



The Council of Chalcedon - 451 A.D.

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Introduction

It was the emperor Marcian who, after the "robber" council of Ephesus (449), commanded this council to meet. **Pope Leo I** was opposed to it. His view was that all the bishops should repent of their ways and individually sign his earlier [dogmatic letter to Flavian](#), patriarch of Constantinople, and so avoid a new round of argument and debate. Moreover, the provinces of the West were being laid waste by Attila's invasions. But before the pope's view became known, the emperor Marcian had, by an edict of 17 May 451, convoked the council for 1 September 451. Although the pope was displeased, he sent legates: Paschasinus bishop of Lilybaeum, Bishop Lucentius, the priests Boniface and Basil, and Bishop Julian of Cos. No doubt Leo thought that the council would cause people to leave the church and go into schism. So he wanted it to be postponed for a time, and he implored the emperor that the faith handed down from ancient times should not become the subject of debate. The only business should be the restoration of the exiled bishops to their former positions.

The council was convoked at Nicaea but later transferred to Chalcedon, so as to be close to Constantinople and the emperor. It **began on 8 October 451**. The legates Paschasinus, Bishop Lucentius and the priest Boniface presided, while Julian of Cos sat among the bishops. By their side were the imperial commissars and those serving on the Senate, whose responsibility was simply to keep order in the council's deliberations.

The lists we have of those present are unsatisfactory. According to Leo there were **600** bishops at the council, whereas according to a letter to him there were **500**.

The "[Definition of the faith](#)" was passed at the council's fifth session, and was solemnly promulgated at the sixth session in the presence of the emperor and the imperial authorities. The formula accepted in the decree is: Christ is one in two natures. This is in agreement with Leo's letter to Flavian of Constantinople, and [Leo's letter is expressly mentioned in the Definition of the faith](#).

The council also issued [27 disciplinary canons](#) (it is unclear at which session).

[What is usually called canon 28](#) (on the honour to be accorded the see of Constantinople) is in fact a resolution passed by the council at the 16th session. It was **rejected** by the Roman legates.

In the ancient Greek collections, canons 29 and 30 are also attributed to the council:

- [canon 29](#) is an extract from the minutes of the 19th session; and
- [canon 30](#) is an extract from the minutes of the 4th session.

Because of canon 28, which the Roman legates had opposed, the emperor Marcian and Anatolius, patriarch of Constantinople, sought approval for the council from the pope. This is clear from a letter of Anatolius which tries to defend the canon, and especially from a letter of Marcian which explicitly requests confirmation. Because heretics were misinterpreting his withholding approval, **the pope ratified the doctrinal decrees on 21 March 453, but rejected canon 28** since it ran counter to the canons of Nicaea and to the privileges of particular churches.

The imperial promulgation was made by Emperor Marcian in 4 edicts of February 452.

Apart from Pope Leo's letter to Flavian, which is in Latin, the English translation is from the Greek text, since this is the more authoritative version.

The letter of Pope Leo to Flavian, bishop of Constantinople, about Eutyches

Surprised as we were at the late arrival of your charity's letter, we read it and examined the account of what the bishops had done. We now see what scandal against the integrity of the faith had reared its head among you. What had previously been kept secret now became clearly revealed to us. **Eutyches**, who was considered a man of honour because he had the title of priest, is shown to be very rash and extremely ignorant. What the prophet said can be applied to him: He did not want to understand and do good: he plotted evil in his bed. What can be worse than to have an irreligious mind and to pay no heed to those who are wiser and more learned? The people who fall into this folly are those in whom knowledge of the truth is blocked by a kind of dimness. They do not refer to

- the sayings of the prophets, nor to
- the letters of the apostles, nor even to
- the authoritative words of the gospels,

but to themselves. By not being pupils of the truth, they turn out to be masters of error. A man who has not the most elementary understanding even of the creed itself can have learnt nothing from the sacred texts of the New and Old Testaments. This old man has not yet taken to heart what is pronounced by every baptismal candidate the world over!

He had no idea *how he ought to think about the incarnation* of the Word of God; and he had no desire to acquire the light of understanding by working through the length and breadth of the holy scriptures. So at least he should have listened carefully and accepted the common and undivided **creed** by which the whole body of the faithful confess that they believe *in*

1. God the Father almighty and in
2. Jesus Christ his only Son, our Lord,
3. who was born of the holy Spirit and the virgin Mary.

