

(THE SYNOD OF MAR 'ISHAQ

410 AD)

By the living God we write the synodical canons established at various times by our holy fathers in the land of the East, and the canons established by Mar Maruta¹, the bishop of Maiparqaṭ when he went down to Persia on an embassy in the days of Yazdgard² the king and in the days of Mar 'Ishaq³ the catholicos, who sat at Seleucia and Ctesiphon.

An account of those things which were corrected in the assembly of bishops, which was the first in the land of the Persians; and of the canons and ordinances set forth in the West in the land of the Romans by the bishops there, to which the bishops in the land of the Persians also agreed; and of those which they on their own established and defined regarding the orders of bishops and metropolitans; and concerning the patriarch and the ranks of the clergy; and concerning the admonitions set forth for those in ecclesiastical service; and concerning the confession of faith of the fathers, the three hundred and eighteen bishops, to which the Persian bishops, who were forty in number, also appended such matters as they accepted, confirmed, and sealed concerning the rest of the canons which had been established by their words and signatures.

First:

The First Synod, of Mar 'Ishaq the Catholicos:

In the eleventh year of the reign of the victorious King of Kings, Yazdgard, when {18} tranquillity and peace had come to the churches of the Lord, he⁴ brought about deliverance and rest to the congregations of Christ, and gave the servants of God the authority for Christ to be openly magnified in their bodies, both in their lives and in their deaths. He rolled away the dark cloud of persecution from all the churches of God, and put away the blackness of affliction from all the flocks of Christ. He commanded in all his kingdom that the temples which had been torn down by his forebears should be magnificently rebuilt in his own days, and the altars which had been pulled down should be carefully supplied. Those who for the sake of God had been tried and tested by imprisonments and torments were to go out in the open, and priests and rulers, as well as the entire holy profession⁵, were to move about freely without dread or fear.

These things happened in the days and through the election to the primacy of the honored and great man of God, our father, Mar 'Ishaq, the bishop of Seleucia and Ctesiphon, the catholicos and head of the bishops of all the East. He was deemed worthy by

¹ Died c. AD 420.

² Reigned 399-420.

³ His catholicate lasted from 399-410.

⁴ I.e., Yazdgard.

⁵ This is a reference to the "Bnai Qyama" **בני קימה**, or **בני קימה** (sing.), "Sons of the Covenant," who have taken some sort of ascetic vows and live a consecrated life, but not in monasteries.

God of this gift of all the East, for during his tenure and through his leadership the door of mercies was opened for the tranquillity and peace of his people and for the church of God, and his piety shone forth with greater honor than all the bishops in the East who preceded him. Through the encouragement and concerned effort of an ambassador of peace, an apostle who was sent to the East by God in his mercies, the wise father and honored ruler, Mar Maruta the bishop, a mediator of tranquillity and peace between the East and the West, he⁶ concerned himself with the restoration of the churches of Christ the Lord and was diligent that the laws, divine ordinances, and upright and trustworthy canons which had been established in the West by the honored fathers, the bishops, might also be established in the East as an edifice of steadfastness and truth for all the people of God.

In their care the rulers and fathers, the bishops of the Roman Empire, Porphyrius, bishop catholicos of Antioch, Acacius, bishop of Aleppo, Pqida, bishop of Edessa⁷, Eusebius, bishop of Tella, and Acacius, bishop of Amida, are worthy of a good memorial before the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as well as (before) all our churches and congregations in the East, for, though physically they are far removed from us, they have fully revealed to us the strength⁸ of their love for us and the anxiety (caused by) their separation from us, by writing a letter to their honored brother, the pride of our churches, Mar Maruta, and enjoining him with binding oaths that, without delay, their letter should be read before the illustrious and victorious King of Kings. Subsequently the honored Mar Maruta the bishop secretly showed the letter to his brother and yokefellow, joined with him in love and united with him in friendship, our father, the elect {19} of God, Mar 'Ishaq, bishop of Seleucia and Ctesiphon and catholicos and chief bishop of the East. With one accord and with one perfect will they translated the letter from the Greek tongue to the Persian, and it was read before the victorious and illustrious King of Kings.

By the will of God, who put it into the heart of Yazdgard, the King of Kings, to provide all benefits and to perform every good thing—as it is written, “The heart of the king is like streams of water in the hands of the Lord, and he causes him to incline whithersoever he chooses”⁹—as soon as he heard it, Yazdgard the King, with a joyful mind, said, “East and West are one authority in the dominion of my kingdom.” And because of the earnest solicitude of his heart he commanded that, by means of swift boatmen, they should hasten to the Marzbans¹⁰ of the districts with a royal patent of his kingdom for the bishops, that they might be sent: that is, (to the bishop) of Nisibis and its jurisdiction, of Hdayab and its jurisdiction, of Beit Garmai and its jurisdiction, of Beit Huzaye and its jurisdiction, of Maišan and its jurisdiction, and of Kaškar. The names of forty bishops were written down¹¹, and they were sent for, that by their coming and in their council disputes might be brought to an end and schisms and division might no longer exist, and that they might accept and carry out those things which were proper and right for the order of the catholic church. Also, (that) their brothers, the bishops of Fars and of the districts remote from a judgment made concerning such bishops, might accept any decree made regarding them.

