The Canons

Quinisext Council (AD 692) (AD 692)

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Introduction

(Labbe and Cossart, Concilia, Tom. VI., col. 1135 et seqq.)

Canon I.

That order is best of all which makes every word and act begin and end in God. Wherefore that piety may be clearly set forth by us and that the Church of which Christ is the foundation may be continually increased and advanced, and that it may be exalted above the cedars of Lebanon; now therefore we, by divine grace at the beginning of our decrees, define that the faith set forth by the God-chosen Apostles who themselves had both seen and were ministers of the Word, shall be preserved without any innovation, unchanged and inviolate. Moreover the faith of the three hundred and eighteen holy and blessed fathers who were assembled at Nice under Constantine our Emperor, against the impious Arius, and the gentile diversity of deity or rather (to speak accurately) multitude of gods taught by him, who by the unanimous acknowledgment of the faithful revealed and declared to us the consubstantiality of the Three Persons comprehended in the Divine Nature, not suffering this faith to lie hidden under the bushel of ignorance, but openly teaching the faithful to adore with one worship the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, confuting and scattering to the winds the opinion of different grades, and demolishing and overturning the puerile toyings fabricated out of sand by the heretics against orthodoxy.

Likewise also we confirm that faith which was set forth by the one hundred and fifty fathers who in the time of Theoriesins the Elder, our Emperor, assembled in this imperial city, accepting their decisions with regard to the Holy Ghost in assertion of his godhead, and expelling the profane Macedonius (together with all previous enemies of the truth) as one who dared to judge Him to be a servant who is Lord, and who wished to divide, like a robber, the inseparable unity, so that there might be no perfect mystery of our faith. And together with this odious and detestable contender against the truth, we condemn Apollinaris, priest of the same iniquity, who impiously belched forth that the Lord assumed a body unendowed with a soul, thence also inferring that his salvation wrought for us was imperfect. Moreover what things were set forth by the two hundred God-bearing fathers in the city of Ephesus in the days of Theodosius our Emperor, the son of Arcadius; these doctrines we assent to as the unbroken strength of piety, teaching that Christ the incarnate Son of God is one; and declaring that she who bare him without human seed was the immaculate Ever-Virgin, glorifying her as literally and in very truth the Mother of God. We condemn as foreign to the divine scheme the absurd division of Nestorius, who teaches that the one Christ consists of a man separately and of the Godhead separately and renews the Jewish impiety.

Moreover we confirm that faith which at Chalcedon, the Metropolis, was set forth in accordance with orthodoxy by the six hundred and thirty God-approved fathers in the time of Marcian, who was our Emperor, which handed down with a great and mighty voice, even unto the ends of the earth, that the one Christ, the son of God, is of two natures, and must be glorified in these two natures, and which cast forth from the sacred precincts of the Church as a black pestilence to be avoided, Eutyches, babbling stupidly and inanely, and teaching that the great mystery of the incarnation (oikonwmiaj) was perfected in thought only. And together with him also Nestorius and Dioseorus of whom the former was the defender and champion of the division, the latter of the confusion [of the two natures in the one Christ], both of whom fell away from the divergence of their impiety to a common depth of perdition and denial of God.

