

**Canon LIV.** A bishop or an elder or a deacon who connects himself with the army, and desires to perform these two offices, that he should follow a human calling and the priestly calling, let him be expelled. For it is said: Give unto the Lord that which is the Lord's, and unto the king that which is the king's. He who despises the king or the magistrate, except with justice, him they shall punish; if it be one of the clergy, he shall be deposed, and if a layman, he shall be expelled.

**Canon LV.** Concerning which books of the Old and of the New [Testaments] are to be received in the Christian church. And these books shall all be sacred and honored to the clergy and laity. And these indeed are of the Old Testament:

**Canon LVI.** The writings of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy; Joshua, the son of Nun; Judges; Ruth; four books of Kings, of which the first and the second are one book, the third and the fourth one book; two books of Chronicles; first and second Ezra; one book of Job; Esther; Tobit; Ecclesiastes; one hundred and fifty psalms of David; the proverbs of Solomon; Ecclesiasticus; the Song of Songs; the twelve minor prophets; Isaiah; Jeremiah; Daniel; Ezekiel. These [writings] teach your children. Besides these: the wisdom of Solomon; Judith; three books of Sefaria [Book of Jubilees]; Jesus the son of Sirach, the very wise. Then also the books of the new Law: four gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John; Acts of the Apostles; two letters of Peter; three letters of John; one letter of James; one letter of Jude; fourteen letters of Paul; the Apocalypse or Vision of John; two letters of Clemens.

**Canon LVII.** Concerning the Canons of the Apostles. This we command you, O bishops, in reference to the Synodus: for if you listen to it, you shall be saved and delivered, and there shall be peace unto you forever. But if you do not obey this and do not receive what is in this, [the Lord] will scorn you, and there shall be sadness in your midst forever, and afterwards you shall meet with the judgment which you deserve on account of your transgression. And may God, the only one, and his only begotten Son, and the Holy Spirit, the Maker of all Creation, give unto each one of you peace, and may he help you with all good things, and may you not faint, but be without stain, having no sin. And may he make you worthy of a place in eternal life, through his Son whom he loves, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Living one, the Savior, to whom is glory with the Father and with the Holy Spirit to all eternity, Amen. This is the Synodus of the Apostles, which we have sent with Clemens, and glory [be] to God to all eternity, Amen.

(Available in PDF format at <https://agape-biblia.org/literatura/#constitutions>)

## The Apostolic Constitutions, Translated from the Ethiopic<sup>1</sup> By Prof. George H. Schodde, Ph.D.

(source: Pre-Nicene Fathers, edited by Philip Schaff - public domain)

**Introduction.** Ever since the discovery and publication of the "Teaching of the Twelve Apostles," by Philotheus Bryennius, the researches into the oldest church history, and especially into the development and growth of ecclesiastical institutions and governments, have received a remarkable impetus. The Didache was soon discovered to be of importance not only for its own day and date, but also because it was the fountain-head of a class of literature and the original source of ideas of church governments and ordinances which later in the life and work of the church exhibited such remarkable potency, and do even to this day in some of the ancient churches of the East, such as, e.g., we find in Ethiopia. The final outcome of this literature, and the ideas for which it is the bearer, we have in the so-called Apostolic Constitutions and the appended Canons. The Constitutions proper consist of eight books, the first six forming one section, the seventh a second, and the eighth a third, to which are added, by way of appendix, Apostolic Canons, eighty-five in all, but of which, however, only fifty secured recognition in the Western Church. The Didache is found to be the basis of the seventh book of these Constitutions.<sup>2</sup> With these books must not be confused the older and more primitive Apostolic Church Order, or the Ecclesiastical Canons of the Holy Apostles, found chiefly in Ethiopic and Arabic versions, and also in one Greek manuscript. It consists of thirty-five articles, with moral injunctions and ecclesiastical ordinances of various kinds, written as though spoken by the Apostles themselves, one or more dicta being assigned to each. This collection is of high antiquity, and can be regarded as the connecting link between the Didache and the Apostolic

<sup>1</sup> Read in December, 1885.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. the interesting discussion and comparisons of Schaff in his "Oldest Church Manual," p. 132 sqq., and 259 sqq.