These three statements wreck the tricks of nearly every heretic. When God is believed to be both almighty and Father, the Son is clearly proved to be co-eternal with him, in no way different from the Father, since he was born God from God, almighty from the Almighty, co-eternal from the Eternal, not later in time, not lower in power, not unlike in glory, not distinct in being. The same eternal, only-begotten of the eternal begetter was born of the holy Spirit and the virgin Mary. His birth in time in no way subtracts from or adds to that divine and eternal birth of his: **but its whole purpose is to restore humanity, who had been deceived, so that it might defeat death and, by its power, destroy the devil who held the power of death.** Overcoming the originator of sin and death would be beyond us, had not he whom sin could not defile, nor could death hold down, taken up our nature and made it his own. He was conceived from the holy Spirit inside the womb of the virgin mother. Her virginity was as *untouched* in giving him birth as it was in conceiving him.

But if it was beyond Eutyches to derive sound understanding from this, **the purest source of the christian faith**, because the brightness of manifest truth had been darkened by his own peculiar blindness, then he should have subjected himself to the teaching of the gospels. When Matthew says, The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, son of David, son of Abraham, Eutyches should have looked up the further *development* in the apostolic preaching. When he read in the letter to the Romans, Paul, the servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for God's gospel, which he had formerly promised through his prophets in the holy writings which refer to his Son, who was made for him of David's seed according to the flesh, he should have paid deep and devout attention to the prophetic texts. And when he discovered God making the promise to Abraham that in your seed shall all nations be blessed, he should have followed the apostle, in order to eliminate any doubt about the identity of this seed, when he says, The promises were spoken to Abraham and his seed. He does not say "to his seeds"--as if referring to a multiplicity--but to a single one, "and to thy seed" which is Christ. His inward ear should also have heard Isaiah preaching *Behold, a virgin will receive in the womb and will bear a son*, and they will call his name Emmanuel, which is translated "God is with us". With faith he should have read the same prophet's words, A child is born to us, a son is given to us. His power is on his shoulders. They will call his name "Angel of great counsel, mighty God, prince of peace, father of the world to come". Then he would not deceive people by saying that the Word was made flesh in the sense that he emerged from the virgin's womb having a human form but not having the *reality* of his mother's body.

Or was it perhaps that he thought that our lord Jesus Christ did not have our nature because the angel who was sent to the blessed Mary said, The holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the most High will overshadow you, and so that which will be born holy out of you will be called Son of God, as if it was because the conception by the virgin was worked by God that the flesh of the one conceived did not share the nature of her who conceived it? But uniquely wondrous and wondrously unique as that act of generation was, it is not to be understood as though the proper character of its kind was taken away by the sheer novelty of its creation. It was the holy Spirit that made the virgin pregnant, but the *reality* of the body derived from body. As Wisdom built a house for herself, the Word was made flesh and dwelt amongst us: that is, in that flesh which he derived from human kind and which he animated with the spirit of a rational life.

So **the proper character of both natures was maintained and came together in a single person.** Lowliness was taken up by majesty, weakness by strength, mortality by eternity. *To pay off the debt of our state*, invulnerable nature was united to a nature that could suffer; so that in a way that corresponded to the remedies we needed, one and the same mediator between God and humanity the man Christ Jesus, could both on the one hand die and on the other be incapable of death. Thus was true God born in the undiminished and perfect nature of a true man, complete in what is his and complete in what is ours. By "ours" we mean what the Creator established in us from the beginning and what he took upon himself to restore. There was in the Saviour no trace of the things which the Deceiver brought upon us, and to which deceived humanity gave admittance. *His subjection to human weaknesses in common with us did not mean that he shared our sins.* He took on the form of a servant without the defilement of sin, thereby enhancing the human and not diminishing the divine. For that self-emptying whereby the Invisible rendered himself visible, and the Creator and Lord of all things chose to join the ranks of mortals, spelled no failure of power: it was an act of merciful favour. So the one who retained the form of God when he made humanity, was made man in the form of a servant. Each nature kept its proper character without loss; and just as the form of God does not take away the form of a servant, so the form of a servant does not detract from the form of God.

It was the devil's boast that humanity had been deceived by his trickery and so had lost the *gifts* God had given it; and that it had been stripped of the endowment of immortality and so was subject to the harsh sentence of death. He also boasted that, sunk as he was in evil, he himself derived some consolation from having a partner in crime; and that God had been forced by the principle of justice to alter his verdict on humanity, which he had created in such an honourable state. All this called for the realisation of a secret plan whereby the *unalterable* God, whose will is indistinguishable from his goodness, might bring the original realisation of his kindness towards us to completion by means of a more hidden mystery, and whereby humanity, which had been led into a state of sin by the craftiness of the devil, might be prevented from perishing contrary to the purpose of God.

