

SPIRITUAL PATH

REMEMBERING SACRED TRADITION AND REFERRING TO THE HOLY FATHERS OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH

Canons of the Holy Sixth Ecumenical Council

69. Let it not be permitted to anyone among all the laity to enter within the sacred altar, with the exception that the Imperial power and authority is in no way or manner excluded therefrom whenever it wishes to offer gifts to the Creator, in accordance with a certain most ancient tradition.

Interpretation.

The holy Bema is consecrated to those in holy orders. For this reason the present Canon prohibits every layman from entering it, except only that person who is the Emperor or King; and he is excepted not as a layman, but as having power and authority and as one anointed of the Lord, who has been permitted to enter it, in accordance with a most ancient tradition, whenever he wishes to offer gifts to God his Creator, and to partake of the Holy Mysteries.¹

¹ Note that, according to the Ecclesiastical History of Theodoret (Book V, ch. 17), notwithstanding the fact that the believer Emperor Theodosius was absolved by St. Ambrose of guilt due to the foul murder he had caused, yet, in spite of this, when he offered the gifts to God inside the Holy Bema and expected to commune there, St. Ambrose would not let him in, telling him that “the inner sanctuary, O Emperor, is accessible to priests alone”; and he was ordered to stay out of the Bema. Thereafter even when the Emperor went to Constantinople, he offered the gifts to God inside the Holy Bema, but immediately stepped outside, and did not go back in to commune, according to custom. For, says Theodoret, after offering the gifts at the sacred table, he at once went out, the most faithful emperor thus showing by his example that emperors who have committed foul murders ought not to commune inside the Bema. See also Nicephorus Callistus, Book XII, ch. 41. Hence let priests and confessors be induced to see to it that the unlawful custom prevailing in many places be cut out — the custom, I mean, of letting laymen come into the Holy Bema, which, failing to distinguish between priests and laymen, causes the latter to incur the penalty which befell King Ahaz, who, though a layman, undertook to perform the functions of those in holy orders. For they too, in such a case, are in a way usurping the functions of priests by entering the place allotted to priests. But if it is unlawful for laymen even to enter the Bema, how much more unlawful must be that which some ignorant priests do in having laymen or anagnosts prepare the holy elements in the holy prothesis on Maundy Thursday inside the Bema! So, for the love of God, let them cease doing this, lest they incur deposition from their holy order. Symeon of Thessalonica, on the other hand, says (ch. 143) that an emperor may commune within the Bema only at the time when he is being anointed as emperor, after from the deacons, and not at the Holy Table, but at a credence table placed beside it and having an antimension laid upon it.

Concord.

That explains why c. XLIV of Laodicea forbids women to enter the sanctuary of the sacrificial altar. Canon I, however, of Patriarch Nicholas allows those monks to enter the Holy Bema who are not guilty of any transgression reflecting upon the modesty of the monastic habit, in order to light the candles or wax tapers. But even St. Nicephorus, in his c. XV, says that nuns ought to enter the Holy Bema for the purpose of lighting the lights and setting things in order and sweeping it. If, however, a person is not a monk but only a novice, he cannot go into the Holy Bema, according to what Balsamon says in his interpretation of c. I of Nicholas, q.v.

70. Let it not be permissible for women to talk during Holy Mass, but in accordance with the words of Paul the Apostle, "let your women remain silent. For it has not been permitted them to talk, but to obey, as the law directs. If they wish to learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home."

"As in all churches of the saints," says Paul the Apostle, *"in the churches let your women remain silent. For it has not been permitted them to talk but to obey, as the law directs. If they wish to learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home"* (1 Cor. 14:33–35.)

"Let the women learn quietly with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to exercise authority over a man, but to be quiet. For Adam was formed first, and then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman having been deceived became at fault. But she shall be saved through child-bearing, if they abide in faith and love and sanctity with sobriety" (1 Tim. 2:11–15).

Interpretation.

According to the words of this Canon and according to the words of St. Paul, women are prohibited from teaching either in holy temples (churches) or outside thereof, for St. Paul does not mean by "church" the temple itself, but a "congregation of people" anywhere; and still more are they prohibited from chanting either in a choir of their own or along with men.

"For it is a shame for women to talk in church" (1 Cor. 14:35). This means that women should keep silent in church, and out of church wherever there is a congregation of people. The fact that the word *talk* is used here, and not the word *speak*, controverts and overthrows the allegation put forward by some persons that only teaching is forbidden to women but not chanting; for talk includes any sort of vocal utterance, and not merely articulate speech. In fact, women are not allowed to let their voice be heard at all within the sacred temple of the church. They may, of course, sing and chant in their hearts praises and blessings to God, but not with their lips.

Before God formed Eve, He said: *"It is not good that man should be alone; let us make for him a helper meet for him"* (Gen. 2:18). This means that woman was created, not to rule man, but to help him and to be ruled by him. Woman is a teacher of every virtue by word and deed within her own province at home; but she is not allowed even to speak or sing within the sacred precincts of the church. Woman's job is to bear children and rear them in the belief and love of God, to uphold the sanctity and sobriety of marriage, and to shun adultery as a thing that is odious to God. By so doing she will be saved, and not otherwise; by leaving this path and failing in these duties, she invites perdition.

"If anyone think himself a prophet or a spiritual agent, let him acknowledge that what I write unto you are commandments of the Lord. But if anyone is ignorant, let him be ignorant" (1 Cor. 14:37–38). A true prophet or teacher or spiritual agent has the spirit of Christ and does not disagree with Christ's Apostle; he easily discerns and believes that St. Paul's commandments are commandments of Christ. Whoever, on the other hand, does not discern and believe this, yet thinks that he is a prophet or a spiritual agent, is merely deluding himself; he is a false prophet lacking the spirit of Christ.

