

Canon Law and the Digital World Kanonsko pravo i digitalni svijet

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Abstract

Canon law, defined as the sum of canonical regulations of the Catholic Church, has tried to be a clear and concrete response to the current needs of all members of the Church through its promulgations and publications in the manner prescribed by the competent authorities of the Church. Until recently the only possible way of publishing and interpreting the canonical norms of the Church was in a printed, paper form. The possibilities of the digital age have brought many benefits to the various institutions, including the Catholic Church.

One of these benefits is a faster and easier acquaintance of the faithful of the Church with its current canonical and legal norms using digital technology.

How does the Catholic Church cope with all this? What legal force and obligation do canonical norms published digitally have? Who is responsible for their digital publication and who controls their content? What about the sensitive personal data that appear in them and their possible misuse?

Since it is impossible to provide comprehensive answers to these questions - due to the complexity of the matter as well as insufficient knowledge of the impact of the digital technology on humans - the answers will only provide some basic guidelines and assumptions.

Key words: canon law, digital world, promulgation, publication, validity, safety.

Sažetak

Kanonsko pravo, definirano kao zbroj kanonskih propisa Katoličke Crkve, nastojalo je biti jasan i konkretan odgovor na aktualne potrebe svih članova Crkve svojim proglašenjima i publikacijama na način propisan koji propisuju mjerodavne crkvene vlasti. Donedavno je jedini mogući način objavljivanja i tumačenja kanonskih odredaba Crkve bio u tiskanom obliku. Mogućnosti digitalnog doba donijele su mnoge koristi raznim

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institucijama, uključujući i Katoličku Crkvu. Jedna od tih koristi je brže i lakše upoznavanje vjernika Crkve s njezinim aktualnim kanonskim i pravnim odredbama korištenjem digitalne tehnologije. Kako se Katolička Crkva nosi sa svim tim? Kakvu pravnu snagu i obvezu imaju kanonske odredbe objavljene digitalno? Tko je odgovoran za njihovu digitalnu objavu i tko kontrolira njihov sadržaj? Što je s osjetljivim osobnim podacima koji se u njima pojavljuju i njihovom mogućom zlorabom? Budući da je nemoguće dati sveobuhvatne odgovore na ta pitanja – zbog složenosti materije kao i nedovoljnog poznavanja utjecaja digitalne tehnologije na ljude – ovaj rad pruža samo neke osnovne smjernice i pretpostavke.

Ključne riječi: kanonsko pravo, digitalni svijet, proglašenje, objavljivanje, valjanost, sigurnost.

Introduction

On February 3, 1983, Pope John Paul II gave a memorable speech presenting the New Code of Canon Law for the Latin Rite Catholic Church. The Pope began with the most obvious and necessary question: »What is law in the Church? Does it respond to the perennial and universal mission that these supreme words of the Gospel assign, in the person of the Apostles, specifically to the Church? Does it conform to her genuine nature as the pilgrim People of God? And why is law in the Church? What purpose does it serve«?

According to the same Pope, one common answer can be given to the questions posed above: »In serving the cause of justice, law must increasingly and better draw inspiration from the law-commandment of charity, drawing life and vitality from it. Animated by charity and ordered to justice, law lives« (*cum caritate animato et iustitia ordinato ius vivit*)!²

Every law, including canon law, does not live only on paper, but in all those who implement it in the life of the Church. For this to be achieved, it is necessary for those for whom the law is intended to know it. Until recently, the ways of knowing canon law were exclusively in published printed form.

Due to the increasing influence and presence of the digital world in the concrete, real life of the Church, there is a need, justified and well-founded, for the digital publication of the canonical norms and regulations. It is true that there are many uncertainties, questions and doubts about the security of the digital publication of the canon laws, as well as the possibility of misuse of their contents. However, there are also many positive aspects of such publication of canonical and church laws, which in turn inspire hope that their true and accurate content will reach those for whom they are intended.

² See the full text of the speech in: John Paul II 1983.

1. Preliminary Observations

Among the juridical institutions most involved in the use of the Web is the publication of canon laws. The historical evolution of the *promulgatio legis* demonstrates the ductility of this instrument with respect to the technical innovations, the use of which is in direct connection with the principle of knowledge and being acquainted with the regulatory acts.

