ADMONITIO GENERALIS, A TESTIMONY TO THE INFLUENCES OF THE *COLLECTTIO DIONISIANA* ON CAROLINGIAN LEGISLATION

Rareș Bardu
PhD Student at Ovidius University of Constanța Romania
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0002-1919-5752

Abstract. The canonical collection of the Proto-Romanian scholar from Scythia Minor (present-day Dobrogea), Dionysius Exiguus ("the humble"), known as the Dionisiana, represented a crucial landmark not only in the formation and consolidation of Western European Canon Law, but also in promoting the ecumenical unity of the Church during the first millennium, by codifying a shared canonical foundation for both East and West. The prestige enjoyed by this collection led to its adoption as a model and source of juridical authority by Charlemagne, in the renowned programmatic decree Admonitio Generalis of 789, which laid the groundwork for his legislative unification efforts within the Frankish Empire. Thus, through the interweaving of canonical legislation with civil law throughout the medieval period, Dionisiana exerted a decisive influence on the genesis and development of Western Christian juridical culture and its juridical institutions.

Key words: Canonical collection, medieval legislation, European Canon Law, Latin Church

* * *

Introduction. The *Collectio Dionysiana* played a pivotal role in shaping the development of Christian law throughout medieval Europe. By compiling, translating, and systematically organizing the decisions of ecumenical councils and papal decretals into a coherent and accessible structure, Dionysius Exiguus - a proto-Romanian monk and scholar from Scythia Minor (present-day Dobrogea, Romania) (Dură, 2003a: 5-18; Mititelu, 2018: 316-331) - provided the Latin Church with a foundational instrument for the governance of ecclesiastical life. Rapidly disseminated and adopted across Western Europe, the collection became a vital point of reference not only for bishops and other ecclesiastical authorities, but also for secular rulers engaged in legal and administrative reform.

This paper examines the reception of the *Collectio Dionysiana* as an etalon within the Carolingian legal reform, particularly in connection with its seminal legislative text, the *Admonitio Generalis*. We present and analyze the first two capitula of this decree, each accompanied by canonico-legal commentary that elucidates the incorporation of ecclesiastical legal concepts into the civil legislation of the Carolingian Empire-an influence that extended into the broader legal culture of medieval Europe.

Admonitio Generalis,* the foundation of *the Carolingian Renaissance

In the 8th century, with the rise of the Carolingian dynasty, the *Collectio Dionysiana* played a crucial role in the ecclesiastical and political reforms promoted by Charlemagne. In 774, at Pavia, Charlemagne received from Pope Hadrian I a revised version of the collection, known later on as the *Dionysio-Hadriana*. This version was presented as a symbolic gift that conferred ecclesiastical recognition and authority and quickly became both a tool of reform and a means of supporting political power. The first documented use of this collection at the Carolingian court occurred in 789, when extensive citations of Eastern canons and relevant papal decretals from the *Collectio Dionisiana* were included in Charlemagne's reform edict, the *Admonitio Generalis*.

In his effort to reform, organize, and centralize the Frankish Empire, Charlemagne (768-814) promulgated, over the course of his long reign, several legislative sets known generically as capitularies, which con-

tained laws called *capitula*, grouped under titles such as the *Capitularies of Herstad* (779) or those united under the title *Admonitio Generalis* issued in 789. The 82 *capitula* included in the *Admonitio Generalis* form a legislative body with a programmatic nature that laid the foundation for what is known in European history as the Carolingian Renaissance. Of the 82 capitula, 59 cited or were entirely based on estern ecclesiastical canons contained in the Dionisio-Hadriana collection, which, the Frankish king received from Pope Adrian as a symbol of papal authority and a benchmark for the canonical legislation of the Western Church. The appeal to the Dionysian collection was not new for the Carolingian dynasty, whose reform efforts spanned three generations. In turn, Pepin the Short (741-751), Charlemagne's father, had received part of Dionysius Exiguus' canonical codex from Pope Zacharias (741-752) when he took over the throne of the Frankish Empire from the last representative of the Merovingian dynasty, Childeric III (717-754). Some of the laws issued by him reflect the influence of canonical legislation from Dionisian collection.

The capitula contained in the *Admonitio Generalis* outlined the educational and religious objectives that expressed Charlemagne's ideals, aiming to establish a unified state and society based on the Church and the principles of Christian morality. According to authors Leighton D. Reynolds and N. G. Wilson, the context that led to the emergence of the capitularies was generated by the fact that:

"*Both the secular and ecclesiastical administration of a vast empire required a large number of trained priests and officials. As the sole common denominator in a heterogeneous kingdom and the repository of both classical and Christian heritage from previous centuries, the Church was the obvious means to implement the necessary educational program to form an educated executive body. However, under the Merovingians, even the Church had entered a difficult period; some priests were so ignorant of Latin that Boniface heard one perform a baptism of dubious efficacy in nomine patria et filia et spiritus sancti (Epist. 68), and knowledge of antiquity had so eroded that the author of a sermon mistakenly believed Venus was male"* (Reynolds, Wilson 2013: 92).

