

# Council of Ancyra (A.D. 314)

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Soon after the death of the Emperor Maximin, a council was held at Ancyra, the capital of Galatia. Only about a dozen [bishops](#) were present, and the lists of subscriptions which are found appended to the canons are not to be depended on, being evidently in their present form of later authorship; as has been shown by the Ballerini. If we may at all trust the lists, it would seem that nearly every part of [Syria](#) and Asia Minor was represented, and that therefore the council while small in numbers was of considerable weight. It is not certain whether Vitalis, ([bishop](#) of [Antioch](#),) presided or Marcellus, who was at the time [bishop](#) of Ancyra. The [honour](#) is by the Libellus Synodicus assigned to the latter.

The disciplinary decrees of this council possess a singular interest as being the first enacted after the ceasing of the [persecution](#) of the [Christians](#) and as providing for the proper treatment of the [lapsed](#). Recently two papyri have been recovered, containing the official certificates granted by the Roman government to those who had lapsed and offered [sacrifice](#).

These [apostates](#) were [obliged](#) to acknowledge in public their adhesion to the national religion of the empire, and then were provided with a document certifying to this fact to keep them from further trouble. Dr. Harnack (*Preussische Jahrbücher*) writing of the yielding of the [lapsed](#) says:

The Church condemned this as lying and denial of the [faith](#), and after the termination of the [persecution](#), these unhappy people were partly [excommunicated](#), partly [obliged](#) to submit to severe discipline. Who would ever suppose that the records of their shame would come doom to our time?— and yet it has actually happened. Two of these papers have been preserved, contrary to all likelihood, by the sands of [Egypt](#) which so carefully keep what has been entrusted to them. The first was found by Krebs in a heap of papyrus, that had come to Berlin; the other was found by Wessely in the papyrus collection of Archduke Rainer. 'I, Diogenes, have constantly [sacrificed](#) and made offerings, and have eaten in your presence the sacrificial meat, and I petition you to give me a certificate.' Who today, without deep emotion, can read this paper and measure the trouble and terror of heart under which the [Christians](#) of that day collapsed?

## Canons

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### [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.

[John Zonaras](#) writes: Of those that yielded to the tyrants in the [persecution](#), and offered [sacrifice](#), some, after having been subjected to torture, being unable to withstand to the end its force and intensity, were conquered, and denied the [faith](#); some, through effeminacy, before they experienced any suffering, gave way, and lest they should seem to [sacrifice](#) voluntarily they persuaded the executioners, either by [bribes](#) or entreaties, to manifest perhaps a greater degree of severity against them, and seemingly to apply the torture to them, in order that [sacrificing](#) under these circumstances they might seem to have denied Christ, conquered by force, and not through effeminacy.

## **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.

In the translation the word abused is given as the equivalent of περισχισθέντας, which [Zonaras](#) translated, if their clothes have been torn from their bodies, and this is quite accurate if the reading is correct, but Routh has found in the Bodleian several mss. which had περισχεθέντας. [Hefele](#) adopts this reading and translates declaring themselves to be [Christians](#) but who have subsequently been vanquished, whether their oppressors have by force put [incense](#) into their hands or have compelled them, etc. Hammond translates and have been harassed by their persecutors forcibly putting something into their hands or who have been compelled, etc. The phrase is obscure at best with either reading.

## 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, 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.

In the Greek the word for full communion is τὸ τέλειον (the perfection), an expression frequently used by early writers to denote the Holy Communion. *Vide* [Suicer](#), *Thesaurus ad h. v.*

## 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.

## 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.

[John Zonaras](#): But should any of those debarred from communion as penitents be seized with illness or in any other way be brought near to death, they may be received to communion; but in accordance with this law or distinction, that if they escape death and recover their health, they shall be altogether deprived again of communion until they have finished their six years penance.

## **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.

[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 had still the [idols](#) in their hearts, that is to say, 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 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](#).

[Van Espen](#) comments: "The case proposed to the synod and decided in this canon was as follows: When the [bishop](#) was willing to ordain two to the [diaconate](#), one of them declared that he did not intend to bind himself to preserving perpetual continence, but intended to get married, because he had not the power to remain continent. The other said nothing. The [bishop](#) laid his hands on each and conferred the [diaconate](#)."

After the ordination it fell out that both got married, the question propounded is, What must be done in each case? The synod ruled that he who had made protestation at his ordination should remain in his ministry, because of the license of the [bishop](#), that is that he might contract matrimony after the reception of the [diaconate](#). With regard to him who kept silence the synod declares that he should cease from his ministry.