It is controversial to what extent, in the last phase of the process of forming laws, promulgation and publication should be functionally distinct. These two sets of obligations are in fact united by those who consider them necessary to integrate the effectiveness of the law, which however would already be perfect by virtue of the approval of both chambers alone. Others, on the other hand, consider it essential to differentiate them conceptually.

In Roman republican law, *promulgatio* meant the notification to the people of a bill: it had to remain exposed to the public for a period varying from 24 to 27 days, after which the *comitia* were called to vote on it.

According to the Romans, the law was properly the decision of the people in the assemblies *lex est quam populus comitiis sciverit*. The four great magistrates, the consul, the praetor, the dictator, and the interrè, had the right to propose a law, because they were the only ones who could deal with the people. In the extraordinary cases of soldiers who took the place of the consuls, the decemvirs and triumvirs enjoyed this right.

The laws were proposed in the field of Flaminius called the *Circus*, in the wood of Petilino, but more often in the *Forum* or *Campus Martius*. Not every day was suitable for this, so it was necessary to wait for the days of *Latium* before heaven had declared itself against the assembly with wonders. The magistrate who was to propose the law composed it first with the help of a council, then presented it to the Senate for votes.

After these preliminaries he exhibited it in public written on a table for the people to examine. It lasted exposed for three consecutive market days (*nundinae*) which was held from nine-to-nine days. When the time had expired, he who was to propose the law assembled the people, and after having it read by an usher, he asked the assembly (*comitia*) for its assent. At that time everyone was allowed to speak for or against (*pro et contra*).

If the law passed, approved version was carved into bronze (*in tabula aenea*), symbolizing permanence and authority. The bronze tablet was placed in the public treasury (*aerarium populi Romani*), located in the Temple of Saturn in Rome. This ensured legal certainty, archival integrity, and public accessibility.

In any case, the publication determines the entry into force of the law, giving it the attribute of obligation (Rubbi 2025, 7).

2. The Concept and Types of Ecclesiastical Laws

The etymology of the word law (*lex*) is uncertain. It is generally considered that it comes from the Latin word *legere*, because the promulgation of laws in ancient Rome took place through public nailing on wooden, marble or bronze tablets, which, in this way, could be read and verified by all citizens. The famous are the *Leges duodecim tabularum* (Laws of the 12 Tablets), which the tradition attributes to the first time of the Republic, which were engraved in bronze and exhibited to the people in 449 BC.

According to others, the term *lex* would come from the verb *ligare* which expresses the obligatory character of the law (Thomas Aquinas 2005, I-II, q 90, a 1).

Neither the previous Codex of 1917 nor the current Code of 1983 provides a definition of law, although in the draft can. 8 of the future Code was the definition of a law, but it was not accepted in the final version of the same canon.³

Since there are different definitions of ecclesiastical law, two definitions predominate among canonists proposed by St. Thomas and Suarez.

St. Thomas briefly defines the law: »The law is an ordinance of reason for the common good, made by him who has care of the community, and promulgated«. (*Ordinatio rationis ad bonum commune, ab eo qui curam communitatis habet, promulgata*) (Thomas Aquinas 2005, I-II, q 90, a 4). Definition of St. Thomas is emphasized by one fundamental element of the law, and that is its ordinance of reason (*ordinatio rationis*). Suarez's definition is: »The law is a common, just and stable precept, sufficiently promulgated«. (*Lex est commune praeceptum, iustu ac stabile, et sufficienter promulgatu*) (Suárez 1612, Lib. I, Cap. XII, n. 5).

The law, therefore, is an ordinance by which people is governed according to a definite purpose. It is a norm of action that strictly obliges. The law is given for the common good of the whole community to help the realization of the supreme law of the Church, which is the salvation of souls (*salus animarum*) (Brkan 1997, 29-30).

³ »Lex, quae quidem est norma generalis ad bonum commune alicui communitati a competenti auctoritate data, instituitur cum promulgatur« (Pontificia Commissio Codici Iuris Canonici recognoscendo 1991, 162).

