

2nd Ecumenical Council Canon VI
Text of Canon found in Etherial Library (14th vol. of Nicene and Post-Nicene
Fathers Series).

Canon VI.

(Probably adopted at a Council held in Constantinople the next year, 382. Vide Introduction on the number of Canons.)

Forasmuch as many wishing to confuse and overturn ecclesiastical order, do contentiously and slanderously fabricate charges against the orthodox bishops who have the administration of the Churches, intending nothing else than to stain the reputation of the priests and raise up disturbances amongst the peaceful laity; therefore it seemed right to the Holy Synod of Bishops assembled together in Constantinople, not to admit accusers without examination; and neither to allow all persons whatsoever to bring accusations against the rulers of the Church, nor, on the other hand, to exclude all. If then, any one shall bring a private complaint against the Bishop, that is, one relating to his own affairs, as, for example, that he has been defrauded, or otherwise unjustly treated by him, in such accusations no examination shall be made, either of the person or of the religion of the accuser; for it is by all means necessary that the conscience of the Bishop should be free, and that he who says he has been wronged should meet with righteous judgment, of whatever religion he may be. But if the charge alleged against the Bishop be that of some ecclesiastical offence, then it is necessary to examine carefully the persons of the accusers, so that, in the first place, heretics may not be suffered to bring accusations touching ecclesiastical matters against orthodox bishops. And by heretics we mean both those who were aforetime cast out and those whom we ourselves have since anathematized, and also those professing to hold the true faith who have separated from our canonical bishops, and set up conventicles in opposition [to them]. Moreover, if there be any who have been condemned for faults and cast out of the Church, or excommunicated, whether of the clergy or the laity, neither shall it be lawful for these to bring an accusation against the bishop, until they have cleared away the charge against themselves. In like manner, persons who are under previous accusations are not to be permitted to bring charges against a bishop or any other clergyman, until they shall have proved their own innocence of the accusation brought against them. But if any, being neither heretics, nor excommunicate, nor condemned, nor under previous accusation for alleged faults, should declare that they have any ecclesiastical charge against the bishop, the Holy Synod bids them first lay their charges before all the Bishops of the Province, and before them prove the accusations, whatsoever they may be, which they have brought against the bishop. And if

the comprovincials should be unable rightly to settle the charges brought against the bishop, then the parties must betake themselves to a greater synod of the bishops of that diocese called together for this purpose; and they shall not produce their allegations before they have promised in writing to undergo an equal penalty to be exacted from themselves, if, in the course of the examination, they shall be proved to have slandered the accused bishop. And if anyone, despising what has been decreed concerning these things, shall presume to annoy the ears of the Emperor, or the courts of temporal judges, or, to the dishonour of all the Bishops of his Province, shall trouble an Ecumenical Synod, such an one shall by no means be admitted as an accuser; forasmuch as he has east contempt upon the Canons, and brought reproach upon the order of the Church.

Interpretation is found on Page 214 of the English translation of THE RUDDER by D. Cummings, The Orthodox Christian Educational Society. Printed in England by W.H. Houldershaw, Ltd., Southend-on-Sea, Essex, England

Interpretation

What the present Canon says may be stated as follows. Since many men wishing to confound the discipline and good order of the Church inimically slander Orthodox bishops, without accomplishing any other result than that of blackening the reputations of those in holy orders and disturbing the laity, on this account it has pleased this holy Council to decree that neither all accusers of Bishops be admitted nor again that all be excluded or refused admissions

But if the charges are personal ones involving only financial loss, or, more specifically speaking, if anyone accuse a Bishop by complaining that he has treated him unjustly or greedily, by depriving him perhaps of some real or personal property, in such cases the person of the accuser must not be examined into, nor his religion; but, on the contrary, no matter what may be his religious views he must have justice done to him in any circumstances.

But if his accusations are of a criminal nature, such, that is to say, as might lower his ecclesiastical standing, as for instance, sacrilege, the performance of sacred rites outside the confines of parish, and the like, then and in that case the accusers ought to be examined, in the first place as to whether they are heretics, mistaken in doctrine, including both those who were anathematized by the Church long ago and those who have but now recently been anathematized by us.

Secondly, as to whether they are schismatics or not, or, more specifically speaking, whether they have separated from the Church on account of any curable habits, according to canon I of Basil the Great, and contrary to the Canons or, in other words, the catholic Bishops who have been ordained in the Orthodox manner and in accordance with the Canons, while they themselves are congregating apart by themselves.

Thirdly, whether they are entirely excommunicated from the Church for some misdeeds of theirs, or have been temporarily excommunicated from the clergyman or laymen. As for those, however, who have already been accused by others, they are not to be permitted to accuse a Bishop or other clergymen until they prove themselves innocent of the crimes imputed to them.

In case, however, those bringing these ecclesiastical and criminal accusations against a bishop happen to be free from all the above enumerated defects, the holy Council commands that these persons first present their indictments of the accused bishop before the synod of all the bishops of that particular province. But if the synod of the province cannot dispose of such a case of crimes, then the accusers may carry the matter up to the greater synod of the bishops of the Diocese, and have the case terminate there.

Because of the fact that in Book LX of the Basilica, Title XXVI, ch. 6, it is written that whosoever turns out to be a traitor and liar in the accusations which he makes, when it comes to the matter of punishment for this crime, shall receive that punishment which the accused one would have received if he had been found guilty, the present Canon pursuant to the civil law adds that provision that the accuser is not to commence a recital of his allegations unless he first gives a written promise to accept the same sentence and punishment as a rightly and truly justly accused bishop would have to undergo, if it be proved that he accused him unjustly and falsely.

Whoever scorns these regulations and affronts all the bishops of the Diocese, and should dare to appeal his case to the Emperor or to civil courts of secular authorities, or to appeal to an ecumenical council, shall be completely stopped from lodging any information, seeing that he has insulted the Sacred Canons and has violated ecclesiastical discipline.