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2026 Conference Abstracts

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Table of Contents

Sessions		
1	Death, the Forces of Darkness, and Last Things	3
2	The Ecumenical Patriarchate - Yesterday and Today	9
Lunch	Legal Identity and Religious Freedom: The Ecumenical Patriarchate Under Turkish and International Law	15
3A	Issues in the Russian Ecclesiastical Diaspora	18
3B	Canonical Ways and Means	24
3C	Challenges and New Interpretations	29
4A	Basic Questions of Hierarchy and Synod	35
4B	Questions of Pastoral Application	41

Index of Speakers 47

Session 1

Death, the Forces of Darkness, and Last Things

Christians Among the "Magicians of the Gentiles":
Sorcery, Demons, and Pastoral Discipline in Medieval Coptic Law

Mena Abdelsayed (University of Oxford)

Under Fatimid and Ayyubid rule, Coptic Christians lived alongside a vigorous economy of Muslim, Jewish, and folk-magical practitioners; recourse to amulets, divination, and the "magicians of the Gentiles" was a persistent feature of Christian life. While Latin and Byzantine ecclesiastical regulation of magic has been examined extensively, the Coptic Arabic canonical response has not. The recent critical editions by Athanasius al-Muqārī—the *Nomocanon* of Anbā Mīkhāʾīl al-Damīrī (twelfth century), the patriarchal canons of the medieval Coptic Church, and Abū Ṣulḥ ibn Nānā's *Jumlat al-Qawānīn* (eleventh century)—now make a synthesis possible.

This paper undertakes that synthesis and argues four claims, each grounded in specific canons of these editions. **First**, the canons preserve a precise catalogue of forbidden practitioners: the sorcerer (*sāḥir*), the maker of *ruqā* (incantations), the diviner (*ʿarrāf*), the astrologer (*munajjim*), the owner of an astrolabe (*ṣāḥib al-isṭurlāb*), the soothsayer who reads "the hours" and "the news of the days," the dream-interpreter (*muſassir al-aḥlām)*, the snake-charmer (*ḥāwī*), and—identified by the canonists themselves with the Greek *φυλακτήρια*—the maker of phylacteries (*ṣāniʿ al-falaqṭīrāt*). The Greek etymology is glossed in the apparatus to Michael of Damietta's *Nomocanon* itself.

Second, the disciplinary regime is severe and theologically articulated. Citing canon 36 of Laodicea, Michael of Damietta rules that "it is not lawful for a priest or a believer to be a sorcerer, nor a charm-maker, nor a soothsayer, nor a diviner, nor an augurer—for these are sins binding the soul (*khaṭāyā muqayyida lil-nufūs*)." Following Basil's twenty-second canon, sorcerers who "deny God without fear" incur a thirty-year exclusion from communion, identical to the penance for apostasy; clergy who consult sorcerers are deposed; sorcerer-bridegrooms are impeded from marriage. The patriarchal

canons place sorcery alongside fornication and demonic possession.

Third, the canons articulate a specifically baptismal and ecclesiological theology of magic. The paradigmatic precedent invoked across both the *Nomocanon* and the patriarchal canons is Peter's expulsion of Simon Magus (*Simʿān al-sāḥir*) from the Church "by the order of the Holy Spirit"; the bishop is to act as Peter acted. The catechumen's baptismal renunciation of "dark instruments… sorcery… demonic powers" frames every subsequent recourse to magic as re-entanglement with what was renounced. Sorcery is therefore not mere deviance but implicit apostasy, reversing the baptismal severance from the forces of darkness.

Fourth, three witnesses to Abū Ṣulḥ ibn Nānā (Vatican Arabic 252, Patriarchal Arabic 6, Paris Arabic 250) preserve variant readings of these disciplinary lists, showing that copyists across the Coptic transmission were attentive to magic-related provisions and the boundary they drew.
Set against the Cairo Geniza, the Coptic magical papyri, and Shāfiʿī juristic discourse, the Coptic canonical regime emerges as deliberately calibrated to remain intelligible across confessional lines — sharing lexical fields like *isṭurlāb* and *munajjim* — while preserving a specifically baptismal-eschatological grammar. The paper closes by reading these canons against the Bright Saturday and Pascha rites, where Christ's binding of the strongman (Mark 3:27) and harrowing of Hades supply the theological frame within which the medieval Coptic prohibition of sorcery makes its full sense.

"Again, I pray to you, O Lord": The Deathbed Prayer of the Deaconess St. Domnika

Laura Wilson (Antiochian House of Studies)

Before her death, the fifth century Constantinopolitan deaconess St Domnika (BHG 562-562f) prayed a public, supplicatory prayer for her monastery, the world, and the empire. The prayer appears to have been important to her community and commemoration because it is the longest speech recorded in her vitae. In 2020, scholars Andrey Kurbanov and Lydia Spyridonova compiled a critical edition of the seventh through tenth century recensions of her vitae, providing us with the texts of this prayer. They identified two liturgical quotations within Domnika's prayer before her death. First, the beginning is a quotation from the sacrament of Holy Unction as recorded in Goar's *Euchologion*, specifically, a portion of the prayer by the first priest after the first Gospel reading and diaconal litany. Interestingly, however, Goar's text contains the form of the sacrament of Holy Unction which was known in the thirteenth century, at the end of a long process of evolution of the rite. Domnika herself would not have known that more developed rite in the fifth century, nor would the author of the seventh century vita; yet, we find a definite relationship between that prayer associated with the blessing of the oil and the seventh century supplicatory prayer of a deaconess. Second, the rest of the prayer included the repetitive and intercessory language of diaconal petitions, concluding with a reference from a petition in the diaconal litany of the *litia* in Vespers, following the prayer at the bowing of the heads. While the seventh century recension of the vita only referenced the *litia*, the tenth century author conformed Domnika's prayer more closely to the liturgical text. By looking at the evolution of the language of the prayer as it was recorded from the seventh to tenth century recensions of the vitae and comparing it to the vesperal litany and the evolving rites of anointing the sick, I suggest a possible explanation for the quotations in this prayer, their diaconal character, and its attribution to the monastic deaconess St Domnika. The Byzantine hagiographers' association of these supplicatory prayers with an ordained deaconess enlightens the elusive ministry and functions of deaconesses around Constantinople in the

early Byzantine period. Her sacramental ordination as a deaconess was likely intended to facilitate the leading of the monastic community in liturgical prayer, especially those prayers of fervent supplication, as demonstrated by this significant prayer before her death.

"Chains for their Own Souls": Byzantine Women's Amulets and the Disparity between Institutional and Individual Religion

Caitlin Mims (Florida State University)

From the earliest centuries of the Christian Church, theologians were concerned about the ambiguous nature of amulets and attempted to legislate against their use. For instance, canon 36 of the synod of Laodicea instructs that "those who are of the priesthood, or of the clergy, ought not be magicians…nor ought they make what are called amulets (φυλακτήρια), which are chains for their own souls. Those who wear [such objects], we command to be cast out of the church." Canon 61 of the Quinisext Council decreed that amulet makers should complete six years of penance, while repeat offenders were to be excommunicated. Similar restrictions against the use of amulets continued to be promulgated throughout the middle and late Byzantine periods.

