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The Pontifical Yearbook 2017 and the “Annuarium Statisticum Ecclesiae” 2015

edited by the Central Office of Church Statistics of the Secretariat of State

The Pontifical Yearbook 2017 and the *Annuarium Statisticum Ecclesiae* 2015, compiled and edited by the Central Office of Church Statistics, are currently being distributed in bookstores.

Both volumes were printed by the Vatican Press.

The data shown in the Pontifical Yearbook enable some new developments to be inferred in relation to the life of the Catholic Church in the world, from 2016.

During this period four new Episcopal sees, one Eparchy, two Apostolic Exarchates and one Ordinariate were erected, and an Apostolic Exarchate was elevated to an Eparchy.

The statistical data of the *Annuarium Statisticum*, which refer to the year 2015, provide a summary overview of the main trends affecting the development of the Catholic Church in the world.

The following describes the evolving trends in the five year period just ended, both of baptized Catholics and of the clergy, professed men religious other than priests, professed women religious and the number of priestly vocations. In order to facilitate an appreciation of the genuine granularity of the data, the information is provided on a global level as well as for the single geographical area. On the contrary, to filter for effects attributable solely to demographic trends, the time series are related to the number of inhabitants in the area. In this paper, the data of 2015, as well as being systematically compared to those of the previous year, are also compared with those of the five-year period that began in 2010, with the aim of extrapolating the evolutionary dynamics prevalent in the medium term. The time frame considered covers a total of the last two years of the pontificate of Pope Benedict and the first three years of the pontificate of Pope Francis, with important information about the Catholic Church in the new millennium.

The number of baptized Catholics has continued to grow globally, from 1,272 million in 2014 to 1,285 million in 2015, with a relative increase of 1 %. This represents a total of 17.7% of the total population. If a medium term

perspective is adopted, for example with reference to 2010, a more robust growth of 7.4% is shown. The dynamic of this increase varies from continent to continent: while, indeed, in Africa there is an increase of 19.4%, with the number of Catholics passing from 186 to 222 million in the same period, in Europe there is instead a situation of stability (in 2015 Catholics amounted to almost 286 million, whereas in 2019 there were just over 800 thousand fewer, and 1.3 million fewer compared to 2014). This stasis is due to the well-noted demographic situation, in which the population is in slight increase and is expected to decline sharply in the coming years. Intermediate situations with respect to the two described above are found in America and Asia, where the growth of Catholics is certainly important (respectively + 6.7% and 9.1%), but in line with the demographic trend of these two continents. Stagnation, obviously with lower values, is also typical of Oceania.

As these trends are correlated with those demographics, better information can be obtained from the relationship between the baptized Catholics and the number of inhabitants. In Africa, for example, the trend of growth is constant, while it is shown to be more contained in Asia and Oceania. It may also be underlined that in the various continents the relative number of Catholics varies between very different sizes, ranging, for the most recent year, from 3.2 Catholics per 100 inhabitants of Asia, to 63.7 in America. The relative number of Catholics is 19.4 in Africa to, 26.4 in Oceania and 39.9 in Europe.

The increased weight of the African continent is also confirmed, with an increase from 15.5% to 17.3% of global baptized faithful. There is, however, a sharp decline in Europe, from 23.8% of faithful worldwide in 2010 to 22.2% in 2015; America instead remains the continent to which almost 49% of baptized Catholics belong. Asian Catholics continue to represent around 11% of the world total 2015. The proportion of Catholics in Oceania also remains stable, although with a figure of less than 0.8% of the world's Catholic population.

A further examination of the territorial detail for each country and observation of the data for 2015 shows that Brazil, of the ten countries in the world with the greatest consistency of baptized Catholics, ranks in first place (with 172,200,000 or 26.4% of all Catholics of the entire American continent). Brazil is followed, in order, by Mexico (110.9 million), the Philippines (83.6 million), USA (72.3), Italy (58.0), France (48.3), Colombia (45.3), Spain (43.3), Democratic Republic of the Congo (43.2) and Argentina (40.8). The total number of Catholics, for the countries in the top ten places, amounts to 717.9 million, i.e. 55.9% of the world's Catholics. Statistics for 2015 also indicate that the number of clerics in the world amounted to 466,215, with 5,304 bishops, 415,656 priests and 45,255 permanent deacons.