Reform had begun under Charlemagne's father, Pepin the Short, but the need was now greater, and Charlemagne felt a personal responsibility to raise the intellectual level of the clergy and, through them, of his subjects.

In 780, in Parma, the Frankish king met the great scholar, Anglo-Saxon monk Alcuin, who was the head of the episcopal school at York Cathedral in England. Charlemagne valued literacy, having learnt to read as an adult, though he never truly mastered writing. At a time when literacy was low outside the clergy, being able to write in any form was an achievement, even for kings, many of whom were illiterate. Recognizing in Alcuin a scholar who could help him achieve a revival of culture and education, as well as a reform of the Church, Charlemagne convinced him in 782 to move to the royal court as master of the palace school in Aachen, where he remained until 796. This school was attended by members of the royal court and sons of noble families. In Aachen, Alcuin also established a large library, for which Charlemagne obtained numerous manuscripts from Monte Cassino, Rome, Ravenna, and other sources.

On this cultural foundation in 789, the *Capitula*, were grouped under the title *Admonitio Generalis* appeared. These body of programmatic laws were aimed to educate and train the subjects of the Frankish Empire on a large scale in essential elements of Christian doctrine, canon law and liturgical church practice, as well as classical culture. At the same time, they sought to integrate the Church as a fundamental pillar within the institutional and political framework of the Frankish Empire, with the aim of strengthening both the unity of the empire and the authority of the ruling dynasty. Backed by citations from the canons of ancient councils, the Church Fathers, and Scripture, the capitularies reveal a high level of cultural sophistication, combined with deep knowledge of canon law, achieved at Charlemagne's court. The objectives sought by the court were grandiose. Charlemagne affirmed his belief in his vocation as a reformer, whose mission was

similar to that of Joshua, the ancient Jewish king who reformed Jewish faith and practice. In the Preface to the Capitularies, we can read:

"*For we read in the books of kings how Saint Josiah, receiving a kingdom from God, strove, through correction, admonition, and instruction, to restore the kingdom to the true worship of God. Not that I make myself equal to his holiness, but because we must always follow the examples of the saints wherever we find them, and it is necessary to gather as many as we can to the pursuit of a good life, to the praise and glory of our Lord Jesus Christ*" (Mordek, Eckes, Glatar, 1975: 180).

He assumed responsibility for leading the new people chosen by God and for reforming their moral and spiritual lives to achieve salvation. To fulfill his role as the new Joshua and to create unity, peace, and harmony among Christians, Charlemagne included in *Admonitio* chapters related to the moral reform and discipline of the clergy, a social category he considered indispensable in carrying out his project. Priests were to be moral and living examples for the people, with the responsibility of preaching "correctly and honestly" and avoiding innovations and teachings contrary to church law. They were urged to live moral lives and to teach their parishioners by the power of the example they set. In turn, they themselves must be guided in fulfilling their duties by bishops, who are instructed to follow the accepted beliefs and practices of the Church. To ensure the transmission and implementation of these capitularies, Charlemagne also conceived a new institution within the administrative apparatus of his empire. The *Missi Dominici* (the lord's envoys) were an executive body composed of members chosen from among the emperor's close associates, with the task and authority to transmit and oversee the implementation of the provisions from the *Admonitio Generalis* across all corners of the empire. To strengthen the moral and legal authority of the 82 capitula, almost each one included references and quotations from Church canons, Scripture and the Church Fathers. As previously mentioned, no fewer than 59 of them were based on and even quoted the canons of the Eastern councils from the first Dionysian compilation, which came from the canonical collection *Dionysio-Hadriana*. The very fact that these laws are generically called *capitula* denotes the influence of the original Dionysiana, where the decisions of the councils were also referred to as *capitula*.

Through the *Admonitio generalis*, these canons of the Eastern synods were to exert a significant influence on medieval legislation in the West.

Here are two examples and their juridical implications in later medieval legislation:

Capitula I - the political recognition of the Church's juridical-canonical Institution of Excommunication

„Omnibus. Sunt enim alqui, quis culpis exigentibus ab episcopo proprio excomunicantur et ab aliis vel laicis praesumptiose in communionem accipiuntur, quod omnium sanctum Nicenum Concilium simul et Calcidonense necnom et Antiocheum atque Sardicense fieri prohibent" (To all: There are some who, due to certain offenses, are excommunicated by their own bishop and presumptuously accepted into communion by others, even by lay persons, who the holy councils of Nicaea, Chalcedon, Antioch, and Sardica strictly prohibit) (Mordek, Eckes, Glatar, 1975:184).

