

Rev. Constantin Dron, *The Current Value of the Canons*, Editura Doxologia, Iași, 2016, 168 pp.

This volume is part of the collection “*Documenta ecclesiae*”, a collection that aims to bring important works from the Romanian theology to the readers’ attention. It was published with the blessing of His Eminence Teofan, Metropolitan of Moldova and Bucovina, at Doxologia Publishing House, in Iași, year 2016. The work of rev. Constantin Dron, “The Current Value of the Canons” is his doctoral thesis, presented in 1928 and is characterized by originality and actuality within the subject of Church law.

The book begins with the Preface signed by Rev. Prof. Constantin Rus PhD., a professor at the Faculty of Theology in Arad, who synthesizes the entire study with obvious professional understanding of the Church law subject, recommending it as an original and current work. After evoking the author’s personality through his biography and journalistic activity, Lecturer Emilian Iustinian Roman PhD. extensively explains the term *canon*, which literally is a reed stick or any straight line of different lengths used for measurements, and figuratively it denotes the term *rule* or *norm*. He distinguishes two directions or currents concerning the Canon law, a rigorous one which takes into account the principle of accuracy, interpreting the canon “ad litteram”, and another more permissive which considers the principle of oikonomy. Further, it is shown that the holy canons are not obsolete and anachronistic, but on the contrary “we are the ones who are not able to live according to their spirit, which is the spirit of the Orthodox tradition”.

The Introduction presents how and when the canons appeared, making a parallel between state laws and holy canons that society and believers have to respect. A natural question arises: are the provisions from almost 2000 years ago still necessary for today’s society? The purpose of this study is to find an answer to this question and to bring light on this issue.

In the second chapter, entitled “Orthodox Church Legislation”, Father Dron divides the Church’s legislative work into three periods: the first -

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from the beginning of Christianity to Constantine the Great, the second - from Constantine the Great to the fall of the Byzantine Empire in 1453 and the third - from 1453 until today. Being persecuted until the time of Constantine the Great, the Church could not be organized on the basis of canons and Church laws; the Gospels, the writings of the Apostles and the traditions received from them were the rule of the Church. This period is called "The Age of Private Synods". The second period is called the "The Ecumenical Councils Age", which ranges from year 325 until 787, and from that date until 1453 the Church consolidated its legislative work by drawing up collections of canons, such as those collected by John Scholasticus, Zonaras, Balsamon et al. The third period coincides with the occupation of Constantinople, the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire, by the Turks. The Church has long resisted the Ottoman Empire, but during this period no legal progress has been made. It can be called "The Age of the National Churches", during which particular Church law was developed. The sources that offer the legal material to the Orthodox Church are the Apostolic Canons, the Resolutions of the Seven Ecumenical Councils, the Private Synods, and the canons of the Church's Holy Fathers.

The third chapter defines the Church Tradition as being an oral transmission of all that was not written by God-inspired authors but preserved in the Church from the time of the Apostles until today. The criteria of authentic Tradition are further exposed, first that it does not contradict the Scripture, and secondly as it was expressed by Vincent of Lerins: "in what was believed always, everywhere, and by all". Then it was required not to contradict another Church tradition and, most importantly, to be anchored in the Church of Christ.

Political and Church laws are mentioned in the fourth chapter; in the Byzantine Empire the ties between the Church and the State were very close, beginning with Constantine the Great who gave Christians the freedom to organize themselves as Religion. The Christian emperors showed much love to the Church and gave favourable laws because the Christian idea deeply penetrated their hearts. Within this "symphony" between the State and the Church, the Byzantine emperors supported the Church, legislating her matters, but they took into account the dogma and the tradition of the Orthodox Church.

In the previous chapters, we have discovered how Church law has appeared and developed over time. In this fifth chapter, it is presented

its relation to the science of Law which the Canon law belongs to. The question is whether these canons are eternal, unchangeable, or they suffer the fate of all that is human. The conclusion is that the Church has lasted for centuries as a divine-human institution, but one of the main strengths of its life is the canonical legislation and the uninterrupted thread of tradition from the time of the Holy Fathers and Ecumenical Councils. The thing that gives eternity to the Church lies in the divinity of her teaching, but as an earthly organization her power lies in the legal organization.

The sixth chapter is entitled "The Character of Canonical Work". The legislative work of the Church arose due to the circumstances of that time. From the moment a heresy appeared, a council was convened; the truth of faith was strengthened by dogmatic judgments and the Church discipline by canons. Councils were not organized periodically, but only when the situation demanded. Some canons include obsolete provisions, repetitions, or even contradictions, therefore the canonical work needs a careful review, but it has to be done in accordance with the Tradition of the Church and the fundamental principles laid down by the Holy Apostles and Fathers.

The seventh chapter entitled "The Validity of the Canons" is very interesting because it questions the actuality of the holy canons. The author cites Prof. Boroianu PhD., who states that "as far as faith is concerned, the laws remain eternally applicable, and as far as the good order in the Church is concerned, as other laws do not change them". Also, the canonist Nicodim Milaș stressed the same thing that dogmas remain unchanged, but the laws regarding discipline in the Church can be changed according to the needs of the times. But this can be done with caution, provided that the fundamental laws of Church organization are taken into account, and that there is no friction between believers.

In the last chapter, Father Constantine Dron claims that the 6th Council in Trullo from 692 was a synod for the revision of the entire Church legislative work until then. In this regard, the canonist Nicodim Milaș said that "The Holy Spirit, who has enlivened the Fathers when they gave laws concerning the needs of the Church at any given time, did not and will not cease to inspire them when they will gather together another time in the name of Christ to change the existing laws or to give new ones according to the new needs of the Church". The revision of the Church's legislative work was interrupted in the tenth century. After the two synods in 861 and 879, unrecognized as ecumenical, there were no

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meetings of bishops throughout the Christian world. There are three causes that led to this interruption: 1. the despotism of the Byzantine emperors, 2. the Mohammedanism, 3. the rivalry between Rome and Byzantium. It is necessary for the entire legislative act to be examined and then revised and complemented with everything that current needs have proven necessary. The only authority entitled to do this is the ecumenical council.

In conclusion, Father Dron points out that canonical work is in force and generally applicable, but it has some provisions that pertain to obsolete things, repetitions or even collisions, which will need to be reviewed at a future ecumenical council. Canons are not eternal laws, and they can be modified, but only by taking into account the connection with the past and respecting the doctrine of the Church, based on what has been written and spoken aloud. It was emphasised the need to convene an ecumenical council, but it is recognized that there is no longer an emperor to coagulate and assemble the whole Church. Today, the states are religiously indifferent because the faith in the hearts of their rulers has weakened.

The author highlights the role that the Romanian Orthodox Church could have, in terms of “continuing the legislative thread”, and considering that raising it to the rank of Patriarchate in 1925 would be a commandment of Providence.

The concluding word of this volume highlights the fact that “the power of the Church lies in its law”.

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