

ON THE HOLY CANONS

By
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*Blessed art Thou, O Christ our God, who has shown forth the fishermen as supremely wise by sending down upon them the Holy Spirit, and through them didst draw the world into Thy net, O Befriender of man, glory be to Thee.
Through the prayers of our holy fathers, Lord Jesus Christ, our God, have mercy on us.
Amen.*

Bishop Ephraim: A funny thing happened to me on the way to this conference. I was standing in the sanctuary and I was listening to your royal gates squeak all through the liturgy. I asked where there's a can of 3-in-1 oil because the same thing happened at the monastery with the side entrance into the sanctuary, and it was driving me crazy, and nobody else seemed to hear it. I mentioned it several times. So finally I lost my patience, and I went to the ecclesiarch's room, and I came back with a can of 3-in-1 oil, and during the service I oiled it myself, to everyone's embarrassment. So tomorrow I'm going to come here with a can of 3-in-1 oil, and as they're vesting me, I'm going to go right up there and oil it myself.

Question from the audience: Is it an oil day tomorrow?

Bishop: Yes. Reminds me of the story of when Harry Truman's wife kept on nagging him to get some exercise — this is when he was president — and he kept on putting her off, and she said, "You should go out and do something, go out and cut the lawn or something, cut the grass." And he kept on ignoring her. So finally she was nagging him so bad, one fine Sunday morning, when everyone else was going to church, there was the president of the United States going back and forth with this manual lawn mower, cutting the grass, and his wife was so embarrassed that she never asked him to do it again.

First of all, I should say that I'm indebted for much of my notes today on the Holy Canons to Holy Cross Seminary. I really am. I learned a lot there, both positive and negative. What significance do the Holy Canons — sorry, wrong question — do the Holy Canons have any significance in the Twentieth Century? Now, you have three guesses as to my answer to that question, and the first two don't count. First I'll give you the bad news. When I was in seminary, there was this young man named Larry who was a convert to Orthodoxy. He'd been a Mennonite before. He was from Pennsylvania, he was a German boy, and he came to the seminary. He'd read many beautiful books about Orthodoxy, but as he saw in actual practice what was going on in the parishes, he became quite dismayed because one thing was written in the books about Orthodoxy, whatever was available at that time anyway, and another, completely different thing was going on in the parishes. So he went to the bishop — he had just been newly-consecrated as a bishop at that time — and he explained his concern to him. The bishop said, "My boy, I want to tell you that a few years ago our archbishop, Archbishop Iakovos, asked me to

make a complete study of all the canons of the church and which of them are relevant for our times today. And after a very extensive and minute study of the whole subject, I came to the conclusion that only one canon is relevant today."

And poor Larry said, "One canon? Out of the hundreds?" The bishop said, "Yes, just one."

And Larry said, "Which one is that?"

"Obedience to the bishop."

And Larry thought to himself, "Gee, I thought I became Orthodox. I didn't realize I became Roman Catholic."

Only one canon was relevant, said the bishop. That would be absolutely terrible. That means that the canons that deal with people who have committed abortions, or adultery, or rape, or murder, or incest, or robbery, or all kinds of terrible things -how would the Church be able to deal with these people and help them if it weren't for the Holy Canons and the guidelines which the Holy Canons provide us? How would the Church properly administer the whole thing about the administration of churches or provisions or alms for the poor, for orphans, for widows, for the proper administration of the Holy Mysteries? Everything would be just wiped off the slate. Can you imagine how long any government would stand on the face of this earth if you had ministers who told you there's only one law here, obedience to me? How long would this government last, if you had a government like that? Or if you had even a business corporation, or any minor official that told you, only obedience to me, that's it? Well, nobody, nobody absolutely would stand for such a thing. It's just awesome. And how would one provide for what the duties of the priests are, and what about the vows that this bishop made when he promised to uphold *all* the holy doctrines of the church and *all* the Holy Canons of the church?

So that's the bad news, number one. Then, I'm sure you've all heard of this Greek bishop down in Australia — this is bad news number two — who referred to the Holy Canons as toilet paper. Actually, that wasn't really the Greek word for it, but I'm not going to translate the Greek word for you. It's very similar to what one very prominent Greek Archdiocese priest said recently in one pamphlet that was published by the Greek Archdiocese, "What was heresy in the Fifth Century is no longer heresy now." So this seems to be the basic premise on which they work, that everything can be sort of swept away.

I'm giving you all the negative things first; then I'll tell you the positive later. I remember also from seminary days when a favorite ploy in order to destroy any credibility in the Holy Canons was to tell you, "Well, the canons say you can't go to Jewish doctors. Now look at that! What kind of a silly and crazy thing is that? How can you possibly enforce something like that today?"

