

IS IT SINFUL TO EAT MEAT? ARE MARITAL RELATIONS IMPURE?

In his first letter to Fr. Pedro, Bp. Kirykos writes: *“Regarding the Canon, which some people refer to in order to commune without fasting beforehand, it is correct, but it must be interpreted correctly and applied to everybody. Namely, we must return to those early apostolic times, during which all of the Christians were ascetics and temperate and fasters, and only they remained until the end of the Divine Liturgy and communed. They fasted in the fine and broader sense, that is, they were worthy to commune.”*

In the above quote, Bp. Kirykos displays the notion that early Christians supposedly abstained from meat and from marriage, and were thus all supposedly “ascetics and temperate and fasters,” and that this is what gave them the right to commune daily. But the truth of the matter is that the majority of Christians were not ascetics, yet they did commune every day. In fact, the ascetics were the ones who lived far away from cities where Liturgy would have been available, and it was these ascetics who would commune rarely. This can be ascertained from studying the Patrologia and the ecclesiastical histories written by Holy Fathers.

The theories that Bp. Kirykos entertains are also followed by those immediately surrounding him. His sister, the nun Vincentia, for instance, actually believes that people that eat meat or married couples that engaged in legal nuptial relations are supposedly sinning! She actually believes that meat and marriage are sinful and should be avoided. This theory appears much more extreme in the person of the nun Vincentia, but this notion is also found in the teachings of Bp. Kirykos, and the spirit of this error can also be found in the above quote, where he believes that only people who are “ascetics and temperate and fasters” are “worthy of communion,” as if a man who eats meat or has marital relations with his own wife is “sinful” and “unworthy.”

But is this the teaching of the Orthodox Church? Certainly not! These teachings are actually found in Gnosticism, Manichaeism, Paulicianism, Bogomilism, and various “New Age” movements which arise from a mixture of Christianity with Hinduism or Buddhism, religions that consider meat and marriage to be sinful due to their erroneous belief in reincarnation.

The Holy Apostle Paul warns us against these heresies. In the First Epistle to Timothy, the Apostle to the Nations writes: *“Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy; having*

their conscience seared with a hot iron; Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer." If all of the early Christians abstained from meat and marriage, as Bp. Kirykos dares to say, how is it that the Apostle Paul warns his disciple, Timothy, that in the future people shall "depart from the faith," shall preach "doctrines of demons," shall "speak lies in hypocrisy," shall "forbid marriage" and shall "command to abstain from meats?"

The heresy that the Holy Apostle Paul was prophesying about is most likely that called Manichaeism. This heresy finds its origins in a Babylonian man called Shuraik, son of Fatak Babak. Shuraik became a Mandaeen Gnostic, and was thus referred to as *Rabban Mana* (Teacher of the Light-Spirit). For this reason, Shuraik became commonly-known throughout the world as *Mani*. His followers became known as *Manicheans* in order to distinguish them from the Mandaeans, and the religion he founded became known as *Manichaeism*. The basic doctrines and principles of this religion were as follows:

The Manicheans believed that there was no omnipotent God. Instead they believed that there were two equal powers, one good and one evil. The good power was ruled by the "Prince of Light" while the evil power was led by the "Prince of Darkness." They believed that the material world was inherently evil from its very creation, and that it was created by the Prince of Darkness. This explains why they held meat and marriage to be evil, since anything material was considered evil from its very foundation. They also believed that each human consisted of a battleground between these two opposing powers of light and darkness, where the soul endlessly battles against the body, respectively. They divided their followers into four groups: 1) monks, 2) nuns, 3) laymen, 4) laywomen. The monks and nuns abstained from meat and marriage and were therefore considered "elect" or "holy," whereas the laymen and laywomen were considered only "hearers" and "observers" but not real "bearers of the light" due to their "sin" of eating meat and engaging in marital relations.

The above principles of the Manichean religion are entirely opposed to the Orthodox Faith, on account of the following reasons:

The Orthodox Church believes in one God who is eternal, uncreated, without beginning and without end, and forever good and omnipotent. Evil has never existed in the uncreated Godhead, and it shall never exist in the uncreated Godhead.

The power of evil is not uncreated but it has a beginning in creation. Yet the power of evil was not created by God. Evil exists because the prince of the angels abused his free will, which caused him to fall and take followers with him. He became the devil and his followers became demons. Prior to this event there was no evil in the created world.

The material world was not created by the devil, but by God Himself. By no means is the material world evil. God looked upon the world he created and said "it was very good." For this reason partaking of meat is not evil, but God blessed Noah and all of his successors to partake of meat. For all material things in the world exist to serve man, and man exists to serve God.

If there is any evil in the created world it derives from mankind's abuse of his free will, which took place in Eden, due to the enticement of the devil. The history of mankind, both good and bad, is not a product of good or evil forces fighting one another, but every event in the history of mankind is part of God's plan for mankind's salvation. The devil has power over this world only forasmuch as mankind is enslaved by his own egocentrism and his desire to sin. Once mankind denies his ego and submits to the will of God, and ceases relying on his own works but rather places his hope and trust in God, mankind shall no longer follow or practice evil. But man is inherently incapable of achieving this on his own because no man is perfect or sinless.

