Everyday life of the Solovetsky monastery in the pre-revolutionary period of its history

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Abstract. The Spaso-Preobrazhensky Solovetsky monastery, founded in the second quarter of the XV century, made a great contribution to the colonization of the Russian North. The article is devoted to the analysis of everyday life of this Northern monastery in the pre-revolutionary period of its history. The founder of the Solovetsky monastery, the monk Zosima, was its Abbot for 26 years (1452-1478). During this period, he drew up the Charter of the monastery and established a hostel in it, which provided for undivided property and a common household, the same food and clothing for all monks, as well as the distribution of monastic works among the entire brotherhood. The manuscript of the monastery's Charter, compiled by Zosima, was kept in the monastery until the beginning of the last century. Being brief in its content, this Charter was essentially reduced to the following regulations: all priests and ordinary monks do not have their own special income, but receive clothes and shoes from the Treasury of the monastery, gather for a common meal and eat a common meal. In addition to these rules, oral covenants were preserved, established, according to legend, by the founder of the monastery: Zosima bequeathed not to keep cattle in the monastery itself. The main occupation of novices and ordinary monks in addition to participation in worship was hard physical labor in the vast economy of the monastery. The monastic authorities, represented by the Abbot and the "Cathedral elders", tried to keep and strictly follow the Statute of the monk Zosima, as the most important condition of the "spiritual fortress" of novices and monks. Revived in 1990 after a 70-year hiatus, the monastery, which is under the direct supervision of the Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia, bases its internal order of life on the community Charter reserved by its founder.

1. Introduction

The Transfiguration Solovetsky Monastery has made a major contribution in colonizing the Russian North. This largest coenobitic monastery of Russia also occupies an important place in the history of Russian monkhood and orthodox monasteries. It was founded by the Venerable Herman, Savvaty and Zosima in the 2nd quarter of the 15th century [1]. A coenobitic monastery is characterized by coenobites’ complete personal selflessness and the possibility to obtain spiritual support from a more skilled monk in achieving a personal rescue under an indispensable condition of bending to the Prior’s will.

2. Main part

It is remarkable that in pre-revolutionary Russia there were also “non-coenobitic” monasteries. There, coenobites had their personal property rights, and also some independence in their daily life. It is important to note that both in coenobitic and non-coenobitic monasteries the main aim of coenobites was salvation for an eternal life, which could be reached by incessant praying and overcoming their own sins and defects. Thus, the monastic vow consisted in obedience and selflessness, chastity preservation.
The monasteries’ daily routine was regulated by their charters. There, the main attention was paid to the Acolouthia of the Divine Services. The disciplinary part in comparison with the Divine Services took a minor place. The founder of the Solovetsky Monastery, the Venerable Zosima, was an abbot of the monastery for 26 years (1452-1478). During this period, he established the internal routine of the monastery, its coenobitic status and financial provision for its maintenance [1]. The manuscript of the monastery charter, composed by Zosima, was retained in the monastery until early last century [2]. The charter has a short content and consists of the following instructions: all clerics and ordinary monks have no special income, but receive their clothes and footwear from the monastery treasury, assembled for a common meal and taste common food [3]. Besides those instructions, there were oral precepts preserved, which, according to the legend, were established by the founder of the monastery. For example, Zosima bequeathed not to keep livestock in the monastery. In order to realize that precept, the monks had to run their farm on one of the Muksalaminsky Islands during a number of centuries [4].

It is necessary to note that the Solovetsky Monastery status was being elevated: in 1683, the highest church power declared the monastery to be the Lavra, and in 1765, it became stavropegial, i.e., reporting directly to the Holy Synod [5].

The monastery authorities (the Prior and “old monks”) aspired to keep and to strictly follow the monastery charter, bequeathed by the Venerable Zosima, as a major condition of “spiritual fortress” of its novices and coenobites. Those wishing to enter the monastery were first accepted as “annual pilgrims” in order to make sure of their sincere aspiration to renounce all temptations of “annual pilgrims”. Those having passed this test became novices who were to resist an obligatory “novices’ temptation”, lasting three years. It is remarkable that the Prior could increase this term for some years. Novices worked in the monastic household, assembled with coenobites for a common meal, and also attended the Divine Services and made the established private rule. Only having passed such a “temptation”, novices could take tonsure.

Up to the time of Peter I who initiated the age limit for the tonsure (30 years for men), in the Solovetsky Monastery, according to written sources, there were some tonsure cases in a rather early age. For example, St. Theodorite, who lived in the 16th century, took tonsure at the age of 15 [6].

The 1st degree monks were Rassofores who wore cassocks and kamilavkas (a woolen hat). The 2nd degree monks were Stavrofores. As a rule, it is them who were and are called monks. They were distinguished with the attire, which consisted of a monastic cloak and klobuk, differently named “rescue helmet”, and a leather belt or “paramandya”, which was put on crosswise. The 3rd degree monks were Schemamonks often known as schemons. They wore carried a koukoulia, a hood covering the head, shoulders, breast and back, and also an analave, a quadrangular piece of fabric or skin covering shoulders and being fastened crosswise on the belt. Schemamonks took rather difficult vows of solitary life and silence, therefore in the late 18th – early 19th centuries, in the Solovetsky Monastery, they used to be aged or sick monks-stavrofores. According to the charter, the monks of all three degrees wore coats, caftans and shirts made of inexpensive furs and fabrics [7].

