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Canonical Norms of the Eastern Church Concerning the Participation of the Laity in the Exercise of Teaching Power

Abstract: The theme of this article was approached from both theological and canonical-juridical perspectives, which allowed me to examine and evaluate the texts of the canonical legislation of the Eastern Church concerning the participation of the laity in the exercise of the teaching power, not only from the standpoint of canonical doctrine, but also from the perspective of the dogmatic and liturgical doctrine of this Church.

This scientific approach also enabled me to ascertain that one may indeed speak of the participation of the laity – who belong to the degrees of the clergy of human institution – in catechetical, missionary, and teaching activities, provided that they are instituted through *chirothesia* (χειροθεσία) by the local bishop. For this reason, I also highlighted the role of the ritual of the laying on of hands, which, in the case of the clergy of divine institution, represented ordination (χειροτονία), while for the clerics of human institution (cf. can. 2 ap.) it signified *chirothesia*, that is, a consecration for ministry in the Church.

I also investigated and examined certain early documentary testimonies of primary importance in order to clarify the canonical-juridical status of the laity, including women, in the exercise of the Church's teaching power. This analysis led me to conclude that the laity were called to confess and defend the Christian faith and to contribute to its transmission by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, being blessed for this purpose by His Apostles and their successors, within the sphere of authority of apostolic succession, namely, by the bishops of the Church.

Keywords: canonical legislation, the laity, clergy of human institution, Holy Sacraments

1. Introduction

I have approached the subject not only from an ecclesiological and canonical perspective, but also from a theological one, including its historical, patristic, dogmatic, and liturgical aspects. To achieve this goal, I have resorted not only to the hermeneutical analysis of the canonical texts and the commentaries of classical Byzantine canonists, but also based my considerations on biblical and literary sources (early Christian literature attributed to the Holy Apostles) etc.

This approach has enabled me to outline not only a complex field of research, but also a broader vision, closer to historical reality, regarding the participation of the laity, who – through the humanly instituted clergy – also participated in the exercise of teaching power, which was not the exclusive preserve of the divinely instituted clergy, since He who founded the Church, namely our Saviour Jesus Christ, willed that the laity who had received the Holy Sacraments of initiation into Christianity (Baptism and Chrismation) should bear witness to Him “before men” (Matthew 10:32).

Since the subject of my study concerns the participation of the laity in the exercise of teaching power, I wish to point out that the laity form the second constitutive element of the Church. For this reason, I considered it necessary to make a few terminological clarifications, however brief they may be, concerning the word *layperson*, since today it often conveys the notion of the profane, suggesting a person alien to the Church of Christ; hence also the doctrines of laicization, with which we have been confronted since the Enlightenment.

In Ancient Greek, the word λαϊκός expressed the notion of ‘profane’ (κόσμικος) or ‘layman’, in contrast to the term κληρικός (‘cleric’). The noun *laikos* derives from the verb λαϊκόω, meaning ‘to make public’, from which developed the sense of profane or lay; from this also emerged the notion of “laicity,”¹ which expressed the idea of belonging to the people, that is, to the profane sphere, and which advocates the separation of public institutions from the Church. A pronounced secularism was promoted by those who supported such ideas, especially since the Enlightenment period.

¹ N. V. DURĂ: “About the Freedom of Religion and the Laicity. Some Considerations on the Juridical and Philosophical Doctrine.” *Bulletin of the Georgian National Academy of Sciences* 13/4 (2019), pp. 156–164.

In Greek Christian literature, the expression ‘the lay person’ (ὁ λαϊκὸς ἄνθρωπος) was mentioned, alongside priests and deacons, for the first time by Saint Clement of Alexandria († 215).² In Latin Christian literature, the term *laicus* is first found in the writings of Tertullian († 240), when he stated that laypersons were also granted the right to administer the Sacrament of Baptism in exceptional cases.³ In Latin, the noun *laicus* (pl. *laici*) is also encountered in the text of the Vulgate, where it designates a person belonging to the body of the faithful without being part of the clergy, while the adjective *laicus* carries the meaning of ‘common’, ‘unsanctified’, or ‘profane’.

The Church granted laypersons the right to exercise the three ministries or functions of Christ, known in Theology as *munus docendi* (‘teaching office’), *munus sanctificandi* (‘sanctifying office’), and *munus regendi* (‘governing office’), because they become members of the royal priesthood (cf. 1 Peter 2:9) through the two sacraments of Christian initiation, namely, Baptism and Chrismation.

In the Church, from the apostolic age onward, the conferral of the authority, and ipso facto, of the power to teach has been effected through the rite of the laying on of hands, accompanied by prayers recited during the Divine Liturgy. This ritual of the laying on of hands was characteristic of both the Old Testament (cf. Numbers 8:10, 27; Leviticus 8:14–15) and the New Testament (cf. Matthew 19:13, 15; Mark 5:23; Mark 16:18).

In the early Church, through this rite of the laying on of hands, accompanied by the prayer pronounced by the bishop of the local Church for the invocation of the grace of the priesthood, the three orders of the clergy of divine institution (bishops, priests, and deacons) were endowed with the grace-bestowing power of the priesthood (cf. John 20:21–23), whereas those chosen for the degrees of the clergy of human institution (deaconesses, subdeacons, readers, psalts, etc.) received the blessing of their consecration by the local bishop for the various ministries of the Church this consecration is known as *cheirothesia* (χειροθεσία), and not as a Sacrament, namely the Sacrament of Ordination, that is, *cheirotomia* (χειροτομία).

² Sf. CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA: “Stromatele”, III, 12, 90, 1. In: *Colecția „Părinți și Scriitori Bisericești”*, vol. V. Trans. D. FECIORU. Bucharest 1982, p. 227.

³ TERTULLIAN: “De Baptismo,” XVII. In: *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 1. Ed. J. D. MIGNE. Paris 1844, col. 1317B–1318A.

The difference between ordination and *cheirothesia* is expressed precisely by the meaning of the two words in Greek. Indeed, in Greek, the term χειροτονία derives from the noun χερ / ος = ‘hand’ and from the verb τείνω = ‘to place, to set’, indicating the gesture of laying hands upon someone to install them in an office. In ecclesiastical language, the term *cheirotomia* has been used to express the conferral of the grace of priesthood upon the three degrees of divine ordination, whereas the term *cheirothesia* has been used to denote the appointment of clerics of human institution dedicated to various ecclesiastical services.

I should note that I have avoided speaking of the “higher clergy” and the “lower clergy,” as this distinction between the degrees of the ecclesiastical clergy is not found in the scholarly literature of the early Church. On the contrary, in the Apostolic Canons, we find that laymen who exercised various ecclesiastical services, such as those of subdeacons, deaconesses, readers (*anagnostai*), chanters, and others, were regarded as belonging to the clergy, more precisely as “οἱ λοιποὶ κληρικοί (the other clerics)” (can. 2 ap.). In fact, even in the Constitutions of Emperor Justinian it is stated that “πάντας κληρικούς καλοῦμεν / omnes clericos appellamus” (*Novella* CXXIII, 19),⁴ that is, all are designated as clerics, because they are chosen ἐν κλήρῳ / *in clero* (‘in the clergy’), that is, in the clerical order (*Novella* CXXIII, 29).⁵

By virtue of *cheirothesia*, that is, of the hierurgical consecration received from the bishop, the degrees of the clergy of human institution were likewise entitled to participate in the exercise of ecclesiastical power in its threefold manifestation: teaching, sanctifying, and governing (jurisdictional) according to their respective degrees of service within the Church. However, over the centuries, their rights were frequently contested and at times even restricted.

In the canonical law of the Eastern Church, we distinguish three categories of Church members, namely the ἱερατικούς, that is, the divinely ordained clergy; the λαϊκοί, that is, the laity; and the ἀσκητάς, that is, the monks (can. 77 Council in Trullo).⁶ Thus, to the two constituent ele-

⁴ *Corpus Iuris Civilis, Seventh Stereotypical Edition, Volume III: Novellae*. Eds. R. SCHOELL, W. KROLL. New Jersey 2010, pp. 594.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 629.

⁶ Σύνταγμα τῶν Θείων καὶ Ἱερῶν Κανόνων τῶν τε Ἀγίων καὶ πανευφήμων Ἀποστόλων, καὶ τῶν Ἱερῶν καὶ Οἰκουμενικῶν καὶ Τοπικῶν Συνόδων, καὶ τῶν κατὰ μέρος Ἀγίων Πατέρων [The Syntagma of the Divine and Sacred Canons of the Holy and All-Laudable Apostles, of the Sacred

ments of the Church, the clergy and the laity, monks⁷ were added as a third element (cf. can. 4 IV ec.).