For this reason, God sent his only-begotten Son, the Word of God, who became incarnate and was born and grew into the man known as Jesus of Nazareth. By his virginal conception; his nativity; his baptism; his fast (which he underwent himself but never forced upon his disciples); his miracles (the first of which he performed at a wedding); his teaching (which was contrary to the Pharisees); his gift of his immaculate Body and precious Blood for the eternal life of mankind; his betrayal; his crucifixion; his death; his defeating of death and hades; his Resurrection from the tomb (by which he also raised the whole human nature); his ascension and heavenly enthronement; and his sending down of the Holy Spirit which proceeds from the Father—our Lord, God and Savior, Jesus Christ, accomplished the salvation of mankind.

Among the followers of Christ are people who are married as well as people who live monastic lives. Both of these kinds of people, however, are sinners, each in their own way, and their actions, no matter how good they may be, are nothing but a menstruous rag in the eyes of God, according to the Prophet Isaiah. Whether married or unmarried, they can accomplish nothing without the saving grace of the crucified and third-day Risen Lord. Although being a monastic allows one to spend more time devoted to prayer and with less responsibilities and earthly cares, nevertheless, being married is not at all

sinful, but rather it is a blessing. Marital relations between a lawfully married couple, in moderation and at the appointed times (i.e., not on Sundays, not on Great Feasts, and outside of fasting periods) are not sinful but are rather an expression of God's love and grace which He has bestowed upon each married man and woman, through the Mystery of Holy Matrimony.

The Orthodox Church went through great extremes to oppose the heresy of Manichaeism, especially because this false religion's devotion to fasting and monasticism enticed many people to think it was a good religion. In reality though, Manichaeism is a satanic folly. Yet over the years this folly began to seep into the fold of the faithful. Manichaeism spread wildly throughout the Middle East, and throughout Asia as far as southern China. It also spread into Africa, and even St. Aurelius Augustinus, also known as Blessed Augustine of Hippo (+28 August, 430), happened to be a Manichean before he became an Orthodox Christian. The heresy began to spread into Western Europe, which is why various pockets in the Western Church began enforcing the celibacy of all clergy. They also began reconstructing the meaning of fasting. Instead of demanding laymen to only fast on Wednesday and Friday during a normal week, they began enforcing a strict fast on Saturday as well. The reason for this is because they no longer viewed fasting as a spiritual exercise for the sake of remembering Christ's betrayal and his crucifixion. Instead they began viewing fasting as a method of purifying one's body from "evil foods." Thus they adopted the Manichean heresy that meat, dairy or eggs are supposedly evil. Thinking that these foods were evil, they demanded laymen to fast on Saturday so as to be "pure" when they receive Holy Communion on Sunday. In so doing, they cast aside the Holy Canons of the All-famed Apostles, for the sake of following their newly-found "tradition of men," which is nothing but the heresy of Manichaeism.

The Sixth Ecumenical Council, in its 55th Canon, strongly admonishes the Church of Rome to abandon this practice. St. Photius the Great, Patriarch of Constantinople New Rome (+6 February, 893), in his Encyclical to the Eastern Patriarchs, in his countless writings against Papism and his work against Manichaeism, clearly explains that the Roman Catholic Church has fallen into Manichaeism by demanding the fast on Saturdays and by enforcing all clergy to be celibate. Thanks to these works of St. Photius the Great, the heretical practices of the Manicheans did not prevail in the East, and the mainstream Orthodox Christians did not adopt this Manichaeism.

However, the Manicheans did manage to set up their own false churches in Armenia and Bulgaria. The Manicheans in Armenia were referred to as *Paulicians*. Those in Bulgaria were called *Bogomils*. They flourished from the 9th century even until the 15th century, until the majority of them converted

to Islam under Ottoman Rule. Today's Muslim Azerbaijanis, Kurds, and various Caucasian nationalities are descendants of those who were once Paulicians. Today's Muslim Albanians, Bosnians and Pomaks descend from those who were once Bogomils. Some Bogomils migrated to France where they established the sect known as the *Albigenses*, *Cathars* or *Puritans*. But several Bogomils did not convert to Islam, nor did they leave the realm of the Ottoman Empire, but instead they converted to Orthodoxy. The sad thing is, though, that they brought their Manichaeism with them. Thus from the 15th century onwards, Manichaeism began to infiltrate the Church, and this is what led to the outrageous practices of the 17th and 18th centuries, wherein hardly any laymen would ever commune, except for once, twice or three times per year. It is this error that the Holy Kollyvades Fathers fought.

Various Holy Canons of the Orthodox Church condemn the notions that it is "sinful" or "impure" for one to eat meat or engage in lawful marital relations. Some of these Holy Canons and Decisions are presented below:

The 51st Canon of the Holy Apostles reads: *"If any bishop, or presbyter, or deacon, or anyone at all on the sacerdotal list, abstains from marriage, or meat, or wine, not as a matter of mortification, but out of abhorrence thereof, forgetting that all things are exceedingly good, and that God made male and female, and blasphemously misinterpreting God's work of creation, either let him mend his ways or let him be deposed from office and expelled from the Church. Let a layman be treated similarly."* Thus, clergy and laymen are only permitted to abstain from these things for reasons of mortification, and such mortification is what one should apply to himself and not to others. By no means are they permitted to abstain from these things out of abhorrence towards them, in other words, out of belief that these things are disgusting, sinful or impure, or that they cause unworthiness.