Teaching and chanting are inconsistent with the nature and destiny of a Christian woman, just as are the priesthood and the bishopric. Eve, the woman formed by God, was the first to teach Adam once, in Paradise, and she ruined everything; that is why women are forbidden to talk in churches. The greatest adornment of women is silence. Let their example be Mary, the New Woman and Child of God, who alone has the honor of having had her speech recorded in history and handed down in the ninth ode of the Church; this refers to her speech and that of Elizabeth. Therefore let Christian women emulate her. The ancient idolaters had priestesses to officiate at the altars and in the temples of idols, in which demons were worshiped; and hence it is that deluded heretics derived this impious custom of theirs of letting women teach and sing and govern in their churches. Shall we Orthodox Christians imitate them? By no means!

It is recorded in the *Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius* (Book 7, ch. 30) that a council of bishops met in Antioch in the third century after Christ from various cities for the purpose of trying Paul the bishop of Samosat, who was rather a sophist and magician than a bishop and who, in addition to other heresies, had introduced a choir of women into the church of Antioch. That council addressed a letter to bishops Dionysius of Rome and Maximus of Alexandria containing the following phrases: *"Having suppressed the psalms to our Lord Jesus Christ on the pretext that they are modern psalms and the writings of modern men, who is preparing women to chant to himself in the midst of the church on the great day of Easter whom one would shudder merely to listen to."*

Women were never permitted to teach or to chant in the church along with the sacred cantors or in a choir of their own. Female choirs are an unexampled innovation involving many perils and capable of leading to many scandals, for woman's voice is more attractive and more pathetic than man's. The appearance of women in the church choir constitutes a stumbling block; for the eyes and ears of the congregation are at once turned to them, and, becoming intoxicated with the sight and sound of the highstrung melodramatic voices of women, they are languorously effeminated in mind and rendered incapable of enjoying the modest and contrite songs of the Church; thus the church choir gradually becomes transformed into a theatrical chorus!

Canon LXXV of the Sixth Ecumenical Synod decrees the following with reference to church choirs: "It is our wish that those who come to church to chant should neither employ disorderly yelling and strain their natural voices to scream, nor recite anything inappropriate and not suited to a church, but that they should offer such psalmodies with great care contrition to God, who listens and looks on in secret." "*The children of Israel shall be reverent,*" saith the sacred saying (Lev. 15:31).

The holy liturgy and sacred hymnody presented in church has the purpose of offering prayers to propitiate God for our sins. Whoever prays and supplicates should be of humble and contrite mind; yelling indicates rudeness and irreverence of mind. But voices and faces of female choirs and the psalmody of European quartets represent a theatrical mind rather than a modest ecclesiastical mind. What is it that is unsuited to the church? Effeminate songs (melodies) and trills (which means the same thing as the warbles of old) and an excessive variety of tones that inclines to whorish songs, Zonaras, an interpreter of the Canons, says.

The children of Israel after Christ are the pious Christians, who should be imbued with fear of God and reverence while within the church. God is not pleased with variety of melodies and voices, but with contrition and repentance of the heart. This is easily understood when we remember that man is pleased to listen to melodies and to look at pretty faces, whereas God looks into man's soul in the depths of the heart and delights in its reverence, which is manifested by *humbleness* of behavior.²

² That is why *divine* Chrysostom also says: "Woman taught once (i.e., Adam in Paradise) and destroyed everything. For this reason, let her not teach." And again: "For so silent must she remain," he says, "that not merely as regarding temporal, but also even as regarding spiritual matters she must not speak a word in church. That is an ornament, that is modesty; that can ornament her far more than clothes" (Sermon 9 on 1 Tim., p. 283 of vol. IV).

Canons of the Holy Local Council of Laodicea

34. It has pleased the Council to decree that no one shall sell any ecclesiastical property, or anything owned by a church; which thing, if it affords no revenue, and there is a serious exigency, should be presented to the eyes of the Primate (or Chief Bishop), and together with the fixed number of Bishops, he should deliberate as to what ought to be done with it. But if there be such an urgent exigency of the church as to preclude deliberation before the sale, the Bishop must call in neighboring Bishops as witnesses, taking care to point out to the Synod all the circumstances that have beset his church; which if he fail to do so he shall be responsible to God and to the Synod, and shall be alienated from his own honor.

(An cc XXXI, XLI; c. XII of the 7th; c. XV of Ancyra; c. XXIV of Antioch; c. XLI of Carthage; c. II of Cyril.).

Interpretation.

Church property ought to be inalienable and irremovable from the churches owning it. For this reason the present Canon forbids every bishop to sell anything belonging to his church. But if it should happen that any real estate of a church fails to produce fruits or a profit, and an occasion arises in which it becomes necessary to sell the property owing to some urgent exigency, the bishop must communicate this fact to the Metropolitan, and they must take counsel and deliberate concerning this matter with the twelve bishops appointed for this purpose. But if there should ensue any such great urgency that time does not suffice for such interrogation and the holding of a deliberate council, he must at least call in the neighboring bishops as witnesses, in order to be able to use their testimony as evidence to show to the Synod which is held annually and declare all the circumstances and needs of his church, on account of which he was compelled to sell the real estate. If he fail to do this, he is to become responsible both to God and to the Synod, and is to be shorn of his prelatial dignity and deposed from office. See also Ap. c. XXXVIII.