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**UND RELIGION**

FACHARTIKEL

**THE DICASTERY FOR COMMUNICATION IN THE SYNODAL PATH  
OF THE "OUTGOING CHURCH"**

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ISSN 2749-2826, DOI [10.5282/nomokanon/271](https://doi.org/10.5282/nomokanon/271)

veröffentlicht am 18.09.2024

# THE DICASTERY FOR COMMUNICATION IN THE SYNODAL PATH OF THE "OUTGOING CHURCH"

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**Summary:** Reaching the conclusion of a long collegial journey, today synodality is indicated as the 'usual' working method for the Roman Curia, a style already in place, but to be developed and implemented over time. This path, according to the Pope's intentions, should prove to be a true revision of the Church's identity, configuration and mission, and not just of some of its operational elements. From it would derive the hermeneutics for a reform in a synodal key, which finds its foundation in the commitment to an essential co-responsibility, not only auxiliary or subsidiary, where synodality is presented as an operational and organic principle. The theme of synodality is linked to the missionary nature of the Church *ad extra*, and it is particularly evident in *Praedicate Evangelium*. The challenge of a Church in transition capable of recovering the dynamics proper to the *traditio* through its heterogeneity in the communion of service, looms particularly large for the Dicastery for Communication.

**Riassunto:** Giungendo alla conclusione di un lungo percorso collegiale, oggi la sinodalità viene indicata come il metodo di lavoro "abituale" della Curia romana, uno stile già in atto, ma da sviluppare e implementare nel tempo. Questo percorso, secondo le intenzioni del Papa, dovrebbe rivelarsi una vera e propria revisione dell'identità, della configurazione e della missione della Chiesa, e non solo di alcuni suoi elementi operativi. Da essa deriverebbe l'ermeneutica per una riforma in chiave sinodale, che trova il suo fondamento nell'impegno per una corresponsabilità essenziale, non solo ausiliaria o sussidiaria, dove la sinodalità si presenta come principio operativo e organico. Il tema della sinodalità è legato alla natura missionaria della Chiesa *ad extra*, ed è particolarmente evidente nel *Praedicate Evangelium*. La sfida di una Chiesa in transizione, capace di recuperare le dinamiche proprie della *traditio* attraverso la sua eterogeneità nella comunione del servizio, si profila particolarmente grande per il Dicastero per la Comunicazione.

Reaching the conclusion of a long collegial journey - culminating in the launching of the Council of Cardinals, instituted by means of a chirograph by the Pontiff on 28 September 2013<sup>1</sup> - today synodality is indicated as the "usual" way of working for the Roman Curia, a style already in place, but to be developed and implemented over time<sup>2</sup>. The theme, that of synodality, which is particularly dear to the current Pontiff, is reminiscent of the first words of his pontificate, proclaimed from the loggia of St. Peter's on the evening of 13 March 2013, immediately after his election: «And now, let us begin this journey: bishop and people. This journey of the Church of Rome, which is the one that presides in charity over all the Churches. A journey of brotherhood, of love, of trust among us»<sup>3</sup>. It is a path that, according to the Pope's intentions, should prove to be a true revision of the Church's identity, configuration and mission, and not just of some of its operational elements<sup>4</sup>. That is, it is a matter of

<sup>1</sup> Following the renewal of the Council by the Pope on 7 March 2023, the Council of Cardinals is composed by Cardinals Pietro Parolin, Secretary of State; Fernando Vérgez Alzaga, President of the Pontifical Commission for Vatican City State and Governorate of Vatican City State; Fridolin Ambongo Besungu, Archbishop of Kinshasa; Oswald Gracias, Archbishop of Bombay; Seán Patrick O'Malley, Archbishop of Boston; Juan José Omella Omella, Archbishop of Barcelona; Gérald Lacroix, Archbishop of Quebec; Jean-Claude Hollerich, Archbishop of Luxembourg; Sérgio da Rocha, Archbishop of São Salvador da Bahia. The secretary is Monsignor Marco Mellino, titular bishop of Cresima.

<sup>2</sup> For more details cf. *Lanave, Gregory F.*, Diachronic Synodality: Synodality within Tradition, in: *The Thomist* 87 (2023) 173-190.

<sup>3</sup> *Pope Francis*, Apostolic Blessing „Urbi et Orbi”, 13 March 2013, in: [First greeting of the Holy Father Pope Francis - Apostolic Blessing "Urbi et Orbi" \(13 March 2013\) | Francis \(vatican.va\)](#).

