

Celibacy and Monasticism According to the Holy Canons

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Abstract: Celibacy and monasticism are two forms of Christian living. From a historical perspective, celibacy came first, but out of the desire to overcome individualism and for better organization, monasticism was born. Celibacy is founded upon chastity, while monasticism on obedience, chastity and poverty. Monasticism arose spontaneously and at the fourth Ecumenical Council was brought under the jurisdiction of the Church. In the holy canons we find numerous decisions regarding celibates and monks, with the aim of defending and observing the vows. In the East, deacons and priests were chosen from among the married, until present time. Bishops were initially chosen from the married, then from those who were celibate and finally from those who are monks. Among the Roman Catholics, the clergy is chosen only from celibates.

Keywords: Family, Celibacy, Monasticism, Obedience, Chastity, Poverty, Vows, Tonsure, Canon, Responsibility, Communion

Celibacy and monasticism are two forms of christian living, born from the teachings of the Holy Scriptures, from the exhortation and life of Saint Apostle Paul. Celibacy and monasticism require living life in self-restraint, in chastity, in asceticism, in voluntary renunciation of family life, so that through sacrifice one can get closer to God².

The first thing that must be said about celibacy and monasticism is that they do not come in hostile opposition to family life, they do not want to replace the family unit, they do not compete with each other, but on the contrary, they support, strengthen and defend the Christian family³.

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² Rev. Prof. Dr. Ștefan Buchiu, Rev. Prof. Dr. Ioan Tulcan, eds., *Dicționar de Teologie Ortodoxă* (Bucharest: Basilica, 2019), 170 and 602-04.

³ See also *Monahismul ortodox românesc. Istorie, contribuții și repertoriare*. volume 1, “Istoria monahismului ortodox românesc de la începuturi până în prezent” (Bucharest: Basilica,

For this reason, canon 1 of the Council of Gangra states: “*If someone defames the wedding, and she who sleeps with her husband, being faithful and pious, he would curse her or defame her, as if she could not enter the heavenly kingdom, let him be anathema*”⁴. The canon, like all the regulations of the Council of Gangra, combats false spirituality, a spirituality that can only be built on love and self-restraint and not on contempt and disregard.

Furthermore, celibacy and monasticism could only be understood through the sacrifice of a life, through total dedication to God, with salvation in mind. Without sacrifice, celibacy and monasticism would be in total opposition to the divine command: “*Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it!*” (*Gen 1:28*)⁵. Sacrifice and love create a life of self control above the divine commandment, not denying it, but perfecting it, valuing and honoring, the purpose and benefit of the Christian family.

From a historical point of view, first there was celibacy, but out of the desire to overcome individualism and for better organization, monasticism was born.

It is interesting to note that celibacy has not become institutionalized, for several reasons. The first would be that celibacy relied more on spontaneity and personal decisions. Then there was the fact that, in Roman society, celibacy was not well seen, as much emphasis was placed on the birth of infants. The Romans believed that the survival of the empire, and especially of the army, could only be possible through an increased birth rate. Only after the spread and rooting of Christianity, celibacy was fully accepted as an authentic form of Christian asceticism⁶.

The lack of institutionalization of celibacy was also reflected in the fact that the Church did not appoint a hierarchy for entering celibacy. However, the holy canons contain many provisions regarding celibacy, as demonstrated below.

Monasticism, sequentially, also appeared spontaneously, but with other spiritual coordinates. Monasticism acquired, over time, a higher spiritual

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⁴ Archd. Prof. Dr. Ioan N. Floca, *Canoanele Bisericii Ortodoxe. Note și comentarii* (Sibiu, 1993), 199.

⁵ Because of its exclusivist biblical view, Protestantism, in all its forms, has not officially understood and accepted celibacy and monasticism as outside Scripture until today.

⁶ In a law issued on January 31, 320, Constantine the Great abolished the sanctions against celibates and childless families imposed by Emperor Octavianus Augustus, granting them the right of succession to property as provided for in their wills. This provision is Christian in inspiration, as the Church encouraged celibacy. The law of Emperor Constantine the Great is also mentioned by the historian Eusebius of Caesarea. He affirms that celibacy and virginity are practiced by those who consecrate themselves to the service of God and the faith, and therefore sanctions against celibates, widows and unmarried persons are not justified, cf. Eusebiu de Cezareea, *Viața lui Constantin cel Mare*, in *PSB* 14, Part 2, trans. and notes by Radu Alexandrescu (Bucharest: EIBMBOR, 1991), 169.

dimension, then became institutionalized, being brought under the jurisdiction of the local bishop, at the Fourth Ecumenical Council.

In this circumstance, the Church ordained a new hierarchy, that of entry into monasticism, outlined by three vows: obedience, chastity (restraint) and voluntary poverty. In addition, through this hierarchy, monks formed the third category of Church members, along with clerics and laymen.