2.1. Basic Features of the Law

1. *Permanence*: the law has one perpetual, i.e. a continuous value, which is why its validity is not limited to a certain period: the law remains in force and then goes to bind, until it is repealed or terminated in a lawful manner.
2. *Generality*: refers either to the subject, which is the whole community, or to the purpose, which is the direct common good, and not to some private good of individual persons or groups.
3. *Obligation*: it is a formal property of the law. It creates in the social community, which consists of individual persons, a necessity of an ethical-legal character (obligation), to which everyone is bound.
4. *Reasonableness*: it is not imposed by someone's arbitrariness, but by reason, which intends to give a norm of action and to achieve an order, aiming at the common good. A law that would be contrary to the principles of fairness and justice, or that would ask for impossible things, or that would be harmful or just useless, would not be reasonable, and consequently, would have no value.
5. *Promulgation*: an essential element or condition of any law, i.e. being its appropriate and formal publication, so that it is credibly communicated to the community (Škalabrin 2005, 7-9.)

2.2. Classification of Laws

The universal laws (*leges universales*) are binding on the whole Church, while more particular laws (*leges particulares*) are binding only on some part of it, such as a diocese, an ecclesiastical province, a people or a community of the faithful. It is evident that general laws can only be issued by the supreme ecclesiastical authority, which means: The Roman Pontiff (can. 332, § 1) and the College of Bishops in hierarchical communion with the head and members of the college (can. 336).

General laws (*leges generales*) are binding on all the faithful without distinction, regardless of their status or position, and special laws (*leges speciales/peculiares*) are binding only on certain categories of persons, e.g. lay people, clerics or religious.

Personal laws (*leges personales*) are directly binding on persons, who are therefore bound everywhere by such laws, and territorial laws (*leges territoriales*) are valid in a specific area, and are binding, in themselves, only by persons who currently reside in it.

Commanding laws (*leges affirmativa*) contain some mandate, order, or commandment.

Negatively laws contain some prohibition.

Annulling laws (*leges irritantes*) render null or void a specific legal act, either directly, with a passsword, or indirectly, with a prescription »for validity« (*ad validitatem*) of observing certain circumstances.

On the contrary, laws that render incapable (*leges inhabilitantes*) render the person themself incapable of committing a juridical act, as is the case with the absolution of an accomplice in sin against the sixth commandment of God (can. 977).

The penal laws (*leges poenales*) are affirmative or negative, to which a penalty is added.

2.3. *Object and Purpose of the Law*

The object of ecclesiastical law is, in general, everything that refers, directly or indirectly, to the purpose or mission of the Church, especially to faith, customs and discipline. The subject matter of the Code is very broad, which can be established by the simple examination of the contents. It should be borne in mind, moreover, that any law, ecclesiastical or civil, applies only to external acts. Acts that are purely internal, according to the more probable doctrine, which relies on St. Thomas (I-II, 91; I-II, 104, 5) and Suarez (*De legibus*, 4, 12), cannot be the direct and immediate object of any law, including ecclesiastical law.

The purpose of the church law is the protection and expansion of the Kingdom of God, the building up of the Body of Christ, the advancement of life and the ecclesial communion, the sanctification of souls and their salvation; Indirectly, the purpose of the Church law is both the perfection and progress of man and his earthly life.

3. The Norms and Ways for Promulgation

Promulgation in canon law refers to the formal process by which a law is made known publicly and thereby acquires legal force. It's a foundational concept in the Catholic Church's legal system, ensuring that laws are not only created but also communicated effectively to those bound by them.

3.1. *Promulgation of Canon Law*

Can. 7: A law is established when it is promulgated.⁴

⁴ Can. 7 – Lex instituitur cum promulgatur.

Law is said to be established when it comes into existence as law. As such, it exists by virtue of an act on the part of the legislator, since the creation of laws is his responsibility. The Code captures the moment of promulgation as the moment of instituting the law. We can define promulgation as the public act by which, in the Church, he who has the right and, before the Lord, the duty to make laws, imposes a norm on the community as binding. Promulgation is certainly the most important act in the process of forming law, because it establishes it. However, we must not forget the process the law had to go through before promulgation. At the institutional level, this process is irrelevant, but at the level of life, it is very important. The legislator cannot proceed arbitrarily. He must read and interpret the will of the community. The promulgation of the law is the final, decisive moment. However, it finds meaning in the path prior to the promulgation.

