

Nature, purpose, and limits in the exercise of ecclesial authority

Nature of the Church and Authority

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During a September 2021 meeting of the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life with international moderators of lay associations, ecclesial movements, and new communities, Msgr. Matteo Visioli, then Undersecretary of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and Consultor for the Dicastery, offered important reflections on exercise of ecclesial authority. The Dicastery and Msgr. Visioli have kindly given Ekklesia permission to republish the text of his talk.¹

Note: The author's discourse, published in our Italian Ekklesia edition in two parts, is instead presented here in the English language version as one article.

Introduction

When speaking of authority in the Church, and in particular of its exercise, we enter into a sensitive area, one that has been the subject of misleading interpretations in the past (and perhaps still is today), which risk becoming an exercise that is anything but virtuous. We know for example that the principle, often misrepresented, according to which authority comes from God (the principle is Saint Paul's, *nulla potestas nisi a Deo*, found in *Rom 13:1*) has legitimized the most atrocious behaviors. However, even the exercise of authority that renounces its own function in the name of another principle, that, according to which, "You have but one teacher, and you are all brothers" (*Mt 23:8*), with equal dignity and therefore equal responsibility, runs the same risk.

The sensitive nature of the theme lies above all in the fact that the word 'authority' conceals another term included in it, the other side of the coin, without which the word itself would have no meaning: community. If there is authority, it is because there is a community towards which a specific exercise of authority must be applied.

There is an additional peculiarity in our case, which seems to render the issue even more complex. Those in authority not only govern the community, but are also a part of it. While it is true that the verb from which the word *auctoritas* derives, the Latin *augeo*, means 'to enhance', 'to increase', or 'I make what already exists grow and become greater',² those in authority enhance and make greater something of which they are part, rather than a reality from which they are distinct. In making this reality grow, they themselves grow. Thus tension is always created (and - as we will soon see - must always be created) making

authority in the Church and its exercise something unfinished, a movement that never slackens and is always being questioned, poised on a ridge between two slopes:

- on the one hand, there is authoritarianism ("I have the power given to me by God and in His name I exercise it regardless of others, at most I will ask for their support");
- on the other hand, there is renunciation of one's own responsibilities ('only what is decided by all and together has value').

We are walking on the ridge. The risk is not that of falling suddenly to one side or the other (no one consciously chooses one), rather that of gradually descending without realizing it, as if on an inclined plane, going down a slope that involves distorting authority, which can take the form of authoritarianism, or renunciation, or other forms that we will later examine.

The fact that Church authority is discussed and challenged makes it true, authentic. On the contrary, when things seem to go ahead without problems, with unanimous consent, in perfect harmony ('We have no problems whatsoever!'), it is necessary to doubt the ecclesial authenticity of authority.

In order to better understand this relationship, I divide my discussion into two parts:

- in the first part I intend to offer some firm points on the particular nature of the Church, first, and then of authority: an ecclesiological foundation;
- in the second part, I will attempt to formulate some consequences on the exercise of authority in the Church, especially on the risks involved.

1. ECCLESIOLOGICAL FOUNDATION

1.1 The Key for Access: The Church as a Dynamic Unity

When we speak of the Church, we are not talking about a generic and abstract idea that can be modelled and reformulated at will on the basis of the categories to us most familiar or that we have created. Indeed, the Church is a concrete reality whose features, although rooted in the mystery of God, can be found clearly and precisely in the Church's bi-millennial teachings, which in turn are based on the centuries-old life and experience of faith of the *christi fideles*. The very life of the Church offers us, from generation to generation, distinctive and insurmountable features, the meaning of which the Magisterium re-proposes through a process of development that is called to be ever consistent with the action of the Spirit and with itself.

Having said this, the Church lives and presents herself in a dynamic and constantly changing manner, just like reality itself. This dynamism of the Church reveals her essence, which is at the same time unitary and multifaceted, and is history and transcendence. This unity is dynamic, not static and monolithic, and it not only 'tolerates' diversity, but also makes it an integral part of itself: up to the point where it remains as a legitimate distinction and does not become contradiction.