Despite these restrictions, there is abundant evidence that in the Byzantine Empire amulets were worn often, especially by reproductive women. Pregnancy and childbirth were among the most dangerous activities undertaken by women. Written sources are filled with harrowing accounts of reproductive issues, such as the story of Aelias in the Life of Saint Porphyry, Bishop of Gaza, who labored in "unspeakable" pain for seven days with a breech baby. In some cases, these challenges and dangers were directly attributed to the interference of demons. A particular class or type of demon is described in some sources as targeting pregnant women and newborn children. Referred to as the gelloudes (γελλούδες), these demons were said to pose a risk to mothers and children for up to a year after birth. To protect themselves, many women wore reproductive amulets, objects which are activated by their owner/wearer's faith in their efficacy and

which function through contact or close proximity to the wearer.

In light of the Church's opposition to the use of amulets, scholars have long associated reproductive amulets with magical practice and have described them as a rare survival of occult practice post-Iconoclasm. I offer a different perspective; I suggest that while these amulets often feature secular and ambiguous elements, they were not understood to be magical in nature by their wearers. Instead, these amulets reflect the different understandings of magic in the Empire: while they may have been classed as magical under the doctrinal definition of magic, the average citizen apparently did not consider their use to be outside the boundaries of Christian faith. Women's use of reproductive amulets thus reflects one difference between the institutional religion described in canon law and the everyday, lived practice of Byzantine peoples.

Session 2

The Ecumenical Patriarchate - Today and Yesterday

The Patriarchate of Constantinople and the Autocephalous Church of Ukraine

His Eminence Metropolitan Kyrillos of Krini (University of Athens)

The current proposed study will examine the canonical, ecclesiological, and political dimensions of the granting of autocephaly to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine by the Ecumenical Patriarchate in 2018–2019. The study argues that the decision of the Ecumenical Patriarchate was grounded in the historical traditions, sacred canons, and established administrative structure of the Orthodox Church, which recognize the unique responsibilities and privileges of the See of Constantinople. The granting of the Tomos of Autocephaly is presented as a legitimate and necessary response to a longstanding ecclesiastical crisis marked by the existence of multiple competing Orthodox jurisdictions in Ukraine. The study maintains that such fragmentation contradicted the fundamental Orthodox principle of ecclesial unity, according to which each locality should be served by one bishop within one canonical Church.

The study critically evaluates objections raised by the Moscow Patriarchate, particularly claims that Ukraine falls exclusively within Moscow's canonical territory and that Constantinople lacked authority to intervene. It contends that the Ecumenical Patriarchate possesses a historically attested right to hear appeals from clergy and bishops beyond its immediate jurisdiction and that this prerogative has been consistently affirmed within Orthodox canonical tradition. The author further rejects arguments that the recognition of clergy originating from schismatic bodies violated canonical norms, citing historical precedents in which the Church restored schismatics and other irregular clergy to communion in the interest of ecclesial reconciliation and unity.

Beyond questions of canon law, the study will argue that the Ukrainian church dispute is inseparable from broader political realities. It suggests that resistance to Ukrainian autocephaly reflects not merely theological concerns but also the geopolitical interests of the Russian state, whose influence has historically been

exercised through ecclesiastical structures subordinate to the Moscow Patriarchate. Consequently, the study will view the establishment of an autocephalous Ukrainian Church as both an ecclesiastical remedy and a necessary step toward reducing political interference in church life.

The study will conclude that the creation of a single canonical and autocephalous Orthodox Church in Ukraine represents the most coherent solution to a decades-long ecclesiastical division. By grounding its analysis in Orthodox ecclesiology, canon law, and historical precedent, it affirms that ecclesial unity, canonical order, and pastoral responsibility are best served through the recognition and consolidation of one unified Orthodox Church in Ukraine.

The Evaluation of the Term "Ecumenical Patriarchate" by the Republic of Türkiye: Nomocanonical Implications Since the Bürgenstock Summit on Peace in Ukraine (2024)

Aetios Nikiforos (Ecumenical Patriarchate, St. Andrew's Greek Orthodox Theological College, Australian University College of Divinity; Aristotle University of Thessaloniki School of Law)

The purpose of this paper is to examine the nomocanonical implications concerning the use of the title “Ecumenical Patriarchate” by the Church of Constantinople in the context of its participation as observer in the Bürgenstock Summit on Peace in Ukraine (June 15-16, 2024). The study argues that the controversy generated by the Patriarchate’s inclusion under the title “Ecumenical” among the countries and organizations supporting the Summit’s Joint Communiqué became the catalyst for an important qualification of the official Turkish governmental position regarding the use of the title “Ecumenical” by the Patriarchate.

Against this background, the paper analyzes a series of written questions submitted in May 2025 by a Member of the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye to Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan concerning the Patriarchate’s participation in

international events under the title “Ecumenical.” The main thesis of the study is that Minister Fidan’s written response to these questions constitutes a significant departure from earlier Turkish positions. Contrary to media portrayals which presented the response as a continuation of the traditional governmental policy of denial of the use of the title “Ecumenical” by the Patriarchate, this paper demonstrates that the Minister’s reasoning closely follows the conclusions of the 2010 Opinion of the Venice Commission on the legal status of the Patriarchate and its right to be called “Ecumenical.”

Three principal elements of the Minister’s response are highlighted: first, the explicit acknowledgement that the Lausanne Treaty contains no provision concerning the ecumenical character of the Patriarchate; second, the recognition that the title “Ecumenical” belongs to the internal ecclesiastical terminology of the Orthodox Church, as a canonical and not a legal notion, referring to the spiritual relationship between the Patriarchate and Orthodox faithful worldwide; third, the emphasis that the title carries neither sovereign nor supranational legal privileges and therefore poses no challenge to the constitutional principle of equality or to Turkish sovereignty.

Drawing upon Orthodox Canon Law, the analysis of the Venice Commission’s Opinion, and historical documentation drawn from late Ottoman and contemporary Turkish archival evidence, the paper argues that the title “Ecumenical” is fundamentally an ecclesiological and theological concept rooted in the canonical tradition of the Orthodox Church. The title reflects the Church of Constantinople’s long-standing canonical responsibilities within the Orthodox world and falls within the sphere of its religious autonomy, as protected particularly by Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

The paper concludes that Minister Fidan’s response represents a noteworthy qualification and smooth evolution in official Turkish discourse. While preserving established state sensitivities regarding formal recognition of the title “Ecumenical,” it implicitly accepts the Patriarchate’s right to employ its historical title and aligns governmental policy more closely with European

standards on religious freedom and church autonomy. As such, the response constitutes an important step toward a more balanced and legally coherent approach to the Ecumenical Patriarchate's status in contemporary Türkiye.

Canon Law in Nineteenth-Century Politics: Russia and the Reforms of the Patriarchate of Constantinople (1858–1860)

Lora Gerd (St. Petersburg Institute of History, Russian Academy of Sciences)

The reforms of the Patriarchate of Constantinople during the Tanzimat period in the mid-nineteenth century have been the subject of numerous scholarly studies (Sokolov, Trubetskoi, Stamatopoulos). Amid the rise of nationalism and the growing Greek–Bulgarian conflict, the struggle between the Western powers and Russia for predominance in the Middle East, and increasing pressure from the Ottoman government, the Patriarchate was compelled to reform its administrative regulations.