So without leaving his Father's glory behind, the Son of God comes down from his heavenly throne and enters the depths of our world, born in an unprecedented order by an unprecedented kind of birth. In an unprecedented order, because one who is invisible at his own level was made visible at ours. The ungraspable willed to be grasped. Whilst remaining pre-existent, he begins to exist in time. The Lord of the universe veiled his measureless majesty and took on a servant's form. The God who knew no suffering did not despise becoming a suffering man, and, deathless as he is, to be subject to the laws of death. By an unprecedented kind of birth, because it was inviolable virginity which supplied the material flesh without experiencing *sexual desire*. What was taken from the mother of the Lord was the nature without the *guilt*. And the fact that the birth was miraculous does not imply that in the lord Jesus Christ, born from the virgin's womb, the nature is different from ours. The same one is true God and true man.

There is nothing unreal about this oneness, since both the lowliness of the man and the grandeur of the divinity are in mutual relation. As God is not changed by showing mercy, neither is humanity devoured by the dignity received. The activity of each form is what is proper to it in communion with the other: that is, the Word performs what belongs to the Word, and the flesh accomplishes what belongs to the flesh. One of these performs brilliant *miracles* the other sustains acts of *violence*. As the Word does not lose its glory which is equal to that of the Father, so neither does the flesh leave the nature of its kind behind. We must say this again and again: **one and the same is truly Son of God and truly son of man**. God, by the fact that in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God; man, by the fact that the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us. God, by the fact that all things were made through him, and nothing was made without him, *man*, by the fact that he was made of a woman, *made under the law*. The birth of flesh reveals human nature; birth from a virgin is a proof of divine power. A lowly cradle manifests the infancy of the child; angels' voices announce the greatness of the most High. Herod evilly strives to kill one who was like a human being at the earliest stage the Magi rejoice to adore on bended knee one who is the Lord of all. And when he came to be baptised by his precursor John, the Father's voice spoke thunder from heaven, to ensure that he did not go unnoticed because the divinity was concealed by the veil of flesh: This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Accordingly, the same one whom the devil craftily tempts as a man, the angels dutifully wait on as God. Hunger, thirst, weariness, sleep are patently human. But to satisfy five thousand people with five loaves; to dispense living water to the Samaritan woman, a drink of which will stop her being thirsty ever again; to walk on the surface of the sea with feet that do not sink; to rebuke the storm and level the mounting waves; there can be no doubt these are divine.

So, if I may pass over many instances, it does not belong to the same nature to weep out of deep-felt pity for a dead friend, and to call him back to life again at the word of command, once the mound had been removed from the four-day-old grave; or to hang on the cross and, with day changed into night, to make the elements tremble; or to be pierced by nails and to open the gates of paradise for the believing thief. Likewise, it does not belong to the same nature to say I and the Father are one, and to say The Father is greater than I. For although there is in the Lord Jesus Christ a single person who is of God and of man, the insults shared by both have their source in one thing, and the glory that is shared in another. For it is from us that he gets a humanity which is less than the Father; it is from the Father that he gets a divinity which is equal to the Father.

So it is on account of this oneness of the person, which must be understood in both natures, that we both read that the son of man came down from heaven, when the Son of God took flesh from the virgin from whom he was born, and again that the Son of God is said to have been crucified and buried, since he suffered these things not in the divinity itself whereby the Only-begotten is co-eternal and consubstantial with the Father, but in the weakness of the human nature. That is why in the creed, too, we all confess that the only-begotten Son of God was crucified and was buried, following what the apostle said, If they had known, they would never have crucified the Lord of majesty. And when our Lord and Saviour himself was questioning his disciples and instructing their faith, he says, Who do people say I, the son of man, am? And when they had displayed a variety of other people's opinions, he says, Who do you say I am? --in other words, I who am the son of man and whom you behold in the form of a servant and in real flesh: Who do you say I am? Whereupon the blessed Peter, inspired by God and making a confession that would benefit all future peoples, says, You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. He thoroughly deserved to be declared "blessed" by the Lord. He derived the stability of both his goodness and his name from the original Rock, for when the Father revealed it to him, he confessed that the same one is both the Son of God and also the Christ. *Accepting one of these truths without the other was no help to salvation; and to have believed that the Lord Jesus Christ was either only God and not man, or solely man and not God, was equally dangerous.*

After the Lord's resurrection--which was certainly the resurrection of a *real* body, since the one brought back to life is none other than the one who had been crucified and had died--the whole point of the forty-day delay was to make our faith completely sound and to cleanse it of all darkness. Hence he talked to his disciples and lived and ate with them, and let himself be touched attentively and carefully by those who were in the grip of doubt; he would go in among his disciples when the doors were locked, and impart the holy Spirit by breathing on them, and open up the secrets of the holy scriptures after enlightening their understanding; again, he would point out the wound in his side, the holes made by the nails, and all the signs of the suffering he had just recently undergone, saying, Look at my hands and feet--it is I. Feel and see, because a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have. All this was so that it would be recognised that the proper character of the divine and of the human nature went on existing inseparable in him; and so that we would realise that the Word is not the same thing as the flesh, but in such a way that we would confess belief in the one Son of God as being both Word and flesh.