Well, what people forget, of course, is that there is such a canon. And there's a reason for the canon, too. The reason for the canon was because there was genuine concern in those days because medicine and philosophy and religion were so intertwined, and if you went to a Jewish doctor, in order to be faithful to his own conscience as a Jewish doctor, he would advise you, "You know, there are certain foods which are not

good for you, they're not clean, and you should stay away from them." The man was acting on his own beliefs, but at the same time, because medicine and religion were so intertwined, it was inconceivable for him *not* to mention these concerns to you. Just as a person who was Jewish would never think of going to a Christian, because of course there were different religious practices involved, and at that time diet was a very a very important part of medicine even as is today. So, for sure, this sort of thing would happen, this temptation would happen, that a Jewish doctor would tell you that you shouldn't eat this sort of food and so on and so forth.

Now, all these misunderstandings come from the fact that we have to understand from the very onset that canons are not the same as laws. The word in Greek for canon is *κανών*, the word for law is νόμος, and they have slightly different definitions and different purposes. When we start thinking of them as laws, that's when we get into trouble, as if it's impersonal, inflexible laws which are passed for us. I remember, whenever I hear people talking about the relevancy of things, I mentioned this one United Church of Christ minister last night when I was here for the Salutations. He had a wonderful sense of humor. He was saying that he's a United Church of Christ minister, and he said, "You know, Your Grace, the United Church of Christ is neither united, nor a church, nor of Christ." I said, "Oh, just like the Holy Roman Empire."

He said, "You know, when people start talking about theology for the Twentieth Century, theology for the 80's, theology for the 90's, I can just imagine some youngster in the Sixteenth Century saying to his father, 'Oh, come on, Dad, we have to have a theology for the 90's, the 1590's, to be in step with the times. Let's get with it.'"

So I mentioned that there's a difference between laws and canons. What is a law? A law is an ordinance, a statute, or, to quote one handbook, "Law is the sum of compulsory rules which regulate man's behavior towards achieving a harmonious relationship with his fellow man." What are canons? A definition for a canon, *Κανών* originally meant a plumb line like a builder uses, with a lead weight, a standard, a model, a paradigm, a metrical scheme when you're setting things to meter, a guideline, an assessment, a boundary, or a limit. So the definitions are different. And that's why the Church uses the term "canon" for its regulations, and, of course, secular governments use the word "law," because they are different.

There are other differences, too. Now, here's where we get more into my notes from seminary days, the positive, the good things, because we are not speaking about a merely human institution or society, but about the Church, this great mystery which is the Body of Christ. We are speaking about the communion of the faithful with God, about the mystical body of which Christ is the head, and which a reflection of Christ's dual nature, both human and divine, visible and invisible, physical and spiritual. Although resembling an earthly institution in outward appearance, the Church differs radically from a worldly organization in that the source of its being and inspiration is God. As a body made up of human beings, however, the Church needs standards that will regulate the harmonious relationship of its members and the accomplishment of its purpose, that is, their eternal salvation.

The principal means by which the visible church is formed and united to the invisible church is the grace of the holy mysteries of God, and these are principally the mysteries of Holy Baptism and Chrismation by which one enters into the household of God, the Holy Eucharist by which one is sustained and nourished within the household of God, and the mystery of the priesthood whereby the other mysteries are administered.

Everything in the Church has as its purpose the union of the members of the visible church with the divine and immortal head, our Lord Jesus Christ. Man's dual nature, physical and spiritual, requires that the Church employ corresponding means to effect man's salvation. The Holy Canons, as an expression of the life of the Church and of its written and unwritten tradition, assist the believer and provide guidelines in achieving the goal of eternal salvation.

At this point, two things have to be kept in mind. First, our entry into society, the world, is involuntary. We are born, and here we are, whether we like it or not. Like it or lump it, we are here for the duration, however long or short it may be. However, once we are here involuntarily, we also immediately and automatically come under our society's compulsory laws. In contrast to this, our membership in the Body of Christ is purely voluntary. It's true that we may have been baptized as infants, but some chose not to maintain their membership in the Church, just as some of those who are baptized as adults have chosen not to maintain their membership.

My personal entry into the Body of Christ was rather traumatic for my relatives, because the priest who baptized me in California — he's still alive as a matter of fact. In fact, he telephoned me about two years ago. Oh, he's way over two hundred. He's a very jolly fellow, actually. He was just a little bit absentminded, that was the only problem, and he had submerged me.

Question from the audience: Did he have water?

Bishop: Yes, he had water, lots of water. I was definitely submerged. He submerged me, and then he forgot the prayer he was supposed to say. He was flipping pages . . . bubbles were coming up . . . my grandmother fainted . . . it was a real scene, a typical Greek situation. I spoke to his son - he almost did the same thing to his son, too — and his son said, "He always did that." So our Savior said, "If any man wills to come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me." So it's a voluntary entry into the Body of Christ.

Secondly, in order to understand the role of the Holy Canons in our salvation, we have to have a correct understanding of the role of works in our salvation. The Orthodox understanding of works is very different from that of the Roman Catholics and Protestants. Although, admittedly, nowadays especially, it is very difficult to pinpoint what a Protestant may believe on any point of doctrine, since each one tends to be a separate denomination in himself. I told you about the United Church of Christ, neither united, nor a church, nor of Christ.

