

*Fr. Perozich comments —*

*With perhaps the exception of Fr. Gerald Murray of New York, any priest who wrote as Bishop Paprocki wrote would be canceled, seeking the assistance of the Coalition of Canceled Priests for sustenance and support.*

*But bishop to bishop, they USUALLY can challenge one another, with several exceptions such as Bishop Rey in France and Bishop Fernandez of Puerto Rico, the first one prohibited from ordaining priests and the latter just summarily removed by the Vatican.*

*The challenges are important because some are trying to change the church according to their own image and likeness.*

*The article from Catholic Voice is first, then Bishop Paprocki's article in First Things, and then Bishop Paprocki's other article challenging Cardinal McElroy's statements.*

CV News Feed on February 28, 2023



**Bishop Paprocki Warns of the Dangerous Road to Schism**

CV NEWS FEED // In a new essay [published by \*First Things\*](#) on Tuesday, Bishop Thomas J. Paprocki of Springfield, Illinois, surprised many by stating directly what other bishops and Catholic commentators have only insinuated: that Cardinal Robert McElroy has espoused “heretical” doctrines against those of the Catholic Church.

Responding to a controversial essay published by Cardinal McElroy by the [Jesuit magazine \*America\*](#), Bishop Paprocki wrote that “Until recently, it would be hard to imagine any successor of the apostles making such heterodox statements” as McElroy’s. Here Paprocki was referring to the cardinal’s proposal to “radically” change the Church’s teachings on homosexuality, marriage, and – most importantly – the Holy Eucharist.

“[I]t is deeply troubling to consider the possibility that prelates holding the office of diocesan bishop in the Catholic Church may be separated or not in full communion [with the Catholic Church] because of heresy,” wrote Paprocki, a Canon lawyer by training and chairman-elect of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Committee on Canonical Affairs and Church Governance.

Paprocki acknowledged in his essay that the term “heretic” has been abused in some Catholic debates, but by carefully quoting several canons of the Code of Canon Law, he made the case that **calling McElroy’s proposals heretical is not hyperbole, but a sad and worrisome reality** – especially when it comes to the conditions necessary to receive Holy Communion clearly established by the Church. The main condition for reception of the Eucharist is not being in mortal sin, and McElroy has rejected that principle.

After citing Church law to make his case against McElroy’s positions, Paprocki stated that **“a cardinal of the Catholic Church, like any other Catholic who denies settled Catholic teaching, embraces heresy, the result of which**

**is automatic excommunication from the Catholic Church.”**

To highlight the gravity of a cardinal being in a state of heresy, Paprocki pointed out that **the pope must take that action. If “he does not do so, the unseemly prospect arises of a cardinal, excommunicated *latae sententiae* (automatically) due to heresy, voting in a papal conclave.”**

In a [previous response](#) to McElroy’s call for “radical inclusion,” Paprocki wrote that

*it appears that for Cardinal McElroy it is Catholicism’s judgmentalism that leads to exclusion, and not the committed sins. But it has always been the practice of the Church to exclude those actively engaging in grave sin from Communion until they have repented, confessed their sins to a priest, and received sacramental absolution. This is not a demand for perfection (despite the Cardinal’s insistence otherwise), nor is it a punishment; it is a consequence of those chosen actions.*

Another opponent of the teachings of the Church highlighted by Paprocki is Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich, the Jesuit Archbishop of Luxembourg, who recently said of the Church’s teaching on homosexuality: “I believe that the sociological-scientific foundation of this teaching is no longer correct.”

Hollerich’s statement contributed to the mounting concerns surrounding the upcoming Synod on Synodality, since Hollerich was appointed by Pope Francis as Relator General, a key position in conducting the synodal process and its conclusions.

**“We must pray that the Holy Spirit will not let this happen, and will inspire anyone who espouses heretical views to renounce them and seek reconciliation with our Lord and his Church,”** Paprocki concluded in his article at *First Things*.

