

“A TREASURE IN EARTHEN VESSELS” (2 COR 4:7) HOW CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING CAN INSPIRE THE SYNODAL PROCESS

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Abstract

This article asks whether and how Catholic Social Teaching (CST) could inspire the Synodal Process, which up until now has mainly been based on dogmatic insights. It inquires how far CST's guiding principles are relevant, not only for the secular political (and economic) spheres, but for the Church as a social entity. Starting from the observation of an osmotic relationship between the Church and her political surroundings in history, it treats the foundational principles of human dignity, equality, solidarity, and participation and their analogous applicability to the Church. It asks whether the equalization of power with service is justified and how that relates to the principle of subsidiarity, and it inquires whether the notion of an ecclesial common

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good would allow for a new perspective on ecclesial questions, such as the ministry for women.

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1. Introduction

During the six years since it started the Synodal Process (SP) has gained considerable momentum. Its basic intention is to reinvigorate Catholic faith through a bottom-up approach and reform the Catholic Church so that she can carry out her mission under different local and global conditions in an ever-better way. The documents published so far reflect the expectations of a rather diverse world church. The first *Instrumentum laboris* (IL I) of June 2023 based on the communiques issued by the Continental Assemblies and the Synod Report (SR) from the First Session of the Synodal Assembly (4 to 29 October 2023) outlines the course to be taken. Under the title “For a Synodal Church. Communion, Participation, Mission” they present the theological understanding and practices of Synodality as a spiritual experience of the whole Church, which is to lead to a joint journey of the People of God at the service of the coming of the Kingdom. This, according to the third part of the SR requires “weaving bonds, building community” focusing on processes of networking between the churches as well as a dialogue with the non-Catholic and non-Christian world, and within the CC.¹ The emphasis in all these documents is on personal conversion, prepared by listening to other Catholic Christians, as a precondition for advancement on the way (*syn-hodos*). Questions of structure, however, play a complementary role. Thus, the Preparatory Document (PD) requests “an examination of how responsibility and power are lived in the church, as well as the structures with which they are administered” (PD 2). And the IL I asks: “How can we breathe the dynamism of the missionary-synodal church into our structures and institutions?” (IL I, 57). How can we affirm, exercise and practice “the common baptismal dignity and co-responsibility in the mission”? (IL I, 21). This equal dignity of the faithful grounded in baptism constitutes the red thread also of the SR, which shows in an impressive way how the theology of Synodality matured along the way.

¹ Particularly IL I emphasises the importance of dialogue, also within the Church between its Roman and Eastern Catholic branches (IL I 24f, B.1.3- 5).

In Catholic theology, it is Catholic Social Teaching (CST) as a theological discipline as well as a branch of the Magisterium which deals with social ethics, e. g., the justice of institutions and their functionality. The documents of the SP argue mainly dogmatically, even though the SR stresses on two occasions the importance of CST (SR 4/n; 5). This article asks which contributions the basic principles of CST can make to the Synodal discourse. It is inspired by the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes* (GS), which sees the Church and the (modern) world (referred to as the “world”) engaged in a continuous dialogue and mutual learning process. Under the subtitle “The help the Church receives from today’s world” GS states, that the “visible, social structure” of the Church can be enriched by contemporary developments so that it can be “designed better and more contemporary” (GS 44). This goes hand in hand with an insight from *Evangelii gaudium* that renewal processes can be promoted by reflecting questions at a different level (EG 19-33).

If anything, what can the Church learn from the “world?” In what way are the social and political principles she promotes through CST and questions of ecclesial structures interrelated? At Vatican II, these questions were not pursued further. They were, however, dealt with in the Synods of the 1970’s and 1980’s. In this context the eminent German theologian Cardinal Walter Kasper, former Head of the Dicastery of Christian Unity, argued that the social principles of CST are also valid for ecclesial structures. The article with the programmatic title: “The character of the Church as divine mystery does not obliterate her social character”² contends, starting with the two natures in Christ, that the Church exists as a mystery (*ecclesia ut mysterium*) and as a society (*ecclesia ut societas*). Therefore, the fundamental theological principle *gratia supponit naturam et perficit eam* holds true for the Church as well. Her social “nature,” i. e. her social order, is not static but - as secular social structures - can and indeed must be reformed so as to answer to the needs of the Church and the faithful in today’s world in the best possible way and serve the aims of the institution.

