

BOOK REVIEW

Palathingal, Varghese, *An Introduction to Canon Law, Qanona 6, OIRSI, Kottayam, 2021, Pp. X+112.*

Divided into nine chapters, besides an introduction and a conclusion, the book introduces canon law in general and Eastern canon law in particular. The contribution intends to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the opening of Vatican II and the 30th anniversary of the promulgation of CCEO.

From the opening sentence of the introduction, the reader has a clear idea about the intention and the content of the work: "... to introduce to the reader the general canonical principles of Church law." This concise sentence is a sign of a straightforward and matter-of-fact language used throughout the book. That style helps the reader to pick up its content effortlessly. After having read the whole book, one can attest that the author has kept himself to the stated intention. The book limits itself to introducing canon law to a reader; that is to say, it is not meant for a deep presentation of canon law. From this book, a beginner in canon law can get a basic knowledge of canon law and its foundations.

The subject matter of the book may be divided generally into two sections related to canon law. After the historical part, the book deals with the general norms of CCEO in different chapters. The first half of the book treats generally the scriptural foundation of Church law and briefly the history of codification with an emphasis on Eastern codification. There is a chapter on the influence of Vatican II teaching on the present Church law, and another on the structure of the Eastern code. The second half of the book introduces the general norms of CCEO without commenting on single norms. One may wonder why only the general norms are introduced and not the other sections of the code. The answer may be found in the introduction of the book: "The spirit that penetrates in the whole code is demonstrated in the consideration of the general norms" (p. 3). In this sentence, we are given to understand that since the general norms permeate directly or indirectly the whole code, introducing those norms will help a reader to a great extent in understanding also the other sections of the code.

The first chapter is dedicated to treating the scriptural foundation of Church law. After a brief presentation of laws in the Old Testament (OT), especially the perspective of the OT legal system and Israelite terms of law, in harmony with the OT vision, biblical law is presented as the revelation of the will of God. Jesus' attitude to law is briefly presented in the second part of the chapter; thereafter a reader is given a general idea about the law in the New Testament (NT). It explains how the NT community used the law in its life. Through this chapter, the reader is made aware that the most basic foundation of Church law is the sacred scripture. Another way of treating the topic of this chapter would be to show how the biblical values and principles form the basis of Church law.

With a brief account of the sacred canons, the second chapter begins to narrate the history of the Eastern codification. It makes references also to the Latin codification which helps a comparative study. The remote and immediate history of the present law of Eastern Churches sheds light on the role of that law in the life of those Churches. While making a nearly passing mention of the ancient and modern history of Eastern canon law until the late 19th century, the author considers at a greater length its history from the beginning of the 20th century. In addition to narrating the events, it contains an exposition of the main principles and guidelines which were applied in the work of codification. An important contribution of this chapter is that it brings up to date the acts of legislation or complementary works passed since the promulgation of CCEO such as the notification of 8 December 2011 (which says that Latin Church is also counted as a *sui iuris* Church when CCEO refers to inter-Church relations), the apostolic letter *De Concordia inter Codices* of 31 May 2016, etc. While these documents directly concern only the Latin law, their relationship with the Eastern law is not negligible, and the book shows their connection with the Eastern law.

In the third chapter, the author links clearly Vatican II teaching to the present Church law, especially that of the Eastern Churches. The chapter shows how the Eastern code has put into effect the council's call to be faithful to the tradition of Eastern Churches. A reader can get a picture of how the council teaching and the post-conciliar legislation became a source of the present Eastern law. It also gives the idea that the code not only contains the principles, laws, and teaching of the council, but that it imbibes the conciliar vision integrating that vision into the code. The relatively wide space and role of particular

law, recognised by the common code, are also an immediate consequence of the Vatican II teaching; and the chapter dedicates a page to briefly treat the question of the particular law in Eastern Churches. Some papal texts are cited without giving full reference to them (e.g., p. 29). This lacuna may be an obstacle for a reader if he/she wishes to have a fuller knowledge of those cited texts' original document.