In the month of Kanon¹², on the holy feast of the Epiphany, they came to the great city, the chief of all cities of the East. The victorious and illustrious King of Kings heard of their coming and commanded our honored father, Mar 'Ishaq, bishop of Seleucia and Ctesiphon and catholicos (and) chief bishop of the entire East, and his brother, Mar

⁶ The antecedent of this pronoun is Mar 'Ishaq.

⁷ Syr. Urhai.

⁸? ܠܘܨܘܨ for ܠܘܨܘܨ.

⁹ Prov. 21:1.

¹⁰ The term “Marzban” indicates a district officer, a Marquis, or frontier warden.

¹¹ ܐܘܫܩܐܝܩܐ for ܘܫܩܐܝܩܐ.

¹² “Kanon” is the name of two months, Prior Kanon (December) and Latter Kanon (January).

Maruta the bishop, that all should gather together at the cathedral church. The letter which was sent from the bishops in the West should be read in their presence, and they should obey and keep all that is written in it.

Then, at the beginning of the month of Šbaṭ¹³, on the third day of the week, there occurred the revival which happened to us, the restoration of the dead which we observed, the deliverance which took place for us, the peace which was multiplied to us, and new things which were done in our generation during the days and under the primacy of our father, Mar 'Iṣḥaq, catholicos and chief bishop, and at the instigation of the husbandman of tranquillity and sower of peace, Mar Maruta the bishop, came to pass, specifically, on the day of the synod of bishops in the land of the East. Our mouth was opened in praise, our heart exulted in gladness, our tongues uttered thanksgiving, and in spiritual worship, with faith we extolled the living God and his Christ, the Savior, and the Holy Spirit, whom we cannot repay for these great things he has abundantly done for us. {20} Together we all besought our merciful God to add days unto the days of the victorious and illustrious king, Yazdgard the King of Kings, and (to) his years for ever and ever, and (that) he might be established unto ages of ages. At the glorious sight of the synod of bishops our soul was magnified as though we stood before the throne of the majesty of Christ.

The heads of the synod [and elect fathers commanded that the letter which had been sent from the West] should be read [before the entire] new [synod] which had gathered in the East, and all of us—the forty bishops who had gathered from various places—gladly and with great eagerness listened to the letter and accepted everything written in it.

First, one concerning bishops: in a short time there shall no longer be two or three in one city, but one bishop in each city and its jurisdiction. Also, when a bishop is dying he is not allowed to consecrate another bishop, either at his death or during his life. Again, a bishop who is made by one or two bishops is invalid—(it is) only by three, even if the bishops are very far off. But this (must be) on the authority of a letter from the metropolitan archbishop.

Second: we should together, as one, keep the holy feast, the first-born of blessed feasts, the glorious day of the birth and epiphany of Christ our Savior. Again, as one, at one appointed time we should all alike keep the complete fast of forty days—seven weeks—and observe the feast of Holy Passover, and the great day of the crucifixion, passion, and resurrection of our Savior. Also, in all our churches one holy oblation should be offered to God, that is, the body and blood of Christ for the pardon of our living and the resurrection of our departed.

Third, perfecting all and adorning all that they¹⁴ wrote to the honorable Mar Maruta the bishop: “If our Lord is pleased to hear our petition, and the victorious King of Kings commands, and the bishops gather and a synod takes place, we now have sent you all the appointed canons which were established in the great synod which took place in the city of Nicea in the days of the just and God-loving Constantine the victorious king, when three hundred and eighteen bishops gathered and, according to the fear of God which was in them, established and set forth steadfast admonitions, chaste laws, upright rules, glorious canons, and enlightening ordinances.”

When we heard this passage from the letter of those honored members, immediately our holy father, worthy of a good memorial, in whose days our bent head was lifted up and tranquillity and peace came to us, Mar 'Iṣḥaq, bishop of Seleucia and Ctesiphon and catholicos (and) chief bishop, was the first to open his mouth, as the head of his members. {21} He said to his brother, joined in his love and in the concord of Christ, Mar Maruta the bishop: “Let them bring the volume in which the canons are written, and let it be read before the whole synod of these bishops.” And when they had

¹³ I.e., February. In the lunar calendar this would be February's new moon to that of March.

¹⁴ I.e., the bishops in the West.

brought it and read it, and when we had heard from it all the provisions which were needed for the upright order of the ministry of the church of Christ and had learned from it all the canons which were composed in the wisdom of God by our fathers, the bishops in the great and holy synod of the West, our soul was exceedingly gladdened with perfect joy. First Mar 'Ishaq the bishop, as the elect head of his members, said, "Anyone who does not agree to these glorious laws and upright canons and does not accept them shall be considered anathema by all the people of God and may not hold authority in the church of Christ." And all of us bishops alike gave consent with amen after him, and all of us spoke as he (had spoken).