For Roman Catholics, works are meritorious. If you do something good, God will paste a gold star on your forehead, and will tell you what a good boy or girl you are, and you've gained a point. If you gain enough points, you win. In such a situation, God is not so much a judge as he is a scorekeeper. If little Dominic says fifty rosaries, or goes on a pilgrimage to the shrine of the Mother of God in Guadalupe, he gets 100 days indulgence, or whatever. But if he turns around and smacks his sister in the kisser, he gets 200 demerits on the celestial scoreboard. And if he pushes her down the stairs, he probably gets life in prison.

For the Protestants, only faith saves. But since the Epistle of St. James emphasizes works over faith, this meant that the Protestant reformers had to discard or disparage this

particular book of the New Testament and refer to it as "chaff," as Luther did, only because it didn't fit into their system of theology.

On the one hand, their battle cry was "*Sola Scriptura*," "Only the Scriptures." But in reality the real code word was "Only the Scriptures *and me*," since everyone interprets the Scriptures privately. Protestants felt that they had the help of the Holy Spirit to interpret.

This United Church of Christ minister told me at one point that right after Luther began his movement, immediately they began to split up in all kinds of different factions. So immediately they felt a need to get everybody back together again somehow, and so some representatives of these other groups came to Luther and they said, "Brother Martin, we feel we should discuss these matters about our being together and united. We see that the spirit is guiding each one of us, so we have to somehow get it all together and work together." And reportedly Luther said at this point, "Spirit? Spirit? I slap your spirit on its snout. You have to have discernment of spirits." This is coming from Martin Luther now, right? Well, of course that's a very good idea, but where was Martin Luther coming from? That's the problem.

So that's why we Orthodox are very careful and we refer to it as the Spirit of Truth. The Spirit of Truth would not lead us in all these different divergent and contradictory doctrines. So we have to be very careful and have discernment of spirit, as St. Paul says in First Corinthians. Otherwise, it's like a shotgun blast, everyone going off in his own direction, like an explosion, which is exactly what happened, by leaps and bounds, and today by geometric progression — this type of mentality is increasing.

However, what is the Orthodox Church's view of the role of works in our salvation? We had an article in the *Orthodox Christian Witness* a short time ago about this very matter, and I'll just refer to that, because it's basically a quote from St. Mark the Ascetic. Mind you, this was 1100 years before the Protestant Reformation. St. Mark writes the following in his work, "On those who think that they are made righteous by works, when Scripture says 'He will reward every man according to his works,' (Matthew 16:27) (this is underlined by St. Mark) "do not imagine that works in themselves merit either Hell or the Kingdom. On the contrary, Christ rewards each man according to whether his works are done with faith or without faith in Himself, and he is not a dealer bound by contract, but He is God, our creator and redeemer. We who have received baptism offer goods works, not by way of repayment, but to preserve the purity given to us. Every good work which we perform through our own natural powers causes us to refrain from the corresponding sin. But without grace it cannot contribute to our sanctification. The self-controlled are such because they refrain from gluttony. Those who have renounced possessions, because they have renounced greed. The tranquil, because they are not talkative. The pure, because they restrain themselves from self-indulgence. Those who are modest are so because they abstain from unchastity. The moderate, from avarice. The gentle, from agitation. The humble, from self esteem. The obedient, from quarreling. The self-critical, from hypocrisy. Likewise, those who pray are protected from despair. The poor, from having many possessions. Confessors of the faith, from its denial. Martyrs, from idolatry."

Even martyrdom — do you see how every virtue that is performed, even to the point of death, is nothing more than refraining from sin? Now to refrain from sin, says St. Mark, is the work within our own natural powers, but not something that buys us the Kingdom. It is not meritorious. Truly, as our Savior taught, "When ye have done all those

things which are commanded you, say, 'We are unprofitable servants. We have done that which was our duty to do.' There is nothing meritorious in doing that which we are supposed to do. Every virtue that we perform is indeed nothing more than refraining from the corresponding sin. Even martyrdom is only a refusal to fall into idolatry, a refusal to deny Christ.

As the implications of this understanding, of this Orthodox understanding of works became clear to our United Church of Christ minister to whom I was speaking in Huntingdon, Pennsylvania, he said, with typical and considerable understatement, "I could live with that." And the tragedy of this really is that all this was written, as I said, 1100 years before this whole controversy broke out in the West. The real tragedy is that the people in the West were not reading St. Mark the Ascetic's writings.

A correct understanding of the role of works in our salvation will also give us a correct understanding of the role of the Holy Canons. The Holy Canons are derived from sources that are independent of secular law. The origin of these sources, both written and oral, are found in the will of our Savior to establish His kingdom in the hearts and souls of mankind. The Holy Canons do have many external characteristics common with secular law:

- (A) Persons invested with authority.
- (B) Means of promulgation.
- (C) Means of formulation.
- (D) Means of interpretation.
- (E) Means of application.
- (F) Means of validation.