Constitutions proper.<sup>3</sup> The Canons, of which we give a translation here, are not a portion of the Apostolic Church Order, or those which Ludolf has published in Ethiopic, but are the Ethiopic form of the Canons appended to the Apostolic Constitutions.<sup>4</sup> They thus represent one of the shapes in which the line of thought on church government, first found expressed in the Didache, eventually took under the molding influence of time, nationality, and doctrinal development. And from this standpoint their importance must be judged. They constituted a collection which is more than a curiosity of literature to the student of church history and church government. In the Church of Ethiopia they have had, and theoretically still have, canonical authority. The Canons constitute a part of the so-called "Synodus" of this church, which is for them virtually a "*Corpus Juris Ecclesiastici*," containing, in addition to these Canons, others, claiming Apostolic authority, as also the Constitutions. This collection, like nearly all the Church literature of the Abyssinian Church, is a translation, and in this case from the Coptic, in which we have preserved a version of the Canons, in its leading features similar to the Ethiopic.<sup>5</sup> The Ethiopic is really a daughter church of the Coptic, and to the present day her *Abuna*, or archbishop, is ordained by the Coptic Church authorities in Cairo. The Ethiopic Canons existed only in manuscript form until 1871, when Winand Fell, of Cologne, published an edition based on these manuscripts, to which he added a Latin version. This little pamphlet is rather rare, and, as this whole class of literature is now being subjected to a rigid examination by specialists in the department of early ecclesiastical history, and as these Canons are in themselves not unimportant literary remains, and, through their connection with the other links in the literary chain of which they constitute one, receive additional importance, the writer thought a translation of these Canons not without merit and worth in these times. The discussion of their contents, and the elucidation of their contributions to theological science, must necessarily be left in the hands of others.

### *Translation.*

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, one God. This is the Synod of the Christian Church, which the Apostles gave through the hand of Clemens, whom they early had sent.

<sup>3</sup> The Ethiopic version of these Orders is published by the learned Ludolf, in his *Comm. ad hist. Aethiop.* p. 314 sqq. Cf. also Schaff *l.c.*

<sup>4</sup> This to correct Schaff's statement on p. 238.

<sup>5</sup> The Coptic version, with translation, was published by Henry Tattam in 1848 as "The Apostolic Constitution or Canon of the Apostles in Coptic."

him; and if he again does not obey, they shall call him a third time and shall again send two bishops to him as messengers. And if he does not obey, and is rebellious and does not come, those shall pass judgment over him who have been assembled according to what is right, that he shall be as one whom they have convicted, because he has fled from judgment.

**Canon LII.** That they shall not listen to the testimony of a heretic against a bishop, and shall not listen to a single person. The testimony of a heretic shall not be received against a bishop, and the testimony of a single person shall not be received; for "everything shall stand by the mouth of two and three." Nor shall it be lawful for a bishop to bestow the office of bishop upon his brother or his son or his kindred, nor shall he ordain whomsoever he pleases; for it is not right that the episcopal dignity shall be inherited: nor shall he give away the property of the Lord for the sake of the will of men, for it is not allowed to make the church of Christ an inheritance. For if they do thus, and thus take to themselves of the office, they will be as though they were nothing; and [the guilty one] himself shall be condemned by a punishment. He who is one-eyed or lame in his foot and is worthy of the episcopal honor, shall be ordained. For a defect of the body does not corrupt him, but a defect of the soul [does]. A deaf and a blind man, however, shall not be ordained as a bishop, not as being unclean, but lest the property of the church be scattered. He who is possessed of a devil shall not be ordained, and he shall not pray with the believers. And if he is purified, they shall admit him; and if he be worthy, he may be ordained as one of the clergy.

