

Summary

The Image of Daily Life of Christians in the East According to Ecclesiastical Normative Sources (4th-5th Century)

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The dissertation entitled *The Image of Daily Life of Christians in the East According to Ecclesiastical Normative Sources (4th-5th Century)* is based upon a selection of ecclesiastical regulations. The selection includes only sources in Greek, as I decided to limit the area of my research only to the eastern part of *Imperium Romanum*. All regulations were written in municipal areas where it was easier for me not only to examine various aspects of Christian life but also their changes in time. The sources originate from the 4th and 5th century, as in the 4th century the situation of Christians changed diametrically and they were no longer persecuted. Additionally, there are many preserved documents from that time, of both ecclesiastic and secular nature, thanks to which I could confront with them the information contained in the canons.

The discussed corpus includes the following ecclesiastical normative sources of Egyptian origin: *Canons of Hippolytus*, *Canons of Pseudo-Athanasius*, *Letters of Dionysius of Alexandria Aleksandrii* (248-264), *Canons of Peter, Bishop of Alexandria* (300-311), *Canons of Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria* (328-373), *Canons of Theophilus, Bishop of Alexandria* (385-412), *Canon of Cyril, Bishop of Alexandria* (412-444); originating in Asia Minor: *Canons of Gregory, Bishop of Pontic Neo-Caesarea* (238-270), *Canons of Basil, Bishop of Cappadocian Caesarea* (370-379), *Canons of Gregory of Nyssa* (ca. 371-395), *Canon of Gregory of Nazianus* (372-ca. 390), *Canons of Amphilochius of Iconium* (374-ca. 396), as well as the *Apostolic Canons* and *Apostolic Constitution*, written in north-western Syria.

The image of daily life presented in this dissertation does not cosely reflect its actual aspects in late antiquity, albeit it is coherent with them to some extent. We must be aware that the authors of the discussed sources wrote them in most cases in order to help improve the quality of ecclesiastic services and to reinforce discipline among the secular. My objective was therefore not to show what everyday life at that time actually looked like, but rather what it should look like according to the authors. Based on the presented regulations we are neither able to determine the scale of particular phenomena, nor to point out where exactly they took

place. If a canon regarding a particular offence occurs only once in the corpus, we may suspect that the offence did not happen often, although there is no guarantee for that.

The first chapter, based on the newest publications available, discusses the ecclesiastical normative works. The current attitude towards this particular group of documents is different from what it was a few decades ago. I refer to the subsequent critical editions and I discuss how their analysis changed with time.

The second and longest chapter is dedicated to the idea of what services of the clergy should look like according to the authors. I described in detail how people of the clergy were supposed to fulfil their duties and what aspects were being taken into account in their relations with other members of the community. I discussed the offenses attributed to them and types punishment which shows that they were expected to hold responsibility for their commitment. I tried to confront the regulations with the canons of selected synods and councils to show how ecclesiastical hierarchy worked. Besides the typical representatives of particular degrees of clergy, I added an extra one of *oikonomos*, held most frequently by a clergyman. That function was of special importance for efficient functioning of the dioceses in the East.

The third chapter focuses on the ideal everyday life of the secular. The authors of the regulations included considerably big amount of information which lets us reconstruct the idea of everyday life of that group and which shows the problems they dealt with while trying to keep the discipline. This is why the canons, besides enumerating particular offences, included also detailed hints regarding the kind and duration of proposed penance. A distinguished group of the secular were undoubtedly monks and consecrated females. The latter, i.e. widows, virgins and deaconesses helped serve other females that were part of the community. The canons did not allow them to celebrate liturgy, teach or baptize though.

The ecclesiastical normative sources discussed in this work clearly show that in the 4th and 5th century Christianity in the East was not homogenous. Particular communities in that part of the empire not infrequently had separate structures, used different liturgy or law, adherent to local customs. Thus the regulations discussed in this dissertation include the mentality, customs and traditions specific of the region from which they originated. For this reason they were discussed with regards to the area where they were written.

The life of a Christian community in that time period focused around the institutional Church. This is why the authors paid much attention to the services of the clergy. The collections of regulations confirm that in the 4th century the process of unification of the basic structure of ecclesiastical hierarchy in the East came to an end. On the top of the community stood a bishop, collaborating with a college of presbyters or *chorepiscopi*, and aided by

deacons. In big episcopal churches there were a number of subdeacons, lectors, cantors and ostiaries, sometimes supplemented by an archdeacon or archpresbyter. The number of serving hierarchs and their assistants depended on the rank and wealth of the bishopric.

