

Brief Explanation of Church Canons

Regarding Diocesan Bishop Nomination to the Patriarchate

Many queries reached us and we read various opinions regarding this issue, to which we responded in detail, and here we offer a brief explanation on this issue.

- 1) The source for this issue is Apostolic Canon 14, which permitted diocesan bishops to relocate for good reasons and under specific circumstances.

A bishop ought not to leave his own parish and leap to another, although the multitude should compel him, unless there be some good reason forcing him to do this, as that he can contribute much greater profit to the people of the new parish by the word of piety; but this is not to be settled by himself, but by the judgment of many bishops, and very great supplication. [cf. P. Schaff and H. Wace, *A.N.Fathers*, Vol. VII, Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1979, p. 501.]

- 2) When it became a prevailing habit for bishops to relocate in a way that violated the Apostolic Canon, the Council of Nicaea 325 AD passed an administrative ruling to prevent great disturbance. Despite this, this Council agreed to relocate two bishops from their dioceses: Eusebius Bishop of Nicomedia who had been before bishop of Berytus; and Eustathius Bishop of Antioch who had been bishop of Berrhoea in Syria, on the basis of applying the Apostolic Canon rightfully. Thus, the exception for good reason was maintained by the Council of Nicaea of 325 AD. The Nicene canon follows:

On account of the great disturbance and discords that occur, it is decreed that the custom prevailing in certain places contrary to the Canon, must wholly be done away; so that neither bishop, presbyter, nor deacon shall pass from city to city. And if any one, after this decree of the holy and great Synod, shall attempt any such thing, or continue in any such course, his proceedings shall be utterly void, and he shall be restored to the Church for which he was ordained bishop or presbyter. [cf. P. Schaff and H. Wace, *N & PN Fathers*, Vol. XIV, Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1979, P. 32.]

Naturally, the Council of Nicaea 325 AD cannot repeal the Apostolic Canon; rather, it prevented violating it.

- 3) **His Holiness Pope Shenouda III** titled the front page article of the Keraza Magazine dated May 5, 1995: **“All the patriarchs of our Orthodox Churches were previously bishops.”** He mentioned details concerning our sister Orthodox Churches in the faith: the Syrian Church, the Armenian Church, the Ethiopian Church, and the Indian Church. Examining what His Holiness mentioned, we find that most of those patriarchs had been diocesan bishops.
- 4) His Holiness Pope Shenouda III hand wrote (translated below and can be seen on our website) supporting the nomination of metropolitans and bishops to the patriarchal throne. This he wrote while bishop of education, during the nominations for the papal throne at its vacancy in 1971 AD. In his handwriting, he pointed to the enthronement of the Ethiopian patriarchs by our church, and the current patriarchal election by-laws of 1971 which is the 1957 by-law completed by canon 20 in

1971, which allows for nominating metropolitans, bishops, and monks. This by-law remains effective to this day.

Rejecting the ordination of bishops currently has against it the following:

- 1- *The Holy Synod falls into contradiction between its action of nominating five metropolitans and bishops, not one monk, and its decision to abolish the bishops and only accept monks.*
- 2- *The Holy Synod falls into a contradiction between its stance regarding the See of St. Mark and its stance regarding Ethiopia.*
- 3- *The Holy Synod collides with the by-laws.*
- 4- *This issue is against personal freedom. H.E. Anba Antonius declined of his own free will and not forced by a synodal decision. Likewise should be applied to the rest.*

5) **His Holiness Pope Cyril VI** enthroned Abouna Basillious the **Metropolitan of Shua** as Catholicos Patriarch for Ethiopian on July 28, 1959. **The Holy Synod envoy** of our church, headed by the locum tenens Metropolitan Antonious of Suhag, ordained Abouna Theophilous the **Bishop of Harar** as Patriarch of Ethiopia on June 9, 1971. This very locum tenens headed the enthronement prayers on His Holiness Pope Shenouda III as patriarch of the See of St. Mark.