The structure of the Eastern code is the subject matter of chapter four. As one can assume, it explains the general structure of the code and the reason for adopting that structure which is different from that of the Latin code. The canons of the code are arranged in thirty titles (except the first six preliminary canons). Then the chapter makes a presentation of each title with its heading and a brief summary of its content. From that summary, a reader can get an introductory knowledge of the content of the whole Eastern code. With this chapter, the first half of the book, which has a general character, is over.

The second half of the book has five chapters (5-9). In those chapters, the book deals with certain titles of the general norms of CCEO. The book follows basically the same pattern in those chapters. Although in this section the book does not offer a commentary of each canon of those titles, it explains the main characteristics of those canons and gives an explanation of the main concepts and terms contained in those titles. Thus, those chapters prepare the reader to enter into the titles treated in them and provide a general knowledge of the same. This is the most significant contribution of those chapters. The terms explained in those chapters have a wide application as one can find them in various canons of the code. In that way, those chapters function partly as a commentary although not of individual norms. The explanation or definition of some of those terms can be found in the code itself, but for the explanation or definition of other terms, the author has made good research outside the code. The chapters in the second half provide also a general knowledge about canon law. Together with the terms, various characteristics of the related canons are also explained. Since the explanation of terms and of canonical provisions uses simple language and easy style, even a non-canonist can understand the basics of canon law by reading these chapters.

The fifth chapter introduces "Law, Custom and Administrative Acts" (cc. 1488-1539). This is the content of title 29 of the code. Some of the

terms explained in chapter five are ecclesiastical law, promulgation, acquired rights, abrogation, common law and particular law, etc. Chapter six treats title 19 (cc. 909-935), persons and juridic acts. Some of the terms explained in this chapter are proper hierarchy, proper pastor, domicile, quasi-domicile, consanguinity, affinity, juridic persons, juridic acts, etc. The seventh chapter deals with offices in the Church (cc. 936-978), which is the content of title 20. Examples of the terms explained in this chapter are office, election, postulation, benefice, etc. Chapter eight deals with the power of governance (cc. 979-995), which is the content of title 21. It contains an explanation of terms connected with the power of governance such as power, governance, delegation, faculty, etc. In chapter nine, the book treats prescription and computation of time (cc. 1540-1546), which is the content of title 30. This chapter explains the characteristics of prescription and other related norms and those of computation of time.

The book has some editorial and printing defects, beyond what would be usually permissible in a book. Those defects consist mainly of spelling mistakes, printing errors, and inconsistency in an editorial style. Language needs correction. Several times two words are attached to each other without a space in between. Another defect is that the page numbers given in the table of contents do not correspond to the actual page numbers of the chapters. These defects give the impression that the text suffers from lax editing and proofreading. The list of abbreviations (named "Ecclesiastical legislations") does not follow the alphabetical order (p. viii-x); it follows the chronological order. This fact may make a reader check the whole list to find an abbreviation.

There are some terms like "Supreme Pontiff", "Supreme Legislator", "Latin rite" (instead of "Latin Church"), etc. in the book, which CCEO deliberately omitted. In a future edition of the book, it is desirable to use terms that are in harmony with those used in CCEO, because that is a sign of the awareness of the author on the current canonical language. There are also certain defects that touch the content, for example, together with the explanation of the concept of *reprobate*, the book does not give any hint of how this term is related to law (p. 55). The book's introduction could have demonstrated in a more explicit way the interconnection among different chapters. Scientific work requires it.

The problem with these abundant defects is that it may reduce the confidence of the readers in the book's credibility. One may begin to wonder whether such defects affect also the content of the book. Such defects may also make a reader develop diffidence towards the references given in footnotes. It is good to pay attention to remedy these defects in a future edition: to make more careful proofreading to avoid spelling mistakes, to be consistent in an editorial style, to use terms in harmony with CCEO, and to publish a more carefully drafted text.

These defects, however, do not reduce the value of the book's content, which is useful to a canonist as well as a non-canonist. From the book, a reader can get a general picture of the history and foundation of canon law and its codification. In that sense, the book serves the purpose which is stated in the first sentence of the "Introduction" (p. 1). Actually, in a nutshell, the book introduces the Eastern canon law, its history and its main underlying principles.

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