Then Mar Maruta said to us all, "All these admonitions, laws, and canons should be clearly subscribed." Then we all subscribed at the end of the decree with our signatures and confirmed (it) with an unchanging covenant. Mar 'Ishaq the catholicos first said, "I place my signature at the head of them all." Then all of us bishops from all the various places promised after him that we too, all of us, would cheerfully accept and confirm with our signatures at the end all that was written above.

After some days our fathers, the honorable Mar 'Ishaq, catholicos of the East, and Mar Maruta the bishop, spoke to the victorious and illustrious King of Kings, and he wisely and grandly issued a decree. He commissioned Kosrau Yazdgard, the Grand Vizier, and Mihr-Šabur, the Chief of Staff, and all of us bishops went in before them and together listened to each of them. Briefly, they spoke to us in this way: "Previously a great persecution came upon you and you went about secretly. Now the King of Kings has brought about great tranquillity and peace for you. Through the mediation of 'Ishaq the catholicos before the King of Kings, whom he was pleased to make head over all Christians in the East, and especially from the day that Maruta the bishop came here in the friendship of the King of Kings, (bringing) the letter which came from the land of the Romans out of concern for the bishops here, tranquillity and peace has multiplied for you. So now Yazdgard, the King of Kings, commands thus: any man whom you desire to govern the people of God, and know to be suitable for rulership, and whom 'Ishaq and Maruta establish, shall become the head. No one may be divided against them¹⁵, and should {22} anyone rise up against them and resist their will, they shall inform us, and we shall inform the King of Kings. He shall have himself to blame for the evil which will come heavily upon him, whoever he may be." Then we left there together.

Again Mar 'Ishaq, catholicos of the East, and his honored brother, Mar Maruta the bishop, said to us, "On the day when the council of the synod took place and the canons and ordinances were read before you—how that the rules, limitations, and jurisdiction of each of the bishops in the various cities should be—you all heard and accepted. Now whatever is necessary for the conduct of the ministry of the catholic church should be written down in an edict, and you should sign and ratify (it) with an inviolable and indissoluble covenant." And all of us said in a loud voice, "Yea, (so) we do and determine gladly. Whoever does not render acceptance, but subsequent to this decree is carried away by the tumult of his own mind, shall be cast out completely from the entire church of Christ together, and there shall no longer be healing for his sickness. In addition he will receive in judgment the swift sentence of the King of Kings, and shall be thrown into bitter bonds in shame and disgrace."

Then we all took upon ourselves completely, with an unchangeable covenant, an inviolable oath, an indissoluble contract, and an immutable decree—and we asked the notary to write down—that foremost in all the churches, prayer, petition, intercession, and supplication should be offered before God, his Christ, and his living and holy Spirit on behalf of kings and rulers, that they may occupy a quiet and tranquil habitation and may not entertain a high and obdurate mind toward the people and church of God.

¹⁵ I.e., 'Ishaq and Maruta.

The Symbol of Faith of the Three Hundred and Eighteen Bishops:

We believe in one God, the omnipotent Father, Maker of heaven and earth and all visible and invisible things; and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who was begotten of the Father, the Only-begotten, that is, of the essence of the Father, God from God and Light from Light, true God from true God, who was begotten and not made, co-essential with the Father, by whom everything came into being in heaven and on earth, who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnated and inhumanated, and suffered and rose after three days, and ascended to heaven, and is coming to judge the living and the dead; and in the Holy Spirit.

But those who say {23} that there was a time when he did not exist, and before he was begotten he did not exist, and that he was made from nothing; or say that he was of some other *qnoma*¹⁶ or essence, or consider the Son of God changeable and mutable, such the catholic and apostolic church anathematizes.

The Canons Which Were Established in the Synod, Being Twenty-one in Number:

First: concerning an election and the order in which bishops ought to come for an ordination¹⁷.

Every bishop who is made by one or two bishops shall be invalid, both he who is made and he who makes. But when a bishop is made, the bishops shall assemble at the city and, with counsel, they shall inquire and seek out a man who is solicitous toward the poor, receives strangers, relieves the distressed, supports the orphans and widows, does not lend money usuriously, does not take a bribe, does not show favoritism in judgment, and separates himself from pride and greed; who meditates upon precept and wisdom and on the teaching of the Scriptures day and night, and has the understanding and discrimination to administer all things due to the church which are necessary for the ministry. When the bishops are gathered with his people and with his church before the altar of Christ at the hour when the oblation is made ready, they shall place the Gospel upon his head and together stretch forth the right hand over him, and the chief among them shall recite the consecrating (prayer). Afterwards, the bishop who was ordained shall come and be completed by the great metropolitan, the catholicos of Seleucia and Ctesiphon, bringing a letter from the bishops who ordained him. However, should any of us venture to make another bishop during his own life or at his death, (both) he who is made and he who makes shall be cast out without mercy from the entire clergy of the church.

Second Canon: concerning eunuchs who mutilate and castrate their members¹⁸.

Concerning eunuchs: according to what was commanded {24} by the synod and we also observe, any man who willfully makes himself a eunuch and damages his fruitful nature, the same shall not be received in the church. But if he was mutilated in his youth, or by his masters through force, or by barbarians, or in his infirmity he was operated on by doctors, he may be received in the clergy of the church, for the canon of the blessed fathers (so) allows.

