



The Minor Clergy of the Orthodox Church: Their role and life according to the canons

Dr John (Patrick) Ramsey

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This study examines the canons identified and ratified by the first Seven Ecumenical Councils and also the canons of the ninth century in regard to the rules that they lay down regarding the minor clergy. By “minor clergy” is meant the various clerical orders of the Church other than the orders of bishop, presbyter, and deacon. These minor orders include the offices of subdeacon, reader, cantor, and deaconess, and also the functions of exorcists, doorkeepers, and acolytes all of whom are listed in the canons as among the clerical orders. The principle issue that is addressed is how should the canons regarding the minor clergy be recognised in the practice and understanding of the minor clergy in the Orthodox churches today. The stipulations of the canons are analysed using principles of legal interpretation. The purpose of a canon and intention of those composing it, where not explicit in the canon or in the Acts of the councils, is derived, where possible, from historical practice and secondary writings, such as: the commentaries of Balsamon, Zonaras and Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain; the laws of Justinian; New Testament writings; ordination prayers; and liturgical theory. Possible exceptions to the strict application of the Canon Law are also examined.

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