The Church-National Assembly met at the Patriarchate for nearly two years. Among the issues discussed were the election of bishops and the Patriarch, the remuneration of the clergy, oversight of the revenues of bishops and ecclesiastical institutions—particularly monasteries—and the participation of laypeople in church administration. While the French and British ambassadors largely remained on the sidelines, the Russian diplomatic mission played an active role throughout the proceedings. Both conservative and reform-minded representatives maintained close contact with the Russian ambassador during the entire period.

The documentation relating to the drafting of the new ecclesiastical regulations has been well preserved in the archives of the Russian Holy Synod (now held in the Russian State Historical Archive in St. Petersburg). It comprises ten volumes: the first three document the reform process of 1858–1860, while the remaining volumes concern the Greek–Bulgarian question. The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Emperor Alexander II actively supported the reforms. On the one

hand, they believed that the reforms would eliminate existing abuses and establish more effective oversight of church finances; on the other, they hoped that the Slavic population of the Ottoman Empire would obtain greater ecclesiastical autonomy. This latter objective aligned closely with the broader policy of Pan-Slavism pursued during the reign of Alexander II. Accordingly, the Russian embassy sought both to support the Sublime Porte in its demand for church reform and to protect the Patriarchate from direct interference by the Ottoman government in ecclesiastical affairs.

This policy encountered strong opposition from the Russian Holy Synod, led by Metropolitan Filaret (Drozdov). In his comments on the diplomatic reports from Constantinople, he offered extensive criticism of the reform proposals, arguing that many of their provisions were incompatible with Orthodox canon law. As one of the foremost authorities in the Orthodox Church, Filaret's opinions were communicated to the Assembly in Constantinople, where some of his recommendations were taken into consideration. Even more uncompromising was the Ober-Procurator of the Holy Synod, Count Alexander Tolstoi, who regarded nearly every proposed reform as a violation of canon law. He was particularly critical of the participation of laypeople in church administration and of the growing influence of national movements within the Church.

Both supporters and opponents of the reforms advanced numerous arguments grounded in canon law. The final decision, however, rested with Emperor Alexander II, who firmly endorsed the position of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Ultimately, Metropolitan Filaret and the Holy Synod accepted the draft of the new ecclesiastical regulations. The course of these debates provides fertile ground for further research into the application of Byzantine canon law in the age of nationalism, as well as the interaction between politics and ecclesiastical governance in the modern era.

Lunch and Legal Discussion

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Legal Identity and Religious Freedom: The Ecumenical Patriarchate Under Turkish and International Law

George Kounoupis (Partner, Hahalis and Kounoupis, PC)

This presentation examines the unresolved issue of legal identity and legal personality for the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Greek Orthodox religious minority under Turkish law, and argues that the issue should be analyzed primarily through the framework of association law, religious freedom, and international human rights protections rather than solely through the traditional framework of minority foundations and property disputes.

The paper explains that the Ecumenical Patriarchate, despite its global religious significance and nearly 1,700-year historical continuity, remains in a form of legal limbo in Turkey. It lacks independent legal personality and therefore cannot fully own or control property, directly operate institutions, independently manage finances, hire clergy without governmental interference, or fully access judicial protections as a recognized legal entity. Instead, much of its property and operations are controlled through minority foundations overseen by the Turkish Directorate General of Foundations.

A central thesis of the presentation is that the long-standing reliance on foundation-based litigation has obscured the broader constitutional and human rights dimensions of the issue. Foundations under Turkish law are fundamentally asset-based entities focused on holding and administering property, whereas associations are member-based entities capable of representing collective religious, organizational, and constitutional interests. The paper argues that the Patriarchate, as a living religious institution rather than merely a collection of properties, cannot adequately be represented solely through foundations.

The presentation analyzes Turkish constitutional law, association law, foundation law, the Treaty of Lausanne, European Court of Human Rights ("ECHR") jurisprudence, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe ("OSCE")

principles, United Nations religious freedom standards, and comparative United States First Amendment jurisprudence. Particular attention is given to the Turkish Constitutional Court's Mamasis decision and the ECHR Mavrakis decision, both of which are argued to contain important implications concerning religious autonomy, organizational rights, clergy participation, and legal standing.

The paper further argues that the absence of legal identity produces practical and existential consequences beyond technical legal limitations. Without recognized legal personality, the Patriarchate remains dependent upon the discretion of changing political authorities and vulnerable to gradual institutional erosion. The presentation compares this condition to the protections enjoyed by religious institutions in the United States under principles of free exercise, association, church autonomy, and access to courts.

Ultimately, the presentation proposes that legal identity should be understood not merely as a technical legal issue, but as a fundamental component of religious freedom, institutional continuity, and the rule of law. The paper concludes by outlining potential legal and strategic next steps for formalizing and advancing the issue under Turkish and international law.

Session 3A

Issues in the Russian Ecclesiastical Diaspora

Interpreting Patriarch Tikhon's Decree 348 (349): A Canonical Reassessment

Andrei Psarev (Holy Trinity Orthodox Seminary)

Patriarch Tikhon's Decree 348 (349) of May 1922 remains one of the most frequently cited and most disputed documents in the history of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia. The decree has often been interpreted as a definitive act dissolving the ecclesiastical structures established by Russian refugees abroad. Yet the text itself, the circumstances of its issuance, and its reception by contemporaries suggest a more complex picture.

This paper reexamines Decree 348 (349) as a canonical document. Rather than focusing primarily on the political history of the Russian emigration, it analyzes the decree's language, internal logic, and juridical implications.
Particular attention is devoted to a distinction that has often been overlooked in subsequent discussions. While Patriarch Tikhon's preliminary statement referred to the Karlovci Council itself, the final resolution adopted by the Holy Synod and Supreme Church Council declared only two political appeals issued by the Council to be without ecclesiastical or canonical significance. The Council itself was not formally condemned, nor were canonical penalties imposed upon its participants.

The paper further examines the decree's apparent contradictions. The same document that ordered the dissolution of the Supreme Church Administration Abroad also entrusted Metropolitan Evlogy with preparing future structures of governance for the churches abroad. Likewise, disciplinary proceedings against individual hierarchs were postponed until the restoration of the normal functioning of the Holy Synod, implicitly acknowledging the abnormal circumstances under which the decree itself was issued.

Drawing upon the decree itself, Patriarch Tikhon's subsequent statements, and the deliberations of the bishops abroad in 1922, the paper argues that the decree was understood by contemporaries not as a final canonical judgment on the existence

of the Russian Church Abroad but as a response to specific political actions undertaken in the Church's name.

The paper therefore offers a reassessment of Decree 348 (349) not as a symbolic document in later church polemics, but as a canonical act whose interpretation depends upon careful attention to its text, context, and reception. In doing so, it seeks to contribute to broader discussions concerning the interpretation of ecclesiastical legislation issued under conditions of political coercion and disrupted church governance.

