

Discussion

Dmitri Gasak: I think this is a good continuation of our morning discussion. Examples of various ecclesiological distortions have been provided. In my opinion, there is room for discussion here.

Fr Ioan Mircea Ielciu: We thank the Rev. Prof. Nicolae Chifăr very much for the presented report. The merit of this report is that it is an approach from a canonical perspective made by a historian which gives a greater substantiation to this approach. All these problems of practice of the provisions of canons, to which he has made reference, could we understand them in the context of the dynamic aspect of tradition? Because, in the introduction, he made a point extraordinarily important, which should not be forgotten whenever we address the issue tradition, that is the role of tradition and the meanings of tradition, and how tradition is reflected in our lives, of every Christian, namely that the Church received a revelation much broader than that documented in the apostolic period. And this revelation, much broader than that recorded in the apostolic period, which was kept and passed on is called the Holy Tradition. The idea is that at first was the Tradition and the Scripture, actually the first book of the Bible, of the New Testament, is the first written tradition. We must not forget that between Scripture, Tradition and the Church there is a very very tight relation. If you were to symbolically represent this ratio, we could present it in the form of three concentric circles. The first circle is the Scripture. The second, which includes the Scripture, is the Tradition. And the third circle, which includes both, is the Church. So, in this context, in the context pointed out by father Professor in the paper, Our Church should decide and clarify those issues. Can we say: are these apparent or less apparent contradictions regarding the canonical provisions, canonical provisions regarding the today practice, can we understand them as a dynamic aspect of tradition? I would ask father Professor if he wished to expand a little this aspect. How does he see this problem in the context of the dynamic aspect of tradition.

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Fr Nicolae Chifăr: Thank you, Father professor Ielciu for the appreciation and the question you've addressed. Undoubtedly we acknowledge a dynamic aspect of the church Tradition, because otherwise we would speak of a static Church, a historical Church, but in no way about a living Church, a Church that is working. And this dynamism is observed clearly in the period to which I referred. Because the 85 apostolic canons covered by the canonical provisions of the Ecumenical Councils, either taken and reconfirmed, or interpreted according to the actual situation of church life at the relevant time. And this indicates a certain dynamism of the Church. And then, recognizing this dynamism, and of course, wishing to have it present today in the Church, we ask ourselves, as I said, if some of these canonical provisions, which anyway are no longer valid, or they are no longer applicable in today's context, why would not be, through a canonical provision, reformulated or reinterpreted. And I believe that in this situation would be further emphasized the dynamic aspect of the Church, and on the other hand, would be avoided any interpretation in the sense that it is not respected, or it is neglected, or becomes relativised the ancient Tradition, or the ancient discipline of the Church. And that, as I said, in this situation, the current provisions that the holy synods of the autocephalous Churches take, can be viewed with the same relativism, and say "it is their decision, but we, in practice, do what we want, because even they no longer comply with other provisions". This raises the issue with our theme, about failure, neglect, superstition, new practices, and so on.

Dmitri Gasak: The problem set up by Fr Nicolae has a lot of aspects. I would like to highlight two of them. First, obviously, church history shows that not all canons and regulations of the age of the Ecumenical Councils are inviolable. Some of them should be somehow corrected, without fear of accusations of disrespect for tradition and the authority of the decisions of the Ecumenical Councils or other similar acts. However, there are today's situations, which on the contrary require returning to ancient regulations. Say, a typical example is the Litany of Catechumens during the Divine Liturgy. Since long ago, nobody in our church reacts to the invocation 'As many as are catechumens, depart.' This invocation has apparently been omitted by the Greeks but still preserved in the Russian Church, where, nevertheless, nobody moves a muscle when hearing it. Somebody in the Greek Church might chuckle at Russians and say they retain what has done its time. But when adult catechumens reappear, this invocation makes sense. Reviving the adult catechesis makes the Litany of Catechumens relevant again. Moreover, some recall that such litanies were also included in matins or vespers. This example shows that the return to some ancient norms may prove fruitful: old-time things seem to be revived in church life.