Polarities that are essential to unity

What triggers this dynamic unity? This unity stems from the action of the Spirit who, in the dialectical tension of human and ecclesial events, guides the Church towards the Truth, overcoming those tensions that hinder this path.

Even Pope Francis, in his *Magisterium*, offers an interesting indication in this respect. Several times he identifies in everyday reality a constant dialectical tension between different realities that live in polar opposition, like foci in an ellipse: idea-reality, local-global, fullness-limitation.³ This opposition is exceptional, since it does not compromise the unity of the two poles, it does not contradict it, but on the contrary it composes its internal motor and - one might even add - the very condition of its being possible.

To better understand we can think of St. Peter's Square, which is shaped like an ellipse, with two foci. Each of them makes up the square. Without one of them, or even by reducing one of them with respect to the other, the shape of the square becomes distorted. If one focus is suppressed, it becomes a circle; if it is increased or decreased, it assumes an ovoid shape.

We can thus say that in reality there are polarities which tend to contradict and overcome one another, and polarities whose tension is instead essential for the subsistence of reality itself. The Church by nature belongs to the second of these realities. But she must be vigilant so as not to fall into the first category.

The risk of reducing reality to a single pole

Recognizing unity when it is the expression of distant poles is not the easiest way, even from an existential point of view. It is much easier to reduce reality to a single pole, eliminating everything that is 'other', 'different', 'opposite', rather than finding the point of true composition in unity of two poles that dynamically oppose each other.

In reference to the topic of authority, what would reducing to one pole and eliminating the opposite pole look like?

Either an arbitrary (even unintentional) exercise of authority (when I become a 'guru', so that I command and others obey); or renouncing one's responsibilities of exercising authority (when I delegate, procrastinate, leave everything to others, rely on a majority viewpoint in order to avoid my own responsibility, etc.).

What has occurred throughout the history of the Church? The Church, in every age, has had to face various forms of reductionism, which aimed at an easier and more obvious understanding of reality, when, in fact it was more difficult not only to affirm the existence of opposing elements and to maintain a balance between them, but also to recognize that legitimate unity is precisely the fruit of the oscillation of this dynamism. One only needs to think of the two natures, human and divine, of the one and only person of the Incarnate Word (and how much easier it was to affirm one at the expense of the other); of the three divine Persons as one God (and how much more obvious it was to reduce the Three to simple aspects of one God); to the experience of grace and sin in the life of the believer (when, even pastorally speaking, it would be quicker to make a resolution compromising the existence of one in favor of the other); to the complex reality of the Church between the visible and invisible elements (in favor of the 'sociological' or the 'spiritual', which thus become sociology and spiritualism); etc..

Unreasonable opposition or legitimate distinction?

These significant examples reveal to us that unity is not possible where there is a true contradiction between the poles, but that it can exist only where there is a legitimate distinction between them. This is how Cardinal Ratzinger expressed it: "Faith remains a sword and may demand conflict for the sake of truth and love (cf *Mt* 10:34). A concept of Church unity in which conflicts are dismissed *a priori* as polarization, and in which internal

peace is bought at the price of the renunciation of the totality of witness, would quickly prove to be illusory".⁴

Of course, the effort consists entirely in recognizing and indicating what the reality of things demonstrate with profound evidence: this is fundamentally the task of the Church's Magisterium.

The basic question, which has provoked the Church, is always the same: how is it possible to understand unity in light of the legitimate distinction that composes it? In our case: if there is a problem of internal governance, is it a symptom of the reality of a sound distinction or is it instead an indication of an unhealthy opposition?

The easiest approach, as indicated above, in other words assimilating a pole to that which is correlative, can certainly lead to overcoming the problem generated by the coexistence of opposing parts ('I decide and this is the end of the matter'). But, in so doing, it ends up eliminating the element of unity that manifests itself as the dynamism of distinct realities, making reality static and monolithic.