The promulgation (*promulgatio*) of a law is a credible promulgation of a law, so that the community may know it and make it binding. Therefore, it is not a simple and informative statement, but a transmission of a commandment, order and decision, which is legally binding.⁵

Different from promulgation is the dissemination of the law, which is nothing more than the publicity of a law already promulgated; equally different is the *notitia legis*, which consists of the simple knowledge of the law by the subjects.

The promulgation of the law is made to the community and not to the individual intended recipient (the subject). Promulgation is necessary for the law to be truly such, that is, established. And our canon tells us that it is established when it is promulgated. Promulgation, therefore, is the fundamental act for the law to come into being.

In the Church's legal system, promulgation is not a simple act of communication, but it constitutes the law. Until a norm, even if validly enacted by the competent legislative authority (e.g., the Pope or an Ecumenical Council), is promulgated, it does not exist as the binding canon law.

This principle reflects respect for legal certainty, ensuring that the faithful know when a law becomes binding; and justice and regulatory transparency, avoiding secret or retroactive norms that have not been promulgated.

In other words, the prescript of can. 7, however, defines the coincidence, so that a law is perfected and produces binding effect by virtue of the promul-

⁵ Croatian canonist Jure Brkan defines the promulgation of a law this way: »Promulgatio est sollemnis publicatio legis communitati ab eo qui curam communitatis habet« (Brkan 1997, 38).

gation. For this reason, this phase constitutes a necessary condition for the law to have binding legal force, supporting the principle of legal certainty in the legal system of the Catholic Church (Santoro et al. 2024, 102-103).

3.2. *Publication of Canon Law*

How is the law of the Church promulgated, where and when does it come into force is the content of the can. 8 of Code 1983 which determines the following:

»§1. Universal ecclesiastical laws are promulgated by publication in the official commentary, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, unless another manner of promulgation has been prescribed in particular cases. They take force only after three months have elapsed from the date of that issue of the *Acta* unless they bind immediately from the very nature of the matter, or the law itself has specifically and expressly established a shorter or longer suspensive period (*vacatio*).

§2. Particular laws are promulgated in the manner determined by the legislator and begin to oblige a month after the day of promulgation unless the law itself establishes another time period.«⁶

Universal ecclesiastical laws (*leges ecclesiasticae universales*), issued by the supreme ecclesiastical authority (the Roman Pontiff and the Ecumenical council), are promulgated by publication in the official journal *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, unless a different method of promulgation is prescribed in special cases. Thus, the Apostolic Constitution *Paenitemini* of Paul VI, of February 17, 1966 (Paul VI 1966, 177-198), on the reorganization of penitential discipline, was promulgated by its inclusion in *L'Osservatore Romano* on the same day.

The *Acta* are nothing more than a *Commentarium Officiale* (official bulletin) of the Holy See, through which all those norms that will have the function of the law for the universal Church are made known and made official. *L'Osservatore Romano* is an Italian-language daily newspaper published in the Vatican City, and it is not an official organ of the Holy See. Since 1968 it has been published weekly in English.

⁶ Can. 8 – § 1. *Leges ecclesiasticae universales promulgantur per editionem in Actorum Apostolicae Sedis commentario officiali, nisi in casibus particularibus alius promulgandi modus fuerit praescriptus, et vim suam exerunt tantum expletis tribus mensibus a die qui Actorum numero appositus est, nisi ex natura rei illico ligent aut in ipsa lege brevior aut longior vacatio specialiter et expresse fuerit statuta.*

§ 2. *Leges particulares promulgantur modo a legislatore determinato et obligare incipiunt post mensem a die promulgationis, nisi alius terminus in ipsa lege statuatur.*

Before 1909, when the Apostolic Constitution *Promulgandī* (1908) of Pius X established that the promulgation of laws took place exclusively with publication in the *Acta*, the laws were posted *ad valvas* (on the doors), especially in the Lateran and Vatican basilicas and in the Secretariats of the Dicasteries.

This method proved to be unsuitable, since it was realized how complicated it was to get the dispositions of the Apostolic See to other parts of the world.