¹⁶ Here *qnoma* is used in the sense of “substance” or “nature”.

¹⁷ Canon 4, Nicea.

¹⁸ Canon 1, Nicea.

Third Canon: concerning female co-habitants¹⁹, that they may no longer dwell with clergy according to the previous custom.

Again, concerning female co-habitants: according to what was established by the synod, we all enact that hereafter any man, (whether) bishop, presbyter, deacon, sub-deacon, or religious²⁰, who makes his dwelling with women and not chastely and in holiness by himself, as is solely proper for the ministry of the church—men with men alone²¹—the same shall not be received in the ministry of the church.

Fourth Canon: concerning clergy who are turned aside by impure profits²².

Again, concerning impure profits, interest, and usury, what was commanded in the synod we gladly observe. Henceforth, any man who is in the ministry of the church in one of the ranks of the clergy and has to do with usury and interest shall become a stranger to the ministry, and he shall have no contact with us.

Fifth Canon: that believers ought not to apply themselves to auguries, divinations, and alien practices.²³

Auguries, divinations, and alien works of impiety and sin which are related to paganism, and spells, amulets, witchcraft, and the service of demons, these all and their practitioners shall be considered anathema and accursed, and shall be alienated from all our churches and fellow-believers. Whoever is found in any of these things shall be cast out without mercy from the whole church of Christ and there shall never be mercy for him.

Sixth Canon: concerning the assembly of bishops: when, where, and for what reasons ought it to take place.²⁴

(Concerning) this canon {25} which was established in the synod—that twice a year there should be a synod in which the bishops should gather so that in their council all disputes and accusations might be brought to an end—we made a strong appeal to the heads of the synod that once in two years, when the king is in Seleucia and Ctesiphon, and the great metropolitan who occupies the see of Koke²⁵ writes to us, we will assemble gladly and will come for the veneration and honor of his fatherhood. All that he commands us we will carry out unreservedly in the fear of God, and the laws which Christ our Lord establishes for us we will accept, and will fulfill his will with fear and trembling.

Seventh Canon: concerning houses which are set apart for the entertaining of strangers; and concerning the needy, that they ought to be received through letters of recommendation²⁶.

Again, concerning the house in which strangers and the poor are received, which is to be designated in all the churches, we are persuaded that they should be received through a letter from a bishop to his colleague, or from a presbyter to his equal.

¹⁹ These are the “subintroductae” (see Canon 3, Nicea).

²⁰ Bar Qyama, lit., Son of the Covenant.

²¹ A footnote in Chabot has the variant addition “and women with women alone”.

²² Canon 17, Nicea.

²³ Canon 36, Laodicea.

²⁴ See canon 7, Arabic Canons of Nicea.

²⁵ This is the cathedral church of the Catholicos-Patriarch.

²⁶ Canon 7, Antioch.

Eighth Canon: That it is not lawful for those clergy who are invited to a supper or an Agape to demand and take away portions from that place, or to eat in a tavern, or to sit down at dinner associations.²⁷

Again, that presbyters, deacons, and sub-deacons may not come to Agapes of the poor unless one has been designated a supper of the clergy, and they are not allowed to take portions from that place, lest they bring disgrace and abuse upon the freedom of the church. No one who is in the church, whether of the presbyters, or deacons, or from the sub-deacons, religious²⁸, consecrated persons²⁹, or door-keepers, is allowed, in any case, to take a seat at dinner associations, whether at a funeral or in taverns.

Ninth Canon: concerning the proprieties due to the observance of the service on the first day of the week.

That on all Sundays the Gospel shall be read along with the other Scriptures and the word of God declared until the third or fourth hours. Then the oblation shall be offered.

{26} **Tenth Canon:** that each and every one of the bishop metropolitans ought to acquire a copy of these canons in order to study them and to establish from them what is right according to the agreement made concerning their keeping.

Because of the great quantity of subject matter in these canons, we agreed that each bishop metropolitan in charge of three, four, or five bishops should write down these canons. They should remain continually in his presence and from them he should establish what is necessary by his command and by his authority. We ourselves bear witness before the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit that we will not at all depart from these glorious laws and enlightened ordinances, neither we nor those who come after us. And as our faith, our baptism, and our church are one, and we worship one Being of the Holy Trinity, so also those who come after us in succession in all our congregations and flocks will be born and reared in the fear of the Lord Christ henceforth and forever.

Eleventh Canon: that there ought not to be an ordination of any bishop by one bishop alone; and concerning clergy who have been suspended by their bishop.

From now on the disorder which has existed among us should no longer continue. One bishop cannot make another, but we shall observe what is written above. Again, a bishop may not, in a disorderly fashion, transgress the boundary of his colleague. He should not do to his colleague that which is unacceptable to himself. A presbyter or deacon who has been bound by his bishop and rebels against him may not be received by another bishop.

Twelfth Canon: concerning the honor which is proper and due to the catholicos who occupies the see of Seleucia and Ctesiphon.