With the desire to create unity in the entity you govern, by eliminating one pole, you achieve the opposite effect; you break the unity, you disfigure the Church by compromising its nature.

I suggest reading the works of two theologians who are not contemporary, yet very significant.

The first is Johann Adam Mohler, who, using the image of the choir, distinguishes between those who perform counterpoint, and therefore stand in opposition, and those who are out of tune, and stand in contradiction. The choir director must listen, distinguish and decide on the matter.⁵

The second is Romano Guardini.⁶ The theologian recovers some polar pairs as the foundation for the whole of human existence and explains how the great temptation for mankind of all times is to desire going beyond this tension between opposite parts, reducing one to the other. And yet, the elimination of one would consequentially lead to the death of the other and, therefore, to the end of the reality that they dynamically compose.

This polarity, through which we can interpret fundamental mysteries of salvation (in addition to important aspects of reality), is also of great help in understanding the figure of authority, at least as it appears within an ecclesial life faithful to its nature.

1.2. Some notes on the concept of authority

So far we have dealt with the Church. But what does authority in the Church mean? Its meaning must necessarily be explored with reference to Jesus Christ, whom the Gospels describe as the One "teaching with authority" (*Mk* 1 :22; *Mt* 7:28).

Biblical perspectives

The New Testament presents the 'power' of God's only begotten Son through the term *exousía*, authority deriving from His particular relationship with God the Father.

The concept of authority therefore has a 'vertical' sense of its origin and exercise. In Christ, it emanates from His unique relationship of intimacy with the Father; it expresses a 'relational nature' that finds its foundation in His presence and action. It follows that it is

Jesus Christ who 'verticalizes' authority in the Church, and not any institutional structure however respectable and necessary it may be.

But even at this level there is a fundamental *polarity*, impossible to eliminate, that is essential to the fabric of the Church's very history. Within that area of familiar intimacy which opens up, in the Spirit, between the Father, the source of all divinity, and the Son, the co-eternal Word of the Father, another polarity also moves, one between Christ and the Church, related in spousal unity, as "two in one flesh" (cf. *Eph* 5:1-32).

Besides, within the Church; the Risen Jesus Christ - and here we note the element of tension - is present both in the hierarchy, which guides the Church through the sacramental structure, as well as in the fraternal communion of the entire People of God, especially where there are two or three gathered in His name (cf *Mt* 18:20).

Without delving into the full breadth of the meaning of 'authority' in the Church, upon which much has already been written, I would like to offer a criterion of interpretation that constantly takes into account this dynamic tension in the Church, between its two constituent poles in order to prevent one, even implicitly, from prevailing over the other.

The hierarchy and the communion of the entire People of God, to which the hierarchy also belongs, represent two dialectical polarities, clearly distinct from one another where one calls into question the other. They are co-essential to that one complex reality which is the image used in *Lumen Gentium* to describe the nature of the Church.⁷

It is important to point out that not only does one polarity call into question the other, but also that in some way each of them is already present in the other: there is also a certain mutual immanence between them.

Authority in the Church thus takes the form of Christ's authority: both vertically (in the hierarchical and sacramental structure of the Church) and horizontally (in the *communio*, that is, in those 'two or more' gathered in His name, at whose service and promotion the former is placed). This is the "synodal" face of the Church.

Synodality, participation and authority

I invite you to read the document of the International Theological Commission *Synodality in the life and mission of the Church*.⁸ In order to describe the nature of "synodality", the text notes another polar opposition within it, one between "participation and authority" (cf. nos. 67-70). The first, participation, "is based on the fact that all the faithful are qualified and called to serve each other through the gifts they have all received from the Holy Spirit." (n. 67). The second, authority, refers here in particular to the College of Bishops headed by the Pope: "The authority of Pastors is a specific gift of the Spirit of Christ the Head for the upbuilding of the entire Body, not a delegated and representative function of the people." (n. 67) Precisely in order to guarantee the Church that dynamism that characterizes her nature, one pole cannot be adopted to the detriment of the other, insofar as it is precisely the reciprocal relationship between the two (where each is in some way already present in the other) that "path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium" (n. 1).

