfred Loisy by name and personally, and declares him to be struck by all the penalties of the publicly excommunicated and thus that he is *vitandus* and must be avoided by all.

This decree established Fr. Alfred Loisy as a *vitandus* excommunicated heretic. After this decree was published, all the faithful were obliged to avoid him. Unless a decree like this has been specifically issued against a person, then the faithful are not obliged to avoid them.

### **Ad Evitanda and Heretics**

As was previously noted Pope Martin V's Constitution "*Ad Evitanda Scandala*" of 1418 introduced the distinction between the *tolerati* and *vitandi*. Though it may sound redundant, these laws regarding excommunicates, applies to all excommunicates, even heretics. This is self-evident from the fact that the Church made no exceptions in regard to heretics when promulgating these laws concerning communication with excommunicates. This is taught by one of the most distinguished theo-

gians of the Church, the Jesuit, Francisco Suarez (1548-1617). In *De Fide, Disp. XXI. Sect. 3*, Suarez writes:

...in Extrav. *Ad evitanda*... the obligation was limited, in such a way that the faithful were only bound to avoid those particularly excommunicated and denounced by name... This new law established by the Council of Constance also extends to heretics and the words of Extrav. [*Ad evitanda*] prove this, which are both general and add an exception to confirm the rule towards everybody else. The teaching is completely true and certain in practice, undoubtedly however much a heretic is notorious and public, the faithful are not bound to avoid him because of his censure, until a sentence declares and denounces him by name, is the common teaching... Martin V approved the first form (namely in the Council of Constance), and it's usage was commonly received by the Church, as I broadly exhibited in *Tom. V., Disp. IX. Sect. ii*.

(Suarez, Francisco, S.J. *De Fide: Disputatio XXI, Sectio 3*. 1621)

Cardinal De Lugo, another eminent Catholic theologian, also affirms that the strict obligation to avoid a heretic depends on whether the Church has declared them, by name, as an excommunicate that is to be avoided. Cardinal De Lugo was so renowned as a theologian that St. Alphonsus Liguori considered him to be second only to St. Thomas Aquinas.

The first opinion teaches, as often as it is evident that someone is a heretic, the very fact makes communication with him forbidden. Thus, Soto 4. *Dist. 25. Quast. 1 art. 1 & 3. & dist. 20. Quast. 1. art. 5. conclus. 2*. The common opinion, however, denies this, in as much as they are not legally declared a heretic, & denounced; because the Council of Constance granted all the faithful in general, as to permit communication with all the excommunicated, except those denounced by name, & those notorious for striking a cleric, with no given exception of heretics: therefore, there is no reason by which that permission does not extend to communicate with them [heretics]. Thus teach Toetus, Ugolinus, Suarez, Azor, & others, whom I have reported, & followed by Thomas Sanchez *lib. 2. in Decal. cap. 9. n. 3* Hurtado *in prasenti, disp. 76 & 4*. & others in common, which I've always embraced in other places.

(*Tractatus de Virtute Fidei Divinae: Disputatio XXII, Sectio. 1*. 1646)

*This Irish Ecclesiastical Record* of 1886 also states the same teaching:

...according to the unanimous teaching of theologians the Constitution *Ad evitanda* includes heretics (excipiendis exceptis) equally with all other excommunicate in its provisions of toleration, so that, *ex vi illius Constitutionis*, as full communication with all heretics *in quibuscumque divinis* as with the rest of the excommunicate is granted to the faithful. Theologians make practically no distinction whatever on this point.  
(Livius, p.38)

Not only do these three sources, themselves, teach that the strict obligation to avoid a heretic depends on whether the Church has declared them, by name, to be avoided; but they state that this is the common and unanimous teaching in the Church.

