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Greetings to the Roman Curia: permanent personal and structural conversion

The Clementine Hall of the Vatican Apostolic Palace was the scene this morning of the encounter between the Holy Father and the cardinals and superiors of the Roman Curia for the traditional exchange of Christmas greetings.

After a welcome from Cardinal Angelo Sodano, dean of the College of Cardinals, the Holy Father addressed the following discourse to those present:

“Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I would like to begin this meeting of ours by offering cordial good wishes to all of you, superiors and officials, papal representatives and staff of the Nunciatures worldwide, all those working in the Roman Curia and to your families. Best wishes for a holy and serene Christmas and a happy New Year 2017!

St. Augustine, contemplating the face of the Baby Jesus, exclaimed: ‘immense in the form of God, tiny in the form of a slave’. To describe the mystery of the Incarnation, St. Macarius, the fourth-century monk and disciple of Saint Anthony Abbot, used the Greek verb ‘smikryno’, to become small, to reduce to the bare minimum. He says: ‘Listen attentively: the infinite, unapproachable and uncreated God, in his immense and ineffable goodness has taken a body, and, I dare say, infinitely diminished his glory’.

Christmas is thus the feast of the loving humility of God, of the God Who upsets our logical expectations, the established order, the order of the dialectician and the mathematician. In this upset lies all the richness of God’s own thinking, which overturns our limited human ways of thinking (cf. Is 55: 8-9). As Romano Guardini said: ‘What an overturning of all our familiar values – not only human values but also divine values! Truly this God upsets everything that we claim to build up on our own’. At Christmas, we are called to say ‘yes’ with our faith, not to the Master of the universe, and not even to the most noble of ideas, but precisely to this God Who is the humble lover.

Blessed Paul VI, on Christmas of 1971, said: ‘God could have come wrapped in glory, splendour, light and power, to instil fear, to make us rub our eyes in amazement. But instead He came as the smallest, the

frailtest and weakest of beings. Why? So that no one would be ashamed to approach Him, so that no one would be afraid, so that all would be close to Him and draw near Him, so that there would be no distance between us and Him. God made the effort to plunge, to dive deep within us, so that each of us, each of you, could speak intimately with Him, trust Him, draw near Him and realise that He thinks of you and loves you... He loves you! Think about what this means! If you understand this, if you remember what I am saying, you will have understood the whole of Christianity'.

God chose to be born a tiny child because He wanted to be loved. Here we see, as it were, how the logic of Christmas is the overturning of worldly logic, of the mentality of power and might, the thinking of the Pharisees and those who see things only in terms of causality or determinism.

In this gentle yet overpowering light of the divine countenance of the Christ Child, I have chosen as the theme of this, our yearly meeting, the reform of the Roman Curia. It seemed to me right and fitting to share with you the framework of the reform, to point out its guiding principles, the steps taken so far, but above all the logic behind every step already taken and what is yet to come.

Here I spontaneously think of the ancient adage that describes the process of the Spiritual Exercises in the Ignatian method: *deformata reformare, reformata conformare, conformata confirmare et confirmata transformare*.

There can be no doubt that, for the Curia, the word reform is to be understood in two ways. First of all, it has to make the Curia *con-form* 'to the Good News which must be proclaimed joyously and courageously to all, especially to the poor, the least and the outcast'. To make it con-form 'to the signs of our time and to all its human achievements', so as 'better to meet the demands of the men and women whom we are called to serve'. At the same time, this means *con-forming* the Curia ever more fully to its purpose, which is that of cooperating in the ministry of the Successor of Peter (*cum ipso consociatam operam prosequuntur*, as the *Motu Proprio Humanam Progressionem* puts it), and supporting the Roman Pontiff in the exercise of his singular, ordinary, full, supreme, immediate and universal power.

Consequently, the reform of the Roman Curia must be guided by ecclesiology and directed *in bonum et in servitium*, as is the service of the Bishop of Rome. This finds eloquent expression in the words of Pope St. Gregory the Great, quoted in the third chapter of the Constitution *Pastor Aeternus* of the First Vatican Council: 'My honour is that of the universal Church. My honour is the solid strength of my brothers. I feel truly honoured when none of them is denied his due honour'.

Since the Curia is not an immobile bureaucratic apparatus, reform is first and foremost a sign of life, of a Church that advances on her pilgrim way, of a Church that is living and for this reason *semper reformanda*, in need of reform because she is alive.