All of us together willingly have agreed—and have also been commanded by Yazdgard, the King of Kings—that we bishops of all the territories of the East and those who come after us shall be subject to the bishop catholicos, the head of the bishops and metropolitan of Seleucia and Ctesiphon—that is to every bishop who sits upon this great

²⁷ See Canons 24 and 27 of Laodicea.

²⁸ Bnai Qyama.

²⁹ For .

throne of the church of Koke—in all {27} due matters which are commanded, until the coming of Christ.

Thirteenth Canon: concerning the ordinances and canons which are appropriate to the liturgy, and to the Holy Mysteries, and to the glorious feasts of our Savior.

Also, the western liturgy which 'Ishaq and Maruta the bishops taught us and all of us saw celebrated here in the church of Seleucia, henceforth we shall celebrate together in the same manner. The deacons in every city shall proclaim the litany like this, and the Scriptures shall be read thus, and the pure and holy oblation shall be offered upon one altar in all the churches, and the usage³⁰ of ancient memory shall no longer exist among us. The oblation shall no longer be offered from house to house, and we shall celebrate together the great feast of the epiphany of our Savior and the great day of his resurrection as the metropolitan, the chief bishop (and) catholicos of Seleucia and Ctesiphon, makes known to us. Whoever ventures to celebrate alone, in his church and among his people, the great feast of the nativity, the fast of forty days, and the great day of the unleavened bread, separating himself from the agreement of the church of the West and of the East, shall be cast out without mercy from the entire ministry of the church as a baneful man, and there will be no more remedy for him.

Fourteenth Canon: concerning chorepiscopoi.

Again, the disorder of many chorepiscopoi for one bishop may not continue. Instead, one chorepiscopus for each bishop is enough, and where there are many they should be dismissed.

Fifteenth Canon: concerning the choice of an archdeacon, and concerning the ordinances which are proper to his ministry and to his administration; and concerning stewards; and concerning the censure of the scornful.

One archdeacon shall be designated for the bishop in a city, one who is articulate and wise in word and doctrine, is attentive toward the poor and solicitous of strangers, and is able to direct and command all that is proper in the service of the church. On Sunday, when the bishop is present, he shall proclaim the litany of the deacons upon the bema, {28} read the Gospel, and command every action which takes place in the service. He shall be the arm, tongue, and venerator of the bishop, and the hidden will of the bishop shall be brought to pass openly through him. He shall seat the presbyters on the benches and shall stand in the row at the head of the deacons when the bishop is sitting upon the throne. He shall place the sub-deacons, who are called “exorcists” by us, at the doors at the hour of service, and he shall command the giving of the Scriptures to the readers. He shall assign to the presbyters, deacons, and sub-deacons the weeks that they are to give baptism, perform the duties of the altar, and tend to the sanctuary and its adornment. It shall be this way in all the churches in which there is a bishop. Those who receive the weeks³¹ shall be maintained by the church, and their bedroom shall be in the diaconion. In every church and city men shall share out the weeks.

Concerning the offerings and gifts of the church which are committed to a certain faithful steward, hereafter this shall be the law: the keys of stewardship shall be placed upon the altar, and he who is (to be) the steward shall take them from the altar. When he resigns from his stewardship or the bishop is pleased to remove him, he shall go and

³⁰ *Καὶ τὸ.*

³¹ I.e., those who are assigned weekly to discharge the daily offices.

place the keys upon the altar, and he will receive from the holy altar either good or ill, as he is deemed worthy.

Each and every presbyter who is in a city, who is not suffering an illness, but is not sitting upon the benches with his colleagues at the hour of prayer, and is not before the altar at the hour of the oblation, shall cease from his ministry. The archdeacon will tell a certain presbyter to offer the oblation when the bishop is away, but when the bishop is present, the bishop is empowered to command as he wishes.

It is the same with deacons—each and every deacon who is in a city and is not suffering an illness, but is not present at the hour of prayer and does not stand with the people in the row of the deacons. Also, when he is commanded by the archdeacon to take the Scripture and to ascend the bema and read, after he reads he is not allowed to leave the people and sit within the diaconion—unless he is ill—but shall stand with his colleagues in the row for the rest of the hour. The archdeacon is empowered to render judgment {29} duly upon the deacon who despises these proprieties.

It is also the same for the sub-deacons: each and every one of them who is not found in the church at the hour of the service—unless he is sick or away on a journey, or there is some hindrance for him—and is not occupied in the Psalms and does not attend to the door of the sanctuary at the hour of service, shall be cast out, that this laxity may not corrupt many.

To him who is the archdeacon belong the responsibilities of consulting and inquiring after each one, and none of the presbyters, deacons, or sub-deacons is allowed to go to any village without his advice. Great care is required of the archdeacon as well, that he might serve strenuously and prudently in the church of Christ, that he might be a good example to many, for he is the lamp of the church and a light before the bishop by his word and his teaching.

This ancient custom shall not continue, that when an older presbyter is present, a presbyter who is younger does not offer the oblation, and for this reason all the presbyters and deacons leave and go out in order “to give opportunity to those who are younger.” Also, in the presence of the bishop one who is younger than he in years is allowed to offer the oblation if it is commanded by him. Only, when the bishop is away and any presbyter, great or small, is offering, none of the presbyters and deacons is allowed to leave the altar and depart. Also, it is proper to render honor to one another, according to the saying of the blessed Paul, who said, “One should consider his colleague to be greater in honor than himself.”³²

Sixteenth Canon: concerning the order which should properly exist for clergy who are called and come for ordination.

