The Ecclesiastical Canons of the Same Holy Apostles

Apostolic Constitutions (c. AD 380)

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XLVII.1. Let a bishop be ordained by two or three bishops. 2. A presbyter by one bishop, as also a deacon, and the rest of the clergy. 3. If any bishop or presbyter, otherwise than our Lord has ordained concerning the sacrifice, offer other things at the altar of God, as honey, milk, or strong beer instead of wine, any necessaries, or birds, or animals, or pulse, otherwise than is ordained, let him be deprived; excepting grains of new corn, or ears of wheat, or bunches of grapes in their season. 4. For it is not lawful to offer anything besides these at the altar, and oil for the holy lamp, and incense in the time of the divine oblation. 5. But let all other fruits be sent to the house of the bishop, as first-fruits to him and to the presbyters, but not to the altar. Now it is plain that the bishop and presbyters are to divide them to the deacons and to the rest of the clergy.

6. Let not a bishop, a priest, or a deacon cast off his own wife under pretence of piety; but if he does cast her off, let him be suspended. If he go on in it, let him be deprived. 7. Let not a bishop, a priest, or deacon undertake the cares of this world; but if he do, let him be deprived. 8. If any bishop, or presbyter, or deacon shall celebrate the holiday of the passover before the vernal equinox with the Jews, let him be deprived. 9. If any bishop, or presbyter, or deacon, or any one of the catalogue of the priesthood, when the oblation is over, does not communicate, let him give his reason; and if it be just, let him be forgiven; but if he does not do it, let him be suspended, as becoming the cause of damage to the people, and occasioning a suspicion against him that offered, as of one that did not rightly offer.

10. All those of the faithful that enter into the holy church of God, and hear the sacred Scriptures, but do not stay during prayer and the holy communion, must be suspended, as causing disorder in the church. 11. If any one, even in the house, prays with a person excommunicate, let him also be suspended. 12. If any clergyman prays with one deprived as with a clergyman, let himself also be deprived. 13. If any clergyman or layman who is suspended, or ought not to be received, goes away, and is received in another city without commendatory letters, let both those who received him and he that was received be suspended. But if he be already suspended, let his suspension be lengthened, as lying to and deceiving the Church of God. 14. A bishop ought not to leave his own parish and leap to

another, although the multitude should compel him, unless there be some good reason forcing him to do this, as that he can contribute much greater profit to the people of the new parish by the word of piety; but this is not to be settled by himself, but by the judgment of many bishops, and very great supplication.

15. If any presbyter or deacon, or any one of the catalogue of the clergy, leaves his own parish and goes to another, and, entirely removing himself, continues in that other parish without the consent of his own bishop, him we command no longer to go on in his ministry, especially in case his bishop calls upon him to return, and he does not obey, but continues in his disorder. However, let him communicate there as a layman. 16. But if the bishop with whom they are undervalues the deprivation decreed against them, and receives them as clergymen, let him be suspended as a teacher of disorder. 17. He who has been twice married after his baptism, or has had a concubine, cannot be made a bishop, or presbyter, or deacon, or indeed any one of the sacerdotal catalogue. 18. He who has taken a widow, or a divorced woman, or an harlot, or a servant, or one belonging to the theatre, cannot be either a bishop, priest, or deacon, or indeed any one of the sacerdotal catalogue. 19. He who has married two sisters, or his brother's or sister's daughter, cannot be a clergyman.

20. Let a clergyman who becomes a surety be deprived. 21. Let an eunuch, if he be such by the injury of men, or his virilia were taken away in the persecution, or he was born such, and yet is worthy of episcopacy, be made a bishop. 22. Let not him who has disabled himself be made a clergyman; for he is a self-murderer, and an enemy to the creation of God. 23. If any one who is of the clergy disables himself, let him be deprived, for he is a murderer of himself. 24. Let a layman who disables himself be separated for three years, for he lays a snare for his own life. 25. Let a bishop, or presbyter, or deacon who is taken in fornication, or perjury, or stealing, be deprived, but not suspended; for the Scripture says: "Thou shall not avenge twice far the same crime by affliction."

26. In like manner also as to the rest of the clergy. 27. Of those who come into the clergy unmarried, we permit only the readers and singers, if they have a mind, to marry afterward. 28. We command that a bishop, or presbyter, or deacon who strikes the faithful that offend, or the unbelievers who do wickedly, and thinks to terrify them by such means, be deprived, for our Lord has nowhere taught us such things. On the contrary, "when Himself was stricken, He did not strike again; when He was reviled, He reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not." 29. If any bishop, or presbyter, or deacon who is deprived justly for manifest crimes, does venture to meddle with that ministration which was once entrusted to him, let the same person be entirely cut off from the Church. 30. If any bishop obtains that dignity by money, or even a presbyter or deacon, let him and the person that ordained him be deprived; and let him be entirely cut off from communion, as Simon Magus was by me Peter.