The 2007 Act of Canonical Communion and the Brazilian Dissent: A Study on Isolation, Congregationalism, and the Challenges of Reception

Roman Kuhnen (Antiochian House of Studies)

The 2007 signing of the Act of Canonical Communion between the Moscow Patriarchate and the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia (ROCOR) was a global milestone in healing the ecclesiastical divisions that occurred as a consequence of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution. However, in Brazil, the unification was met with total resistance. Unlike other regions in South America where jurisdictional outcomes were divided, 100% of the Russian Church in exile in Brazil adhered to the schism, currently identified as ROCOR-A (under the authority of Metropolitan Agafangel of Odessa). This paper explores the canonical, historical, and socio-psychological reasons behind this unanimous rejection.

The study argues that the dissent was driven by systemic isolation. Based on qualitative interviews with clergy and laity, as well as an analysis of diocesan documents, the research identifies three primary factors for this monolithic stance.

First, the impact of episcopal vacancy and the historical role of congregationalism. Between 1987 and 2007, Brazil lacked a resident ruling bishop. This administrative vacuum facilitated the use of civil statutes as a legal

mechanism at the end of the process to maintain control over church properties. This context favored a "Religious Underground" identity, rooted in a "zealot" ethos that claimed to be the only true church. In Brazil, this extremist narrative prevailed due to the absolute lack of a moderate theological counterbalance.

Second, an informational vacuum regarding the reunification process. The research reveals that the dialogue initiated in the 1990s, including the work of the joint commissions and their issued documents, was not of public knowledge in Brazil. Furthermore, although the Moscow Patriarchate has maintained a presence in the country since 1987, there were never any official dialogues between the two jurisdictions at the local level. Fundamental texts, such as The Basis of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church (2000), were not translated or disseminated. This work acts as a pioneer in building a bridge between these sides, addressing a silence that has persisted for decades.

Third, the socio-psychological trauma of the diaspora. The community in Brazil, of which Displaced Persons (DPs) were a part, existed within a historical context marked by trauma related to the Soviet regime. The paper examines how the concept of "Holy Rus'" was idealized as a mystical paradise lost, creating a psychological barrier against normalization with the post-Soviet Moscow Patriarchate, which was perceived as a continuation of the former regime.

Finally, the paper concludes that by breaking the informational vacuum through translation and this first academic rapprochement, a foundation of hope is established for the future restoration of unity. By examining the specific case of the Russian Church in Brazil, this study contributes to a broader understanding of the challenges of receiving major ecclesiastical agreements in geographically and linguistically isolated environments.

The Autocephaly of the Orthodox Church in America: An Examination of Opposing Views on the Extent and Purpose of the 1970 Tomos

Ethan Wayne Bucshon (Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology)

The Tomos of Autocephaly granted by the Patriarchate of Moscow on April 10, 1970 to The Russian Orthodox Greek Catholic Church in North America, called today the "Orthodox Church in America" (OCA), though having the stated purpose of "the normalization of relations among the various ecclesiastical jurisdictions in America", exacerbated ethnic, jurisdictional, and political tensions within Orthodoxy both in and outside of the diaspora. The act was sharply rebuked by various hierarchs, particularly within the Ecumenical Patriarchate, as contrary to the canonical tradition of the Orthodox Church. Debates, both on the merits and canonicity of the Tomos itself and on ancillary matters, preceded and followed its issuance.

Among the most notable responses to the Tomos was a June 24, 1970 letter of Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras to Metropolitan Pimen, then locum tenens of the Patriarchate of Moscow. In this letter, Patriarch Athenagoras stated his objections to the Tomos as well as the canonical principles underlying it. Further, he described the proper conditions for the issuance of a Tomos of autocephaly, as understood by the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

Significant disagreements on the nature of autocephaly are observed in the Ecumenical Patriarch's letter and in contemporaneous correspondences and literature on the subject. Under the view of Patriarch Athenagoras, the Tomos constituted an uncanonical intrusion of the Russian Church into territory outside her bounded jurisdiction, usurping the rights of the other Churches in the United States in creating a new Church with exclusive jurisdiction over the United States. However, in various documents and responses of representatives of the OCA, a contrary view was articulated which understands the Tomos as purely "internal" to the Russian Church and a temporary measure to ensure the independence of the OCA as they work toward the establishment of a fully united Church in the United States.

This paper will briefly examine the historical background for the granting of the 1970 Tomos, contrast the disparate models for autocephaly presented by the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the OCA, and examine the Ecumenical Throne and the OCA's ecclesiological assertions in light of the relevant canonical and historical literature. In particular, this paper will examine the claims of Patriarch Athenagoras in his aforementioned letter, the responses to the controversy over the Tomos written by Father Alexander Schmemann and other OCA theologians, and the language of the Tomos itself and the agreement between Moscow and The Russian Orthodox Greek Catholic Church in North America which preceded it.

Further, this paper will argue that, when examined in light of the canons and historical precedents relevant to autocephaly, the understanding of the OCA's autocephaly as merely provisional is inconsistent with Orthodox canonical principles. Thus, while understandable at the time it was pursued, the Tomos is not an adequate model for the pursuit of ecclesial unity in the United States, and the understanding articulated by Patriarch Athenagoras avoids the canonical problems created by this model.

Session 3B

Canonical Ways and Means

Legal Method in Cyprian: Considering Epp. 70 & 72 as Resources for Canonical Legal Reasoning

Emily Turner (Boston College)

Although most impactful in the Western Christian tradition, Cyprian of Carthage is a recognized authority in Orthodox canon law.

The focus on Cyprian in Orthodox canon law has largely been his commitment to the requirement of rebaptism for those first baptized in schismatic churches. Schismatics having separated themselves from the true church, Cyprian's reasoning goes, they have lost the Holy Spirit; consequently, they are incapable of either remitting sins or communicating the Spirit to others in baptism. Those who wish to be incorporated into the catholic church thus required baptism and the laying on of hands by the bishop for the remission of sins and the communication of the Spirit.

Famously, Cyprian's argument lost in its own historical moment. The position of Stephen of Rome prevailed and has been inherited by the Latin tradition. Yet, as Heinze Ohme has recently reminded readers, "a Greek translation of the synodal letter of the Carthaginian Synod of 255 [concerning the controversy over rebaptism]… found its way into the Greek canonical collections as 'a canon of Cyprian of Carthage.'"[1] Focus in such discussions is overwhelmingly on *Ep.* 70 of Cyprian's corpus.

This paper draws attention to an additional way Cyprian's letters may be valuable resources for the early roots of Orthodox canon law: namely, his method of reasoning in cases of conflicts regarding doctrine and discipline among the churches of the Late Ancient Mediterranean world. With special attention to *Epp.*

[1] Heinze Ohme, "Greek Canon Law to 691/2" in *The History of Byzantine and Eastern Canon Law to 1500,* eds. Wilfried Hartmann and Kenneth Pennington, Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2012.

70 and 72 in the corpus, the paper will attend to two elements of this juridical approach: first, Cyprian's engagement with authoritative, analogous cases in the past and, second, Cyprian's evident sensitivity to the authority of the local bishop to decide. The argument will be that these principles have been more successfully retained in the history of Orthodox canon law than they have in the Western canonical tradition.