In the following we will analyze what the three monastic vows signify through a canonical perspective.

Obedience

Obedience is the canonical compliance that every member of the Church must give to higher governing bodies. Obedience integrates the believer into the ecclesial communion, guides him and, at the same time, structures his Christian life.

Canonical obedience is the act by which the authority of the church hierarchy is recognized and concretized. When canonical obedience ceases, so does the hierarchy and the Church. Canonical obedience has freedom and faith at its foundation, without these two, canonical obedience becomes either coercion or nonsense.

Through freedom a christian reaches faith and through faith he puts into practice obedience to his superiors, according to the words of Saint Paul who says: “*Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account*” (Heb 13:17)⁷.

In this sense, obedience also takes on a liturgical form, namely **the cutting of the hair**. Tonsure is practiced by the Church, according to the biblical model (Acts 18:18; 21:23-27), at Baptism, at Ordination and at *the taking of monastic vows*.

Just as Saint Paul cut his hair as a sign of the promise he made, so does a Christian when he submits to the liturgical tonsure as a sign of obedience⁸.

However, obedience is not uniform, but rather gradual, depending on the tonsure that the Christian willingly accepts, more precisely on the way in which he is enrolled in the Christian life of the Church, respectively:

a) ***The spiritual obedience to the laity of the Church***, found upon baptismal tonsure. It is the smallest form of obedience, with a general character, without constraint, based on faith and the desire for salvation.

⁷ Ioan Cârstoiu, “Temeiuri netestamentare pentru voturile monahale,” in *Glasul Bisericii*, no. 1-2 (1985): 59-69.

⁸ “And when Paul had tarried many days in Corinth, he took leave of the brethren, and sailed to Syria with Priscilla and Aquila, having cut his hair at Chenhreaea, having made a promise” (Acts 18, 18). Following this model, the liturgical pruning of the faithful was born, as a sign of the promise of obedience, in the corresponding step.

Any Christian, at the moment he assumes Baptism (directly or indirectly, through their Godparent), also assumes obedience to the hierarchy of the Church, to a specific priest and to all the canonical ordinances that guide our lives.

In the prayer that is said when cutting the hair at Baptism, the priest states the following: “And grant this newly baptized, n.n. to believe everything according to Your Law and to do what pleases You”⁹.

b) *The canonical obedience of clerics to their superiors*, based on the tonsure before Ordination. It is an increased obedience in continuity with the spiritual obedience of Baptism. Clerical obedience is affirmed and conditioned by the Ordination covenant, where the candidate affirms his obedience to the Holy Council or, respectively, to his bishop.

It must be said, however, that this obedience is unconfined, and not total as in monasticism, since it cannot exclude the personal responsibility of the clergy in the church mission bestowed to them¹⁰.

c) *Total obedience of the monks to their superiors (abbots)*, based on the monastic vows. This canonical obedience is unconditional and goes as far as the complete cutting off of personal will. This is the highest form of obedience.

Monastic obedience reached its fullness through the integration of monasticism into the Church, through the Fourth Ecumenical Council (Chalcedon, 451), through its submission to the local bishop¹¹.

Canon 4, states: “*Those who truly and innocently spend the lonely life should be worthy of due honor. But (...) no one anywhere should build a monastery or house of prayer without the consent of the local bishop. And those who live the monastic life, either in a city or in the country, should obey the bishop and keep silence and spend time only in fasting and prayer, remaining in the places where they were ordained (...). Whoever violates this decision, we order to be condemned, so that the name of God is not blasphemed. The bishop of the city must take proper care of the monasteries*”¹².

⁹ *Aghiasmatar* (Bucharest: EIBMBOR, 1992), 42.

¹⁰ For this reason, the term 'bishop' derives from “overseer” (ἐπίσκοπος), not “master” (δεσπότης). The bishop has full ecclesiastical power to govern the diocese, which consists also in supervising his subjects, allowing them responsible freedom of expression, and intervening only when necessary. When freedom is stifled, supervision can become despotic, cf. Pr. Dr. Ioan Mircea, *Dictionar al Noului Testament* (Bucharest: EIBMBOR, 1984), 137 and 459.

¹¹ See also Emilian Bîrdaş, “Originea istorică a voturilor monahale,” in *Glasul Bisericii*, no. 9-10 (1954): 511-523; Nestor Vornicescu, “Începutul vieții de obște în monahism,” in *Mitropolia Moldovei și Sucevei*, no. 5-7 (1957): 416-430.

¹² Flocă, *Canoanele*, 80.

Tonsure in monasticism has its symbolism related to obedience, but originally was also *an actual haircut*, since the wearing of locks was a distinctive sign of the pagans. We find this mentioned in the holy canons.