According to the testimony of the canonist Theodore Balsamon (12th century), “there is no difference between ascetics and monks.”⁸ The distinction exists only between “those who are in the altar,”⁹ that is, the clergy of divine institution, who “are ordained, namely bishops, priests, deacons, and subdeacons,”¹⁰ and the clergy instituted through *cheirothesia* in the naos; yet “clerics are also called those who minister outside the altar (βῆμα), in the naos (ναός), namely readers, keepers of the sacred vessels, and others such as these.”¹¹ We note, therefore, that Balsamon also counted subdeacons among the degrees of the clergy of human institution, since they were subsequently placed, in the Eastern Church, at the head of the catalogue of the clergy of human institution, as its first degree.

As for ascetics or monks, Balsamon specified that these “are monks who have not yet received the seal from the bishop,”¹² that is, the *chirothesia*, “but only the monastic tonsure,”¹³ and that only “those who have received the seal from the bishop (σφραγίδα ἐπισκοπικὴν) are considered clergy.”¹⁴

In terms of structure, the article consists of three substantive sections. In the second section, I present – albeit briefly – the Eastern Church’s doctrine on the teaching power and its exercise. In the third section of the article, I provide the reader with several documentary and illustrative testimonies regarding the degrees of the clergy of human institution and their participation in the exercise of the teaching power. Finally, in the fourth section, I analyze the canonical and legal status of the laity, including women, and their participation in the exercise of teaching power in the light of the canonical legislation of the Eastern Church.

Ecumenical and Local Synods, and of the Holy Fathers in particular] (*Athenian Syntagma*), vol. II. Eds. G. A. RHALLE, M. POTLE. Athens 1852, pp. 483–484.

⁷ N. V. DURĂ: “Monahii, al treilea element constitutiv al Bisericii” [Monks, the third constituent element of the Church]. *Biserica Ortodoxă Română* 12/7 (2003), pp. 469–483.

⁸ T. BALSAMON: “Commentary on Canon 77 of the Council in Trullo.” In: *Athenian Syntagma*, vol. II..., p. 485.

⁹ Ibidem.

¹⁰ Ibidem.

¹¹ Ibidem.

¹² Ibidem, p. 484.

¹³ Ibidem.

¹⁴ Ibidem.

2. The Eastern Church's doctrine on the teaching power and its exercise

Jesus Christ the Saviour, He who has “the words of eternal life” (John 6:68), commanded His Holy Apostles to preach “the Gospel of God” (1 Thessalonians 2:2) to all creation (Matthew 10:5), and to teach “all nations” (Matthew 28:19). Based on this command, the Holy Apostles made the ministry of the Word of the Gospel a missionary work of preaching the Christian faith.

The power of the Church – with its three forms of manifestation (teaching, sanctifying, and governing) – has its foundation in the divine mandate, that is, in the Saviour's command given to His Apostles “to go and teach all nations (πάντα τὰ ἔθνη), baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them (διδάσκοντες αὐτοὺς) to observe all that I have commanded you”¹⁵ (Matthew 28:19–20).

The first manifestation of the power with which Christ endowed His Apostles – and through them His Church – is therefore the power of teaching, which is not limited merely to the preaching of His Gospel, but also involves teaching the Christianized nations how to observe all that He has commanded them. Consequently, the teaching power, through the combination of these two realities, takes on various forms of manifestation, and this is based on the divine mandate.

That the Apostles received this divine mandate as a command is also confirmed by the words with which the Lord asked His Apostles to teach the nations and how “to observe all (τηρεῖν πάντα) that I have commanded you (ὅσα ἐνετειλάμην)”¹⁶ (Matthew 28:20).

These words of the Lord, recorded by Saint Matthew the Evangelist in the Gospel written in Aramaic “around the year 50, for Christians of Jewish origin in Palestine,”¹⁷ and “rewritten in Greek around the year 65,”¹⁸ were able to circulate widely because, at that time, “the entire culture of the Roman Empire circulated in Greek.”¹⁹

¹⁵ *Nou Testament (Versiune bilingvă, greacă și română)* [New Testament]. Vatopedi Monastery, Mount Athos 2022, p. 86.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 87.

¹⁷ *Biblia sau Sfânta Scriptură. Ediție jubiliară a Sfântului Sinod* [The Bible or Holy Scripture. Jubilee Edition of the Holy Synod]. Bucharest 2001, p. 1459.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

In his commentary on verses 19–20 of chapter XXVIII of the Gospel of Matthew, a renowned Byzantine theologian of the 11th–12th centuries, Theophylact, Archbishop of Ohrid (Macedonia) – under whose jurisdiction at that time were also “the Vlachs (Romanians, n.n.) south of the Danube”²⁰ – wrote that the Apostles were sent to preach the Gospel “not only to the Jews,” but also “to all nations,” that is, “to all creation” (πάσῃ τῇ κτίσει) (Mark 16:15), for Christ the Lord “has dominion over all, sanctifying all human nature in Himself.”²¹

The Archbishop of Ohrid also adds the clarification that “God the Father has subjected all things to Him,” that is, He has given all things to His Son, Jesus Christ (Matthew 11:27). That “He has given Him all authority in heaven and on earth” (Matthew 28:18) is confirmed to us by our Saviour Jesus Christ Himself (Matthew 28:18).

From the text in Matthew 28:19–20, Theophylact of Ohrid also noted that Christ the Lord asked His Apostles “to keep,” that is, to preserve and fulfil “not one or two, but all [His] commandments,”²² hence his natural conclusion that we too “are required to keep them,”²³ since “the word of the Lord encompasses both foundations of Christianity: theology and good works. For, in saying that one ought to be baptised in the name of the Holy Trinity, He gives us theology, and in telling us to keep the commandments, He shows us active good works.”²⁴

Therefore, the word of the Lord encompasses both theoretical theology and practical theology. The former teaches us how to preach the Gospel of the Lord, whilst the latter teaches us how to keep His commandments.

To this missionary work of preaching the Gospel, which must be carried out through the Church of Christ, “the pillar and foundation of the Truth” (1 Timothy 3:15), all believers have been called, that is, both men and women, as is evident from the words of our Lord Jesus Christ: “Everyone who acknowledges Me before men, I will also acknowledge before My Father in heaven” (Matthew 10:32).

Both the teaching power and the other two branches of ecclesiastical power – sanctifying and governing – form part of “the means with which

²⁰ R. SINEANU, L. S. DESARTOVICI: “Cuvânt introductiv” [Foreword]. In: St. THEOPHYLACT, ARCHBISHOP OF OHRID: *Tâlcuirea Sfintei Evanghelii de la Matei* [Commentary on the Holy Gospel of Matthew]. Bucharest 2002, p. 20.

²¹ St. THEOPHYLACT, ARCHBISHOP OF OHRID: *Tâlcuirea Sfintei Evanghelii...*, p. 475.

²² Ibidem, p. 476.

²³ Ibidem.

²⁴ Ibidem.

the Holy Apostles endowed the Church when they established the divinely instituted priesthood and equipped it with all the means necessary for its mission. As such, the entire ecclesiastical power is conditioned by the priesthood, just as the mission or work of the priesthood is conditioned by ecclesiastical power.”²⁵

The organs of the Church through which the truths of the faith are preserved and preached are the priesthood, with all its divinely instituted degrees (bishops, priests, and deacons), and the body of the faithful, that is, the lay Christians, “to whom also falls the duty and the right to work actively towards the acquisition, knowledge and preservation of the faith.”²⁶

The definition and explanation of the truths of the faith were established through the decisions of the Councils, and in particular through the Ecumenical Councils, whilst the proclamation of the truths of the faith, through preaching, was carried out by the bishop or presbyter (cf. can. 58 ap., 19 Council in Trullo). However, lay Christians also participated in the preaching of the Gospel. Subsequently, laypersons were forbidden to preach or teach in public, as it was considered that by doing so the laity would assume the “office of teaching” (ἄξίωμα διδασκαλικόν) (cf. can. 64 Council in Trullo).