As for this vile and lax custom, which came into being in a disorderly way, that easily and hastily the right hand is indiscriminately placed upon those who are young and do not know the teaching of the Scriptures—henceforth this limitation shall exist according to the command of the synod: ordination to the presbyterate shall not be given to one who is less than thirty years. Again, the bishop is not allowed to ordain presbyters and deacons in ordinary places, but only in churches before the altar, in monasteries, and where the sacrament is consecrated. One who is unlearned in teaching, if he cannot recite David³³ orally, cannot even {30} be a sub-deacon, but should be reprovved until he learns to recite David orally, for because of this laxness there has been darkness in the churches. If he previously happened to receive ordination to the diaconate or the presbyterate, let him now recollect his mind and be instructed in doctrine, that the ministers of Christ may not be like laymen, ignorant in their speech and doctrine.

³² Phil. 2:3.

³³ I.e., the Psalms.

Seventeenth Canon: again, the agreement and covenant of the bishops concerning the keeping of these canons; and concerning the censure which they decreed against the scornful who neglect them.

All of us bishops who have gathered from various places according to the command of the victorious and illustrious Yazdgard, the King of Kings, have accepted gladly all these admonitions, beginning with our father and head, Mar 'Ishāq the bishop and metropolitan, (and) catholicos and head of the bishops, and all of us together. May the fire of God fall upon anyone who ventures to transgress any of these commandments, and may the wrath of God remain upon him. May he be bound and anathematized from the entire church of Christ in the four regions. Because of the disorder which previously existed due to ancient custom, it was arranged that all the requisites needed for the reformation of the churches which are in the East and the bishops in them who are over them, be written down in this edict and established for the generations to come, so that from this time on the previous tumult may never occur again. The names of these bishops have been written down and the authority which is given them, and by the command of the synod they have accepted that, for those who come after them, this limitation should also be placed upon them. May the binding and anathema written above, as well as the punishment of the King of Kings, remain upon anyone who ventures to transgress the canon. Any bishop of Seleucia and Ctesiphon is empowered to make another bishop in his (the offender's) place, and to appoint one who agrees with the correct opinion of the church to his position. However, even a bishop metropolitan, when he makes and establishes a bishop in his place, is not allowed to do this alone, but (only) when five bishops are with him, or, at the very least, three. In the case of the bishop who is in harmony with the church and is led by these canons written above, he shall have a good memorial in all the churches and flocks of Christ, and he³⁴ will give glory to him in the world which does not pass away, and bring (him) to life; and he will receive a good reward with all who have served well and attain good ranks with much confidence in the kingdom of heaven.

{31} Eighteenth Canon: concerning the primacy of order which is owed to the metropolitans; and concerning those things which are owed to them by each one of the bishops under them.

*And the names of the cities whose rulers are valid, and the cities over which they are appointed: for each city its name and designation, and the head in it who is the bishop there*³⁵.

The bishop who is placed over them³⁶ shall be a helper and encourager for them in all due matters, and when there is a dispute among them he shall bring peace to them through the counsel of love, not through the power of coercion.

Every bishop is empowered in his own land and city to make presbyters and deacons, to make disciples, to build churches, and to add to all of them such refinements as he desires, that he might be a good example to his colleagues. To a bishop metropolitan who is placed over his brother bishops in various places so as to be honored among them in rank belongs the right in his region to write and inform the great metropolitan concerning every matter which comes up among the bishops who are near him and under his control. If it happens that there is some accusation between a bishop and his colleague, or (against) a presbyter or deacon by his bishop, or (if) a bishop, whoever he may be, does not conduct himself according to the proprieties of the ministry, the bishop metropolitan who is placed over them should restore order among them with love,

³⁴ I.e., Christ.

³⁵ The portion I have italicized seems to be a misplaced heading.

³⁶ The plural pronoun here refers to the ordinary bishops. The "bishop who is placed over them" refers to the metropolitan.

understanding, and kindness, according to what has been established in the canons of the great synod. But if any matter whatsoever is too difficult for the metropolitan and he is not able to resolve it in peace, let him write and inform the great metropolitan and be rid of the vexation. It will belong to the catholicos to write [and according to his wisdom] give command and make resolution.

Nineteenth Canon: that a bishop is not permitted to act despotically or deal oppressively with one of his fellow bishops.

A bishop who becomes a metropolitan {32} is not allowed to exercise his authority violently, so as to enter the jurisdiction of the diocese of any of those bishops over whom he has been placed, or to write and demand things violently. Instead, (remaining) in his own place, let him write to the bishop of the diocese concerning certain accusations he has heard (about). If he is responsive to him (well and good); if not, let him inform the great metropolitan as written above. If the bishop of a diocese is so inclined, and on a memorial of martyrs seeks out the metropolitan who is placed over him to invite him to his diocese, such belongs to a bishop, whoever he may be, that he may please the bishop who is greater than he.