At the councils cited, in the Dionysian canonical compilation, the prohibition on communion with those excommunicated is decided in the following canons:

Canon 5 of Nicaea (325) forsees: *"Regarding those who are deprived of communion, whether from the clergy or from the laity, the decision of the bishops in each province shall prevail: so that those who are rejected by some should not be received by others...".*

Canon 2 of Antioch (341) stipulates: "*It is not permitted to enter into communion with those who are excommunicated; nor should anyone pray together with those who gather in homes, avoiding the prayers of the Church. Furthermore, one who does not assemble in their own Church should not be accepted by another*

Church. If any bishop, priest, deacon, or other member of the clergy is found to enter into communion with those excommunicated, he too shall be excluded from communion, as one who disturbs the rule of the Church".

Canon 16 of Sardica (343) says: "*It is also agreed by all that if a deacon, priest, or any cleric is deprived of communion by their bishop and goes to another bishop, and the latter knows that the one who fled to him has been rejected by his own bishop, he should not grant him communion. If he does, he must be aware that he will have to give an account in front of a synod of bishops*".

This *capitula* holds particular significance from the perspective of this study, both through its canonical argumentation drawn from the Dionysian Collection and its addressees and implications. By the Latin word *omnibus* (for all), we understand that these were both clerics and laity. Thus, a Church institution-excommunication-acquires *de jure* political and social recognition.

The suspension of communion with the excommunicated, even for lay people, had a profound reception with significant social and political impact in the centuries that followed. Numerous testimonies from the early medieval period indicate that in the West, those excommunicated by bishops, or the papacy were often socially excluded, regardless of their rank or social category, and had to perform public acts of penance to obtain forgiveness (Lea, 1888: 88). In this way, the papacy acquired an extremely efficient means of projecting its influence in the political and social spheres, which it used in many instances, with the main argument and juridical power for this being extracted from the Dionysian Collection.

Excommunication was the most severe sanction of the medieval Church, consisting of the temporary or permanent exclusion of a person from Eucharistic communion and from the community of the faithful (Brundage,1995: 127–130). Theologically, excommunication presupposes a serious sin and serves a medicinal purpose, not merely punitive-it calls the sinner to repentance and correction, aiming to bring them back into full communion with the Church (Dură, 1987: 105-143). Practically, the excommunicated person was considered "exiled" from the ecclesiastical community, losing the right to receive sacraments and participate as an active member of the Church. In the Middle Ages, excommunication had a dual role: on the one hand, a disciplinary-moral function (correcting those who committed grave sins or violated canons), and on the other hand, as a legal and political tool of ecclesiastical authority. Bishops applied it to maintain ecclesiastical order-from undisciplined clerics to nobles violating the rights of the Church (Tierney, 1988: 34; Mititelu, 2012: 23-67).

In the patristic era, excommunication had been primarily used as a means of public penance. The Christian community in the early centuries imposed harsh penances for grave sins (apostasy, murder, adultery, etc.), during which the sinner was excluded from the Eucharist. The goal was spiritual healing and reintegration after fulfilling the penance canon (McLynn, 1994: 291; Dură, 2014; 99-127; Mititelu, 2015: 10-18). A famous example is the attitude of St. Ambrose of Milan towards Emperor Theodosius the Great. After the massacre in Thessalonica in 390, Ambrose demanded that the emperor repent and forbade him from receiving communion until the penance was completed. In his letter, the bishop emphasized that even the emperor was not above God's judgment, setting a precedent where ecclesiastical authority could rebuke and "excommunicate" the imperial authority. Theodosius complied, performing public penance-an episode that illustrates the time's conception: excommunication was temporary and meant to bring the lost soul back to a state of grace. The Ecumenical Councils during this period (Nicaea 325, Constantinople 381, Chalcedon 451) legislated the procedural aspect of excommunication, integrating it into a coherent legal system (as we analyzed above in the respective canons). Excommunication was viewed as a severe but necessary spiritual remedy for maintaining the doctrinal and moral purity of the Church.

In the medieval period (6th-15th centuries), alongside its spiritual dimension, excommunication acquired a pronounced socio-political function. As the Western Church gained influence and in the absence

of a unified empire (after 476), ecclesiastical anathema became a weapon in relations with nobles and kings. During the Carolingian period, as we saw, excommunication was supported by state law: Charlemagne ordered its strict enforcement by all subjects and required the clergy to use it to correct serious deviations among the faithful.

Later, during the Gregorian Reform (11th century), Pope Gregory VII used excommunication to impose the supremacy of canonical norms over lay interference (Cowdrey, 1988: 172) (the famous Investiture Controversy). In 1076, after Emperor Henry IV defied papal authority, Gregory excommunicated him and released his subjects from their oaths of allegiance (Barber, 2004: 92). The effect was dramatic: in medieval mentality, excommunication of a king was practically equivalent to dethroning him, as a king "cast out of the Church" lost legitimacy in the eyes of many vassals. Henry IV was forced to humiliate himself at Canossa (1077) to have the excommunication lifted. This episode shows the enormous power of excommunication in the Middle Ages: it was feared not only as a spiritual sanction but also as a civic-legal one, with consequences for public order (for example, no one could have contact with the excommunicated, contracts with them could be considered void, and their territories could be left unprotected). In the 13th century, Pope Innocent III took the use of excommunication to its peak, combining it with the interdict (the suspension of religious services in an entire territory) to coerce powerful kings (Powell, 2004: 92). Notable cases included the interdict over England (1208–1213) and the excommunication of King John of England, or the repeated excommunication of Emperor Frederick II. Reactions varied -some feared and yielded (e.g., John yielded and became the pope's vassal), while others defied (Frederick II responded propagandistically) (Southern, 1970:101). In any case, during the Middle Ages, excommunication was viewed as a tool with relative power, respected by most, but also ignored by some when political interests prevailed, and the social context was permissive.