The same Council, convened in 691/692 (the second Session of the Sixth Ecumenical Council), forbade women to speak “during the Divine Liturgy” (ἐν τῷ καιρῷ τῆς Θείας Λειτουργίας) (can. 70 Council in Trullo). However, both Christian historiography and Christian tradition attest that lay catechists, mostly the women, also had the duty to catechize young and old of both sexes.

The participation of the laity was a presence in the life of the Church and in the work of deepening the truths of the faith through catechesis, but only those persons designated and approved by the bishop could teach the catechism both in the Church and in private homes (cf. can. 26 Laodicea).

Catechetical schools, which developed from the work of the well-known διδάσκαλοι (teachers) played an important role in the process of catechesis. Over time, such catechetical schools evolved into theological schools led by theologians who also possessed a solid philosophical grounding, such as Pantene, the founder of the Theological School of Alexandria, Saint Justin the Martyr and the Philosopher (Rome), Tatian and Athenagoras (Athens),

²⁵ I. N. FLOCA: *Drept canonic ortodox. Legislație și administrație bisericească* [Orthodox Canon Law. Church Legislation and Administration], vol. II. Bucharest 1990, p. 14.

²⁶ Ibidem, p. 17.

Praxeas (Asia Minor, Rome, and Carthage), Origen with the School of Caesarea in Palestine, etc.

Although, under the provisions of the canonical legislation of the Eastern Church, the right to preach and teach in the Church is held only by those who have received the grace of the priesthood – that is, the three orders of its divine institution, namely bishops, priests, and deacons – nevertheless, the laity have participated and continue to participate – in their capacity as collaborators of the divinely instituted clergy – in the exercise of the *teaching power (potestatis magisterii)*.

By virtue of the grace received through the three Sacraments of Christian initiation, namely the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, the Sacrament of Holy Chrism, and the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, the laity also may preach the word of God, for they too are not only “members” of the “Body of Christ” (1 Corinthians 12:27), but also, through the reception of these Holy Sacraments, “the faithful [who] become members of the universal Priesthood” (1 Peter 2:9; Revelation 1:6; 5:10; 20:6).

The laity participate in Christ’s ministry in its threefold aspect, namely, the teaching, sacramental, and kingly ministries, which theologians define as the *munus docendi* (teaching ministry), *munus sanctificandi* (sanctifying ministry), and *munus regendi* (governing, kingly ministry). These three forms of ministry are individual in nature; therefore, the work of the laity may encompass all three aspects of Christ’s ministry.

The laity, however, are entitled to participate in the work of the three forms of Christ’s ministry, but only insofar as it has been granted to them and insofar as it is possible for them to do so, since only those who are deemed worthy of the grace of the priesthood through the Sacrament of Ordination can exercise the power with which Christ endowed His Church. Moreover, the New Testament text tells us that God distributes His gifts “to each according to his ability” (Matthew 25:15), and that God also grants power (ἐξουσία) to those whom He deems should receive the gift of leadership and governance, since they too are “ministers” of God (Romans 13:6).

From Holy Scripture we also know that the power of God is one of His attributes (Mark 14:62; Acts 10:38), and that “the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation” (Romans 1:16). The same teaching tells us that “God imparted of His power to the apostles and to the believers,”²⁷ and that

²⁷ I. MIRCEA: *Dicționar al Noului Testament* [Dictionary of the New Testament]. Bucharest 1995, p. 431.

therefore the “Gospel” of Christ was “not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit” (1 Thessalonians 1:5).

The canonical teaching of the Eastern Orthodox Church also tells us that “the right of the governing Church to teach does not exclude that of the laity,”²⁸ who “began by being able to preach, were later forbidden to preach in the presence of the bishop, and subsequently were only permitted to preach with the consent of the ecclesiastical authority.”²⁹

According to the teaching of the Ecumenical Church, the exercise of teaching power is manifested through the acceptance of its truths of faith, and their formulation and transmission are carried out by the Church through its members, clergy and laity, that is, by the entire people of God, whose presence is indispensable also in the offering of the bloodless sacrifice, that is, the Holy Eucharist.³⁰

Indeed, according to the apostolic and ecumenical order of the Church, it is inconceivable that a Eucharistic Divine Liturgy should be celebrated “only for priests,” without the participation of at least one layperson. Moreover, the laity contribute not only to the provision of the Eucharistic elements (liturgical bread and wine), but also collaborate “with the priests” of the Church “in all the acts of the Holy Liturgy through prayer.”³¹

The very Acts of the Ecumenical Councils bear witness to the participation of the laity in those councils; although the signatures appended to the dogmatic and canonical decisions show that only the clergy of divine institution (bishops, priests, and deacons)³² were signatories. The presence of lay people at these councils, however, attests to the fact that the laity,

²⁸ L. STAN: *Mirenii în Biserică. Importanța elementului mirean în Biserică și participarea lui la exercitarea puterii bisericești. Studiu canonic-istoric* [The Laity in the Church. The Importance of the Lay Element in the Church and its Participation in the Exercise of Ecclesiastical Power. A Canonical-Historical Study]. Sibiu 1939, p. 108.

²⁹ Ibidem.

³⁰ N. V. DURĂ: “‘Povățuiri’ și ‘Învățături’, cu conținut liturgico-canonic, privind Sfânta Euharistie. Considerații eclesiologico-canonică” [“Guidance” and “Teachings,” with liturgical-canonical content, concerning the Holy Eucharist. Ecclesiological and canonical considerations]. In: *Dimensiunea penitențială și euharistică a vieții creștine*. Eds. G. PETRARU, L. PETCU. Iași 2014, pp. 63–109.

³¹ L. STAN: *Mirenii în Biserică...*, p. 55.

³² N. V. DURĂ: “Simbolul de credință al celor 318 Sfinți Părinți ai Sinodului de la Niceea (325), chintesență a învățăturii de credință ortodoxă” [The Creed of the 318 Holy Fathers of the Council of Nicaea (325), the quintessence of Orthodox doctrinal teaching]. In: *Sinodul de la Niceea (325). Mărturie a Sfinților Părinți, mărturisire de credință și autoritate canonică*. Iași 2025, pp. 163–199.

too, were entitled to participate in their working sessions and, consequently, in the exercise of the Church's teaching power.

A careful examination of the text of the canonical legislation of the Eastern Church can edifyingly confirm that the exercise of teaching power has a solid canonical basis,³³ and that laypersons are also recipients of God's grace through the reception of the Holy Sacrament of Baptism³⁴ and Chrismation.³⁵

And, consequently, they too may administer the Holy Sacrament of Baptism in cases of necessity, which – according to the dogmatic, canonical and liturgical doctrine of the Eastern Church – the ritual must subsequently be completed with the ceremony prescribed by the liturgical order, even if this “adds nothing to the validity and efficacy of baptism,”³⁶ whose indelible character is, moreover, identical to that of the other Sacraments of the Church.

The same canonical doctrine tells us that the efficacy of other Sacraments is also contingent upon the cooperation of the laity, such as the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony³⁷ and the Holy Sacrament of Confession.³⁸ For example, in the case of the confession of sins, the layperson must “examine themselves” (1 Corinthians 11:28) and demonstrate complete sincerity and a disposition of the soul that leads them to turn away from sin, and to sincerely desire to amend his ways, in order to be deemed worthy of “the final and most necessary provision (τοῦ τελευταίου καὶ ἀναγκαιοτάτου ἐφοδίου)” (can. 13 I ec.),³⁹ that is, the Holy Eucharist.

In the case of receiving the Holy Sacrament of Matrimony, any Christian layperson is required to express their consent, for without it the marriage

³³ C. MITITELU: “The Exercise of Teaching Power and its Canonical Bases.” *Icoana Crediinței* 20/10 (2024), pp. 23–32.

³⁴ N. V. DURĂ: “Dispoziții și norme canonice privind administrarea Sfântului Botez” [Canonical Provisions and Rules Concerning the Administration of Holy Baptism]. *Orthodoxia* XXXI/3–4 (1979), pp. 593–612.

³⁵ N. V. DURĂ: “Rânduiești și norme canonice privind administrarea Mirungerii. Sfințirea Sfântului Mir pe teritoriul românesc, expresie elocventă a stării de autocefalie a Bisericii române de-a lungul secolelor” [Canonical Rules and Regulations Concerning the Administration of Chrismation. The Consecration of the Holy Chrism on Romanian Territory, an Eloquent Expression of the Autocephaly of the Romanian Church Throughout the Centuries]. *Mitropolia Moldovei și Sucevei* LVII/1–3 (1981), pp. 39–57.