2. The Osmotic Relationship of Church and World

The celebrations of the coronation of King Charles III in May 2023 were a fascinating review of the sacred forms of politics that shaped

² Walter Kasper, “Der Geheimnischarakter der Kirche hebt den Sozialcharakter nicht auf,” *Herderkorrespondenz* 41 (1987), 232-236.

European Christianity for a millennium and a half. At its foundations lay imperial Roman forms of organization and law, which were adopted by the Church, transformed and transmitted to Western culture. This shows the highly osmotic character of the relationship between political and ecclesial structures since the beginning of Christian times. Whereas the early Christian communities, as described in the NT, had plural and embryonic institutions,³ the institutional structures of the CC underwent radical changes when the Christian religion became the public and state religion 313 - 382 AD. This truly stunning process of inculturation, inspired by the political inventions of Greco-Roman antiquity,⁴ was also the foundation of secular political forms.⁵ Moreover, the struggle between political and ecclesial powers throughout the Middle Ages led to the creation of spaces which were largely free from political influence. This juxtaposition of the *saeculum* and the *sacrum imperium* constitutes one of the specificities of Western history. The battle for *libertas ecclesiae* limited political power with its tendency to become absolute and can duly be regarded as a pre-history of the development of a modern civil society. This osmotic relationship, which was also ambivalent, with the Church taking feudal and absolutist forms of rule from the political sphere, came to a halt with the American and French revolutions of the 18th century. These established democratic and secular political structures are based on individual rights in the worldly sphere.⁶ Thereby, the French revolution, which was secularist, anti-Christian, and took place in a Catholic country became the point of reference for the CC leading to her dissociation from liberal political culture, which

³ Thomas Söding, "Beraten und entscheiden. Synodale Prozesse im Fokus des Urchristentums," Markus Graulich/Johanna Rahner (ed.), *Synodalität in der katholischen Kirche. Die Studie der Internationalen Theologischen Kommission im Diskurs* (Herder: Freiburg 2020), 42-94.

⁴ Ingeborg G. Gabriel, "Kenosis and Crisis. Christianity's Inculturation into Modernity," Daniel Munteanu/Sorin Selaru (eds.), *Holding Fast to the Mystery of the Faith*. Festschrift for Patriarch Daniel of the Romanian Orthodox Church (Paderborn: Brill Schöningh 2022), 97-113.

⁵ Cf. Jürgen Habermas, *Also a History of Philosophy. Volume 1: The Project of a Genealogy of Postmetaphysical Thinking*, (New York: Wiley 2023) devotes about 300 pages to this process of inculturation; see also Harold Berman, *Law and Revolution. The Formation of the Western Legal Tradition* (Boston: Harvard University Press 1983); most recently the monumental study of Otto Kallscheuer, *Papst und Zeit. Heilsgeschichte und Weltpolitik* (Berlin: Matthes&Seitz 2024).

⁶ François Furet, *Das Ende einer Illusion. Der Kommunismus im 20. Jahrhundert* (München: Piper 1996), 9 states that both human rights and totalitarianism are part of modern political culture from the beginning.

throughout the 19th century and beyond it was regarded as the product of an anti-Christian revolution. The anathemas hurled against it, foremost the *Syllabus Errorum* of 1864 of Pope Pius IX., were the expression of this embittered struggle, which - though these antagonisms were overcome step by step - still influences the present. Thereby, it remains under-recognized that essential foundations of modern political culture have been inspired by Christian beliefs and Church practice and would not have developed without them. Human dignity, freedom, equality and fraternity, as well as the centrality of the covenant are central to Jewish and Christian teachings.⁷ Modernity's institutional and legal forms were prepared by Catholic theologians, e. g., by Late Spanish scholastics whose concept of human rights is largely identical with that of John Locke, a Protestant. Thus, the inventions of human rights and democracy must be seen, last but not least, as the result of one and a half millennia of Christian history.⁸ The presumption of a fundamental discontinuity between a Christian pre-modernity and a secular modernity is an ideological construct promoted by secularists and Catholic conservatives alike not doing justice to history. Despite their novel character, liberal political thought and human rights are anchored in Christian theological traditions which, as Samuel Moyn recently showed, also influenced the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).⁹ Their acceptance by the Magisterium in CST, thus was not the introduction of a *locus alienus* into Catholic teaching, but the resumption of an osmosis interrupted by the modern revolutions.¹⁰ What lessons can be drawn from this for the Church *ad intra*? In what follows I will take up the basic principles of CST, asking how they might give impulses for the SP.