The resolution of the synod to the first question shows that there was a general law which bound the [deacons](#) to continence; but this synod judged it meet that the [bishops](#) for just [cause](#) might dispense with this law, and this license or dispensation was deemed to have been given by the [bishop](#) if he ordained him after his protestation at the time of his ordination that he intended to be married, because he could not remain as he was; giving by the act of ordination his tacit approbation. Moreover from this decision it is also evident that not only was the ordained [deacon](#) allowed to enter but also to use matrimony after his ordination. Moreover the [deacon](#) who after this protestation entered and used matrimony, not only remained a [deacon](#), but continued in the exercise of his ministry.

## **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.

Compare St. Basil's twenty-second canon in his letter to Amphilochius, where it is so ruled.

## **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.

If the first part of the thirteenth canon is easy to understand, the second, on the contrary, presents a great difficulty; for a [priest](#) of a town could not in any case have the power of consecrating [priests](#) and [deacons](#), least of all in a strange diocese. Many of the most learned men have, for this reason, supposed that the Greek text of the second half of the canon, as we have read it, is incorrect or defective. It wants, say they, ποιεῖν τι, or *aliquid agere*, i.e., to complete a religious function. To confirm this supposition, they have appealed to several ancient versions, especially to that of Isidore: *sed*

*nec presbyteris civitatis sine episcopipræcepto amplius aliquid imperare, vel sine auctoritate literarum ejus in unaquaque* (some read ἐν ἐκάστη instead of ἐν ἐτέρῃ) *parochia aliquid agere*. The ancient Roman ms. of the canons, *Codex Canonum*, has the same reading, only that it has *provincia* instead

of *parochia*. Fulgentius Ferrandus, [deacon](#) of [Carthage](#), who long ago made a collection of canons, translates in the same way in

his *Breviatio Canonum*: *Ut presbyteri civitatis sine jussu episcopi nihil jubeant, nec in unaquaque parochia aliquid agant*. [Van Espen](#) has explained this canon in the same way.

Routh has given another interpretation. He maintained that there was not a word missing in this canon, but that at the commencement one ought to read, according to several mss. χωρηπισκόποις in the dative, and further down ἀλλὰ μὴν μηδὲ instead of ἀλλὰ μηδὲ then πρεσβυτέρους (in the accusative) πόλεως and finally ἐκάστη instead of ἐτέρα, and that we must therefore translate, *Chorepiscopi* are not permitted to consecrate [priests](#) and [deacons](#) (for the country) still less (ἀλλὰ μὴν μηδὲ) can they consecrate [priests](#) for the town without the consent of the [bishop](#) of the place. The Greek text, thus modified according to some mss., especially those in the Bodleian Library, certainly gives a good meaning. Still ἀλλὰ μὴν μηδὲ does not mean, *but still less*: it means, *but certainly not*, which makes a considerable difference.

Besides this, it can very seldom have happened that the *chorepiscopi* ordained [presbyters](#) or [deacons](#) for a town; and if so, they were already forbidden, at least implicitly, in the first part of the canon.

## 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.

There is a serious dispute about the reading of the Greek text. I have followed Routh, who, relying on three mss. the *Collectio* of John of [Antioch](#) and the Latin versions, reads εἰ δὲ βδελύσσονται instead of the εἰ δὲ βούλονται of the ordinary text, which as Bp. Beveridge had pointed out before has no meaning unless a μή be introduced.

[Zonaras](#) points out that the canon chiefly refers to the Love feasts.

I cannot agree with [Hefele](#) in his translation of the last clause. He makes the reference to this present canon, I think it is clearly to the 53 (52) of the so-called Canons of the Apostles, τῷ κανόνι the well-known Canon.

## 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.

[Hefele](#): "If the purchaser of [ecclesiastical](#) properties has realized more by the temporary revenue of such properties than the price of the purchase, the Synod thinks there is no occasion to restore him this price, as he has already received a sufficient indemnity from the revenue, and as, according to the rules then in force, *interest* drawn from the purchase money was not permitted. Besides, the purchaser had done wrong in buying [ecclesiastical](#) property during the vacancy of a see (*sede vacante*). Beveridge and Routh have shown that in the text ἀνακαλεῖσθαι and πρόσσοδον must be read."

## 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 hierarchs.

### **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.

I read ἔθνων for χρόνων and accordingly translate of the [heathen](#).

## **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.