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## **“May the Old Customs Be Observed”: Canons on Custom and Their Significance for the Contemporary Life of the Serbian Orthodox Church**

*»Naj se spoštujejo stare navade«: kanoni o navadah in njihov pomen za sodobno življenje Srbske pravoslavne Cerkve*

*Abstract.* This paper represents an analysis of a custom from the life of the Serbian Orthodox Church, connected to the celebration of the feast of Saint Archangel Michael as a family patron saint day (Slava), commonly known as “Arandelovdan” (Archangel’s Day). In some Serbian regions, hosts refuse to prepare boiled wheat or *koljivo* for the feast of Saint Archangel Michael, claiming that *koljivo* is prepared exclusively for saints who have died. At the same time, maintenance of this custom is often justified by the argument that it is inherited from ancestors and, in that sense, represents part of family heritage or a certain kind of pledge. After an analysis of the Holy Canons, it is concluded that the criterion by which the canons accept a custom as legitimate is compatibility of that custom with apostolic tradition. From that perspective, we will seek to show why that is not the case with the aforementioned custom observed on Saint Archangel Michael’s day.

*Keywords:* Slava, Saint Basil the Great, Saint Archangel Michael, *koljivo*; John Zornaras, Theodore Balsamon

*Povzetek:* Prispevek analizira običaj v Srbski pravoslavni Cerkvi, povezan s praznovanjem praznika svetega nadangela Mihaela kot družinskega zavetnika (slava), ki je splošno znan kot »Arandelovdan« (dan nadangela). Pri tem v nekaterih srbskih regijah gostitelji pripravo kuhane pšenice ali koljiva ob prazniku svetega nadangela Mihaela zavračajo, saj menijo, da se koljivo lahko pripravlja izključno za umrle svetnike. Ohranjanje tega običaja pogosto utemeljujejo z argumentom, da je podedovan od prednikov in tako predstavlja del družinske tradicije ali neke vrste zavezo. Analiza kanonov je pokazala, da je merilo za sprejem običaja kot legitimnega njegova združljivost z apostolsko tradicijo. S tega vidika bomo poskušali pokazati, zakaj to za omenjeni običaj ob praznovanju dne svetega nadangela Mihaela ne velja.

*Ključne besede:* Slava, sveti Bazilij Veliki, sveti nadangel Mihael, *koljivo*, Joanes Zornaras, Teodor Balsamon

## 1. Introduction

Customary practice is present in various fields of human activity. Custom is a subject of study in philosophy (ethics), law, sociology, and ethnology. The aim of this paper<sup>1</sup> is to approach the phenomenon of custom as a paradigm of Church life from the perspective of the canon-law tradition of the Church.

In the Serbian-speaking context, custom is usually identified with a certain ritual that represents an integral part of the celebration of Church feasts within the family environment. That ritual is often, in the absence of authentic ecclesiastical consciousness, the only – unfortunately, by many also perceived as a “sufficient” – connection of an individual, and families, with Church tradition. From the many different definitions of the notion of “custom”, the one most suitable for our research seems to be that given by Milenko Perović – a custom is “by habit established way of practical life of some ethnic or social group” (Perović 2004, 220). As has already been noticed, customs are based “on, from religion derived worldview” (Zorić 1991, 9), but those who practice them are often “characterized, first of all, by the absence of awareness of the purpose and reasons for which they exist.” (Zdravković 2005, 138–139) When it comes to the contemporary Serbian context, it should be added that, in most cases, the notion of the original meaning of customs has been lost, while the way some of them are practiced is in contradiction with the authentic ecclesiastical consciousness (Milošević 2022a; 2022b). However, their existence is defended by tradition, i.e. longevity, by the fact that “that was the way of the ancestors.” In this paper, we will aim to show in which case – according to the canons of the Church – a custom can be a criterion in Church life, referring specifically to one custom associated with the celebration of Saint Archangel Michael.