The 1st Canon of the Holy Council of Gangra reads: *"If anyone disparages marriage, or **abominates or disparages a woman sleeping with her husband**, notwithstanding that she is faithful and reverent, as though she could not enter the Kingdom, let him be anathema."* Here the Holy Council anathematizes those who believe that a lawfully married husband and wife supposedly sin whenever they have nuptial relations. Note that the reference *"as though she could not enter the Kingdom"* can also have the interpretation *"as though she could not receive Communion."* For according to the Holy Fathers, receiving Communion is an entry into the Kingdom. This is why when we are approaching Communion we chant *"Remember me, O Lord, in Thy Kingdom."* Therefore, anyone who believes that a woman who lawfully sleeps with her own husband, or that a man who lawfully sleeps with his own wife, is somehow "impure," "sinful," or "evil," is entertaining notions that are not Orthodox but rather Manichean. Such a person is anathematized.

The 2nd Canon of the Holy Council of Gangra reads: *“If anyone criticize adversely a person eating meat (without blood, and such as is not meat that has been sacrificed to idols or killed by strangulation) with reverence and faith, as though he had no hope of partaking, let him be anathema.”* Here the Holy Council anathematizes whoever considers those who eat meat as being supposedly sinful or impure. The reference *“as though he had no hope of partaking,”* can refer to partaking of salvation in general, but can also refer to partaking of Holy Communion. For anyone who believes that meat is a sin or a cause of impurity if partaken during the week before receiving the Holy Mysteries, such a person is anathematized. Certainly it is pious and welcoming for someone to fast for reasons of temperance. But to think that it is this act of fasting that makes them “pure” or “worthy,” or to think that if they had not fasted they would have been “impure” and “unworthy” on account of the act of eating meat, is the heresy of Manichaeism and is anathematized.

The 10th Canon of the Holy Council of Gangra reads: *“If anyone leading a life of virginity for the Lord regard married persons superciliously, let him be anathema.”* The interpretation of St. Nicodemus reads: *“This canon too anathematizes those who remain virgins for love of the Lord, but who maintain a proud attitude as regards those who are united in lawful marriage.”*

The 18th Canon of the Holy Council of Gangra reads: *“If anyone for the sake of supposedly ascetic exercise should fast on Sunday, let him be anathema.”* This takes the 9th Apostolic Canon even a step further. For whereas the Apostolic Canon decrees that anyone who fasts without oil on a Sunday, or a Saturday (except only for Holy and Great Saturday) should be deposed if a clergyman or excommunicated if a layman, this Canon of Gangra gives a much severer punishment, that of anathematization, to those who dare to fast on Sunday.

The 3rd Canon of St. Dionysius of Alexandria also corroborates the Canons of Gangra in regards to nuptial relations. The Canon reads: *“Persons who are self-sufficient and married ought to be judges of themselves. For we are told in writing by St. Paul that: it is fitting that they should abstain from each other by agreement for a time, in order that they may indulge in prayer, and again come together (1 Corinthians 7:5).”* Here St. Dionysius states that married couples who are Orthodox Christians should abstain from nuptial relations in order to devote themselves to prayer, and obviously also to devote themselves to fasting, and that then they are to come together. But their coming together is by no means sinful and nor does it make them impure or unworthy of the Kingdom or of Holy Communion.

In the 12th century a local council in Constantinople under Patriarch Luke Chrysoberges (+1169) prescribed three days of abstinence of marital relations prior to Communion. However, this recommendation was directed towards the clergy and laity equally. Thus it does not give a strict demand to laity while allowing clergy to be lenient. It also speaks nothing of fasting from food for three consecutive days, but only talks of marital relations. If the Fathers of the Council desired the three days to refer to food as well, they would have said so. But they remain silent, speaking only of nuptial relations.

It must however be mentioned that the Council based its decision on a passage from the Old Testament, where the future King David and his companions were asked if they had abstained from women in order to eat the showbread. But this was referring to women in general, and not to their lawful wives. It was also a fact that the showbread was forbidden to laity in the Old Testament, for only the priests who served the Temple were permitted to partake of it. For this reason this question was asked to David and his companions, since they should not have been allowed to partake of the showbread at all. But in the New Testament, Holy Communion, however, is not permitted only to the priests but to all members of the Church who are not excommunicated or under any penance. Thus Christ said *"Drink of it all of you, for this is my Blood of the New Testament."* Thus there is no difference between clergy and laity in regards to permission to receive Holy Communion, and there is no need for laymen to fulfill an extra fast that priests are not required to fulfill.

Finally, this Council in Constantinople was only a local council that has not been confirmed by any Ecumenical Council. This is not on the same level as the Apostolic Canons or the Councils of Gangra, Antioch, Carthage, etc, which received sanction by the decisions of Ecumenical Councils. Since the Council of Constantinople under Patriarch Luke Chrysoberges was entirely local in nature and decided this in regard to practice and not in regard to dogma, it is therefore binding on only a local level and for a set time period until overruled by future councils. For if we are to make such local councils of an Ecumenical status we shall have no reference as to which Local Council to follow. For many of them contradict one another in regards to issues of practice. Thus two Local Councils of Russia, one in the 12th century and one in the 16th century declared only one day of abstinence between married couples to be necessary in order for them to receive Holy Communion. But again, this speaks only of nuptial relations, and there is no mention at all of fasting from any particular foods. In any case, the Patriarchal Council under St. Gregory V of Constantinople in 1819, and the Council of the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece in 1886 (which officially endorsed the book *"On Continuous Communion"* by St. Macarius Notaras and St. Nicodemus of Athos) overrules

any previous local council. So within Greece, it is the teaching found in this very book that is what the current practice should be for Orthodox Christians.

