

Canons of Ancyra

<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3802.htm>

*Discipline was formalized at the Council of Ancyra in 314. Penitents fell into four classes or degrees: 1. WEEPERS – prostrated themselves at the church doors in mourning garments begging to return to good standing from both clergy and laity. 2. HEARERS – were allowed to hear the Scripture lessons and the sermon, but not join the body. 3. KNEELERS – attended public prayers, but only on their knees while the rest stood. 4. STANDERS – could take part in the entire worship service standing, but they were excluded from the communion.*¹

Canon 1 – With regard to those presbyters who have offered sacrifices and afterwards returned to the conflict, not with hypocrisy, but in sincerity, it has seemed good that they may retain the honour of their chair; provided they had not used management, arrangement, or persuasion, so as to appear to be subjected to the torture, when it was applied only in seeming and pretence. Nevertheless it is not lawful for them to make the oblation, nor to preach, nor in short to perform any act of sacerdotal function.

Canon 2 – It is likewise decreed that deacons who have sacrificed and afterwards resumed the conflict, shall enjoy their other honours, but shall abstain from every sacred ministry, neither bringing forth the bread and the cup, nor making proclamations. Nevertheless, if any of the bishops shall observe in them distress of mind and meek humiliation, it shall be lawful to the bishops to grant more indulgence, or to take away [what has been granted].

Canon 3 – Those who have fled and been apprehended, or have been betrayed by their servants; or those who have been otherwise despoiled of their goods, or have endured tortures, or have been imprisoned and abused, declaring themselves to be Christians; or who have been forced to receive something which their persecutors violently thrust into their hands, or meat [offered to idols], continually professing that they were Christians; and who, by their whole apparel, and demeanour, and humility of life, always give evidence of grief at what has happened; these persons, inasmuch as they are free from sin, are not to be repelled from the communion; and if, through an extreme strictness or ignorance of some things, they have been repelled, let them immediately be re-admitted. This shall hold good alike of clergy and laity. It has also been considered whether laymen who have fallen under the same compulsion may be admitted to orders, and we have decreed that, since they have in no respect been guilty, they may be ordained; provided their past course of life be found to have been upright.

Canon 4 – Concerning those who have been forced to sacrifice, and who, in addition, have partaken of feasts in honour of the idols; as many as were haled away,² but afterwards went up with a cheerful countenance, and wore their costliest apparel, and partook with indifference of the feast provided; it is decreed that all such be hearers for one year, and prostrators for three years, and that they communicate in prayers only for two years, and then return to full communion.

Canon 5 – As many, however, as went up in mourning attire and sat down and ate, weeping throughout the whole entertainment, if they have fulfilled the three years as prostrators, let them be received without oblation; and if they did not eat, let them be prostrators two years, and in the third year let them communicate without oblation, so that in the fourth year they may be received into full communion. But the bishops have the right, after considering the character of their conversion, either to deal with them more leniently, or to extend the time. But, first of all, let their life before and since be thoroughly examined, and let the indulgence be determined accordingly.

¹ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Vol. 2, p. 189.

² Hale: to cause to do something through pressure or necessity, by physical, moral or intellectual means (*coerced*).

Canon 6 – Concerning those who have yielded merely upon threat of penalties and of the confiscation of their goods, or of banishment, and have sacrificed, and who till this present time have not repented nor been converted, but who now, at the time of this synod, have approached with a purpose of conversion, it is decreed that they be received as hearers till the Great Day, and that after the Great Day they be prostrators for three years, and for two years more communicate without oblation, and then come to full communion, so as to complete the period of six full years. And if any have been admitted to penance before this synod, let the beginning of the six years be reckoned to them from that time. Nevertheless, if there should be any danger or prospect of death whether from disease or any other cause, let them be received, but under limitation.

Canon 7 – Concerning those who have partaken at a heathen feast in a place appointed for heathens, but who have brought and eaten their own meats, it is decreed that they be received after they have been prostrators two years; but whether with oblation, every bishop must determine after he has made examination into the rest of their life.³

Canon 8 – Let those who have twice or thrice sacrificed under compulsion, be prostrators four years, and communicate without oblation two years, and the seventh year they shall be received to full communion.

Canon 9 – As many as have not merely apostatized, but have risen against their brethren and forced them [to apostatize], and have been guilty of their being forced, let these for three years take the place of hearers, and for another term of six years that of prostrators, and for another year let them communicate without oblation, in order that, when they have fulfilled the space of ten years, they may partake of the communion; but during this time the rest of their life must also be enquired into.

Canon 10 – They who have been made deacons, declaring when they were ordained that they must marry, because they were not able to abide so, and who afterwards have married, shall continue in their ministry, because it was conceded to them by the bishop. But if any were silent on this matter, undertaking at their ordination to abide as they were, and afterwards proceeded to marriage, these shall cease from the diaconate.