In the early modern period (16th-17th centuries), with the advent of the Protestant Reformation, the effectiveness of excommunication as an external coercive tool began to decline, although it remained important spiritually. In 1521, the reformer Martin Luther was excommunicated by Pope Leo X's papal bull *Decet Romanum Pontificem*, after he refused to retract his teachings (Bokenkotter, 2004: 208-211). This excommunication marked the confessional rupture in the West- Luther and his followers rejected papal authority, thus rendering the anathema ineffective for reintegration: instead of returning to the Church, Protestant excommunicates formed parallel communities. Nevertheless, the Catholic Church continued to use excommunication more internally (to discipline wandering or rebellious Catholics) and as a formal declaration against heretical leaders. A notable example of excommunication with political implications is Pope Pius V's bull *Regnans in excelsis* (1570), which excommunicated Queen Elizabeth I of England and released her subjects from the obligation of loyalty to her. However, in the context of emerging nation-states, such papal decrees had limited success: Elizabeth ignored the anathema, and in England, anti-Catholic penal laws rendered the pope's excommunication ineffective (even dangerous for English Catholics, who were seen as potential traitors because of it) (Duffy, 2006: 170). Gradually, in the modern era, excommunication returned to its purely spiritual and internal juridical role in the Catholic Church.

After the Enlightenment and emancipation from religious tutelage, states no longer recognized the civil effects of excommunications. However, the sanction remained an important means of emphasizing the seriousness of doctrinal or disciplinary deviations: for example, the Church issued famous excommunications in the 19th and 20th centuries (in 1897 against Freemasonry in Italy, in 1949 against communists, etc.), but these concerned the spiritual status of the believer and their relationship with the Church, without legal implications for laypersons. Today, the Catholic Church's *Code of Canon Law* (1983) prescribes excommunication as an extreme punishment for very grave offenses (heresy, schism, sacrilege, etc.) (Codex Juris Canonici,

1983, can 1364-1398), emphasizing its medicinal nature-the correction of the guilty party. In the contemporary secularized world, the fear of excommunication has diminished compared to the Middle Ages, but for practicing believers, it remains a sanction with profound spiritual significance (e.g., self-declared excommunication in the case of abortion is meant to highlight the gravity of the sin and the need for confession for reintegration) (Catechism of Catholic Church, 2272).

On the other hand, papal authority was also influenced and enhanced by the evolution of excommunication practices. In the canons of Sardica (343) - often cited by later popes - it was recognized that, in special cases, a deposed or excommunicated bishop could appeal his case to the bishop of Rome for a re-examination (Hafelle, 1986: 199). This became a cornerstone in the development of papal primacy: although Sardica was not an ecumenical council, some popes such as Leo I and Gelasius invoked their right to receive appeals, grounding their claims on this tradition (Dvornik, 1996: 98; Dură, 2006: 287). In the Middle Ages, popes increasingly claimed monopoly over major excommunications. As early as 700, only the pope could excommunicate a ruler (in practice, the pope excommunicated kings and emperors, not mere bishops). The case of Gregory VII vs. Henry IV highlighted that excommunicating a sovereign was the pope's weapon, not anyone else's- German bishops would not have dared to anathematize the emperor by themselves, but the pope did, thus consolidating his supremacy within the Church. Gregory's act of absolving the people from their oaths to the excommunicated king was a radical affirmation of papal authority over the political-religious order: the pope implicitly claimed the right to depose kings, something no local bishop could do on his own (Tierney, 1988: 49). In the following centuries, the papal power of excommunication became an accepted fact (even though feared and sometimes contested by laypersons): for example, Pope Innocent III's bull excommunicating English barons who rebelled against the king (Magna Carta) or, conversely, the excommunication of King John - both highlight the pope's role as the ultimate arbiter.

