



25 March 2026

BACKGROUND

DICASTERY FOR LEGISLATIVE TEXTS – ROMAN CURIA

Historical Notes

With the Motu Proprio *Cum iuris canonici* of 15 September 1917, Pope Benedict XV established the Pontifical Commission for the Authentic Interpretation of the Code of Canon Law, promulgated on 27 May 1917. This Commission remained in existence until the establishment of the Pontifical Commission for the Revision of the Code of Canon Law, created by Pope John XXIII on 28 March 1963 in order to prepare, in light of the decrees of the Second Vatican Council, the reform of the Code promulgated by Benedict XV.

On 11 July 1967, Pope Paul VI established the Pontifical Commission for the Interpretation of the Decrees of the Second Vatican Council. Its competence was later extended to the interpretation of documents issued by the Holy See for the implementation of the conciliar decrees (Letter of the Secretariat of State No. 134634 of 14 April 1969).

With the Motu Proprio *Recognito Iuris Canonici Codice* of 2 January 1984, Pope John Paul II established the Pontifical Commission for the Authentic Interpretation of the Code of Canon Law. Its task was to interpret the canons of the new Code of Canon Law promulgated on 25 January 1983 and the universal laws of the Latin Church. With the establishment of this Commission, both the Pontifical Commission for the Revision of the Code of Canon Law and the Pontifical Commission for the Interpretation of the Decrees of the Second Vatican Council ceased to exist.

With the Apostolic Constitution *Pastor Bonus* of 28 June 1988, the Commission was transformed into the Pontifical Council for Legislative Texts, with broader and more articulated competence.



After the completion of the work of the Pontifical Commission for the Revision of the Code of Canon Law of the Eastern Churches (established by Paul VI on 10 June 1972), and following the promulgation of the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches on 18 October 1990, John Paul II suppressed the aforementioned Commission and, in accordance with *Pastor Bonus*, art. 155, entrusted to the Pontifical Council for Legislative Texts the task of interpreting that Code and all the common laws of the Eastern Catholic Churches (cf. Letter of the Secretariat of State, No. 278.287/G.N., of 27 February 1991).

With the Apostolic Constitution *Praedicate Evangelium*, promulgated on 5 June 2022, which abrogated *Pastor Bonus*, the Pontifical Council for Legislative Texts became the Dicastery for Legislative Texts, and its functions and competencies are defined in arts. 175–182.

Competencies

The Dicastery for Legislative Texts carries out its activity in various areas:

1. Promotion of Canon Law and Assistance for Its Proper Application

First and foremost, the Dicastery is responsible for promoting and fostering within the Church the knowledge and acceptance of Canon Law, both of the Latin Church and of the Eastern Churches, offering assistance for its correct application (art. 175 §1 of *Praedicate Evangelium*). It serves the Roman Pontiff, the curial Institutions and Offices, diocesan/eparchial Bishops, Episcopal Conferences, Eastern hierarchical Structures, as well as the supreme Moderators of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life of pontifical right (art. 175 §2). In carrying out its mission, it makes use of the collaboration of canonists from diverse cultures and continents (art. 175 §3).

The promotion of Canon Law of the Latin Church and of the Eastern Churches is also pursued through the organization of interdicasterial meetings and conferences, and by encouraging international and national associations of canonists (art. 182 §1).

Another specific task entrusted to the Dicastery is the supervision of correct canonical practice, so that the law in the Church may be properly understood and correctly applied by all. When necessary, it is for the Dicastery to point out to the competent Authority the emergence of illegitimate practices and to suggest possible solutions (art. 182 §2).



2. Interpretation

The Dicastery is competent to formulate authentic interpretations, confirmed by pontifical authority, of the universal laws of the Church (art. 176), that is, the laws concerning the Latin Church and those common to the Eastern Catholic Churches. For questions of greater importance, before formulating an authentic interpretation, the Dicastery consults the competent curial Institutions and Offices of the Roman Curia regarding the matters under consideration.

When a juridical doubt arises that does not require an authentic interpretation, the Dicastery may offer appropriate and authoritative clarifications—through declarations or explanatory notes—regarding the meaning of the norms (art. 176), following the criteria established by canon law.

3. Legislative Proposals to the Holy Father

By studying the current legislation of the Latin Church and of the Eastern Churches, the Dicastery examines the possible existence of *lacunae legis* (gaps in the law), also on the basis of indications arising from ecclesial practice, and presents suitable proposals to the Roman Pontiff for remedying them. Should the need arise to modify or update existing norms, it suggests amendments, ensuring the harmony and effectiveness of the law (art. 178).

4. Collaboration with the Dicasteries of the Roman Curia and with Other Institutions

By virtue of its competence, the Dicastery assists the Dicasteries of the Roman Curia and other curial institutions in the preparation of general executive decrees, instructions, and other normative texts, so as to guarantee their conformity with the prescriptions of the universal law in force and their proper juridical formulation (art. 179).

It also examines general decrees issued by Plenary Councils, Episcopal Conferences, and Eastern hierarchical Structures that are submitted to it by the Dicastery competent to grant the *recognitio*, in order to assess them from a juridical standpoint (art. 180).

At the request of interested parties, it determines whether laws and general decrees issued by legislators lower than the Roman Pontiff are in conformity with the universal law of the Church (art. 181).



SUMMARY

Under Praedicate Evangelium (Arts. 175–182), the **Dicastery for Legislative Texts** serves the Roman Pontiff by promoting and safeguarding the proper understanding, interpretation, and application of canon law in both the Latin Church and the Eastern Catholic Churches. It fosters knowledge and acceptance of the Church's legal tradition, assists bishops, episcopal conferences, Eastern hierarchical structures, curial institutions, and religious superiors in the correct juridical application of universal law, and collaborates with canonists worldwide.

The Dicastery has the authority to formulate authentic interpretations of ecclesiastical laws, subject to approval *in forma specifica* by the Roman Pontiff as Supreme Legislator. It also issues clarifications when doubts arise that do not require an authentic interpretation. In addition, it reviews current legislation to identify gaps (*lacunae legis*), proposes updates or amendments to ensure harmony and effectiveness in the legal system, and assists curial offices in drafting normative texts to ensure juridical precision and conformity with universal law.

It examines general decrees of plenary councils, episcopal conferences, and Eastern hierarchical structures from a juridical perspective prior to *recognitio*, and, upon request, determines whether particular laws or decrees promulgated by legislators below the Roman Pontiff conform to universal Church law. The Dicastery also promotes canonical scholarship and sound canonical practice, organizing conferences and supporting associations of canonists, while advising competent authorities when illegitimate practices emerge.

Role of the Prefect:

The Prefect of the Dicastery for Legislative Texts presides over and directs the Dicastery's work in the name and authority of the Roman Pontiff. The Prefect oversees the preparation of authentic interpretations, supervises the review of legislative texts and decrees, ensures collaboration with other curial institutions and canonists, and safeguards the juridical integrity and coherence of the Church's universal legal order.

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