Second, Fr Nicolae mentioned the status of vicar bishop. I think the position of vicar bishop is determined by the status of the senior bishop. This year, during the course on ecclesiology, which I teach, after having discussed the procedure for nominating the bishops and the issue of hierarchy in the church, I gave my students a task to analyze the address at nominating the bishop and the acceptance speech. When the Patriarch presents the bishop with the pastoral staff, His Holiness tells him words of exhortation. Now, thank God, these addresses can be found on the official website of the Moscow Patriarchate. We discussed some examples of these addresses at a seminar. One of the questions was about where (that is, in what place) the bishop is nominated. Students arrived at the conclusion that both the Patriarch and the bishop refer to nomination for a certain territory. The bishop becomes a kind of its spiritual ruler, by analogy with secular rulers: there is a secular power, and here is a spiritual power. I think the well-known 6th canon of the Fourth Ecumenical Council comes from the fact that the bishop, above all, cannot be without his flock. Bishop exists only in the church, within the church gathering. Otherwise he is not needed anywhere but in the church. There is a distortion here: if we hold the view that the essence of the bishop's ministry lies in his spiritual authority over a territory, then, of course, a senior bishop may have a vicar bishop, even more than one. He may delegate to them the powers of ordaining priests etc. If it is fundamental to us that a bishop is nominated in the church understood not as a territory but primarily as a small or large gathering of people, then the question on a vicar bishop takes us back to the spirit and the letter of this canon of the Fourth Ecumenical Council. Thus we come to the question of what our understanding of the church is.

I think the issue on the situation in Europe, as Fr Nicolae pointed out, namely, the problem of several bishops being present in one city, is also related to the understanding of what the church is. Probably, in Europe the situation is aggravated as nowhere else, because in a city there can be parishes under quite different jurisdictions. In this connection, it is noteworthy that all the efforts to establish a single European autocephalous church, significant in the 20th century, have failed so far. The Orthodox might not come to an agreement. Would you mind me asking you to comment upon it?

Fr Nicolae Chifăr: On the issue of the catechumens Litany, I remember that I was a student and this issue was called into question: does this Litany remain in the Divine Liturgy, or should it be removed because it is no longer valid? And one of my theology professors explained that the Litany in question must remain as catechumens, in the strictest sense, are no longer, into the Church, because they are baptized, but there are catechumens in that they must be catechized, be

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practitioners of authentic Christian life, and not just baptized on paper. This Litany would practically include many of those who are in the Church, those who need catechisation, for the training in the church policy. So in our case the situation is viewed a little differently, but in most churches is uttered this litany. Regarding the vicar bishop and the presence of several bishops in the same city, I, of course, agree with what you have said yourself, that the bishop is ordained for a church community. This is about our ecclesiological understanding of the Church. Therefore the problem of abolishing the institution of the vicar bishop is not even put into question. I recalled it in connection with what I said, with the possibility of reformulating certain canonical provisions, so as not to give opportunity to interpretations of this kind that the canonical provision is not respected. Because it's clear that there are not two forms to the ordination of the bishop: one for titular bishop, and the other for the vicar bishop. It's the same ordination received by each, but the problem arises at the administrative level, the function each exercises. Because I want to tell you that sometimes, under this guise, the vicar bishop may be released from certain obligations. He can say: "This is not my problem, is the holder's". He can do certain things, or not do, passing the responsibility on the holder's account, although he is equally responsible for the ecclesial community, like the one that has the administrative function.

Fr Vasile Grăjdian: I am glad that the exposure of Father Nicolae Chifăr began with the end of the Gospel and the end of the Gospels, namely that warning, which sometimes is regarded as a figure of speech, that the Savior did many other things that are not written in this book, but if it were to try to write them the whole world could not comprise them. Speaking of the canonical problem, and not only, this can give us a quantitative picture and convenient, simplistic in the sense that, if there was no room in a small book, nor did it fit in the whole world, in the entire universe. But it could be something more. The fact that not even into all the world can be contained, it skips the amount idea and sends us to a qualitative understanding of the situation. Why did I start therewith? Because confusing the dynamics of spiritual life with the change, can create a problem and draw us into a trap. There is a view of experienced, successive history of the Church, where the traditional Churches did not have any problem to operate some changes. As you said in the interpretation of the canons, the one on the marriage of the bishops. But when the enlightenment world, and especially the Protestant one, wanted to return and began to see history simultaneously, at least in theory, then put them side by side and have repeated somehow the temptation in heaven, when the devil said to the people "Did God say that you can eat from all the trees? What do you mean you can not eat from one?" This is a simplistic logic. Why do I say this thing? Be-