This Eutyches must be judged to be extremely destitute of this mystery of the faith. Neither the humility of the mortal life nor the glory of the resurrection has made him recognise our nature in the only-begotten of God. Nor has even the statement of the blessed apostle and evangelist John put fear into him: Every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ came in the flesh is from God, and every spirit which puts Jesus asunder is not from God, and this is *Antichrist*. But what does putting Jesus as under consist in if not in separating his human nature from him, and in voiding, through the most barefaced fictions, the one mystery by which we have been saved? Once in the dark about the nature of Christ's body, it follows that the same blindness leads him into raving folly about his suffering too. If he does not think that the Lord's cross was unreal and if he has no doubt that the suffering undergone for the world's salvation was real, then let him acknowledge the flesh of the one whose death he believes in. And let him not deny that a man whom he knows to have been subject to suffering had our kind of body, for to deny the reality of the flesh is also to deny the bodily suffering. So if he accepts the christian faith and does not turn a deaf ear to the preaching of the gospel, let him consider what nature it was that hung, pierced with nails, on the wood of the cross. With the side of the crucified one laid open by the soldier's spear, let him identify the source from which blood and water flowed, to bathe the church of God with both font and cup.

Let him heed what the blessed apostle Peter preaches, that sanctification by the Spirit is effected by the sprinkling of Christ's blood; and let him not skip over the same apostle's words, knowing that you have been redeemed from the empty way of life you inherited from your fathers, not with corruptible gold and silver but by the precious blood of Jesus Christ, as of a lamb without stain or spot. Nor should he withstand the testimony of blessed John the apostle: and the blood of Jesus, the Son of God, purifies us from every sin; and again, This is the victory which conquers the world, our faith. Who is there who conquers the world save one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? It is he, Jesus Christ who has come through water and blood, not in water only, but in water and blood. And because the Spirit is truth, it is the Spirit who testifies. For there are three who give testimony--Spirit and water and blood. And the three are one. In other words, the Spirit of sanctification and the blood of redemption and the water of

baptism. These three are one and remain indivisible. None of them is separable from its link with the others. The reason is that *it is by this faith that the catholic church lives and grows*, by believing that neither the humanity is without true divinity nor the divinity without true humanity.

When you cross-examined Eutyches and he replied, "I confess that our Lord was of two natures before the union, but I confess one nature after the union", I am amazed that such an absurd and corrupt declaration of faith was not very severely censured by the judges; and that an extremely foolish statement was disregarded, as if nothing whatever offensive had been heard. It is just as wicked to say that the only-begotten Son of God was of two natures before the incarnation as it is abominable to claim that there was a single nature in him after the Word was made flesh. Eutyches must not suppose that what he said was either correct or tolerable just because no clear statement of yours refuted it. So we remind you, dearest brother, of *your charity's responsibility* to see to it that if through God's merciful inspiration the case is ever settled, the rash and ignorant fellow is also purged of what is blighting his mind. As the minutes have made clear, he made a good start at abandoning his opinion when, under pressure from your statement, he professed to say what he had not previously said, and to find satisfaction in the faith to which he had previously been a stranger. But when he had refused to be party to the anathematising of his wicked doctrine, your fraternity would have realised that he was persisting in his false belief and that he deserved a verdict of condemnation. If he is honestly and suitably sorry about this, and acknowledges even at this late stage how rightly episcopal authority was set in motion, or if, to make full amends, he condemns every wrong thought he had by word of mouth and by his actual signature, then no amount of mercy towards one who has reformed is excessive. Our Lord, the true and good shepherd who laid down his life for his sheep, and who came not to destroy but to save the souls of men and women, wants us to be imitators of his goodness, so that whilst justice represses sinners, mercy does not reject the converted. The defence of the true faith is never so productive as when false opinion is condemned even by its adherents.

In place of ourself, we have arranged for our brothers, Bishop Julius and the priest Renuat of the church of St Clement, and also my son, the deacon Hilary, to ensure a good and faithful conclusion to the whole case. To their company we have added our notary Dulcitus, of proven loyalty to us. We trust that with God's help he who has fallen into error might condemn the wickedness of his own mind and find salvation.

God keep you safe, dearest brother.

Definition of the faith

The sacred and great and universal synod by God's grace and by decree of your most religious and Christ-loving emperors Valentinian Augustus and Marcian Augustus assembled in Chalcedon, metropolis of the province of Bithynia, in the shrine of the saintly and triumphant martyr Euphemia, issues **the following decrees**.