In the time period interesting to us the clergymen in the East did not live in celibacy. Married bishops, presbyters or deacons were a common phenomenon. They only had to refrain from sexual activities directly before Eucharist, which was not celebrated every day. The three upper ranks in hierarchy were also not supposed to get married again if widowed and the demand that they would not get married after being ordained was becoming stronger and stronger. Lower rank clergy were allowed marry again if they had been widowed. No clergyman, however, was allowed to marry an actress, an abandoned woman or another woman of unclear past. Frequent repetitions of that ban may suggest that it was often broken.

Many clergymen had to work to for a living. Some of them were craftsmen or peasants. Their work often took much of their time of which our authors were not satisfied. They would certainly prefer that all clergymen devoted themselves exclusively to services. Due to work some of the priests happened to miss or come late to services. That was why the authors postulated that the community should provide living resources for the clergy. The clergy was also not allowed to do trade or manage real estates, as those professions were found dishonest.

The authors of the canons emphasized the importance of liturgy sanctity. Priests were to strictly obey its sequence and to come to church punctually. The sources inform us that in Egypt services were celebrated in white attire stored in closets inside the church. It was of utmost importance that no one unworthy (a catechumen, penitent, excommunicated person or heretic) would receive the Holy Communion. Priests and their assistants would see to it, which was not always easy, particularly when the church was crowded. Another important issue was to prevent insects (attracted by the light of lamps) from falling into the chalice with wine during liturgy. Deacons in Egypt and Syria used special fans to scare them off. Deacons were also responsible for keeping order among the faithful who talked too loud in church. It happened however that their own behaviour was far from being correct. We must not forget though that the services were a few hours long.

The sources pay much attention to various forms of assistance to individuals who needed it: the poor, orphans, widows, consecrated virgins, the sick, prisoners or refugees. Documents of Egyptian origin emphasize the role of an *oikonomos* in providing resources to help such individuals. The Syrian *Apostolic Canons* imposed that obligation on presbyters and deacons.

Charity took up different forms as described by the authors. One of common ones were the *agape* feasts, organized by the bishop in private houses or in church buildings after Sunday services, during which the poor received *eulogias*. Another form was caretaking for the lonely and the sick in church dormitories. Efficient assistance was possible thanks to good information circulation. Deacons were obliged to inform the bishop of the needs of the lonely and sick. The authors forbade favouring the rich, which suggests that such situations must have taken place. Another plague disapproved in the canons was robbing the poor by dishonest grain weighing. The regulations ordered sealing the weighs to prevent forgery. It is known that in the 4th and 5th century charity was run on a scale so far unknown. The number of individuals in need was so huge, that it was impossible to help all of them. For that reason there existed registers of the poor who needed aid. Assistance included orphans as well. If they had no relatives, they were educated by priests. Teaching practical professions was important to help them enter the adult life.

The sources reveal a big challenge for the Orthodox clergy, caused by heretics and schismatics. Bishops were obliged to control if all books of the Bible were canonical. Apocryphal books had to be turned down. The control would also include the songs sung during liturgy. As schismatics sometimes attempted to disturb services, clergymen were responsible to keep guard at the church entrance. Sometimes the church door had to be guarded at night as well.

In the sources we can find that some representatives of clergy committed serious offences, too. Deposition was the most severe punishment for clergymen for such an offence and it was for life. Lesser offences were punished with temporary suspension. They would include such offences as moving to another diocese without the bishop's consent, cheating the poor, usury, adultery, drunkenness, gambling, disobeying fasting, disturbing order at the altar, theft, contacts with magicians or heretics, a new marriage, violence against the faithful, seducing a consecrated virgin, castration, simony, nepotism, eating meat with blood, participating in Jewish celebrations and many others. Still, the assumption that the Church in the East in the 4th and 5th century had only to do with serious pathologies like those, would be an unjustified simplification.

Indeed, pathologies seemed to be only a small part of ecclesiastic life. The sources inform that many people of the clergy did their services in most excellent way. So wrote Pseudo-Athanasius about presbyters in the introduction to his work. Also the letters of the bishops of Alexandria demonstrate that the faithful put much trust in their priests.

The canons give a description of an ideal clergyman, close to his community and knowing its needs. Aid to those in need was his primary task. Caring for the sick and the homeless was not a grateful job, yet in the East there were many places where they could seek help. Basil the Great and John Chrysostom paid much attention to aiding the poor. Egyptian papyri testify that some bishops had close relations with their faithful and helped them in solving their daily problems. Pseudo-Athanasius was probably right saying that many clergymen of that time chose that kind of service to gain personal profits. Still, we must objectively say that the 4th and 5th century sources show that many priest reached the ideal of service postulated in normative acts.