In the work "On Continuous Communion," by St. Macarius Notaras of Corinth, edited by St. Nicodemus of Athos, the Holy Fathers declare that there is no difference between clergy and laity in regards to preparation for Holy Communion, for as long as the laity are not under any penance and are permitted by their spiritual father to receive Holy Communion. Thus if laity are expected to abstain from meat for an entire week, then more so should all the bishops and priests be expected to do this, every single week of every year, for as long as they are receiving communion every Sunday. But if they who are the ones standing at the Bema and calling upon the Lord to sanctify the Holy Gifts, that is, if the bishops and priests are exempt from such a fast, then much more exempt are the laity who stand afar off in the crowd. And as for marital relations, unless a married priest abstains from marital relations for every week of every year, for as long as he receives communion every Sunday, and even on weekdays, then such a married priest may desire to demand it upon laymen. But for as long as married priests are having children, and are engaging in nuptial relations from time to time, and yet communing regularly, how are they given the right to force laity to abstain from marital relations for an entire week in order to commune on Sunday, or to abstain from marital relations permanently if they wish to commune often? But in truth, these issues are up to each spiritual father, and not up to any bishop or priest to judge if he does not know the person or the couple in question. The spiritual father knows best, for he is their confessor, so thus he shall decide what they require in preparation for Holy Communion.

In his excellent work regarding the Mystery of Confession, St. Matthew of Bresthena (+1950), advises that in a normal week married couples should abstain from nuptial relations on Wednesdays and Fridays due to the fasts prescribed on these days, and also on Saturdays and Sundays so as to devote these days to Divine Liturgy and Holy Communion. There is nothing to be found in any of his writings that people must fast for the entire week in order to commune on Sunday, or that married couples must refrain from nuptial relations for the entire week in order to commune on Sunday. On the contrary, he urges all the faithful to commune as regularly as possible. This would have been hypocritical of him if he expected them to all become monastics and fast all week long in order for them to be able to commune. But if he meant such a thing surely he would have said it. But no such theory can be found in any of the hundreds of pages of his writings. Wherever he mentions abstaining from meat he speaks only of Wednesdays and Fridays of normal weeks, and during the Four Lents, namely, Nativity, Pascha, Apostles and Dormition. As for marital relations, he advises married couples to abstain

only on all the abovementioned fast days, as well as on Saturdays and Sundays and on all major Feastdays of the Lord, the Virgin and the Great-Martyrs. He speaks nothing at all of abstinence from all fasting foods (meat, cheese, eggs, fish, oil, wine) for a week prior to communion. Nor does he speak of marital relations to be forbidden for an entire week. For if such a thing is not demanded upon married clergy, why should it be demanded upon laymen? After all, St. Matthew of Bresthena was himself a Kollyvas Father and the spiritual son of several Kollyvades Fathers.

In another article, Bp. Kirykos tried to cite the 48th Canon of Carthage as proof that laymen are to follow his advice and fast strictly for one week prior to Communion, while he exempts himself from this rule, despite being a Bishop. However, by reading the text of the canon itself one understands that Bp. Kirykos is misinterpreting this canon. The 48th Canon of Carthage reads: *"It is decreed that the holy rites of the altar shall not be performed except by fasting men, with the exception of a single day in the year on which the Lord's Supper is celebrated. But if during the late afternoon any men have died, whether bishops or other persons, and a commendation is made for them, let it be done with prayers alone, if those making it be found to have eaten a breakfast."*

Firstly, this canon is addressed to clergy performing "the holy rites of the altar," and is therefore not addressed to laymen. Secondly, the fact that it says fasting is not required for the whole day prior to the Lord's Supper (on Holy Thursday) due to the Liturgy being held at night, means that the term "*fasting*" in this canon cannot be referring to abstinence from meat, dairy, eggs or fish, for all such things are forbidden during Holy Week regardless. Thus the term "*fasting*" here refers to a complete abstinence from all foods. Thirdly, the reference to those clergy who are "*found to have eaten a breakfast*" clearly demonstrates that the entire canon is a warning for clergymen to not eat any breakfast in the morning before serving Divine Liturgy.

It is well-known by all who lived at Koropi that Fr. Pedro never ate breakfast prior to serving Divine Liturgy. Heavens forbid! Neither do any Orthodox Christians dare to do such a thing. But not because food is "sinful" or "impure," but because we desire the Holy Communion to be the first food to be consumed on that day, so that by abstaining from all foods and even from water, we may prove to the Lord that our greatest desire is to receive His immaculate Body and precious Blood. For if we were to eat breakfast first, it would mean that our first desire was to fill our bellies with anything we could, rather than our desire being directed towards the Lord.