Twentieth Canon: concerning the order which is proper for the metropolitans to employ in an election and ordination within their jurisdiction.

When a bishop from one of the dioceses over which he is placed dies, a metropolitan is empowered to gather the other bishops and to establish a bishop with whom the city is pleased, and after he has established him to send him with a letter to the great metropolitan to be completed by him. Other than these things a bishop metropolitan has no authority over the bishops who are under his control. Also, he is not allowed to make a demand upon them through avarice or greed, or in a matter of taking or giving³⁷.

Twenty-first Canon: concerning the order and honor of precedence of the provinces and sees of the metropolitans, and the bishops under their control, one after another.

Since in this decree the bishops in the particular cities are named, the sees of the metropolitans are also made known one after another, and the bishops under their control are set forth: corresponding to the greatness of a city (its) see is also honored. Disorder and tumult have been found in all dioceses, among which are cities whose bishops should be cast out and rejected, for a certain Mḥapṭa and Mara nearby and here was and in Karka, which our bishops and 'Agapeṭa, Mara, Baršabṭa, and Šila, and they impudently gave them empty ordinations each of them to usurp the primacy for himself, and {33} laymen were also carried off by their tumult, vain pride attracting each faction to itself, (therefore) it is necessary for us to distinguish and make known the sees one after another. We have decreed in this synod for the bishops of both these cities—that is, of Beit Lapaṭ and of Karka—that each of them remain in his church in his own congregation, and one of them may not have authority over his colleague. Until all of them pass away they will have no authority to make presbyters or deacons either in the city or in a village. Concerning the bishops, they may not act against any of the bishops³⁸ listed above, and this decree is established with anathema.

Those sees which are honored and are set forth one after another because of the greatness of the city:

³⁷ I.e., in a matter of business or commerce

³⁸ The sense is unclear. Chabot has “may not make (others) beyond all the bishops”.

Even if one who is young occupies a particular see, honor is rendered to him because of his see and because of his city.

The first and chief see is that of Seleucia and Ctesiphon, and the bishop who occupies it is the great metropolitan and head of all the bishops. The bishop of Kaškar is reckoned with this diocese of the (great) metropolitan, and he is his right hand and fellow servant and governs his see after him. Henceforth the metropolitan of a diocese is under the control of the great metropolitan who occupies the see of Seleucia and Ctesiphon.

After this (is) the see of Beit Lapaṭ the metropolitan of Beit Huzaye. Therefore, when those bishops who have been restricted have departed, a bishop who is made by the metropolitan of Seleucia (will) be bishop metropolitan over his fellow bishops.

After this (is) the see of Nisibis, and the bishop who occupies it is metropolitan over 'Arzon, Qardo, Beit Zabdai, Beit Reḥimai, and Beit Moksaye and the bishops in them.

After this is the see of Prat and Maišan, and the bishop who occupies it is metropolitan over Karka, over Rima, and over Nhargor and the bishops in them.

After this is the see of 'Arbil, and the bishop who occupies it is metropolitan of Beit Nuhadra, Beit Bagaš, Beit Dasen, Ramonin, Beit Mahqart, and Dabarinos and the bishops in them.

After this is the see of Karka, and the bishop who occupies it is metropolitan over Šharqart, Lašom, 'Ariwan, Daraḥ³⁹, and Ḥarbgelal.

The names of the bishop metropolitans of the regions who are presently bishops:

For Beit Lapaṭ, which is a metropolis, there is no single bishop {34} whose name we may write among his fellow metropolitans, since all of the cities have two or three bishops in them whom the synod does not accept. However, when there is one bishop in Beit Lapaṭ he (will) be metropolitan over Karka, Hormizd-'Ardašir, Šošterin, and Šuš and the bishops in them. But (for) these three cities their bishops are valid in each city: Yoḥanan, bishop of Hormizd-'Ardašir, 'Abišo', bishop of Šošterin, and Zoqa, bishop of Šuš.

The next metropolitan (is) Hoša', bishop of Nisibis, and the bishops under his control (are) Daniyel, bishop of 'Arzon, Šmuel, bishop of 'Arzon for Baita dAustan, Daniyel, bishop of Beit Moksaye, and 'Abraham, bishop of Beit Raḥmai⁴⁰.

The metropolitan of Maišan (is) Zabda, the bishop of Prat, and belonging to his jurisdiction (are) Mari, bishop of Karka, 'Abraham, bishop of Rima, and Yoḥanan, bishop of Nhargor.

The metropolitan of Ḥdayab (is) Daniyel, the bishop of 'Arbil, and those in his jurisdiction (are) 'Išhaq, bishop of Beit Nuhadra, Baryanos, bishop of Beit Bagaš, 'Aḥadabuh, bishop of Beit Dasen, 'Aqbalaha, bishop of Ramonin, and Noḥ, bishop of Rabranahsan.

The metropolitan of Beit Garmai (is) 'Aqbalaha, the bishop of Karka: Paulos, bishop of Šharqart, Baṭa, bishop of Lašom, Yoḥanan, bishop of 'Ariwan, Narsa, bishop of Daraḥ⁴¹, and Yausep, bishop of Ḥarbgelal.