**Canon LIII.** He who has lately been baptized shall not be ordained as a bishop. He who has come from among the gentiles, or has been living in sins and has been baptized, shall not be ordained as bishop at once; nor is it allowed that he who has not been tried, shall become the teacher of other men, but he shall become this by the grace of God. Nor shall it be allowed the bishop that he shall gather and accumulate wealth, but he shall be found to be a servant of the church; but if not, he shall not perform episcopal functions. "There is no one who can serve two masters," according to the command of our Lord. And we command that no servant shall be ordained but with the consent of his master, lest his master be offended, for in this way the families are diminished. If ever there is found a servant in his time who is worthy of the station of ordination, as there has appeared to us Onesimus, and his master sets him free and lets him go forth from his family, let him be ordained.

Jews or the place of the heretic in order to pray, let the priest be deposed and the layman be expelled.

**Canon XLVI.** Concerning him who strikes a man until he dies and him who overpowers a virgin. If a priest has a quarrel with another and strikes him, and he dies, let him be deposed on account of the hardness of his heart; and in the case of a layman, let him be expelled. And if a layman has destroyed a virgin before she has been promised, and has cohabited with her, let him be expelled. And he shall not marry another, but he shall abide with her whom he has forced, even if she is poor and deformed.

**Canon XLVII.** Concerning him who is ordained a second time. If a bishop or an elder or a deacon has been ordained a second time, let him be deposed, as also the one who ordained him; unless indeed it is certain that they have been ordained by heretics, for it will never be that they who have been baptized or ordained by such men will become believers [i.e., church members] or clergy.

**Canon XLVIII.** Concerning him who does not fast in the forty days and on the fourth and on the sixth. If a bishop or an elder or a deacon or a reader or a psalm-singer does not fast in the holy forty days and on the fourth and the sixth, let him be deposed, except if illness of body prevents him; and in the case of a layman, let him be expelled.

**Canon XLIX.** If a bishop or an elder or a deacon or any of the clergy fasts with the Jews or celebrates the Pascha with them or accepts from them the gifts of their festival, leaven or whatever is like it, let him be deposed; and in the case of a layman, let him be expelled. And if a layman brings oil or lamps into the temple of the gentiles or the synagogue of the Jews, let him be expelled.

**Canon L.** Concerning him who steals the oil or the wax or anything that is the property of the church. If any of the clergy steals the wax belonging to the church, or the oil, let him be deposed, and what he has stolen he shall refund fivefold. Silver vessels and clothes, if they have been seen a few days, no man shall take from them for himself alone anything; for this action is a sin. And he who does this shall be expelled, and they shall punish him.

**Canon LI.** Concerning the bishop whom they have accused [of a crime]. When believing, truthful and good men have accused a bishop, it is necessary that he be called before the bishops. And if he comes and confesses his sins, they shall again take him and pass over him a judgment which is just. And if they call him and he does not come, they shall call him a second time, and two bishops shall go as messengers to

**Canon I.** Concerning the number of bishops who should take part in the ordination of a bishop. A bishop shall be ordained by two or by three bishops, but an elder and a deacon and the rest that are ordained shall be ordained by one bishop alone.

**Canon II.** Concerning the things which shall be brought upon the altar. If any bishop or elder brings anything else upon the altar of the Lord except that which we have commanded, that they shall bring and place there as an offering; should they bring either honey or milk, or of birds or of beasts anything else than that which our Lord has commanded, let him be deposed. Nor shall they be allowed to bring anything upon the altar except ears of grain and grapes in their seasons and the oil of the holy lamps and frankincense at the time of the holy Eucharist. But the other fruits they shall send into the house, and they shall belong to the bishop and the presbyters; only they shall not bring them upon the altar. And the bishop and the presbyters and the other ordained persons shall divide these among themselves.

**Canon III.** A bishop or an elder or a deacon shall not reject his wife under the pretext of a service of the Lord. But if they have rejected [her], let them be separated [from the church]; and if they do not return them and bring them back, let them be deposed.