Canon 42 Trulan states: “*We order that the hermits, who are dressed in black and wear hair on their heads, roam the cities spending time among laymen and women and slandering their own vow, if by cutting their hair, they choose to receive the scheme of other monks, let them be placed in the monastery and be counted among the brothers. And if they don’t choose this, let them be completely driven out of the cities and live in the deserts from which they also made their names*”¹³.

Likewise, canon 21 Trulan mentions the following: “*Those who have been guilty of serious canonical offenses and for this reason have been subjected to complete penance forever, and given to the state of the laity, if they willingly set out to return and renounce the sin for who have fallen from grace and make themselves completely strangers to it, then let them shave their heads in the image of the clergy. If they will not choose this willingly, then they should let their hair grow just like the laity, like those who valued the world more than the heavenly life*”¹⁴.

For various historical reasons, values were reversed: locks and long hair (hair left uncut), came to be the sign of taking monastic vows and not the actual cutting of hair¹⁵.

In the *Collection of Canons of the Orthodox Church*, most regulations related to obedience concern the monastic life. Based on this, we can summarize the following provisions¹⁶:

- Tonsure into monasticism should be done in the presence of the abbot of the monastery. He who does not observe this rule should repent, *can. 2, I-II*.

- Monks and nuns are not allowed to leave their monastery and go to another, or to another place, without the permission of the abbot or abbess, *can. 46 VII; can. 21 VII; can. 3 I-II*. If they refuse to let them leave, they can appeal to the Bishop, *can. 6 Nic. of Const.*

- The itinerant monk must be obligated (even by force) to return to their monastery, *can. 23 IV; can. 35 Nichifor the Martyr*.

- The monk who flees from their monastery must be damned, *can. 4 I-II*.

¹³ Floca, *Canoanele*, 132.

¹⁴ Floca, *Canoanele*, 118.

¹⁵ This also extended to the priests of myrrh. In Ardeal, the hair was the distinguishing mark of the priests, and the “popa Tunsu” was, in fact, the priest who had been catechized or had renounced the priesthood.

¹⁶ They were taken from the *Îndrumătorul Canonic* compiled by Rev. Prof. Dr. Liviu Stan, republished in *Biserica și Dreptul. Studii de Drept Canonic Ortodox*, edition coordinated by Rev. Prof. Dr. Irimie Marga, volume 9, “Îndrumător canonic. Alte studii și articole,” (Sibiu, 2018), 7-84.

- The monk can leave the monastery, “if the abbot is a heretic and if he allows the entry of women into the monastery”, *can. 17 Nichifor the Martyr*.
- The Bishop who receives a monk from another diocese, without a letter from the competent Bishop, must be punished, *can. 80 Cartagina*.
- The bishop can move a monk from one monastery to another, as well as allow a monk to live outside the monastery, *can. 2 and 4 I-II*.

All the holy canons give dispositions that are based upon canonical obedience¹⁷. Where the canonical obedience ceases, the power of the holy canons also ceases. On the other hand, the holy canons condemn those who reject canonical obedience, as a rejection of the promise expressed by the liturgical tonsure. As a result, the laity can be excommunicated, the clergy can be scolded to the point of excommunication and the monks can be excluded from monasticism, or be totally excluded from the Church¹⁸.

Canonical obedience cannot be invoked when the ecclesiastical authority exercises an abuse of power. That is why the holy canons condemn clerics who abuse ecclesiastical power (*can. 4, VII Ec.*¹⁹), meanwhile those in obedience cannot be held accountable for canonical disobedience, when they signal the abuse, and are even urged to ask for the help from superiors (*can. 125 Cart.*²⁰). Monks, without being condemned as disobedient, can leave their monasteries when the abbot no longer respects church ordinances or becomes a heretic (*17 Nichifor the Martyr*²¹).

Canonical obedience requires responsibility and discernment both for church authorities and for those in obedience. Canonical obedience, assumed in a

¹⁷ Casian Crăciun, “Importanța regulilor monahale,” in *Mitropolia Ardealului*, no. 5 (1987), 83-90.

¹⁸ See also *Regulamentul autorităților canonice disciplinare și al instanțelor de judecată ale Bisericii Ortodoxe Române* (Bucharest: EIBMBOR, 2015).

¹⁹ “If, therefore, for the extortion of gold, or of any other kind, or for any passion of his own, any one (of the bishops) should be found to withhold from the service, and to put to shame any of the clergy subject to him, or to shut up any honest church, that the services of God should not be performed therein, and his folly pass upon the foolish man, being truly without sense, he will be subject to the same passions, and his wickedness will return upon his own head (*Ps 7:16*), as a transgressor of the commandment of God and of the apostolic ordinances. For Peter, the first chief of the Apostles, also commands, “Keep the flock of God in your own care, watching over it, and not grudgingly, but reverently, after God; not seeking shameful gain, but zealously, not as being rulers over the flock, but being a model to the flock; and when the High Priest appears, receive the crown of glory (*1 Pet 5:2-4*)”, cf. Floca, *Canoanele*, 165.