cause many times we find ourselves in the situation where we can not determine a spiritual reality from the written things. In our case, Mr. Gzgyan spoke in the morning about the pillars in the air, or we can even say the pillars of air that keep going the ecclesiastical building. What does this mean? When I say “of air” or “built of air” we can say “of breath”, “of spirit”, “of ruach”, “of pneuma”, which is at the same time air and spirit, the spirit, which is strong and the flesh or letter which is weak, that kills. But there is a connection between them. Why did I say these things? We can not solve these issues as simple as sending them into a historic setting, because there are others who come, tempting, who ask us “ Why like this, or why so”. So my intervention regarded especially the danger of falling into a simplified explanatory flight, to make people understand, but there are some who do not want to understand that simple. One little observation: also our Saviour called attention to this type of difficulty, when He said, for example, that there are many written from Moses, that even the contemporaries Jews did not respect. He even remembered David, who at the time of his persecution, he ate the shewbread. So even the Saviour draws attention to the too simple interpretations. One more thing I wanted to mention. Regarding the Litany of the catechumens, from the point of view of liturgical theology or a particular liturgical theology, keeping some things that are no longer directly contemporary, are related to a specific recapitulation of the history of salvation, called anamnesis, which includes also the history of the Church. So it is something that was happening and I bring in actuality what has always happened until today. And then, liturgically, it’s not a problem to have a litany which today is no longer in the social use of the Church, or in the catechetical use of the Church, but which reminds us, and makes us contemporary with the Christians, from anywhere and anytime.

Alexandr Kopirovsky: Fr Nicolae raised a very difficult point. Indeed, many issues cannot be solved unambiguously, simply and quickly. The reason is not that one cannot write a new resolution. One does not have to unravel the cobweb of canons, trying to figure out how it is after all correct. One must understand that the situation has gone so far that it has already become fundamentally unsolvable. ‘Precept upon precept, line upon line’ (Isaiah 28:10) – this ‘Orthodox Talmud’ has become a reality since long ago. The number of rules is so immense that one can always find something advantageous to oneself at the moment. In other words, all this gives occasion to abuse. Whereas multiplying regulations only aggravates the situation. Unfortunately, many things in the church, including relationship between clergy and laity, have been objectified.

On the other hand, some very good and necessary rules are often not kept. For example, our church has retained in the order of the liturgy the Litany of Cat-

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echumens, even when the latter ones were not actually present in the church. And now, when catechumens have finally appeared, this litany is often omitted at holiday services. This Sunday you will visit the church at the Novodevichy convent, where many people come out at the invocation ‘As many as are catechumens, depart.’

Let us consider an issue of smaller scale – the image of the cross. The 73rd canon of the Trullan Synod (691 – 692)¹ forbids placing the image of the cross on the floor of a church not to be desecrated by the trampling under foot. Unfortunately, in some churches ornaments with crosses are still inlaid on the floor. To avoid such things, one needs conscience, taste, knowledge, sensitivity. If these things lack, no regulation will help.

And here is an amusing example. Bishops have sakkoses with crosses embroidered on all sides. When a bishop sits down on his throne, is the embroidered image of the cross desecrated or not? Seemingly, it is not. On the other hand, it is. What to do then? I think, if a bishop wears vestment with embroidered crosses, it is more befitting of him not to sit down. If one should not desecrate the cross, this regulation must be kept in all regards. On the other hand, nowadays crosses are worn as jewellery, ear-rings or even nose-rings, they are drawn everywhere. Doesn't this mean the desecration of the cross? It could be argued that it is unbelievers who make such things. And what about churchware and icons being for sale in kiosks in the underground passageways next to alcohol, ladies' underwear and kitchen utensils? This is worse than an ornament inlaid on the floor. And the whole multitude of our canons proves powerless here. By their implication, not by their letter, these examples fall under the canon of the Trullan Synod to a greater extent than the ornamental image of the cross inlaid on the floor. That is, I would like to somehow broaden up the problem statement. Thank you, Father Nicolae, for bringing up the issue on canons.