<sup>4</sup> The Pontiff refers to synodality as a process of reconfiguration of identities, relationships and communicative dynamics between ecclesial subjects, and its consequences in the conception, organisation and governance of institutions in the Church. So it is a matter of thinking of a new ecclesial 'way forward' (cf. *Luciani, Rafael*, Tempo di conversione, tempo di riforma, in: *Il Regno. Attualità* 2 (2022) 58).



the episcopal sphere and proceeds to affect the governance of the Church in the local reality<sup>10</sup>. Already in the Preamble of *Praedicate Evangelium*, the link between the conciliar concept of synodality as communion and the relationship of this with the criteria of spirituality, missionisation and subsidiarity, which facilitate its realisation, is evident, especially in numbers 2, 3 and 4. In the synodal dynamic of pastoral conversion promoted by the curial reform, therefore, the criterion of "concentration" must be placed alongside that of decentralisation, which indicates the objective of simplification<sup>11</sup>. In the curial reform desired by the Pope, this criterion is also realised in the transformation and merger of the former Pontifical Councils into a series of Dicasteries. This was the case with the Dicastery for Communication into which, also on the basis of the application of the criterion of innovation, the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, the Holy See Press Office, the Vatican Internet Service, Vatican Radio, the Vatican Television Centre, L'Osservatore Romano, the Vatican Printing Press, the Photographic Service, and the Vatican Publishing House are merged; they represent that 'material structure of the Church', capable of finding in the communicative aspect the means and instrument through which the evangelising mission can reach the "existential peripheries" and place itself also at the service of the "last ones"<sup>12</sup>. This is why the Dicastery for Communication "has a very recent history with ancient roots"<sup>13</sup>. In the "families" that comprise it and which are moulded into a single structure, beat the hearts of the different realities that for many decades have supported the pontifical magisterium and Vatican information, through traditional means and multimedia technologies<sup>14</sup>. Article 183 of the Apostolic Constitution states that this Dicastery, in taking care of the entire communication system of the Apostolic See, unifies all the realities of the Holy See in the field of communication in structural unity and in respect of the relative operational characteristics, so that the entire system responds coherently to the needs of the evangelising mission of the Church in a context characterised by the presence and development of digital media, by the factors of convergence and interactivity<sup>15</sup>.

The Pontiff, therefore, in the perspective of an authentic decentralisation, entrusts a mission through the discernment of a competence or charisma that justifies the decision itself. In this way, the authority delegated by the *missio canonica* would configure, from a juridical point of view, the service of the subject involved. The personal charisma is put to use according to the competencies of the various Dicasteries<sup>16</sup>. It becomes fundamental that the person chosen be an ordained or lay person, so that a

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**10** What is at stake is not the sense of the individual Bishop it is the sense of the whole Church, the *sensus Ecclesiae totius populi*. In this way, institutional mediations must be promoted which not only allow for the acceptance and discernment of the hearing, but also for the results obtained to be binding for the processes of change necessary for the renewal of the ecclesial institution. It is important to take into account all the communicative dynamics involved in a synodal Church, since the purpose of this synodal journey is not simply to meet and get to know each other better, but to work together in order to make pastoral decisions (cf. *Luciani, Rafael, Noceti, Serena, Imparare un'eclesialità sinodale*, in: *Il Regno. Attualità* 8 (2021) 257-264.

**11** Demands for decentralisation are evaluated realistically, taking into account the effective possibilities of each episcopate, since often the present situation is not a consequence of centralisation, but rather of the need for substitution (on the subject cf. *Arrieta, Juan Ignacio*, *Presupposti organizzativi della Curia Romana*, in: *Ius Ecclesiae* XXVII (2015) 37-60.

**12** Cfr. [The-synodal-journey-Documents-EN.pdf](#), 255-267.

**13** *De Carolis, Alessandro*, [The humble ambition to communicate to all - Vatican News](#).

**14** Cfr. *Ibidem*.

**15** Cfr. *Pope Francis*, Apostolic Constitution "Praedicate Evangelium" on the Roman Curia and its Service to the Church in the World (19 March 2022), in: *AAS* 114 (2022) 375-455.

**16** The promulgation of the Apostolic Constitution, *Praedicate Evangelium*, in confirming, from a juridical point of view, the innovations previously introduced by pontifical provisions with a view to the missionary conversion of the Church, is functional to the great project of reform of the Roman Curia that has been underway for over ten years (for more details see *Ouellet, Marc*, *La riforma della Curia romana nell'ambito dei fondamenti del diritto nella Chiesa*, at: <https://www.osservatoreromano.va/it/news/2022-07/quo-164/la-riforma-della-curia-romana-nell-ambito-dei-fondamenti-del-di.html>).

pneumatological perspective does not upset the hierarchical structure of the Church, because in continuity with the Church's Tradition it would be under the sign of synodality<sup>17</sup>.