## 2. Custom in the Canonical Tradition of the Church

In the canons of the Church and in the acts of ecumenical and local councils we find several terms that are used to denote a custom: ἔθος; συνήθεια; ἥθος; as a syntagm “κατὰ τὸ εἰωθὸς” (for example in the 1<sup>st</sup> canon of Saint Cyril of Alexandria [Rhallē and Potlē 1854, 356]) meaning “according to the custom” (Senc 1910, 245), which is a participle perfect of the verb “ἔθω” – “be used to” (Liddell and Scott 1996, 480); it can be also found in the feminine gender – “τῆς ἐκκλησίας εἰωθυίας” (3<sup>rd</sup> canon of Theophilus of Alexandria [Rhallē and Potlē 1854, 344]) – “the Church usually excludes such men”<sup>2</sup>, but also in perfect of the same verb – “εἰώθει” (37<sup>th</sup> canon of the Council of Carthage [Rhallē and Potlē 1853, 400]), “as is the custom”;

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<sup>2</sup> In our translation of the Holy Canons in this paper, besides the Greek original, we used also the Serbian translation in: Jevtić 2006.

as adverb "εἰκότως" (81<sup>st</sup> canon of the Council of Carthage [Rhallē and Potlē 1853, 505]) – what bishop Athanasius Jevtić translates as "according to custom" (Jevtić 2006, 356); in the form "εἰθισμένον" (14<sup>th</sup> canon of the First-Cecond Council 861 [Rhallē and Potlē 1852, 692]) – "accustomed, usual" (Senc 1910, 244).

In the early Church, certain aspects of ecclesiastical life were arranged according to customs that had to conform to the teaching of the apostles. That is testified by Tertullian in the often-quoted (Milaš 1902, 52; Cisarž 1970, 28; Troicki 2011, 89; Perić 1999, 38; Gardašević 2002, 294) passage from his work *De Corona*: "If no passage of Scripture has prescribed it, assuredly custom, which without doubt flowed from tradition, has confirmed it." (Tertullian 1995, 94) Speaking about various customs related to the Holy Mystery of Baptism and some other aspects of Christian life, Tertullian concludes: "If, for these and other such rules, you insist upon having positive Scripture injunction, you will find none. Tradition will be held forth to you as the originator of them, custom as their strengthener, and faith as their observer." (95) Thus, in the Church, from her very beginnings, some aspects of her grace-filled and salvific life were regulated by unwritten rules, yet exclusively by those which were deemed not to be in contradiction with the principles of apostolic tradition (Milaš 1902, 50).

When discussing the notion of custom in the second millennium of the Christian era, we approach the consideration with the prior knowledge of the already formed canon of Holy Scripture, as well as with the generally accepted collection of canonical regulations, better known as *Nomocanon in Fourteen Titles* or *Nomocanon of Photius*. However, the position of Christians in the first three centuries was drastically different. This was a period of active efforts of various heretical groups to reduce the normative collection of Church books or to expand it with writings these groups considered authoritative (Dragutinović 2010, 33–44). As for canonical texts, although principles originating from the Holy Apostles can be identified in the so-called Apostolic Canons, even that collection was not formed before the fourth century (Jevtić 2006, 31–36), while the earliest council whose canons are today regarded by the Church as universally valid gathered in Ancyra in 314. Based on this, it can be inferred what significance inherited customs had for the martyr Christian generations of the first three centuries.

In the canonical texts of the Church, great respect is expressed toward unwritten custom that is part of Church tradition. Some canons represent a "legalization" of the inherited custom: "Those who join the Orthodoxy, and the part of those who are being saved, from heretics, we receive according to the following order, and custom /... /." (Rhallē and Potlē 1852, 187; 7<sup>th</sup> canon of the Second Ecumenical Council, repeated in the 95<sup>th</sup> canon of the Council in Trullo; see also the 8<sup>th</sup> canon of the Third Ecumenical Council, the 90<sup>th</sup> and 102<sup>nd</sup> canons of the Council in Trullo, the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> canons of the Seventh Ecumenical Council, the 70<sup>th</sup> of the Council of Carthage, canons 3 and 4 of Saint Basil the Great, canons 7 and 8 of Saint Gregory of Nyssa, canon 2 of Theophilus of Alexandria) Saint Basil the Great is particularly striking regarding the significance of unwritten rules or customs in his work *On the Holy Spirit*. A passage from this work constitutes the 91<sup>st</sup> canon of this Saint:

“Because if we attempt to reject the unwritten customs as not having great power, we will without awareness do damage to the Gospel in principal things, rather reducing the preaching to a bare name. As for instance (to mention firstly what is first and most common), shape of the Cross with which those who hope in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ seal themselves, who thought (us) by a writing? To turn toward east during prayer, which writing thought us? The words of invocation (ἐπικλήσεως) during the elevation (ἀναδείξει) of the bread of thanksgiving (εὐχαριστίας), and the cup of blessing, who of the saints left to us in writing? For surely we do not satisfy with these [words, S.M.] which the Apostle or the Gospel mentions, but we say before and after other [words, S.M.], as having great power in relation to the mystery, receiving [them, S.M.] from unwritten teaching. We bless the water of baptism, and the oil of unction, and the baptized one also: according to which writing? Isn’t it from the oral and mystic tradition? What: the anointing of oil, which written word thought [us, S.M.]? That a man is immersed three times [when baptized, S.M.], from where? But also the things concerning baptism, to renounce the Satan and his angels, from which biblical text is it? Isn’t it from that unannounced and secret teaching, which the Fathers preserved in not meddled with (ἀπολυπραγμονήτω) and simple (ἀπεριεργάστω) silence, rightly being thought that the honour of the mysteries is preserved in silence?” (Rhallē and Potlē 1854, 283–284; Jevtić 2006, 500–501)

Thus, according to the testimony of Saint Basil, customary heritage had its place even in the Mystery of Mysteries – the Holy Eucharist – because it was considered part of the apostolic tradition, which is the criterion for the validity of a custom.

Precisely because they are not part of that Tradition, certain customs inherited from paganism are rejected (canons 62, 65, 71 of the Council in Trullo; canon 24 of the Council of Ancyra; and canon 84 of Saint Basil the Great). However, some pagan customs associated with certain agricultural works persisted not only until the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century (as evidenced by the aforementioned canons of the Council in Trullo [691]), but, according to the testimony of Byzantine commentators of canons, John Zonaras and Theodore Balsamon, were still being practiced even in the 12<sup>th</sup> century (Rhallē and Potlē 1852, 449; 451; Pravila 1877, 484; 486). Commenting on the 62<sup>nd</sup> canon of the Council in Trullo, Bishop Athanasius Jevtić writes that “the struggle with paganism lasts in the man himself during life”, and that the function of the Holy Canons in the Church is to contribute to the formation of a new, Christ-like man within him (Jevtić 2006, 175). This very understanding of the role of canonical regulations in the life of the Church represents the starting point for the analysis of a specific custom that we will conduct in this paper.

### 3. One Custom Related to the Feast of Saint Archangel Michael

Among blessed and Church-approved customs of the Serbian people<sup>3</sup> is also the celebration of Slava (the family patron's day). Various theories about the origin of this custom have been proposed, not only by theologians. For example, it has been assumed that the basis of Slava was the Roman pagan cult of household deities Lares and Penates, the cult of the Sun god, the Old Slavic cult of the dead, and others. (Čajkanović 1985, 13–14; Petrović 1985, 17–23; Kalezić 2005; Mandić, Đorđić and Damjanović 2016, 124–125; Marjanović 2011, 208–209; Vlahović 1998, 24–25). For the Serbian Orthodox Church, however, as expressed by Patriarch Pavle, Slava represents "the day of celebration of the Saint on whose feast the ancestor of a family was baptized, took the name of that Saint, celebrated that day himself and left that as a legacy to his descendants" (Kalezić 2005, 3).