Fr Nicolae Chifăr: Sure there are many things which, not necessarily lead to a change in church life or church tradition, or failure to observe the ordinances of the church, but we should nevertheless be careful to these little things about what is happening into the Church, in order not to provoke, as St. Paul says: if I eat meat I offend my brother, who is weak, then, I will no longer eat meat. This

¹ “Since the life-giving cross has shown to us Salvation, we should be careful that we render due honour to that by which we were saved from the ancient fall. Wherefore, in mind, in word, in feeling giving veneration (προσκύνησιν) to it, we command that the figure of the cross, which some have placed on the floor, be entirely removed therefrom, lest the trophy of the victory won for us be desecrated by the trampling under foot of those who walk over it. Therefore those who from this present represent on the pavement the sign of the cross, we decree are to be cut off.”

is how we should see things with these practices in the Church. If some of them offend we should pay close attention. As I said about that woman. Sure, many ignored her and they considered her to be ill. But there were some who questioned the idea that, indeed, blasphemy was brought to the Holy Cross, because it was there, and people stepped on it. So things must be a bit nuanced. Sure we have in the Church a settled habit, which often is not written, and sometimes overlaps or interposes with the canonical written provision, and it is even stronger than the written one. But again I want to emphasize this aspect, however, things have to be regarded very carefully, to transform what is not essential in essential, and what it is essential to be neglected.

Fr Georgy Kochetkov: Thank you, Father Nicolae, for this topic and for the discussion. In my opinion, this topic is the key one of our seminar, both practical and theoretical. Of course, one should admit directly that canons are not an easy issue for the church. There are almost no canons that are kept from A to Z in their initial sense in which they were adopted. This is a problem. Loosely speaking, we indeed leave ourselves wide open to criticism in situations in which we might avoid it.

For instance, there is the 66th canon of the Quinisext Ecumenical Council on partaking of the Divine Mysteries during Bright Week. This remarkable canon enjoins all to take communion during Bright Week. Is this canon respected? No, it is not. Further, there is another canon, also adopted at one of the Ecumenical Councils, about commenting on the Scripture immediately after reading it. If one read the Scriptures in a church gathering, one must give a sermon. Without preaching the Orthodox worship is incomplete. Are the clergy and the laity aware of it? No. But, for example, there is a canon not allowing lay people to preach. This canon seems to be correct when one enters its logic. On the other hand, the 20th century overturned this canon. As early as the Moscow Council (1917 – 1918) adopted the acts admitting the possibility for lay people to give sermons. Moreover, later in the Russian emigration in Paris, Mother Maria (Skobtsova), the holy venerable-martyr, received the blessing of Metropolitan Eulogius (Georgievsky) to preach, that is, to deliver sermons. Formally, it contradicts even some words of the Scripture. For example, as the Apostle Paul wrote, women should remain silent in the church. But life overturns the literal understanding of these words and of this canon.

Needless to say, there are twists and turns regarding catechumens in general and different stages of catechesis in particular. Catechumens and those preparing for illumination are not one and the same. The Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts, celebrated in the second half of the Great Lent, starting with the week of the Veneration of the Holy Cross, comprises the litanies both of catechumens and those

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preparing for illumination. But it is now of rare occurrence but in our brotherhood it exists, because over more than a decade we have the adult catechesis lasting a year and a half. We really have catechumens, those preparing for illumination and those newly-illuminated. So the situation turns out to be as it was previously described by Alexander Kopirovsky. At Easter or Pentecost, the Litany of Catechumens is omitted in the church, because we sing ‘All ye that have been baptized into Christ, Christ have ye put on,’ as the Greeks proceed. But about a third or a quarter of all who are present in the church are catechumens or those preparing for illumination. Those who are in the altar – bishops and presbyters – do not take this into account. They simply do not assume the responsibility for this, therefore a misunderstanding occurs. Once I was watching from the altar how it was going: people became anxious because catechumens did not know whether they had to stay or come out. They had already got used to come out on every Sunday at the invocation, ‘As many as are catechumens, depart.’ Anyway, we have been practicing it since the 1970s, and all seem to have become accustomed to, nobody opposes, although this practice is still of rare occurrence in our church.