In order to properly speak of authority, participation and communion, it is therefore necessary to clarify its essential reference to Christ: It is He who causes a change of paradigm, not a sociological or democratic key register, but rather in an ecclesiological and Trinitarian one.

Assessing the Risks

2. FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS

The above considerations, within the framework of a prominently "relational" paradigm, make it possible to illustrate some fundamental implications of the discussion on authority, relation to the major and concrete *risks* that its exercise faces today, especially, but not only, in the realities linked to the so-called "particular" charisms.

For the sake of simplification, I will proceed by "theses," almost by statement, trying to set them out briefly in the light of the ecclesiological considerations of the first part.

2.1 Self-referentiality and Misrepresentation of the Charism

Founding charism and charism of the founder

One of the risks that can block this tension and dynamic unity, and therefore disfigure the Church, is a self-referentiality, disembodied from the ecclesial fabric, which, in fact, expresses itself in two harmful consequences: when the charism coincides with authority itself; and when those in authority are held to possess the fullness of the charism.

This brings to mind the concept expressed by Cardinal Ratzinger, the then Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, several times to his close collaborators when he explained that a charism is never given in its fullness (or entirely), as if to remind everyone that no person or no ecclesial group on its own can fully express or exhaust the potential of a charism: Not even the founder or the person whom the founder has designated as his or her successor, if this occurs. In fact, as we have seen, every salvific gift from God (*charisma*), is always given within a polarity, a relationship between two poles. There is a 'beyond' me, a 'different' from me that explains my existence, without which I myself would not be what I am. Claims of totality are foreign to ecclesial life.

Self-referentiality means confusing the founding charism with the charism of the founder.

The *founding charism* is the set of spiritual gifts that, through one or more founders, attract people and awaken in them the desire to live an evangelical life: in the associative realities that they generate, the faithful live and share these evangelical ideals for their own sanctification and the sanctification of all.

The *charism of the founder*, on the other hand, is that set of personal gifts from which the founder benefits both for his or her own sanctification, and well as to allow the charism of the foundation (or institution) to spread and evolve.⁹

Moreover, the *founding charism* is perpetuated and develops in the community (even if never in a complete form, as the then-Cardinal Ratzinger would have said), thanks to the historic ecclesial journey through which the Spirit, in addition to suggesting to the Church the best path, renders the Church capable of updating the gifts it needs to follow this path.

The *charism of the founder*, on the other hand, is not perpetuated in the community nor in the founder's successors, who receive their own personal charisms. The successors receive and take up the founding charism in a unique way and develop it with their own personal charism. They are not successors in the charism, but in governance.

The *founding charism* is entrusted to the entire community, a community that interprets and recognizes it (in individuals, and in authority), that watches over it and promotes it, that corrects any deviations, and interprets its development. Here "community" means not only the lay association, but the entire Church, and Magisterium is its guardian and guide.

The *charism of the founder* is associated with a decisive prophetic component, thanks to which the founder perceives a new path of possible holiness, presents it for recognition by the Church, and gives origin to a new ecclesial component (*pro-phhecy* or 'speaking forth').

The *founding charism*, on the other hand, does not necessarily inherit the same prophetic component. There is above all no transfer of the same prophetic intuition from one authority to another (as Elisha receives from Elijah: cf. *2 Kings 2*, 1-15). Rather each authority is in its own way 'prophetic' insofar as it participates in the common priesthood. On the other hand, those in authority must govern with their own charism an entity endowed with its specific charism, born from the charism of others (*pre-sidenza* or *fore-seeing*).