In establishing his disciples in the knowledge of the faith, our lord and saviour Christ said: "My peace I give you, my peace I leave to you", so that **no one should disagree with his neighbour regarding religious doctrines** but that the proclamation of the truth would be uniformly presented. But the evil one never stops trying to smother the seeds of religion with his own tares and is for ever inventing some novelty or other against the truth; so the Master, exercising his usual care for the human race, roused this religious and most faithful emperor to zealous action, and summoned to himself the leaders of the priesthood from everywhere, so that through the working of the grace of Christ, the master of all of us, every injurious falsehood might be staved off from the sheep of Christ and they might be fattened on fresh growths of the truth.

This is in fact what we have done. We have driven off erroneous doctrines by our collective resolution and we have renewed the unerring creed of the fathers. We have proclaimed to all the creed of the 318; and we have made our own those fathers who accepted this agreed statement of religion -- the 150 who later met in great Constantinople and themselves set their seal to the same creed.

Therefore, whilst we also stand by

- the decisions and all the formulas relating to the creed from the sacred synod which took place formerly at **Ephesus**,
 - whose leaders of most holy memory were Celestine of Rome and Cyril of Alexandria

we decree that

- pre-eminence belongs to the exposition of the right and spotless creed of the 318 saintly and blessed fathers who were assembled at **Nicaea** when Constantine of pious memory was emperor: and that
- those decrees also remain in force which were issued in **Constantinople** by the 150 holy fathers in order to destroy the heresies then rife and to confirm this same catholic and apostolic creed.
 - The creed of the 318 fathers at Nicaea.
 - And the same of the 150 saintly fathers assembled in Constantinople.

This wise and saving creed, the gift of divine grace, was **sufficient for a perfect understanding and establishment of religion**. For its teaching about the Father and the Son and the holy Spirit is complete, and it sets out the Lord's becoming human to those who faithfully accept it.

But there are those who are trying to ruin the proclamation of the truth, and through their private heresies they have spawned novel formulas:

- some by daring to corrupt the mystery of the Lord's economy on our behalf, and refusing to apply the word "**God-bearer**" to the Virgin; and
- others by introducing a confusion and mixture, and mindlessly imagining that there is **a single nature of the flesh and the divinity**, and fantastically supposing that in the confusion the divine nature of the Only-begotten is possible.

Therefore **this sacred and great and universal synod**, now in session, in its desire to exclude all their tricks against the truth, and teaching what has been unshakeable in the proclamation from the beginning,

- **decrees** that the creed of the 318 fathers is, above all else, to remain inviolate. And because of those who oppose the holy Spirit, it
- **ratifies** the teaching about the being of the holy Spirit handed down by the 150 saintly fathers who met some time later in the imperial city

- -- the teaching they made known to all,
- **not introducing anything** left out by their predecessors, **but clarifying** their ideas about the holy Spirit by the use of scriptural testimonies against those who were trying to do away with his sovereignty.

And because of those who are attempting to corrupt the mystery of the economy and are shamelessly and foolishly asserting that he who was born of the holy virgin Mary was a mere man, it has accepted

- **the synodical letters of the blessed Cyril**, [already accepted by the Council of Ephesus] pastor of the church in Alexandria, to Nestorius and to the Orientals, as being well-suited to refuting Nestorius's mad folly and to providing an interpretation for those who in their religious zeal might desire understanding of the saving creed.

To these it has suitably added, against false believers and for the establishment of orthodox doctrines

- [the letter of the primate of greatest and older Rome](#), the most blessed and most saintly Archbishop *Leo*, written to the sainted Archbishop Flavian to put down Eutyches's evil-mindedness, because it is in agreement with great Peter's confession and represents a support we have in common.

It is opposed to those who attempt to tear apart the mystery of the economy into a duality of sons; and

- it *expels* from the assembly of the priests those who dare to say that the divinity of the Only-begotten is passible, and
- it *stands opposed* to those who imagine a mixture or confusion between the two natures of Christ; and
- it *expels* those who have the mad idea that the servant-form he took from us is of a heavenly or some other kind of being; and
- it *anathematizes* those who concoct two natures of the Lord before the union but imagine a single one after the union.

So, *following the saintly fathers*, we all with one voice teach the confession of one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ: the same perfect in divinity and perfect in humanity, the same truly God and truly man, of a rational soul and a body; consubstantial with the Father as regards his divinity, and the same consubstantial with us as regards his humanity; like us in all respects except for sin; begotten before the ages from the Father as regards his divinity, and in the last days the same for us and for our salvation from Mary, the virgin God-bearer as regards his humanity; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only-begotten, acknowledged in two natures which undergo no confusion, no change, no division, no separation; at no point was the difference between the natures taken away through the union, but rather the property of both natures is preserved and comes together into a single person and a single subsistent being; he is not parted or divided into two persons, but is one and the same only-begotten Son, God, Word, Lord Jesus Christ, just as the prophets taught from the beginning about him, and as the Lord Jesus Christ himself instructed us, and as the creed of the fathers handed it down to us.