Here it must clearly be said that reform is not an end unto itself, but rather a process of growth and above all of conversion.

Consequently, the aim of reform is not aesthetic, an effort to improve the looks of the Curia, nor can it be understood as a sort of facelift, using make-up and cosmetics to embellish its aging body, nor even as an operation of plastic surgery to take away its wrinkles.

Dear brothers and sisters, it isn't wrinkles we need to worry about in the Church, but blemishes!

Seen in this light, we need to realise that the reform will be effective only if it is carried out with men and women who are renewed and not simply new. We cannot be content simply with changing personnel, but need to encourage spiritual, human and professional renewal among the members of the Curia. The reform of the Curia is in no way implemented with a change of persons – something that certainly is happening and will continue to happen – but with a conversion in persons. Permanent formation is not enough; what we need also

and above all is permanent conversion and purification. Without a change of mentality, efforts at practical improvement will be in vain.

That is why, in our last two meetings at Christmas, I discussed certain 'diseases', drawing on the teaching of the Desert Fathers (2014), and compiled, on the basis of the word 'mercy', a catalogue of virtues necessary for curial officials and all those who wish their consecration or service to the Church to become more fruitful (2015). The underlying reason is that, as in the case of the Church overall, the *semper reformanda* must also become, in the case of the Curia, a permanent personal and structural process of conversion.

It was necessary to speak of disease and cures because every surgical operation, if it is to be successful, must be preceded by detailed diagnosis and careful analysis, and needs to be accompanied and followed up by precise prescriptions.

In this process, it is normal, and indeed healthy, to encounter difficulties, which in the case of the reform, might present themselves as different types of resistance. There can be cases of open resistance, often born of goodwill and sincere dialogue, and cases of hidden resistance, born of fearful or hardened hearts content with the empty rhetoric of 'spiritual window-dressing' typical of those who say they are ready for change, yet want everything to remain as it was before. There are also cases of malicious resistance, which spring up in misguided minds and come to the fore when the devil inspires ill intentions (often cloaked in sheep's clothing). This last kind of resistance hides behind words of self-justification and often accusation; it takes refuge in traditions, appearances, formalities, in the familiar, or else in a desire to make everything personal, failing to distinguish between the act, the actor, and the action.

The absence of reaction is a sign of death! Consequently, the good cases of resistance – and even those not quite so good – are necessary and merit being listened to, welcomed and their expression encouraged, because this is a sign that the body is living.

All this is to say that the reform of the Curia is a delicate process that has to take place in fidelity to essentials, with constant discernment, evangelical courage and ecclesial wisdom, careful listening, persevering action, positive silence and firm decisions. It requires much prayer, much prayer, profound humility, farsightedness, concrete steps forward and – whenever necessary – even with steps backward, with determination, vitality, responsible exercise of power, unconditioned obedience, but above all by abandonment to the sure guidance of the Holy Spirit and trust in his necessary support. And, for this reason, prayer, prayer and prayer.

SOME GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF THE REFORM

These are principally twelve: individualism; pastoral concern; missionary spirit; clear organisation; improved functioning; modernisation; sobriety; subsidiarity; synodality; catholicity; professionalism and gradualism.

1. Individual responsibility (personal conversion)

Once again I reaffirm the importance of individual conversion, without which all structural change would prove useless. The true soul of the reform are the men and women who are part of it and make it possible. Indeed, personal conversion supports and reinforces communal conversion.

There is a powerful interplay between personal and communal attitudes. A single person can bring great good to the entire body, but also bring great harm and lead to sickness. A healthy body is one that can recover, accept, reinforce, care for and sanctify its members.

2. Pastoral concern (pastoral conversion)

Mindful of the figure of the shepherd (cf. Ez 34:16; Jn 10:1-21) and recognising that the Curia is a community of service, 'it is good for us too, called to be pastors in the Church, to let the face of God the Good Shepherd enlighten us, purify us and transform us, fully renewed, to our mission. That even in our workplaces we may feel, cultivate and practise a sound pastoral sense, especially towards the people whom we meet each day. May no one feel overlooked or mistreated, but may everyone experience, here first of all, the care and concern of the Good Shepherd'. Behind every paper there is a person.