Some say it is necessary to remember that all need to be catechised. One would find difficulty to quarrel with this statement, but there is a problem. This being so, at the invocation, ‘As many as are catechumens, depart,’ all people must come out. I cannot but recall another noteworthy episode. In the early 1980s I studied at the Leningrad Theological Academy. Then, at the Holy Trinity Cathedral of the Alexander Nevsky Monastery, the dedication day service was celebrated by the Metropolitan of Leningrad. There were about a dozen bishops and, consequently, a lot of sub-deacons. I was a sub-deacon, too, and therefore in the altar. Suddenly, at the invocation, ‘As many as are catechumens, depart’, a sub-deacon said as a joke but in a very loud voice, ‘Why are people still remaining here in the altar?’ Of course, it was meant as a joke, simply to play a prank on the bishops and all the others, but this, I must say, sounded very commanding.

So what do and say here? Do we violate church canons? Yes, we often do in situations when church canons should not be violated. It was correctly stated that any canon can be infringed because there are back-ways. At the same time, canons are often used by bishops to repress priests undesirable to them. Canons are used as a smear to blame somebody, often totally guiltless. And there is nobody to complain to. Are the church canons violated? Certainly they are. On the other hand, not every case of formal non-observance means violation of the canon, if one observes the spirit and the meaning of the canon, the eternal foundation, which is present in our canonical legacy, in our canonical church tradition.

I recall two articles that have gained ground. First, there is an article by Fr Nikolay Afanasyev, *The Canons of the Church: Changeable or Unchangeable?*

Later on, in the 1980s or the early 1990s, Fr John Meyendorff wrote another article by analogy with the article by Fr Nikolay, *The Church's Worship Changeable or Unchangeable*. It is also a noteworthy study posing a general problem, not practical on any particular occasion or a given canon but on the entire canonical tradition. It is clear that one can raise the question in this way. Certainly, it is a major issue, quite difficult from a practical standpoint because in the people's mentality absolutely insignificant things are sometimes of paramount importance. In this regard, Fr Nicolae was on target. By contrast, church people are not aware of serious, profound things and not preoccupied with them.

Of course, a canon is not a dogma. It is us who know that canon is not a dogma. We understand the difference between canon and dogma, but it cannot be denied that in history this difference was not immediately understood. The acts of the first Ecumenical Councils directly indicate that the fathers of the Councils did not differentiate whether these canons refer to the rule of faith, the rule of prayer or the rule of life. *Lex orandi, lex credendi, lex vivendi* – fathers of the Councils regarded these three laws as being on the same level. Moreover, they did not distinguish between dogma and canon. But the history has shown that this distinction is necessary because the dogma is a sound base of our faith. We treat the dogmatic tradition of the church very carefully and thoroughly. As for the canonical tradition of the church, normally, it certainly must always change as it has been changing in the early centuries of Christianity. Life would constantly impose rules corresponding to and regulating it. It is a different matter that maybe one should admit to a larger extent the possibility of diversity in these particular manifestations of church life. This was a historical misfortune that the canons started being perceived not only as inviolable but also as compulsory for all. This is, of course, a historical failure, it is fundamentally wrong because it is contrary to the same doctrine that the Church is the living Body of Christ. Otherwise it 'necroses,' and we become infected with legalism, pharisaic behaviour, fundamentalism, etc.