⁷ For Jonathan Sacks this belief constitutes the foremost contribution of Judaism to world culture, Jonathan Sacks, *Essays on Ethics* (Jerusalem: Maggid Books 2018), xx-xxi.

⁸ Ingeborg G. Gabriel, "Menschenrechte, III. Perspektiven christlicher Ethik," Staatslexikon⁸ online, URL: <https://www.staatslexikon-online.de/Lexikon/Menschenrechte> (accessed 22/07/2024).

⁹ Samuel Moyn, *Christian Human Rights* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press) 2015. John Witte Jr., *God's Joust, God's Justice. Law and religion in the Western tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 2006).

¹⁰ Here the political impact of this development of CST is to be remembered: In the Rosary Revolution in the Philippines (1987), the "Velvet Revolutions" in Communist countries (1989) as well as in present day democracy movements (e. g. in Hong Kong and in African countries) Catholic Christians are in leading positions.

3. Dignity, Equality and Solidarity as Ecclesial Principles

The first principle of CST and its all-encompassing aim is the realization of the God-given dignity of each and every human being whatever the social and political conditions. This belief lies at the heart of Christian ethics and of CST, but also of immanent ethics (GS 12). In view of the reality of the cosmos, the centrality of the person is by no means self-evident. It is a bold ethical statement and an act of faith for believers and non-believers alike. Without it, however, morals and law, responsibilities and rights are without foundations. Rights are to enable persons to lead a life protected and furthered by legal security contributing to him/her being able to fulfil a unique mission in life. The preponderance of personal dignity in CST overlaps with that attributed to it in liberal political ethics, with human rights being a means of protection vis-à-vis abuses of political power and the basis of civic participation. Is this foundational principle of dignity applicable in the Church as well? For the SR (and other documents of the SP) equal dignity in the Church is conferred through baptism making Catholic Christians active and responsible subjects of the people of God (SR introd.; 1a/d *et passim*). SR thereby summarizes the experience made during the Synod as follows: "We understood, in fact, that walking together as baptized persons, in the diversity of charisms, vocations, and ministries, is important not only for our communities, but also for the world." (SR, introduction). The dignity of Catholic Christians grounded in baptism also constitutes the read thread in the *Instrumentum laboris* for the Second Session of the Synod issued on July 9th 2024 (IL II).

Dignity thus is the basis of duties and rights, or rights and duties. The sequence thereby depends on whether one looks at it from a personal or legal angle. For the latter rights have priority over duties, whereas for the former duties come before rights. This must be stated explicitly since it has become an object of (unnecessary) dispute. The duty to respect each and every person because he/she has been created by God finds its legal expression in human rights. As freedom rights, they are to protect individuals from the arbitrary exercise of power by the state and its organs. They also make him/her a co-responsible actor in the political community (participation rights), whereby the basis for an effective exercise of these rights is a satisfaction of basic needs to be accomplished through social rights. The purpose of human rights as constitutional rights, like that of laws in general, thereby does not lie in themselves. They are to enhance legal security that empowers

people to live good lives, to work and to be engaged in the community. A weak legal culture makes it difficult to lead a good life and has corrupting effects on moral practices, injustice and want making people more likely to steal, give the wrong witness etc. Such a view of the life-promoting potential of law is deeply anchored in the Scriptures. There, the law is frequently praised as a life-giving gift from God (e.g. Ps 109) and a sign of “wisdom and education in the eyes of the people” (Dt 4:6). Today’s attitude towards law is more sober and ambivalent, also in the Church’s. In the post-Vatican period, positivistic approaches, that regard – against the natural law tradition – laws as being sacrosanct were opposed by views that see the Church as a community of love, not in need of law. For CST, the priority of virtues does not reduce the significance of the law. Love and justice are not opposites, but complementary. The famous dictum of St. Thomas of Aquinas may well lead to reflections here: “Justice without empathy is cruelty and empathy without justice is the mother of dissolution.”¹¹