But St. John Chrysostom, in one of his homilies, advises us that it is also holy and beneficial to abstain from food for a time after receiving Holy

Communion as well. Thus he writes: *“You fast before Communion in order to be worthy of Communion. But as soon as you receive Communion, instead of increasing prudence and temperance, you let it all go, whereas you should be more temperate after Communion. For before you received Communion you fasted in order to be worthy to receive the Bridegroom, while after this you should be more prudent and temperate in order not to seem unworthy of what you have received. What, then? Should we fast after Communion as well? I don’t say this, and I don’t force you. It would be good, but I don’t force you to do this. But I exhort you not to feast to excess (St. John Chrysostom, Homily 27 on I Corinthians, 7).”*

Therefore as a system during the Christian Roman Empire, people communed every day and therefore did not eat breakfast. Their only breakfast would be Holy Communion itself. Inside Church, right after receiving Holy Communion, the faithful would “wash it down” with a cup of wine mixed with hot water and a piece of bread. These foods are not communion itself, but are blessed wine and blessed bread consumed for the purpose of “washing down” the Holy Gifts, so that they do not remain in the mouth or on the lips. Following this there are other gifts offered in Church (such as artoklasia or other blessed breads or cakes, and sometimes even fruit such as grapes on certain occasions), but these are blessed in Church and are the only form of “breakfast” in the Christianized Roman Empire.

Because Holy Communion followed by “Church food” were the only known breakfast among Orthodox Christians of old, there are therefore no Orthodox prayers set to be read before and after breakfast. The only meal prayers known are before and after lunch, and before and after dinner. This is because the first meal would be lunch (the largest meal of the day) at some time in the afternoon, followed by a light dinner immediately after Vespers and before Compline. Lunch would be the larger meal and dinner the smaller meal, so as to prepare for Holy Communion on the following day. If it was a fasting day, the lunch meal would be Lenten as would the dinner meal. If it was a non-fasting day the lunch meal would be non-Lenten while the dinner meal would be either Lenten or non-Lenten depending on the greatness of the feast of that day. After dinner they would read Compline, including the canon and prayers of preparation for Holy Communion, and then they would commune the next day as well, and so on and so forth.

This routine has also been imbedded in some Orthodox cultures. For instance, in Russia, lunch continues to be the largest meal of the day, while dinner is only a light snack. But this has become an empty custom, for after years of Westernization from the time of Czar Peter the “Great” onwards, followed by the rise of Communism, the practice of frequent communion has ceased amongst most Russians, and what has remained is an empty habit of

eating hardly no breakfast, a large lunch, and a small dinner. Rather than Holy Communion being their first meal and only breakfast of the day, they have replaced it with a glass of vodka. May God enlighten that land and restore it to the glorious past of Holy Russia.

What about the earliest Christians of the apostolic times? Did they fast prior to communion? According to Bp. Kyrkos: "...We must return to those early apostolic times, during which all of the Christians were ascetics and temperate and fasters, and only they remained until the end of the Divine Liturgy and communed. They fasted in the fine and broader sense, that is, they were worthy to commune." But is this true? If this was so, why did the Holy Apostles only direct Wednesday and Friday to be fast days, while warning anyone who fasts on a Saturday or Sunday with threats of deposition?

The truth of the matter is that during apostolic times, the Christians would receive Holy Communion on a Saturday night. For, according to the Bible, days are counted from sunset to sunset, and therefore Saturday night after sunset was already Sunday. The Christians would thus attend Vespers shortly before sunset, would serve the Divine Liturgy from sunset onwards, and after communion they would sit and eat whatever food they would bring from home to share with the parish, while they listened to their bishop's sermon. Sometimes the sermons would last until midnight, and sometimes even until sunrise. Proof of this is found in the Book of Acts: "*And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight. And there were many lights in the upper chamber, where they were gathered together... When he therefore was come up again, and had broken bread, and eaten, and talked a long while, even till break of day, so he departed (Acts 20:7-11).*" At the beginning, the term "first day of the week" refers to the eve of the first day of the Week (i.e., Saturday night). This is when St. Paul voiced a sermon until midnight. This sermon refers to the preliminary part of the Divine Liturgy, where psalms are chanted, the Epistles and Gospels are read, and special petitions are made for the faithful. After this sermon, St. Paul "broke bread" (i.e., served the Divine Liturgy), at which the faithful had "eaten" (i.e., received Holy Communion), then he talked a while longer until daybreak.

Since Divine Liturgy was held on a Saturday night, and since the Apostles forbade fasting from all foods on a Saturday (for to fast on Saturday would be to observe the Sabbath of the Jews), it is beyond doubt that the Christians would eat food during the Saturday prior to communing that night. But this is not only a speculation, but the words of the Apostle Paul himself. For in his admonition against the Corinthians, who were not sharing their food with the poorer parishioners, he told them that this act of theirs

was causing them to become unworthy of the Holy Communion. They needed to reconcile with their parishioners and be on equal terms with all of them in order to become worthy again. By no means does he warn them that if they eat any food prior to receiving Holy Communion that they will become unworthy. On the contrary, he advises them that rather than to bring food to Church and eat it in front of the poor, it would be better if they ate at home prior to going to Church! This is clearly seen by reading the whole chapter:

*“Now in this that I declare unto you I praise you not, that ye come together not for the better, but for the worse. For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it. For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you. When ye come together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord’s supper. For **in eating every one taketh before other his own supper: and one is hungry, and another is drunken.** What? have ye not houses to eat and to drink in? or despise ye the church of God, and shame them that have not? What shall I say to you? shall I praise you in this? I praise you not.*

*For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: **this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me.** After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, **This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.** For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord’s death till he come.*

Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.

Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, tarry one for another. And if any man hunger, let him eat at home; that ye come not together unto condemnation. And the rest will I set in order when I come (1 Corinthians 11:17-34).”

Thus the only thing mentioned that may cause someone to commune unworthily is if they are in discord with their brethren, and bring their own food to the agape meal after Liturgy, and do not share their food with the brethren with which they are in discord. Nowhere does this text mention that fasting for a week is what makes one worthy of communion. On the contrary, the Apostle Paul even advises for the faithful to eat at home before arriving!

But how on earth could the Apostle Paul suggest that people eat prior to receiving Holy Communion? In actual fact, it was not the Apostle Paul who began this practice, but it was Christ Himself. *“And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins (Matthew 26:26-28).”* The Apostles thus received the Holy Communion during a meal in which they were already eating of other foods. For, it is written that Christ instituted the Mystery *“as they were eating.”*

By no means are we advising for Orthodox Christians to ever do this today. They are certainly not to be eating other foods at the time of Divine Liturgy. Nor are they to eat at home prior to receiving Holy Communion. Not because Jesus Christ or the Apostle Paul were mistaken, but because as Orthodox Christians we must follow the Holy Fathers who called Holy Councils and devised Holy Canons for the purpose of answering questions and fixing problems. According to these Holy Canons, such as the 51st Canon of the Council of Carthage which was provided earlier, we must abstain from all foods in the morning in which we are to receive Holy Communion. It is for this reason that the Church changed the time of Divine Liturgy from Saturday night to Sunday morning, so as to allow people to attend Divine Liturgy on an empty stomach, having fasted from all foods from midnight onwards, until receiving Holy Communion on Sunday morning, it being their first meal.

Now as for marriage, let it be known that Christ was not opposed to marriage. He not only performed his first miracle at a marriage feast, namely, the Wedding at Cana (John 2:1-11), but the majority of disciples he chose were married, whether among the twelve or among the seventy. According to Holy Tradition, only two Apostles were not married. These were St. John the Theologian who was a virgin for his entire life, and St. Paul the Apostle who was married in his past but not at the time of his ministry. It is not known whether he was widowed or divorced. All that is known is that he was married in his past, because it would have been impossible for him to be a teacher among the Pharisees had he not been married. But we know that he was not married at the time of his ministry because he says so in one of his epistles. Aside from these two Apostles, every other Apostle was married, including even St. Peter. We know that the Holy Apostle Peter was married because of the following passage: *“And when Jesus was come into Peter’s house, he saw his wife’s mother laid, and sick of a fever (Matthew 8:14).”* Thus, the majority of Apostles had wives and children. Not only the Twelve Apostles and Seventy Apostles, but also the majority of bishops, presbyters, deacons and laymen that all constituted the early Apostolic Church from the very day of Pentecost onwards, were married with children. They were not at all

monastics. They did not shun marital relations. Even though St. Paul was not married at the time of his ministry, and even though he did say that being married makes it more difficult to dedicate one's entire life towards serving the Church, he nevertheless praised marriage and declared the nuptial relations of a lawfully married couple to be pure. Therefore, he declared quite clearly: *"Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed is undefiled (Hebrews 13:4)."*

Since the majority of Christians in the early apostolic times were married, and since even the Apostles themselves were married, and since they not only ate meat regularly, but even ate foods on Saturdays prior to communing on Saturday nights (as we see was the custom at the time of St. Paul the Apostle), in what kind of way were the Christians of the early apostolic times *"ascetics and temperate and fasters"* that *"fasted in the fine and broader sense,"* as Bp. Kirykos informs us, and that their supposed lack of meat and marriage is the reason why *"they were worthy to commune?"*

The only phrase in Bp. Kirykos' entire statement that is worthy of attention is his advice that *"we must return to those early apostolic times."* Indeed, may God grant that we return to those early apostolic times when bishops were not such liars, frauds, hypocrites, Pelagians, Pharisees, Sabbatians, Protopapists, Manicheans, heretics! May God grant that we return to those early apostolic times when bishops actually obeyed the Law of God and not their own old wives' tales! May God grant that we return to those early apostolic times when laymen could find a true shepherd instead of so many wolves in sheep's clothing! May the Lord grant!