³⁶ L. STAN: *Mirenii în Biserica...*, p. 57.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 55.

³⁸ C. MITITELU: “The Application of Epitimias in the Rite of Confession According to the ‘Canonical Custom’ and the ‘Penitential Canons’.” *Teologia Młodych* 4 (2015), pp. 10–18.

³⁹ *Athenian Syntagma*, vol. II..., p. 143.

does not produce canonical-legal effects. Moreover, the juriconsults⁴⁰ of Roman law had affirmed that “*Nuptias non concubitus, sed consensus facit* (Marriage is created not by cohabitation, but by consent)” (Ulpianus, *Libro XXXVI ad Sabinum*),⁴¹ and that “Marriage (*Nuptiae*) cannot take place unless all consent (*nisi consentiant omnes*), namely those who are being united (*coeunt*) and those under whose authority they are (*quorumque in potestate sunt*)” (Paulus, *Edict*, Book 35).⁴²

In the Church of the early centuries, the participation of laity in certain forms of Christian worship is also attested by the existence of two categories of laypersons in the life of the early Church, namely, the “*didaskaloi*”⁴³ and the women “*deaconesses*.”⁴⁴

Regarding the *didaskaloi* (‘teachers’) – who were laypersons – both the biblical text of the New Testament and certain testimonies of the early Church, such as the “*Didache of the Twelve Apostles*,” the “*Didache of the Apostles*” and the “*Apostolic Constitutions*,” attest to the fact that their role was to spread Christian teaching and, by implication, to participate in the Church’s ministry.

We should also note that, in the Apostolic Church, the preachers of the Holy Gospel, referred to by Saint Paul the Apostle as *teachers* (διδασκάλους) (1 Corinthians 12:28), stood alongside the Apostles and Prophets (προφῆτας) (1 Corinthians 12:28), that is, the third body in the teaching ministry of the Apostolic Church about whom the testimonies of the early Church tell us that they had a consecration and a blessing from the Church, and that thus they participated in the exercise of teaching power by virtue of the grace received from the Lord.

⁴⁰ N. V. DURĂ: “*Responsa Jurisprudentium* (Responses of the Roman Juriconsults) on *Jus* (Law) and *Justitia* (Justice).” *Dionysiana* 1 (2021/2022), pp. 286–295.

⁴¹ JUSTINIAN: “*Digesta*,” I, 17, 30. In: *Corpus Iuris Civilis, Editio Stereotypa Septima*, vol. I. Ed. T. MOMMSEN..., p. 869.

⁴² JUSTINIAN: “*Digesta*,” XXIII, 2, 2. In: *Corpus Iuris Civilis, Editio Stereotypa Septima*, vol. I. Ed. T. MOMMSEN..., p. 295.

⁴³ A. FALCETTA: *Early Christian Teachers. The ‘Didaskaloi’ from Their Origins to the Middle of the Second Century*. Tübingen 2020, pp. 40–43.

⁴⁴ K. K. FITZGERALD: *Women Deacons in the Orthodox Church. Called to Holiness and Ministry*. Brookline 1998, pp. 17–46.

3. Documentary testimonies regarding the degrees of the clergy of human institution and their participation in the exercise of teaching power

St. Paul the Apostle tells us that there are “different ministries,” but it is “the same Lord” (1 Corinthians 12:5). One such different ministry was that of the deaconesses. Their ministry also included missionary and teaching activities. The same Apostle to the Gentiles tells us that, for those who have been baptised “into Christ [...] there is no longer male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).

In the Codex Barberini we also find the service for the “ordination of a bishop (χειροτονία ἐπισκόπου),”⁴⁵ from which we note that the archbishop “placed the Gospel on his head and neck,”⁴⁶ that is, on the one brought to be ordained bishop, “and made the sign of the cross three times with it and laid his hands upon him (ἐπιτιθεὶς αὐτῷ τὴν χεῖρα).”⁴⁷

From the text of the prayer which the bishop recited at the “ordination of the deacon (χειροτονία διακόνου),”⁴⁸ we note that he implored God to grant him the Grace of the Holy Spirit, so that he might become a minister, and be “worthy (ἄξιος) of the ministry to which he has been called,”⁴⁹ “to proclaim the Gospel of his salvation” and to offer to God the “spiritual sacrifice (θυσία πνευματικῆς).”⁵⁰

From the text of the Prayers in the Codex Barberini (Εὐχολόγιον Barberini gr. 336) it can be seen that, during the administration of the Holy Sacrament of Baptism – performed by a bishop or priest – the deacon⁵¹ recited the litanies, and not the deaconess.

We find the same thing in the Service of Anointing with Holy Chrism,⁵² where the litanies are recited only by the deacon or archdeacon,⁵³ which

⁴⁵ *L'Euclologio Barberini gr. 336 (ff. 1–263)*. Eds. S. PARENTI, E. VELKOVSKA. Second edition. Rome 2000, pp. 174–178.

⁴⁶ Ibidem, p. 175.

⁴⁷ Ibidem.

⁴⁸ Ibidem, p. 179.

⁴⁹ Ibidem, p. 180.

⁵⁰ Ibidem.

⁵¹ Ibidem, pp. 108–136.

⁵² Ibidem, pp. 137–141.

⁵³ Ibidem, p. 139.

attests to the fact that deaconesses did not possess the grace of the priesthood.

On the occasion of ordination to the three orders of divine institution (bishop, priest, and deacon), “the people (ὁ λαός)” were required to say “Worthy and Just (Ἄξιον καὶ δίκαιον).”⁵⁴ These words attest to the fact that, in the early Church, the people participated in the selection of the ministers of the Altar and had a decisive say even in their ordination.

However, the Codex Barberini also contains the “Prayer for the Ordination of a Deaconess (Εὐχή ἐπὶ χειροτονία διακονίσσης),”⁵⁵ from which we retain the following points:

- a) The rite (*diataxa*) for the ordination of a deaconess took place within the Holy Liturgy, but in the naos.
- b) This rite was performed by the bishop, who invoked “divine grace” to make her worthy of the gift of ministry to which she had been called, since the text refers to a “Ἱερουργία” (*Hierourgia*), and not to a Sacrament (*Mysterion*).
- c) The ordination ritual was almost identical to that for the other orders of divine institution, namely: the bowing of the head, the bishop placing his hands upon her head, and the making of three signs of the cross.
- d) That this is not an *ordination* (χειροτονία), but a *hierourgia* (ἱερουργία), that is, a sacred rite for consecration, associated with a benediction (εὐλογία), as it is also indicated by the text of the prayer recited by the bishop, from which we note that, “through the birth according to the flesh of the Son of our God from the Holy Virgin Mary,”⁵⁶ the whole of human nature, both male and female, was sanctified, and that God bestowed “grace upon women” (γυναιξιν τὴν χάριν) through the descent of the Holy Spirit upon them.
- e) The deaconess was called “to the work of service” to God, for which the bishop prays to God to send her “the rich gift of the Holy Spirit (τὴν πλουσίαν δωρεάν τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος).”⁵⁷
- f) It follows from the text of the prayer that the deaconess performed a ministry (λειτουργία); therefore, she did not perform a sacramental rite, as was the case with deacons, but a liturgical one.

⁵⁴ Ibidem, p. 180.

⁵⁵ Ibidem, pp. 185–186.

⁵⁶ Ibidem, p. 185.

⁵⁷ Ibidem, p. 186.

Consequently, the fact that the text of this Euchologion uses the word “ordination” also for deaconesses, that is the term used only for the Sacrament of Priesthood, instead of the proper term, namely *chirothesia*, that is a “hierurgy,” should not lead us to the mistaken conclusion that, in the early Church, deaconesses received the Sacrament of Ordination, as is claimed today even by adherents of feminist currents.

It should also be noted that the text of this prayer attests that deaconesses constituted the first degree within the body of the clergy of human institution, followed by the rank of subdeacons, readers, and chanters. We should not, therefore, be surprised by the fact that, in the case of the *chirothesia* of deaconesses and subdeacons, there exists a prayer for their so-called ordination, pronounced within a liturgical rite similar to that of deacons,⁵⁸ although in reality what is involved is a *chirothesia*, as will also be confirmed by the Fathers of the Seventh Ecumenical Council (cf. can. 14 VII ec.).

