



Book Review

Szabó, Péter, Editor. 2019. *Primacy and Synodality. Proceedings of the 23rd Congress of the Society for the Law of the Eastern Churches, Debrecen, 3-8 September 2017*. Nyíregyháza: St. Athanasius Greek-Catholic Theological Institute, 2019.

<https://szentatanaz.hu/index.php/primacy-and-synodality-kanon-25>

The Society for the Law of the Eastern Churches was founded in 1969 to foster scholarly cooperation among specialists of the law of the Oriental Orthodox, Orthodox and Eastern Catholic Churches. Under the auspices of this Society itself and the Metropolitan Church *sui iuris* of Hungary, the Society held its 23rd Congress in Debrecen on 3-8 September 2017. *Primacy and Synodality* comprises the proceedings of that congress.

Some of the papers (Baán, Erdő, Gefaell, GrigoriŪã, Job [Getcha], Kaptijn, La Terra, Papatomas, Szabó, Valdrini, Vasil', Wijlens) focused on the theological and ecclesiological foundations of synodal governance.

Papatomas offers an interesting challenge to the Catholic Church to enter into a new phase of ecclesial life in which the individual primacy exists in a conciliar context, a “conciliar primacy” with other primates as lived in the first millennium. The author’s challenge to the Catholic

Church's alleged presumption that the Orthodox are in a state of permanent schism can contribute to a resolution of issues that might appear irresolvable. It is gratifying to find concern for the future; the contributor would have been more persuasive if challenges had been articulated for the both the Orthodox and Catholic Churches.

We must also take into account that our respective Churches are each facing a unique set of challenges. Szabó observes that the Orthodox Church has suffered from a drifting apart of the Churches while the Catholic Church has experienced an intensification of the role of the pope to the detriment of the rightful autonomy of the local bishops (p. 695). Further reflection on and implementation of the theoretical aspects of synodality can benefit all of us in resolving practical problems in our own Churches. The author calls for a focus on the affiliation of the bishop to his own eparchy rather than the College of Bishops (p. 697). In a society that nurtures bureaucracy, a re-focus on the local Church is a challenge to be taken up.

Several papers (Aydin, Condorelli, Constantinescu, Farrell, Gallaro, Haddad, Kappes, Kaufhold, Maximos [Vgenopoulos], Panturu, Patsavos, Roman, and Salachas) describe how synodality is operative in various Churches and ecclesial Communion either at the present time or from an historical perspective.

Farrell describes how synodality is operative in various ways in the thirty-nine provinces of the Anglican Communion in which leadership, governance and administration is shared among the laity, clergy and bishops in a manner consistent with the episcopal character of the church. Constantinescu offers interesting insights in historical analysis of synodality in the first millennium, including criteria for a synod to be deemed ecumenical. His description of the dynamics, issues, procedures and reception of the 2016 Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church is most appreciated. Patsavos examines the five charters for the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America issued by the Church of Constantinople from 1922-2003. The evolution of

governance structures as articulated in the structures manifests the flexibility of the Greek Orthodox Church in dealing with evolving situations. Salachas presents the provisions of the *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches* for the synodal institutions in the Eastern Catholic Churches.

Other presentations (Marti, Nassis, Niolakakis, Psarev, Ruysen, Sabbarese) treated specific synodal institutions in the various Churches from an analytical / historical perspective.

Psarev describes the recently established Inter-Council Presence, which he portrays as the Think Tank of the Moscow Patriarch and the Council of Bishops of the Russian Church. In addition to presentation of its organizational structure Psarev offers a candid analysis of the challenges in its work. La Terra offers insights into the function of consultation in the context of synodal institutions and actions. Marti argues that the episcopal conferences of the Latin Church should not be construed as expressions of episcopal synodality.

The notion of “synodality” has been much discussed during the pontificate of Pope Francis. The Catholic Church celebrated in 2017 the fiftieth anniversary of the institution of its own Synod of Bishops and the 2022 theme of next Synod will be “synodality.” This collection of proceedings can serve as a valuable resource for the 2022 Synod of Bishops.

While the evident and intended purpose of the Society for the Law of the Eastern Churches is the scholarly advancement of law, the membership of the Society perforce means that a secondary purpose is ecumenism. To those who are pessimistic of any advance in consideration of a millennium of division, we must respond that there is an earlier precedent of a millennium of unity. The path to unity is tedious and perhaps we must admit that re-integration lies in the distant future. Nevertheless, canonists must be in the process of preparing governance structures for that unity. The theological dialogues have made great efforts and met with significant success in achieving a

common acceptance of doctrinal positions. Canonists seem to be waiting until every doctrinal position has been clarified before they start to plan for the governance of a reintegrated Church. For that reason, the canonical presentations regarding the governance of the various Churches tend to be expositional, i.e., an explanation of the governance of an individual Church, rather than propositional, i.e., setting forth possible governance arrangements that could be acceptable to all Churches in a re-integrated Church. Canonists, like theologians, must take up the challenge of re-integrating the Church of Christ.

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