In conclusion, the first *capitula* in the *Admonitio Generalis* regarding excommunication reflects a moment of synthesis between the patristic canonical tradition and medieval order. Thanks to the Dionysian Collection, the strict establishment of norms based on the canons of Nicaea, Antioch, and Sardica was possible in the West. Under Charlemagne, this canonical corpus, with its incontestable authenticity, strengthened ecclesiastical discipline, ensuring that the anathema remained an effective tool of spiritual governance. It reinforced the power of bishops to govern their flocks authoritatively, knowing that their decisions would be respected everywhere, while also preparing the ground for the increasingly energetic assertion of papal primacy, with the popes becoming the ultimate guardians of the canonical and disciplinary unity of the Western Church. Over the centuries, excommunication has taken various forms of application - from the sincere concern of the Fathers for healing souls to the diplomatic weapon of medieval pontiffs - but in essence, it has remained the expression of the Church's power to bind and loose, to temporarily exclude from the community those who have violated its order, so that, through repentance, they may be reintegrated as members of the Body of Christ. The implementation of this canonical and legislative institution in the West had its argumentative origin in the Eastern canons cited from the Dionysian Collection.

Capitula 2, Moral Probity rebecame a foundational juridical principle and institution

Moral probity as a foundational juridical principle finds its earliest formal roots in Roman law, where legal norms were deeply intertwined with ethical and civic virtues. The concept of *bona fides* (good faith), essential in Roman contracts and legal dealings, reflects the expectation that individuals act with honesty, integrity, and fairness-principles at the heart of moral probity. Roman jurists such as Ulpian and Cicero emphasized that law (*ius*) should not only regulate external actions but also embody justice (*aequitas*) and virtue (*virtus*). Over time, *bona fides* evolved from a flexible moral standard into a binding legal doctrine that shaped obligations, contracts, and procedural justice. This Roman heritage laid the groundwork for the Christian canon law

tradition, where moral rectitude became institutionalized as a juridical criterion, particularly in matters of ecclesiastical discipline, clerical conduct, and the right to exercise Church authority. Thus, the Roman legal emphasis on integrity became a cornerstone of the Church's juridical understanding of moral probity (Schulz, 1951:105-110).

„Episcopis. Etim habet in eodem concilio ut eorum qui ad ordinandum veniunt fide et vita prius a b episcopo diligenter discutiatur et sic ordinatur" (Mordek, Zekiel, Glatar, 1987:186). *(To the bishops: The same council establishes that the faith and life of those who come to be ordained must be carefully examined by the bishop before they are ordained).*

This capitulum refers to Canon 9 of Nicaea, which in the Dionysiana is formulated as follows: *„Si qui presbyteri sine examine sunt provecti, vel, cum discuterentur, peccata sua confessi sunt, et homines, contra canones commoti, manus confessis imponere tentaverunt, tales regula non admittit, quia quod irreprehensibile est catholica defendit Ecclesia. De his qui in persecutionibus negaverunt, et postmodum in clero promoti sunt"* (Migne, 1865: 149*).(If some priests were promoted without examination or, when they were examined, they confessed their sins, and people, against the canons, attempted to lay hands on those who confessed their sins, such a rule is not accepted, because the Catholic Church defends what is irreproachable. Regarding those who denied the faith during persecutions and were later promoted to the clergy).*

This capitula illustrates Charlemagne's desire to establish within his empire a clergy marked by integrity-both in morality and in the orthodoxy of faith (McKitterick, 1982: 112). This aspiration is evident even from the introduction to the *Admonitio Generalis*, where he states that the servants of the Church must bring the "speaking sheep" into the walls of the Church upon the shoulders of good example.

Charlemagne regarded himself as a "new Joshua," responsible for the moral health and salvation of his subjects. He issued the *Admonitio Generalis* in order to correct the deviations of the Church and society, and to safeguard the orthodoxy of the faith within the Frankish Kingdom (Collins, 1998: 91).

Specifically, in Capitula 2 of the *Admonitio Generalis*, he instructed bishops to examine with particular care the faith and morals of those they were about to ordain, ensuring that new clerics were doctrinally orthodox and morally exemplary before receiving the sacrament of ordination (Mordek, Zechiel Eckes, Glatthaar, 2012: 184). This requirement reflects one of the primaries aims of Carolingian reform: the strengthening of ecclesiastical discipline and the promotion of a virtuous clergy, worthy of serving as models for the faithful.

This measure was not entirely new; Charlemagne adopted it from the tradition of Church canons compiled in the *Dionysio-Hadriana*. However, the *Admonitio Generalis* imposed it with royal authority over the entire empire, emphasizing the close relationship between secular and religious power in the moral reform of society. Under the influence of canonical legislation, Charlemagne extended the strict criteria of faith and morality, originally reserved for clergy, to civil officials in his administration. Carolingian reform included a sacralization of public office, requiring even lay administrators to be devout Christians, upright, and loyal to Christian moral values (Wallance-Hadrill, 1983: 248).

For example, in the year 802, Charlemagne dispatched imperial envoys (*missi dominici*) - chosen among the wisest and most pious individuals, including bishops, abbots, and devout laymen - to oversee the implementation of laws throughout the kingdom. These imperial emissaries-often high - ranking clerics or morally irreproachable nobles - demonstrate how the criteria of faith and integrity were applied in the recruitment of royal officials. In his later capitularies, Charlemagne explicitly called for close cooperation between bishops and counts in administering justice "with love and in the unity of peace," commanding them to live according to God's will, so that justice might prevail through their example (Nelson, 1986: 111).

