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Summary of the Letter "Iuvenescit Ecclesia" (The Church rejuvenates)

Vatican City, 14 June 2016 – The following is a summary of the Letter of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Iuvenescit Ecclesia" (The Church rejuvenates), to the bishops of the Catholic Church on the relationship between hierarchical and charismatic gifts for the life and the mission of the Church. The letter consists of an introduction (The gifts of the Holy Spirit in the Church in mission, The multiform ecclesial groups, Purpose of the present document), five chapters (The charisms according to the New Testament, The relationship between the hierarchical and the charismatic gifts in the recent Magisterium, Theological foundation of the relationship between the hierarchical and the charismatic gifts, The relationship between hierarchical and charismatic gifts in the life and mission of the Church, The ecclesial practice of the relationship between hierarchical and charismatic gifts), and a conclusion, dedicated to the Virgin Mary.

Hierarchical and charismatic gifts, co-essential in the life of the Church

The hierarchical and charismatic gifts are “co-essential” in the life of the Church: this is the central point of the Letter Iuvenescit Ecclesia (The Church rejuvenates), published by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. The document – signed by the prefect, Cardinal Ludwig Müller and the secretary, Archbishop Luis Ladaria, is addressed to the bishops of the Catholic Church and focuses on “the relationship between hierarchical and charismatic gifts for the life and the mission of the Church”. The first are those conferred by the Sacrament of ordination (Episcopal, priestly and diaconal), while the second are freely distributed by the Holy Spirit. The publication of the Letter – dated 15 May 2016, Solemnity of Pentecost – was ordered by Pope Francis on 14 March, in the audience granted to Cardinal Müller.

Harmonious and complementary connection, with obedience to Pastors

In particular, IE is centred on theological, rather than pastoral or practical, question deriving from the relationship between the ecclesial institution and new movements and aggregations, insisting on the harmonious connection and complementary nature of the two subjects, provided that it is part of a “fruitful and ordered participation” in the charisms of the communion of the Church, which does not authorize them “to withdraw the obedience owed

towards the ecclesial hierarchy"; nor does she "bestow the right to an autonomous ministry". As "gifts of indispensable importance for the life and mission of the Church", authentic charisms are called to "missionary openness, to the necessary obedience to pastors, and to maintain ecclesial communion".

Do not oppose the institutional Church and the Church of charity

Therefore, "their opposition, and equally their juxtaposition" with hierarchical gifts would be a mistake. Indeed, a Church "of the institution" should not be opposed to a Church "of charity", since in the Church "the essential institutions are also charismatic" and "the charisms must, in one way or another, be institutionalized to have coherency and continuity". In this way, both dimensions "together concur to make present the mystery and the salvific work of Christ in the world".

May the charismatic dimension never be missing in the Church, but ecclesial maturity is needed

The new realities, therefore, must reach the "ecclesial maturity" that leads to their full development and integration in the life of the Church, always in communion with Pastors and attentive to their indications. The existence of new realities, indeed – the Letter underlines – fills the heart of the Church with "joy and gratitude", but are also called to "relate positively with all of the other gifts present in ecclesial life", so as "to promote them generously, and to accompany them with vigilant paternity" of Pastors "in such a manner that all contribute to the good of the Church and to its evangelising mission". "The charismatic dimension will never be lacking in the life and mission of the Church".

Criteria for discerning authentic charisms

But how can an authentic charismatic gift be recognised? The Letter of the Congregation calls for discernment, a task "that appertains to the ecclesial authorities", in accordance with specific criteria: to be an instrument of holiness in the Church; to be engaged in the missionary dissemination of the Gospel; to fully confess the Catholic faith; to bear witness to active communion with all the Church, welcoming with faithful willingness her doctrinal and pastoral teachings; to acknowledge and respect the other charismatic components of the Church; to accept with humility moments of trial in discernment; to have spiritual fruits such as charity, joy, peace and humanity; and to consider the social dimension of evangelisation, aware of the fact that "concern for the integral development of society's most neglected members … cannot be lacking in an authentic ecclesial entity".

Juridical recognition in accordance with canon law

In addition, IE indicates two other fundamental criteria to consider for the juridical recognition of the new ecclesial realities, according to the forms established by the Code of Canon Law: the first is "respect for the particularity of individual charismatic groups, avoiding juridical straitjackets that deaden novelty". The second criterion concerns "respect for the fundamental ecclesial regimen", favouring "the effective insertion of the charismatic gifts into the life of the Church", but avoiding the danger that the entities "might be considered in some way as running parallel to the ecclesial life or not ordered in relation to the hierarchical gifts".

The relationship between the Universal Church and the particular Churches is essential

The document of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith then shows how the relationship between hierarchical and charismatic gifts must take into account the "constitutive and essential relation between the universal Church and the particular Churches". This means that while the charisms are given to all the Church, "the dynamism of these gifts must actualise itself in the service of a concrete diocese". In addition, these also represent an "authentic opportunity" to live and to develop the Christian vocation of each person, whether this be marriage, priestly celibacy, or ordained ministry. In addition, consecrated life too "is located within the charismatic dimension of the Church", since the spirituality of institutes "can become for both the lay faithful and the priest a significant resource enabling them to live their own proper vocation".

Look to the model of Mary

Finally, IE suggests looking to Mary, “Mother of the Church” and model of “complete docility to the action of the Holy Spirit” and of “transparent humility”: by her intercession, it is hoped that “the charisms, abundantly bestowed by the Holy Spirit among the faithful, may be received with docility and bear fruit for the life and mission of the Church and for the good of the world”.

The full text of the Letter "Iuvenescit Ecclesia" in English can be consulted at: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20160516_iuvenescit-ecclesia_en.html