**Canon IV.** Concerning the day on which Pascha should be celebrated. If any bishop or elder or deacon celebrates the holy Pascha with the Jews before day and night are equal [vernal equinox], let him be deposed.

**Canon V.** A bishop or an elder or a deacon shall not mix in with the doings of this world. But if they do this, let them be deposed.

**Canon VI.** But if a bishop or one of the priests who does not accept the eucharist at the time of the solemnization, mentions a reason for this; and if there is something that made him unworthy, let him be forgiven; but if he does not mention a reason, let him be deposed; for he was the leader that there should be sin to the people, and has caused them to take offense at him who has brought the eucharist, as though he had not brought it in purity.

**Canon VII.** Every believer who enters the Christian church and hears the Scriptures, and does not stand while they pronounce the prayers and does not receive the holy eucharist – over such a one they shall not pray, and it is their duty that he be expelled; for he has caused contention and disturbance in the Christian church.

**Canon VIII.** And if there is any one who prays with him who does not partake of the mysteries, and even if it be at home, let him be expelled.

**Canon IX.** And they shall not pray with him who has been expelled; and if one of the priests prays with a priest who has been expelled, let him also be expelled.

**Canon X.** And if one of the priests or a layman who have been expelled goes into a city just as if he had not been expelled, and he enters this city without permission [of the bishop] and is ordained, then let both he and the one who ordained him be expelled. For if he had been driven outside [of the congregation], let him be driven out a still greater length of days, for he has lied to the Church of God.

**Canon XI.** It is not allowed to a bishop to leave his diocese and be ordained over another, even if the people should urge him, except for the sake of benefit, and [unless] they shall urge him to do this, because he will be able to benefit those who are there through the word of truth. But this he shall not do of his own account, but according to the judgment of many bishops and on account of a very strong entreating.

**Canon XII.** But if any presbyter or deacon or any one of the grade of priests leaves his post and goes to another place and dwells at that place a length of time, except by permission of the bishop, we order that he forever do not perform his official functions. And especially, if the bishop has sent to him to return to his place, and he has not listened to him, let him be expelled from his office, and let him approach the place where he was as a layman. And if the bishop with whom he was receives him as one of the priests, and regards this order which we have established as void, let this bishop also be expelled as a teacher of the transgression of the law.

**Canon XIII.** Concerning him who marries two [women] or a widow. He who marries two women, or a concubine after his baptism, cannot be ordained as a bishop or an elder or a deacon, nor shall he at all be numbered with the ordained priests. And he who marries a widow, or her who has become suspected, or her who has been overpowered, or a harlot, or a female servant, or one who appears in the theater, shall not be ordained as a bishop or an elder or a deacon, and shall not at all be counted among the ordained priests. Or he who dwells with two sisters or with a daughter of his brother, shall not be able to become a priest.

**Canon XIV.** A priest who becomes security for a man shall be deposed.

**Canon XV.** Concerning eunuchs. If any one has become a eunuch through men by force, or if they have deprived him of his organ in war, or if he has been born thus, and they deem him worthy, let him be ordained as bishop. But if he has castrated himself of his own will, he cannot become one of the ordained; for he has become a slayer of himself and an enemy of the

strangers on account of the needs of travel. And if one of those ordained curses a bishop, let him be deposed; for it is said, "You shall not curse the leader of your people." And if one of the lower clergy curses an elder or a deacon, let him be expelled. And if one of the priests ridicules a person that is deaf or lame or blind or deformed at his feet, let him be expelled; and thus also in the case of a layman, if he does this.

**Canon XXXVIII.** Concerning the bishop or elder who does not teach the people to serve the Lord. A bishop or an elder who neglects the clergy and the laity and does not teach them the service of the Lord, let him be removed; and if he continues in his neglect, let him be deposed.

**Canon XXXIX.** If a bishop or an elder is neglectful in reference to him who is poor from among the clergy, and he does not make him his equal by giving to him according to his desire, let him be removed. And if he continues in his neglect, let him be deposed like him who slays his brother.