31. If any bishop makes use of the rulers of this world, and by their means obtains to be a bishop of a church, let him be deprived and suspended, and all that communicate with him. 32. If any presbyter despises his own bishop, and assembles separately, and fixes another

altar, when he has nothing to condemn in his bishop either as to piety or righteousness, let him be deprived as an ambitious person; for he is a tyrant, and the rest of the clergy, whoever join themselves to him. And let the laity be suspended. But let these things be done after one and a second, or even a third admonition from the bishop. 33. If any presbyter or deacon be put under suspension by his bishop, it is not lawful for any other to receive him, but for him only who put him under suspension, unless it happens that he who put him under suspension die.

34. Do not ye receive any stranger, whether bishop, or presbyter, or deacon, without commendatory letters; and when such are offered, let them be examined. And if they be preachers of piety, let them be received; but if not, supply their wants, but do not receive them to communion: for many things are done by surprise. 35. The bishops of every country ought to know who is the chief among them, and to esteem him as their head, and not to do any great thing without his consent; but every one to manage only the affairs that belong to his own parish, and the places subject to it. But let him not do anything without the consent of all; for it is by this means there will be unanimity, and God will be glorified by Christ, in the Holy Spirit. 36. A bishop must not venture to ordain out of his own bounds for cities or countries that are not subject to him. But if he be convicted of having done so without the consent of such as governed those cities or countries, let him be deprived, both the bishop himself and those whom he has ordained.

37. If any bishop that is ordained does not undertake his office, nor take care of the people committed to him, let him be suspended until he do undertake it; and in the like manner a presbyter and a deacon. But if he goes, and is not received, not because of the want of his own consent, but because of the ill temper of the people, let him continue bishop; but let the clergy of that city be suspended, because they have not taught that disobedient people better. 38. Let a synod of bishops be held twice in the year, and let them ask one another the doctrines of piety; and let them determine the ecclesiastical disputes that happen-once in the fourth week of Pentecost, and again on the twelfth of the month Hyperberetaeus. 39. Let the bishop have the care of ecclesiastical revenues, and administer them as in the presence of God. But it is not lawful for him to appropriate any part of them to himself, or to give the things of God to his own kindred. But if they be poor, let him support them as poor; but let him not, under such pretences, alienate the revenues of the Church.

40. Let not the presbyters and deacons do anything without the consent of the bishop, for it is he who is entrusted with the people of the Lord, and will be required to give an account of their souls. Let the proper goods of the bishop, if he has any, and those belonging to the Lord, be openly distinguished, that he may have power when he dies to leave his own goods as he pleases, and to whom he pleases; that, under pretence of the ecclesiastical revenues, the bishop's own may not come short, who sometimes has a wife and children, or kinsfolk, or servants. For this is just before God and men, that neither the Church suffer any loss by the not knowing which revenues are the bishop's own, nor his kindred, under pretence

of the Church, be undone, or his relations fall into lawsuits, and so his death be liable to reproach.

41. We command that the bishop have power over the goods of the Church; for if he be entrusted with the precious souls of men, much more ought he to give directions about goods, that they all be distributed to those in want, according to his authority, by the presbyters and deacons, and be used for their support with the fear of God, and with all reverence. He is also to partake of those things he wants, if he does want them, for his necessary occasions, and those of the brethren who live with him, that they may not by any means be in straits: for the law of God appointed that those who waited at the altar should be maintained by the altar; since not so much as a soldier does at any time bear arms against the enemies at his own charges. 42. Let a bishop, or presbyter, or deacon who indulges himself in dice or drinking, either leave off those practices, or let him be deprived.

43. If a sub-deacon, a reader, or a singer does the like, either let him leave off, or let him be suspended; and so for one of the laity. 44. Let a bishop, or presbyter, or deacon who requires usury of those he lends to, either leave off to do so, or let him be deprived. 45. Let a bishop, or presbyter, or deacon who only prays with heretics, be suspended; but if he also permit them to perform any part of the office of a clergyman, let him be deprived. 46. We command that a bishop, or presbyter, or deacon who receives the baptism, or the sacrifice of heretics, be deprived: "For what agreement is there between Christ and Belial? or what part hath a believer with an infidel? " 47. If a bishop or presbyter rebaptizes him who has had true baptism, or does not baptize him who is polluted by the ungodly, let him be deprived, as ridiculing the cross and the death of the Lord, and not distinguishing between real priests and counterfeit ones.