Also we recognize as inspired by the Spirit the pious voices of the one hundred and sixty-five God-beating fathers who assembled in this imperial city in the time of our Emperor Justinian of blessed memory, and we teach them to those who come after us; for these synodically anathematized and execrated Theodore of Mopsuestia (the teacher of Nestorius), and Origen, and Didymus, and Evagrius, all of whom reintroduced feigned Greek myths, and brought back again the circlings of certain bodies and souls, and deranged turnings [or transmigrations] to the wanderings or dreamings of their minds, and impiously insulting the resurrection of the dead. Moreover [they condemned] what things were written by Theodoret against the right faith and against the Twelve Chapters of blessed Cyril, and that letter which is said to have been written by Ibas. Also we agree to guard untouched the faith of the Sixth Holy Synod, which first assembled in this imperial city in the time of Constantine, our Emperor, of blessed memory, which faith received still greater confirmation from the fact that the pious Emperor ratified with his own signet that which was written for the security of future generations. This council taught that we should openly profess our faith that in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, our true God, there are two natural wills or volitions and two natural operations; and condemned by a just sentence those who adulterated the true doctrine and taught the people that in the one Lord Jesus Christ there is but one will and one operation; to wit, Theodore of Pharan, Cyrus of Alexandria, Honorius of Rome, Sergius, Pyrrhus, Paul and Peter, who were bishops of this God-preserved city; Macarius, who was bishop of Antioch; Stephen, who was his disciple, and the insane Polychronius, depriving them henceforth from the communion of the body of Christ our God.

And, to say so once for all, we decree that the faith shall stand firm and remain unsullied until the end of the world as well as the writings divinely handed down and the teachings of all those who have beautified and adorned the Church of God and were lights in the world, having embraced the word of life. And we reject and anathematize those whom they rejected and anathematized, as being enemies of the truth, and as insane ragers against God, and as lifters up of iniquity. But if any one at all shall not observe and embrace the aforesaid pious decrees, and teach and preach in accordance therewith, but shall attempt to set himself in opposition thereto, let him be anathema, according to the decree already promulgated by the up-proved holy and blessed Fathers, and let him be cast out and stricken off as an

alien from the number of Christians. For our decrees add nothing to the things previously defined, nor do they take anything away, nor have we any such power.

Notes.

Ancient Epitome of Canon I. No innovation upon the faith of the Apostles to be allowed. The faith of the Nicene fathers is perfect, which overthrows through the homousionthe doctrines of Arius who introduced degrees into the Godhead. The Synod held under Theodosius the great shall be held inviolate, which deposed Macedonius who asserted that the Holy Ghost was a servant. The two hundred who under Theodosius the Younger assembled at Ephesus are to be reversedfor they expelled Nestorius who asserted that the Lord was man and God separately (idikwj).Those who assembled at Chalcedon in the timeof Marcion are to be celebrated with eternal remembrance, who deposed Eutyches. who dared to say that the great mystery was accomplished only in image, as well as Nestorius and Dioscorus, observing equal things in an opposite direction. One hundred and sixty-five were assembled in the imperial city by Justinian, who anathematized Origen, for teaching periods (periodouj) of bodies and souls, and Theodoret who dared to set himself up to oppose the Twelve Chapters of Cyril.

At Constantinople a Synod was collected tinder Constantine which rejected Honorius of Rome and Sergius, prelate of Constantinople, for teaching one will and one operation. Aristenus. The fifth was held in the time of Justinian the Great at Constantinople against the crazy (parafronj) Origen, Evagrius and Didymus, who remodelled the Greek figments, and stupidly said that the same bodies they had joined with them would not rise again; and that Paradise was not subject to the appreciation of the sense, and that it was not from God, and that Adam was not formed in flesh, and that there would be an end of punishment, and a restitution of the devils to their pristine state, and other innumerable insane blasphemies.

Canon II.

IT has also seemed good to this holy Council, that the eighty-five canons, received and ratified by the holy and blessed Fathers before us, and also handed down to us in the name of the holy and glorious Apostles should from this time forth remain firm and unshaken for the cure of souls and the healing of disorders. And in these canons we are bidden to receive the Constitutions of the Holy Apostles [written] by Clement. But formerly through the agency of those who erred from the faith certain adulterous matter was introduced, clean contrary to piety, for the polluting of the Church, which obscures the elegance and beauty of the divine decrees in their present form. We therefore reject these Constitutions so as the better to make sure of the edification and security of the most Christian flock; by no means admitting the offspring of heretical error, and cleaving to the pure and perfect doctrine of the Apostles. But we set our seal likewise upon all the other holy canons set forth by our holy and blessed Fathers, that is, by the 318 holy God-bearing Fathers assembled at Nice, and those at Ancyra, further those at NeoCaesarea and likewise those at Gangra, and besides, those at Antioch in Syria: those too at Laodicea in Phrygia: and likewise the 150 who assembled in this heaven-protected royal city: and the 200 who assembled the first time in the metropolis of the Ephesians, and the 630 holy and blessed Fathers at Chalcedon. In like manner those of Sardica, and those of Carthage:

those also who again assembled in this heaven-protected royal city under its bishop Nectarins and Theophilus Archbishop of Alexandria. Likewise too the Canons [i.e. the decretal letters] of Dionysius, formerly Archbishop of the great city of Alexandria; and of Peter, Archbishop of Alexandria and Martyr; of Gregory the Wonder-worker, Bishop of NeoCaesarea; of Athanasius, Archbishop of Alexandria; of Basil, Archbishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia; of Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa; of Gregory Theologus; of Amphilochius of Iconium; of Timothy, Archbishop of Alexandria; of Theophilus, Archbishop of the same great city of Alexandria; of Cyril, Archbishop of the same Alexandria; of Gennadius, Patriarch of this heaven-protected royal city. Moreover the Canon set forth by Cyprian, Archbishop of the country of the Africans and Martyr, and by the Synod under him, which has been kept only in the country of the aforesaid Bishops, according to the custom delivered down to them. And that no one be allowed to transgress or disregard the aforesaid canons, or to receive others beside them, supposititiously set forth by certain who have attempted to make a traffic of the truth. But should any one be convicted of innovating upon, or attempting

to overturn, any of the afore-mentioned canons, he shall be subject to receive the penalty which that canon imposes, and to be cured by it of his transgression.

Notes.

Ancient Epitome of Canon II. Whatever additions have been made throughguile by the heterodox in the Apostolic Constitu-tions edited by Clement, shall be cut out. This canon defines what canons are to be understood as having received the sanction of ecumenical authority, and since these canons of the Council in Trullo were received at the Seventh Ecumenical Council in its first canon as the canons of the Sixth Ecumenical (of which the Quinisext claimed to be a legitimate continuation) there can be no doubt that all these canons enumerated in this canon are set forth for the guidance of the Church. With regard to what councils are intended: there is difficulty only in two particulars, viz., the "Council of Constantinople under Necta- rius and Theophilus," and the "Council under Cyprian;" the former must be the Council of 394, and the latter is usually considered to be the III. Synod of Carthage, a.d. 257.

Fleury. (H.E. Liv. xl., chap. xlix.) The Council of Constantinople under Nectarius and Theophilus of Alexandria must be that held in 394, at the dedication of Ruffinus's Church; but we have not its canons. ... "The canon published by St. Cyprian for the African Church alone." It is difficult to understand what canon is referred to unless it is the preface to the council of St. Cyprian where he says that no one should pretend to be bishop of bishops, or to oblige his colleagues to obey him by tyrannical fear. It will be noticed that while the canon is most careful to mention the exact number of Apostolic canons it received, thus deciding in favour of the larger code, it is equally careful not to assign them an Apostolic origin, but merely to say that they had come down to them "in the name of" the Apostles. In the face of this it is strange to find Balsamon saying, "Through this canon their mouth is stopped who say that 85 canons were not set forth by the holy Apostles;" what the council did settle, so far as its authority went, was the number not the authorship of the canons. This, I think, is all that Balsamon intended to assert, but his words might easily be quoted as having a different meaning.

This canon is found, in part, in the Corpus Juris Canonici, Gratian's Decretum, Pars I., Dist. XVI, c. VII.

Canon III.