**Canon XL.** If there is one who spreads the writings which heretics in falsehood have written, and brings them into the Christian church as holy writings, in order to entrap the people and the clergy, let him be deposed.

**Canon XLI.** Concerning the priest whom the people convict of fornication or something else. If there is a dispute among the believers with regard to the fornication or luxurious life or other fault [of a priest], and if they convict him, he shall no longer be among the clergy.

**Canon XLII.** Concerning the denial of Christ and the denial of the dignity of the priesthood. If any of the clergy denies on account of the fear of man, either of the Jews or of the gentiles or of the heretics, and if it is the name of Christ which he has denied, let him be removed. And if it is the name of the priesthood, let him be deposed. And if he repents, they shall receive him, and he shall enter as a layman.

**Canon XLIII.** If a bishop or an elder or a deacon or one of the ordained clergy eats meat in which there is the blood of its life, or which has not been slaughtered, or of which an animal has been bitten, or which has been found dead, let him be deposed, as the law commands in regard to this. And if he be a layman, let him be expelled.

**Canon XLIV.** If any of the clergy has been discovered as fasting on the Lord's day or on the Sabbath day, except on the great Sabbath day alone which is the Pascha, let him be deposed.

**Canon XLV.** If one of the clergy or a layman enters the synagogue of the

Lord, so that when the bishop dies, he can control his property and give it to whom he pleases. For it is not right that the property of the bishop should be destroyed on the pretext of the property of the church, especially if he has a wife or children or kindred or servants. For it is not right that the property of the church be destroyed because it is unknown what is the property of the bishop, nor [is it right] that the property of the bishop and of his kindred be from afar ask of him who visit him, so that he may not lack those things which they ask of him. For it is a law of God that those who serve at the altar shall also be sustained from the altar; for the soldiers of a king will not fight against his enemies while supporting themselves.

**Canon XXXII.** Concerning those who frequent theatrical plays. A bishop or an elder or a deacon who frequents the theater or wanders around or becomes intoxicated, shall cease doing so; but if not, he shall be expelled. Subdeacons and readers and psalm-singers, if they do this deed, shall cease; but if not, they shall be expelled; and thus also the laymen. A bishop or an elder or a deacon who knows of one that frequents and does not cease, is in duty bound to prevent him; but if not, he shall be deposed.

**Canon XXXIII.** A bishop or an elder or a deacon who attends the baptism of the heretics or their celebration of the Eucharist, we command that he shall be deposed. For what communion has Christ with Satan; or what part have believers with those who do not believe?

**Canon XXXIV.** Concerning the condition of him who regards marriage as impure. But if a bishop or an elder or a deacon or one of the ordained priests refuse to marry or to eat meat or to drink wine, and it is not on account of temperance, but because these are impure (although the Scriptures establish all these things as good and God created man male and female), and such a one thus blasphemes, let him cease; but if not, let him be deposed, and let him depart from the Christian church: and thus also in the case of a layman.

**Canon XXXV.** Concerning the deposing of him who does not receive those who have repented of their sins. If a bishop or an elder or a deacon is not willing to receive him who has repented of his sins, let him be deposed; for he grieves the heart of our Lord who says, that there will be joy in heaven over one sinner that repents.

**Canon XXXVI.** If a bishop or an elder or a deacon will not eat a little meat and drink a small measure of wine during the festival days, and in secret considers these things wrong, and thus becomes a cause of offense to the people, let him be deposed.

**Canon XXXVII.** If one of the priests has been found eating or drinking in a place of public resort, let him be removed, except if it be in an inn for

creature of God. And if one of the ordained castrate his organ, let him be deposed, for he is only a slayer of himself. And a layman who castrates himself shall be expelled three years, for he is only an enemy of his life.

**Canon XVI.** Concerning him who commits fornication or swears falsely or steals. A bishop or an elder or a deacon who is discovered in fornication or in swearing falsely or in theft, shall be deposed, but shall not be expelled. For God says that he does not punish twice for one crime.