48. If a layman divorces his own wife, and takes another, or one divorced by another, let him be suspended. 49. If any bishop or presbyter does not baptize according to the Lord's constitution, into the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, but into three beings without beginning, or into three Sons, or three Comforters, let him be deprived. 50. If any bishop or presbyter does not perform the three immersions of the one admission, but one immersion, which is given into the death of Christ, let him be deprived; for the Lord did not say, "Baptize into my death," but, "Go ye and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." Do ye, therefore, O bishops, baptize thrice into one Father, and Son, and Holy Ghost, according to the will of Christ, and our constitution by the Spirit.

51. If any bishop, or presbyter, or deacon, or indeed any one of the sacerdotal catalogue, abstains from marriage, flesh, and wine, not for his own exercise, but because he abominates these things, forgetting that "all things were very good," and that "God made man male and female," and blasphemously abuses the creation, either let him reform, or let him be deprived, and be cast out of the Church; and the same for one of the laity. 52. If any bishop or presbyter does not receive him that returns from his sin, but rejects him, let him be deprived; because he grieves Christ, who says, "There is joy in heaven over one sinner that

repenteth." 53. If any bishop, or presbyter, or deacon does not on festival days partake of flesh or wine, let him be deprived, as "having a seared conscience," and becoming a cause of scandal to many.

54. If any one of the clergy be taken eating in a tavern, let him be suspended, excepting when he is forced to bait at an inn upon the road. 55. If any one of the clergy abuses his bishop unjustly, let him be deprived; for says the Scripture, "Thou shall not speak evil of the ruler of thy people." 56. If any one of the clergy abuses a presbyter or a deacon, let him be separated. 57. If any one of the clergy mocks at a lame, a deaf, or a blind man, or at one maimed in his feet, let him be suspended; and the like for the laity. 58. Let a bishop or presbyter who takes no care of the clergy or people, and does not instruct them in piety, be separated; and if he continues in his negligence, let him be deprived. 59. If any bishop or presbyter, when any one of the clergy is in want, does not supply his necessity, let him be suspended; and if he continues in it, let him be deprived, as having killed his brother.

60. If any one publicly reads in the Church the spurious books of the ungodly, as if they were holy, to the destruction of the people and of the clergy, let him be deprived. 61. If there be an accusation against a Christian for fornication, or adultery, or any other forbidden action, and he be convicted, let him not be promoted into the clergy. 62. If any one of the clergy for fear of men, as of a Jew, or a Gentile, or an heretic, shall deny the name of Christ, let him be suspended; but if he deny the name of a clergyman, let him be deprived; but when he repents, let him be received as one of the laity. 63. If any bishop, or presbyter, or deacon, or indeed any one of the sacerdotal catalogue, eats flesh with the blood of its life, or that which is torn by beasts, or which died of itself, let him be deprived; for this the law itself has forbidden. But if he be one of the laity, let him be suspended.

64. If any one of the clergy be found to fast on the Lord's day, or on the Sabbath-day, excepting one only, let him be deprived; but if he be one of the laity, let him be suspended. 65. If any one, either of the clergy or laity, enters into a synagogue of the Jews or heretics to pray, let him be deprived and suspended. 66. If any one of the clergy strikes one in a quarrel, and kills him by that one stroke, let him be deprived, on account of his rashness; but if he be one of the laity, let him be suspended. 67. If any one has offered violence to a virgin not betrothed, and keeps her, let him be suspended. But it is not lawful for him to take another to wife; but he must retain her whom he has chosen, although she be poor. 68. If any bishop, or presbyter, or deacon, receives a second ordination from any one, let him be deprived, and the person who ordained him, unless he can show that his former ordination was from the heretics; for those that are either baptized or ordained by such as these, can be neither Christians nor clergymen.

69. If any bishop, or presbyter, or deacon, or reader, or singer, does not fast the fast of forty days, or the fourth day of the week, and the day of the Preparation, let him be deprived, except he be hindered by weakness of body. But if he be one of the laity, let him be suspended. 70. If any bishop, or any other of the clergy, fasts with the Jews, or keeps the festivals with them, or accepts of the presents from their festivals, as unleavened bread or some such

thing, let him be deprived; but if he be one of the laity, let him be suspended. 71. If any Christian carries oil into an heathen temple, or into a synagogue of the Jews, or lights up lamps in their festivals, let him be suspended. 72. If any one, either of the clergy or laity, takes away from the holy Church an honeycomb, or oil, let him be suspended, and let him add the fifth part to that which he took away.