Cardinal De Lugo further teaches, in the same previously mentioned work of his, that communication with undeclared heretics is, in certain cases, also permitted in sacred matters:

The second chief doubt is whether we may communicate with an undeclared heretic only in civil and human affairs or even in sacred and spiritual things. It is certain that we cannot communicate with heretics in the rites proper to a heretical sect, because this would be contrary to the precept of confessing the faith and would contain an implicit profession of error. But the question relates to sacred matters containing no error, e.g. whether it is lawful to hear Mass with a heretic, or to celebrate in his presence, or to be present while he celebrates in the Catholic rite, etc.

...But the opposite view [i.e. that attendance at such a Mass is lawful] is general [communis] and true, unless it should be illicit for some other reason on account of scandal or implicit denial of the faith, or because charity obliges one to impede the sin of the heretical minister administering unworthily where necessity does not urge. This is the teaching of Navarro and Sanchez, Suarez, Hurtado and is what I have said in speaking of the sacrament of penance and of matrimony and the other sacraments. It is also certain by virtue of the said *litterae extravagantes* [i.e. *Ad evitanda scandala*] in which communication with *excommunicati tolerati* is conceded to the faithful in the reception and administration of the sacraments. **So as these heretics are not declared excommunicates or notoriously guilty of striking a cleric, there is no reason why we should be prevented from receiving the sacraments from them because of their excom-**

**munication**, although on other grounds this may often be illicit unless necessity excuse as I have explained in the said places.  
(*Tractatus de Virtute Fidei Divinae: Disputatio XXII, Sectio.I.* 1646)

Further, specifically in regards to the idea that the faithful shouldn't be permitted to take part in sacred Catholic rites with undeclared heretics, De Lugo states:

The practice is to the contrary, for some heretical princes, which whenever going to Rome or other Catholic places, they go, with the permission of the superiors, to the Churches, & attend the sacred [ceremonies], priests knowing it, & celebrate without scruple. Indeed, I have sometimes seen them in the presence of the sacred College of Cardinal's solemn Mass, all knowing well that they are heretics, & pretending, & because of the esteemed merits produced by the experience; indeed they conceive better thoughts of the benefits of Catholic rites, & notice the frauds of their teachers. I acknowledge, excluding ignorance, they cannot attend Mass, since they are excommunicated, & the Council of Constance does not favor them: those, however, who celebrate in the presence of them, do not sin, since the same Council permits them to communicate with them in profane, and also even in the sacred.  
(*Tractatus de Virtute Fidei Divinae: Disputatio XXII, Sectio.I.* 1646)

The 1932 book, *The Delict of Heresy*, also shows that sacraments can be received from heretics in certain cases according to the 1917 Code of Canon Law. In this book's section titled, *Heresy and Official Status and Actions*, it states:

[referring to heretics] ...the second and third sections of canon 2261 provide for the delinquents administration of Sacraments in certain special cases. This provision is not intended as a favor to the delinquent himself, but rather as a means of making the Sacraments more available to the faithful, especially urgent cases... The provisions distinguish between those priests who have not and those who have received judicial sentences, and between the faithful whose case is urgent and those who are in ordinary need of the Sacraments.

...Canon 2261 is the logical complement of this legislation, in giving the faithful the right to seek the ministrations of priests so empowered... When the priest or other cleric is excommunicated, but

has not received either a declaratory or condemnatory sentence, the faithful are permitted to ask and receive from him any Sacrament or Sacramental, especially if other ministers are absent. In these circumstances the said minister is free to administer to the faithful, and does not thereby violate the censure of which he is conscious. The faithful are required to have a just cause for their request, but canonists do not require that it be a serious (*gravis*) cause; the earlier conferring of Baptism, the dispelling of doubt concerning the gravity of a sin and the state of conscious, the desire for greater purity of soul when approaching the Holy Table, or the wish to communicate more frequently, have been recognized as just causes for requesting Sacraments even from priests known to be under simple censure. Meanwhile the minister is not required to investigate the reasons impelling the faithful to approach him, nor to verify the justice of their reasons. On being asked to administer a Sacrament, he is immediately free (*ratione censurae*) to do so. Even more, canonists do not require him to wait for an explicit request. Any implicit or reasonably presumed petition will be sufficient. **Hence, when no other minister is available, a priest who is consciously guilty of a delict of heresy may go to Church, and show himself as ready to hear Confessions at the regular hours to distribute Communion and celebrate Mass when the faithful gather for these purposes.**  
(pp.78-79)

As the preceding sources have affirmed, it's been well established within the Church that the laws regarding *vitandi* and *tolerati* excommunicates apply to heretics; and unless a heretic has been declared and denounced by name, by the Church, then the faithful are not obliged to avoid them in both civil and sacred matters.

