

Three keywords

Editorial

Hubertus Blameiser

There is a connecting thread that runs through this issue of *Ekklesia* and that is made up of three key words.

First of all, the emergence of a growing practice of *participation* in the journey of the People of God. This was a fundamental tenet of the Second Vatican Council, which stressed the equal dignity of all the baptized and the active role the laity in the mission of the Church. It saw this as a part of the *sensus fidei* and of the priesthood common to all the faithful which can be discerned in the gifts and charisms found among the People of God. In reality, then, the Council was acknowledging a development that had been taking place for some time under the guidance of the Spirit and which Romano Guardini, in the first half of the twentieth century, succinctly expressed with: "The Church awakens in souls". It is no coincidence that Pope Benedict recalled this prophetic expression on February 28, 2013, in his farewell greeting to the cardinals present in Rome. On closer inspection, however, this is not a profile of the Church that only came to the fore in the last century. In the early days of Christianity, the role of the laity was a very vibrant one and decisive for the very spread of the Gospel.

This dynamism of participation, which with the current world synodal process has entered a new stage, does not abolish the role of *authority*. Synodality and episcopal ministry belong equally to the nature of the Church, although this is not always very apparent in recent media coverage. With a rather effective analogy, Matteo Visioli compares the role of authority and that of the entire community to the two focal points of the colonnade of St. Peter's Square: they cannot be reduced to one another or privileged over each other. The Risen Christ "is present, both in the hierarchy, which guides the Church through the sacramental structure, and in the fraternal communion of the whole People of God, especially where there are two or three gathered in his name (cf. *Mt 18:20*)". Herein lies a distinctive factor about synodality with respect to simple democracy: it does not disregard authority but refers to it. And vice versa! An awareness of this has also emerged in the Anglican-Catholic dialogue as illustrated by Callan Slipper's brief note. Deliberative systems of thinking is an approach to understanding and analyzing decisions in a democratic context and Piero Coda uses aspects of this method to examine how the

relationship between authority in the Church and the involvement of the laity can produce communion.

The third key word is the term *leadership* which, in the light of what has been said so far, needs adequate definition when used in the ecclesial sphere. It is a question of developing a way of progressing that does not replace and kill-off participation but rather favors it, releases it and enhances it. A leadership *of communion*, therefore, as Jesús Morán explains, cannot be identical to that which is in place in other organizations but must be constitutively at the service not only of the members of the community but of the evangelical ideal at the same time. This something which Eva Gullo and Alberto Frassinetti bring out in their article. A "baptized" leadership therefore and consequently an Easter one, held together by the reciprocity of love and the dynamic of losing and rediscovering. This, in turn, opens up space to the Leader *par excellence*: Jesus, present with the breath of the Spirit equally in those who carry out the service of authority and all those in the community who are united in his name.

The connecting thread of this issue of Ekklesia, however, is placed within a framework that can never be missing and that must give direction to everything: *mission*. Participation, authority and leadership are not an end in themselves and are not the be-all and end-all of the ecclesial community. Where these dimensions are well articulated with each other, the conditions for a qualitative leap occur. The Gospel is not therefore solely entrusted to the witness and proclamation by a few "professionals" but involves all the members of the People of God and thus can penetrate all areas of human life in a variety of ways.

This idea of a more participatory mode of being Church has also been the object of harsh criticism and as it has emerged at a time when the ordained ministry, because of the scandal of abuse, is experiencing a crisis of credibility and a harsh purification. Could it not be, however, that these travails are part of the birth pangs of a new advent of Christianity at the service of all humanity?

Cf. also the study by Paolo Siniscalco, a distinguished scholar who recently passed away, *The Laity's historical role in the Italian Church*, published in issue no. 4 (2019/3) of Ekklesia.