Redacting Severus of Antioch: A Case Study in the Formation of Epistolary Canons

Simon Samuel Koostra-Ford (Ghent University)

The period between the suppression of the anti-Chalcedonian episcopate in Asia, Pontus, and Oriens, in 518-522, and the Islamic conquest of the Levant, in the early seventh century, witnessed the progressive coalescence of corpus of legal writings by Miaphysite bishops. Overwhelmingly, these appear to have taken the form of epistolary responsa. Authored both by individual bishops and by groups of episcopal legislators, these letters provided a form of remote superintendence, offering guidance on the regulation of the sacraments and the imposition of ecclesiastical discipline to a communion, often deprived of direct oversight, laying the foundation for the emergence of a separate body of Severan-Jacobite (a.k.a., Syrian Orthodox) canon law.

While a portion of these early responsa have been transmitted as more or less intact letters, a significant corpus has survived only through their redaction into epistolary canons. Circulated both as independent texts and as part of the West Syrian *Synodicon*, most such canons have lost much of their epistolary form and content, which is often legible only through a notice in their rubrics or, in some case, through the retention of short opening formulae. In addition to the removal of their original context, the preservation of these responsa as canons frequently obscures the degree to which their extant form(s) are the product of redaction.

Focusing on a group of ten texts authored by the patriarch Severus of Antioch,

which have survived both as more or less intact letters and as epistolary canons within the *Synodicon*, this paper offers a case study on the textual mechanics by which juridical correspondence was adapted to serve as canons within the Severan-Jacobite tradition. It concludes that, far from simple excerpts, the resultant canons are the product of a process of selection and redaction, which verges at times upon rewriting. In this way, it argues that, rather than straightforward sources, epistolary canons instead represent composite documents, whose textual histories must be considered.

The Enduring Legacy of William Beveridge

John Schroedel (St. Mary's Orthodox Cathedral [OCA] Minneapolis, MN)

The publication of William Beveridge's *Synodikon sive Pandectae Canonum* at Oxford in 1672 marked a pivotal moment in the history of Orthodox canon law. Not only was it a monumental work of scholarship that far surpassed every previous attempt at a critical edition of the canons, but it also presented, for the first time together in print, the commentaries of all three great Byzantine medieval commentators—Aristenos, Zonaras, and Balsamon. To these, Beveridge added his own learned *annotationes*.

In a 2021 *Ecclesiastical Law Journal* article, "Rediscovering Anglican Priest-Jurists III: William Beveridge (1637–1708)," Norman Doe and Dimitrios (Aetios) Nikiforos drew attention to how this work became the basis for the *Pedalion* (1800) and the template for Rhalles and Potles' *Syntagma* (1852–59). This paper takes up their call to "rediscover Beveridge" and tells the story of his *Synodikon* from a broader perspective.

Beginning with the provenance of the manuscripts used, this paper considers the extraordinary confluence of events, technologies, and convictions that made publication possible—a venture so resource-intensive that it nearly bankrupted the publisher, Robert Scott. Then, with guidance from Ivan Žužek's encyclopedic

Kormčaja kniga (1964), it examines how the *Synodikon* was received not only among Greek speakers but also in the Slavic world, from Patriarch Adrian of Moscow through the era of the *Kniga Pravil*. Finally, it traces Beveridge's lasting influence in Western Europe and North America, especially through Migne's *Patrologia Graeca* and Percival's *Seven Ecumenical Councils* (Series II, Volume 14 of *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*), both of which reshaped his legacy for new audiences.

This is the story of how one person's warm-hearted love of tradition rekindled canonical scholarship across confessional boundaries, and of the communities that made this possible. It is a story of struggle for survival in the face of political pressure, foreign influence, and religious polemic. It is a parable for our own moment: a time of new technologies, unprecedented cross-confessional contact, and porous linguistic and geographical boundaries.

Session 3C

Challenges and New Interpretations

Between Legality and Canonicity: The Institution of Military Chaplains in Orthodox Canon Law in the Light of Tradition and Contemporary Challenges

Athenagoras Soupourtzis (Orthodox Theological Academy of Volyn)

The institution of military chaplains constitutes one of the most complex and institutionally distinctive fields of contemporary Orthodox Canon Law. The presence of clergy within military structures raises critical questions concerning the limits of ecclesiastical canonicity, the nature of the priesthood, Church-State relations, episcopal supervision, and the possibility of exercising pastoral ministry in an environment structured according to military hierarchy and state authority. The present study examines the institution in light of Orthodox canonical tradition and the ecclesiological self-understanding of the Church, drawing upon the sacred canons, Byzantine experience, and contemporary canon law scholarship.

The originality of the present study lies in its systematic examination of the canonical boundaries of the institution through the lens of both Byzantine historical experience and contemporary challenges. While existing scholarship has addressed aspects of military chaplaincy in Western canonical traditions, a comprehensive Orthodox canonical analysis that integrates patristic sources, the sacred canons, and current pastoral realities — including moral injury and post-traumatic spiritual care — remains a scholarly lacuna that this paper seeks to address.

Particular emphasis is placed upon the distinction between military authority and the pastoral presence of the Church, as well as upon the fundamental canonical principle that military chaplains do not constitute a distinct form of priesthood but rather a special pastoral ministry within a particular institutional framework. Issues of jurisdictional subordination, ecclesiastical discipline, and canonical responsibility are examined through analysis of Canon 83 of the Holy Apostles, Canon 7 of the Fourth Ecumenical Council, and related conciliar legislation. The study also draws upon the Byzantine experience of clergy accompanying military units, demonstrating that even under conditions of historical accommodation, the

canonical tradition consistently maintained the priority of episcopal supervision.

The study concludes that the canonical legitimacy of military chaplaincy is possible only insofar as five fundamental conditions are preserved: episcopal supervision, a clear distinction between state and ecclesiastical competence, the avoidance of the ideologization of pastoral ministry, adequate theological and canonical formation, and the protection of the sacramental nature of the priesthood. The military chaplain never ceases to be a minister of the Church; his service integration cannot annul his sacramental identity. When the balance between state legality and ecclesiastical canonicity is disrupted, serious pathologies arise that undermine both the integrity of the institution and the canonical constitution of the Church.

The Holy Canons and Disability: A Contemporary Approach to a Perennial Issue

Ioannis E. Kastanas (School of Law, University of Nicosia, Nicosia)

Inherently complex and interdisciplinary, the concept of "disability" is shaped by legal, social, medical, and political approaches. According to L. Davis "disability per se" did not exist prior to the eighteenth century. Even if this assertion is true, it was the case that in Ancient Greece weakness, or feebleness or disability [αδυναμία in Greek] resulted disbarment from holding military, political and religious roles in Athens and elsewhere. On the other hand, though, it should be noted that in Sparta the authorities chastised anyone with a disabling impairment who chose not to fight, while lauding those who "overcame" their disabilities and did fight. In ancient Rome and throughout the Roman period the attitude to disability [debilitas in Latin] was the same. In the Jewish tradition, too, rules around disability were more clearly focused on the priesthood since Jewish priests, charged with laying offerings in front of God, were required to be free of any blemish. Different approaches to disability in antiquity aside, in general disability was not positively perceived.

Christianity emerged against this historic backdrop; yet reading the New Testament, one understands that the new religion took —and still takes— a different stance. Based on the New Testament's letter and the tradition of the Apostles and their successors, the Canon Law of the unifying Church was supplemented with Canons introduced in different periods without any codification. After the Great Schism, Orthodox Canon Law remained uncodified, and even today no codification exists. By contrast, the corpus of Canons of the other Christian denominations has already been codified. This particularity within the Orthodox Church influences the interpretation of the Holy Canons as well as their application. On result of this situation, is that the applicable legal text is the constitutional charters adopted by the local Churches.