Local rulers were also required to appoint only trustworthy subordinates-those who upheld the law and justice, refrained from oppressing the poor, and avoided corruption and injustice (Boretius, 1883: 96). These

provisions clearly reveal the parallel between the expectations imposed on clerics (doctrinal orthodoxy and moral life) and those expected of lay dignitaries: true public servants were to be like clergy-upright, disciplined, and faithful to Christian principles. Essentially, the model of the virtuous shepherd promoted for priests in Capitula 2 was extended to lay "shepherds" of the community-counts, judges, or other officials-who were expected to govern not only with competence but also with Christian morality.

These reforms had a profound impact on medieval administration, consecrating the idea that public authority carries a moral-religious dimension. In the Carolingian Empire, governance became inseparable from the religious mission of societal reform. Public officials were responsible not only for applying secular law but also for upholding and enforcing Christian norms. A capitula from 802, for example, proclaims that all people-from monks and clerics to laymen-must live “according to God’s commandment, in justice … in mutual love and perfect peace,” and empowers imperial envoys to correct any deviation from this conduct (Boretius, 1883: 59).

Thus, Christian morality became a criterion for evaluating an official’s performance: a corrupt judge, a count who tolerated injustice, or an official who violated religious precepts risked both earthly and spiritual penalties. Carolingian legislation explicitly criminalized pagan practices and deviations from orthodoxy among the population, with the task of suppressing idolatry and heresy assigned to local authorities. *Admonitio Generalis* mandated in Capitula 23 the destruction of pagan cult objects (sacred trees, stones, wells), or at least their Christianization through the placement of crosses-measures to be enforced by territorial officials.

Overall, early medieval administration adopted the role of guardian of public morality and orthodoxy. Without a modern “background check” system, the era nonetheless required general conformity to Church norms. An official condemned by the Church (for instance, for heresy or public immorality) was often deemed disqualified from office. In the centuries that followed, this conception endured: crimes were seen also as sins that “taint the soul,” and secular laws frequently included moralizing passages and Scriptural quotations. Even judicial courts often convened in the church porch. (McKitterick, 1983: 112).

Therefore, the influence of Capitula 2 from the *Admonitio* was not limited to the ecclesiastical sphere but extended to the transformation of medieval governance into an ethical vocation, where sound administration was closely tied to the religious and moral life of the one who exercised it.

The principles introduced by Charlemagne-that only individuals of irreproachable morality and orthodox faith should hold sacred or public office-were reaffirmed by his successors and adapted throughout the Middle Ages. (2, Nelson, 1992: 88). Ecclesiastically, the Gregorian reforms of the 11th–12th centuries rediscovered and reinforced the strict criteria for clerical selection: simony and priestly concubinage were banned, episcopal appointments were to follow canonical procedure, and priests were required to lead pure lives. Though in the 10th–11th centuries some appointments were influenced by secular or feudal power, the Church’s Great Reform brought back to the forefront the ideal of a fully devoted and moral clergy. This ideal had been foreshadowed in the *Admonitio Generalis*.

A late echo of the canonical principle from Capitula 2 appears in the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), which lamented the appointment of individuals “unworthy, lacking in knowledge and honesty of conduct” to ecclesiastical offices. Canon 27 of this council commanded hierarchs to choose only suitable candidates-those with pure lives and doctrinal training-and required a yearly provincial synod to investigate unworthy appointments, sanctioning those responsible (Blumenthal, 1988: 54).

Thus, the requirement of prior examination (both doctrinal and moral) of candidates became a general norm in the medieval Church, from Charlemagne to the great reforming councils.

In the secular sphere, the criterion of orthodoxy as a condition for exercising power became more entrenched as medieval Christendom evolved. Already the *Admonitio* required every subject of the empire

to swear an oath of allegiance to Charlemagne as emperor, an oath that implied acceptance of the Christian order. Later, the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) went further, demanding that all secular rulers-regardless of rank-publicly swear to defend the Catholic faith and eradicate heresy, under threat of excommunication and loss of the title of "faithful".

Thus, in the later medieval kingdoms, it became customary for monarchs, nobles, and magistrates to act as guarantors of the Church and Orthodoxy: at coronation, kings swore to defend the Church and lead their people in the Christian spirit, and local officials (e.g., judges, mayors) were often required to be good Christians-otherwise, they risked removal. The institution of excommunication served a disciplinary role: a noble excommunicated for a serious offense often lost his authority, as vassals were released from their oath of loyalty. Likewise, instruments such as the medieval Inquisition (13th–14th centuries) formalized the investigation of a person's orthodoxy, collaborating with secular power to eliminate heretics from influential positions.

Therefore, the principles of Capitula 2 from the *Admonitio Generalis*-morality and orthodoxy as selection criteria-remained a constant thread, reinterpreted and applied by both Church and Christian states throughout the Middle Ages, from Carolingian reform to the great councils of the medieval West.