The Code also indicates the period of *vacatio* of ecclesiastical laws, i.e. the time within which the law comes into force to all intents and purposes, three months for universal laws and one month for particular ones (local church), this is done precisely to facilitate the correct reception of the law in itself by the addressees (natural or legal persons).

Promulgating a law and disseminating it are not synonymous, its dissemination awaits exclusively the pastoral aspect of the norm (catechesis, preaching, social media), therefore it does not affect its strictly juridical aspect. Given this, it is good to understand why it is necessary for laws to be promulgated.

No less important aspect, and one that often interests us, is the orientation of the law to the common good, it could not be otherwise when we speak of ecclesiastical laws. In fact, an irrational law can never favour the common good, so rationality is always an essential requirement of a norm.

Particular laws (*leges particulares*), issued by the Roman Pontiff or by another competent authority (diocesan bishop for his area), are promulgated in the manner determined by the legislature.

The provisions prescribed for the promulgation of laws shall also apply to the promulgation of the general executive decisions.

3.3. Vacation of the Law (*Vacatio Legis*)

The promulgation of the law does not coincide with its application, i.e. with its entry into force. In all legal systems, a certain period of time must pass between the proclamation and coming into force, called vacation (*vacatio*), in which the law »stands still« (*vacat*), i.e. remains ineffectual, in order to give an

⁷ »Verum, quum promulgandae legis ratio et modus a legislatoris voluntate pendeat, cui integrum est constitutas innovare ac moderari formas, aliasque pro temporum ac locorum opportunitate sufficere; idcirco factum est, ut, vel anteaetis temporibus, non omnes Apostolicae Sedis leges ac Constitutiones, memorata forma, hoc est consuetis Urbis affixae locis promulgarentur« (Pius X 1908).

opportunity to those to whom the law is addressed to become familiar with it and to prepare for its observance. In other words, the time elapsed between the publication of a law and its coming into force is called *vacatio legis*.

In the case of the ecclesiastical laws, it is necessary to distinguish whether it is a universal or a particular law. Universal ecclesiastical laws enter into force three months after their promulgation, »unless they bind immediately from the very nature of the matter, or the law itself has specifically and expressly established a shorter or longer suspensive period«. Thus, the Code of Canon Law, promulgated on January 25, 1983, entered into force on November 27 of the same year.

However, there are certain exceptions. Namely, »By the nature of things« (*ex natura rei*) laws of a dogmatic character are immediately binding, as well as those that state or interpret divine law, naturally or positively.

For particular laws, a vacation of one month is set from the promulgation, »unless the law itself establishes another time period«. In both cases the law is binding after the expiration of *vacatio legis*, regardless of the recipient's personal knowledge.

4. Global Developments in Digitalization of the Canon Law by Some Church's Institutions

Since this paper deals with the digital impact of modern technology on the publication of church and canon law (universal and particular laws and norms), we asked artificial intelligence what it could tell us about their historical publication methods - up to the present day. The artificial intelligence's response is in the table below and provides accurate data divided into the most important milestones in the creation and publication of church regulations:

Period	Key Development
1st-4th Century	Laws promulgated orally or by letters; local bishops and councils issued norms.
325 AD	First Ecumenical Council (Nicaea): Canons circulated regionally.
Ca. 1140	<i>Decretum Gratiani</i> : First major compilation of canon law; informal promulgation.
16th Century	Council of Trent (1545–1563): Centralized legislative authority in Rome.
1587	Establishment of the <i>Congregatio Concilii</i> to oversee implementation of laws.
1917	First <i>Codex Iuris Canonici</i> : Promulgation formalized via <i>Acta Apostolicae Sedis</i> .
1983	Revised Code: Can. 8 CIC confirms promulgation through AAS; laws take effect after 3 months unless stated otherwise.
2000s	Digital publication begins on official Church websites (e.g., vatican.va).
2020-2025	Scholarly debate on digital promulgation's legal equivalence to printed form.
2024	<i>Diritto Canonico Digitale</i> published: proposes reforms for online promulgation.
Present Day	Laws promulgated via AAS and online platforms like <i>delegumtextibus.va</i>

The promulgation of canon law through online publication is an increasingly relevant topic in the contemporary ecclesiastical law, especially considering the digitalization of the legislative processes. Traditionally, in canon law, promulgation occurs through the official publication of the legislative acts, as provided for in can. 8 of the *Codex Iuris Canonici*. However, with the arrival of digital technologies, a debate has arisen as to whether the online publication can constitute a valid form of promulgation.