There are many consequences of self-referentiality. I will mention three.

a. *Forming people in One's Own Image and Likeness*

The authority can tend to co-opt into leadership only people who are like them, since authority aims at creating an identity of the Church in its own image and likeness (narcissistic praxis), because of an inability to dialogue with those whose positions differ from their own. In the name of the annihilation of opposition (as described above), distinction is also abolished. Thus, one does not 'build' the Church of Christ, but one's own church instead.

Among the tasks of authority there is also that of providing for the formation of persons who in the future, with their own charism, can lead the community by making the founding charism evolve. This does not always happen, and if it does happen, it does not always happen without self-referentiality: indeed, one sometimes has the impression that the failure to train future leaders is due to the fear of seeing one's own leadership threatened.

b. *Suppressing the difference between the internal forum and external forum*

At times, having become ego-centered in the ecclesial context, authority even tends to 'invade' what is known as the "'internal forum', no longer distinguishing it from that which instead, concerns the 'external forum'. The distinction between the fora is often traced back to moral issues (protection of the intimacy of the person) or spiritual issues (sacredness of conscience). However, at the basis of the distinction there is above all a motivation of an

ecclesiological nature: in the perspective of the polarity we have outlined, the internal forum and the external forum should certainly not be opposed but, rather, distinguished. Those in authority must meticulously set out the boundaries and ensure that they are not overstepped: both to protect the person and to correspond to its ecclesial function. Violating boundaries means not only violating the person, but also the very nature of the Church.

c. Endless responsibilities.

Staying in office longer than is necessary is a risk that, especially in recent times, has shown its harmful side, because it causes a slow and inadvertent shift from authority as service to authority as power. The shift is insidious, because in words I can say that I carry out my task with a sense of service and responsibility. It is even more insidious when I have the community's consent to do what I am doing. However, it is clear that staying too long in a position of responsibility risks triggering the very taking possession of the flock that Pope Francis often stigmatizes.¹⁰ It is the responsibility of people in authority to ask for the gift of inner freedom, in order to avoid the feeling of their own importance rendering vain their long-time service and true dedication. It is the responsibility of those in authority to imagine 'after my time' with serenity, almost like a continuous spiritual exercise.

2.2. The Horizontal Dimension: The Legend of Democratism

No longer recognizing the truth in the Church, which, while including us, also precedes and exceeds us with its mystery, one tends to shape reality to one's own liking, often pursuing approval from the majority.

Thus there is the risk of a 'democratism' that reduces the *sensus fidei* (fidelium) to the opinion of the majority, democratically expressed. The value and meaning of the *sensus fidei* should not be read in light of simple unanimity. From a democratic point of view, it is easy to lose the sense of the *objectivity* of the *res salvifica*, of the divine gift of salvation with all of its instruments. The 'heritage' (*traditum*), received and accepted, cannot be manipulated at will; we are instead called to re-propose it in such a way as to be faithful to what we have received.

2.3. Instrumentalizing (the heritage of) faith

There is a risk that the heritage of faith (the element of *fides quae*) may become an instrument in the hands of the majority, for objectives which are totally unrelated to the *salus animarum* [the salvation of souls]. In so doing, each person can use it in an arbitrary manner and, therefore, far from any evangelical logic.

For example, people no longer try to discern what profoundly corresponds or does not correspond to the gift of God, rather they try to discern what accords with a certain trend or does not accord with it. I accept only that which confirms my vision of the Church, of the person, whatever agrees with my spirituality ... In this way, we no longer make the effort to describe the reality of situations as they truly are, instead we use convenient categories to interpret them (right-wing/left-wing, progressive/conservative, liberal/traditionalist),

easy to use but always inadequate for grasping the signs of the times, the inspirations of the Spirit and the truth of the ecclesial community.