The Frankish Kingdom was not alone in integrating religious criteria into public service. Other medieval states had similar regulations, shaped by their cultural context and Church collaboration. For instance, in the Visigothic Kingdom of Spain (6th–7th centuries), where the clergy played a major legislative role, secular laws expressed profoundly religious ideals. The Visigothic Code (Recceswinth, 654), largely drafted by the bishops of the Councils of Toledo, defined the law as "an emulator of divinity, a messenger of justice, the mistress of life," and treated crimes as sins, with the law's purpose being to preserve the subjects' soul purity. Like other codes of the era, it included provisions to suppress paganism, apostasy, and heresy-thereby assigning royal officials the duty of protecting religious orthodoxy (Gallo, 1971: 112).

In the medieval East, the Byzantine Empire carried the interdependence of orthodoxy and public function even further. Emperor Justinian (527–565) legislated explicitly that only orthodox Christians could hold state office, barring heretics, pagans, Jews, and Samaritans from public service and even ordering the removal of their places of worship. This fusion of religious and secular authority remained a defining feature of the Byzantine Empire throughout the Middle Ages, with emperors considering themselves defenders of the faith and holding both the right and duty to purge the administration of non-believers (Dagron, 2003: 16; Mititelu, 2016: 383-397).

Even from the first millennium, many Byzantine imperial laws prescribed severe penalties for doctrinal deviations (Arianism, Iconoclasm, etc.), excluding the guilty from civic life. The Byzantine Empire thus served as a true model for Charlemagne.

In conclusion, the principle that authority entails moral and religious responsibility was a constant in European medieval civilization, manifesting in various forms across different regions. Whether through Carolingian capitularies, Western synodal canons, Visigothic laws, or Byzantine codes, one finds the same foundational idea: only those upright in faith and conduct are fit to lead-be it souls, as priests, or communities, as judges or magistrates.

Grounded and legitimized juridically by Canon 9 of Nicaea, as cited in the *Dionisiana*, Capitula 2 of the *Admonitio Generalis* was among the first systematic expressions of this canonical principle in medieval Western Europe. Its influence was felt in how both the Church and Christian states legitimized and controlled their servants throughout the entire Middle Ages. The power of this argument derived from the undeniable authority of the Dionysian Collection as a source of law (Dură, 2003b: 19-33; Mititelu, 2011: 111-120).

Conclusions. The two selected *capitula*-s from the Carolingian decree *Admonitio Generalis* and their analysis offer a vivid picture of how, thanks to the canonical collection of the proto-Romanian monk Dionysius Exiguus, elements from eastern canon law were transposed into civil legislation in early medieval Western Europe. If early Byzantine nomocanonical literature accommodated canons and ecclesiastical rules to Roman law principles, it can be said that in the West, the reverse trend existed, with a strong influence of canonical collections on civil legislation. Due to this phenomenon, the Dionysian Collection, which in the first millennium was a true benchmark of Western canonical collections, had a significant influence on the early development of European Christian law. The coherence between canonical sources (*Dionisiana*) and legislative texts (*Capitula*) in *Admonitio Generalis* demonstrates the effort to construct a unified doctrine of religious and secular authority.

This symbiosis between ecclesiastical and civil law contributed significantly to shaping the ethos of medieval governance in Western Europe. So *Admonitio Generalis* stands as a cornerstone in the formation of medieval European political and ecclesiastical thought, exemplifying the deep interweaving of canon law with civil governance. Through the incorporation of Eastern synodal canons from the *Collectio Dionysiana*, Charlemagne was able to enforce a unified legal and moral order across his empire, anchored in Christian orthodoxy and virtue. The two examined *capitula*-on excommunication and clerical ordination-reveal how theological principles were translated into actionable legislation, with enduring consequences for both Church and state. By rooting imperial reforms in the authority of patristic and conciliar tradition, Charlemagne not only strengthened episcopal discipline but also elevated the ethical standards for all public officials. This convergence of sacred and secular law, made possible by Dionysius Exiguus' compilation, forged a model of governance where moral integrity became inseparable from legitimate authority. In doing so, the Carolingian court laid the foundation for a Western legal culture shaped by Christian values, ecclesiastical norms, and a shared commitment to order, justice, and spiritual accountability. The legacy of this integration would resonate through the centuries, influencing medieval councils, royal policies, and the very conception of lawful rule in Christendom.

References

Barber, Malcolm (2004). *The Two Cities: Medieval Europe 1050–1320*, University of Pennsylvania Press.

Blumenthal, Uta-Renate (1988). *The Investiture Controversy: Church and Monarchy from the Ninth to the Twelfth Century*, University of Pennsylvania Press.

Bokenkotter, T. (2004). *A Concise History of the Catholic Church*, Image Books, New York.

Catehismul Bisericii Catolice (Catechism of Catholic Church), (https://www.vatican.va/archive/compendium_ccc/documents/archive_2005_compendium-ccc_ro.html (Accessed 22.02.2025).