²⁰ “And it was resolved that the presbyters, deacons, and other inferior clerics who are dissatisfied with the sentence of their bishops in matters concerning them, shall be heard by their neighboring bishops, and the controversies between them shall be settled by those who have been accepted by them, with the consent of their own bishops.”, cf. Floca, *Canoanele*, 296.

²¹ Floca, *Canoanele*, 456.

balanced and convincing manner for all members of the Church, means progress on the path of salvation, participation in the sacramental work of the Church and growth in virtues towards the acquisition of eternal life²².

Chastity

The second monastic vow concerns chastity. We are talking about *conjugal restraint*, since monasticism does not include only virgins, but all those who, from the moment of their vow, dedicate themselves to asceticism.

In this sense, canon 43 Trulan²³ specifies that someone's previous, sinful life is not an obstacle for entering monasticism, the condition is dedication and repentance in obedience, which he will have to prove in the monastery.

Regarding age, canon 126 Cartagina²⁴ requires that tonsure in monasticism should be done at the age of 25, that is, at full maturity, when the candidate realizes whether or not he can bear the cross of self restraint. Only exceptions, for blessed reasons, can be received before this age.

In order for monks to overcome temptations and deceptions, canon 20, VII ec.²⁵ specifies that a monk and nun should not have a conversation together alone. Moreover, monks are not allowed to sleep in nunneries and vice versa.

²² On the basis of the general priesthood (which is continued and fulfilled in the special priesthood), but also on the basis of the organic principle of Sagunian, obedience can also be divided in other ways, according to the sense in which it manifests itself: 1. *The hierarchical obedience* (of the groom, the priest, the bishop) to the higher ecclesiastical authorities, i.e. obedience from the bottom up. This is the expression of Christ's authority in word and grace, as the One who comes from the Father, according to his words: "He who listens to you listens to me" (*Lk* 10:16). Through this obedience the authority of those on high is recognized. 2. *The humble obedience of the higher ecclesiastical authorities to the subordinate*, that is, obedience from the top down. This is a spiritual obedience and reflects the kenosis of Christ, Who humbly descends to us, assumes His human being totally apart from sin. He gives us the perfect example when he listens to his Mother in Cana of Galilee, when he listens to the Canaanite woman or the Roman centurion. Humble obedience is a fulfillment of the exhortation: "He who would be first, let him be servant of all" (*Mt* 20:26). You cannot be someone's servant if you do not obey him. By humble obedience one recognizes the spiritual authority of those below. In this spirit Christ washed the feet of his disciples (*Jn* 13:5). Therefore, a priest or bishop only then exercises his canonically superior authority authentically when he is also humbly obedient, recognizing the authority of his subjects. Moreover, neither can you have authority from above if you do not recognize the authority of those below, according to the words "he who humbles himself will be exalted" (*Lk* 14:11).

²³ "It is lawful for a Christian to choose the ascetic life, and, leaving the too troubled life of the affairs of life, to enter a monastery and be trimmed according to the monastic image, even if he should be caught in any fall into error. For our Savior God said, 'I will not cast out him who comes to me' (*Jn* 6:37)", cf. Floca, *Canoanele*, 132.

²⁴ Floca, *Canoanele*, 296-97.

²⁵ "The monk shall not have idle talk with the nun, or the nun shall not speak to the monk, nor shall the monk lie in a women's monastery, nor shall the nun eat alone with him", cf. Floca,

In addition, canon 23 Nichifor the Martyr mentions that: “It is not appropriate for a nun to receive communion from a young priest monk, when he is serving the holy liturgy”²⁶.

With regard to the vow of self-restraint, the *Canons* also condemn some sins that may occur in a monk’s life. A monk who commits fornication or flees from the monastery and marries, should be subject to penances for fornicators, according to canon 44 Trulan²⁷.

Canon 60 of Saint Basil the Great²⁸ specifies that they should be given penance for adulterers, while canon 16 of Saint John the Hermit²⁹ provides exclusion for two years from communion, during which time they must fast and prostrate. Canon 35 Nichifor the Martyr³⁰, being much harsher, mentions their anathema.

Co-responsibility is very important for the community of monastic life. That is why he who knows the grave sins of other monks and does not reveal them to the abbot, should be subject to the same penance as the one who committed them, as stated by *Canons* 38 of Saint John the Hermit³¹ and 71 of Saint Basil the Great³².

Poverty

The last monastic vow is the vow of poverty, of renouncing everything in the world. This vow represents *voluntary impoverishment*, more specifically, the voluntary renunciation of all material things, with the aim of total dedication to spiritual life. This voluntary impoverishment must go to the point where the monk has no personal wealth, but assigns everything to the monastery, as mentioned in canon 6, I-II³³.