The phrase of can. 8, §1: »unless in special cases it has been established a different way of promulgating« regulates the possibility to resort to the alternative ways of promulgating canon law.

By publication in the *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* (AAS), universal church laws are promulgated, i.e. they come into force. But the Vatican files also contain speeches, letters or reports on events. Depending on the genre, the texts have different meanings.

Among these new forms is the promulgation on *L'Osservatore Romano*, newspaper of the Vatican City, providing news and commentary on the activities of the Catholic Church and international events from a Catholic perspective. Founded in 1861, it reports on Pope's public activities, publishes official documents, and offers insights into Vatican's views on various topics, with editions available in multiple languages, including a monthly magazine format since January 2025. One example is the *motu proprio Quærit semper* of Benedict XVI of 30 August 2011 (Benedict XVI. 2011, 569-571), promulgated in the newspaper on September 28, 2011. The explicit indication by Benedict XVI overcame the objection to this mode of promulgation that such a publication could have a mere informative purpose and non-binding (Santoro et al. 2024, 106-107).

In addition to the above methods of publishing canonical and church laws, the Holy See also uses two digital methods: vatican.va and delegumtextibus.va.

It is not the only Holy See that publishes its norms digitally. Many other ecclesiastical institutions also use the benefits of the digital age to publish their decrees and laws. Among them are many Bishops Conferences of the Catholic Church.

Here are a few concrete examples: In Germany, 25 of 27 dioceses publish their norms digitally. France and Switzerland use digital celebrats (priestly identity cards with QR codes), linked to central databases for verifying church sanctions. Belgian Bishops Conference has established on its website (www.cathobel.be) a section dedicated to the legislation complementary to the Code of Canon Law; it also dedicates another section to the provisions of the particular

law, specifying however that the publication of this legislation is in addition to the paper version in the journal of the *Interdiocésan Contact Centre*. Similarly, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' (www.usccb.org) allows users to consult specific laws related to the topic of interest. In this case, the digital tool's limitation may be structural: the legislation is listed under Canon Law, a subsection of the main menu that links to the page where the Conference's decrees are published, along with their approval, publication, and effective dates.

The Italian Episcopal Conference has also introduced a dedicated section on its website (www.repertoriogiuridico.chiesacattolica.it) within which Italian dioceses have the right to publish their own specific normative production, for the benefit of both the faithful and professionals. This database dedicated to the particular canon law also represents an important opportunity for scholarly research into this unique area of canon law, whose sources are sometimes difficult to find (Santoro et al. 2024, 109-110).

The Croatian Bishops' Conference (HBK), established on May 15, 1993, also has its own website (www.hbk.hr), where it publishes current events of the conference itself, as well as some of its decisions.

When it comes to digital publication, the HBK provides numerous documents online, including plenary reports, pastoral letters, liturgical guidelines, statements on social issues, etc. These publications are publicly accessible but lack an explicit promulgation order.

However, the following is missing from the above documents: a reference to a church data protection law; no explicit statements on artificial intelligence, digital ethics, or internet policy issues; no central canon law database for Croatian particular law.

One of the fundamental elements that is still missing from the HBK is the legal and factual certainty that digitally published norms are in line with the printed text.

The authenticity of the information published on the web site of Croatian Bishops Conference, as well as on the websites of individual dioceses, might be assured using an artificial system of digital signature and stamp attesting to the authenticity of the digital document.

In particular, the digital signature is instead affixed by the person responsible for the publication (president of Bishops Conference or diocesan bishop), to ensure the conformity of the content in its digital version, as well as to ensure that the object of the subscription has not been subject to any alteration with respect to the paper version. At least from a formal point of view, there is therefore a duplication of the procedure provided for the formation of the print draft.