From the same Alexandrian Euchologion it may also be noted that there exists a “Prayer for the *Procheirisis* (*Cheirothesia*) of the Reader and the *Psaltis* (Εὐχή ἐπὶ προχειρίσεως ἀναγνώστου καὶ ψάλτου),”⁵⁹ which explains the fact that, in the early Church, readers and chanters were appointed (instituted) and not ordained.

Therefore, although for the first two degrees of the clergy of human institution, namely the deaconess and the subdeacon, we encounter the word “ordination,” this was in fact a *chirothesia*, as is also evident from the text of the Barberini Euchologion. Moreover, from the text of this Euchologion it may be seen that neither the deaconess nor the subdeacon received the Holy Chalice, as the deacon did, since they had not been invested with grace-bestowing power.

It should, however, be pointed out that in some Patriarchates today there is a strong call for the reinstatement of the institution of deaconesses,⁶⁰ taking into account the contribution they can make, particularly to the catechesis of women and children. For example, the St. Phoebe Center for the Deaconess in Alexandria proposed *Guidelines for the Revival of the Ordained Female Diaconate in the Orthodox Church Today* in which, among other things, it is mentioned that “the historical precedent of

⁵⁸ Ibidem, pp. 188–189.

⁵⁹ Ibidem, p. 190.

⁶⁰ “Bishop Ordains Orthodox Christian Woman as Deaconess in Response to Local Needs in Africa,” <https://orthodoxdeaconess.org/the-deaconess/ordination-in-africa/> [accessed 22.10.2025].

the female diaconate within the Orthodox Church has been soundly documented through sources such as ordination rites, canons, deaconess saints, and archeological evidence. Renewing the order of deaconess as an integral part of our larger diaconal ministry will connect the Church's sacramental and liturgical life to pastoral needs today."⁶¹

The first degree of the clergy of human institution was thus that of the deaconesses, whose existence is also attested by the New Testament texts (cf. Romans 16:1 and Acts 9:36). In the text of Acts 9:36, the Lord's female disciple, named Tabitha, is regarded by the Fathers of the Church as a prefiguration of the ministry (διακονία) of women in the apostolic Church, and she remained exemplary through the good works and acts of charity that she performed.

Although, with regard to deaconesses, the word "ordination" has usually been employed in the scholarly literature (dogmatic, canonical, and liturgical), the liturgical rite and the words of the prayer accompanying it prove that, in fact, what was involved was a *cheirothesia*,⁶² that is, a hierurgy, a sacred rite. Therefore, deaconesses were not instituted through *cheirotomia* (χειροτομία), but through a consecration known as *cheirothesia* (χειροθεσία), the liturgical rite of which was similar to that administered in the case of the subdeacon.

To shed further light on the canonical and legal status of the subdeacon, we shall refer to the text of the Prayer for the "Ordination of a Subdeacon" from the Barberini Euchologion (Greek 336), from which we may note that, through his ministry, he receives the charisms (τὰ χαρίσματα) and is called "to stand at the doors of Thy holy temple" and "to kindle the lamps of the tabernacle."⁶³

From the text of this Prayer, although it is entitled "Prayer for the Ordination of the Subdeacon (Εὐχὴ ἐπὶ χειροτονία ὑποδιακόνου)," it is nevertheless clear that it refers to a *chirothesia*, that is a hierurgy, and not a Sacrament, and that, through this liturgical consecration, the subdeacon also received

⁶¹ *Proposed Guidelines for the Revival of the Ordained Female Diaconate in the Orthodox Church Today Prepared by the St. Phoebe Center for the Deaconess*, <https://orthodoxdeaconess.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/08-24-Revised-Proposed-Guidelines-for-the-Revival-of-the.pdf> [accessed 14.11.2025].

⁶² E. THEODOROU: "Ἡ Ὑποδιακονία ἢ Ὑποδιακονία τῶν διακονισσῶν" [The Ordination or *chirothesia* of Deaconesses]. *Theologia* 23 (1954), pp. 576–601.

⁶³ *L'Eucologio Barberini gr. 336...*, pp. 188–189.

“the charisms (δαιρῶν) which God distributes,”⁶⁴ through the Holy Spirit, to each of those appointed to serve in one of the “degrees of ministry.”

As mentioned above, in the famous Barberini Euchologion, also known as the Euchologion of Saint Mark of Alexandria († 62), we find prayers for the “ordination of deaconesses (χειροτονία διακονίσσης),”⁶⁵ that is, in fact, for the “Ordination of Deaconesses,” which are similar to those recited for deacons, but not identical in meaning and content. For example, from the text of the ritual for the ordination of deaconesses, we note that only deacons kiss “the Holy Gifts when they are placed on the Holy Table,”⁶⁶ and that only they received the “Holy Chalice” (τὸ Ἅγιον Ποτήριον) at ordination,⁶⁷ not the deaconesses.

Regarding the ordination of deaconesses, the Apostolic Constitutions – composed *ante quem* and *post quem* in the second half of the 3rd century and the first half of the 4th century – specified that the bishop was to “lay his hands upon her (ἐπιθήσεις αὐτῇ τὰς χεῖρας) in the presence of the presbyters, deacons and deaconesses,”⁶⁸ and to pray to God “that He might grant her the Holy Spirit and cleanse her of all defilement of body and spirit (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:1) so that she may fulfil the office (ἔργον) entrusted to her” (*Apostolic Constitutions*, Book VIII, 19–20).⁶⁹

From the text of the prayer recited by the bishop on the occasion of the ordination of a deaconess, we see that she was regarded as the successor to those who, at the Temple in Jerusalem, were “guardians of Your Holy Gates (τὰς φρουρὰς τῶν ἁγίων σου πυλῶν)” (*Apostolic Constitutions*, Book VIII, 20).⁷⁰ Consequently, through their ministry, deaconesses also fulfilled the role of gatekeepers at the doors of the churches through which women entered and exited, just as had been the custom at the Temple in Jerusalem.

As can be seen from an examination of the text of the Alexandrian Euchologion and that of the Apostolic Constitutions, neither the deaconesses nor the subdeacons received the Sacrament of Ordination, but only a liturgical blessing, so that the Holy Spirit might enable them to fulfil their many duties, including that of teaching the true faith.

⁶⁴ Ibidem, p. 188.

⁶⁵ Ibidem, pp. 185–186.

⁶⁶ Ibidem, p. 184.

⁶⁷ Ibidem.

⁶⁸ *The Apostolic Constitutions*, Volume III: Books VII–VIII, Introduction, critical text, translation and notes. Ed. M. METZGER. Paris 1987, p. 220.

⁶⁹ Ibidem, p. 223.

⁷⁰ Ibidem, pp. 222–223.

With the widespread adoption of infant baptism between the 5th and 8th centuries, deaconesses were to disappear from the Church's landscape, although "the prayers for the ordination of deaconesses"⁷¹ continued to be found "in the service books (Ephologions) until the 12th–13th centuries."⁷²

Regarding deaconesses, we should also note that their presence is attested to in the texts of certain canons, such as Canons 19 of the First Ecumenical Council, 15 of the Fourth Ecumenical Council, 14 and 40 of the Council in Trullo, and 44 of Saint Basil the Great.

Saint Basil the Great, who referred to the woman "deacon" (ἡ διάκονος), that is, to the deaconess, stated that it is not permitted for "the body of the deaconess, being sanctified (τῆς διακόνου τὸ σῶμα ὡς καθιερωμένον), to be used for carnal purposes (ἐν χρήσει σαρκικῇ)"⁷³ (can. 44).

This sanctification of the deaconess's body was a consequence of the bishop's blessing, because – as the Fathers of the Sixth Ecumenical Council also affirmed (Second Session, 691/692) – "a blessing is the communication of sanctification (εὐλογία ἁγιασμοῦ μετάδοσις ἐστίν)"⁷⁴ (can. 26 Council in Trullo).

In the Eastern Church, the layperson who reads the *Kazania* (Book of Homilies) and the "Synaxarion of the day" (Lives of the Saints), and who gives the responses to the litanies during the Divine Liturgy, is the Church chanter (ψάλτης). Through these readings from the Church's liturgical books and through the responses given during the Holy Services, chanters (church singers), in their capacity as collaborators of the priests, also participate in the exercise of the teaching power within Christian worship.