In consequence, as those who live and renounce all material goods, they must not dress in luxurious clothes, which would deceive, or would not reflect their state of poverty, according to canon 45 Trulan³⁴.

Canoanele, 177.

²⁶ Floca, *Canoanele*, 457.

²⁷ Floca, *Canoanele*, 133.

²⁸ Floca, *Canoanele*, 379.

²⁹ Floca, *Canoanele*, 438.

³⁰ Floca, *Canoanele*, 457.

³¹ Floca, *Canoanele*, 445.

³² Floca, *Canoanele*, 382.

³³ Floca, *Canoanele*, 308.

³⁴ Floca, *Canoanele*, 133.

Additionally, for the same reason of poverty, the monks can no longer practice trade, as specified by canon 76 Trulan³⁵. Monks must distinguish themselves by not intervening in the affairs of lay people (according to chapter 71 of the Pravila Mare³⁶) and to avoid entering ill-famed locations (bars), according to canon 24 Laodicea³⁷.

Monasticism and celibacy in relation to Mysteries and blessings

Regarding the monastic ascetic life, there are some specific aspects, regulated by the *Canons* of the Orthodox Church or by some local ordinances, which we will refer to in the following.

Tonsure in monasticism can only be done in the monastery, with the approval of the local bishop and in the presence of the abbot, only by hieromonks. This means that it cannot be performed by married priests in parish churches, the logical motivation being not to mix ordinances regarding the life of monks and the life of the laity.

Furthermore, the order also established that Baptisms and Weddings should be performed only by married parish priests, in parish churches. This ordinance was made by the decision of April 17, 2010 of the Holy Council of the Romanian Orthodox Church, with the title: *Monasticism in the monastery and wedding in the parish*³⁸.

These regulations are also found in the Great Rule (1652), chapter 135: “The hieromonk does not crown a man and a woman, he does not bless them, because this is unlawful and improper”³⁹.

Likewise, lay people cannot be godparents of monks, and monks cannot be godparents of lay people at Baptisms and Weddings, because each godparent must attend to their own way of Christian living⁴⁰.

Another important aspect is related to the sorrowful event from the communist period of Decree 410/1959⁴¹. It is an abusive decree by which monks

³⁵ Floca, *Canoanele*, 148.

³⁶ *Îndreptarea Legii 1652*, 71 (Bucharest: Editura Academiei, 1962), 711.

³⁷ Floca, *Canoanele*, 222.

³⁸ “Călugărie în mănăstire și Cununie în parohie: Comunicat de presă privind oficierea Tainei Sfântului Botez și a Tainei Cununii în mănăstiri,” <https://arhiva.basilica.ro/calugarie-in-manastire-si-cununie-in-parohie-comunicat-de-presa-privind-oficierea-tainei-sfantului-botez-si-a-tainei-cununii-in-manastiri/>.

³⁹ *Îndreptarea Legii 1652*, 135, 746.

⁴⁰ *Îndreptarea Legii*, 135, 746.

⁴¹ George Enache, “Decretul 410/1959. Un scurt bilanț la 50 de ani de la adoptare,” <https://ziarullumina.ro/actualitate-religioasa/documentar/decretul-410-1959-un-scurt-bilant-la-50-de-ani-de-la-adoptare-37899.html>.

under the age of 55 and nuns under the age of 50 were cast out of the monastery, under the pretext that they should “work for the creation of the multilaterally developed socialist country”⁴².

Due to the situation, many monks returned to society and got married. Here the question arises: Could former monks, who left the monastic vows by force, be married in the church?

The answer was given on the basis of canon 16, IV ec. which established: “It is not permitted for a virgin who has devoted herself to the Lord God, nor to monks, to enter into marriage. If they find themselves doing this, let them be damned. But I arranged for the local bishop to have the power to be respectful towards them”⁴³. Therefore, the local bishop was able to release them, on a case-by-case basis.

Another situation, related to the monastic status of women, was represented by the canonical “dispute” between Archbishop Andrei Șaguna and Bishop Calinic of Râmnicului regarding *the entry of nuns into the altar*.

Archbishop Andrei Șaguna, in the manual “*Elements of canon law*” regarding Orthodox Canon Law published for Romanians in Sibiu 1854, writes that according to can. 69 Trulan⁴⁴, nuns are not allowed to enter the altar. However, Bishop Calinic contradicts him, invoking can. 15 Nichifor the Martyr⁴⁵, and rejects the distribution of the Șagunian book in the diocese of Râmnicului.

Archbishop Andrei Șaguna, in the next edition of the manual (1855), revises his position and accepts that nuns have the privilege to enter the altar, according to the liturgic custom.