# IMAGINING A HERETICAL CARDINAL

*by Thomas J. Paprocki*

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Imagine if a cardinal of the Catholic Church were to publish an article in which he condemned “a theology of eucharistic coherence that multiplies barriers to the grace and gift of the eucharist” and stated that “unworthiness cannot be the prism of accompaniment for disciples of the God of grace and mercy.” Or what if a cardinal of the Catholic Church were to state publicly that homosexual acts are not sinful and same-sex unions should be blessed by the Church?

**Until recently, it would be hard to imagine any successor of the apostles making such heterodox statements. Unfortunately, it is not uncommon today to hear Catholic leaders affirm unorthodox views that, not too long ago, would have been espoused only by heretics.** “Heretic” and “heresy” are strong words, which contemporary ecclesiastical politeness has softened to gentler expressions such as “our separated brethren” or “the Christian faithful who are not in full communion with the Catholic Church.” But the reality is

that those who are “separated” and “not in full communion” are separated and not in full communion because they reject essential truths of “the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 1:3). Thus, **it is deeply troubling to consider the possibility that prelates holding the office of diocesan bishop in the Catholic Church may be separated or not in full communion because of heresy.**

**Yet both the cases mentioned above would in fact involve heresy, since heresy is defined as “the obstinate denial or obstinate doubt after the reception of baptism of some truth which is to be believed by divine and Catholic faith” (canon 751 of the *Code of Canon Law*).** What, then, constitutes “some truth which is to be believed by divine and Catholic faith”?

According to canon 750,

A person must believe with divine and Catholic faith all those things contained in the word of God, written or handed on, that is, in the one deposit of faith entrusted to the Church, and at the same time proposed as divinely revealed either by the solemn magisterium of the Church or by its ordinary and universal magisterium which is manifested by the common adherence of the Christian faithful under the leadership of the sacred magisterium; therefore all are bound to avoid any doctrines whatsoever contrary to them.

In 1998, Pope John Paul II added a second paragraph to canon 750, which states,

Furthermore, each and every thing set forth definitively by the Magisterium of the Church regarding teaching on faith and morals must be firmly accepted and held; namely, those things required for the holy keeping and faithful exposition of the deposit of faith; therefore, anyone who rejects propositions which are to be held definitively sets himself against the teaching of the Catholic Church.

The Holy Father also amended canon 1371 of the *Code of Canon Law*, adding an appropriate reference to canon 750, so that it now reads: “The following are to be punished with a just penalty: a person who . . . teaches a doctrine condemned by the Roman Pontiff, or by an Ecumenical Council, or obstinately rejects the teachings mentioned in canon 750 § 2 or in canon 752 and, when warned by the Apostolic See or by the Ordinary, does not retract.”

Canon 752 says,

Although not an assent of faith, a religious submission of the intellect and will must be given to a doctrine which the Supreme Pontiff or the college of bishops declares concerning faith or morals when they exercise the authentic magisterium, even if they do not intend to proclaim it by a definitive act; therefore, the Christian faithful are to take care to avoid those things which do not agree with it.

In his apostolic letter *Ad Tuendam Fidem*, Pope John Paul II explained his reason for making these changes to canon law:

To protect the faith of the Catholic Church against errors arising from certain members of the Christian faithful . . . we, whose principal duty is to confirm the brethren in the faith (Lk 22:32), consider it absolutely necessary to add to the existing texts of the *Code of Canon Law* and the *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, new norms which expressly impose the obligation of upholding truths proposed in a definitive way by the Magisterium of the Church, and which also establish related canonical sanctions.

Normally canonical sanctions require that either a judicial or administrative process be followed before a penalty can be imposed. However, it is important to note that canon 1364 says that “an apostate from the faith, a heretic, or a schismatic incurs a *latae sententiae* excommunication.” A *latae sententiae* excommunication is a sentence that is automatically incurred without any canonical process. While an automatic penalty

without due process is unheard of in most judicial systems, canon law provides for such penalties, due to the distinctive character of spiritual offenses such as apostasy, heresy, and schism, since a person who espouses apostasy, heresy, or schism has de facto separated themselves ontologically—that is, in reality—from the communion of the Church. Thus heretics, apostates, and schismatics inflict the penalty of excommunication upon themselves.