The bishops of distant lands — of Fars, the islands, Beit Madaye, Beit Riqaye — even if of the lands of 'Abrašahar — afterwards shall receive the decree established in this synod, each first coming and making acceptance and ratifying this decree with their handwriting and agreeing to these canons. A bishop has been established for the islands of 'Ardai and Todoro by the great metropolitan. His name is Paulos, and he has also agreed to this edict and given his signature with his fellow bishops.

³⁹ Perhaps one should read Radani (ܪܕܢܝ) for Daraḥ (ܕܪܗܝ).

⁴⁰ But see above for spelling differences.

⁴¹ ? Perhaps Radani (see note above).

The bound and execrable Baṭi of Mašmahig, is bound and anathematized, null and void, and rejected by this entire synod, he and anyone who accepts ordination from him.

Concerning the others who are headstrong and disorderly, who have called themselves by an episcopal title by way of usurpation and have led many astray, the synod of bishops has determined them to be bound and anathematized in heaven and on earth, as well as anyone who has fellowship with them, receives them, prays with them, or brings them into his house. {35} Let them be cast out of the entire church and flock of Christ and let their memories be blotted out from beneath the heavens. But if they show the fruit of repentance and conduct themselves simply like the rest, so that they come to the great metropolitan and write (that) they repudiate themselves⁴², and if they continue to fulfill whatever is commanded them, then there will be mercy for them. But if any of them ventures to transgress against this decree and his affair is reported to the king, he will receive punishment from the King of Kings and from the synod and there will be no healing or forgiveness for him. By a letter of anathema and of bonds from the synod they shall be bound, anathematized, and rejected by name in all the lands in which they live. A certain disorderly man from among them, who is present now, whose name is Daniyel, who received a worthless ordination from the bound and execrated Baṭi, shall be bound and anathematized by this synod. He must go out of the entire district into which he brought commotion and must not be found in it, but must go to his own land bound, dismissed, and rejected.

The peace of the Lord Christ be with those who follow the clear pathway of the true faith of the catholic church of the apostles.

The Signatures

- I, 'Išhaq, bishop catholicos, agree to everything written above.
- I, Maruta the bishop, agree to everything written above.
- I, Hoša', bishop of Nisibis, agree to everything written above.
- I, Zabda, bishop of Prat, agree to everything written above.
- I, Daniyel, bishop of 'Arbil, agree to everything written above.
- I, 'Aqbalaha, bishop of Karka, agree to everything written above.
- I, Yazdaidad the bishop, agree to everything written above.
- I, 'Agapeṭa the bishop, agree to everything written above.
- I, Miliš the bishop, agree to everything written above.
- I, Bar Šabta the bishop, agree to everything written above.
- I, Mara the bishop, agree to everything written above.
- I, Šila the bishop, agree to everything written above.
- I, 'Abdišo' the bishop, agree to everything written above.
- I, Zoqa the bishop, agree to everything written above.
- {36} I, Bar Ḥaila the bishop, agree to everything written above.
- I, Daniyel, bishop of 'Arzon, agree to everything written above.
- I, Šmuel, bishop of 'Arzon of Baita dAustan, agree to everything written above.
- I, Mihrbozyad the bishop, agree to everything written above.
- I, Mari, bishop of Maišan, agree to everything written above.
- I, 'Abraham, bishop of Rima, agree to everything written above.
- I, Yoḥanan, bishop of Nhargor, agree to everything written above.
- I, 'Išhaq the bishop, agree to everything written above.
- I, Baryanos the bishop, agree to everything written above.
- I, Paulos the bishop, agree to everything written above.
- I, the bishop, agree to everything written above.
- I, Mari, bishop of Kaškar, agree to everything written above.

⁴² I.e., abdicate.

I, Baṭa the bishop, agree to everything written above.
I, Yausep, bishop of 'Ariwan⁴³, agree to everything written above.
I, Yoḥanan, bishop of Garyatan, agree to everything written above.
I, 'Abraham the bishop, agree to everything written above.
I, Mara the bishop, agree to everything written above.
I, Milis of Prat⁴⁴, bishop, agree to everything written above.
I, 'Abi, bishop of Rima⁴⁵, agree to everything written above in this holy synod.
I, 'Abdišo', bishop of Nhargor⁴⁶, agree to everything written above in this holy synod.
I, Milis, bishop of Zabe, agree to everything written above in this holy synod.
I, Hoša', bishop of Ḥirta, have confirmed everything written above.
I, Šem'on Bardoq, bishop of Šošter⁴⁷ confirm everything written above.
I, 'Eliya, bishop of Mašmahig, confirm everything written above.

The Synod of Mar 'Išḥaq is concluded.

⁴³ In the list in the text above a Yoḥanan is named bishop of 'Ariwan.

⁴⁴ But see above for Zabda of Prat.

⁴⁵ But see above for 'Abraham of Rima.

⁴⁶ But see above for Yoḥanan of Nhargor.

⁴⁷ In the list in the text 'Abišo' is listed as bishop of Šošter. Can these latter names be later additions after changes in episcopal sees due to death?