Canon 11 – It is decreed that virgins who have been betrothed, and who have afterwards been carried off by others, shall be restored to those to whom they had formerly been betrothed, even though they may have suffered violence from the ravisher.

Canon 12 – It is decreed that they who have offered sacrifice before their baptism, and were afterwards baptized, may be promoted to orders, inasmuch as they have been cleansed.

Canon 13 – It is not lawful for Chorepiscopi to ordain presbyters or deacons, and most assuredly not presbyters of a city, without the commission of the bishop given in writing, in another parish.

Canon 14 – It is decreed that among the clergy, presbyters and deacons who abstain from flesh shall taste of it, and afterwards, if they shall so please, may abstain. But if they disdain it, and will not even eat herbs served with flesh, but disobey the canon, let them be removed from their order.

³ Hefele: Several Christians tried with worldly prudence, to take a middle course. On the one hand, hoping to escape persecution, they were present at the feasts of the heathen sacrifices, which were held in the buildings adjoining the temples; and on the other, in order to appease their consciences, they took their own food, and touched nothing that had been offered to the gods. These Christians forgot that St. Paul had ordered that meats sacrificed to the gods should be avoided, not because they were tainted in themselves, as the idols were nothing, but from another, and in fact a twofold reason: first, Because, in partaking of them, some still had the idols in their hearts, that is to say, they were still attached to the worship of idols, and thereby sinned; and secondly, Because others scandalized their brethren, and sinned in that way. To these two reasons a third may be added, namely, the hypocrisy and the duplicity of those Christians who wished to appear heathens, and nevertheless to remain Christians. The Synod punished them with two years of penance in the third degree, and gave to each bishop the right, at the expiration of this time, either to admit them to communion, or to make them remain some time longer in the fourth degree.

Canon 15 – Concerning things belonging to the church, which presbyters may have sold when there was no bishop, it is decreed that the Church property shall be reclaimed; and it shall be in the discretion of the bishop whether it is better to receive the purchase price, or not; for oftentimes the revenue of the things sold might yield them the greater value.

Canon 16 – Let those who have been or who are guilty of bestial lusts, if they have sinned while under twenty years of age, be prostrators fifteen years, and afterwards communicate in prayers; then, having passed five years in this communion, let them have a share in the oblation. But let their life as prostrators be examined, and so let them receive indulgence; and if any have been insatiable in their crimes, then let their time of prostration be prolonged. And if any who have passed this age and had wives, have fallen into this sin, let them be prostrators twenty-five years, and then communicate in prayers; and, after they have been five years in the communion of prayers, let them share the oblation. And if any married men of more than fifty years of age have so sinned, let them be admitted to communion only at the point of death.

Canon 17 – Defilers of themselves with beasts, being also leprous, who have infected others [with the leprosy of this crime], the holy Synod commands to pray among the hiemantes.

Canon 18 – If any who have been constituted bishops, but have not been received by the parish to which they were designated, shall invade other parishes and wrong the constituted [bishops] there, stirring up seditions against them, let such persons be suspended from office and communion. But if they are willing to accept a seat among the presbyterate, where they formerly were presbyters, let them not be deprived of that honour. But if they shall act seditiously against the bishops established there, the honour of the presbyterate also shall be taken from them and themselves expelled.

Canon 19 – If any persons who profess virginity shall disregard their profession, let them fulfil the term of digamists. And, moreover, we prohibit women who are virgins from living with men as sisters.

Canon 20 – If the wife of anyone has committed adultery or if any man commit adultery it seems fit that he shall be restored to full communion after seven years passed in the prescribed degrees [of penance].

Canon 21 – Concerning women who commit fornication, and destroy that which they have conceived, or who are employed in making drugs for abortion, a former decree excluded them until the hour of death, and to this some have assented. Nevertheless, being desirous to use somewhat greater lenity, we have ordained that they fulfil ten years [of penance], according to the prescribed degrees.

Canon 22 – Concerning wilful murderers let them remain prostrators; but at the end of life let them be indulged with full communion.

Canon 23 – Concerning involuntary homicides, a former decree directs that they be received to full communion after seven years [of penance], according to the prescribed degrees; but this second one, that they fulfil a term of five years.

Canon 24 – They who practice divination, and follow the customs of the heathen, or who take men to their houses for the invention of sorceries, or for lustrations, fall under the canon of five years' [penance], according to the prescribed degrees; that is, three years as prostrators, and two of prayer without oblation.

Canon 25 – One who had betrothed a maiden, corrupted her sister, so that she conceived. After that he married his betrothed, but she who had been corrupted hanged herself. The parties to this affair were ordered to be received among the co-standers after ten years [of penance] according to the prescribed degrees.