Cowdrey, H.E.J. (1998). *Pope Gregory VII, 1073–1085*, Clarendon Press.

Dagron, Gilbert (2003). *Emperor and Priest: The Imperial Office in Byzantium*, Cambridge University Press.

Duffy, E. (2006). *Saints and Sinners: A History of the Popes*, Yale University Press.

Dură, Nicolae V. (1987). „Precizări privind unele noțiuni ale Dreptului canonic (depunere, caterisire, excomunicare, afurisire și anatema) în lumina învățăturii ortodoxe. Studiu canonic" (Clarifications regarding some notions of Canon Law (deposition, demotion, excommunication, excommunication and anathema) in the light of Orthodox teaching. Canonical study), partea I. In: *Ortodoxia*, XXXIX, 2, 84-135; partea a II-a. In: *Ortodoxia*, XXXIX, 3, 105-143.

Dură, Nicolae V. (2003a). „Christianism in Pontic Dacia. The „Scythian Monks" (Daco-Roman) and their Contribution to the Advance of Ecumenical Unity and the Development of the European Christian Humanist Culture". In: *Revue Roumaine d'Histoire*, 1-4, 5-18.

Dură, Nicolae V. (2003b). „Colecții canonice, apusene, din primul mileniu" (Western canonical collections from the first millennium). In: *Analele Universității Ovidius. Seria: Drept și Științe Administrative*, 1, 19-33.

Dură, Nicolae V. (2006). *„Scythia Mynor" (Dobrogea) și Biserica ei apostolică. Scaunul arhiepiscopal și mitropolitan al Tomisului (sec. IV-XIV)* ("Scythia Mynor" (Dobrogea) and its Apostolic Church. The Archbishopric and Metropolitan See of Tomis), București.

Dură, Nicolae V. (2014). „Taina Sfintei Mărturisiri în lumina dispozițiilor și normelor canonice ale Bisericii Ortodoxe" (The Sacrament of Holy Confession in the Light of the Canonical Provisions and Norms of the Orthodox Church). In: *Spovedanie și Euharistie*, Doxologia, Iași, 99-127.

Dvornik, F. (1966). *Byzantium and the Roman Primacy*, Fordham University Press.

García Gallo, Alfonso (1971). *El Código de Recesvinto Recesvint*, *Liber Iudiciorum*, 654 Instituto de Estudios Políticos,

Hefele, C. J. (1896). *A History of the Councils of the Church*, vol. II, T&T Clark, Edinburgh.

James M. Powell (1994). *Innocent III: Vicar of Christ or Lord of the World,* Catholic University of America Press.

McKitterick, Rasmond (1983). *The Frankish Kingdoms under the Carolingians*, Longman, London.

Migne, J. P. (1865). *Patrologiae Latina*, vol. 67, Paris.

Mititelu, Cătălina (2011). „Internal (Material) Sources of Orthodox Canonical Law". In: *Philosophical-Theological Review*, 1, 111-120.

Mititelu, Cătălina (2012). *Pravilele româneşti, tipărite, din secolul al XVII-lea. Infracţiuni şi pedepse* (Romanian printed laws from the 17th century. Crimes and punishments), Bucureşti.

Mititelu, Cătălina (2015). „The application of Epitimias in the See of Confession according to the "Canonical Custom" and the "Penitential Canons"". In: *Teologia Młodych*, 4, 10-18.

Mititelu, Cătălina (2016). „The legislation of emperor Justinian (527-565) and its reception in the Carpathian-Danubian-Pontic space". In: *Analecta Cracoviensia*, 48, 383-397.

Mititelu, Cătălina (2018). „Dacian-Roman Cultural Personalities from Scythia Minor (4^{th}-6^{th} Centuries) and their Contribution to the Affirmation and Promotion of a Humanistic-Christian Culture at European Level". In: *3rd Central & Eastern European LUMEN – New Approaches in Social and Humanistic Sciences*, ed. V. Manolachi, C. Rus, S. Rusnac, Lumen, Iași, 316-331.

Mordek Hubert, Zechiel Klaus Eckes, Glatar Michael, (2012). *Die Admonitio Generalis, karls Dern Grossen,* Hannover*, e- book,* -https://www.dmgh.de/mgh_fontes_iuris_16/index.htm#page/III/mode/1up (Accessed 22.02.2025).

Nelson, J. L. (1986). *Politics and Ritual in Early Medieval Europe*, Hambledon Press.

Nelson, J. L. (1992). *Charles the Bald*, published by Longman, London.

Reynolds, Leighton D., Wilson N. G. (2013), *Scribes and Scholars, A Guide to the Transmission of Greek and Latin Literature* -Oxford University Press UK.

Schulz, F. (1951). *Classical Roman Law. Oxford University Press.*

Southern, R. W. (1970). *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages*, Penguin Books.

Tierney, B. (1988). *The Crisis of Church and State, 1050–1300*, University of Toronto Press.

Wallace Hadrill, J.M. (1983). *The Frankish Church*, Oxford University Press.