

# A CONSIDERATION OF THE CHURCH ON THE BASIS OF THE COMMON CHRISTIAN CONDITION

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SUMMARY: I. *The baptismal perspective.* II. *The articulation of Ecclesiology.*

IN the early Twentieth Century, during the first decades of the priestly ministry of St. Josemaría, Catholic teaching and practice emphasized the distinction between pastors and faithful almost to the point of separation. This emphasis went back to the reaction to Protestant anti-hierarchical thought, with its unilateral position regarding the equality of all the baptized. This explains the scant reference in the Catholic theology to the common Christian vocation, an absence that was even felt, for example, in the works of the First Vatican Council, in which the Church was spoken of as a society of non-equals. Thus, we read in the first draft of *Pastor Aeternus*:

The Church of Christ is not a community of equals, in which all believers would have the same rights, but rather it is a society of non-equals, not only because among believers some are clerics and others are laypersons, but also, in a special way, because in the Church resides the power of God, for which it is given to some, and not to others, to sanctify, teach, and govern.<sup>1</sup>

A similar orientation was also manifested in the pontifical magisterium of the epoch, for example, that of Leo XIII.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, in the encyclical *Vehementer Nos* of 1906, St. Pius X stated:

The Scripture teaches us, and the tradition of the Fathers confirms the teaching, that the Church is the mystical body of Christ, ruled by the *Pastors* and *Doctors* a society of men containing within its own fold chiefs [leaders] who have full and perfect powers for ruling, teaching and judging (Mt. 18, 18-20; 16, 18-19; 18,17; Titus 2,15; 1Cor. 10, 6; 13,10). It follows that the Church is essentially an *unequal* society, that is, a society comprising two categories of persons [*sic*], the Pastors and the flock, those who oc-

<sup>1</sup> J.D. MANSI, *Sacrorum Conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio*, Akademische Druck, Graz 1960-1962, vol. 51, col. 543.

<sup>2</sup> LEO XIII wrote to the archbishop of Tours: "It remains and is clear that in the Church there are two very different orders by nature: the shepherds and the flock; that is, the leaders and the people. The first order has the function of teaching, governing, and leading the people in life and imposing rules; the other has the duty of submitting itself to the first, to obey and honor their orders." (ASS 21 [1888] 322).

copy a rank in the different degrees of the hierarchy and the multitude of the faithful. So distinct are these categories that with the pastoral body only rests the necessary right and authority for promoting the end of the society and directing all its members towards that end; the one duty of the multitude is to allow themselves to be led, and, like a docile flock, to follow the Pastors.<sup>1</sup>

Theology also emphasized the inequality between clergy and laity, as can be verified with a simple consultation of the academic textbooks that were in use. Naturally, the problem with this approach was not in the affirmation of the existence of a hierarchical ministry or a specific priestly ministry within the Church, but in the way in which this fact was presented: as a starting point for the conception of the Church, barely granting relevance to the common condition shared by pastors and the faithful. Moreover, in emphasizing the difference between the hierarchy and the faithful in this way, it was inevitable to conceive the Church as a pyramidal institution that is unequal in essence and divided into categories, which, in practice, came with it the risk of identifying the Church with its hierarchy. Therefore, the value of the baptismal vocation of the simple faithful was obscured, subordinating them to the clergy, and though they certainly could and had to help, it was without exerting a direct responsibility in the mission.

To this we must add the distinction (which was common at that time) between the 'two paths' of the 'precepts' and of the 'counsels', that is, between the path of the commandments, belonging to the majority of Christians; and the path of greater perfection in the profession of the evangelical counsels, which is open only to a few. It was the inevitable conclusion that the simple baptized found themselves in a situation of objective spiritual inferiority.

In this climate of ideas, one finds a contrast in the message of St. Josemaría on the universal call to holiness and apostolate of all the baptized. Such a contrast was not exempt from misunderstanding, according to his own testimony. "When I saw in 1928 what Our Lord wanted of me, I immediately set to work. At that time (...) I was taken for a madman. Some people indeed, in an excess of understanding, called me a dreamer, but a dreamer of impossible dreams."<sup>2</sup>

Those dreams, which were the heart of his preaching and activity, constitute a work of enduring effect in the Church. It is worthwhile to investigate the ecclesiological conception that this message implies, not only in those instances, but also for a proper understanding of the present day Church. In order to adjust to the time available, we shall limit ourselves to some brief considerations.

<sup>1</sup> Pius X, Enc. *Vehementer nos*, 11 February 1906, in ASS 39 (1906) 8-9.