We should also note that, "in the East, during the 4th and 5th centuries, women were also employed as singers and readers,"⁷⁵ that is, as psalts and anagnosts (readers). This situation lasted until the 8th century, when, with the systematization of church chant into eight modes by Saint John of Damascus, "this chant could only be performed correctly by professional

⁷¹ E. BRANIȘTE, EC. BRANIȘTE: *Dicționar enciclopedic de cunoștințe religioase* [Encyclopaedic Dictionary of Religious Knowledge]. Caransebeș 2001, p. 135.

⁷² Ibidem.

⁷³ *Athenian Syntagma*, vol. IV. Athens 1854..., p. 192.

⁷⁴ *Athenian Syntagma*, vol. II..., p. 362.

⁷⁵ E. BRANIȘTE, EC. BRANIȘTE: *Dicționar enciclopedic...*, pp. 95–96.

singers,”⁷⁶ that is, by *psaltis*, who usually also served as conductors of the church choir.

4. The canonical-legal status of the laity and their participation in the exercise of teaching power in the light of the canonical legislation of the Eastern Church

In the early Church, the laity had not only duties but also certain rights which the Church itself recognized. Among these rights and duties assigned to the layperson, we may mention: the right to participate in the election of clergy, in their ordination, in the exercise of teaching power, etc.

These rights, however, were to be restricted or even prohibited over time, as attested by the text of Canon 13 of the Council of Laodicea (343–370), according to which “the multitudes (τοῖς ὄχλοις) should not be given permission to make the elections (τὰς ἐκλογάς) of those who are to be instituted into the priesthood (καθίστασθαι εἰς ἱερατεῖον).”⁷⁷

Regarding this prohibition on the participation of the multitudes, that is, of the laity, in the elections of divinely appointed clergy (bishops, priests, and deacons), the Byzantine canonists of the 12th century were even more categorical, stating expressis verbis that it is “forbidden for the laity (ὁ κοσμικοῖς) to elect bishops,”⁷⁸ although, in the Church of the early centuries, this was a practice grounded in the apostolic order and ancient canonical custom. Moreover, from among these multitudes of laypersons were recruited not only clergy of divine institution, but also those of human institution, both of whom participated in the exercise of the Church’s teaching power.

In accordance with the canonical provisions of the Eastern Church, ecclesiastical power must be exercised with the blessing of the Church – that is, of the local bishop – and must be carried out under the guidance of the divinely instituted clergy; hence the prohibitions which the Fathers of certain Ecumenical Councils laid down as binding norms to be followed.

⁷⁶ Ibidem, p. 96.

⁷⁷ *Athenian Syntagma*, vol. III. Athens 1853..., p. 183.

⁷⁸ A. ARISTENOS: “Commentary on Canon 13 of Council of Laodicea.” In: *Athenian Syntagma*, vol. III..., p. 183.

Among these rules and norms established by the Fathers of the Church, and expressly set out in the text of the canons, I would like to draw attention to some of the most representative, namely:

1. Those who have had the “clerical tonsure (ιερατική κουρά)” from childhood, and have not received the blessing of their bishops, may not preach from the “Ambo (ἐπ’ ἄμβωνος).”

In accordance with the provision of Canon 33 of the Council in Trullo (691/692),⁷⁹ it is not permitted for those “numbered among the clergy (τὴν τῶν ἐν τῷ κλήρῳ καταλεγομένων τάξιν) to speak to the people (τῷ λαῷ) in a loud voice, from the Ambo (ἐπ’ ἄμβωνος), the divine words (τοὺς θείους λόγους)”⁸⁰ from Holy Scripture, for only he who has been deemed worthy “of clerical degree and canonically (κανονικός) receives the blessing (τὴν εὐλογίαν) from his own shepherd”⁸¹ may preach from the Ambo (pulpit). Anyone who did not observe this canonical provision was to “be excommunicated (ἀφορίζεσθω)” (can. 33 Council in trullo),⁸² that is, to be excommunicated.⁸³

The phrase “clerical degree” in the text of the canon of the Sixth Ecumenical Council (Second Session) must therefore be understood as the authorization of a layperson to be counted among the clergy and to perform clerical duties. This entitlement was obtained through a blessing from the bishop to which Byzantine canonists also refer. For example, the canonist John Zonaras was keen to point out that anyone who had not received “the canonical blessing from his own bishop”⁸⁴ could not “read the Holy Scriptures from the Ambo.”⁸⁵

2. It is not permitted for a layperson to assume the “office of teaching,” but they must follow “the order handed down by the Lord.”

⁷⁹ N. V. DURĂ: “The Ecumenicity of the Council in Trullo: Witnesses of the Canonical Tradition in the East and the West.” In: *The Council in Trullo Revisited*. Eds. G. NEDUNGATT, M. FEATHERSTONE. Rome 1995, pp. 229–262.

⁸⁰ *Athenian Syntagma*, vol. II..., p. 379.

⁸¹ Ibidem.

⁸² Ibidem.

⁸³ N. V. DURĂ: “Precizări privind unele noțiuni ale Dreptului canonic (depunere, caterisire, excomunicare, afurisire și anatema) în lumina învățaturii ortodoxe. Studiu canonic” [Clarifications regarding certain concepts of Canon Law (deposition, defrocking, excommunication, *afurisire*, and anathema) in the light of Orthodox teaching. Canonical study]. *Orthodoxia* XXXIX/2 (1987), pp. 84–135.

⁸⁴ I. ZONARAS: “Commentary on Canon 33 of Council in trullo.” In: *Athenian Syntagma*, vol. II..., p. 380.

⁸⁵ Ibidem.

In accordance with the decision taken by the Fathers of the Sixth Ecumenical Council (Second Session), it was forbidden for “the laity (λαϊκόν) to deliver a sermon or to teach in public (διδάσκειν (ἐν) δημοσίᾳ) so as, in this way, to appropriate the teaching office (ἄξιωμα διδασκαλικόν), but to submit to the Lord’s order (τοῦ Κυρίου διατάξει),”⁸⁶ that is, to “open their ears to those who have received the gift of the teaching word (τοῦ διδασκαλικοῦ λόγου),”⁸⁷ that is, the gift received by teachers, who by definition are destined to teach, and only “from them” must the laity “learn the divine things (τὰ θεῖα παρ’ αὐτῶν ἐκδιδάσκεσθαι)” (can. 64 Council in Trullo).⁸⁸

In their commentary on this canon, the Byzantine canonists also reiterate that “laypeople must not teach, nor engage in dogmatic debates (λόγους δογματικούς), lest they thereby unlawfully assume the office (dignity) of teaching (ἄξιωμα διδασκαλικόν).”⁸⁹

3. The canonical-legal status of women and their participation in the exercise of teaching power.

In order to discuss women’s participation in the exercise of teaching power, perceived and expressed as a participatory act of collaboration, we must first of all understand their canonical-legal status, that is, as established by the canonical legislation of the Eastern Church, for only in this way will we be able to evaluate the testimonies provided by theological literature (biblical, ecclesiological, historical, canonical, etc.) regarding female deacons, female *psaltis* (chanter), female abbesses, female missionaries (e.g., Mother Teresa, of Wallachian descent from Albania), etc.

To shed light on women’s right to participate in the exercise of teaching power, we note that the rights and duties of female deacons were laid down in both canonical and secular law, namely in Byzantine imperial legislation, from which it is evident that they entered in of the clergy of human institution through a consecration (blessing) by the bishop, referred to in liturgical and canonical theology as *chirothesia*, which is in fact a hierurgy and not a Sacrament, as has been erroneously stated in some texts in the theological literature.

⁸⁶ *Athenian Syntagma*, vol. II..., p. 453.

⁸⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁸⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 454.

⁸⁹ A. ARISTENOS: “Commentary on Canon 64 of Council in trullo.” In: *Athenian Syntagma*, vol. II..., p. 456.

4. The canonical-legal status of the reader (ἀναγνώστης) and his participation in the exercise of teaching power.

The Fathers of the Seventh Ecumenical Council (Nicaea 787) likewise observed that, although ordinations “into the priesthood (τῇ ἱερωσύνῃ)” had to be carried out “with exactness (σὺν ἀκριβείᾳ),” that is, with strict compliance with the provisions of the canonical norms, even in their own time some no longer observed or applied them. Thus, some received “the clerical tonsure (τὴν κουρὰν τοῦ κλήρου) from childhood, without *cheirothesia* from the bishops (παρ’ ἐπισκόπων χειροθεσίαν), and, reading in the assembly from the ambo (τῇ συνάξει ἐπ’ ἄμβωνος), do this uncanonically (ἀνακονίστως),”⁹⁰ hence their ruling that “from now on this must no longer happen” (can. 14 VII ec.).⁹¹

From the same text of Canon 14 of the Seventh Ecumenical Council, we note that the exercise of the office of reader was forbidden to anyone who did not have *cheirothesia* from his bishop, even if he had “a tonsure on the crown of his head,”⁹² that is, even if he had been “dedicated to God (ἀφορισθέντες τῷ Θεῷ) from childhood,”⁹³ bearing “a tonsure on the crown of his head.”