In fact, Bishop Nicodim Milaș explains this misunderstanding, in his comments on the holy canons, showing that both were right. The source of the dispute comes from old manuscripts, which interpret the same canon differently, specifically: the *slavă Cormciaia*, acknowledged and understood restrictively by archbishop Andrei Șaguna, while *the Athenian Syntagma of Armenopoulos* and *the Pidalion*, understands the same canon permissively⁴⁶. The argument for

⁴² *Enciclopedia Ortodoxiei Românești* (Bucharest: EIBMBOR, 2010), 413.

⁴³ Floca, *Canoanele*, 87.

⁴⁴ “Let none of all the laity be permitted to enter into the interior of the holy altar in any way, but the royal power and dominion is not restrained from this, when, according to some very ancient teaching, they would offer gifts to the Creator.”, cf. Floca, *Canoanele*, 145.

⁴⁵ “It is the duty of the nuns to enter the holy altar and light candles and candles, to clean and sweep it”, Floca, *Canoanele*, 455.

⁴⁶ Here is what Rev. Prof. Dr. Liviu Stan, a comment taken and published by Archd. Prof. Dr. Ioan N. Floca: “Referring to canon 69 Trulan, Andrei Șaguna seems to have a reservation, since in this canon only the emperor is allowed to enter the altar, apart from the clergy. Laymen, by this canon, are not allowed to enter the altar. Canon 44 Laodicea absolutely forbids women from entering the altar, on the grounds that they have monthly cleansings. There was also a controversy

reconciliation was given by Byzantine tradition and Romanian custom, which are in favor of nuns entering the altar, a custom preserved to this day.

A final aspect is related to the candidates for Bishop Ordination. The biblical principle is that the bishop is the husband of one wife (*1 Tim 3:2*). According to Saint Apostle Paul, in the early ages of the Church, bishops were married. However, *the apostolic canons* tell us that some of them tended to separate from their wives, so that for spiritual reasons they could live celibately, totally dedicated to the Church. *Canons 5 and 51 ap.*⁴⁷ did not accept this and stopped married bishops from abandoning their families, leaving their wives in order to live alone.

between Andrei Șaguna and Bishop Calinic of Valcea, who refused to distribute in his diocese Șaguna's book, *Elemente dreptului canonic* (Sibiu, 1854) on the grounds that Șaguna was showing that nuns or nuns could not enter the altar. This explains the appearance in the following year of the second edition of the *Elementele dreptului canonic*, in which Șaguna makes the above mention. Nicodemus Milaș notes, however, that in *Cormciaia*, the collection of canons in Slavonic, the text of this canon provides precisely the opposite, stating: "It is not proper for nuns to enter the holy altar and light candles" (Canon 11, II, 275). To this the canonist Nicodemus Milas adds his opinion, judging that the text of *Cormciaia* "corresponds better to the canonical doctrine of the Orthodox Church than the permission given by the present canon after the text of the *Sintagma Ateniană*, of *Armenopolis*, and of *Pidalion*", mentioning in the footnote that in the *Pidalion* it is added - as does Andrei Șaguna, probably after the *Pidalion* - that "this is permitted to nuns only in their monasteries" and directing readers to canon 69 Trulan, which, however, makes very little reference to the question of "this". N. Milaș motivates his opinion by invoking the authority of Zonara in the commentary on canon 44 Laodicea. And as an argument in this regard, the canonist N. Milaș invokes the decision of the Synod of Constantinople, from the time of Patriarch Nicholas in the 12th century, which allows monks to enter the altar, saying that if it was only 300 years after Patriarch Nichiphorus (9th century) that monks were allowed to enter the altar, in derogation from the provisions of canon 69 Trulan, how can it be that Patriarch Nichiforus allowed this to nuns? From this N. Milaș concludes that it seems to him to be more understandable that the ordinance was: "nuns may not enter the altar", as it was preserved in the *Cormciaia* edition, which was also translated from a Greek manuscript, different from the one from which the *Pidalion* and the *Sintagma Ateniană* were composed and inserted in the *Pidalion*, and from which N. Milaș made his translation. In support of his opinion, N. Milaș also invokes the authority of canon 44 Laodicea, saying that he does not see how Patriarch Nichifor could have allowed nuns to enter the altar in the 11th century, when the entry of monks was only allowed in the 12th century. Given these rational reasons, N. Milaș concludes by saying: "We believe that the text of this canon (15) of Nichiphor is more correct in *Cormciaia*, that is, in that Greek manuscript after which it was translated into *Cormciaia*, than the texts in the Greek collections mentioned above" (Floca 11, II, 234), cf. Floca, *Canoanele...*, 455-56.