<sup>2</sup> *Friends of God*, no. 59. The English version of the works of St. Josemaría Escrivá and its numeration are taken from [www.escrivaworks.org](http://www.escrivaworks.org). The works quoted without an author are always and only of St. Josemaría.

## I. THE BAPTISMAL PERSPECTIVE

As we know, St. Josemaría directed his preaching and pastoral activity mainly to those whom he called ‘ordinary’ Christians. As the expression indicates, the ordinary Christian is one who, incorporated to Christ by baptism and made a participant in the mission of the Church, lives in the ordinary conditions of the world. Those Christians were, of course, the lay Christians, who St. Josemaría encouraged to become aware of their vocation and mission in the Church and in the world. However, it is significant that St. Josemaría, in addressing the laity, appealed above all to their status as baptized. He certainly did not fail to insist, throughout his life, on the secular character of the laity. However, a fact that cannot go unnoticed is the importance that St. Josemaría granted to the event of baptism. “I have always thought – he said in 1968 – that the basic characteristic of the development of the laity is a new awareness of the dignity of the Christian vocation. God’s call, the character conferred by Baptism, and grace mean that every single Christian can and should be a living expression of the faith.”<sup>1</sup> The defining characteristic of the laity is not primarily their secularity, although it is a relevant factor. Actually, for the lay Christians, to be Christian is their substantive reality, and being lay is the way in which their baptismal vocation is configured, which, incidentally, is similarly applicable to priests and religious, inasmuch as pastoral ministry and religious life presuppose the condition of the baptized.

Taking Baptism as a starting point has notable ecclesiological consequences. “This brings with it a deeper awareness of the Church as a community made up of all the faithful, where all share in one and the same mission, which each should fulfil according to his personal circumstances.”<sup>2</sup> The consideration of Baptism, which presupposes faith, makes the Church appear in its primary condition as a *congregatio fidelium* or as a convocation of those called to communion with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Starting from Baptism, emphasis was placed on the unity between pastors and the faithful in the common Christian condition, in the ontology of the ‘new creature’ in Christ, that is, men and women redeemed by Christ and transformed into children of God by faith and Baptism. Before any division of duties and responsibilities, this equality was given to all believers. It is in the interior of the baptismal unity where the distinction of special vocations, duties, and charisms is placed, all in essential complementarity. In this way, the unity of vocation, the distinction of services and the communion of all in the mission, are all in the internal dimensions of the Church, which we shall now illustrate starting from the pastoral preaching and praxis of St. Josemaría.

In the first place, there is the unity of the baptismal vocation. Becoming aware of the laity, we have said, meant placing in the foreground the equality based

<sup>1</sup> *Conversations*, no. 58.

<sup>2</sup> *Conversations*, no. 59.

in Baptism. This was stated repeatedly by St. Josemaría. “In the Church there is equality, because once baptized we are all equal, all children of the same God, our Father. There is no difference as Christians between the Pope and someone who has just joined the Church.”<sup>1</sup> “A priest is no more a man or a Christian than any ordinary lay person (...) it would be a serious error to argue that a priest is more a member of the faithful than an unordained Christian is.”<sup>2</sup> By virtue of the common baptismal condition, priests and lay persons share the same requirements of holiness and of mission. “As Christian faithful, priests and lay people share one and the same condition, for God our Lord has called us to the fullness of charity which is holiness”.<sup>3</sup> “There are no second-class Christians, obliged to practice only a ‘simplified version’ of the Gospel. We have all received the same baptism.”<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, Baptism creates the quality of being a member of the People of God, consecrated as the Body of Christ the Priest. There is in Saint Josemaría a strong awareness of the common priesthood of the faithful. “Through baptism all of us have been made priests of our lives, ‘to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.’ Everything we do can be an expression of our obedience to God’s will and so perpetuate the mission of the God-man.”<sup>5</sup> The life of the Christian is the unfolding of the filial and priestly condition granted through baptismal incorporation in Christ.<sup>6</sup> “Each of us is to be

<sup>1</sup> *In Love with the Church*, no. 30.

<sup>2</sup> *In Love with the Church*, nos. 40-41. The complete paragraph reads: “In those who have been ordained, the ministerial priesthood is added to the common priesthood of all of the faithful. Therefore, although it would be a serious error to argue that a priest is more a member of the faithful than an unordained Christian is, it can, on the other hand, be said that he is more a priest: like all Christians he belongs to the priestly people redeemed by Christ, and in addition to this he is marked with a character of the priestly ministry which differentiates him essentially and not only in degree from the common priesthood of the faithful.”. The expression “is more a priest” has to be understood in light of the essential difference, and not as a matter of degree, something which St. Josemaría recalls in the same paragraph. The priest is not ‘more’ priest on the level of the common priesthood, but the ordained member of the faithful, in addition to the common priesthood which remains in him, receives the ministerial priesthood. The common priesthood remains with its own contents in the sacred ministries, not being ‘surpassed’ or ‘subsumed’ by the ministerial priesthood. The common priesthood demands of the faithful-minister that his ministerial priesthood become ‘existential’: an existence lived by the priest in a spirit of self-denial.