Since we have formulated these things with all possible accuracy and attention, the sacred and universal synod decreed that **no one is permitted to produce, or even to write down or compose, any other creed or to think or teach otherwise**. As for those who dare either to compose another creed or even to promulgate or teach or hand down another creed for those who wish to convert to a recognition of the truth from Hellenism or from Judaism, or from any kind of heresy at all: if they be bishops or clerics, the bishops are to be deposed from the episcopacy and the clerics from the clergy; if they be monks or layfolk, they are to be anathematized.

CANONS

1

We have deemed it right that the canons hitherto issued by the saintly fathers at each and every synod should remain in force.

2

If any bishop performs an ordination for money and puts the unsaleable grace on sale, and ordains for money a bishop, a chorepiscopus, a presbyter or a deacon or some other of those numbered among the clergy; or appoints a manager, a legal officer or a warden for money, or any other ecclesiastic at all for personal sordid gain; let him who has attempted this and been convicted stand to lose his personal rank; and let the person ordained profit nothing from the ordination or appointment he has bought; but let him be removed from the dignity or responsibility which he got for money. And if anyone appears to have acted even as a go-between in such disgraceful and unlawful dealings, let him too, if he is a cleric, be demoted from his personal rank, and if he is a lay person or a monk, let him be anathematized.

3

It has come to the notice of the sacred synod that some of those enrolled in the clergy are, for sordid gain, acting as hired managers of other people's property, and are involving themselves in worldly business, neglecting the service of God, frequenting the houses of worldly persons and taking over the handling of property out of avarice. So the sacred and great synod has decreed that in future no one, whether a bishop, a cleric or a monk, should either manage property or involve himself as an administrator of worldly business, unless he is legally and unavoidably summoned to take care of minors, or the local bishop appoints him to attend, out of fear of the Lord, to ecclesiastical business or to orphans and unprovided widows and persons in special need of ecclesiastical support. If in future anyone attempts to transgress these decrees, he must be subject to ecclesiastical penalties.

4

Those who truly and sincerely live the monastic life should be accorded appropriate recognition. But since there are some who don the monastic habit and meddle with the churches and in civil matters, and circulate indiscriminately in the cities and even are involved in founding monasteries for themselves, it has been decided that no one is to build or found a monastery or oratory anywhere against the will of the local bishop; and that monks of each city and region are to be subject to the bishop, are to foster peace and quiet, and attend solely to fasting and prayer, staying set apart in their places. They are not to abandon their own monasteries and interfere, or take part, in ecclesiastical or secular business unless they are perhaps assigned to do so by the local bishop because of some urgent necessity. No slave is to be taken into the monasteries to become a monk against the

will of his own master. We have decreed that anyone who transgresses this decision of ours is to be excommunicated, lest God's name be blasphemed. However, it is for the local bishop to exercise the care and attention that the monasteries need.

5

In the matter of bishops or clerics who move from city to city, it has been decided that the canons issued by the holy fathers concerning them should retain their proper force.

6

No one, whether presbyter or deacon or anyone at all who belongs to the ecclesiastical order, is to be ordained without title, unless the one ordained is specially assigned to a city or village church or to a martyr's shrine or a monastery. The sacred synod has decreed that the ordination of those ordained without title is null, and that they cannot operate anywhere, because of the presumption of the one who ordained them.

7

We decree that those who have once joined the ranks of the clergy or have become monks are not to depart on military service or for secular office. Those who dare do this, and do not repent and return to what, in God, they previously chose, are to be anathematised.

8

Clerics in charge of almshouses and monasteries and martyrs' shrines are, in accordance with the tradition of the holy fathers, to remain under the jurisdiction of the bishop in each city. They are not to be self-willed and rebellious towards their own bishop. Those who dare to break a rule of this kind in any way whatever, and are not obedient to their own bishop, are, if they are clerics, to be subject to the canonical penalties; and if they are monks or layfolk they are to be made excommunicate.

9

If any cleric has a case to bring against a cleric, let him not leave his own bishop and take himself off to the secular courts, but let him first air the problem before his own bishop, or at least, with the permission of the bishop himself, before those whom both parties are willing to see act as arbiters of their lawsuit. If anyone acts in a contrary fashion, let him be subject to canonical penalties. If a cleric has a case to bring either against his own or against another bishop, let him bring the case to the synod of the province. If a bishop or a cleric is in dispute with the metropolitan of the same province, let him engage either the exarch of the diocese or the see of imperial Constantinople, and let him bring his case before him.