Theologians generally agree that the efforts of the first Serbian Archbishop Saint Sava to eradicate pagan remnants and consolidate Orthodox Christianity in the medieval Serbian state represent a turning point in the establishment of Slava as a family celebration in the name of the protector saint (Grujić 1985, 458–463; Bogdanović 1985, 486–511; Kalezić 2005, 38–45). Radoslav Grujić linked the origin of Slava to the Old Slavic cult of making vows to a particular deity, which, after the adoption of Christianity, was transformed into vowing to a specific saint, to whom also the temple was built. Vows were made not only by individuals, but also by entire clans or family communities, led by their head. However, even after the Christianisation of this ritual, the Slavs continued – following the Old Slavic custom – to bring sacrificial livestock to churches to be blessed by priests, after which those animals would be ritually slaughtered by the priests, and after that, a banquet would be prepared from their meat around the churches. At the initiative of the first Serbian Archbishop, Saint Sava, these banquets were moved from the churchyard to private homes, while with the church remained exclusively associated the offering of bloodless sacrifice on these holidays – candles, incense, bread, wine and – *koljivo* (boiled wheat). (Grujić 1985, 458–463) Since the custom we intend to analyse in this paper from a canonical perspective is related to the preparation of *koljivo* in memory of Saint Archangel Michael, we will devote more attention to that aspect of the Slava ritual.

Among the Serbian Orthodox population, the preparation of *koljivo* for Slava is not widespread (Bogdanović 1985, 495; Marjanović 2011, 211; 214). In some regions (for example, in the villages of the Kolubara region), some believers do not want to prepare *koljivo* for the feast of Saint Archangel Michael, under the pretext that he is a "living saint"<sup>4</sup>. In this way, the understanding is expressed that all other saints celebrated as protectors of families, and who ended their life either by a

<sup>3</sup> Although Slava is not an exclusive characteristic of Orthodox Serbs, among them this feast is most prevalent (Vojvodić and Vojvodić, 2010, 475; Kalezić 2005, 11; 59–62; 102).

<sup>4</sup> We would like to thank Father Marko Milovanović, parish priest of Slavkovića, who explained to us this practice he encountered in his parish.

natural or martyr death (e.g., Saint Nicholas of Myra, Saint George the Great Martyr, Saint Alypius the Stylite, etc.), require offerings for their repose after their death, just like all other deceased Christians who are not celebrated as saints. This custom is, therefore, based on: a) a mistaken understanding of “holiness”, and b) a mistaken understanding of the liturgical meaning of *koljivo*.

### 3.1 The Notion of Holiness in Christianity

The notion of “holiness” in Christianity is highly complex, and a more detailed analysis lies beyond the scope of this paper. Therefore, we will highlight only those aspects relevant to our topic.

All Christians are called to be holy: “But as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written: ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’” (1 Pt 1:15-16)<sup>5</sup> Apostle Paul addressed the Christians of Ephesus as “saints” (Eph 1:1). Thus, holiness is the aim of every member of the Church (Filaret 2007, 518–522). However, very early on, certain Christians were shown special reverence after their death, which was closely connected to their miraculous relics. The cult of holiness developed within a local Church community around the saint’s relics, with special importance given to the miracles associated with them. With the tacit approval of the local hierarchy, a service and hagiography were written, icons were painted, and the saint’s annual commemoration was liturgically marked. The situation changes somewhat in late Byzantium, in the period of the Palaiologos dynasty (13<sup>th</sup>–14<sup>th</sup> century), when the synod based in Constantinople, headed by the patriarch, began proclaiming the holiness of God’s holy servants through decrees – to “canonize” them. Such recognition did not imply that a person’s holiness depended on the decision of the synod, but rather that the saint in question was included in the calendar of Hagia Sophia in which way his or her veneration was encouraged, and his or her teaching affirmed as correct and orthodox, which was especially significant in the context of the intense ecclesiastical disputes of the time (the anti-unionist struggle, the hesychast controversies). (Makrides 2008, 130–136) In any case, the assembly of saints represented, for the Church, an assembly of intercessors for the human race before the throne of God, and in that sense, a cause for thanksgiving, not for prayer that their souls might rest in peace – since they already possess that peace. Any offering made for the “repose of the soul” or “forgiveness of sins” which is usually offered for departed Christians, would be inappropriate in the case of the saints (Kalezić 2005, 78). Speaking about the commemoration of saints in the Eucharistic sacrifice, Saint Nicholas Cabasilas writes that any prayer for the saints with such a purpose would amount to mere “idle talk” (ληρηνῶν). On the contrary, the Eucharist is offered for them as well, but as thanksgiving, because they received what the entire Church longs for – holiness, and not as a prayer for the forgiveness of their sins. (Kavasila 1865, 473; 476; 480–481; Kavasila 2017, 174–175; 181)