Now, as for anyone who may continue to think that if someone eats meat that this act in and of itself makes them sinful, defiled, corrupt, or unworthy, to them we must ask: Can the Holy Trinity ever become sinful, defiled, corrupt or unworthy? Certainly they would not dare to ever believe such a blasphemy that the perfect and all-good Godhead could ever be deemed sinful, defiled, corrupt or unworthy. But what if they were to be informed that the Three Angels who visited Abraham, these Three Persons who are the Typos and Image of the Holy Trinity, actually ate meat? But how is this possible? How is it possible that the Divine Vision seen of the Patriarch Abraham could dare to eat something as "disgusting" and "sinful" as meat? Yet, the Three Angels who visited Abraham, these Three Persons who are the Image and Typos of the Holy Trinity, did in fact eat meat! For it is written:

"And the Lord appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre: and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day; And he lift up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood by him: and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground, And said, My Lord, if now I have

*found favour in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant: Let a little water, I pray you, be fetched, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree: And I will fetch a morsel of bread, and comfort ye your hearts; after that ye shall pass on: for therefore are ye come to your servant. And they said, So do, as thou hast said. And Abraham hastened into the tent unto Sarah, and said, Make ready quickly three measures of fine meal, knead it, and make cakes upon the hearth. **And Abraham ran unto the herd, and fetched a calf tender and good, and gave it unto a young man; and he hastened to dress it. And he took butter, and milk, and the calf which he had dressed, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree, and they did eat** (Genesis 18:1-8)."*

Shudder O heavens! Groan O earth! How is it possible that the Three Persons who visited Abraham—these Three Persons who are the Image and Typos of the Holy Trinity—could ever fall into such a “disgusting” and “defiling” act? How could they “sin” by daring to eat meat? The answer is that the Three Persons neither sinned, nor were they defiled. This was actually a prophetic vision of the Divine Economy. For not only was God to eat flesh, but “One of the Trinity” was Himself to become flesh! *“And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:14).”*

Yes, the Word of God received a human soul and a human body, which grew to have every bone intact and every muscle in place. The Word of God also received typical human organs, including a brain, heart and liver, as well as lungs, kidneys and bowels. Were these not disgusting for the God-man to receive? Perhaps in the mind of a Manichaeon, but for Christians this was the Divine Economy. When becoming man, the Word of God not only received all these human organs, but also even male genitalia. Thus on the eighth day after his birth he was circumcised according to the Law of Moses. Was this organ not disgusting for the God-man, Jesus Christ, to possess? Perhaps in the mind of a Manichaeon, but for Christians this was all part of the Divine Economy. Before Jesus Christ was born, he grew inside a virginal womb. When he was born, he passed through the virginal female genitalia. But the Mother of God did not lose her virginity, but remained whole and intact despite the delivery of the child. Was this not disgusting for the God-man, Jesus Christ, to pass through? Perhaps in the mind of a Manichaeon, but for Christians this was the Divine Economy. Then the God-man, Jesus Christ, according to his humanity, hungered and thirsted. So for this reason, as a babe, he suckled milk from his mother’s breasts. Was this not disgusting for the God-man, according to his humanity, to do? Perhaps in the mind of a Manichaeon, but for Christians this was all part of the Divine Economy. Then he grew in stature, and he ate of the foods that are prescribed by the Law of Moses. Since he was eating, it is only natural that he was also defecating and

urinating. Was this not disgusting for the God-man Christ, according to his humanity, to do? Perhaps in the mind of a Manichaeon, but for Christians this was all part of the natural daily process in the life of the Lord Jesus Christ, who was made flesh for the purpose of saving the world. Certainly it was a great concession for God to become a man, but “concession” is the very meaning of *oekonomia* (Greek: οἰκονομία) in the term “Divine Economy.”

Finally, the God-man Christ informed the world that this flesh he had received, this Body and Blood, was the Heavenly Bread that was to be eaten by all who believe in him, so that they may have everlasting life. Jesus Christ commanded us to eat his human body! Is this not absolutely disgusting? Is this not even cannibalistic? Perhaps in the mind of a Manichaeon, but for Christians this is the Divine Economy. *“Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world. Then said they unto him, Lord, evermore give us this bread. And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst (John 6:32-35).”*

But the Pharisees, since they were also Manicheans to a degree, could not accept this teaching of being required to eat Christ’s flesh and drink his blood. *“The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying, How can this man give us his flesh to eat? Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me. This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever (John 6:52-58).”*

So impossible was it for the Jews to comprehend this teaching that even some of Jesus’ own disciples departed from him, being unable to accept the notion of eating his flesh and drinking his blood. *“Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard this, said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it? When Jesus knew in himself that his disciples murmured at it, he said unto them, Doth this offend you? What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before? It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life. But there are some of you that believe not. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him. And he said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father. From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him (John 6:60-66).”* Notice that the disbelief

in the teaching of eating Christ's flesh and drinking his blood is contained in a passage that is numbered with the mark of the beast. This is most likely prophetic, for whoever denies the flesh of Christ is not a Christian but an antichrist. *"For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist (2 John 1:7).*

The true disciples accepted the teaching that the Lord Jesus Christ was truly the Word of God in the flesh, and that his flesh was offered to them for food. They truly believed that by eating the Body and drinking the Blood of Jesus Christ, they would have remission of sins and eternal life. These true disciples remained with Christ because they believed, although one of them did not truly believe, but he remained with Christ anyway. *"Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God. Jesus answered them, Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil? He spake of Judas Iscariot the son of Simon: for he it was that should betray him, being one of the twelve (John 6:67-71)."*

This same disciple, namely, Judas Iscariot, who did not truly believe that Christ was the Word of God in the flesh, and did not truly believe in the teaching of eating the Body and drinking the Blood of the Lord, was the very one that betrayed the Lord. Not only this, but he conducted this betrayal on the very night that the Lord Jesus Christ offered his immaculate Body and precious Blood for the first time, that is, on the night of the Mystical Supper.

