

CHURCH DISCIPLINE- EASTERN STYLE: A GROWING CHURCH TAKES SHAPE

In our survey of Ecumenical councils, it is helpful to discuss one that while not **officially** among the list of 21, a council held in 692 is seen by many scholars today as **supplemental** to the previous two ecumenical councils. Just eleven years after Constantinople III, Emperor Justinian II called a council to address key aspects of **regulating** Church life. Thus, it was not doctrinal, but contained **disciplinary canons** regulating Church practice. This **Council in Trullo**—referred to as the *Quinisext* (lit. the “fifth/sixth”)—was held in the same domed-shaped hall (*trullo*) where Constantinople II was held. When finished, **102 decrees** were passed, reflecting all aspects of Church life. While doctrine is vital, so too is the manner in which clergy carry out their duties in service of doctrine. They were spot on! Among its canons, one finds elements for the later Eastern Code of Canon Law. The **Orthodox Church** judges it on par with the canons passed by the first four ecumenical councils.

Several canons reflect an **evident tension** between Rome and the East with respect to clerical celibacy. Canon VI of Trullo reaffirmed the rule that unmarried priests, deacons, and subdeacons may **not marry after** their ordination. This remains the case in eastern churches in union with Rome that allow a married clergy—ordination is the final step. **Bishops** were chosen from among the ranks of the monks, thus **unmarried**. Canon IX forbade clergy from engaging in secular trades, noting that if clerics cannot enter into taverns (bummer!), then neither should they serve others in one. Prudence takes center stage—clergy should shun secular jobs, that they may be dedicated to the Lord. [I found nothing in the Latin text forbidding the auctioning off one’s childhood baseball cards for charity— that was **not** considered commerce on the side. J] Two canons addressed what foods could be eaten during Lent— did fasting preclude eating eggs and cheese, for example? The Romans fasted on Saturdays— ought that still stand? They got into the weeds, for sure!

Canon X forbids usury among the clergy— charging unlawful interest on a loan. In truth, Canon XI forbade social interaction with Jews, clearly a **sad commentary** on the time. We cannot hide from **unsavory** aspects of our history, but rather must both confront and learn from them. Canon XV forbids the ordination to the sub-diaconate before the age of twenty, while Canon XVIII reminds clergy who “in consequence of a barbaric incursion” high tailed it out of town—absent a good reason— needed to return to their assignments! Canon LXXXII forbade representing Christ as a Lamb in icons, a prohibition the West would never accept. Two canons addressed forthrightly the evil of abortion. Though a mere sampling in a lengthy list, it highlights that as the Church grew, it was necessary to have more **organizational structure**. These reflected a growing and more intentional church that emerged from its infancy and now had deeper roots.

While not on the official list of twenty-one, **Trullo in 692** remains one of my most quoted church councils, as I refer to it whenever attending **wedding receptions**. You see, it’s my “golden ticket” to an **early bedtime**! Canon XXIV reads: “No one who is on the priestly catalogue nor any monk is allowed to take part in horse-races or to assist at theatrical representations. **But if any clergyman be called to a marriage, as soon as the games begin let him rise up and go out**, for so it is ordered by the doctrine of our fathers.” Translation? When the wedding games (i.e., dancing) begin—**after a tasty dinner**, that is—the clergy are to leave the premises. Preachin’ to the choir—I’m all in! While many of these disciplinary canons no longer apply, it is crucial to understand their vital place in our history.

While neither possible nor desirable to regulate every aspect of a priest’s life, I’m on solid ground

in saying that the lay faithful justifiably have certain **expectations** about our demeanor and behavior, based upon our sacred calling. Particular rules in the Church, while reflective of their day, respond to **perceived needs** in real time. This is what we **want** our Church to do. Over the years I have become comfortable with some of what I do or do not do as a result of my state in life. I am uncomfortable staying in 4-star hotels for myriad reasons, preferring clean, comfortable and modest ones. Yet, I readily admit that I enjoyed **excellent seats** at the Twins home opener—about 30 rows up from home plate. I **rarely** have flown business class but would not criticize others who do. Much of it is a **gut feeling** on what is appropriate behavior given my state in life. While a rule book ought not be needed for common sense, I actually **appreciate broad parameters**.

Church discipline serves **not as an end in itself**, but as a **means** to a more efficient and consistent Gospel message in service of the Risen Lord. We are **stewards** of His message of truth, not **creators** of our own. It is reasonable to have basic expectations for clergy and Trullo merely reflects the need for the codification of these expectations. While diocesan priests do not take a vow of poverty, we do **embrace** a life consistent with one who desires to serve and **not be served**. Challenges exist when trying to legislate clerical practice across a universal church, with its many differing social customs. As such, some regulations are much better left to local authority. While this decidedly Eastern council lacked the “stuff” of an **ecumenical** council, it set the stage for greater order in the Church.

- The **unrest** in the Twin Cities following the tragic police-involved death of Daunte Wright comes during a time of **heightened tension** as we approach the end of the Derek Chauvin trial. Archbishop Hebda invites us all to pray daily, both for justice and peace in our community.
- While I am less fond of winter with each passing year, at least I’ll never have to encounter a **10-foot alligator** underneath my car, as did a Florida resident. Yikes! Recently however, I did see a **red fox** outside my rectory window in the early hours of morning. While still dark, clearly this was no cat. Where do these animals come from, where do they live?
- Did you know that **St. Joseph** was present when the Blessed Mother appeared at Knock (Ireland) in 1879? It was a silent apparition—no words were spoken by either. The decoration of St. Joseph Chapel in this special Year of St. Joseph is now complete. The beautiful atmosphere of the chapel is most inviting for prayer. Please visit.
- Over the course of the Easter season, we will be reintroducing elements of **congregational singing** at our Masses. This will be done organically in stages. Masking is still requested for the time being and I thank you for your understanding.
- “Who’s on second?” The idea of starting extra innings of a baseball game with a **man on second base** isn’t sitting right with me. Though it greatly reduces the chances of extremely extended games, history reveals that **nearly half** of extra-inning games ended in the 10th inning anyway. Only **4.6%** of all games played have reached the 11th inning and beyond. Why mess with tradition?

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,
Rector