The number of **bishops** has increased over time, satisfying the needs of an increased number of faithful and a numerical and functional balance with regard to the priestly body. In the last five years there has been an increase of 3.9%. Such movement of growth occurs in all continents, although the variation is more pronounced for the Asian continent (+ 5.4%) and Europe (4.2%) and below the general trend for America (+ 3.7%) and Africa (+ 2.3%). It can also be seen that the relative weight of each continent has remained, in the period, virtually unchanged and commensurate to the relative importance of the individual continental situations. In particular, in 2015, America holds 37.4% of all prelates, followed by Europe (with 31.6%), Asia (with 15.1%), Africa (13, 4%) and Oceania (2.5%).

In 2015 there is decline in the number of priests from the previous year, thus reversing the upward trend that characterized the years from 2000 to 2014. The decrease between 2014 and 2015 is of 136 units and particularly affects Europe (-2.502 units), whereas in the remaining continents positive changes are registered from year to year: +1133 units for Africa, +47 for America, +1104 for Asia and + 82 for Oceania. The total amount of priests in the world in 2015, compared to 2010, has increased by 0.83% (from 412,236 to 415,656 units). While Africa and Asia show a sustained trend (respectively + 17.4% and + 13.3%) and America has remained almost stationary (+ 0.35%), decidedly negative rates are registered for Europe and Oceania in the same period: respectively to -5.8 and -2.0 per cent. Then, looking at the distinction between diocesan and religious priests, there appears to be a clearly divergent evolution of the two categories. With regard to the first, there is a total increase of 1.6%, from 277,009 units in 2010 to 281,514 in 2015; the second, however, are in constant decrease (-0.8% in the period in question), arriving at slightly more than 134 thousand in 2015. The number of religious priests, in addition to being in line with the aggregate data, in decline in Europe and Oceania, also shows a significant reduction in the American continent, with just over 38,000 units in 2015 compared to over 40 thousand in 2010. The numerical change compared to 2010 is accompanied by a

noticeable structural variation within continents and sub-continents. The relationships of composition between the amounts in these areas and the world show, indeed, that Africa, the South and Central-Continental America and South East Asia have seen their proportion increase from 2010 to 2015, Middle East Asia and Oceania remain virtually stationary in this regard, and finally, the proportion of North America and Europe is in decline.

In particular, if in 2010 priests in Europe accounted for 46.1% of the global total, they dropped to little more than 43% in 2015 with a fall of three percentage points. Taking into consideration the relationship between the number of baptized Catholics present in the various continental areas and the number of priests, it can be seen that, while in 2010 an average of 2,900 Catholics were attributed to each priest, in 2015 this ratio rises to 3.091. The situation in America, where the Catholics per priest ratio exceeds 5,000 units and keeps increasing throughout the period, is particularly critical. But the presence of priests is also weakening in Europe, even though the latter has 1,595 Catholics per priest, the best ratio overall. The pastoral workload of priests in Asia has improved (from 2,269 to 2,185 Catholics per priest), while it is stable in Africa with around 5,000 Catholics per priest.

The population of **permanent deacons** shows a significant evolutionary trend: an increase in 2015 of 14.4% compared to five years previously, from 39,564 to 45,255 units. The number of deacons is improving on every continent at a significant pace. In Oceania, where they do not yet reach 1% of the total, they have increased by 13.8%, amounting to 395. The figure is also improving in areas where their presence is quantitatively significant. In America and Europe, where about 98% of the total population of deacons is found, they have increased in the relevant period by 16.2 and 10.5 per cent respectively.

The pastoral activity of the clergy is joined, too, by other types of pastoral workers, including in particular professed men religious other than priests and professed women religious: from the numerical analysis of these operators we can make some important observations.

The group of **professed men religious** other than priests constitutes a group in decline globally: from 54,665 individuals in 2010 to 54,229 in 2015. The decline is attributable, in order of importance, to the European, American and Oceanic groups, while in Africa there has been an increase of these operators, as well as in Asia to a lesser extent. These trends also determine a different numerical dislocation, over time, between different continents: Europe and America, in 2015, remain the continents with the largest number of professed men religious other than priests (16,004 and 15,321, respectively, out of a worldwide total of 54,229 individuals), but less so than at the beginning of the period considered.

