

## The Theology of Gender - 16. The Applicability of Canonical Principles Related to Women (Sofia Matzarioti-Kostara)

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)



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The first commandment which was given to Adam and Eve is the original indication of the role of divine law in human life. "God gave them the commandment in order for them to be perfected gradually and, with time, to attain to immortality and *theosis*." [\[1\]](#) Theosis is the condition in which man is a partaker of the Grace of God through his cooperation with God's Will and is completed in absolute freedom. Theosis is the aim of Christian life and sin interrupts its way.



*Detail from The Baptism of Jesus fresco, by hand of John Popa, Romania*

Throughout patristic theology and the canonical tradition of the Orthodox Church, sin is addressed as illness<sup>[2]</sup> and according to St. Basil, it results in the loss of God's Grace.<sup>[3]</sup> The liberation of humanity from the shackles of sin is the main effort of the Church, and canon law "shares to some extent in the exalted mission of the Church"<sup>[4]</sup>, offering the means for the therapy of sin through its canons. St. Gregory of Nyssa, in his first canon, compares this therapeutic method of the Church through the canons, to medicine, and stresses the need for different treatment, according to the specific disease of the soul.<sup>[5]</sup> The main work of the Synods was, according to Romanides, to preserve the therapeutic method that the Church offers to its members.<sup>[6]</sup>

In Orthodox theology the Church is considered as the community that is formed of the people and God Himself (θεανθρώπινη κοινωνία) through Jesus Christ. This divine-human communion is a mystery and is realized because of God's love. The members of the Church constitute the body of Christ and the essential element of this unity is the participation in the Holy Eucharist.

According to Archimandrite George Kapsanis<sup>[7]</sup> the ecclesiastical community can be compared to concentric circles; the innermost circle includes the partakers of the Holy Eucharist, the next consists of those who are taking part in the prayers but are not receiving, and finally there are those who stand and hear the word of God. The simile is a graphic description of the stages of repentance; weepers, hearers, kneelers (προσκλαίοντες, ακροώμενοι, υποπίπτοντες, συνιστάμενοι), which aim at the restoration of the sinner into communion with the body of Christ through the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist. Those who have fallen from the faith or the Christian life need to pass through these stages and move towards the inner circle where there is true communion with Christ. The Holy Eucharist is the very heart of

the Christian life and in the ancient Church the fact that a Christian did not receive Communion was rare occurrence. Thus, the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> canons of the Holy Apostles condemn those who do not receive Holy Communion without a reasonable excuse.

The use by St. Basil of the sentence of excommunication, as the only penalty, indicates the ecclesiological basis of the canons. Excommunication is actually the acknowledgment from the Church of the reality of one's departure from the ecclesiastical community, and the main effort of her pastoral work is the return of the member which has become estranged.

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[1] Romanides, *The Ancestral Sin*, 158.

[2] In canon 102 of Trullo «νόσος», «ἁρρώστημα», in canon 6 of St. Gregory of Nyssa «ἁρρώστιαν», in canon 1 of St. Gregory of Nyssa «ἁρρώστημα ψυχικόν», in canon 14 of St. Basil «νόσημα».

[3] Hierotheos, *Καιρός τοῦ ποιῆσαι*, 315.

[4] L. Patsavos, *Spiritual Dimensions of the Holy Canons*, (Brookline MA, 2003), 5.

[5] Canon 1 of Saint Gregory of Nyssa «Ὡσπερ γάρ ἐπὶ τῆς σωματικῆς θεραπείας, ὁ μὲν σκοπὸς τῆς ἱατρικῆς ἐστὶ, τό ὑγιᾶναι τόν κάμνοντα, τό δέ εἶδος τῆς ἐπιμελείας διάφορον (κατὰ γάρ τὴν ποικιλίαν τῶν ἁρρώστημάτων καταλλήλως καὶ ἡ θεραπευτικὴ μέθοδος ἐκάστω τῶν νοσημάτων προσάγεται) ὡτῶ, πολλῆς οὐσης καὶ ἐν τῇ ψυχικῇ νόσῳ τῆς τῶν παθῶν ποικιλίας, ἀναγκαίως πολυειδὴς γενήσεται ἡ θεραπευτικὴ ἐπιμέλεια, πρὸς λόγον τοῦ πάθους ἐνεργοῦσα τὴν ἴασιν».

[6] J. Romanides, *Πατερικὴ Θεολογία*, Επιμέλεια Μοναχοῦ Δαμασκηνοῦ Ἀγιορείτου, (Θεσσαλονίκη, 2004), 213.

[7] G. Kapsanis, *Ἡ Ποιμαντικὴ Διακονία κατὰ τοὺς Ἱερούς Κανόνας*, (Αθήνα, 2003), 38.

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