5. Challenges of the Digital World

Publication of the church laws online makes canon law accessible to a wider audience. This helps with the education and transparency, but it also raises questions about how to ensure the accuracy and credibility of this information in the digital environment. The digital publication of canon law has many advantages, but it also brings several problems (Santoro et al. 2024, 113-118):

1. *Authenticity and Legal Binding*: Digital versions are often not legally binding if there is no legal basis. There is a lack of the authentic digital versions that are considered to be official sources, especially for older laws or church decrees.

2. *Versioning and Timeliness*: It is difficult to guarantee up-to-date versions if changes are not clearly documented or traceable. Without control to establish clear version, outdated standards can circulate and lead to misinterpretation.

3. *Accessibility and Barrier-Free Access*: Not all digital platforms are accessible or user-friendly, for example, for people with visual impairments or older users. Church legal sources are often fragmented and difficult to find, especially if they are not centrally archived.

4. *Linguistic and Technical Inconsistency*: Different formatting, translations, and technical standards make comparability and evaluation difficult. Church texts are often available in Latin or in non-standardized translations.

5. *Data Protection and Personal Rights*: Personal data may be affected when publishing rulings or church administrative documents. The GDPR requires a careful balance between transparency and data protection – especially in church disciplinary cases.

6. *Interpretation problems due to a lack of context*: Digital texts are often read in isolation, without commentary, historical context, or systematic references. This can lead to misinterpretations, especially when it comes to the complex canonical norms.

Solutions to Digital Publication Challenges (Mosconi 2001, 376-380):

1. *Legal Authentication of Digital Texts*: The following elements can be of great benefit and may bolster safety: Digital Signatures and Seals, use of cryptographic methods to verify the authenticity of published legal texts; Official Online Gazettes; Governments and churches can designate specific websites or platforms as legally binding sources (e.g., *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* for Vatican documents).

2. *Version Control and Traceability*: Document Management Systems (DMS) that track changes, timestamps, and authorship. Change Logs and Historical Archives could provide access to previous versions with clear annotations of amendments.

3. *Centralized and Curated Repositories*: Canonical Databases like Canon Law Abstracts (<https://canonlawabstracts.uk/>) Datenbank Kanonisches Recht (DaKaR), Gruppo Italiano Docenti di Diritto Canonico (G.I.D.D.C.), Kanonistische Literaturdocumentation Innsbruck (KALDI) etc. offer centralized access to canon law texts, judgments, and commentaries.

4. *Improved Accessibility and Usability*: Responsive Design and Accessibility Tools: Ensure platforms are usable on all devices and accessible to people with disabilities. Multilingual Interfaces: Offer translations and parallel texts, especially for Latin documents in canon law.

5. *Privacy and Data Protection Compliance*: Anonymization of Sensitive Data: Redact personal identifiers in published rulings or decrees. Internal Data Protection Policies must be aligned with GDPR and Canon 220 by establishing ecclesiastical supervisory bodies.

6. *Contextualization and Commentary*: Integrated Scholarly Commentary provides expert notes, theological reflections, and cross-references to related norms. Educational Portals develop platforms that explain legal texts in the plain language for clergy, laity, and students.

Conclusion

Digital publications are becoming increasingly important in canon law for the promulgation of the ecclesiastical laws and documents. The main reasons in favour of this claim are:

Accessibility: Online publications make canonical texts more easily accessible to the Catholic faithful worldwide, overcoming geographical barriers.

Timeliness: Documents can be published and updated quickly online, improving the timeliness of promulgation.

Authenticity: There are challenges to ensuring the authenticity and integrity of digitally published texts, for example using digital signatures.

Preservation: The long-term preservation of the digital documents requires new strategies and technologies to prevent data loss or corruption.

Regulation: Canon law must be updated to address the legal and technical issues related to the official digital publication of texts.

In summary, digital publication opens new opportunities but also new challenges for the effective and authentic promulgation of the canon law in the Church. It is a rapidly evolving area that requires a careful balance between tradition and innovation. At the same time, one must not lose sight of the fact that there are no absolute certainties in the field of security regarding the genuineness and authenticity of documents, but rather greater or lesser degrees of security, which will depend on the importance of the content of the document, its nature, and the verifiability of any tampering.

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