The Holy Canons, however, gather their material from theology, and they differ from secular law in cause, purpose, place, time, origin, and extent. The Holy Canons are primarily spiritual and sacred because (1) they strive for the spiritual perfection of the Church's members, and (2) they concern themselves with the inner disposition behind every act. The spirit of divine love and truth, that is, a commitment to the spiritual perfection of the individual, must prevail in the application of the Holy Canons also. This entails the use of both exactness and *economia*: exactness, especially in the matters of the faith, in which, as St. Mark of Ephesus says, there can be no compromise; and *economia*, especially in dealing with the failings of individuals, especially in our times, which are nearly totally pagan and hedonistic. There are canons which deal with the integrity of the faith, and these must be kept with great care and exactness. And there are canons which deal with the inner discipline of the Church, and here both exactness and *economia* are employed.

The Holy Canons themselves describe how we do this. I believe the 102nd Canon of the Quinisext Council describes how the spiritual fathers are to employ, according to their spiritual discretion, sometimes exactness, sometimes *economia*, all for the purpose of drawing the person closer to healing, to restoration within the Body of Christ, and to spiritual advancement. The spiritual character of the Holy Canons is evident from the fact that it is not coercive, as is secular law. It is looking to the spiritual welfare and perfection of the individual, and in addition, is voluntary, since membership in the Church is voluntary, as we said. Unlike Islam, where if you apostasize and fall away from Islam, it's an automatic death penalty.

By the way, many times I read in newspapers where American Moslems keep referring to Islam and saying that "Islam" is derived from the Arabic word for "peace."

Wrong. It means "submission." Of course, they mean submission in their own understanding, right? Like they mean "peace" in their own understanding, like the peace of a corpse. If you just read the Koran, you can see what it says about how you take care of dissidents.

Also, not everyone has the authority or the ability to interpret and apply the Holy Canons. In addition to *The Rudder*, that is, the book which contains the Holy Canons — and, unfortunately, in English we have a very, very poor edition of *The Rudder*, I understand it's a major job to come out with something good, but what we have in English right now is absolutely terrible, including the commentaries that are in the English edition. There are also other volumes, about five volumes, as a matter of fact, containing the interpretations of the ancient canon law interpreters: Balsamon, Zonaras, Aristinos. Also there was a very excellent canon law expert in Serbia in the last century, Milosh. He was the one who more or less condensed the interpretations of the three commentators that I mentioned before.

The Holy Canons must not only be applied faithfully, they must also be interpreted correctly. This can be done only by someone who has the proper authority and expertise. It is not true, as someone once asserted, that bishops can do whatever they want. They, too, have to abide by the Holy Canons, as properly interpreted, otherwise they themselves become guilty and liable. On one occasion, I remember — it was back in my seminary days, I was a senior at that time, in the seminary — we went to visit the Episcopal Theological School in Cambridge. And we were having -this is a confession — we were having an ecumenical dialogue. (Mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa.) Well, there we were, and there were representatives from the Roman Catholic seminary, St. John's down in Brighton. So we got into a bit of a discussion with the Roman Catholic professor of patristics, Fr. Von Ewe. So finally we said to this professor. "You have to understand one thing," we said. "All Orthodox bishops are infallible — until they make a mistake. And then they get the axe." He didn't have too much of a response for that one.

In any case, not everyone has the right or the ability to apply or explain the Holy Canons, since here, too, the whole tradition of the Church must be taken into account, for it provides guidelines and insights taken from the Holy Scriptures, the writings of the Church Fathers, and the lives of the saints. On the one hand, this doesn't necessarily mean that you have to be a lawyer. You've all heard these terrible lawyer jokes going around. But you do have to have a good knowledge of the Church's tradition. As Fr. Michael Gelssinger, who was tonsured Theodore, monk, at the monastery, says in his article on the Creed that was published recently in the *True Vine*, "a man who acts as his own lawyer has a fool for a client."

And that's why, also, when a bishop is applying the Holy Canons, he will always consult with his clergy. There is nothing shameful about that because, as we know from our experience as clergymen, when we have our meetings, our synaxes every year, and we put our heads together about something, well, as brothers, we have our different points of view, and we'll have little arguments, but we all have the one standard that we go by in what we're striving for. What we're doing is, we're putting together, really, hundreds of years of pastoral experience when we're trying to determine what course of action we should take on a particular matter, be it on marriage, or some spiritual matter that has come up, a pastoral matter, a divorce, whatever it happens to be, by drawing on all this experience of all the clergy. Literally it's hundreds of years of pastoral experience, and any bishop who doesn't avail himself of that kind of experience should be allowed to go

back to a monastery and just be a plain monk.

Comments from the audience: No way. Fat chance.