10

A cleric is not allowed to be appointed to churches in two cities at the same time: to the one where he was originally ordained, and to another more important one to which he has betaken himself out of desire to increase a baseless reputation. Those who do this are to be sent back to their own church in which they were ordained at the beginning, and only there are they to serve. But if some have already been transferred from one church to another, they are not to take part in any of the affairs of their former church, or of the martyrs' shrines or almshouses or hospices that come under it. The sacred synod has decreed that those who, subsequent to this decree of this great and universal synod, dare to do anything that is now forbidden are to lose their personal rank.

11

We have decreed that, subject to examination, all paupers and needy persons are to travel with ecclesiastical letters or letters of peace only, and not of commendation, since it befits only reputable persons to be provided with letters of commendation.

12

It has come to our notice that, contrary to the ecclesiastical regulations, some have made approaches to the civil authorities and have divided one province into two by official mandate, with the result that there are two metropolitans in the same province. The sacred synod therefore decrees that in future no bishop should dare do such a thing, since he who attempts it stands to lose his proper station. Such places as have already been honoured by imperial writ with the title of metropolis must treat it simply as honorary, and that goes also for the bishop who is in charge of the church there, without prejudice of course to the proper rights of the real metropolis.

13

Foreign clerics and readers without letters of commendation from their own bishop are absolutely forbidden to serve in another city.

14

Since in certain provinces readers and cantors have been allowed to marry, the sacred synod decrees that none of them is permitted to marry a wife of heterodox views. If those thus married have already had children, and if they have already had the children baptised among heretics, they are to bring them into the communion of the catholic church. If they have not been baptised, they may no longer have them baptised among heretics; nor indeed marry them to a heretic or a Jew or a Greek, unless of course the person who is to be married to the orthodox party promises to convert to the orthodox faith. If anyone transgresses this decree of the sacred synod, let him be subject to canonical penalty.

15

No woman under forty years of age is to be ordained a deacon, and then only after close scrutiny. If after receiving ordination and spending some time in the ministry she despises God's grace and gets married, such a person is to be anathematised along with her spouse.

16

It is not permitted for a virgin who has dedicated herself to the Lord God, or similarly for a monk, to contract marriage. If it is discovered that they have done so, let them be made excommunicate. However, we have decreed that the local bishop should have discretion to deal humanely with them.

17

Rural or country parishes belonging to a church are to stay firmly tied to the bishops who have possession of them, and especially if they have continually and peacefully administered them over a thirty-year period. If, however, within the thirty years any dispute about them has arisen, or should arise, those who are claiming to be wronged are permitted to bring the case before the provincial synod. If there are any who are wronged by their own metropolitan, let their case be judged either by the exarch of the diocese or by the see of Constantinople, as has already been said. If any city has been newly erected, or is erected hereafter, by imperial decree, let the arrangement of ecclesiastical parishes conform to the civil and public regulations.

18

The crime of conspiracy or secret association is entirely prohibited even by the laws of the land; so all the more properly is this forbidden in the church of God. So if any clerics or monks are found to be either forming a conspiracy or a secret society or hatching plots against bishops or fellow clergy, let them lose their personal rank completely.

19

We have heard that in the provinces the synods of bishops prescribed by canon law are not taking place, and that as a result many ecclesiastical matters that need putting right are being neglected. So the sacred synod decrees that in accordance with the canons of the fathers, the bishops in each province are to foregather twice a year at a place approved by the bishop of the metropolis and put any matters arising to rights. Bishops failing to attend who enjoy good health and are free from all unavoidable and necessary engagements, but stay at home in their own cities, are to be fraternally rebuked.

20

As we have already decreed, clerics who are serving a church are not permitted to join a church in another city, but are to be content with the one in which they were originally authorised to minister, apart from those who have been displaced from their own country and been forced to move to another church. If subsequent to this decision any bishop receives a cleric who belongs to another bishop, it is decreed that both the received and the receiver are to be excommunicate until such time as the cleric who has moved returns to his own church.

21

Clerics or layfolk who bring allegations against bishops or clerics are not to be admitted to make their charges without more ado and before any examination, but their reputation must first be investigated.

22

It is not permitted for clerics, following the death of their own bishop, to seize the things that belong to him, as has been forbidden even by earlier canons. Those who do this risk losing their personal rank.

23

It has come to the notice of the sacred synod that certain clerics and monks who have no employment from their own bishop and have sometimes even been excommunicated by him, are frequenting imperial Constantinople and spending long periods there causing disturbances, upsetting the ecclesiastical establishment and ruining people's homes. So the sacred synod decrees that such people are first to be warned by the public attorney of the most holy Constantinopolitan church to get out of the imperial city; and if they shamelessly persist in the same kinds of behaviour, they are to be expelled by the same public attorney even against their will, and are to betake themselves to their own places.