73. A vessel of silver, or gold, or linen, which is sanctified, let no one appropriate to his own use, for it is unjust; but if any one be caught, let him be punished with suspension. 74. If a bishop be accused of any crime by credible and faithful persons, it is necessary that he be cited by the bishops; and if he comes and makes his apology, and yet is convicted, let his punishment be determined. But if, when he is cited, he does not obey, let him be cited a second time, by two bishops sent to him. But if even then he despises them, and will not come, let the synod pass what sentence they please against him, that he may not appear to gain advantage by avoiding their judgment. 75. Do not ye receive an heretic in a testimony against a bishop; nor a Christian if he be single. For the law says, "In the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established."

76. A bishop must not gratify his brother, or his son, or any other kinsman, with the episcopal dignity, or ordain whom he pleases; for it is not just to make heirs to episcopacy, and to gratify human affections in divine matters. For we must not put the Church of God under the laws of inheritance; but if any one shall do so, let his ordination be invalid, and let him be punished with suspension. 77. If any one be maimed in an eye, or lame of his leg, but is worthy of the episcopal dignity, let him be made a bishop; for it is not a blemish of the body that can defile him, but the pollution of the soul. 78. But if he be deaf and blind, let him not be made a bishop; not as being a defiled person, but that the ecclesiastical affairs may not be hindered.

79. If any one hath a demon, let him not be made one of the clergy. Nay, let him not pray with the faithful; but when he is cleansed, let him be received; and if he be worthy, let him be ordained. 80. It is not right to ordain him bishop presently who is just come in from the Gentiles, and baptized; or from a wicked mode of life: for it is unjust that he who has not yet afforded any trial of himself should be a teacher of others, unless it anywhere happens by divine grace. 81. We have said that a bishop ought not to let himself into public administrations, but to attend on all opportunities upon the necessary affairs of the Church. Either therefore let him agree not to do so, or let him be deprived. For, "no one can serve two masters," according to the Lord's admonition.

82. We do not permit servants to be ordained into the clergy without their masters' consent; for this would grieve those that owned them. For such a practice would occasion the subversion of families. But if at any time a servant appears worthy to be ordained into an high office, such as our Onesimus appeared to be, and if his master allows of it, and gives him his freedom, and dismisses him from his house, let him be ordained. 83. Let a bishop, or presbyter, or deacon, who goes to the army, and desires to retain both the Roman government and the sacerdotal administration, be deprived. For "the things of Caesar belong to

Caesar, and the things of God to God." 84. Whosoever shall abuse the king or the governor unjustly, let him suffer punishment; and if he be a clergyman, let him be deprived; but if he be a layman, let him be suspended.

85. Let the following books be esteemed venerable and holy by you, both of the clergy and laity. Of the Old Covenant: the five books of Moses-Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy; one of Joshua the son of Nun, one of the Judges, one of Ruth, four of the Kings, two of the Chronicles, two of Ezra, one of Esther, one of Judith, three of the Maccabees, one of Job, one hundred and fifty psalms; three books of Solomon-Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs; sixteen prophets. And besides these, take care that your young persons learn the Wisdom of the very learned Sirach. But our sacred books, that is, those of the New Covenant, are these: the four Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; the fourteen Epistles of Paul; two Epistles of Peter, three of John, one of James, one of Jude; two Epistles of Clement; and the Constitutions dedicated to you the bishops by me Clement, in eight books; which it is not fit to publish before all, because of the mysteries contained in them; and the Acts of us the Apostles.

Let these canonical rules be established by us for you, O ye bishops; and if you continue to observe them, ye shall be saved, and shall have peace; but if you be disobedient, you shall be punished, and have everlasting war one with another, and undergo a penalty suitable to your disobedience. Now, God who alone is unbegotten, and the Maker of the whole world, unite you all through His peace, in the Holy Spirit; perfect you unto every good work, immoveable, unblameable, and unreprovable; and vouchsafe to you eternal life with us, through the mediation of His beloved Son Jesus Christ our God and Saviour; with whom glory be to Thee, the God over all, and the Father, in the Holy Spirit the Comforter, now and always, and for ever and ever. Amen. The end of the Constitutions of the Holy Apostles by Clement, which are the Catholic doctrine.

Source. English translation: an older public-domain translation as collected in the Writings-Database (HistoricalChristianFaith), mostly from the Ante-Nicene, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers and similar nineteenth-century editions. SermonIndex has only divided it into chapters and short sections; the wording is the translator's own. Square brackets, Greek or Latin words and footnote-free text are as the source file prints them, and a transcription error may remain. No Greek or Latin text is shown beside it yet, and no modern English version has been made.