At present, the Pan-Orthodox Council is being prepared but it is not clear yet whether the fathers of this Council will hazard to change even the most minor canons, that is, for instance, to change a canon of any of the Ecumenical or local councils. Or will they leave the letter of the canon unchangeable and will try only to differently interpret it? So to speak, will they attempt to solve the issue in a sophisticated way? There are both tendencies in the Orthodox episcopate. Some bishops believe one can change canons at the level of the Pan-Orthodox Council. Others consider this unacceptable because the Pan-Orthodox Council should comprise all the ancient churches, therefore the Catholic Church, too. As it is not yet so, one cannot gather the Ecumenical Council and change the letter of the canon. Let's wait and see how the situation will develop in our life at the pan-Orthodox level, albeit not yet universal.

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And here is the last point. At the end of your paper there is an interesting statement, which I hopefully understood correctly through translation. It turns out that what we perceive as the violation of canons is related not to the canonical discipline of the church, which has held true to the Apostolic Tradition, but to the way this discipline is actually observed by each particular bishop. I would not quite agree with that. I think one cannot confer responsibility merely on bishops, especially on each particular one. I believe it is a matter of sobornost, of the church conciliarity. This is the responsibility of the higher clergy, of the higher hierarchy, of the entire church. In my view, this problem should also be stated. It is the church that must vote for observance, conservation or change of canons. We – I mean all lay people and priests, not only bishops – should not be indifferent about whether a sermon after reading the Scripture is delivered or not. This is the responsibility of the church. As long as a bishop thinks he is the church ('I am France, and France is me,' as it was once in history), the problem will not be solved, it is useless even to state it. When it will be recalled that 'the church is in the bishop and the bishop is in the church,' and only these two statements constitute the known truth, only then it will make sense to discuss solutions. Because it is clear to all: one cannot place responsibility merely on bishops, they have their weaknesses. Once I used to think it is only in our church, so badly affected during the Soviet era, where so many excesses are committed. That is not the case: everywhere there are problems with bishops, although somewhere the situation is better, somewhere – worse, because they do not see and do not understand the limits of their authority, thus tempting themselves and the others, undermining the sobornost of the church, in fact, the very faith in the church, which, of course, is quite inadmissible. As I have already said today, without faith in human being, in the Church there is no faith in God, in Christ.

This paper seems very important to me. Thank you again, Father Nicolae, because it raises questions that address the very sensitive issues of the church life in different countries and nations. We know that people try to somehow solve them. The Orthodox Church in America, for example, tries to find a new answer to the question why there are several bishops in one city, searching the ways to interpret this situation in accordance with canons. Although we know, of course, the ancient rule that 'in one city there must be one bishop.' But they attempt to change this principle of church locality. Maybe this also has some spiritual meaning. One must further discuss it. Thank you very much.

Fr Nicolae Chifăr: Thank you very much for all relevant comments and remarks that you made and the way you made reference to the spirit and not the letter, the spirit of interpretation and application of the canons, and not the letter

itself. It is clear that the Church has used this interpretation, this spirit, through the rites which it drew up and which took into account. Rites are highly developed. They refer to a certain canonical provision, but they regulate the life of the Church in detail. Related to the last paragraph, I threw the responsibility on the account of the Bishops, in that they constitute an authority within the Church, and we believe that the Holy Synod is the supreme authority of the Church. But that does not mean that priests and faithful, or the Church as a whole, is not responsible for compliance with its ordinances and regulations, but especially the bishop, because he, of his choice, makes this covenant, that he will keep the canonical rules and that he will respect the canons. But, on the other hand, we have to take into account situations in which the bishops have decided something in the Synod, and the priests and the faithful did not receive that something decided. It is the case of the Synod from Hieria, an iconoclast council that decided removing icons from the Church and their destruction, but the Church did not receive such judgments, although the council was entitled The holy and great Ecumenical Council at Hieria, with over 350 bishops, with the king ahead, and so on. Yet the council has not been validated. And let's not mention the Ferrara-Florence, which was again a ample synod, where the participants were in large numbers, which was signed by several bishops, and yet the Church did not accept it, did not receive it and had no validity. So, sure, the responsibility is not exclusive of the bishop, but of the whole community that is called through Baptism to keep the correct teaching of the Church. Thank you, once again, very much, Father Georgy!