If the Church, particularly a world Church, as well as other large social bodies, needs laws, the question arises how and in which form human rights can be an inspiration for ecclesial law. This requires theological reflections on similarities as well as differences in the conditions of baptized Catholics as “citizens of the Church” (Eph 2:19) and the citizens of nation states which cannot be done here. The underlying question thereby is: Which spaces of freedom within the Church will further a life of faith and protect the faithful against the misuse of ecclesial power so that they may fulfil their mission? Formulated differently: How can the dignity of the person and his/her self-respect, which is the highest good of well-ordered societies, be strengthened in the Church?¹²

The questions are by no means new. Here it is to be remembered that after Vatican II, Pope Paul VI nominated a Commission (1965-1980) to design a *Lex Ecclesiae Fundamental* (LEF). It foresaw a catalogue of basic rights for Catholic Christians, as well as the reform of administrative ecclesial law.¹³ It was based on *Lumen gentium* which stresses the three *munera* of the faithful conveyed by baptism, that of

¹¹ *Quia iustitia sine misericordia crudelitas est, misericordia sine iustitia mater est dissolutionis*, Thomas Aquinas. *Commentary on the Gospel of St. Matthew (Super Evangelium S. Matthaei)* Chapter 5, 1.2. (<https://isidore.co/aquinas/SSMatthew.htm#5>), (accessed 19/04/2024).

¹² John Rawls, *Eine Theorie der Gerechtigkeit* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp 1979), 479ff.

¹³ Some of its suggestions have been integrated into the CIC/1983.

the priest, the prophet, and the king (LG 10; 32). As this papal initiative demonstrates, a Constitution of the Church is legally feasible. It would give the Church a foundation and framework with positive consequences far beyond the legal sphere. It would enhance her credibility, both internally and externally, by reducing the discrepancy between the ecclesial and the secular order promoted by CST. It would strengthen Catholic Christians and their identification with the mission of the Church.

Such a LEF should include social rights which are an integral part of human rights (UDHR 22-28) in a particular form to be discussed, to further solidarity within the CC. There exist myriads of global, regional, and local Catholic works which make significant contributions to the lives of marginalized and women worldwide. They are an inspiration for non-believers and people of other faiths. To put this exchange of gifts between the poorer and the richer churches (cf. 2 Cor 8:7-15) which is also demanded in several documents of the SP (IL I 4; B.1.1.; IL II, 44) on a legal basis would give it additional weight. A more just distribution of material goods within the Church would thus be a programmatic right (as social rights are in states) which would guide actions. This way, the Church would last but not least hold up a mirror to a world which has tended to ignore social human rights, particularly during the past decades.

4. Participation: An Elementary Expression of Personal Dignity

While I write this, I watch on TV long queues of people in an African country wearing their best garments, waiting to cast their vote. These pictures show the importance of participation in today's world. The SP conceives the Church as an "active and participatory interaction community" (e.g., IThK 67 f, 73) and the SR formulates: "The richness and depth of the SP indicates the value of expanding participation" (SR 1/m). Thus, while earlier debates on Synodality focused on subsidiarity, the core issue now is participation.

Democracy as practiced in the secular sphere, however, is regarded with ambivalence in the documents of the SP. On one hand it is associated with social friendship essential for the Church (PD 2), on the other, it is rejected as a majority principle (PD 14), a concern found also in the SR (SR 1/g). This calls for clarifications. The slogan "The Church is no democracy" is of no help, since it does not stand up to factual

scrutiny.¹⁴ Any closer look shows, that there are democratic elements in many of the Church's institutions. Popes are elected (and have always been), the CC constituting an electoral monarchy as well as are abbots and priors. The statutes of congregations foresee elections for ministries by majorities. As the NT shows, such elections are to be accompanied by prayer (and fasting) to find the right person according to God's will (Acts 1:15-26), which gives them their special character. Not only persons, but also theological questions have been and are subject to majority vote, e. g., at the Councils from Nicea to Vatican II.¹⁵ The slogan "the truth cannot be voted on" is thus far from ecclesial realities as well. In the Church as in other large social and political institutions, the taking of decisions needs to be based on majorities. Thereby, the composition of the voting bodies, the active and passive right to vote or to be voted into office, and the majorities required (simple, 2/3 or others), as well as the periods of office - from short periods to lifetime - vary greatly. Consensus may be preferable to majority decisions (II I, 39). As the only mode of decision making it would paralyze any institutional body. How this participation is to be organized, needs profound theological and ethical reflections, whereby functional aspects are to play a role (e. g., with regard to terms of office). Even more important, however, is that the dignity of the persons belonging to the Church is respected, as is their sense of what is just, thus strengthening their engagement with the mission of the Church.