The first category of Holy Canons concerning disability relates to eligibility for admission to the priesthood. Although the explicit canonical references to eunuchs have largely fallen into desuetude, the normative spirit and hermeneutical principles underlying these canons continue to inform the interpretation of contemporary canon law and ecclesiastical practice. Another Holy Canon of relevance here is the Fifty-Seventh Apostolic Canon, which reproaches believers who mock or ridicule persons with disabilities. Valuable secondary sources may also be found in the Lives of the Saints. Characteristic examples include the lives of St. Germanus I of Constantinople (whose feast day is 12 May), who was a eunuch, and St. Mark the Deaf (whose feast day is 2 January), among others.

Orthodox Canon Law possesses a firmly established and pioneering normative framework in support of persons with disabilities, both for the period in which it was enacted and by present-day standards. Its written sources do not always follow contemporary terminology and are fragmentary in nature. Each local Church addresses the issue through the lens of its own pastoral sensitivity. It is proposed that, on the initiative of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and in cooperation with the other local Churches, an interpretative guide should be prepared to explain how the Holy Canons apply to disability in all its forms, as understood by contemporary medical science. Particular emphasis should be placed on admission to the priesthood and on the retention of clerical status in cases of

subsequently acquired disability. The interpretation should be dynamic, drawing too on the institution of ecclesiastical economy. This would safeguard against legalistic interpretations, in accordance with Paul's saying, "τὸ γὰρ γράμμα ἀποκτείνει, τὸ δὲ πνεῦμα ζωοποιεῖ" 2 Corinthians 3:6.

The Other Trullan Canons Regulating Aesthetics

David Olster (Independent Scholar)

Twelve Trullan canons regulate ecclesiastical and secular imagery and iconography, costume and presentation, and ritual gesture, a set of topics that together fall under the category of societal aesthetics or accepted and acceptable public display. Although only nineteen of the one-hundred-two Trullan canons are original, the rest being revisions of earlier canons or imperial legislation, seven of these "aesthetics" canons are original; indeed, there is no other Trullan regulatory heading that inspired so much original legislation. This emphasis reveals the authors' concern with the power of appearances: devotional, liturgical and social. Unfortunately, scholars, drawn by the irresistible pull of the looming iconoclast controversy, have exclusively focused on Trullan canon 82, which forbids ovine Christ depictions, and ignored other canons that regulate aesthetics. Our aim in this paper is to analyze the Trullan "aesthetics" canons in order to determine first, the theory that shaped them; second, how the canons fit within the Trullan code's broader reform program; and third, how these canons reveal a critical aspect of seventh-century imperial imagery and messaging.

Moral reform was a central feature of the Trullan program, an attempt to suppress the sins that had aroused divine wrath and led to Arab victories, and the canons' authors sought to regulate the senses, above all, sight, in order to control or limit sin's power. As Trullo 100 explains, "'Let your eyes behold the thing that is right,' orders Wisdom, 'and keep your heart with all care.' For the bodily senses easily bring their own impressions into the soul." Then, following this theory of sin, the canons focus on religious imagery and social presentation in order to restore an ecclesiastical and societal *taksis* that had fallen into sinful abeyance.

Beyond moral reform, canons 73 and 101, which regulate cross imagery, evidence a defining, seventh-century intersection of image, religious practice and imperial policy. The cross was not only the dominant Christ symbol, but the most important imperial victory sign, one that the Heraclians consistently exploited. George of Pisidia not only celebrated Heraclius's triumphant return of the True Cross to Jerusalem, but wrote a Life of Anastasius the Persian, the saint most closely associated with the True Cross's trials, tribulations and triumph, while his contemporary, Antiochus Monachus, wrote an almost hagiographic account of the True Cross's miracles in exile. Heraclius further ensured that his victory over the Persians, sealed by the Cross's return, would be remembered; the Elevation of the Cross feast's full integration into the liturgical calendar dates from this time and celebrates his victory. Indeed, long after Jerusalem's fall to the Arabs, the Golgotha cross-on-steps adorned Roman solidi with the legend, "Victory of the Emperor(s)", and the anti-Jewish dialogue, *The Trophies of Damascus*, boasted that even Christ's most intransigent enemies, the Jews, acknowledged the Cross's power when they accepted the gold on which it was stamped. So, in order to measure these canons' cultural valance and their place in the Trullan program, we must consider their relationship to the Heraclian cross cult.

Justinian II's court was acutely aware of aesthetics' importance: Justinian ostensibly went to war over the Caliphate's coin iconography, and he issued Christian Rome's most radical coin iconography. But his aesthetics program extended well beyond numismatic iconography. This presentation will hopefully shed some light on his program in its own 690's context, not as a foreshadowing of iconoclasm, but reflecting a time of both imperial resurgence and intense apocalyptic expectation.

Session 4A

Basic Questions of Hierarchy and Synod

The 1985 Basic Statute of the Holy Synod (*al-Lāʾiḥa al-Asāsiyya li-l-Majmaʿ al-Muqaddas*): The Constitutional Refounding of Coptic Synodality Under Pope Shenouda III

Mena Basta
(Claremount Graduate University/St. Shenouda the Archimandrite Coptic Society)

On 1 June 1985, at Dayr Anba Rueiss in Cairo, the Coptic Orthodox Holy Synod approved article-by-article *al-Lāʾiḥa al-Asāsiyya li-l-Majmaʿ al-Muqaddas* (The 1985 Basic Statute of the Holy Synod), the first formal statute in the Synod's contemporary history. The Synod's own third-edition publication of its decisions concedes, in its preface, that no such statute had existed before that date. This paper argues that the 1985 Statute set up the constitutional refounding of Coptic synodality: a codification that retains the classical institution of the synod of bishops but installs it within a modern juridical register, with no immediate precedent in Copto-Arabic canonical literature.

The argument draws on the Synod's official volume *al-Qarārāt al-Majmaʿiyya fī ʿAhd Ṣāḥib al-Qadāsa al-Bābā Shanūda al-Thālith* (3rd ed., Cairo 2011), which prints the Statute in full and organizes the Synod's 1971–2010 decisions into twenty-five thematic chapters. Close reading of the Statute identifies three features without contemporary Coptic precedent. First, the act of codification itself: before 1985, Coptic synodal governance operated through custom, patriarchal direction, and the *ad hoc* reception of classical canons; the Statute supplies in its place a written text that binds the Synod itself. Second, the structural apparatus: a permanent committee system (Faith, Teaching, and Legislation; Eparchial Affairs; Monastic Affairs; Ecclesial Relations; Liturgy, and others), a follow-up committee for the implementation of decisions, and a formal procedure of ecclesiastical due-process for the removal of bishops and clergy. Third, the juridical register: Article 4 names the Synod *al-sulṭa al-kahnūtiyya al-ʿulyā* ("the highest priestly authority"), a constitutional-supremacy formulation without analogue in classical conciliar vocabulary, and Articles 55–57 codify

patriarchal property and succession in terms that explicitly exclude the bodily heirs of a deceased patriarch. Subsequent amendment sessions (1986/6/21; 2005/6/18) operate the Statute as a living constitution.

