

BOOK REVIEW

Conference of Catholic Bishops of India, *Complementary Norms to the Code of Canon Law*, Conference of Catholic Bishops of India, Bangalore, 2024. ISBN: 978-81-19664-10-8; pp. 31.

The Second Vatican Council declared, “By divine Providence it has come about that various churches, established in various places by the apostles and their successors, have in the course of time coalesced into several groups, organically united, which, preserving the unity of faith and the unique divine constitution of the universal Church, enjoy their own discipline, their own liturgical usage, and their own theological and spiritual heritage” (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 23). And, further, “This variety of local churches with one common aspiration is splendid evidence of the catholicity of the undivided Church” (*ibid*). The Council goes on to say, “In like manner the Episcopal bodies of today are in a position to render a manifold and fruitful assistance, so that this collegiate feeling may be put into practical application” (*ibid*).

Even though individual Bishops have full pastoral care of the portion of God’s people entrusted to them (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 27), it is often necessary that in certain matters they act jointly, in consultation with the other Bishops of the region or nation so that coordination in the apostolate might assist the pastoral care of the faithful. The Council continues to state, “An Episcopal Conference is, as it were, a council in which the bishops of a given nation or territory jointly exercise their pastoral office to promote the greater good which the Church offers mankind, especially through the forms and methods of the apostolate fittingly adapted to the circumstances of the age” (cf. *Christus Dominus*, 38). Moreover, the Council states, “Decisions of the Episcopal Conference, provided they have been approved legitimately and by the votes of at least two-thirds of the prelates who have a deliberative vote in the conference, and have been recognized by the Apostolic See, are to have juridically binding force only in those cases prescribed by the common law or determined by a special mandate of the Apostolic See, given either spontaneously or in response to a petition of the Conference itself” (*ibid*).

The Code of Canon Law envisages this aforementioned teaching in Can. 455 §§1-2. It states, “Can. 455 §1. A conference of bishops can

only issue general decrees in cases where universal law has prescribed it or a special mandate of the Apostolic See has established it either *motu proprio* or at the request of the conference itself. §2. The decrees mentioned in §1, in order to be enacted validly in a plenary meeting, must be passed by at least two thirds vote of the prelates who belong to the conference and possess a deliberative vote. They do not obtain binding force unless they have been legitimately promulgated after having been reviewed by the Apostolic See. §3. The conference of bishops itself determines the manner of promulgation and the time when the decrees take effect. §4. In cases in which neither universal law nor a special mandate of the Apostolic See has granted the power mentioned in §1 to a conference of bishops, the competence of each diocesan bishop remains intact, nor is a conference or its president able to act in the name of all the bishops unless each and every bishop has given consent.”

The Code of Canon Law, promulgated by the Holy Father on January 25, 1983, following this principle, has, in many matters, provided general directives for the universal Church and left their particular application to the local Bishops or the Episcopal Conference. The Bishops of the Latin Church in India, at their meetings in Nagpur (1984), Goa (1986), Kottayam (1988), Shillong (1989), and Bombay (1993), discussed matters in the Code that needed to be adapted to the Indian context. The decisions made at these meetings were transmitted by the Conference of the Catholic Bishops of India (CCBI) to the Holy See for review (*recognitio*) in accordance with the requirements of canon law. By its letter dated December 2, 1994 (Prot. 5220/94), the then Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples gave *recognitio* to the Complementary Legislation to the Code of Canon Law.

Since then, several amendments have been made to the Code of Canon Law, necessitating the updating of the existing Complementary Legislation to the Code of Canon Law and the addition of new general decrees by the Conference of Catholic Bishops of India (CCBI). Therefore, after approximately twenty-five years of its promulgation, in 2020, Most Rev. Dr. Derek Fernandes, the then Chairman of the Canon Law Commission and Other Legislative Texts, took up the task of revising the Complementary Legislation. He entrusted it to Rev. Dr. Merlin Rengith Ambrose, professor of Canon Law at St Peter’s Pontifical Institute, Bangalore

and the Executive Secretary of the Commission for Canon Law and Other Legislative Texts in the Conference of Catholic Bishops of India, to carry out the revision process of these old Complementary Legislations published in 1994. He prepared the revised draft of the Complementary Norms after reviewing all twenty-five years of reports from the Executive Committee meetings and Plenary Assembly meetings of the Conference of the Catholic Bishops of India from 1995 to 2021. The revised draft was submitted to His Eminence Oswald Cardinal Gracias on December 12, 2021. His Eminence, with the assistance of ten other canonists, provided his suggestions.

