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Editorial

Authority in the Church

According to the scripture, the heart of leadership in the Church is servanthood (Mk 10:42–45). It also includes the responsibility to guide, teach and sanctify others, an authority that comes from God and delegated to the leaders (for example, 1 Thes 5:12–13). The authority given is to serve the members as representatives of God, to guide the community, discerning together the will of God. At the same time, authority in the Church does not mean a despotic power that can outlaw and suppress dissent. All the faithful have the right to express dissent, rather they have the responsibility to express dissent when justice and fidelity to their Christian vocation demand that. When there is dissent, it is a call to discern together, as evidenced by the Jerusalem Council and many other instances in the bible, and throughout the history of the Church. The authority is a sign of unity in the Church, which is in fact a community of equals. When authority is considered a sign of privilege and right to rule over others, it leads to misuse of power, destroying the unity of the Church and the real spirit of authority.

Every member of the Church, including those in authority, is called to be submissive to others (Eph 5:22). Similarly, leadership in the Church does not give unlimited powers. The leaders are accountable to God and to one another. The leaders should be open to the voice of God expressed through others, and to exercise their authority keeping the ethical principles of uprightness, justice, love and mercy. Above all, they should exercise their ministry with special care and concern for the poor and the marginalised.

Recent decades have witnessed a more profound search for a renewed understanding of authority in the Church, especially in the wake of sex abuse by the clergy, financial and other scandals even in the top levels of the Church. One of the theological difficulties in

dealing with authority in the Church is the concept of hierarchy in the Church, integrally connected to ordination. Are hierarchy and servant leadership compatible? Is the authority in the Church given by God alone, or does the community have any role in it? Are the leaders in the Church accountable to God alone, or to the community as well? There are so many questions, though answers are not easy.

Peter De Mey analyses the development of the concept of authority from *Mystici Corporis* to Pope Francis, especially paying attention to the way the relation between hierarchy and laity has been described in the texts by the Catholic magisterium. He observes that since the 1962 draft of *De Ecclesia*, Catholic ecclesiology stresses the participation of all members of the people of God in the threefold office of Christ and that the ordained exercise their authority as a service towards the laity. Pope Francis underscores that the identity of the priest can only be discovered in relation to the other members of the people of God.

Vincent Kundukulam holds that since priests are not only spiritual heads but also social figures, the question of authority must be thought also from the perspective of social sciences. He investigates into the power base of clergy and points out that priesthood is a unique profession with high potential to use authority thanks to the sacred nature attached to it. The misuse of clerical authority can be controlled by a gospel-oriented vision of clerical life. Kundukulam underscores that a relational understanding of clerical life and authority can help priests see their role as animators and facilitators. Rafael Luciani argues that hierarchy and ordained ministry must be understood in the light of the ecclesiology of the People of God. He emphasises that instituting the practice of collegiality in the context of chapter two of *Lumen Gentium* is the path by which the hierarchy can be transformed and adapted on the basis of its service to the People of God. Further, attempting to situate collegiality within synodality, he opines that synodality offers the most adequate interpretative framework for understanding and reforming hierarchical ministry, and opens the way to overcome institutionalized clericalism. Can Catholic social teaching be applied internally to the Church as a hierarchical structure? Phyllis Zagano addresses the issue of internal justice in the Catholic Church. She appraises Church structures in light of Catholic social teaching and ecclesiology. Besides, she delineates attempts to modify Canon Law to allow genuine participation by the people of God. In particular, she points out the historicity of territorial jurisdiction by women and recent possibilities for them to regain a share in Church governance. Zagano explains

how ecclesiology and Catholic social teaching create a framework for analysing the possibilities for justice inside the Church and argues that many problems of ecclesiology might be solved by the Church's internal application of its own social teachings.

While agreeing that authority in the Church is an indispensable tenet of Christian tradition, Vimal Tirimanna shows how clericalism has distorted the ecclesial element of authority. He explains that clericalism is a distortion of real leadership in the Church, delineates a few breeding grounds of clericalism and concludes that ecclesial authority needs to be liberated from clericalism by returning to the ecclesiology of Vatican II. George Therukattil continues with the same line of thinking and points out that clericalism has received a lot of attention in the wake of the clergy abuse scandal. He also agrees that a distorted sense of entitlement, power and domination comes to the priests and bishops because they think that ordination confers a superior dignity upon them than is available to the layperson. He analyses clericalism in the background of a gospel-based, true image of the church as conceived especially by Yves M. Congar and proposes some theoretical and practical solutions to eradicate clericalism.

Joseph Ettolil, enumerating the features and characteristics of the doctrinal authority, discusses the nature of the teaching authority of the Church and its relationship with the different forms of teachings in the Church. The Roman Pontiff, Episcopal conferences and individual bishops have the faculty to teach with authority in matters of faith and morals. However, he argues, the faithful is devoid of participation in the teaching authority of the Church. That is, the doctrinal authority in the Church is not exclusively limited to the hierarchical Church but is open to the Church as a whole. Peter M. Folan undertakes a critical examination of the office of auxiliary bishop. Of Vatican II documents, only *Christus Dominus* speaks about the office of the auxiliary bishop. In spite of the various arguments at the Council against continuing this office, it was continued. Substantiated by various arguments, Folan holds that the practice of ordaining priests to become auxiliary bishops ought to be suspended. Rosmin Cheruvilparambil, while acknowledging that religious life is understood as a life of total submission to God and superiors, calls for a different understanding of religious authority after the servant leadership model of Jesus Christ. She explains that this reverse perspective of religious authority where the superiors reach out to the community members as servants of God is the spirit of the codes

of canon law, and it will create an ambience of peace, fraternity and mutual self-giving.

The following three articles deal with a few practical implications of power and authority in the Church. P. Lawrence Thomas discusses some of the current challenges of the pastors and emphasizes certain ethical principles in pastoral ministry. He underscores that Jesus of Nazareth who went about doing good is the model for pastors. Pointing out the possible dangers of institution-centred approach, secularization and material affluence, he highlights the relevance of spiritual, disciplined and the holistically efficient pastors who can read the signs of the times and give the core message of the Gospel in the present context. Anatoly Angelo R. Aseneta investigates into the involvement of the Church's ministers in socio-political issues, with special reference to the relationship between the Church and the state in the Philippines. He argues that though ordained ministers cannot remain indifferent towards socio-political issues on account of their prophetic mission, due to their power to define reality they must engage these issues responsibly. He also proposes three virtues for them in this task: courage, humility, and prudence. Aseneta underscores that the Church cannot take upon itself the political battle, but the role of the Church is to purify reason through rational arguments, spiritual and moral energies. Rebecca G. Cacho presents family as a model for a lay-centred Church. She points out that the central role of family in shaping and sustaining the church has been highlighted in the context of Covid-19, when people were confined to their homes, and places of worship were closed. According to her, the bond of love that permeates every good family must inspire the same fellowship among the members of the institutional church. Cacho argues that retrieving the family as model of being church directs us to the most fundamental form of being a community of disciples. On the other hand, acknowledging the indispensable role of each baptized in the mission of the Church, families made up of lay people may be inspired to renew their commitment to become domestic churches.

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