Fr. Christos Constantinou: We'll just make him avail himself of the opportunity. You are what you are.

Bishop: As this United Church of Christ minister said — you should pray for him, his name is William — he said, "Your Grace, if I were a layman, I'd be an Orthodox Christian right now."

And I said to him, "William, if I were a layman, I'd be the happiest man in the world!"

Fr. Christos: "Pick up your cross, and follow Me."

Bishop: Why am I losing all my hair, and what's left has turned white, and my hands are starting to shake? I know you can't be young and handsome all the time, but, anyway, back to the subject.

A person who tries to interpret the Holy Canons on his own is like a person who tries to interpret the Holy Scriptures on his own. He will go astray. And this brings us to the main and final point of this subject: the relevance of the Holy Canons in the Twentieth, almost Twenty-first Century. If the Holy Canons are not relevant in our day, then neither are the Holy Scriptures (which inspire the Holy Canons) relevant in our day. If the Holy Canons are outmoded in our day, then the Holy Scriptures are even more outmoded because they are even older. If the Holy Canons are not applicable today, then the striving for a love for God and man and for holiness are also not applicable. If the Holy Canons are set aside or disparaged, then we are left only with tyranny. "Only one canon is relevant today, obedience to the bishop." Or, anarchy, which inevitably leads to tyranny, the arbitrary rule of the strong over the weak. It means an abolition of faithfulness to God, a subversion of love for the weak, a repudiation of compassion for the ailing, a suppression of the spiritual striving for perfection of all the Church's members, and the end of our Savior's desire to establish His kingdom in the hearts and souls of mankind. That's why the Holy Canons are more relevant and more needed today, in the Twentieth Century, than they've ever been before.

Question and Answer Session

Question: Can you give us some examples of canons?

Bishop: Well, canons govern every aspect of the life of the Church. About who can be made a priest, who cannot be made a priest, how the services are to be properly conducted. How we deal with people who have fallen into various sins or crimes, and how the Church restores these people back to spiritual health. How to administer alms? The canons deal with people who have fallen into witchcraft or have renounced Christ, various sins. How do we help these people to get back on their feet again? The canons cover every aspect of our spiritual life. Also, they deal with ownership of the church, all kinds of things. As you know, we had this court trial in Worcester. Well, as it was demonstrated,

the canons go into this very extensively, this whole question. About rules for monastics, for lay people, about fasting, about who may marry, about divorces, sponsors, godfathers, all these things.

Fr. John Fleser: The canons here — we can get a book and we can read a few canons to you so you can see a little bit more clearly — but what they do is, just for example, you mentioned relationships. It will tell you, and it's very involved, it will tell you brothers and sisters, twins cannot marry twins, there's a whole relationship that exists. Also the canons will specify that a bishop cannot go outside of his diocese to go into another diocese, a priest cannot leave his parish and go into somebody else's parish, without permission. That's why the faithful, for example, from Boston may go up to Ipswich or someplace else and walk into the parish and get in the communion line and don't think anything of it. But in reality, you'd have to have a letter from your priest, because you just don't walk around ad hoc saying, "Here I am" and the priest of another parish is obliged to give you Holy Communion." You have to be identified. So there's a whole set of regulations.

The Bishop mentioned ordination of the clergy. There are requirements, because the canons give you a way of keeping you away from falling into lust and sin and all these other things, and there are requirements for the priesthood, that you should meet these requirements. There are guidelines here that we should all become aware of. So they're really like the sides of a ship; if you're inside the ship, you know you're protected. And so the canons are that ship around us. It's when we step outside of them that we get into trouble.

Question: Can you give us a chronology of the canons, when they were first formulated and whether in theory there could be new canons today?

Bishop: As far as the canons, we have what are called the Apostolic Canons, to begin with. This means, as I understand it, they came from apostolic times, including the apostolic fathers, the first generation of Christians. These have also been incorporated into the decisions of the Ecumenical Councils as well. Many times you'll find that these people who belong to innovating jurisdictions will brush off and try to dismiss the authority of the Apostolic Canons by saying that they're later formulations or whatever. The fact remains, however, that they do have authority for the Church precisely because the Ecumenical Councils have accepted them as being authoritative, and you see them mentioned sporadically in Church Fathers from the earliest times, from the Apostolic Fathers. So already, from the very beginning, from the Acts of the Apostles, we have already, where the apostles gathered and they said how people should be received into the Christian Church, Jews and Gentiles. What guidelines should be used about various types of foods, whether there should be regulations about kosher and unkosher and all this. Remember how this was all discussed there, and St. James was the one who presided (to the dismay of modern Roman Catholics.) It wasn't Peter who presided. And that was really the first council of the Church.

Fr. Christos: That's the one that said about how many bishops ordain a bishop, and not to pray with heretics.

