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2005

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“Excommunication.” In *A Dictionary of Jewish-Christian Relations*, edited by Edward Kessler and Neil Wenborn, 152. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

EXCOMMUNICATION

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Expulsion from a community. In the Bible the Hebrew term *herem* meant setting someone or something apart from God, either devoting it to divine service or, in context of war, destroying the person or thing so that no warrior would profit from it. (See Exodus 17:14-16 and Deuteronomy 25:17-19 on Amalek and 1 Samuel 13:1-35.) John 9:22,12:42,16:2 uses the term *aposynagogos* ("put out of the synagogue") to describe expulsion of Jewish-Christians, most likely by authority of the local leaders, not as a result of a decree of the Synod of Jabneh/Jamnia (about 85). Probably Jewish-Christian were objects of a curse (*Birkat Ha-Minim*) only after the Bar Kochba revolt (132-135). During the early centuries after the Romans destroyed the Temple in 70, punishment of an offender was isolation from the community (*niddui*). Later the *herem* designated a harsher penalty, including curses. The Talmud listed 24 offenses for which *niddui* was prescribed; seven more were added in the 16th century *Shulhan Aruk* of Joseph Karo. The philosopher Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677) was placed under *herem* by the Jewish community of Amsterdam in 1656.

Matthew 18:15-17; 1 Corinthians 5:5, 13; Acts 5:1-11; 8:18-24; 1 Timothy 1:18-20 describe expulsions from early Christian communities. Technically excommunication would affect Christians only, but in the Middle Ages "a judgment of the Jew" might be applied indirectly to deal with a Jew who had offended by an act normally punishable by excommunication, e.g. striking a cleric. The bishop would forbid all Christians to contact him, under threat of excommunication. The Church developed a system of suspension and excommunication for individuals, according to the degree of seriousness of public sins. An interdict censured an entire community. The authorities hoped thus to bring the person or community to repentance. By the 16th century excommunication of rulers usually had little effect politically.

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