The efforts of all who work in the Curia must be inspired by pastoral concern and a spirituality of service and communion, for this is the antidote to all the venoms of vain ambition and illusory rivalry. Paul VI cautioned that 'the Roman Curia should not be a bureaucracy, as some wrongly judge it, pretentious and apathetic, merely legalistic and ritualistic, a training ground of concealed ambitions and veiled antagonisms, as others would have it. Rather, it should be a true community of faith and charity, of prayer and of activity, of brothers and sons of the Pope, who carry out their duties respecting one another's competence and with a sense of collaboration, in order to serve him as he serves his brothers and sons of the universal Church and of the entire world'.

3. Missionary spirit (Christocentrism)

As the Council taught, it is the chief aim of all forms of service in the Church to bring the Good News to the ends of the earth. For 'there are Church structures which can hamper efforts at evangelization, yet even good structures are only helpful when there is a life constantly driving, sustaining and assessing them. Without new life and an authentic evangelical spirit, without the Church's fidelity to her own calling, any new structure will soon prove ineffective'.

4. Clear organization

On the basis of the principle that all Dicasteries are juridically equal, a clearer organization of the offices of the Roman Curia was needed, in order to bring out the fact that each Dicastery has its own areas of competence. These areas of competence must be respected, but they must also be distributed in a reasonable, efficient and productive way. No Dicastery can therefore appropriate the competence of another Dicastery, in accordance with what is laid down by law. On the other hand, all Dicasteries report directly to the Pope.

5. Improved functioning

The eventual merging of two or more Dicasteries competent in similar or closely connected matters to create a single Dicastery serves on the one hand to give the latter greater importance (even externally). On the other hand, the closeness and interaction of individual bodies within a single Dicastery contributes to improved functioning (as shown by the two recently created Dicasteries).

Improved functioning also demands an ongoing review of roles, the relevance of areas of competence, and the responsibilities of the personnel, and consequently of the process of reassignment, hiring, interruption of work and also promotions.

6. Modernization (updating)

This involves an ability to interpret and attend to 'the signs of the times'. In this sense, 'We are concerned to make provisions that the Dicasteries of the Roman Curia be suited to the circumstances of our time and adapted to the needs of the universal Church'. Such was the request of the Second Vatican Council: 'the departments of the Roman Curia should be reorganized in a manner more appropriate to the needs of our time and of different regions and rites, especially in regard to their number, their titles, their competence, their procedures and how they coordinate their activities'.

7. Sobriety

Here what is called for is a simplification and streamlining of the Curia. This involves the combination or merging of Dicasteries based on their areas of competence; simplification within individual Dicasteries; the eventual suppression of offices no longer responding to contingent needs; the integration into Dicasteries or the reduction of Commissions, Academies, Committees, etc., all in view of the essential sobriety needed for a proper and authentic witness.

8. Subsidiarity

This involves the reordering of areas of competence specific to the various Dicasteries, transferring them if necessary from one Dicastery to another, in order to achieve autonomy, coordination and subsidiarity in areas of competence and effective interaction in service.

Here too, respect must be shown for the principles of subsidiarity and clear organization with regard to relations with the Secretariat of State and, within the latter, among its various areas of competence, so that carrying out its proper duties it will be of direct and immediate assistance to the Pope. This will also improve coordination between the various sectors of the Dicasteries and the Offices of the Curia themselves. The Secretariat of State will be able to carry out its important function precisely in achieving unity, interdependence and coordination between its sections and different sectors.

9. Synodality

The work of the Curia must be synodal, with regular meetings of Heads of the Dicasteries, presided over by the Roman Pontiff; regularly scheduled Audiences of Heads of the Dicasteries with the Pope, and the customary interdicasterial meetings. The reduced number of Dicasteries will allow for more frequent and systematic meetings of individual Prefects with the Pope and productive meetings of Heads of Dicasteries, since this cannot be the case when groups are too large.

Synodality must also be evident in the work of each Dicastery, with particular attention to the Congress and at least a greater frequency of the Ordinary Sessions. Each Dicastery must avoid the fragmentation caused by factors such as the multiplication of specialized sectors, which can tend to become self-absorbed. Their coordination must be the task of the Secretary, or the Undersecretary.