The sources define everyday discipline of the secular, demonstrating problems they had to cope with in order to keep it. In the 4th century many individuals decided to join Christian communities. That was why ecclesiastical authors described the conditions upon which catechumens could be received. They had to give up their previous lifestyle and customs. As some of them used to put off the decision of being baptized for years, they were expected to get more involved in the life of the community. They would pay visits to the sick and help the poor. After they had declared their readiness for baptism, they were taught the Holy Bible for several weeks.

The regulations also demonstrate that the authors put much attention to keeping the principles of ecclesiastic law. We learn that many Christians had problems to stick to ecclesiastic discipline. For that reason the authors wrote down certain norms, according to which particular offenses resulted in appropriate penance or even excommunication. We should notice, though, that the superior objective of such regulations was to prevent the offences described therein. Canonical law was certainly moralizing in its nature. The authors intended to create correct attitude to life. That was why almost all authors emphasized the role of attending services and reading the Bible. The illiterate were supposed to listen to sermons at church.

We learn from the canons what kinds of offences were committed by Christians most frequently. They included adultery, debauchery, multiple marriages, drunkenness, meeting heretics and fortune-tellers, going to the hippodrome or theatre, usury, cheating the poor. There were other, more specific offences, such as grave-robbery, zoophilia, incest or abandoning infants. Penance for such offences had several degrees and could last for many years.

In the regulations we can also find the ideal of a pious Christian female. The women were encouraged to develop their inner beauty through doing good deeds, but they were

discouraged to pay too much attention to dressing, using perfumes or dyeing hair. It was particularly difficult to convince wealthy women who used to emphasize their social status through their look. All females were encouraged not to use public baths to avoid tempting and being tempted by males.

Wives were to be subordinated to their husbands and bring up their children without the aid of nurses. Abandoning children was unacceptable. Abortion and killing infants was identified with homicide. Basil the Great paid much attention to the situation of females, referring with much care to their offences. He was of an interesting opinion that a female was never guilty of the rape on her.

Consecrated women: deaconesses, widows and virgins constituted a remarkable group among Christian females. They served other females during the ceremony of baptism, prayed in the intention of the Church and helped those who were sick or in need. Deaconesses and widows recruited from the women who had lost their husbands and wanted to devote their lives to a pious life. The authors postulated that they should be of no less than sixty years of age. Consecrated virgins, on the other hand, were chosen by their parents. They were most often sixteen- or seventeen-year-old girls. Much room in the regulations was devoted to the vow to live in solitude. It happened many times that deaconesses, widows and virgins broke the vow and had relationship with men. In such cases they were removed from the list of females maintained by the Church. Looking at the particular position of deaconesses in the Eastern Church some individuals have tried to explain the idea of consecrating females. We must say, though, that the canons do not speak clearly about this issue. Deaconesses could not celebrate liturgy, teach or baptize, which does not mean they did not have ambitions like that, but in the Orthodox Church they were not allowed to.

Eastern canonical regulations draw the image of Christian males. Ecclesiastical authors expected them to be responsible. A married man should never cheat his wife. All adults should wear a beard, have a short haircut and dress modestly. This original Syrian description can be confronted with the opinion, popular at that time, that only females attracted others with their look. A man should also be laborious and avoid abusing alcohol, inappropriate entertainment, such as going to a chariot race or watching female dancers in the theatre.

A special group of Christians mentioned in ecclesiastical regulations were monks and nuns. Egyptian pseudoepigraphic writers must have been fascinated by the phenomenon of asceticism. They kept reminding that monks were supposed to live in total separation from earthly problems. They would practise fasting, mortify themselves and endure temptations.

The canons inform, however, that they were not always successful in that. They were not allowed to drink wine but we know they did. Moreover, they sometimes had their own vineyards and sold wine to others.

I am fully aware that my research was not exhaustive enough to cover the entire subject I was examining. It was not possible due to a huge source base and relatively short time devoted to the research. I only tried to sketch a general image of the daily life of a Christian community which emerges from these regulations. Ecclesiastical canons discussed various aspects or everyday life of Christians. And although thanks to them we can learn many interesting details, we must realize they were not an accurate record of real life, which was often very far from the presented ideal. This is why we must accept that these regulations postulated a worthy life and showed the way how to achieve it rather than described it. It is true, however, that comparing the information in the canons with other documents may bring us closer to understanding the conditions which reigned in the East in the 4th and 5th century.

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