A path of synodality is what was traced out by the Pontiff in *Praedicate Evangelium*, in particular in the regulation of the Dicastery for Communication. This represents the key to understanding this new season of the Church, which orients its objectives and style of witness, and which also sees in the work of streamlining the Dicasteries a rationalisation of quality<sup>18</sup>. Certainly, the idea of the Curia as "a sort of platform and forum for communication", from which the particular churches and the Holy See must benefit equally, is an ambitious project that needs adequate tools to be realised, as emphasised in no. 42 of the Apostolic Constitution, where the Apostolic See is called upon to provide the Church with a platform for communication<sup>19</sup>. In no. 42 of the Apostolic Constitution, it is stressed that the "synodal" approach to solving problems can make use of the "frank and cordial dialogue" between the Dicasteries. They can advise and encourage the particular Churches and Episcopal Conferences, giving them "appropriate suggestions and indications" and receiving from them "suggestions and indications for an ever more effective service". This is an exchange in which the "centre" discovers what is happening in the "periphery" and the "periphery" can benefit from the "centre's" know-how.<sup>20</sup> What emerges from the discipline of the Dicastery for Communication is, therefore, a synodal path for all to travel upon, the realisation of which must be carried out by the entire People of God. Because synodality cannot be limited to a mere extension of the exercise of collegiality but presupposes that the exercise of co-responsibility by all the faithful is essential and binding, in order to realise a hermeneutical model of "ecclesiastical institutionality" that also functions organically through consensus building<sup>21</sup>.

Reflecting on how the Church can be more synodal, understanding synodality as a "constitutive and constituent dimension" of the Church itself, is a question of method concerning the ways and means of communion and participation of the faithful in the life of the Church. Even in the face of the just expectations of renewal, or in the face of the demand for a clear and courageous language on the questions of our time, the Church cannot evade her role. As reaffirmed in canon 747 § 2, her task of proclaiming always and everywhere "moral principles also regarding the social order, and likewise pronouncing judgement on any human reality, insofar as the fundamental rights of the human person or the salvation of souls demand it"<sup>22</sup>. Starting from this concept, it is evident how reflecting synodality in the Curia requires the strengthening of collegial bodies and the revision of administrative management procedures, since it is not only structures, but above all governance procedures that will be able to impart the proper spirit of communion to the central organisation of the Roman Curia<sup>23</sup>.

<sup>17</sup> Cfr. Ibidem.

<sup>18</sup> For more details see *Ganarin, Manuel*, La Costituzione apostolica *Praedicate Evangelium* di Papa Francesco, in: *La Costituzione Apostolica Praedicate Evangelium di Papa Francesco - L-JUS*.

<sup>19</sup> Cfr. *Masotti, Adriana*, *Ruffini: il Sinodo, la proposta dell'ascolto in un'epoca di scontri e monologhi - Vatican News*.

<sup>20</sup> For further information on the subject cfr. *Manlio, Miele*, La sinodalità tra principio e metodo. Brevi note, in: *JUS- ONLINE 6 (2020) 257-282*; *Id.*, La sinodalità nell'ecclesologia di Papa Francesco, in: *Artigo 3,6 (2020) 159-188*; *De Salis, Miguel*, La sinodalità della Chiesa. Sensi e contorni di una espressione, in: *Annale Theologici 36 (2022) 283-316*.

<sup>21</sup> Consequently, the effective way to meet to the postulate of "collegiality" is not so much the recourse to international collegial bodies of representation, but rather the establishment of appropriate administrative procedures to be followed in the line-up of measures which, together with due monitoring, enable the involvement of diocesan Pastors and competent Dicasteries (cf. on this point *Arrieta*, *Presupposti (Anm. 11)*, 50-58).

<sup>22</sup> For an effective synthesis on the subject of *salus animarum* cf. *Pellegrino, Piero*, La *salus animarum*, in: *Ius Canonicum 87 (2004) 141-151*.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. *Ouellet*, La riforma della curia romana (*Anm. 16*).

The challenge is to understand that we are a Church in transition capable of recovering the dynamics proper to tradition.