In this respect, the Byzantine canonists stated that “some, after having been clothed in black from childhood, as those who had been dedicated to God,”⁹⁴ considered that they could read “the divine Scriptures from the Ambo [...] without having *cheirothesia* from the local bishop.”⁹⁵ Hence their categorical prohibition that “no one is to read [...] unless he has received the seal of the tonsure (σφραγίδα ἐπικουρίδος) through episcopal *cheirothesia* (διὰ χειροθεσίας ἐπισκοπικῆς),”⁹⁶ through which the reader “immediately becomes a cleric (αὐτίκα κληρικὸς ἐστίν).”⁹⁷ Therefore, entry into the order of the clergy of human institution was conditional upon episcopal *cheirothesia*.

⁹⁰ *Athenian Syntagma*, vol. II..., p. 615.

⁹¹ *Ibidem*.

⁹² I. ZONARAS: “Commentary on Canon 14 of Seventh Ecumenical Council.” In: *Athenian Syntagma*, vol. II..., p. 616.

⁹³ T. BALSAMON: “Commentary on Canon 14 of Seventh Ecumenical Council.” In: *Athenian Syntagma*, vol. II..., p. 616.

⁹⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 617.

Both the text of Canon 14 of the Seventh Ecumenical Council and the commentaries of 12th-century Byzantine canonists indicate the following:

- a) The office of reader (*anagnostes*) was obtained solely through the rite of *cheirothesia* by the bishop, since the tonsure on the crown of the head in infancy could not qualify anyone to acquire the office of anagnost (reader).
- b) The fact that the *anagnostes* read the Holy Scriptures from the Ambo remains clear evidence that he also participated in the exercise of the Church's teaching power.
- c) The tonsure on the crown of the head formed part of the rite of the reader's *cheirothesia*, and only through both ritual acts – namely, the tonsure and the *cheirothesia* conferred by the bishop, accompanied by a prayer likewise said by the bishop that God might make him worthy in the ministry to which he had been called – was the reader entitled to be numbered among the clergy of human institution.
- d) We also note that, through Canon 14 of the Seventh Ecumenical Council, a clear terminological distinction was made for the first time between *cheirotomia* and *cheirothesia*. The latter, that is, *cheirothesia*, was associated with the institution of clerics of human institution. But the fact that, during the first seven or eight centuries, there was no terminological precision in defining the two concepts of ordination and *cheirothesia* is also attested by Byzantine legislation. For example, in one of his Imperial Constitutions, Emperor Justinian was keen to specify that “a deaconess to be ordained (*χειροτονείσθαι / ordinari*) in the Holy Church who is under forty years of age, or who has not married twice (*δευτέρως γάμους / secundas nuptias*)” (*Novella CXXIII, 13*).⁹⁸

This terminological incongruity between the words *cheirotomia* and *cheirothesia* was therefore a reality both in ecclesiastical and in juridical language; however, the two terms did not designate the same thing, since the former denoted the ranks of the clergy of divine institution, whereas the latter denoted the ranks of the clergy of human institution.

5. The canonical-legal status of the *psaltis* (chanter) and their participation.

Regarding the canonical psalts (*τῶν κανονικῶν ψαλτῶν*), that is, the church chanters who had received *chirothesia* from the bishop,

⁹⁸ *Corpus Iuris Civilis, Seventh Stereotypical Edition, Volume III: Novellae ...*, p. 604.

mention is made “for the first time”⁹⁹ in Canon 15 of the Council of Laodicea (343/370), from whose text we observe that only these were permitted “to sing in church,” and that only they were allowed “to ascend the Ambo and chant from the Book” (ἀπὸ διφθέρας ψαλλόντων).¹⁰⁰

In Greek, the books written on specially processed leather, which were used in Antiquity instead of paper, were called διφθέρας, that is ‘books’. The Romans also called them *pergamena charta*, that is, ‘books written on parchment’. And, at that time, that is, around the middle of the 4th century, church chant was performed by psalts using these leather books, to which Saint Paul the Apostle also referred in his Epistle to Timothy, in which he asked him to bring him “the books (τὰ βιβλία),” and especially the parchments (τὰς μεμβράνας) (2 Timothy 4:13).

In the Ethiopian Church, church chanters are still known as “dābtāra” (Ge‘ez: ደብተራ),¹⁰¹ and even today they use books written on parchment, from which they read and sing in the same manner as the *anagnostai* and *psaltai* of the ancient Church.

With regard to the *anagnostes* (reader), from the present-day *Order of the Service of the Divine Liturgy with a Bishop* we may observe that he awaits the bishop, together with “three deacons,” in the “narthex of the church”¹⁰² and carries “the bishop’s mantle”¹⁰³; then “the ecclesiarch or the priest on the left takes the mantle (of the bishop) from the anagnostes and helps the bishop to put it on.”¹⁰⁴ Therefore, the principal duty of the *anagnostes* in the exercise of his ministry was to receive the bishop with the mantle in the narthex of the church whenever the Divine Liturgy was celebrated by him.

From the same *Order of the Service of the Divine Liturgy with a Bishop* we also note that the bishop gives his crozier to the *anagnostes* when he goes to venerate and kiss the “royal icons,”¹⁰⁵ and then takes

⁹⁹ I. N. FLOCA: *Canoanele Bisericii Ortodoxe. Note și comentarii* [The Canons of the Orthodox Church. Notes and Commentaries]. Sibiu 1991, p. 207.

¹⁰⁰ *Athenian Syntagma*, vol. III..., p. 184.

¹⁰¹ See N. V. DURĂ: “Anaforalele (*canoane liturgice*) Bisericii etiopiene. Procesul apariției și dezvoltării lor” [The Anaphorals (*liturgical canons*) of the Ethiopian Church. The Process of Their Emergence and Development]. *Studii Teologice* XXIX/7–10 (1977), pp. 589–599.

¹⁰² “Tipicul Slujbei Sfintei Liturghii cu Arhiereu” [The Order of Service of the Divine Liturgy Celebrated by a Bishop]. In: *Liturghier [Hieratikon]*. București 2000, p. 480.

¹⁰³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 481.

the crozier back “from the *anagnostes*.”¹⁰⁶ Hence the conclusion that, although initially the principal duty of the *anagnostes* was the reading of the biblical lessons, such as those from the Book of the Apostle, later his ministries also included others, for example, carrying the bishop’s mantle and crozier.

We note that, at present, the biblical readings – which formerly fell within the responsibility of the *anagnostes* – are read by the *psaltes* (chanter), to whom, at the Divine Liturgy, the bishop or the priest addresses the words, “Peace be unto thee, reader!”¹⁰⁷ This explains the fact that, in reality, the *psaltes* has also assumed the office of the reader (*anagnostes*).

That there exists a grace-endowed distinction between the *anagnostes* (reader) and the deacon is also evident from the words addressed to them by the bishop or the priest. For example, the *anagnostes* is addressed with the words, “Peace be unto thee, reader!,” whereas to the deacon, who reads the Holy Gospel, the bishop addresses the words, “Peace be unto thee, who hast proclaimed the good tidings!”¹⁰⁸ This confirms that the *anagnostes* (reader) indeed belongs to the clergy of human institution, whereas the deacon belongs to the rank of the clergy of divine institution.

We note that the Fathers of the Council of Laodicea forbade “the reading in church of special hymns (ιδιωτικούς ψαλμούς),”¹⁰⁹ or “non-canonical books” (ἀκανόνιστα βιβλία) (can. 59, Council of Laodicea),¹¹⁰ but – as the Byzantine canonist John Zonaras specified in his commentary on this canon – only the books listed “in the 85th Apostolic Canon”¹¹¹ were to be read.