Since our pious and Christian Emperor has addressed this holy and ecumenical council, in order that it might provide for the purity of those who are in the list of the clergy, and who transmit divine things to others, and that they may be blameless ministrants, and worthy of the sacrifice of the great God, who is both Offering and High Priest, a sacrifice apprehended by the intelligence: and that it might cleanse away the pollutions wherewith these have been branded by unlawful marriages: now whereas they of the most holy Roman Church purpose to keep the rule of exact perfection, but those who are under the throne of this heaven-protected and royal city keep that of kindness and consideration, so blending both together as our fathers have done, and as the love of God requires, that neither gentleness fall into licence, nor severity into harshness; especially as the fault of ignorance has reached no small number of men, we decree, that those who are involved in a second marriage, and have been slaves to sin up to the fifteenth of the past month of January, in the past fourth Indiction, the 6109th year, and have not resolved to repent of it, be subjected to canonical deposition:

but that they who are involved in this disorder of a second marriage, but before our decree have acknowledged what is fitting, and have cut off their sin, and have put far from them this strange and illegitimate connexion, or they whose wives by second marriage are already dead, or who have turned to repentance of their own accord, having learnt continence, and having quickly forgotten their former iniquities, whether they be presbyters or deacons, these we have determined should cease from all priestly ministrations or exercise, being under punishment for a certain time, but should retain the honour of their seat and station, being satisfied with their seat before the laity and begging with tears from the Lord that the transgression of their ignorance be pardoned them: for unfitting it were that he should bless another who has to tend his own wounds. But those who have been married to one wife, if she was a widow, and likewise those who after their ordination have unlawfully entered into one marriage that is, presbyters, and deacons, and subdeacons, being debarred for some short time from sacred ministration, and censured, shall be restored again to their proper rank, never advancing to any further rank, their unlawful marriage being openly dissolved.

This we decree to hold good only in the case of those that are involved in the aforesaid faults up to the fifteenth (as was said) of the month of January, of the fourth Indiction, decreeing

from the present time, and renewing the Canon which declares, that he who has been joined in two marriages after his baptism, or has had a concubine, cannot be bishop, or presbyter, or deacon, or at all on the sacerdotal list; in like manner, that he who has taken a widow, or a divorced person, or a harlot, or a servant, or an actress, cannot be bishop, or presbyter, or deacon, or at all on the sacerdotal list.

Notes.

Ancient Epitome of Canon III. Priests who shall have contracted second marriages and will not give them up are to be deposed. But those who leave off the wickedness, let them cease for a fixed period. For he that is himself wounded does not bless. But who are implicated in nefarious marriage and who after ordination have contracted marriage, after a definite time they shall be restored to their grade, provided they remain without offence, having plainly brown off the marriage. But if after it shall have been prohibited by this decree they attempt to do so they shall remain deposed. Zonaras. What things pertain to this third canon are only adapted to the time in which the canon was passed; and afterwards are of no force at all. But what things the Fathers wished to be binding on posterity are contained in the seventeenth and eighteenth canons of the holy Apostles, which as having been neglected during the course of time this synod wished to renew.

Van Espen. It is clear from this canon that the Emperor very especially intended that the indulgence which the Church of Constantinople extended to its presbyters and deacons in allowing them the use of marriage entered into before ordination, should not be allowed to go any further, nor to be an occasion for the violation of that truly Apostolic canon, "The bishop, the presbyter, and the deacon must be the husband of one wife." I. Tim. iii. 2. For never did the Constantinopolitan nor any other Eastern Church allow by canon a digamist (or a man successively the husband of many wives) to be advanced to the order of presbyter or deacon, or to use any second marriage. Antonio Pereira. (Tentativa Theologica. [Eng. trans.] III. Principle, p. 79.) In the same manner a second marriage always, and everywhere, incapacitated the clergy for Holy Orders and the Episcopate. This appears from St. Paul, 1 Tim. Chap. iii., and Titus, Chap. i., and it was expressly enactedby the sixteenth of the Apostolical Canons, renewed by the Popes Siricius, Innocent and Leo the Great, and may be gathered from the ancient fathers and councils generally received in the Church.