Hierom. Vasile Bîrzu: There were raised many issues on this topic, regarding the evaluation criterion of canonicity of an icon or an aspect of the tradition. St. Apostle Paul says that spiritual man judges all things, but nobody judges him. I would link this criterion in assessing an aspect of Tradition, to a doctrine of spirituality, about the feeling of mind – *aistesis noera*. The name *aistesis* shows us an evaluation of beauty, of common sense. For example, the fact that the parents or bishops at the synod of Hieria were denied in their determination by the people, the people had that common sense, it felt that the icon is something indispensable for its spiritual life. Canons in general, in different epochs, express this common sense, this spiritual sense that the Church in a given period crystallizes. I consider essential for the dynamism of the tradition, the experience of grace embodied in the person of the bishop, in the person of the spiritual father. And because you asked what would be the criteria by which an image can be painted genuine or not, St. Diadochos of Photice uses this metaphor of staying peacefully of the hesychast so that the Holy Spirit to paint over the image of God in him the glow of likeness. See, the Holy Spirit paints the beauty of the likeness, the fullness of

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grace. Likewise, we could say that the Holy Spirit reveals the respective canons or inspiration. At Andrei Rublev we see that summary of the Trinitarian and spiritual theology in his famous icon. It shows the obedience and the brightness and the kingdom and the dignity and the harmony, a sublime aesthetics. It is this inner organ of the feeling of mind, which reveals, discovers. It is the alive torch of Tradition. And it rests, just as the divine glory in the Old Testament, above the temple. If people lived in grace, *shechina*, the divine glory protected it, guarded it. If people broke the commandments which God had given them, *shechina* would leave it, and would enter in captivity. The criterion of this dynamic interpretation of Tradition, lies in updating and incarnation in different eras of God's Spirit, the specific person who in times of crisis, come with the spiritual solution, which, often, is a summary of Tradition. The answer is always sublime, exceeds common logic, because, through *aistesis noera* enters the the divine logic, in the shapeless beauty. And, regarding the litanies of catechumens, you should know that the mystagogical interpretation of the liturgy, in the time of St. Dionysios the Areopagite, a mystagogical interpretation rooted in the problem of one and the multiple from the Plotinian philosophy, allows an understanding. Just like in Russian, *vhod/vohod*, the exit should be entry. That is: "those called, exit" – "exit the steady-state and enter". Because, as Schmemmann's liturgical theology says, There is a progression, a mystery of the entry and progression in the altar. Those who are already baptized enter more into the mystery of God's presence. Prayer of the priest with the Gospel is the prayer of all the people to entry together with the priests in the altar, in the intimacy of God's presence. Those called, come, practically in the original mystagogical understanding. Then came the symbolism of prefiguration, specific to the iconological mystagogy and other mistagogies from the Byzantine period. But the original understanding of the liturgy, at Dionysios the Areopagite, provides precisely this union of the myriad of the people with the One God present on the chair from above. And the people is called in an expectatic movement, to get closer to God, it exits its state but enters it. So I believe that the Litany must be preserved and should be understood this dynamism of our submission, *vizavi* the danger of relativisation. I affirm the necessity of discernment of bishops and those who lead a community, to understand perfectly well what believers shepherd and how they build the religious conscience of their faithful. So it's problem concerning the spiritual man, who judges them all but also fulfills them. Because otherwise the conscience does not confirm his state of grace. Thank you very much!

Fr. Sorin Dobre: Most reverend Fathers, in the spirit of the read essay, we all know there are canons, I do not know precisely at what the council they were issued, but it refers to the fact that the priest, the clergy is forbidden to sing or par-

ticipate in performances, or his family, or to join the circus performance (Fr. Prof. Chifăr: In the apostolic canons and then taken up by the First Ecumenical Council). I myself have been put in this situation when, due to my preparation and the department I work in with father Grăjdian, I had to sing in an opera, being a priest. Incidentally, it was even opera *Rusalka* by Antonin Dvořák. I knew about these canons, but I went at the worthy of remembrance Metropolitan Antonie Plămădeală and I waited long in front of His Holiness to give me a resolution. His Holiness, after fifteen minutes of thought, he said: “Sing beautifully!” I did my best to sing beautifully. By participating in that show, being a priest, and everyone who was there knew that I was a priest – I was dressed as a hunter, for example, I never felt that I brought damage to my priesthood, but, on the contrary, through my singing, I may have made it clear that I could confess Christ also on stage. Currently, in the Romanian Orthodox Church, there are many priests and priest wives, who are professional singers of opera or folk musicians and appear frequently on stages not only in the country, but even abroad. What do you think about this, and are there such cases within the Russian Orthodox Church? Thank you!

