

Sins reserved to the Holy See

Certain particularly grave sins incur excommunication, the most severe ecclesiastical penalty, which impedes the reception of the sacraments and the exercise of certain ecclesiastical acts, and for which absolution consequently cannot be granted, according to canon law, except by the Pope, the bishop of the place, or priests authorized by them. In danger of death any priest, even if deprived of faculties for hearing confessions, can absolve from every sin and excommunication.

In the 1983 *Code of Canon Law* (CIC) nine sins carry the penalty of automatic excommunication.

Apostasy

Apostasy is the total repudiation of the Christian faith.

Heresy

Heresy is the obstinate doubt or denial, after baptism, of a defined Catholic doctrine.

Schism (CIC 1364:1)

Schism is the refusal of submission to the Roman Pontiff or the refusal to be in communion with members of the Church who are in communion with him (CIC 751).

Violating the sacred species (CIC 1367)

Violation of the sacred species is the throwing away the consecrated species of Christ's body or blood or the taking or retaining of them for a sacrilegious purpose (CIC 1367).

Physically attacking the pope (CIC 1370:1)

Physically attacking the pope is self-explanatory, as are absolving an accomplice in a sexual sin and consecrating a bishop without authorization from the Vatican.

Sacramentally absolving an accomplice in a sexual sin (CIC 1378:1)

Consecrating a bishop without authorization (CIC 1382)

Directly violating the seal of confession (CIC 1388:1)

A direct violation of the seal of confession is one in which both the penitent and the penitent's sin can easily be determined by the confessor's words or behavior. Again, the penalty of automatic excommunication does not apply if no one perceives the disclosure (CIC 1330).

A cleric or religious who attempts marriage, even if only civilly, (1394)

Abortion

A person who actually procures an abortion incurs a *latae sententiae* excommunication (1398). Automatic excommunication for abortion (CIC 1398) applies not only to the woman who has the abortion, but to "all those who commit this crime with knowledge of the penalty attached, and [this] includes those accomplices without whose help the crime would not have been committed" (*Evangelium Vitae* 62).

No one is automatically excommunicated for any offense if, without any fault of his own, he was unaware that he was violating a law (CIC 1323:2) or that a penalty was attached to the law (CIC 1324:1:9). The same applies if one was a minor, had the imperfect use of reason, was forced through grave or relatively grave fear, was forced through serious inconvenience, or in certain other circumstances (CIC 1324).

A *latae sententiae* penalty is one that follows *ipso facto* or automatically, by force of the law itself, when a law is broken. A penalty that binds a guilty party only after there has been a trial and judgment is known as a *ferendae sententiae* (meaning "sentence to be passed") penalty.