⁴⁷ Can. 5 ap.: "*The bishop or presbyter or deacon shall not divorce his wife on the ground of piety. And if he should cast her away, he is to be defrocked and, if he is obstinate, he is to be catechized*"; can. 51 ap. : "*If any bishop or presbyter or deacon, or any one of the priestly catalog (cinul), abstains (would abstain) from marriage and from meat and wine, not for the sake of self-control, but for the sake of shame, overlooking (forgetting) that all things are very good and that God made man male and female, but blaspheming, would cleverer the creature, let him either amend, or else let him be put in an order of correction, or else let him be catechized and put away from the Church. So also the layman*", cf. Floca, *Canoanele*, 10 and 34.

The problem of the relationship between family life and Ordination⁴⁸ also arose in the Western Church, from the beginning of the first century. Therefore, at the local council of Elvira (today's Seville) between the years 305-306, through canon 33 it was decided that all clergy should be chosen only from celibates, considering that those who have no family would be more devoted to Christian mission⁴⁹.

This ruling was strictly respected only in the West⁵⁰, and did not influence the Eastern Church. Moreover, at the Trullan Council through canon 3, both circumstances were accepted, based on the principle of economy and unity in diversity.

This canon was expressed beautifully and wisely: "*Those of the most holy Church of the Romans proposed to keep the canon of harshness, while those under the seat of the God-guarded and imperial city (of Constantinople), accepts the canon that loves people and understands them, we accept them both for God, so as not to allow either gentleness to be too lenient or harshness to be too inhumane*"⁵¹.

Therefore the VI Ecumenical Council admits unity in diversity, just as according to the principle of dispensation, leniency and harshness can coexist without contradicting each other, so it was accepted that, in the West the clergy should be celibate⁵², while in the East deacons and priests should be married⁵³.

However, the same Council decided differently regarding bishops. Following the findings that those without family were more dedicated to the Church, while married bishops produced confusion among the faithful, it was decided that married bishops would no longer be accepted but should only be chosen from celibates.

⁴⁸ Here we must remember the principle that there can be no incompatibility between the Sacrament of Holy Communion and the Sacrament of Ordination. The sacraments are not mutually exclusive. If there are some regulations and prohibitions in this regard, they are not to be understood from a dogmatic point of view, but only from a canonical, moral and liturgical point of view, with the aim of serving the Christian faithful usefully and without disobedience.

⁴⁹ *Geschichte der Katholischen Kirche. Ein Grundkurs* (Graz-Wien-Köln: Verlag Styria, 1986), herausgegeben von Josef Lenzenweger, Peter Stockmeier, Karl Amon și Rudolf Zinnhobler.

⁵⁰ At the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), honorary deacons were allowed to marry, without abolishing the celibacy of priests and bishops. With the advent of Uniatism (from the 17th century), marriage was allowed for deacons and Eastern Rite Catholic priests, following the Orthodox model.

⁵¹ Floca, *Canoanele*.

⁵² Nicolae Mladin, "Celibatul preoților romano-catolici," in *Mitropolia Ardealului*, no. 4-6 (1970), 412-13.

⁵³ Spiridon Căndea, "Preoți căsătoriți sau celibatari?," in *Mitropolia Ardealului*, no. 9-10 (1961), 580-599; Jan Rusin, "Starea civilă a preoților și diaconilor după sfintele canoane," in *Studii Teologice*, no. 5-6 (1973), 387-398.

The following was decided by canon 12 Trulan: *“Even this has come to our knowledge, that in Africa and in Libya and in other places, the God-loving prelates (bishops) do not shy away from living together with their own wives, even after the ordination that came upon them, creating confusion and madness among the people. Therefore, because of our great zeal we believe that everything should be done for the benefit of the herds of those under our hand, it seemed to us that, anything like this should not happen from now on. However, we do not overthrow those who have been legislated apostolically but rather, making the salvation and advancement of the peoples for the better and not to give (opportunity) for any blame against the priestly state. For the divine Apostle says: do all to the glory of God. Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God: Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved. Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ. (1 Cor 10:31-32; 11:1). If someone were to be caught doing something like this, let them be defrocked”*⁵⁴.

This canon brought a change, abrogating the apostolic practice of married bishops, on the grounds of stopping confusion and making the mission more efficient, especially during the Arab invasions, under which three great patriarchs fell, imposing their celibacy, with arguments from the writings Saint Apostle Paul.

Moreover, canon 48 Trulan decided that bishops who were already married, should separate from their wives: *“The wife of one raised to the dignity of the bishopric, having previously separated from her husband, by mutual agreement, after the episcopal ordination over him, should enter a monastery built far from the bishop’s residence and should receive care from the bishop; if she proves herself worthy, she should advance to the rank of deaconess”*⁵⁵.

In the East it was established that deacons and priests could be married, while bishops could only be chosen from celibates. Celibates meaning those who were not married, but also those who separated from their wives⁵⁶, as well as widowers⁵⁷ who naturally remained without spouses. However, putting into

⁵⁴ Floca, *Canoanele*, 110.

⁵⁵ Floca, *Canoanele*, 134-135.

