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WEB-JOURNAL

FÜR RECHT

UND RELIGION

EINFÜHRUNG ZUR SONDERAUSGABE

CHANGES IN CHURCH LEADERSHIP

Introduction and Presentation of the Special Edition

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ISSN 2749-2826, DOI 10.5282/nomokanon/268

veröffentlicht am 13.09.2024

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Introduction and Presentation of the Special Edition

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The special edition of the web journal 'NomoK@non' on the topic of 'Changes in Church Leadership' is based on a panel with the same title, for which the authors convened on 20 May 2024, at the seventh annual conference of the European Academy of Religion (EuARe) in Palermo. As the overarching topic of the conference was „Paradigm Shifts“, the contributors discuss whether various recent changes in the leadership of the Catholic Church may be considered paradigm shifts.

The Catholic Church is a global community with 1.3 billion members. It is fascinating how its leadership has functioned for centuries. But there have also been failures of leadership. The Church's governance structure is often seen as a pyramid with different levels: the Pope is at the top, in the centre are the bishops and the bishops' conferences and at the bottom are the parishes? Even Pope Francis used the image of the pyramid, but turned it upside down by saying: "But in this Church, as in an inverted pyramid, the top is located beneath the base. Consequently, those who exercise authority are called 'ministers', because, in the original meaning of the word, they are the least of all. [...] And in a similar perspective, the Successor of Peter is nothing else if not the *servus servorum Dei*."¹

This might be seen as a paradigm shift. Pope Francis has already been introducing changes with regard to church leadership in several areas: firstly, the Roman Curia, i.e. the official bodies in Rome that help him to govern the entire Church; secondly, the Synod of Bishops, i.e. the assembly of bishops chosen from different regions of the world in order to assist the Roman Pontiff with their counsel; thirdly, the accessibility of church governance for lay people, i.e. for faithful who have not received the sacrament of ordination.

The focus of the special issue is on the Roman Curia: one article examines whether the reform has really led to decentralisation. Two further contributions are dedicated specifically to one Curia authority each, namely the Dicastery for Integral Human Development and the Dicastery for Communication. A further contribution will deal with the participation of the laity in the ecclesiastical power of governance. Finally, the special issue also takes into account the fact that the Catholic Church is a global organisation and that different governance issues arise in different parts of the world. Therefore, one article also deals with changes in Church leadership in Cameroon.

¹ Pope Francis, Address: Ceremony commemorating the 50th anniversary of the institution of the synod of bishops (17 October 2015), at: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco_20151017_50-anniversario-sinodo.html

The authors, who report on their individual research fields, provide diverse perspectives from Germany, Italy and Africa and also consider possible future developments. Daniela Tarantino, Associate professor of Canon and ecclesiastical law at the Department of political and international science of the University of Genova treats the topic: "The Dicastery for Communication in the Synodal Path of the 'Church Outgoing'". Emma Graziella Saraceni, Professor of Canon Law at the Faculty of Law at the University of Tor Vergata in Rome addresses the topic: "The Church and progress: the role of the laity in the Dicastery for Integral Human Development". As the editor of the special issue, Burkhard Berkmann, professor of canon law at the Ludwig-Maximilian-University in Munich, provides an article on "Decentralisation in the Roman Curia". Lukas Brechtel, a junior researcher at his chair in Munich addresses the topic: "Consultative participation of the laity in the ecclesiastical power of governance". Jean-Olivier Nke Ongono, junior professor for global church leadership at the University of Munich reports about "Changes in Church leadership. The context of Cameroon".

The five contributions complement each other well, providing insight into changes in governance structures within the Catholic Church. The organiser of the panel and editor of the special edition would like to thank all the authors for their excellent collaboration and wishes all the readers great pleasure in discovering paradigm shifts.