



Guide for a Church under Islam: The Sixty-Six Canonical Questions Attributed to Theodoros Balsamon

Patrick Demetrios Viscuso

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In the Christian East, the pastoral manuals of the Church took a literary form known as "Questions/Answers." The authors of these canonical works were bishops and priests who usually wrote to guide clergy in addressing issues arising from diocesan and parish life. Unlike any of these other guides, in the present work an entire church subject to Islamic persecution sought the counsel of its sole Eastern sister church that was free from Muslim conquest. This pastoral guide for a church under Islam sets forth a pattern meant for a patriarchate to apply in addressing issues arising in a society under the domination of an alien religion that regarded itself as superior by nature.

In addition to the main issue, the twelfth-century document has a number of interesting features relevant for Church history, including its record of ancient Christian practices regarding liturgy, fasting, preparation for the Eucharist, burial of the dead, deaconesses, and the internal life of Arabic Christians living in what would become modern Egypt, Palestine, Lebanon, and Syria. The translation as well as its annotations and introductory history represent a time capsule of the Church's history in the aftermath of the Muslim conquests of the Middle East and just before the taking of Constantinople in 1204 by the Latin Crusaders.

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