<sup>5</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from The ESV Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version), published by Harper Collins Publishers, 2001 by Crossway.

The main ingredient of *koljivo* – wheat – is a symbol of resurrection (Jn 12:24) (Kalezić 2005, 50). As Christ himself says, if the wheat grain does not die, it will not bear fruit (Jn 12:24; 1 Cor 15:36). If a person does not “mortify” himself or herself through spiritual struggle, they will not be resurrected to eternal life (Popović 2001, 135–138). That paradox (“folly to Gentiles” [1 Cor 1:23]) has been one of the central motives in the life of all Christian saints – martyrs, ascetics, confessors, righteous ones, and others – who did not spare not only anything of their own, but not even life itself in order to bear witness to and glorify Christ. Their dying – whether seen as a matter of moment (martyrs) or as a continual dying to this world through ascetism and spiritual struggle (ascetics) – happened with hope and a foretaste of eternal life. That is why wheat is, in a way, also a symbol of their life – they are the wheat in the Lord’s field from the Gospel parable, which the weeds did not choke (Mt 13:24-30).

The illogical nature of the dilemma regarding *koljivo* among some Serbian Slava celebrants is also revealed by reference to the authentic liturgical function of *koljivo* during the commemoration of saints.

### 3.2 Liturgical Meaning of *Koljivo*

In contemporary Serbian, there is no terminological distinction between *koljivo* prepared in honour of a saint and that prepared for the commemoration of the deceased. However, such a distinction existed in old Serbian handwritten and printed service books (*služebnik*) and books of needs (*trebnik*). For the integration of *koljivo* in the liturgical life of the Church, a well-known tradition of the miracle of Saint Martyr Theodore the Tyron during the time of the Roman emperor Julian the Apostate (361–363) is especially significant. Namely, in an effort to revive pagan polytheistic religion, of which he himself was a supporter (Mirković 2016, 168–171), the emperor ordered that all foodstuffs in the markets of Constantinople be sprinkled with the blood of animals sacrificed to idols, with the intention of defiling Christians who would eat those foods. Upon learning this, concerned Christians asked their archbishop Eudoxius what they should do. Following the advice of Saint Martyr Theodore, who appeared to him in a vision, the archbishop told them to prepare *koljivo* – boiled wheat – and to eat it. Since then, the Church has established the custom of blessing *koljivo* on the day of Saint Theodore on the first Saturday of Great Lent, after the Vespers on Friday. Since, according to the liturgical order, the commemoration of the departed is performed afterwards, Kalezić assumes that this led to the practice of blessing *koljivo* also during the commemoration of the deceased (Kalezić 2005, 51).<sup>6</sup> According to the testimony of Blessed Augustine, in his time Christians used to bring certain foods to the graves of the martyrs to be blessed, and then they ate them or distributed them to the