Women religious constitute a population with a certain consistency: in 2015 they exceed by 61% the number of priests worldwide, and are currently in clear decline. At global level, they have decreased in number from 721,935 in 2010 to 670,320 in 2015, a relative diminution of 7.1%. Profound differences emerge when analyzing the time series for the individual territorial areas.

Africa is the continent with the highest increase of religious, from 66,375 in 2010 to 71,567 in 2015, with a relative increase of 7.8% for the entire period and an average annual growth rate of 1.6%. It is followed by South East Asia, where professed women religious have increased in number from 160,564 in 2010 to 166,786 in 2015, an increase of 3.9% over the entire period and an annual average growth rate of 0.78%. In South and Central America, in the same period, there is a drop from 122,213 in 2010 to 112,051 in 2015, with an overall decrease of 8.3% and a average of -1.7% per annum. Finally, three continental areas have experienced a sharp decline: North America (-17.9% over the period and 3.6% as an annual average rate of change), Europe (-13.4% and -2.7%) and Oceania (-13.8% and -2.7%). These areas therefore have a significant impact on global data.

There is a continuation of the decline which has for some years characterized priestly vocations: in 2015 there was a total of 116,843 **major seminarians**, up from 116,939 in 2014; 118,251 in 2013; 120,051 in 2012; 120,616 in 2011 and 118,990 in 2010. The rate has dropped, in turn, from 99.5 seminarians per million Catholics in 2010 to 90.9 in 2015. A brief disaggregated analysis at sub-continental level highlights that forms of local behaviour are deeply differentiated, so that the global examination of the evolution of the numerical consistency of vocations may be not exhaustive.

In Africa, for example, the number of major seminarians in the period under examination has steadily increased, with an increase of 7.7% for the entire period. In all areas of America we have witnessed a continuous decline in vocations, resulting in a variation of -8.1%. In the Middle East, the decrease was accentuated until 2013 and the subsequent development does not show unique trends; conversely in South East Asia, the initial growth ended in 2012 (+ 4.5% compared to 2010), and was followed by a marked decline which brought the number of major seminarians in 2015 at a level 1.6% less than the maximum of 2012.

In Europe from 2010 to 2015, the number of seminarians has decreased by 9.7%. In Oceania, the highest figure was recorded in 2012, followed by continuous decline – the number of seminarians in 2015 was 6.9% lower than in 2012. Of the 116,843 seminarians from all over the world, in 2015, the continent with the greatest number of seminarians was Asia with 34,741 individuals. It is followed by America with 33,512, Africa with 29,007, Europe with 18,579 and finally Oceania with 1,004 seminarians. It is different if one takes into account the number of Catholics on each continent. In fact, considering the intensity of priestly vocations with the number of seminarians for a million Catholics, we see that vocations are more common in Asia (245.7 seminarians for a million Catholics) and in Africa (130.6). Europe and America with 65.0 and 53.6 seminarians per million Catholics, respectively, occupy the last positions. As a consequence of the above findings it is evident that the relative weight of the various continents, with regard to the candidates for the priesthood, has changed significantly during the course of the period of observation, so that for example while Africa in 2010 accounted for 22.6% and in 2015 for 24.8%, in Europe is the number of seminarians reduced from 17.3 to 15.9 percent.

The analysis of the preceding paragraphs suggests the emergence of a mixed picture in which, alongside the persistence of very long-term evolutionary trends, there are relatively recent dynamics in a consolidation phase, in some cases not necessarily in the desired direction.

Among the dynamics already consolidated, is the confirmation of the positive trend in the number of Catholics in the world, especially in the African continent, whose relative weight continues to increase over time. With reference to the trends among the various pastoral workers, particularly in the period 2010-2015, there has been a significant growth in the number of bishops, deacons, lay missionaries and catechists in the face of a clear reduction in the professed religious brothers and professed women religious. Among the clergy, in particular, although there is an improvement in the overall number of bishops compared to that of Catholics, the number of priests suffered a setback in 2015, with a decline largely attributable to the two geographical areas of Europe and North America. Inside the category of priests, then, the statistics show the persistence of diverging trends between religious and diocesan priests, with a relative reduction of the first compared to a moderate expansion of the second group.

Finally, the datum that merits particular attention relates to the progress of priestly vocations. Indeed, the number of seminarians, after reaching a maximum in 2011, has suffered a gradual reduction. The sole exception remains Africa, which does not yet seem to be affected by the crisis in vocations and is confirmed as the geographical area with the greatest potential.