## Conclusion

The admonitions mentioned in Titus 3:10 are not the admonitions of just anyone, but are, rather, canonical admonitions, or admonitions from Church officials. The non-authoritative admonitions of a layman have no bearing on the law of Titus 3:10, and this is why the Church was able to enact the laws that She has concerning the *vitandi* and *tolerati*. This is also why the Church could, at times, officially permit and perform marriages of Catholics to non-Catholics, a fact not previously mentioned in this essay. If the admonitions of Titus 3:10 included those of the laity, the

Church would never have been able to teach that the faithful only had to avoid those excommunicates that had their name officially declared by the Holy See as *vitandi*, and that they were not obliged to avoid those that were not *vitandi*. Not only has the Church taught this, but She has promulgated laws to that effect. The Church would have been contradicting Titus 3:10 with these laws, teachings, and practices, if the admonitions in that instruction to Titus included those of the laity; since it would never have been true that the faithful only had to avoid those excommunicates that had their name officially declared by the Holy See as being *vitandi*. However, the Catholic sources just presented have made it sufficiently clear that the admonitions of Titus 3:10 are those of Church officials, and not of the laity.

# Appendix

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## Original Latin of Selected Quotes

### Cardinal De Lugo's *Tractatus de Virtute Fidei Divinae: Disputatio XXII, Sectio.I*

#### Quote 1

Prima sententia docet, quoties constat aliquem esse haereticum, eo ipso prohibitam esse cum illo communicationem. Ita Sotus in 4. Dist. 25. Quast.1 art.1 & 3. & dist. 20. Quast.1. art.5. conclus. 2. Communis tamen sententia id negat, quandiu haereticus non est juridice declaratus, & denunciatus; quia Concilium Constantiense indulget generaliter omnibus fidelibus, ut possent licite communicare cum omnibus excommunicatis, exceptis nominatim denunciatis, & notoriis Clericorum percussoribus, ubi nulla prorsus sit exceptio de haereticis: non est ergo cur indultum illud ad communicationem etiam cum illis non extendatur. Ita Toetus, Ugolinus, Suarez, Azor, & alii, quos refert, & sequitur Thomas Sanchez lib.2. in Decal.cap.9.n.3 Hurtado in prasenti, disp.76&4. & alii comuniter, quod ego etiam in aliis locis semper amplexus sum. (pp.560-561)

#### Quote 2

Secundo principaliter dubitatur, an non solum in civilibus, & humanis possimus cum haeretico non denunciato communicare, sed etiam in sacris, & spiritualibus. Certum autem est, non posse nos cum haereticis communicare in ritibus propriis sectae haereticae, quia hoc esset contra praeceptum confessionis fidei, & contineret implicitam professionis erroris: sed quaestio est de rebus sacris nullum errorem continentibus, v.g. an liceat cum haeretico Missam audire, vel eo praesente celebrare, vel ipsi ritu Catholico celebranti adesse, etc.

...Contraria sententia communis, & vera est, nisi aliunde ratione scandali, vel ob negationem fidei implicitam illicitum sit, vel quia charitas obligat ad impediendum peccatum ministry haeretici indigne ministrantis, si necessitas non urgeat, ita cum Navarro Sanchez *ubi supra num.10*. Suarez *num.5*. Hurtado *ubi supra, §.13*. & loquens de sacramento poenitentiae idem dixi *disp.18 de poenitentia, sect.2num.18& 19*. & loquens de matrimonio ac aliis sacramentis, idem dixi *disp.8.de sacramentis in genere, sect.14*. & constat ex dicta extravaganti, in qua conceditur

fidelibus communicatio non excommunicatis tolerates in susceptione, & administratione sacramentorum: cum ergo ii haeretici non sint excommunicati denunciati, nec notorii Clerici percussores, non est cur ratione excommunicationis prohibeamur ab iis sacramenta suscipere: quanvis id aliunde possit saepe illicitum esse, nisi necessitas excuset, ut explicui in praedictis locis. (pp.562-563)