The paper situates the 1985 Statute within the broader twentieth-century phenomenon of Christian canonical codification (the 1917 and 1983 Latin codes, the 1990 CCEO, the Russian Orthodox *Ustav* sequence) and contributes a close reading of a foundational text that has received no Anglophone scholarly treatment. The 2003/6/14 decision against "unsanctioned" monastic formations outside *al-iṭār al-sharʿī al-kanasī li-al-rahbana* illustrates the Statute's authority-logic deployed against customary ecclesial practice. The paper concludes that contemporary Coptic synodal governance, though framed in ecclesial discourse as apostolic-traditional, is substantially the product of a 1985 juridical moment. The contrast with the pre-juridical synodality of Pope Kyrillos VI (1959–1971), who governed the same institution without a written charter, frames the 1985 Statute as a specifically Shenoudian achievement.

Returning to the *Alma Mater*: A Case for Renewed Alexandrian Jurisdiction Over the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church

Kyrillos Nashed (Hellenic College)

The Orthodox Church, being a catholic church, embodies the concept of *lex orandi, lex credendi, lex vivendi* (the law of what is prayed [is] what is believed [is] the law of what is lived). Within the title of the Patriarch of Alexandria in its fullness, he is called "Pope and Patriarch of the Great City of Alexandria, Libya, Pentapolis, Ethiopia, Africa, and all the land of Egypt" (Πάπα καὶ Πατριάρχου τῆς Μεγάλης Πόλεως Ἀλεξανδρείας, Λιβύης, Πενταπόλεως, Αἰθιοπίας, Ἀφρικῆς καὶ πάσης γῆς Αἰγύπτου). If we are to pray what we believe and believe what we pray, it should be acceptable for the Patriarchate of Alexandria to fully realize Her position as the mother figure and to exercise authority whenever necessary to maintain the unity of the Orthodox Church in Her jurisdictional capacity.

For the past several decades, the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (EOTC) has been fractured with instability due to political and ethnocentric divisions between Her children, both clergy and laity alike in Ethiopia and across the world. Consequently, schismatic and uncanonical patriarchs and synods have been formed, all acting independently from the EOTC and Her Holy Synod based in Addis Ababa, namely the uncanonical patriarchs of the Marxist regime, the so-called Synod in Exile from 1992–2018, and the more recent Tigray, Oromia, and Amhara-Ethiopian Orthodox synods. With these imposturous synods in actions, rooted in political affiliation and tribalism, many questions arise concerning autocephaly, ecclesiology, hierarchical legitimacy, and mission of the EOTC.

After examining sources regarding the state of autocephaly of the EOTC, origins of acquisition, relations between the Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and the Church of Ethiopia, and the current dynamic of the EOTC Holy Synod, this paper calls for a reconsideration of the nature and extent of the autocephaly of the EOTC. Additionally, it also proposes the possibility of a temporary restoration of Alexandrian jurisdiction as a means of reestablishing canonical order, hierarchical legitimacy, and ecclesial unity within the EOTC, and ultimately strengthening relations with the Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria.

In this proposed case, the Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria would act not as an external force interfering with the Church of Ethiopia, but rather in Her rightful position as the *alma mater* (nursing mother), caring for Her sister church in the manner that an older sister assumes the duties of a mother, and as the "Patriarch[ate] of Alexandria…Ethiopia…and Africa." As the one who granted autocephaly to the Church of Ethiopia, it is incumbent upon the Patriarchate of Alexandria to help restore stability to the EOTC for the peace and edification of the Church domestically and in the diaspora.

Sede Vacante Norms in Armenia, 440–461 A.D.

Hovannes Khosdeghian (St. Nerses Armenian Seminary)

There is scant evidence of the actual norms followed in the election of Metropolitan or Patriarchal bishops in the early church. Synodal canons stipulate that bishops of the jurisdiction must meet in council to elect and to ordain or install, as applicable, their Metropolitan bishop, but remain silent on the actual procedures to be followed.

In Acts 1:15–26, the Apostle Peter invites the assembly of "brothers," numbering about 120, to elect one of the men who accompanied the Twelve "during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us" to be a witness to the Lord's resurrection. The assembly proposes Joseph, called Barsabbas (also known as Justus), and Matthias. A brief prayer asks the Lord (Jesus) to show which of the two He has chosen. They (the assembly?) cast lots for the two, and the lot falls on Matthias, who is added to the twelve.

A slightly different procedure is followed in the selection of the seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, in Acts 6.2-6, whom the Apostles appoint to the task of waiting on tables (or keeping accounts?) by praying and laying their hands on them.

The New Testament Epistles set qualifications for those who aspire to the offices in the household of God (1 Timothy 3:15), but provide no specific norms or procedures for the process.

Councils of the early Church regulated various aspects of the office of the Bishop, but the actual election procedures have either not been considered important enough to be recorded or have been supplanted by sudden disruptions of the social order. However, incidental allusions to roles and accidental mentions of titles in surviving correspondence among bishops help us recover details of

seemingly well-established norms governing the succession process.

The paper will present evidence of norms governing the vacancy of the Catholicos' See in Armenia in the Fifth Century, drawn from correspondence, synods, and customs governing embassies, thereby helping us better understand the *ius successionis* applicable to the *sede vacante* in the Church of Armenia.

Session 4B

Questions of Pastoral Application

Οἰκονομία as a Pastoral Tool in Orthodox Canon Law

Milan Sturgis (Independent Scholar)

The Orthodox Church has always understood herself as a place of healing rather than a courtroom, and nowhere is this more evident than in the principle of *οἰκονομία*. The word itself comes from the Greek for "household management" — a deliberately domestic image, one that evokes not a judge behind a bench but a father at a table, making wise decisions for the good of his family. At its heart, *οἰκονομία* is the Church's way of acknowledging that people are complicated, that life rarely conforms to ideal circumstances, and that the rigid application of rules can sometimes wound the very souls the rules were written to protect. It exists alongside its counterpart, *ἀκρίβεια*— strict canonical exactitude — and the life of the Church breathes through the tension between them.

This principle did not emerge from abstract legal theory. It grew from the Church's lived experience of caring for real people in real crises — the lapsed who wanted to return, the irregularly ordained who nonetheless served faithfully, the converts whose previous sacramental lives did not fit neatly into Orthodox categories. The Fathers, especially Basil the Great, understood that the canons were servants of salvation, not ends in themselves. When strict observance would drive a struggling person further from God rather than closer, a wiser and more merciful path had to be expressed. Οἰκονομία is that path — not a loophole, but a deeper fidelity to what canon law is always trying to accomplish, salvation.

In practice, it falls to the Hierarch to exercise this discretion. As the chief pastor of his diocese, he carries the weight of his people's spiritual wellbeing, and *οἰκονομία i*s one of the most serious tools in his care. He may apply it when receiving converts, navigating broken marriages, or restoring the penitent to sacramental life. But this authority is never a license for carelessness. *Οἰκονομία* exercised without genuine pastoral need, or used to paper over theological compromise, ceases to be *οἰκονομία* at all — it becomes mere laxity dressed in a respectable name.