Bishop: Right. And baptism by immersion. So all these things, right from the apostolic

fathers. And then progressively, as church councils began to be able to meet, because you also had the persecutions, too, but as the Church began to regulate its life more naturally, the canons developed. Now today — the question is, can canons be formulated today — I suppose, in theory, that if the Church met in certain circumstances . . .

Fr. John: Didn't the Synod do it, with the ecumenists?

Bishop: Yes, that was a decision against ecumenism. In a sense, what we have to do, when the clergy also are dealing with a peculiar situation in our own time, things which were totally unheard of in the first centuries, drug abuse, whatever you might be able to think of.

From the audience: Bridal party members.

Bishop: Bridal party members.

Fr. Christos: Well that was an issue, remember? We had to discuss that, it was a whole big issue. You laugh, but it was a problem.

From the audience: Transplants.

Bishop: Transplants, yes. So what we try to do, we try, from our collective experience, drawing from the Holy Canons, from the Holy Tradition of the Church, the Scriptures, the writings of the Church Fathers, we try to formulate a consensus about what the Church's response should be. But that's formulating canons.

(You know, I refer to bridesmaids as "walking flower pots." I never could figure out what their purpose was, anyway. That's why I became a monk, I guess.)

Fr. Christos: To add to that, there are also the canonical decisions of the Seven Ecumenical Councils, which are the ones that His Grace referred to which accepted the Apostolic Canons, that's what gives them ecumenical application. There are also local councils. There was Laodicea, Carthage and several others — they met to deal with local situations, but in time those Local Councils had ecumenical application, their decisions have been accepted as applying to the Church as a whole wherever it is.

And then, of course, even our own day, while we don't call it "canon this" and "canon that," when we get together, in actuality, in practice, what we're deciding is a canonical decision, that is to say, a rule or a guideline by which the church here, locally — obviously it's local — is going to deal with some of the situations that His Grace referred to, like the transplants, or, it sounds funny, but even the membership in a bridal party, and who can receive Communion in which jurisdiction here in the States and by what standards, especially with the issue of the different Greek Old Calendar group, and so on and so forth. Those are local matters that are important to the church here that have to be resolved for unity and regulation of the Body of Christ, and while it may never enter *The Rudder* with universal application, they might serve in the future, as a guideline for others. Who knows? But they certainly serve to regulate the life of the church here, and therefore they've become canonical in that sense.

Bishop: Right. Because again, remember the definition of "canon." It's a plumb line, a guideline to help us guide the ark of the Church.

Fr. John: In reference to your question, Seraphim, when you look at the history of the Church, when we talk about the Ecumenical Councils and all these other councils, local councils, Carthage, etc., that there was a response. A need arose. An issue came up. A matter of faith. If you look at the councils, they were not called together because we didn't like the rules of fasting and therefore we wanted to change the rules of fasting. What really was the impetus for the councils was to define the faith because it was the Trinity, the *homoiousios*, it was Christological and Mariological, issues that came up, and councils were called. And in defining the matters of faith, they also took up other matters that they discussed and then these were written down. I think we have to have a couple of things in mind. Just because a council met, and they wrote down certain decisions, it didn't automatically become accepted.

I think here in the 1990's we forget that these issues, the decisions that were made, they were passed around, and all those bishops, and the people, the faithful, all participated in slowly accepting, or disagreeing — because we had a robber council that was totally rejected, although it had authority when it met — but the issue becomes one in which it's a matter of faith that gets clarified. The councils, the decisions, the canons, and what's interesting is that they don't define it; they tell you what it's not.

The wisdom and the truthfulness of what the canons guide us into can only be attested to by your life. Ultimately, if we don't pay heed to the canons and don't try to follow them, they become intellectual discussions. It was interesting, the Bishop mentioned, just for example, about not going to Jewish doctors. That was one thing that was thrown up in our faces at the seminary constantly. I was at St. Vladimir's. And it was always a joke that, well, you don't want to follow the canons because you can't go to Jewish doctors. Though something may not be applicable today, the canon still stands, because it may be applicable tomorrow.

Fr. Christos: The principles.

Fr. John: The principle is there because in case that heresy arises again, you have a defense against it. That's why you can't wipe out the anathema of 1054, although they tried to lift the anathema. You can't lift it. You cannot reject any of the canons of the Church. Now whether or not you follow them, that's a different issue. But the point is, the Church has them here for us as guides. So, again, just as a point of reference, the Synod, when we were with the Synod, came out with its statement about ecumenism. And it was issued, in several languages, and we even chant it at the Synodicon, we added it to the Synodicon, as I remember, which is against ecumenism. The fact that "World Orthodoxy" may not have accepted it, what we have is a presentation that this is a definition of the heresy of ecumenism. Therefore, we abide by that, because we see this as really, truly given here by the gift of God through the Holy Spirit.