**Canon XVII.** And also with reference to the rest of the ordained. Those who are readers or psalm-singers, if they enter into the priesthood and desire to marry, let them marry. But we command them only that while they are readers they shall marry. But then it shall not be possible for them afterwards to be ordained.

**Canon XVIII.** Concerning the priests who strike someone. A bishop or an elder who strike a Christian or one who does not believe, when he has sinned, and seeks by this deed to cause men to fear, we command that he be deposed. For the Lord did not command that we should do this: for when they struck him, he did not strike; when they reviled him, he did not revile; and when they afflicted him, he did not take vengeance or become angry.

**Canon XIX.** Concerning him who is rightly deposed from the clerical ranks. If a bishop or an elder or a deacon who has rightly been deposed on account of a sin that has become manifest, becomes obstinate, and returns to take possession of his former office, let this one also entirely depart from the Christian church.

**Canon XX.** Concerning him who has been ordained through bribery. If there is a bishop or an elder or a deacon who has taken the grade of a priest by bribery, let him be deposed. And let him who ordained him also be deposed and removed forever from the priestly office and let them not associate with him in any respect, just as I removed Simon the Magician from me.

**Canon XXI.** Concerning him who calls in aid that he may hold the Christian church. If a bishop obtains a position through the assistance of the princes of this world and rules the Christian church through them, let him be removed and deposed, he and all who follow him.

**Canon XXII.** Concerning the elder who despises the bishop. If an elder despises a bishop and separates himself from him and builds for himself an altar, although no guilt is found in judgment against the bishop, and he is right in reference to the service of the Lord, let him be deposed; for he is ambitious for office, and also all the priests who follow him, for he is a rebel. And the laymen who follow him shall be expelled. And this shall take

place when the bishop shall have asked them once and a second time and a third time.

**Canon XXIII.** Concerning the elder or the deacon who the bishop has expelled. If a bishop has expelled an elder or a deacon, another bishop shall not allow him to enter again, unless he who has expelled him permits it or if he has died.

**Canon XXIV.** Let not a strange bishop receive as elder and deacon those who have been admitted in the lower clergy, except that they have the permission of being ordained and associated. And if they are preachers of righteousness, let them enter. But if not, then let them give them what they desire, and let them not associate with them. For there are many such impure ones.

**Canon XXV.** It is the duty of the metropolitan bishop to know the bishops of the whole province, and it is their duty to know who is the first among them, and they shall call him the metropolitan. And not shall they undertake an important work without the consent of the leader. And each one shall do his work which is his duty according to his office and according to the people who are in his diocese.

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**Canon XXVI.** And if one has been ordained as bishop and does not instruct nor think concerning the people who have been given to him, let him be removed until he learn to instruct. And the same in reference to an elder and a deacon. But if he has advanced in his instruction, and the people do not receive him, and this not on his account, but on account of the people, let him remain bishop, but the clergy of this city shall be removed, because they have not admonished the people.

**Canon XXVII.** Let there be a meeting of the bishops twice each year, and let them examine concerning the ordinance of the divine office and let them explain concerning the heresies and the offenses which are in the Christian church. And the first meeting shall be in the middle of Pentecost and the second meeting on the eighteenth of Tekemt [October].

**Canon XXVIII.** Let the bishop take thought for the property of the church and let him manage this as one upon whom the Lord is looking. And not shall it be his privilege to take anything thereof for himself alone as profit; and not shall he give any property of the Lord to the children of his relationship, even if they are poor. And not shall it be his privilege to sell the property of the Lord on these pretexts.

**Canon XXIX.** Concerning the consultation of the bishop. No elder or deacon shall do anything whatever without the advice of the bishop; for he is the one to whom the people of the Lord have been entrusted, and he again it is who will answer for their souls.

**Canon XXX.** It should be known what is the private property of the bishop, if he has private property; and it should be known what is the property of the