24

Monasteries once consecrated in accordance with the will of the bishop are to remain monasteries in perpetuity, and the effects which belong to them are reserved to the monastery, and they must not be turned into secular hostelries. Those who allow this to happen are to be subject to the canonical penalties.

25

According to our information, certain metropolitans are neglecting the flocks entrusted to them and are delaying the ordination of bishops, so the sacred synod has decided that the ordination of bishops should take place within three months, unless the period of delay has been caused to be extended by some unavoidable necessity. If a metropolitan fails to do this, he is to be subject to ecclesiastical penalties. The income of the widowed church is to be kept safe by the administrator of the said church.

26

According to our information, in some churches the bishops handle church business without administrators; so it has been decided that every church which has a bishop is also to have an administrator, drawn from its own clergy, to administer ecclesiastical matters according to the mind of the bishop concerned so that the church's administration may not go unaudited, and that consequently the church's property is not dispersed and the episcopate not exposed to serious criticism. If he does not comply with this, he is to be subject to the divine canons.

27

The sacred synod decrees that those who carry off girls under pretext of cohabitation, or who are accomplices or co-operate with those who carry them off, are to lose their personal rank if they are clerics, and are to be anathematised if they are monks or layfolk.

28 [in fact a resolution passed by the council at the 16th session but **rejected** by the Pope]

Following in every way the decrees of the holy fathers and recognising the canon which has recently been read out--the canon of the 150 most devout bishops who assembled in the time of the great Theodosius of pious memory, then emperor, in imperial Constantinople, new Rome -- we issue the same decree and resolution concerning the prerogatives of the most holy church of the same Constantinople, new Rome. The fathers rightly accorded prerogatives to the see of older Rome, since that is an imperial city; and moved by the same purpose the 150 most devout bishops apportioned equal prerogatives to the most holy see of new Rome, reasonably judging that the city which is honoured by the imperial power and senate and enjoying privileges equalling older imperial Rome, should also be elevated to her level in ecclesiastical affairs and take second place after her. The metropolitans of the dioceses of Pontus, Asia and Thrace, but only these, as well as the bishops of these dioceses who work among non-Greeks, are to be ordained by the aforesaid most holy see of the most holy church in Constantinople. That is, each metropolitan of the aforesaid dioceses along with the bishops of the province ordain the bishops of the province, as has been declared in the divine canons; but the metropolitans of the aforesaid dioceses, as has been said, are to be ordained by the archbishop of Constantinople, once agreement has been reached by vote in the usual way and has been reported to him.

29 [an extract from the minutes of the 19th session]

The most eminent and illustrious officials asked: What does the sacred synod advise in the case of the bishops ordained by the most reverend Bishop Photius and removed by the most reverend Bishop Eustathius and consigned to be priests after losing the episcopacy? The most reverend Bishops Paschasinus and Lucentius and the priest Bonifatius, representatives of the apostolic see of Rome, replied: It is sacrilege to reduce a bishop to the rank of priest. But if whatever cause there is for removing those persons from the exercise of episcopacy is just, they ought not to occupy the position even of a priest. And if they have been removed from office and are without fault, they shall be restored to the episcopal dignity. The most reverend archbishop of Constantinople, Anatolius, replied: If those who are said to have descended from the episcopal dignity to the rank of priest have been condemned on what are reasonable grounds, they are clearly not worthy to hold even the office of a priest. But if they have been demoted to the lower rank without reasonable cause, then as long as they are seen to be innocent, they have every right to resume the dignity and priesthood of the episcopacy .

30 [an extract from the minutes of the 4th session]

The most eminent and illustrious officials and the exalted assembly declared: Since the most reverend bishops of Egypt have up to now put off subscribing to the letter of the most holy Archbishop Leo, not because they are in opposition to the catholic faith, but because they claim that it is customary in the Egyptian diocese not to do such things in contravention of the will and ordinance of their archbishop, and because they consider they should be given until the ordination of the future bishop of the great city of Alexandria, we think it reasonable and humane that, retaining their present rank in the imperial city, they should be granted a moratorium until such time as an archbishop of the great city of Alexandria is ordained. Most reverend Bishop Paschasinus, representative of the apostolic see, said: If your authority demands it, and you order that some measure of kindness be shown them, let them give guarantees that they will not leave this city before Alexandria receives its bishop. The most eminent and illustrious officials and the exalted assembly replied: Let the resolution of the most holy Bishop Paschasinus be upheld. So let the most reverend bishops of the Egyptians maintain their present rank and, either providing guarantees if they can, or pledging themselves on solemn oath, let them await the ordination of the future bishop of the great city of Alexandria.

Introduction and translation taken from *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, ed. Norman P. Tanner

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