In order to be a true Christian, and not an antichrist as was Judas Iscariot, a true Christian must believe that the Word of God became flesh in reality, not only in appearance. A true Christian must believe that the Word of God received a real soul consisting of a human mind, a human sense of feeling and a human will. A true Christian must believe that the Word of God received a real body, consisting of a human brain, a human heart and human bowels. A true Christian must believe that the Word of God received bones, marrow, ligaments, muscle, tendons, nerves, arteries, blood and skin. A true Christian must believe that this very human soul and body of Jesus Christ is what they eat and drink every time they partake of Holy Communion.

Thus the Blessed Chrysostom, when he was explaining the words of the Holy Apostle Paul, wrote: *"The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a communion of the Blood of Christ?" Very persuasively spoke he, and awfully. For what he says is this: "This which is in the cup is that which flowed from His side, and of that do we partake..." "For we, who are many, are one bread, one body." "For why speak I of communion?" says he, "we are that self-same body." For what is the bread? The Body of Christ! And what do they become who partake of it? The Body of Christ:*

not many bodies, but one body... I say now, if even a man's garment be what one would not venture inconsiderately to touch, what shall we say of the Body of Him Who is God over all, spotless, pure, associate with the Divine Nature, the Body whereby we are, and live; whereby the gates of hell were broken down and the sanctuaries of heaven opened? How shall we receive this with so great insolence? Let us not, I pray you, let us not slay ourselves by our irreverence, but with all awfulness and purity draw near to It; and when you see It set before you, say thou to yourself: "Because of this Body am I no longer earth and ashes, no longer a prisoner, but free: because of this I hope for heaven, and to receive the good things therein, immortal life, the portion of angels, converse with Christ; this Body, nailed and scourged, was more than death could stand against; this Body the very sun saw sacrificed, and turned aside his beams; for this both the veil was rent in that moment, and rocks were burst asunder, and all the earth was shaken. This is even that Body, the blood-stained, the pierced, and that out of which gushed the saving fountains, the one of blood, the other of water, for all the world." (John Chrysostom, Homily 24 on the First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians).

Blessed Chrysostom also expressed this much more precisely in another homily: *"He hath given to those who desire Him not only to see Him, but even to touch, and eat Him, and fix their teeth in His Flesh, and to embrace Him, and satisfy their love..."* (St. John Chrysostom, *Homily 46 on John, 3.*) Yes, you are to eat the very meat of the crucified and third-day-risen Christ. For it is not good enough to just look upon the crucified Lord. It is not good enough to merely touch his feet or grab his garment. It is not profitable for you to give him a kiss on the cheek as did Judas. But rather, as you see his crucified body, you must bite into his flesh and eat it. As you see his side pierced with a lance and see the blood and water gush forth, you must draw near reverently and drink of it, believing it to be the Fountain of Life. Are you disgusted by this thought? If so, you may be a Manichaean. But if you are not disgusted, but truly believe that when you partake of Holy Communion that you are partaking the real meat and actual blood of the "Word made flesh," then you are a real Orthodox Christian as far as this dogma is concerned.

Remain in this Christian teaching and shun all forms of Manichaeism, be it Paulicianism, Bogomilism or the new heresy of the so-called "Genuine Orthodox Christian" Bishop Kirykos of Mesogaea and Laureotica. Perhaps it was right that his own Synodal President, the late Archbishop Andrew Anestes (+21 September, 2005), denounced him and removed him from the role of Synodal Secretary in 2001, by a unanimous vote of the entire Synod of Bishops. Perhaps it was also right that, following Archbishop Andrew's repose, the Synod of Archbishop Nicholas suspended Bp. Kirykos even from his episcopal duties in 2005 and deposed him from the office of the priesthood in 2007, reducing him to the rank of a simple monk. Perhaps it was also right

that in 2009 the same Synod went even further and removed from him the monastic garb, restoring him to the name he held while a layman, thereafter referring to him as "Mr. Menas Kontogiannis." For no true priestly office can be held by a man who for thirty years has disrupted the Church, re-written history, "systematized" the old ecclesiology to suit his own misconceptions, created many schisms, and has now fallen into countless heresies including Manichaeism. He is Christian perhaps in the appearance of works. He is Christian perhaps in name. But although he appears to live, he is in fact spiritually dead. To him the Lord says: *"I know thy works: that thou hast the name; that thou livest; but thou art dead (Rev. 3:1-2)."*

In conclusion, meat and marriage are not sinful. The Image and Typos of the Holy Trinity ate meat. For even "One of the Trinity" became meat himself, in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. He offers us this very meat, consisting of His immaculate Body and precious Blood. This is a Great Mystery, and it is the Marriage Feast of the Bridegroom, Christ, and His Holy Bride, the Church. Our Lord Jesus Christ, taught us to pray to the Father to give us this food daily for the remission of sins: *"Give us day by day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins (Luke 11:3-4)."* He offers us this Heavenly Bread for our spiritual and physical nourishment. He offers His immaculate Body and his precious Blood in the appearance of bread and wine, respectively, for us to eat continually, for the remission of our sins and for eternal life. Amen.