10. Catholicity

Among the Officials, in addition to priests and consecrated persons, the catholicity of the Church must be reflected in the hiring of personnel from throughout the world, of permanent deacons and lay faithful carefully selected on the basis of their unexceptionable spiritual and moral life and their professional competence. It is fitting to provide for the hiring of greater numbers of the lay faithful, especially in those Dicasteries where they can be more competent than clerics or consecrated persons. Also of great importance is an enhanced role for women and lay people in the life of the Church and their integration into roles of leadership in the Dicasteries, with particular attention to multiculturalism.

11. Professionalism

Every Dicastery must adopt a policy of continuing formation for its personnel, to avoid their falling into a rut or becoming stuck in a bureaucratic routine.

Likewise essential is the definitive abolition of the practice of *promoveatur ut amoveatur*.

12. Gradualism (discernment)

Gradualism has to do with the necessary discernment entailed by historical processes, the passage of

time and stages of development, assessment, correction, experimentation, and approvals *ad experimentum*. In these cases, it is not a matter of indecision, but of the flexibility needed to be able to achieve a true reform.

STEPS ALREADY TAKEN

I will now mention briefly and concisely some steps already taken to put into practice these guiding principles and the recommendations made by the Cardinals in the plenary meetings before the Conclave, by the COSEA, by the Council of Cardinals (C9), and by the Heads of the Dicastries and other experts and individuals:

- On 13 April 2013 it was announced that the Council of Cardinals (*Consilium Cardinalium Summo Pontificio*) – the C8 and, after 1 July 2014, the C9 – was created, primarily to counsel the Pope on the governance of the universal Church and on other related topics, also with the specific task of proposing the revision of the Apostolic Constitution *Pastor Bonus*.
- With the Chirograph of 24 June 2013, the Pontifical Commission for Reference on the Institute for Works of Religion was established, in order to study the legal status of the IOR and to allow for its greater ‘harmonization’ with ‘the universal mission of the Apostolic See’. This was ‘to ensure that economic and financial activities be permeated by Gospel principles’ and to achieve a complete and acknowledged transparency in its operation.
- With the Motu Proprio of 11 July 2013, provisions were made to define the jurisdiction of the judicial authorities of Vatican City State in criminal matters.
- With the Chirograph of 18 July 2013, the COSEA (Pontifical Commission for Reference on the Organization of the Economic-Administrative Structure) was instituted and given the task of research, analysis and the gathering of information, in cooperation with the Council of Cardinals for the study of the organizational and economic problems of the Holy See.
- With the Motu Proprio of 8 August 2013, the Holy See’s Financial Security Committee was established for the prevention and countering of money laundering, the financing of terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. This was to bring the IOR and the entire Vatican economic system to the regular adoption of, and fully committed and diligent compliance with, all international legal norms on financial transparency.
- With the Motu Proprio of 15 November 2013, the Financial Intelligence Authority (AIF), established by Benedict XVI with his Motu Proprio of 30 December 2010 for the prevention and countering of illegal activities in the area of monetary and financial dealings, was consolidated.
- With the Motu Proprio 24 February 2014 (*Fidelis Dispensator et Prudens*), the Secretariat for the Economy and the Council for the Economy were established to replace the Council of 15 Cardinals, with the task of harmonizing the policies of control in regard to the economic management of the Holy See and the Vatican City.
- With the same Motu Proprio of 24 February 2014, the Office of General Auditor (URG) was established as a new agency of the Holy See, charged with auditing the Dicastries of the Roman Curia, the institutions connected with to the Holy See or associated with it, and the administrations of the Governorate of Vatican City.
- With the Chirograph of 22 March 2014, the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors was established, in order ‘to promote the protection of the dignity of minors and vulnerable adults, using the forms

and methods, consonant with the nature of the Church, which they consider most appropriate’.

- With the Motu Proprio of 8 July 2014, the Ordinary Section of the Administration of the Patrimony of the Apostolic See was transferred to the Secretariat for the Economy.
- On 22 February 2015, the Statutes of the new economic agencies were approved.
- With the Motu Proprio of 27 June 2015, the Secretariat for Communication was established and charged ‘to respond to the current context of communication, characterized by the presence and evolution of digital media, and by factors of convergence and interactivity’. The Secretariat was also charged with overall restructuring, through a process of reorganization and merging, of ‘all the realities which in various ways up to the present have dealt with communications’, so as to ‘respond ever better to the needs of the mission of the Church’.
- On 6 September 2016, the Statutes of the Secretariat for Communication were promulgated; they took effect last October.