It is natural that the monastic life began from the tonsure day. In order to mentor each Rassofore, the Prior selected a cenobite who was aged and skilled in “spiritual making”. The latter was to devote the Rassofore in the rules of the coenobite’s life, for example, where to sit in the refectory, how to read “Jesus’ prayer” and to make the private rule, how to behave during the Divine Services in the church [8]. The latter was especially important since most part of coenobites’ day was in prayers in the cell or in the church. It is therefore necessary to note that all order of life in the coenobitic monastery, like the Solovetsky Monastery, was defined by the succession of the Divine Services which were at least 7 - 8 hours long on weekdays, and were longer on big holidays [8].

The coenobite’s day began with making the private rule for which he woke up at nighttime before the dawn with the bell ring of the “alarm” monk. Though the rank of the private rule was established with the monastery charter, the coenobite himself could increase the number of prayers and bows or to make that with his confessor’s blessing. After making the private rule, monks, often in darkness, assembled with the bell ring in the church for the Midnight Office. The “alarm” monk was to report to the Prior on those who missed the Divine Service explaining their absence reasons. After the Midnight Office, monks went to take
orders. The first ones who could leave the church were the coenobites working at the kitchen and the refectory.

One of such orders was salt production, which began along with the monastery foundation, and was an important income of the Solovetsky Monastery. Another important order was icon painting, known on the Solovetsky Islands since the 16th century. It is necessary to note that, along with the relics of the Venerable Zosima and Savvaty, the icons by the monastery painters attracted a big number of worshippers and pilgrims for whom the hotels, served by monks, were built. The fact, testifying the development of icon painting on the Solovetsky Islands, is that since the 17th century there have been a number of cells named “icon” ones in the northern part of the monastery [9].

As already mentioned, monks assembled for meals. They were also organized according to the “rank”: the meal started with praying, and during the meal itself, which the monks were having, according to the charter, in silence, and “moderately, not looking around and not leaning the elbows on the table”, the reader-coenobite read the Church Fathers’ exhortations or fragments from “The Lives of the Saints” who were commemorated that day. It is remarkable that there was no wine served for a meal, except on Sundays when the elder brethren could drink a little wine separately, in the cellarer’s. The workers of the refectory “tasted food” after the other brethren did. Despite some food interdictions, the menu of the Solovetsky monastery was nevertheless various. For example, the first meal consisted of four courses served with the bell ring. On fast days, the meal included various vegetables, mushrooms, berries, but on ordinary days, the most widespread meal was a cod. This fish was served steamed or with some “ukha”. On ordinary days, the first meal used to finish with milk porridge, and on fast days, with hemp oil porridge. White bread was served only on big holidays, and on week-days there was only rye bread. For an evening meal there were three courses in the Solovetsky Monastery. Each meal used to finish with thankful praying after which the Prior could preach to the brethren [9].

The basic part of the novice and ordinary monk’s daylight consisted of orders in the form of physical work. The monastic household had to be conducted in the conditions of a severe northern climate of the Solovetsky Islands. It is necessary to underline that throughout the monastery existence during the pre-revolutionary period there were all jobs, necessary both for maintenance of the life, and for a quite successful housekeeping, among daily orders of the monastery brethren. Among the Solovetsky monks there were not only bell ringers, candle-makers, cooks, icon painters, that is characteristic almost for each orthodox monastery, but also there were tar extractors, wool fullers, blacksmiths, tailors, cattlemen, skippers, etc.

To perform the physical or “black” work, celibate priests (monks-priests) and hiero-deacons were sent rather seldom, since their basic duty or order consisted in fulfilling authorized church divine services.

The uppermost place in the succession of orders was the activities of the monastery Prior and also those of “old monks”. During the first two hundred years of the monastery history, its Prior had the rank of hegumen, and after 1651 the rank of archimandrite, since Metropolitan Nikon of Novgorod (subsequently the Patriarch) especially honored the Venerable Zosima’s monastery where he began his monkhood as a monk of the Anzersky Monastery. For each new Prior the detailed inventory of the monastery properties was compiled. The Prior, being the monastery head, participated in solving all issues of the monastery, and he also was the confessor of all monks. The second most important person in the monastery was the Abbot who was considered as the first assistant to the Prior and consequently he also knew all spheres of the monastery activities. The key posts were also the cellarer, supervising construction and arrangement of monastic cells, the treasurer, who was responsible for the finance of the Solovetsky Monastery and the sacristan, who was responsible for the sacristy where there were ancient monastic relics and church utensils. With his special decree, Tsar Michael Fedorovich allowed monasteries to “conciliarly” elect the cellarer and the treasurer informing the Patriarch in each case [5].

Especially, it is necessary to emphasize the role of the council of “old monks” in the Solovetsky Monastery life. They were elected by all coenobites of the monastery. During the Synod period, their election was confirmed by the Moscow Synod office. These old monks participated in conciliar sessions where the important issues of the monastic life were brought and solved. One of these old monks, rather respected and spiritually skilled, was the confessor, i.e., the spiritual head of all brethren, whom the monastery monks were to confess during the Lent, and also at any time they could ask him for advice and
spiritual help. The important member of the council of old monks was the monastery dean. He was to watch the behavior of the monks, novices and pilgrims in the monastery churches, cells and during meals.

3. Conclusion
In 1990, after a 70-year-long interval, the monastic life on the Solovetsky Islands was revived [10]. The monastery, where now there are approximately a hundred monks, is stavropegial (i.e., it reports directly to the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia) and bases its internal life routine on the coenobitic charter given by its founder, the Venerable Zosima.

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