The right to participation is no panacea, as some signs of erosion in democracies show. Participatory processes require considerable maturity and well reflected attitudes from the participants. What is even more important is that in secular democracies, the right to vote and rules to make decisions with majorities are embedded in other rules and rights. Fundamental rights of others cannot be cancelled by majority decisions. Democracy is thus neither a "tyranny of the majority" nor a "dictatorship of relativism." This needs to be stated

¹⁴ The questions raised here are treated in detail in Valentin Zsifkovits, *Die Kirche, eine Demokratie eigener Art?* (Lit: Münster 1997); Hans Maier, *Keine Demokratie? Laienmeinungen zur Kirche* (Freiburg: Herder 2006); Wolfgang Beinert, "Die Kirche ist keine Demokratie." Ein Satz auf dem Prüfstand. In: *Stimmen der Zeit* 148 (1/2023), 3-11.

¹⁵ Hans Küng, *Strukturen der Kirche* (München: Piper 1987) 77-104 (English edition *Structures of the Church*, New York: Crossroad 1982). The voting rights for lay people are not new in the CC. Küng points to many precedents in history.

clearly since in some documents, contrary to CST, a certain devaluation can be observed (PD 14; SR 1/g; IL II, 20).

The fundamental Christian belief that all power stems from God (Romans 13:1) neither sanctifies existing forms of political power nor does it specify how power should be distributed and administered in order to serve the common good. A theocracy in the strict sense of the term is impossible since God never rules without intermediaries but through persons who act within institutions shaped by humans. However, while democratic participation as an expression of equal dignity among citizens was expanded step by step in the modern state, it was rather restricted in the Church because of the historical reasons mentioned above.

In this situation, this calls for an evaluation of the different forms of participation and decision making which exist in the Church. This could initiate what Pope Francis called in another context, “a courageous cultural revolution” (*Laudato si’* 114).

5. Power, Service and the Principle of Subsidiarity

The term “power” carries negative connotations in ecclesial discourse and is therefore often replaced by “service.” This has far-reaching consequences. Even though the aim of power should be to serve others, in the Church as in other institutions (the term ministry is a reminder of Christian influence in the secular realm!), an equation of both overlooks that anthropologically power is different from service. The terminological change is based on the pessimistic assumption that power is an evil, which is to be overcome. Catholic theology has, however, always seen power as belonging to the human condition as well as a social and political reality. How deeply a negative view of power is, however, anchored in the present day discourses (not only in the Church) is shown by that fact that students when told that every person has power are greatly astonished. Humans have the power to maintain themselves, to interact with others and to influence them to the good or the bad thereby shaping their social environment. Power is thus a God-given human quality,¹⁶ which can be used for different purposes. St. Thomas Aquinas distinguishes between evil, neutral, e. g., self-interested, and good aims, which in concrete human actions are inter-woven.¹⁷ These

¹⁶ For a comprehensive reflection see Romano Guardini, *Power and Responsibility. A Course of Action for the New Age* (Michigan: Regnery 1962).

¹⁷ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* II-II q.47, a 13.

always contain elements of (neutral) self-interest and - because of human fallibility and sin - are infected by evil. It is therefore unrealistic to assume that personal as well as institutionally mediated power is ever only (selfless) service. Factually, all human actions are flawed and reach the goal of the good imperfectly, as good as the intention may be.

Moreover, the power a person has because of his/her capabilities is increased significantly through institutions. The word of a professor counts more than that of a speaker in Hyde Park, that of a president more than that of an ordinary citizen, and that of a bishop more than that of a layman. Even the writings of St. Therese of Lisieux would not be known had they not been published by her congregation. Competence and commitment become effective through and in institutions which enhance (or diminish) the effects of individual actions. Any terminological replacement of power by service tends to overlook this basic reality of social and ecclesial life.