With the two Motu Proprios of 15 August 2015, provisions were made for the reform of the canonical process in cases of declaration of marital nullity: *Mitis et Misericors Iesus* for the Code of Canons of the Oriental Churches, and *Mitis Iudex Dominus Iesus* for the Code of Canon Law.

- With the Motu Proprio of 4 June 2016 (*Come una madre amorevole*), an effort was made to prevent negligence on the part of bishops in the exercise of their office, especially with regard to cases of the sexual abuse of minors and vulnerable adults.
- With the Motu Proprio of 4 July 2016 (*I beni temporalis*), following the rule whereby the organs of oversight should be separate from those that being overseen, the respective areas of competence of the Secretariat of the Economy and of the Administration of the Patrimony of the Apostolic See should be more carefully delineated.
- With the Motu Proprio of 15 August 2016 (*Sedula Mater*), the Dicastery for Laity, the Family and Life was established, in the light of the general pastoral purpose of the Petrine ministry: ‘I hasten to arrange all things necessary in order that the richness of Christ Jesus may be poured forth appropriately and profusely among the faithful’.
- With the Motu Proprio of 17 August 2016 (*Humanum progressionem*), the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development was established, so that development can take place ‘by attending to the inestimable goods of justice, peace and the care of creation’. Beginning in January 2017, four Pontifical Councils - Justice and Peace, Cor Unum, the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, and Healthcare Workers – will be merged into this Dicastery. For the time being, I will directly head the section for the pastoral care of migrants and refugees in the new Dicastery.
- On 18 October 2016, the Statutes of the Pontifical Academy for Life were approved.

Our meeting today began by speaking of the meaning of Christmas as the overturning of our human criteria, in order to emphasize that the heart and centre of the reform is Christ (Christocentrism).

I would like to conclude simply with a word and a prayer. The word is to reiterate that Christmas is the feast of God’s loving humility. The prayer is the Christmas message of Father Matta el Meskin, a monk of our time, who, addressing the Lord Jesus born in Bethlehem, said: ‘If for us the experience of (your) infancy is so difficult, it is not so for you, O Son of God. If we stumble along the way that leads to communion with you because of your smallness, you are capable of removing all the obstacles that prevent us from doing this. We know that you will not be at peace until you find us in your likeness and with this (same) smallness. Allow us today, O Son of God,

to draw dear to your heart. Grant that we may not consider ourselves great in our experiences. Grant us instead to become small like you, so that we can draw near to you and receive from you abundant humility and meekness. Do not deprive us of your revelation, the epiphany of your infancy in our hearts, so that with it we can heal all our pride and all our arrogance. We greatly need... for you to reveal in us your simplicity, by drawing us, and indeed the Church and the whole world, to yourself. Our world is weary and exhausted, because everyone is vying to see who is the greatest. There is a ruthless competition between governments, churches, peoples, within families, from one parish to another: Who of us is the greatest? The world is festering with painful wounds because of this great illness: Who is the greatest? But today we have found in you, O Son of God, our one medicine. We, and the whole world, will not find salvation or peace unless we go back to encounter you anew in the manger of Bethlehem. Amen.

Thank you, and I wish you a Holy Christmas and a Blessed New Year 2017!"

At the end of his address, the Pope added the following extemporaneous remarks:

"When, two years ago, I spoke about the illnesses, one of you came to say to me: 'Where must I go, to the pharmacy or to confession?' 'Well... both!' I replied. And when I greeted Cardinal Brandmüller, he looked me in the eye and said: 'Acquaviva!' I, at the time, did not understand, but later, thinking about it, I remembered that Acquaviva, the third general of the Society of Jesus, had written a book which we students read in Latin; the spiritual fathers made us read it, and it was entitled: *Industriae pro Superioribus ejusdem Societatis ad curandos animae morbos*, that is, the illnesses of the soul. Three months ago, a very good edition came out in Italian, done by Father Giuliano Raffo, who died recently, with a good prologue which indicates how to read the book, and also with a good introduction. It is not a critical edition, but it is a really beautiful translation, very well done, and I believe it could be useful. As a Christmas gift, I would like to offer it to each one of you. Thank you".