Fr. Nicolae Chifăr: I would like to make a brief comment at those exposed here by Father Sorin Dobre. First, the respective canon refers to those who practice it as a service, as a permanent occupation, as a source of revenue, of finance. And then the Church comes with such a provision, finding the presence of the clergy on stage as incompatible with its mission and with the testimony it gives to the faithful. Your presence on stage was probably once or twice and not with the purpose of gain, but because of the splendid voice with which God has endowed you and that was needed at that time. Therefore I suspect that His Holiness Antonie had a reserve until he gave his answer, but when he gave it, he did it absolutely and positively. Instead, the other cases which are not very common, but there are some in our Church are questionable. The parts that they interpret do not always have a religious character. If they were performers of religious music, of hymns, they could fall somewhat and we could say they convey a Christian message. But often the songs performed are of an entirely different hue. That is why I said in my presentation: it is a problem and a responsibility of the bishop on which depends this person and how he interprets the canonical provision.

David Gzzyan. When you come to think of the origins of the canon discussed, probably, it is not so seditious to suppose it is associated with anything but the professionalization of the priest’s ministry. In the ordination service he continues to be called presbyter, but for all he is already an iereos, whose place is in the church building. In this sense, he is a figure belonging to sacred space. Therefore,

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he has nothing to do outside the church building. And in this sense, he also does not need a job. Thus I see the logic of this canon. However, there were times when both the church and our Soviet atheistic state tolerated not only a priest employed at a job but even a bishop who carried out his church ministry and concurrently was a practicing surgeon. It is easy to understand that I refer to St. Luke (Voyno-Yasenetsky). In this connection, one can also recall Fr Pavel Florensky. Although his case was different: he was an engineer and a lecturer at university, and he was forbidden to serve as priest at that time. The question is whether the Orthodox Church must develop such experience or block it. I venture to suggest, especially referring to the examples of unmercenary ministers throughout history, that in a Christian way, from the standpoint of ethics, it would be better to develop this experience in all respects, whereas canonically it proves necessary to be forbidden! It is known that the life of the Orthodox clergy in the emigration departed from the canons. Therefore, Russian priests belonging to the West-European Exarchate, worked in the past and work nowadays because it is often quite impossible for their parish and diocese to support them. In terms of the letter, they do not observe the canon but, in my opinion, they do not lose the dignity of clergyman because of this.

Dmitri Gasak: By the way, I recall that some years ago I was operated by a surgeon, an alumnus of St Tikhon's Orthodox University, preparing to be ordained priest. The diocesan commission delivered him an ultimatum – either to quit medicine or to dismiss the idea of ordination. Then he evoked the example of St Luke (Voyno-Yasenetsky) and was reasonably contradicted, 'You're not St Luke.' This position is understandable: a surgeon always runs higher risks because his patient can die on the operating table. And this physician is oncologist, a quite talented surgeon. He insisted on his wish not to quit medicine because he felt his job could truly help people. Finally, he was ordained. I do not know how he had managed to be admitted by the commission. Nevertheless, he serves as presbyter and concurrently works as physician.

So, thank God, canons are canons and life is life. Here, of course, one cannot but recall the saying of Vasily Bolotov, the famous Russian church historian, who argued that what is canonical is what is useful for the church. Thus he attempted to reintroduce the canons into the church life and mentality. At the same time, he believed that the church should not regard a canon as a dogma or as an unchangeable rule. After all, canons are made for the church, and not the church for canons. But for this purpose the church must really be an organism having mechanisms to evaluate these canons and correct them, if necessary, to make decisions regarding their abolition or continuation. The Church must be truly the one whole, not divided into clergy and laity, etc. This is what I consider fundamental here.