<sup>6</sup> Professor Nenad Milošević points to the similarity between the memorial service for the death (*Parastos*) and the service of the *Panikhida* (πανυχίς), a prayer for the “whole night”, which, according to the testimony of Symeon of Thessalonica, in his time was celebrated following the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts. The *Parastos*, as a distinct *akolouthia*, probably emerged through the combination of the Canon for the Departed – which the Triodion prescribes to be performed every Friday after Vespers – and the *akolouthia* of *Panikhida*. (Milošević 2021, 279–284)

poor (Augustin 1995, 164–165; 1982, 611; 613; Grujić 1985, 461–462). Grujić held that the reference here is specifically to *koljivo* (Grujić 1985, 461–462). In both cases – when *koljivo* is prepared in memory of the saints and when it is prepared in memory of deceased Christians – its main ingredient, wheat, symbolizes the Christian faith in the resurrection that comes despite physical death, for those who believe. (Grujić 1985, 423; Kalezić 2005, 49–52)

*Koljivo* was accepted as an element of the liturgical rite on the family patron's day modelled on the Old Testament vegetable offerings, and Grujić demonstrated that, most likely, the original liturgical "topos" of Slava wheat is the blessing of the five loaves, wheat, wine and oil during Vespers on the eve of great feasts (*Artoklasia* – The Blessing of the Five Loaves). That is evidenced by the oldest rite of blessing *koljivo*, which, at the time Grujić wrote his article (for the first time published in Glasnik Srpskog naučnog društva VII–VIII for the year 1930 [Kašić 1980, 58]), was practiced by the inhabitants of the village of Drenok in what is now North Macedonia. Namely, Slava celebrants would bring *koljivo* to the Vespers and pour it into a common large vessel. The priest would bless the *koljivo* during the rite of the blessing of the five loaves, and after Vespers, he would distribute it to all the celebrants to take it to their homes. (Grujić 1985, 413–432) Another evidence for Grujić's assumption may be that in the old *Serbian Service Book* (*Služabnik*) from the 13<sup>th</sup> century, "Prayer over Kutija (= *Koljivo*) at the Offering to the Saints" closely resembles the prayer for the blessing of the five loaves (Jevtić 2007a, 429).

In general, the blessing of *koljivo* in the Slava rite becomes "a kind of offering in honor and memory of certain saints, as well as for the repose of the souls of those who previously themselves brought their offerings, also to the church, in glory of those saints" (Grujić 1985, 424). Such an understanding is also expressed in the Rite for the Blessing of *Koljivo* in today's Service Book: "... / for your servants offered this in Your glory, and in honor of Saint (name), and in memory of those who passed away in pious faith." (*Služebnik* 2017, 298).

A confusing factor in the case of the celebration of the angelic powers is the fact that they are God's creatures, which do not undergo bodily death, since they are bodiless and – by grace – immortal.<sup>7</sup>

Given that *koljivo* is prepared for the commemoration of a saint or the departed, it should be borne in mind that every act of remembrance in the Church aims at the "embodiment" into the communion of saints – the Church (Milošević 1998, 56), just as every offering is meant to culminate in the Mystery of Mysteries, the bloodless sacrifice of the New Testament – the Holy Eucharist. Therefore, in order to discover the authentic meaning of the offering of *koljivo* in commemoration of a saint during the celebration of Slava, the starting point should be the liturgical commemoration of the saints performed during the Anaphora. The commemoration within the Diptychs in the Liturgy points to the fact that we are all – saints,

<sup>7</sup> "An angel, then, is an intellectual nature, ever-moving, of free will, bodiless, ministering God, who by grace received an immortal nature." (Damaskēnou 1864, 865) We also used the Russian translation in Afinogenov et al. 2002, 187. See also: Popović 1932, 232–234.

living, the departed – one body in the Church, co-members of the one Body of Christ, the Church. It should be noted, in the context of the feast discussed in this paper, that within the Diptychs in the Holy Liturgy, "Holy Bodiless Powers" were once commemorated, together with the Holy Forerunner, the Apostles, and all other saints, as is the case, for example, in the oldest Slavic-language service book, the *Service Book of Varlaam of Khutyn* from the late 12<sup>th</sup> to early 13<sup>th</sup> century (Jevtić 2007b, 67; 78–79), and in the *Service Book of the Solovetsky Collection* from the 13<sup>th</sup> century (2007a, 379). The commemoration of the Bodiless Powers in the Diptychs and the Oblation is omitted today, but this old practice affirms that, within the Orthodox tradition, the Bodiless Powers as well are regarded as members of the Church of Christ.<sup>8</sup> In general, this part of the Anaphora reflects the understanding of the unity of the Church of Christ as a single unique heavenly-earthly reality. Saint John Chrysostom speaks about this in his 41<sup>st</sup> homily on the First Epistle to the Corinthians:

"Let us, thus, not cease to help the departed, and to offer prayers for them; for the universal cleansing of the whole world lies (κοῦται). Because of this, we dare to pray for the whole world at that time, and we commemorate them with the martyrs, with the confessors, and with the priests. For we are all one body, even though there are members more radiant than others; and it is possible from all sides to gather forgiveness for them, from prayers, from gifts for them, and from those who are commemorated with them." (Chrysostomou 1862, 361)<sup>9</sup>

The prayer for the blessing of *koljivo* – in which the living members of the household are mentioned, and departed relatives, as well as the saint in whose memory the *koljivo* is offered – points to the same unity in Christ and in the Church. That the *koljivo* is prepared as a "memorial service to the saint" represents an understanding that is a remnant of pagan consciousness. As a symbol of the resurrection (Jn 12,24), it is prepared and offered in memory of the saint as a thanksgiving, and as a prayerful offering for the repose of the souls of departed ancestors. (Kalezić 2005, 50–55; 78–79; Protić 1995, 56)<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Speaking about Oblation, as it was performed in his time (15<sup>th</sup> century), Saint Symeon of Thessalonica speaks of the particle taken out for the heavenly bodiless powers: "And on the left [side, S.M.], from the other *prosphora* (προσφοράς) the priest while cutting out particles in the form of the cross from the seal with the spear, commemorates all the saints and places [particles on the Paten, S. M.]. And the first he offers in the honour and memory of the honourable heavenly powers. And it is necessary to offer for them, for they also served the mystery of oikonomia; and because they united with us, and we are one Church (S. M.); and since they long to glance inside the Mysteries of the Church, receiving ascent themselves; and because they are with us our guardians and intercessors to God." (Symeōn 1866, 280) in translating, we also used the Serbian translation found in: Jevtić 2007b, 289.

<sup>9</sup> In translating, we also used the translation of this passage of the Bishop Athanasius Jevtić, found in Jevtić 2009, 447.

<sup>10</sup> As emphasized by certain researchers of the Kollyvades movement which was active among Athonite monks in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the movement's representatives understood *koljivo* as a symbol of the departed who, according to the word of Christ resurrects (Jn 12,24) just as a grain of wheat first dies, and then even more beautiful fruit is born from it (Rodionov 2014, 332; Radović 1976, 47).

## 4. Conclusion

Custom is one of the sources of canon law, according to which, throughout the history of the Church up to the present day, certain aspects of its life have been regulated. At the same time, only the custom which hasn't contradicted the teaching inherited from the Apostles has been adopted, that is, tolerated. Because they deviated from apostolic teaching, certain customs have been condemned as harmful to Christian life. The custom of not preparing *koljivo* for the feast of Saint Archangel Michael, practiced by some Serbian Slava celebrants, results from a misunderstanding of the function of *koljivo* in the liturgical rite and the meaning of the commemoration of saints in the prayers of the Church. Beginning with the Holy Eucharist as the archetype of every offering and commemoration in the Church, we conclude that *koljivo*, as an offering, has a twofold function. For departed ancestors who celebrated the family patron saint, it is offered for their repose, while for the saints – as with the Eucharistic sacrifice – it is offered as thanksgiving, because we have them as protectors and intercessors before God. In this sense, the argument of longevity in the case of the custom under analysis cannot be sufficient for its acceptance, since this custom belongs to those that are in contradiction with the Church's teaching—in this case, with the teaching on the meaning of the commemoration of God's saints and their dignity in the community of the Church. Accordingly, this custom cannot be accepted as a norm in the liturgical life of the Church.

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