Existing structures and institutions are, last but not least, the result of the actions and decisions of previous generations, which also were of mixed moral quality. They are also "structures of sin," containing socially dysfunctional and inhumane elements. This is true for the Church as well. Structures can advance as well as hamper her flourishing as a social body and that of Catholic Christians. In a fallen world, institutions therefore require *re-formatio*, so as to better fulfill their function and prevent power abuses in the future. This is recognized by the documents of the SP, most prominently in IL II, which devotes a whole chapter to "transparency, accountability, and evaluation" of those who wield power in the Church (cf. IL II, 73ff).

In this context, the principle of subsidiarity of CST is of particular importance. It is directed against power accumulation and abuse which are to be prevented through decentralization. To achieve this, the functions smaller units can perform must not be absorbed by larger and more potent ones (*Quadragesimo anno* 79). Already, Pope Pius XII. described it as a fundamental building law of the Church that strengthens the personal dignity of believers and considered this principle of high relevance for the CC.¹⁸ Pope Paul VI opted for ecclesial regionalization (*Octogesima adveniens* 4), a position promoted forcefully by the present Pontiff. Practical suggestions on how more

¹⁸ Arthur Fridolin Utz-Groner, *Aufbau und Entfaltung des gesellschaftlichen Lebens. Soziale Summe Pius XII.* (Freiburg: Paulus Verlag 1954) Nr. 4094.

decision making power could be given to local churches can be found in all the documents of the SP (e. g., PD 9; IL II, 89ff). Albeit abuses of power can never be excluded, decentralization and a well-structured system of checks and balances can considerably limit their extent and probability. The sexual abuse crisis has led to the establishment of ecclesial control mechanisms in many local churches, which should be evaluated to use the experience gained and the insights gained to create ecclesial mechanisms which prevent power abuse in other fields.

6. The Common Good: *Suprema lex for the Church?*

According to CST, the primary goal of every community is its common good. The term has a long tradition in social philosophy and can be summarised as a maxim for action in a word coined by Cicero: *suprema lex salus populi*.¹⁹ This common good is recognized as part of the mission of the Church *ad extra* (IL I, B.1.1). But could it not be applicable for the Church *ut societas* also *ad intra*? Could it not offer a new perspective and break up entrenched ideas, e.g., with regard to access to the office? The common good of the Church is the salvation of all the faithful and their growth in faith so that they can fulfil their mission to spread the good news of the Kingdom of God in the world of today. Ecclesial institutions are to serve this aim. In this sense, Vatican II defines the Church as a sacrament, “that is, in Christ as a sign and instrument of intimate union with God and of the unity of all humanity” (LG 1). The IL I takes up this definition stating that the Church is destined to transmit salvation to believers and to all people (IL I, 28). Structures are so to speak the house in which the Church as the people of God lives and into which she wants to invite people. Whether they are hospitable or not will frequently determine whether this invitation is accepted. The social form of the Church is therefore not secondary. It is neither legitimized as the result of an evolutionary process, nor can it be derived directly from the NT. Thus, the question has to be asked in which way the Spirit wants to lead the Church (GS 11) and how she is to serve the common good of *in hoc tempore* in the best possible way, making her a “nucleus of unity, hope and salvation” (LG 9).

¹⁹ Ingeborg Gabriel, “Ist das Gemeinwohl überholt? Zur politischen Aktualität eines Prinzips der katholischen Soziallehre,” Bartosz Rydlinski/Slawomir Sowinski/Radoslaw Zenderowski (ed.), *Wolnosc. Wieczne. Wyzwanie* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UKSW 2018), 461- 479.

The Synod has initiated an impressive worldwide process of ecclesial communication and discernment. It has led to many personal encounters and increased mutual understanding in a Church spread out across five continents. How this process will continue and which fruits it will bring in the long-run has become a vital question for the whole Church.

We have argued on the basis of CST that this requires a new sense of equal dignity on the basis of baptism of Catholic Christians, enhanced through new forms of ecclesial participation and more transparent and accountable power structures. Models of inner-ecclesial solidarity and subsidiarity could, moreover, decisively contribute to the common good of the Church. After all, she carries the treasure of the Gospel in “earthen vessels”, whereby the Spirit guides her and the “surpassing power (Greek *dynamis!*) stems from God and not from us” (2 Cor 4:7).