Taking into account the canonical-legal status of the laity – as provided for by ecclesiastical (canonical) and imperial (Byzantine) legislation – we may conclude that all categories of laity who were part of the clergy of human institution received episcopal *cheirothesia*, on the basis of which they could also participate in the exercise of ecclesiastical power – through collaboration with the degrees of the divinely instituted clergy (bishop, priest, deacon) – including the exercise of teaching power to the extent possible for them, that is, as determined by the Church.

¹⁰⁶ Ibidem, p. 485.

¹⁰⁷ Ibidem, p. 491.

¹⁰⁸ Ibidem, p. 491.

¹⁰⁹ *Athenian Syntagma*, vol. III..., p. 225.

¹¹⁰ Ibidem.

¹¹¹ Ibidem.

5. Conclusions

From the text of the Gospel according to Matthew, chapter XXVIII, 18–20, we learn that the preaching of the Gospel was carried out *ab initio* on the basis of a divine mandate, and that this had an eminently missionary character, concerning “all the world” and “all creation” (Mark 16:15), and was to be taken “to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

The preaching of the Gospel of Christ was not, however, entrusted solely to the Apostles and their disciples, but also to lay Christians, since they too received the mandate to bear witness to the Word of life before men (cf. Matthew 10:32–33). Consequently, Christ called “all Christians, and not only the hierarchy”¹¹² of the Church, to preach His Gospel.

The testimonies of the New Testament biblical text confirm that Christ recruited His first Christian disciples from among the laity who saw Him, listened to Him, or were healed by Him, and these were also the first witnesses to the Gospel of Christ (Mark 5:18–19; 1 Thessalonians 1:7–8).

After the First Ecumenical Council (Nicaea, 325), Ethiopia was also Christianized by the layman Frumentius, who converted the city of Aksum in ancient Ethiopia and later became its bishop, having been ordained at Alexandria by Saint Athanasius the Great around 329–330.¹¹³ Among the laity was also Saint Gregory the Illuminator, the Christianizer of Armenia, who was later ordained bishop in Caesarea of Cappadocia. Likewise, in Georgia, the one who contributed to the adoption of Christianity as the state religion was a woman, namely Saint Nina of Cappadocia.¹¹⁴ All these lay missionaries were among those “πιστοῖς ἀνθρώποις” (faithful people), who, having received the teaching of Christ, proved themselves worthy “to teach others also” (ἐτέροισ διδάξαι) (2 Timothy 2:2).

Towards the end of the 4th century, the first restrictions on the right of laypersons to preach without the consent of the divinely appointed clergy began to appear, requiring them “to teach in the presence of the clergy” and “only at their request” (can. 98 IV Carthage).¹¹⁵ However, as the renowned Romanian canonist Liviu Stan, noted, “this canon confirms the custom

¹¹² L. STAN: *Mirenii în Biserică...*, p. 70.

¹¹³ Cf. N. V. DURĂ: *Organizarea Bisericii etiopiene și bazele ei canonice* [The Organization of the Ethiopian Church and its Canonical Foundations]. Bucharest 1990, pp. 21–65.

¹¹⁴ G. KVESITADZE, N. V. DURĂ: *The Roots of Georgian and Romanian Science and Culture*. Bucharest 2017, p. 20.

¹¹⁵ L. STAN: *Mirenii în Biserică...*, p. 83.

of laypeople's participation in the teaching office,"¹¹⁶ and, implicitly, their collaboration in the exercise of teaching power, as indeed the Apostolic Constitutions also confirm.

The fact that laypersons preached the Gospel of Christ is also confirmed by the commentaries of Byzantine canonists on Canon 64 of the Council in Trullo (691/692). And some contemporary canonists have also pointed out that, through this canon, the Fathers of the Sixth Ecumenical Council (Second Session) did not seek to eliminate "lay participation in preaching," but merely wished to specify that this had to be done "with the bishop's permission."¹¹⁷

Indeed, Canon 64 of the Council in Trullo prohibited laypersons from "discussing the faith in public," or from substituting themselves for the "teacher,"¹¹⁸ that is, for the person who possessed the appropriate theological training and who had the Church's permission to teach. For this reason, it was also stipulated that layperson should learn only "what they are permitted to learn," that is, by the priests of the Church.

As for the right of Christian women to exercise teaching power, the New Testament text tells us that they may not "teach others" in the Church, but "learn in silence with all submission" (1 Timothy 2:11–12), for "it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in church" (1 Corinthians 14:35). With regard to women, the Holy Fathers of the Seventh Ecumenical Council – most of whom were monks – also affirmed that their presence "is a cause for confusion," and that if the presence of any woman were found "in a diocese or in a monastery," the bishop or abbot should be defrocked (can. 18 VII ec.).¹¹⁹

In his commentary on this canon, Theodore Balsamon specified that it was, in fact, forbidden for "the bishop to have any woman or to live with her. And if he accepted this, he was to be expelled from the episcopate."¹²⁰ Furthermore, the Byzantine canonist noted that "Chapter 15 of Title I of Book IV of the *Basilika* categorically prohibits a woman from residing in a men's monastery."¹²¹

¹¹⁶ Ibidem.

¹¹⁷ Ibidem, p. 86.

¹¹⁸ I. ZONARAS: "Commentary on Canon 64 of Council in trullo." In: *Athenian Syntagma*, vol. II..., p. 454.

¹¹⁹ *Athenian Syntagma*, vol. II..., p. 628.

¹²⁰ T. BALSAMON: "Commentary on Canon 18 of Seventh Ecumenical Council." In: *Athenian Syntagma*, vol. II..., p. 629.

¹²¹ Ibidem.

From the decisions taken by the Fathers of the Seventh Ecumenical Council (Nicaea 787), we also note that “the readers (ἀναγνώστας) who read from the Ambo during the service, without having received chirothessia from the bishop, perform this act uncanonically (ἁκανόνιστος),”¹²² hence the prohibition that “from now on they should no longer do this” (can. 14 VII ec.).¹²³

Documentary testimonies attest that, in both the Eastern and the Western Church, the participation of the laity in the exercise of teaching power constituted a reality as early as the pre-Nicene period. The participation of the laity was also clearly manifested in the election of bishops, albeit “in different forms, with a progressive elimination of the laity (but not of the powers of the laity),”¹²⁴ namely of teaching, sanctifying, and governing (jurisdictional) power.

According to the statements of the same learned Western theologians, who also had solid historical and juridical training, a progressive elimination also took place in the Latin Church, “even of a part of the clergy, which lasted until the course of the thirteenth century, [...] when the election (of bishops) would be replaced by pontifical appointment.”¹²⁵

According to the current canonical legislation of the Latin Church, through Baptism, “the Christian faithful (*christifideles*)”¹²⁶ become “the people of God (*populum Dei*)”¹²⁷ and are “made sharers [...] in Christ’s priestly, prophetic, and royal function (*muneris Christi sacerdotalis, prophetici et regalis*), they are called to exercise the mission which God has entrusted to the Church to fulfill in the world” (can. 204 § 1).¹²⁸

The same canonical legislation provides that, in the Church, there are “sacred ministers (*ministri sacri*),”¹²⁹ “by divine institution (*ex divina institutione*),”¹³⁰ chosen from among the Christian faithful, and these are called

¹²² *Athenian Syntagma*, vol. II..., p. 615.

¹²³ *Ibidem*.

¹²⁴ J. GAUDEMET et al.: *Les élections dans l’Église latine des origines au XVI^e siècle*. Paris 1979, p. 8.

¹²⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹²⁶ *Codul de drept canonic. Textul oficial și traducerea în limba română* [The Code of Canon Law. The Official Text and the Romanian Translation]. Second edition. Iași 2012, pp. 154–155.

¹²⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹²⁸ *Ibidem*.

¹²⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 156–157.

¹³⁰ *Ibidem*.

“clerics,” while “the other members of the Christian faithful are called laypersons” (can. 207 § 1).¹³¹

Among the rights of the laity is also mentioned their right to exercise “the ministry of the word (*ministerium verbi exercere*)” (can. 230 § 3).¹³²

In order to preserve the order and discipline established by the Church from the apostolic age, we must also take into account the prohibitions imposed on the laity by certain canons. Nevertheless, these prohibitions must not be understood as restrictions on the rights of clerics of human institution, including their right to participate in the exercise of the teaching power, in cooperation with the priests of the Church, within the limits established by the norms of canonical Legislation and by the Statutes governing the organization and functioning of the local Orthodox Churches.

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¹³¹ Ibidem.

¹³² Ibidem, pp. 166–167.

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