### Quote 3

Usus etiam est in contrarium, nam Principes aliqui haeretici, qui quandoque Romam, vel ad alia Catholicorum loca, permittentibus superioribus, veniunt, eunt ad Ecclesias, & sacris intersunt, sacerdotibus id scientibus, & absque scrupulo celebrantibus. Imo vidi ego aliquando eos coram sacro Cardinalium Collegio Missae solemni interesse scientibus bene omnibus eos esse haeticos, & simulantibus, & merito propter fructum experientia probatum; concipiunt enim meliora de ritibus Catholicis, & fraudes suorum magistrorum advertunt. Fateor, eos seclusa ignorantia non posse Missae interesse, cum excommunicati sint, & Concilium Constantiense illis non faveat: qui tamen coram illis celebrant, non peccant, cum ab eodem Concilio licentiam habeant cum illis communicandi in profanes, atque etiam in sacris. (p.563)

### Francisco Suarez's 1621 *De Fide: Disputatio XXI, Sectio 3.*

... Jure antiquo haec obligatio universalis erat, nec postulabatur alia conditio ex parte excommunicati nisi quod in re ipsa excommunicationem incurrisset. Ex parte vero aliorum solum erat necessaria sufficiens notitia censurae, hac tantum observatione adhibita, ut si excommunicatus esset occultis respectu aliorum, occulte vitaretur: si vero publicus, publice. Postea vero in extrav. *Ad evitanda*... limitata fuit illa obligatio, ut fideles tantum tenerentur vitare excommunicatum in particulari et nominatim denuntiatum, ac declaratum, cum quadam limitatione; quam infra attingam. ... Statuendum est hoc novum jus Concilii Const. etiam ad haeticos extendi,... et verba Extrav. convincunt, quae et generalia sunt, et addunt exceptionem, quae firmat regulam quoad omnes alios. . . . Sententia omnino vera et practice certa, nimirum quantumcumque haeticus sit notorius et publicus, non teneri fideles ad vitandum illum ex vi hujus censurae, donec sit per sententiam nominatim declaratus ac denuntiatum,

est communis sententia. . . . Martinus V. priorem formam (scil. ex Concil. Constant.) approbavit, et communi usu Ecclesiae recepta est, ut latius ostendi in *Tom. v., Disp. ix. Sect, ii.*" (p.316)

Cornelius a Lapide's 1717 *Commentarius in Secundam S. Iohannis Epistolam*

Nota. Non tantùm jure Humano & Canónico, quod post. S Johannem ediderunt Pontífices & Concilia, sed & jure divino ac naturae? fugiendi sunt haeretici tribus casibus. Primus est, cum est periculum ne tu vel toi ab eis pervertantur, quod ordinariè subesse solet. *Nam ferino eorum ut cancer serpit*, ait S. Paulus 2. Timoth.2.17.

Secundus, cum suscipiendo cum, videris ejus haeresi favere, eamque tacite profiteri aut adjuvare, v.g. si Ministrum Calvinianum cogituni domo & mensa excipias, qui ea de cause venit, ut haeresin suam propaget; si ejus concioni Se coenae "Eucharisticae intersis; si ei in sacris & Sacramentis communices.

Tertius, cùm scandalum alijs creas, ut ipsi putent te haeresis & haeticorum hospitem Se patronum, utque ipsi ad idem faciendum tuo exemplo incitentur.

Hisce casibus exceptis, jure divino & naturae non vetatur communicatio cum haeticis, praesertim si necessitas, pietas aut gravis utilitas earn suadeat. (p.525)



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