Nevertheless we know from Theodoret, Bishop of Cyrus, that many bishops remarkable for their learning and sanctity, frequently dispensed with this Apostolical law; as Alexander of Antioch, Acacius of Berea, Prayline of Jerusalem, Proclus of Constantinople, and others, by whose example Theodoret defends his own conduct in the case of Irenaaeus, in ordaining him Archbishop of Tyre, although he had been twice married. But what is more surprising in this matter is that, notwithstanding the eleventh Decretal of Siricius, and the twelfth of Innocentius the First, that they who had either been twice married, or had married widows, were incapable of ordination, and ought to be deposed; the Council of Toledo, Canon 3, and the First Council of Orange, Canon 25, both dispensed with these Pontifical laws. The first, in order that those who had married widows might remain in holy orders; the second,

that such as had twice married might be promoted to the order of subdeacon. Socrates also observes that although it was a general law not to admit catechumens to orders, the bishops of Alexandria were in the habit of promoting such to the order of readers and singers.

Fleury. (H. E., Liv. XL., chap. 1.) These canons of the Council of Trullo have served ever since to the Greeks and to all the Christians of the East as the universal rule with regard to clerical continence,and they have been now in full force for a thousand years. That is to say, It is not permitted to men who are clerics in Holy Orders to marry after their ordination. Bishops must keep perfect continence, whether before their consecration they are married or not. Priests, deacons, and subdeacons already married can keep their wives and live with them, except on the days they are to approach the holy mysteries.

Canon IV.

IF any bishop, presbyter, deacon, sub-deacon, lector, cantor, or door-keeper has had intercourse with a woman dedicated to God, let him be deposed, as one who has corrupted a spouse of Christ, but if a layman let him be cut off.

Notes.
Ancient Epitome of Canon IV. A cleric coupled to a spouse of God shall be deposed In the case of a layman he shall be cut off. This canon is found in the Corpus Juris Canonici, Gratian's Decretum, Pars II., Causa XXVII., Q. I., c. vj. A layman ravishing a nun, by secular law was punished by death. Balsamon gives the reference thus: V Cap. primi tit. iiij. Lib. Basilic. or cxxiij. Novel.

Canon V.

Let none of those who are on the priestly list possess any woman or maid servant, beyond those who are enumerated in the canon as being persons free from suspicion, preserving himself hereby from being implicated in any blame. But if anyone transgresses our decree let him be deposed. And let eunuchs also observe the same rule, that by foresight they may be free of censure. But those who transgress, let them be deposed, if indeed they are clerics; but if laymen let them be excommunicated.

Notes.
Ancient Epitome of Canon V. A priest, even if a eunuch, shall not have in his house a maid or other woman except those on whom no suspicion can light. See Canon III., of First Ecumenical Council at Nice. This canon adds Eunuchs.

Canon VI.

Since it is declared in the apostolic canons that of those who are advanced to the clergy unmarried, only lectors and cantors are able to marry; we also, maintaining this, determine that henceforth it is in nowise lawful for any subdeacon, deacon or presbyter after his ordination to contract matrimony but if he shall have dared to do so, let him be deposed. And if any of those who enter the clergy, wishes to be joined to a wife in lawful marriage before he is ordained subdeacon, deacon, or presbyter, let it be done.

Notes.
Ancient Epitome of Canon VI. If any ordained person contracts matrimony, let him be deposed. If he wishes to be married he should become so before his ordination. Aristenus points out how this canon annuls the tenth canon of Ancyra, which allows a deacon and even a presbyter to marry after ordination and continue in his ministry, provided at the time of his ordination he had in the presence of witnesses declared his inability to remain chaste or his desire to marry. This present canon follows the XXVI of the Apostolic canons. The last clause of this canon, limited in its application to subdeacons, is found in the Corpus Juris Canonici, Gratian's Decretum, Pars I., Dist. XXXII., c. vi.

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.