Returning to the earlier examples cited, it is contrary to a “truth which is to be believed by divine and Catholic faith” to reject or condemn “a theology of eucharistic coherence that multiplies barriers to the grace and gift of the eucharist,” as if no such barriers existed. They do exist, and they are a matter of divine revelation. The truth about eucharistic coherence that must be believed by divine and Catholic faith was articulated by St. Paul in his First Letter to the Corinthians: “Whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord . . . For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself” (1 Cor. 11:27–29). This has been the constant teaching of the Church for the past two thousand years. Thus, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states, “Anyone aware of having sinned mortally must not receive communion without having received absolution in the sacrament of penance.” A mortal sin is one which “destroys charity in the heart of man by a grave violation of God's law; it turns man away from God.”

With regard to the sinfulness of homosexual acts, the truth that must be believed with divine and Catholic faith is also stated clearly in the *Catechism*:

Basing itself on Sacred Scripture, which presents homosexual acts as acts of grave depravity, tradition has always declared that “homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered.” They are contrary to the natural law. They close the sexual act to the gift

of life. They do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity. Under no circumstances can they be approved. Thus a cardinal of the Catholic Church, like any other Catholic who denies settled Catholic teaching, embraces heresy, the result of which is automatic excommunication from the Catholic Church.

In addition, a cleric can be punished with the penalties mentioned in canon 1336, such as prohibiting residence in a certain place or territory and removing “a power, office, function, right, privilege, faculty, favor, title, or insignia, even merely honorary.” Canon 1364 adds, “If contumacy of long duration or the gravity of scandal demands it, other penalties can be added, including dismissal from the clerical state.”

Canon 194 provides for removal from an ecclesiastical office by the law itself in the following cases:

- 1) a person who has lost the clerical state;
- 2) a person who has publicly defected from the Catholic faith or from the communion of the Church; and
- 3) a cleric who has attempted marriage even if only civilly.

However, canon 194 adds this restriction: “The removal . . . can be enforced only if it is established by the declaration of a competent authority.” Only the pope can remove a cardinal from office or dismiss him from the clerical state in the case of heresy or other grave crimes. If he does not do so, the unseemly prospect arises of a cardinal, excommunicated *latae sententiae* due to heresy, voting in a papal conclave.

We must pray that the Holy Spirit will not let this happen, and will inspire anyone who espouses heretical views to renounce them and seek reconciliation with our Lord and his Church.

*Thomas J. Paprocki is bishop of Springfield, Illinois, and chairman-elect of the United States Conference of Catholic*



*Bishops' Committee on Canonical Affairs and Church Governance.*

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## **A better way forward: A response to Cardinal Robert McElroy**

*It is important to recognize and identify that Cardinal McElroy is seeking to revive the discredited theological notion of the “fundamental option” that became popular in the 1960s.*

[February 20, 2023 Bishop Thomas John Paprocki](#)

Print



**(Image: Josh Applegate/Unsplash.com)**

Much ink has been spilled about Cardinal Robert McElroy's **January 24th piece** in *America* on synodality and inclusion. Less attention has been paid to Cardinal McElroy's **follow up interview** (Feb 3, 2023), also in *America*, in which his views on sexual immorality were more explicit and, unfortunately, more concerning.

The Cardinal explains, "We have cast violations for which you need to not go to the Eucharist, or need to go to confession first, largely in terms of sexual things." It is true that the Church has always taken sexual sin very seriously (more on that from St. Paul shortly). But Cardinal McElroy misdiagnoses the situation in stating the Church is too focused on "sexual things." The Church is concerned with all grave sin that violates the Ten Commandments (cf. CCC 1858).

For example, it is a matter of grave concern that many Catholics apparently do not think it is a mortal sin to miss Mass on Sunday, yet it is in direct disobedience of the Third Commandment for Catholics to skip Mass on Sunday without a just excuse, such as serious illness or infirmity. The Church has even told racists that they cannot go to Holy Communion, as the Archbishop of New Orleans did in 1962 when he excommunicated several Catholics who vociferously opposed the racial desegregation of parochial schools in the Archdiocese of New Orleans. If our culture had a widespread issue with theft or worship of pagan gods, the Church would prominently proclaim that these serious sins precluded people from the Eucharist.