2.4. Moral Compromise

Thus, there is a tendency to transform even morality into a source of ever deeper compromises. This is a morality that legitimizes the behavior that most people would be able to adopt, in the name of a presumed closeness to the 'world', but which however lacks a movement of Paschal exodus (conversion). In effect, it takes humanity as it is and leaves it as it is, with an idea of salvation that is in fact incapable of truly justifying and purifying already in this life. On the contrary, the grace of God - which always demands a decentralization from the 'person towards the Divine otherness - if it is truly so, takes you as you are, but never leaves you as you are.

2.5. Losing Prophecy

In this reduced redeeming context, the works of Christians no longer become capable of speaking the language of God. They no longer become a transparent place of a Presence capable of changing humanity and the world for the better. They no longer bear witness to the Mystery that generates them and from which we all originate, rather they become an attempt, ever more inadequate, to legitimize the presence of the Church in this world, in the eyes of the 'world' itself. The Church, from humble and tenacious service of He who is the Protagonist of history, becomes instead a 'courtier of history'.

In this reduced horizon of salvation, the works of Christians no longer become capable of speaking the language of God. They no longer become a transparent place of a Presence capable of changing the human being and the world for the better. They no longer bear witness to the Mystery that generates them and from which we all come, but become an attempt, always inadequate, to legitimize the presence of the Church in this world, in the very eyes of the "world." The Church, from humble and steadfast service of the One who is the Protagonist of history, becomes instead "a kept mistress of history."¹¹

2.6. Blind Obedience and Intellectual Obedience

In the dynamics of exercising authority, the question of obedience also emerges. This is a term most frequently associated with consecrated life, where there is a vow or promise of obedience to superiors. However, even in lay associations there is mention of obedience, within the context of that 'evangelical counsel' which, because it is evangelical cannot be reserved to only a few, but is proper to every Christian on his or her journey towards the Kingdom. More than a virtue, obedience is a relationship. "The duty of the brothers who have authority (is) to strengthen the community in the collective commitment of seeking the will of God".¹²

There can be blind obedience, that is, irrational obedience, which 'hands over' one's conscience to authority without personal discernment. In this case, as well, the dynamics of

the two poles are destroyed: one is totally absorbed by the other. Those in authority can take pleasure in this submissive attitude, which appears to be a 'virtue', and the community can be gratified by it. But renouncing discernment compromises the ecclesiality of the Christian experience.

Vice versa: there can be an 'intellectual' obedience which, using the discernment of conscience of the 'adult Christian' as an excuse, effectively considers itself free from any relationship with authority as such.

Looking to Christ, we see that "he learned obedience from what he suffered" (*Heb* 5:8). The things He suffered were not endured by Him, rather *chosen* by Him. He faced them with a free conscience, but nevertheless He submitted Himself to the will of the Father ("Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me; still, not my will but yours be done" *Lk* 22:42). In other words, Christ's obedience is what reveals the Father to us. "Since, for Christ, obedience was the way of revealing that He was Son, 'the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth' (*Jn* 1:14), the baptised person is realised in the likeness of Him in whose image He was created (cf. *2 Cor* 4:4; *Col* 1:15)".¹⁴

Conclusion

I will leave my conclusions to the words attributed to a saint of our time: Oscar Romero. The source is unclear.¹⁵ However, regardless of who the author is, I enjoy finding here the profound sense of living authority as a service, keeping in dynamic unity the two foci of the matter:

Every now and then it helps us to take a step back and see things from a distance.

The Kingdom is not only beyond our efforts, it is also beyond our vision.

In our lives, we manage to achieve only a small part of the marvelous plan that is God's work.

Nothing that we do is complete,

which is to say that the Kingdom is greater than ourselves.

No statement says everything that can be said.

No prayer completely expresses the faith.

No Creed brings perfection.

No pastoral visit solves every problem.

No program fully accomplishes the mission of the Church.

No goal or purpose ever reaches completion.

This is what it is about:

We plant seeds that one day will grow.

We water seeds already planted, knowing that others will watch over them.