It is a challenge that, given its heterogeneity in the communion of service, looms particularly large for the Dicastery for Communication which, as underlined by Prefect Ruffini, in the interview given to the Vatican Press Office on 28 September 2023 on the pre-synodal prayer vigil, sees in synodality "not an algebraic counting of prior opinions", but rather the "alternative proposal" that the Church can offer to the entire world<sup>24</sup>. As emphasised by the Pontiff in his address to the Plenary Assembly of the Dicastery on 12 November 2022, a truly "synodal" communication can only be achieved through the "humanisation" of communication itself, which means dialogue, promotion of evangelical values, immersion in the "existential peripheries" to give voice to the voiceless, in awareness of the "fatigue of communicating" and in commitment to achieving the "communion between diversities" that makes communication an "encounter", "sharing" and a "witness"<sup>25</sup>. Humanisation that, as underlined by the Pontiff in his message for the 58th World Communications Day, on 29 September 2023, must be confronted today with the evolution of artificial intelligence systems, so that these do not deprive "the warmth" that only communication between people can generate<sup>26</sup>. As stated in Article 184 of the Curial Reform, is necessary to implement the profound link between the needs of the evangelising mission of the Church and the use of technological innovations, also futures, in order to preserve the unity of faith and manifest the pluralism of the Church in a salvific perspective.

This is also evident in the delicate task with which art. 186 of *Praedicate Evangelium* entrusts the Dicastery, which must strive "that the faithful may be ever more aware of the duty, incumbent on each individual, to commit themselves to ensuring that the multiple instruments of communication are at the disposal of the Church's pastoral mission, at the service of the growth of civilisation and morals", dedicating itself to "such awareness especially on the occasion of the celebration of World Communications Day", a task that the Dicastery performs, as stated in Art. 187 of *Praedicate Evangelium*, in synergy with the "connectivity and network infrastructures of Vatican City State, in conformity with the specific legislation and international commitments undertaken by the Holy See". In this way, it fulfils its function through an attitude of "collaboration with the relevant Curial Institutions and in particular with the Secretariat of State". Thus, it improves the efficiency of editorial and technological production processes, thanks to a careful management of activities and a management control system, as stated in Art. 188 of the Apostolic Constitution. So, the Dicastery supports the function of the other Curial Institutions that are based in the Vatican City State, or that depend on the Apostolic See, in their communication activities<sup>27</sup>.

In today's reality, in which the "poor in the peripheries of life" await the Word of Salvation, in which the hoped-for integration between peoples takes on business connotations that make its implementation complex, communication assumes fundamental importance, at every level, on every front, in the manner in which it is expressed, and in the ends it proposes to achieve<sup>28</sup>. For these

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. Masotti, Ruffini (Anm. 19).

<sup>25</sup> Cf. *Pope Francis, A Dipendenti e Partecipanti all'Assemblea Plenaria del Dicastero per la Comunicazione (12 novembre 2022) | Francesco (vatican.va)*. For the Pontiff, communication is about making people less lonely and giving a voice to the marginalised, because communication is "the craft of bonds" in which God's voice resonates and is heard (cf. *Campisi, Tiziana, Comunicare è rendere le persone meno sole*, in: *Francesco: comunicare è rendere le persone meno sole e dare voce agli esclusi - Vatican News*).

<sup>26</sup> Cf. *Pope Francis, Messaggio del Santo Padre Francesco per la 58ma Giornata Mondiale delle Comunicazioni Sociali (vatican.va)*.

<sup>27</sup> For further information on this Dicastery cf. *Tarantino, Daniela, Comunicare la testimonianza. Il Dicastero per la Comunicazione nella riforma curiale, Varazze (SV) 2023*.

<sup>28</sup> Attention to marginality, to the social and internal peripheries, to waste and to the essential is a central point in the teaching of Pope Francis, who has repeatedly stressed that a conscious discernment of the essential can only take place in the light of the Gospel, which the Church is called to proclaim starting from the "peripheries". These are not only places, but also and above all people. The men and

reasons, the Dicastery for Communication plays a vastly important role, in which the spirit of the curial operators must fully manifest itself, in that “grammar of communication”, which Prefect Ruffini defines as a “mission within a mission”<sup>29</sup>, to keep one's gaze fixed on that “communicative context” that is constantly changing, but which always has as its goal to communicate the joy of the Gospel.

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women of our time are in great danger of living an individualistic sadness, isolated even in the midst of an abundance of consumer goods from which many remain excluded. For this reason, a world in such rapid transformation demands that Christians be willing to search for forms or ways of communicating the perennial newness of Christianity in a comprehensible language, learning to keep their gaze fixed on the essential.(cf. *Pope Francis, Messaggio del Santo Padre al Meeting per l'amicizia fra i popoli [Rimini, 24 - 30 agosto 2014] | Francesco (vatican.va).*

**29** *Ruffini, Paolo, Profile Dicastery for Communication (vatican.va).*