It is worth pausing to contrast this with how the Latin West handles a similar problem. The Roman Catholic tradition has the concept of *dispensatio* — a formal, juridical act by which a competent authority suspends the application of a Church law for a just cause. It is orderly, codified in the 1983 Codex *Iuris Canonici,* and conceived primarily as an exercise of hierarchical power over law. *Οἰκονομία* operates from a different starting point entirely. It is less a legal mechanism than a pastoral instinct, guided by the Holy Spirit and rooted in the bishop's fatherly relationship with his flock. Dispensation tends to be formally granted and prospective; *οἰκονομία* is often quiet and retrospective, recognized in the mending of a situation more than announced in advance. The difference ultimately reflects two distinct visions of what the Church is — a perfect juridical society that governs by law, or the living Body of Christ, within which law exists to serve the community's life in God.

What *οἰκονομία* ultimately reveals is that Orthodox canon law is not really about law in the way that word is usually understood in the West. It is about salvation. The canons exist because human beings need structure and guidance on the long road toward union with God — but they were never meant to become juridical obstacles on that road. When they threaten to, the Church, in her maternal wisdom, knows how to let mercy lead the way.

Beyond Regulation: Canon Law as Spiritual Medicine in the Syriac Orthodox Tradition

Timothy (Tenny) Thomas Varghese (St. John's University)

Modern scholarship frequently approaches canon law through juridical and institutional categories, interpreting ecclesiastical canons primarily as systems of governance, discipline, and regulation. While such approaches illuminate important administrative dimensions of Church life, they often fail to capture the deeply spiritual and therapeutic character of canon law within the Syriac Orthodox Christian tradition. In Syriac Christianity, canon law was never understood merely as an external legal framework imposed upon the faithful;

rather, it functioned as a pastoral and ascetic instrument directed toward the healing of the human person and the restoration of communion within the Body of Christ. This paper proposes a therapeutic reading of Syriac Orthodox canon law, arguing that the Syriac Orthodox canonical tradition understood ecclesial discipline fundamentally as spiritual medicine rather than juridical punishment.

The paper will focus particularly on the canonical vision of Bar Hebraeus (1226–1286), whose *Kthobo d-Hudoye* (*Nomocanon*) represents one of the most comprehensive canonical syntheses in the Syriac tradition. Drawing upon earlier Syriac sources—including Jacob of Edessa, the Synodicon tradition, monastic literature, and ascetical theology—Bar Hebraeus presents canon law as inseparable from spiritual anthropology and pastoral care. Within this framework, sin is treated less as a legal transgression demanding retribution and more as a distortion of the human person requiring discernment, repentance, and healing. Consequently, bishops, confessors, and canonists are envisioned not merely as judges or administrators, but as physicians of souls entrusted with guiding the faithful toward restoration and deification.

This study argues that Syriac Orthodox canon law operates within a broader theological worldview shaped profoundly by liturgy, asceticism, sacramental life, and the Syriac understanding of divine mercy. The influence of St. Ephrem the Syrian and St. Isaac of Nineveh is especially significant in this regard. Syriac spirituality consistently emphasizes the healing of the inner person through repentance, tears, fasting, prayer, and Eucharistic participation. Canonical discipline therefore emerges not as a detached legal process, but as one component within the Church's larger therapeutic vocation. The canons seek not simply the preservation of institutional order, but the reintegration of wounded humanity into communion with God and neighbor.

The paper further contends that this therapeutic model offers critical insights for contemporary Orthodox discussions surrounding authority, pastoral care, repentance, and ecclesial discipline. In an age marked by institutional distrust, spiritual alienation, mental exhaustion, and growing suspicion toward structures of authority, the Syriac tradition offers an alternative vision of canon law

grounded not in coercion or legalism but in healing and transformation. The Syriac Orthodox canonical imagination challenges both rigid juridicism and modern individualism by insisting that authentic ecclesial order exists for the salvation and restoration of the human person.

Ultimately, this paper seeks to recover Syriac Orthodox canon law as a living spiritual practice rooted in mercy, discernment, and pastoral healing. By moving "beyond regulation," the Syriac tradition invites contemporary canon law scholarship to rediscover the Church's canonical life as participation in Christ's ongoing work as the Physician of souls.

Canonical Order and Pastoral Vitality: The Supernatural Telos of Canon Law

Vladimer Narsia (Ilia State University, Tbilisi, Georgia)

This paper examines the critical role of canon law for the pastoral mission of the Georgian Orthodox Church. This field was long underdeveloped or misrepresented in Georgian ecclesiastical life for reasons that were neither accidental nor freely chosen, but rather imposed by the Soviet regime, which astutely understood the power of the Church governed by its sacred traditions, particularly its canon law. The Georgian Church endured the Soviet regime and successfully preserved her apostolic spirit, theological depth, and a profound memory of the canonical tradition. Now, in the new era of his Holiness Patriarch Shio III, the time has come for this memory to be transformed into a living and active force for the Church.

My work is a modest attempt to highlight the importance of canonical vitality within the Georgian Church, presenting it as an intellectual and pastoral tradition awaiting a profound revival in this new era of Patriarch Shio's leadership. I emphasize that canon law does not merely constitute a compilation of legal norms in a narrow sense but rather embodies the directives of the Church's pastoral guidance. Proceeding from this foundational argument, this paper

broadens the conceptual scope of canonical scholarship through a contextual comparison of the preparatory or formative legal systems, such as: Roman law, with its sophisticated jurisprudence and public order; Hebrew legal thought, rooted in a covenantal understanding of community and obligation; and classical legal-philosophical frameworks, which were intricately woven into the matrix of Christian ethics. Canon law, however, is not reducible to any of these systems. What it introduced into the history of legal science was genuinely unprecedented: a distinct theology of law—the conviction that the governance of the human community within the Church derives from the revealed will of God, as received and transmitted by the Church through the Holy Spirit, and that its ultimate purpose is the inner transformation of man for a salvific mission. This theological foundation fundamentally distinguishes canonical jurisprudence from every secular tradition, endowing it with a dignity and gravity that secular legal science, for all its technical precision, cannot replicate.

The paper then turns to the institutional dimension of canonical regulation, the concrete areas of ecclesial life that canon law structures and safeguards. It envisions episcopal power not as personal sovereignty, but as a stewardship accountable simultaneously to the synod, the canons, and ultimately, the community of faith. Furthermore, it examines the theology and practice of the Holy Synod as the primary organ of collegial governance in the Orthodox Church, outlining the conditions under which synodal authority can be both genuinely exercised and genuinely respected. Across each of these domains, the paper returns to a single, insistent claim: that canonical order is the necessary condition of the Church's pastoral vitality.

Index of Speakers

Abdelsayed, Mena	4
Basta, Mena	36
Bucshon, Ethan Wayne	22
Gerd, Lora	13
Kastanas, Ioannis	31
Khosdeghian, Hovannes	39
Koostra-Ford, Simon	26
Kounoupis, George	16
Kuhnen, Roman	20
Kyrillos of Krini	10
Mims, Caitlin	7
Narsia, Vladimer	45
Nashed, Kyrillos	37
Nikiforos, Aetios	11
Olster, David	33
Psarev, Andrei	19
Schroedel, John	27
Soupourtzis, Athenagoras	30
Sturgis, Milan	42
Turner, Emily	25
Varghese, Timothy Thomas	43
Wilson, Laura	6

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