⁵⁶ This is not about divorced spouses in the modern sense of the word. From a civil point of view, divorce is a failure, an abandonment, a tragedy that destroys the family. Canon 48 Trulan does not speak of divorce (as some mistranslate this canon), but of amicable separation, not out of hatred, but out of love for salvation, asceticism and sacrifice in the service of the Church. Glava 219 of the Great Pravila (1652) also provides that a priest amicably separated from his wife, "if he is able to do so, shall be made a good priest" (Archd. Prof. Dr. Ioan N. Floca, *Drept Canonic Ortodox. Legislație și Administrație bisericească*, Bucharest, 1990, volume 1, 145). Therefore, the idea that those civilly divorced, by misunderstanding, as a failure of family life, could accede to the episcopal episcopate is totally wrong and anti-canonical.

⁵⁷ The status of widower is not a culpable status, but a sad, painful one, which arises without human will, but by divine will. That is why the Romanian tradition of electing bishops from among widowed priests by death has existed since ancient times and has been preserved to this day.

practice the provision of celibacy for bishops was not easy, in the Eastern Church there continued to be married bishops, even up to the 12th century, “there were married bishops even much later in the 18th century”⁵⁸.

Over time, however, the situation in the Church evolved and bishops were chosen both from among celibates, but also from among monks, as it was found that they showed a better theological preparation for the episcopal rank.

Along with this, the question of the relationship between the monastic state and the episcopal state arose. For this reason, at a local council in Constantinople from the year 879, also called the “Council of St. Sophia” because it took place in this church, this issue was discussed, and the following was established: *“Although until now some of the bishops who descended into the monastic scheme were forced to remain at the height of the bishopric, and by doing this they were overlooked, this holy and ecumenical council, correcting this decided that, if any bishop or anyone else of the episcopal dignity wanted to descend to the monastic life and fulfill the place of penance, he would no longer have a claim to the episcopal dignity. Because the settlements have a word for unconditional obedience and apprenticeship, not for learning and being a leader; nor do they ask to shepherd others, but to be shepherded themselves. For that reason, as it was said before, we decree that none of those who are included in the bishop’s catalog and among the shepherds should not lower themselves to the place of those who are shepherded and repent. If anyone dares to do this after the issuance and publication of the decision given now, that one, depriving himself of the episcopal rank, should not return to the previous dignity, which he renounced through his deeds”*⁵⁹.

This canon clearly shows the incompatibility between the episcopal state and the monastic state, because logically, one cannot have both full authority in the diocese and unconditional obedience to his abbot at the same time. It is clear that one cannot be master and servant at the same time. However, the bishops who were elected from among the monks kept and still keep some monastic attributes, but only by virtue of custom and not of the authentic fulfillment of monastic vows.

It should be remembered that the election of bishops from among the monks was not stopped, only that monks once ordained as a bishop, can no longer claim that they can continue to be monks, because the vote of monastic obedience is completely annulled.

However, over time, in the course of the Church’s history, *the custom of bishops being chosen only from among monks became widespread*. In this way, the election of bishops from among celibates, those separated from their wives and

⁵⁸ Floca, *Drept Canonic Ortodox*, volume 2, 62.

⁵⁹ Floca, *Canoanele*, 316.

widows, was allowed only on condition that they were ordained to monasticism before being ordained bishops. This custom became so strong that it is observed to this day, even if it does not have a complete theological logic.

In our Church, according to *the Statute for the organization and operation of the Romanian Orthodox Church*, art. 130, par. (3), candidates for the bishopric can be “an archimandrite or a widowed priest (his wife passing away naturally)”⁶⁰. Interestingly, celibates were no longer mentioned, but practically it was found that they were never excluded, because they cannot lose their canonicity.

In conclusion, **celibacy and monasticism** are two forms of Christian living, which brought wealth, strength and dedication to the Church of Christ.

Monks and celibates, who live in restraint, bring light to the family because as Canon 13 Trulan says, through them it was not intended to “*dishonor the marriage that was legislated by God and blessed by His presence; for the voice of the Gospel cries out: What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder (Mt 19:6); and of the Apostle who teaches: Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled (Heb 13:4)*”⁶¹.

The fact that the Church, through its *Canons*, ordained monasticism and celibacy, did it “*not for the overthrow of those who were legislated apostolically, but rather for taking care of the salvation and growth for the better of the nations. Because the divine Apostle says: do all to the glory of God (1 Cor 10:31)*”⁶².

⁶⁰“Statutul pentru organizarea și funcționarea Bisericii Ortodoxe Române,” <https://patriarhia.ro/images/documente/Statutul%20pentru%20organizarea%20si%20functionarea%20Bisericii%20Ortodoxe%20Romane.pdf>.

⁶¹ Floca, *Canoanele*, 111.

⁶² Canon 12 Trulan, cf. Floca, *Canoanele*, 110.