

SPIRITUAL PATH

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

Canons of the Holy Apostles

8. If any Bishop, or Presbyter, or Deacon, or anyone else in the sacerdotal list, fail to partake of communion when the oblation has been offered, he must tell the reason, and if it is good excuse, he shall receive a pardon. But if he refuses to tell it, he shall be excommunicated, on the ground that he has become a cause of harm to the laity and has instilled a suspicion as against the offerer of it that the latter has failed to present it in a sound manner.

Interpretation.

It is the intention of the present Canon that all, and especially those in holy orders, should be prepared beforehand and worthy to partake of the divine mysteries when the oblation is offered, or what amounts to the sacred service of the body of Christ. In case any one of them fail to partake when present at the divine liturgy, or communion, he is required to tell the reason or cause why he did not partake: then if it is a just and righteous and reasonable one, he is to receive a pardon, or be excused; but if he refuses to tell it, he is to be excommunicated, since he also becomes a cause of harm to the laity by leading the multitude to suspect that that priest who officiated at liturgy was not worthy and that it was on this account that the person in question refused to communicate from him.

9. All those faithful who enter and listen to the Scriptures, but do not stay for prayer and Holy Communion must be excommunicated, on the ground that they are causing the Church a breach of order.

(Canon LXVI of the 6th; c. II of Antioch; cc. III, XIII of Tim.).

Interpretation.

Both exegetes of the sacred Canons — Zonaras, I mean, and Balsamon — in interpreting the present Apostolical Canon agree in saying that all Christians who enter the church when the divine liturgy is being celebrated, and who listen to the divine Scriptures, but do not remain to the end nor partake, must be excommunicated, as causing a disorder to the church. Thus Zonaras says verbatim: “The present Canon demands that all those who are in the church when the holy sacrifice is being performed shall patiently remain to the end

for prayer and holy communion." For even the laity then were required to partake continually. Balsamon says: "The ordainment of the present Canon is very acrid; for it excommunicates those attending church but not staying to the end nor partaking."

Concord.

Agreeably with the present Canon c. II of Antioch ordains that all those who enter the church during the time of divine liturgy and listen to the Scriptures, but turn away and avoid (which is the same as to say, on account of pretended reverence and humility they shun, according to interpretation of the best interpreter, Zonaras) divine communion in a disorderly manner are to be excommunicated. The continuity of communion is confirmed also by c. LXVI of the 6th, which commands Christians throughout Novational Week (i.e., Easter Week) to take time off for psalms and hymns, and to indulge in the divine mysteries to their hearts' content. But indeed even from the third canon of St. Timothy the continuity of communion can be inferred. For if he permits one possessed by demons to partake, not however every day, but only on Sunday (though in other copies it is written, on occasions only), it is likely that those riot possessed by demons are permitted to communicate even more frequently. Some contend that for this reason it was that the same Timothy, in c. III, ordains that on Saturday and Sunday that a man and his wife should not have mutual intercourse, in order, that is, that they might partake, since in that period it was only on those days, as we have said, that the divine liturgy was celebrated. This opinion of theirs is confirmed by divine Justin, who says in his second apology that "on the day of the sun" — meaning, Sunday — all Christians used to assemble in the churches (which on this account were also called "*Kyriaka*," i.e., places of the Lord) and partook of the divine mysteries. That, on the other hand, all Christians ought to frequent divine communion is confirmed from the West by divine Ambrose, who says thus: "We see many brethren coming to church negligently, and indeed on Sundays not even being present at the mysteries." And again, in blaming those who fail to partake continually, the same saint says of the mystic bread: "God gave us this bread as a daily affair, and we make it a yearly affair." From Asia, on the other hand, divine Chrysostom demands this of Christians, and, indeed, *par excellence*. And see in his preamble to his commentary of the Epistle to the Romans, discourse VIII, and to the Hebrews, discourse XVIII, on the Acts, and Sermon V on the First Epistle to Timothy, and Sermon XVII on the Epistle to the Hebrews, and his discourse on those at first fasting on Easter, Sermon III to the Ephesians, discourse addressed to those who leave the divine assemblies (*synaxeis*), Sermon XXVIII on the First Epistle to the Corinthians, a discourse addressed to blissful Philogonius, and a discourse about fasting. Therein you can see how that goodly tongue strives and how many exhortations it rhetorically urges in order to induce Christians to

partake at the same time, and worthily, and continually. But see also Basil the Great, in his epistle to Caesaria Patricia and in his first discourse about baptism. But then how can it be thought that whoever pays any attention to the prayers of all the divine liturgy can fail to see plainly enough that all of these are aimed at having it arranged that Christians assembled at the divine liturgy should partake — as many, that is to say, as are worthy?

10. If anyone pray in company with one who has been excommunicated, he shall be excommunicated himself.

Interpretation.

The noun *akoinonetos* has three significations: for, either it denotes one standing in church and praying in company with the rest of the Christians, but not communing with the divine mysteries; or it denotes one who neither communes nor stands and prays with the faithful in the church, but who has been excommunicated from them and is excluded from church and prayer; or finally it may denote any clergyman who becomes excommunicated from the clergy, as, say, a bishop from his fellow bishops, or a presbyter from his fellow presbyters, or a deacon from his fellow deacons, and so on. Accordingly, every *akoinonetos* is the same as saying excommunicated from the faithful who are in the church; and he is at the same time also excommunicated from the Mysteries. But not everyone that is excommunicated from the Mysteries is also excommunicated from the congregation of the faithful, as are deposed clergymen; and from the penitents those who stand together and who neither commune nor stay out of the church like catechumens, as we have said. In the present Canon the word *akoinonetos* is taken in the second sense of the word. That is why it says that whoever prays in company with one who has been excommunicated because of sin from the congregation and prayer of the faithful, even though he should not pray along with them in church, but in a house, whether he be in holy orders or a layman, he is to be excommunicated in the same way as he was from church and prayer with Christians: because that common engagement in prayer which he performs in conjunction with a person that has been excommunicated, wittingly and knowingly him to be such, is aimed at dishonoring and condemning the excommunicator, and traduces him as having excommunicated him wrongly and unjustly.