We lay the foundations of something that will develop.

We add the yeast which will multiply our possibilities.

We cannot do everything, yet it is liberating to begin.

This gives us the strength to do something and to do it well.
It may remain incomplete, but it is a beginning,
a step along the way.
It is an opportunity for the grace of God to enter and to do the rest
It may be that we will never see its completion
but that is the difference between the master and the laborer,
We are laborers, not master builders, servants, not the Messiah.
We are prophets of a future that does not belong to us.

Notes

- ¹ M. Visioli, *The Exercise of Ecclesial Authority: Nature, Purpose and Limits*, in Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life, *General decree. "The international associations of the faithful". Texts and comments*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2022, pgs. 49-69.
- ² Cf. E. Benveniste, *Il vocabolario delle istituzioni indoeuropee*, Torino 1976, pp. 396-398.
- ³ Cf. Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* on proclaiming the Gospel in today's world, 24 November 2013, nos. 222-237. Cf. also A. Cozzi, *La verità di Dio e dell'uomo in Cristo*, in: A. Cozzi, R. Repole, G. Piana, *Papa Francesco. Quale teologia?*, Assisi 2016, 14-35.
- ⁴ J. Ratzinger, "The Ecclesial Movements: a Theological Reflection on their Place in the Church, in: PONTIFICIUM CONSILIUM Pro Laicis, and Their Place in Theology" in *New Outpourings of the Spirit*, Ignatius Press, 2007, pp. 17-61) May 27, 1998: Message from John Paul II to participants in the Congress.
- ⁵ Cf. J. A. Möhler, *L'unità nella Chiesa. Il principio del cattolicesimo nello spirito dei padri della Chiesa dei primi tre secoli*, Roma 1969, 194.
- ⁶ Cf. R. Guardini, *L'opposizione polare. Tentativi per una filosofia del concreto vivente*, in Id., *Scritti di metodologia filosofica*, Brescia 2007, pp. 65-238.
- ⁷ "Christ, the one Mediator, established and continually sustains here on earth His holy Church, the community of faith, hope and charity, as an entity with visible delineation through which He communicated truth and grace to all. But, the society structured with hierarchical organs and the Mystical Body of Christ, are not to be considered as two realities, nor are the visible assembly and the spiritual community, nor the earthly Church and the Church enriched with heavenly things; rather they form one complex reality which coalesces from a divine and a human element. For this reason, by no weak analogy, it is compared to the mystery of the incarnate Word. As the assumed nature inseparably united to Him, serves the divine Word as a living organ of salvation, so, in a similar way, does the visible social structure of the Church serve the Spirit of Christ, who vivifies it, in the building up of the body. (cf. Eph 4:16)" (SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 8).
- ⁸ International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, 2 March 2018.
- ⁹ Cf. F. CIARDI, *Il carisma de fondatore*, in *Annales theologici*, 30 (2016), 141 - 156.
- ¹⁰ The "founders who have received the charism of foundation from the Holy Spirit [...] remain founders for life," in that "they are the ones who inspire, give inspiration, but who let the inspiration go forward." (FRANCIS, *Address to the Renewal in the Holy Spirit movement*, 3 July 2015).

- ¹¹ Cf. A. Emo, *La Chiesa e cortigiana della storia*, in *La Repubblica*, 22 July 1989, p. 14.
- ¹² Cf. J.M. Tillard, *Obeissance*, in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, vol. XI, Paris 1981, col. 558.
- ¹⁴ Cf. M. Tenace, *Custodi della sapienza. Il servizio dei superiori*, Roma 2007, 138.
- ¹⁵ The most accredited source attributes the text to the hand of Fr. Kenneth Untener, who is said to have written this text for a homily that Cardinal Dearden delivered on October 25, 1979, at the Eucharistic celebration in suffrage of deceased priests. The text was cited in: FRANCIS, *Presentation of Christmas Greetings to the Roman Curia*, 21 December 2015.