6) On July 28, 1928, the Holy Synod nullified the decision of the 1873 synod, whose decision was passed under very special circumstances, not applicable beyond the circumstances of its time, especially since it relied on an incorrect translation of Apostolic Canon 14.

Following is the text of the 1928 Synod decision: **“To constantly follow the principle of promoting one of the metropolitans or bishops to the rank of patriarch once the patriarchal throne is vacated.”** [cf. Kamel Saleh Nakhla, and Farid Kamel, members of the Coptic History Committee, *History of the Coptic Nation, the Second Era: Compendium of the History of Christianity in Egypt.* 4th ed. Cairo: Mahaba Coptic Orthodox Bookstore, Vol 3, p. 172.]

Based on this decision, an ecclesiastic and a popular election took place, to promote Metropolitan Yuannis of Behaira and Menufia to become Pope Yuannis XIX. He was enthroned by fourteen metropolitans and bishops on December 16, 1928. Among them was Metropolitan Athanasius of Bahnasa and Beni-Sweif, who later became the locum tenens who headed the enthronement of Pope Cyril VI. He was the only bishop remaining, who had been ordained by Pope Cyril V (who had been a monk before becoming patriarch) [cf. *The History of the Patriarchs.* 3rd. edition, Vol. III.: The Sorian Monastery, 2011, pp. 227-228].

7) Regarding the circumstances of the 1873 AD Synod: the metropolitans and bishops refused to have Metropolitan Marcos of Behaira, the deputy of the See of St. Mark and the patriarchal vicar, imposed upon them by the Khedewy through Mr. Wahba Al-Gezawy, the senior financial scribe. The number of metropolitans and bishops who attended that synod was nine; they (unintentionally) relied on an incorrect translation of Apostolic Canon 14, not being familiar with the Greek language. The text they relied on (inserted below) contradicts the true text of Apostolic Canon 14.

Any bishop who abandons his throne, duties, diocese, and responsibility to care for his people, and goes to a different country, even if in need and out of necessity of harm, should be exiled and divested of his rank, unless asked by the bishops to stay with them for a reason or for the benefit of the people of his country, **asking him to remain with them until he fulfills his needs.** [Cf. *“The Fall of the Giants”* (which is one of the worst books) by Bishara Bastawros p. 65 of the Arabic version].

The incorrect translation advocates that a bishop should not go to another bishopric except to collect funds for the sake of his diocese. This is contrary to what was written in the correct text, that he can relocate for a good reason, such as to **“contribute much greater profit... by the word of piety,”** for the sake of education in the church.

This synod passed the following obscure decision: “Any enthroned bishop or metropolitan who requests this rank (patriarch), seeks it, accepts it, or if anyone seeks it for him, if a priest, an archpriest, or a layperson, this person **is excommunicated.**” [Cf. *“The Fall of the Giants”* (which is one of the worst books) by Bishara Bastawros p. 68 of the Arabic version].

If these excommunications were applied to the following generations, the apostolic succession of our church would be broken —God forbid— as we shall clarify.

- 8) All the metropolitans and bishops who enthroned His Holiness Pope Cyril VI were ordained by Pope Yuannis XIX, who had been metropolitan of Behaira and Menufia, and Pope Yusab II, who was metropolitan of Girga, except Metropolitan Athanasius who took part in the enthronement of Pope Yuanis XIX in 1928. If the excommunications of the 1873 synod were applied —God forbid— then all those would have been excommunicated, beginning from Pope Yuannis XIX until Pope Shenouda III, along with all whom he and the previous patriarchs had ordained [Pope Yuannis XIX, Pope Macarius III (who did not ordain any bishops), Pope Yusab II, and Pope Cyril VI].
- 9) Is it fitting for the contemporary fathers of our church to break the chain of apostolic succession of our church, simply based on their desire to prevent the nomination of diocesan bishops, or one of them? Is it fitting to post this on the internet, and force others to propagate this idea to the congregations in some churches? The apostolic precept is to “rightly divide the word of truth” (Cf. 2 Tim 2:15).

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Commemoration of St. Cyril the great of Alexandria the Pillar of Faith