Bishop: And it represents the whole tradition of the Church. That's always the guiding line. For instance, I've been thinking now, that since today — this is a good thing to discuss with the clergy, too, in October — when you take into consideration today, for example, something contemporary, that concerning the matter of fasting, which is always being discussed, people are always saying how difficult fasting is. Actually, of course, we

know that fasting is much simpler today than it's ever been because we have all these canned foods, and we have all these frozen foods, and here it is January, February, March, and we're eating grapes from Chile and tomatoes from Israel.

Fr. Christos: And cantaloupe from California.

Bishop: And all this. I was thinking, since in our Twentieth Century — a theology for the 90's, right?

Fr. Christos: Don't get any smart ideas.

Bishop: Since this is the 90's of the Twentieth Century, I think we should make the fasting rules *much stricter* now, make everyone fast all year round, just so we get more in the spirit of the thing — right? — and with the tradition of the Church.

(Loud groans from the audience.)

Bishop: Well, I want to get back to my monastery somehow.

There was a break after the talk and the following was a continuation of the question and answer session.

BISHOP EPHRAIM: What we were discussing earlier about the matter of heresy and grace with the New Calendar churches, I think we have to remember there are certain points that we should have in mind in this whole question.

We already mentioned that it's a gradual thing that we see happening in front of us now. And the traditional Orthodox hierarchies have tried to respond as these developments have progressed. I was mentioning to someone, for example, that when the change of the Church calendar first came in Greece, as a specific example, the hierarchy of Greece which adopted the New Calendar was not unanimous in its decision. There were many bishops who were against the change, but they were outvoted. In fact, there was one bishop, who was second in rank, I think, Germanos or Dimitrios, who refused to change in his diocese until 1928, and it was only because of very intense government pressure that he finally agreed to change.

There were many New Calendar bishops, nominally New Calendar bishops, who were fighting for the Old Calendarists, and defending them, and protecting them, and doing everything they could to help them out. And there were other New Calendar bishops who were viciously persecuting the Old Calendarists. So even then there was a division in the ranks. And that's why the Old Calendarists, the traditional Orthodox Christians, had genuine hopes, valid hopes, that eventually the traditionalists within the New Calendarist synod would be able to swing things around again and get them back on course.

Well, they saw, instead, that things got progressively worse, to the degree that finally three bishops, formerly of the New Calendar, left the New Calendarists and came back to the traditional Orthodox Christians after eleven years. More would have come over, but they were frankly afraid of the persecutions, which had already taken place. So you see, at the beginning, things were not cut and dried, black and white, and our people

also understood this, and they were trying to encourage these bishops. And finally some bishops did finally say, "We can't go along because this is getting further and further from the Orthodox faith." When they saw that on the one hand they were persecuting the Old Calendarists, calling their mysteries invalid, and at the same time recognizing the sacraments of the non-Orthodox as being valid, all of a sudden, for the first time, they saw what was going on.

But the government had its own program, and the Greek government, you know, is basically like other governments, they're not particularly religious. In fact, most of them are openly Masonic, and some of them today are even mostly Socialists, so what do they care? They have their own program, their own priorities. So there was a gradual worsening of the Church's situation.

And as things worsened, the traditional Orthodox Christians had to respond to all this changing, as we're still doing today, as a matter of fact. As things progress, we ourselves have to modify, change, and address these changes. There's one article in the *Orthodox Christian Witness* which is coming out about this exact subject. We see heresy, now, being taught in these jurisdictions, openly, synodically, officially, and we have to make a response. If tomorrow, all of a sudden, they were to say, "We've come to our senses, we want to retract all these things which have taken place," communion could be restored almost immediately with these people. But, of course, they also have to make these modifications, these retractions on their part, of things which violate the Orthodox faith, officially and synodically. So there is something that still could be done if these people were tomorrow to have a change of heart.

That's not true, however, with older, much older heresies like Roman Catholicism or Protestantism. You can't say, "Well, tomorrow, if you just change a couple of things, we can be back in communion again." There's no possibility of that. Nothing can be salvaged in these denominations. Whereas with the Orthodox, we can still appeal, at least, to a common source of tradition. They're rejecting it more and more, but, as I mentioned to you, we do see dissension. Some of our clergy have telephoned me fairly recently, and they're saying how, in a couple of large New Calendar parishes in the cities they are located, for some reason, people are becoming very distressed in a couple of large Greek parishes about ecumenism, all of a sudden. And they're very upset about where it's going. Glory be to God, right? So we say, and we see, again, that they're ordering things from St. Nectarios Press, and they're playing tapes from our conferences, listening to all this, which we've been trying to make available to these people all these years. So if something does come of this, we glorify God for it, and we hope that it's not simply lay people — fine if it's lay people — but also the clergy, and even some of the bishops will come to their senses.

Unfortunately, I should tell you before Fr. Christos begins here, I just want to tell you one development which is very sad, just so you have it also in mind and know what's going on. Last week we got a telephone call from Cyprus. It was from a convent which used to be with the New Calendar but it switched back to the Old Calendar, but they're still under a New Calendar bishop. But they're following the Old Calendar, at least. So they telephoned us and they told us that the monks of Stavrovuni Monastery, the oldest Orthodox monastery in existence.