Rev. Dr. Merlin Rengith Ambrose incorporated Cardinal's suggestions. He presented the revised and newly added forty-three general decrees one by one to the member Bishops of the CCBI during the 34th Plenary Assembly meeting on January 28, 2023, in four full sessions at St. John's National Academy of Health Sciences, Bangalore. They were discussed in detail with keen attention by all the member Bishops of the Conference of Catholic Bishops of India. Under the able guidance of Most Rev. Dr. Antonysamy Savarimuthu, the newly elected Chairman of the Commission for Canon Law in 2023, Rev. Dr. Merlin Rengith Ambrose, carefully incorporated the suggestions from the Plenary Assembly again. As the Plenary Assembly unanimously decided and voted to submit the revised Complementary Legislation after the incorporation of the suggestions to the Dicastery for Evangelization for *recognitio ad normam iuris* Can. 455. The Dicastery for Evangelization, in turn, sent these norms to the Dicastery for the Legislative Texts, which offered eight corrections (Prot. N. 18047/2023) to be included in the revised draft of the Complementary Norms. The executive secretary of the Commission incorporated the corrections, and the finally revised Complementary Legislation to the Code of Canon Law was subsequently reviewed (*recognitio*) by His Eminence Luis Antonio Cardinal Tagle, the Pro-Prefect of the Dicastery for Evangelization, on August 8, 2023, with a decree.

Having obtained the *recognitio* of the Dicastery for Evangelization on August 8, 2023, His Eminence Filipe Neri Cardinal Ferrão, the President of the Conference of Catholic Bishops of India promulgated the above-mentioned revised Complementary Norms to the Code of Canon Law on January 26, 2023 by publishing it during the 35th Plenary Assembly of the Conference of Catholic

Bishops of India (CCBI) held on January 30, 2024 in Bangalore in the presence of His Eminence Oswald Cardinal Gracias, His Eminence Antony Cardinal Poola, Most Rev. Dr. George Antonysamy, the then Vice-President of the CCBI, Most Rev. Dr. Anil Cuoto, the then Secretary-General of the CCBI, Most Rev. Dr. Antonysamy Savarimuthu, the Chairman of the Commission for Canon Law and other Legislative Texts in the CCBI, Rev. Dr. Merlin Rengith Ambrose, the Executive Secretary of the same Commission in the CCBI, Rev. Dr. Stephen Alathara, the Deputy-Secretary General. The revised Complementary Legislation to the Code of Canon Law came into force on March 19, 2024, Solemnity of St. Joseph, Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

This extensive revision ensures that our Complementary Norms to the Code of Canon Law, published by the Conference of Catholic Bishops of India, remain aligned with the latest developments in the universal Church while addressing the specific context of the Catholic community in India. The Commission members' expertise and dedication were commendably instrumental in bringing this project to fruition. The revised Complementary Norms encompass a broad range of areas, including ecclesiastical governance, pastoral ministry, and the administration of Church property. It provides clarity and guidance for dioceses, parishes, and individual members of the faithful in navigating various legal matters.

In addition to the revised Complementary Norms to the Code of Canon Law, the book includes the updated figures for extraordinary administration and alienation, which were approved by the Dicastery for Evangelization (Prot. N. 4290/22) on January 10, 2023. Also featured in the book is the circular letter from His Eminence Filipe Neri Cardinal Ferrão, dated March 8, 2023, which communicates this decree regarding the revised amounts for extraordinary administration and alienation to the Indian Church.

This significant update marks a new chapter in the legal framework of the Catholic Church in India. The revised Complementary Norms will serve as a valuable resource for Bishops, canonists, chancery officials, and pastoral ministers, ensuring the smooth functioning of the Church in India and effectively responding to the pastoral needs of the faithful in India, while remaining faithful to the magisterium of the Catholic Church.

Merlin Rengith Ambrose