But our current culture is infatuated with sexual sin, and so the Church vocally warns of its harm, calls ardently for conversion in this area, and proclaims the beauty of God's plan for human sexuality.

The Cardinal goes on to say that sinfulness can and does exist within sexual lives, which is an important clarification as many readers interpreted his original piece as condoning all sexual activity. He explains, "Our sexual lives have many areas of

sinfulness and I'm not challenging that. All I'm saying is that in the Christian moral life, they don't automatically represent mortal sin. Mortal sin in Catholic teaching is a sin so grave that it is objectively capable of cutting off our relationship with God. That's pretty severe." I won't quibble by focusing on the fact that the Church makes a distinction between mortal sin and grave matter (mortal sin requires grave matter, full knowledge, and deliberate choice), and so the Church would disagree that sexual sins "automatically represent mortal sin."

I would prefer to address the idea that the "framework doesn't fit" by casting sexual sins as grave matter. The Cardinal seems to be calling for the Church to devalue the gravity of sexual sin, but sexual sin is part of the "framework" found in God's Word: "Do you not know that the unjust will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither *fornicators* nor idolaters nor *adulterers* nor boy *prostitutes* nor practicing *homosexuals* nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor 6:9–10, NAB, emphasis added).

Not inheriting eternal life is indeed "pretty severe," and the Church rightly treats it so. But why did sexual immorality make St. Paul's list? Because sexuality affects all aspects of the human person (cf. CCC 2332) and, thus, sexual sins have devastatingly widespread effects.

It is important to recognize and identify **what Cardinal McElroy is attempting to do here: he is seeking to revive the discredited theological notion of the "fundamental option" that became popular in the 1960s. In moral theology, the concept of the "fundamental option" says that individual acts do not change our basic relationship with God and that only when our fundamental option changes against God do we fall out of the state of grace. In this view, a person can commit particular sinful actions without losing the state of grace.**

Pope St. John Paul II addressed the erroneous notion of fundamental option theory in his 1993 encyclical letter *Veritatis Splendor* in paragraphs 65-70, most notably in this passage:

To separate the fundamental option from concrete kinds of behavior means to contradict the substantial integrity or personal unity of the moral agent in his body and in his soul. ... In point of fact, the morality of human acts is not deduced only from one's intention, orientation or fundamental option, understood as an intention devoid of a clearly determined binding content or as an intention with no corresponding positive effort to fulfil the different obligations of the moral life. (*Veritatis Splendor* 67)

In the end, all these disagreements seem to boil down to the Cardinal's thoughts on sin: "My own view is [that] judgmentalism is the worst sin in the Christian life.... So what the parable of the adulterous woman is about is: Don't be judgmental." **It is troubling to see the beautiful balance struck by Jesus in this story between an acceptance of the woman but not her behavior flattened to "don't be judgmental."**

**It appears that for Cardinal McElroy it is Catholicism's judgmentalism that leads to exclusion, and not the committed sins.** But it has always been the practice of the Church to exclude those actively engaging in grave sin from Communion until they have repented, confessed their sins to a priest, and received sacramental absolution. This is not a demand for perfection (despite the Cardinal's insistence otherwise), nor is it a punishment; it is a consequence of those chosen actions.

As Pope Francis said in an interview on September 15, 2021 about withholding Communion, "This is not a penalty: you are outside. Communion is to unite the community."

Apart from the Communion issue, Cardinal McElroy rightly notes that as a Church we need to do a better job of accompaniment because "the grace of God acts progressively in

our lives.” The challenge of loving accompaniment is to avoid judging the heart of the other while still judging his action. This is the only way to reconcile Jesus’ statements, “Judge not, that you be not judged” (Mt 7:1) and “If your brother sins, rebuke him” (Lk 17:3).

We are called to accompany the other regardless of his choices while standing in the truth of what is genuinely good for him. This is difficult, especially since as fallen humans we instinctively favor one part of that approach, usually to the detriment of the other.

May we all learn to love more like Jesus so that we can see beyond the sin to the person and lovingly offer him invitation to conversion. In a world so confused about sin, we must do *both* of those things in pursuing a better way forward.

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