FR. CHRISTOS CONSTANTINOU: On Cyprus, of course.

BISHOP: In continuous existence, it was established — the only problem with Cypriots is that they drive on the wrong side of the street. It drives you crazy, they're going around a curve and you're going "Wait, wait, wait, what are you doing, you're going to kill us all."

FR. CHRISTOS: They're not at fault, the British are.

BISHOP: So we got a telephone call, and they said that the monks — I have to back up a little bit. Last summer there was an agreement signed between the Orthodox and Roman Catholics, it's called the Balamand Agreement because it's named after a monastery in Lebanon called Balamand, it's an ancient monastery there, and the Roman Catholics and Orthodox representatives there agreed that they are both sister churches, one church, they both have valid and effectual sacraments, and also they recognized the Uniate movement as being a valid and legitimate movement. Virtually everybody — the Church of Jerusalem was not there, and was not represented, the Church of Greece was not represented, but all the others were — and they signed this agreement.

So the monks of Stavrovuni Monastery, the Mountain of the Cross, went to their archbishop — this is reported to us now by people who are under this bishop — and they said to the bishop, "There is no way we are going to accept this agreement. You can just get it out of your mind."

And the archbishop got very nervous and excited and he said, "Wait, wait, these are just proposals."

And the monks said, "There can be no such proposals. We simply cannot even consider such a thing, so forget about it; we are not going to go along with it." So they made their position clear.

While they were still there, there was another bishop also present, the Bishop of Larnica (that's where St. Lazarus's tomb was), and he told the monks, "Listen, fathers, let me tell you something, just so you have it in mind. The union between the churches has been signed. It has been taken care of now. It's up to you to determine how you're going to accept it. That's your problem." He was very forthright. "It's just being broken to the people slowly, but we're doing it gradually. But it's been signed."

Well, I happened to mention this to Fr. David Belden, who was here last week, as we were driving to Worcester for the service there. And he said, "Now that's very funny, Your Grace, because when I went on my pilgrimage to the Holy Land last year, and we went to Mount Sinai, there was an English novice there, at St. Catherine's Monastery, from England. And as we were going up, climbing to the peak, we were talking about this and that, and he told me that before he came to become a novice at St. Catherine's, he went to get a blessing from his bishop in England, Bishop Kallistos Ware. And they started discussing various things, and he told me, 'Bishop Kallistos told me, among other things, that the union between the churches had been signed. But now we are trying to present it gradually to the people so there won't be any major disruptions.'"

So, from two completely different sources, independent sources, we're getting this message now. This is very sad. And also, just recently, it was just printed in the New Calendar periodical, *Orthodoxos Typos*, about a protest of the Holy Mountain fathers, the Athonite fathers, sent to the Ecumenical Patriarchate about this very thing, and they're telling them the same thing. It covers three and a half full-size pages in the New Calendar newspaper. "We are not going to accept this." And they list all the reasons why. This was

sent in December. The Patriarch became furious. This is all from the New Calendar newspaper now; this is all the news that they're printing.

The Ecumenical Patriarch became furious and he sent three bishops as a commission to the Holy Mountain, demanding that they put this question on the agenda at the meeting of all fathers of the board of governors of the Holy Mountain. And the fathers of the Holy Mountain, the Athonite fathers, said, "No, we can't do this because before we put something on the agenda, all the monasteries have to vote to put it on. It's just a matter of a couple of days, and we can put it on the agenda."

And the commission from the Ecumenical Patriarch said, "No, we are from the Ecumenical Patriarch, you have to put it on your agenda."

And the Athonite fathers said, "No, we can't do this because the constitution which governs the administration of the Holy Mountain, which has been given to us and ratified by tens of former ecumenical patriarchs over one thousand years, says that we have to do it like this."

And the Ecumenical Patriarch's commission said, "No, we're going to do it the way the Ecumenical Patriarch says."

"Yes we will."

"No you won't."

"Yes we will."

"No you don't."

So it was a deadlock. The news got back to the Ecumenical Patriarch, and he defrocked four of the representatives on the Holy Mountain for disobedience. And the Holy Mountain fathers wrote back a message, and they said, "We don't recognize this action on your part because it is completely illegal and these fathers are not being disobedient, they are simply following what they've always done to govern the Holy Mountain for over ten centuries, and you have no right to overturn these things." So that's where it stands right now. This is the latest. So, on the one hand it's very sad to see how they're trying to push this thing down people's throats. On the other hand, it's edifying to us to see resistance in some quarters, and we can only hope that something takes effect here.

FR. JOHN FLESER: We have here, for our next topic, "Discrimination According to God: Male and Female Created He Them." And with that, Father Christos will make his presentation, and as he said, during his talk your hands may fly and he will respond to your raised hands as he goes through his discussion. So feel free to question him.

BISHOP: Just as long as the fists don't fly.