<sup>3</sup> *In Love with the Church*, no. 37.

<sup>4</sup> “There are no second-class Christians, obliged to practice only a ‘simplified version’ of the Gospel. We have all received the same baptism, and although there is a great variety of spiritual gifts and human situations, there is only one Spirit who distributes God’s gifts, only one faith, only one hope, only one love.” (*Christ is Passing by*, no. 134).

<sup>5</sup> *Christ is Passing by*, no. 96.

<sup>6</sup> “An apostle – that is what a Christian is, when he knows that he has been grafted onto Christ, made one with Christ, in baptism. He has been given the capacity to carry on the battle in Christ’s name, through confirmation. He has been called to serve God by his activity in the world, because of the common priesthood of the faithful, which makes him share in some way in the priesthood of Christ. This priesthood – though essentially distinct from the ministerial priesthood – gives him the capacity to take part in the worship of the Church and to help other men in their journey to God, with the witness of his word and his example, through his prayer and work of atonement. Each of us is to be ipse Christus: Christ himself. He is the one mediator between God and man. And we

*ipse Christus*: Christ himself. He is the one mediator between God and man. And we make ourselves one with him in order to offer all things, with him, to the Father.”<sup>1</sup> With his activity, example, and word, with prayer and the offering of his life to God, the Christian is “called to serve God by his activity in the world, because of the common priesthood of the faithful.”<sup>2</sup>

To affirm baptismal equality was obviously not, for Saint Josemaría, a polemic affirmation in the face of the ministerial hierarchy, nor did it mean to ignore all difference in the Church. “The Church is by divine will a hierarchical institution.”<sup>3</sup> In reality, to speak of equality is to underline the unity that sustains any further distinction. In the bosom of the priestly People, in effect, some of its members are called through Christ to be ministers of the Lord, that is, to represent Him before His brothers and sisters as the unique Mediator and Head of His Body: the bestowal of Orders gives them the capacity to act *in persona Christi*. Their task as representative of Christ is indispensable for the Church.<sup>4</sup>

Nonetheless, the ministerial priesthood does not absorb the entire Christian mission. “Spreading the kingdom of God isn’t only an official task of those members of the Church who represent Christ.”<sup>5</sup> In virtue of the common priesthood, the mission constitutes, for the Christian, something “instinctive. It is not something added onto his daily activities and his professional work from the outside.”<sup>6</sup> “Being a Christian is not simply a way to personal contentment; it implies a mission.”<sup>7</sup> This responsibility of the faithful in mission derives from

make ourselves one with him in order to offer all things, with him, to the Father.” (*Christ is Passing by*, no. 120).

<sup>1</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>3</sup> *In Love with the Church*, no. 30.

<sup>4</sup> “The sanctifying role of the lay person is incomplete without the sanctifying role of the priest, who administers the Sacrament of Penance, celebrates the Eucharist and proclaims the word of God in the name of the Church. (*Conversations*, no. 69). “The Church is by divine will a hierarchical institution. The Second Vatican Council (Const. dogm. *Lumen gentium*, no. 8), describes it as a society structured with hierarchical organs in which the ministers are invested with a sacred power (*ibid.*, no. 18)” (*The Supernatural Aim of the Church*, in *In Love with the Church*, no. 30). “If they are not in union with the bishops and with their head, the Pope, they cannot, if they are Catholics, be united to Christ.” (*Conversations*, no. 59). “In the sacrament of holy orders our Father God has made it possible for some members of the faithful, by virtue of a further and ineffable communication of the Holy Spirit, to receive an indelible character on their soul which configures them to Christ the priest so that they can act in the name of Jesus Christ, head of his mystical body (cfr. CONCILIIUM TRIDENTINUM, sess. XXIII, c. 14. CONCILIIUM VATICANUM II, Decr. *Presbyterorum ordinis*, no. 2). By virtue of this ministerial priesthood—which differs essentially and not only in degree from the common priesthood of the faithful (cfr. Const. dogm. *Lumen gentium*, no. 10)—the sacred ministers can consecrate the body and blood of Christ, offering God the holy sacrifice. They can pardon sins in sacramental confession and carry out the ministry of teaching the peoples ‘about everything that refers to God’” (*Christ is Passing by*, no. 79). “By expressed divine will there are different functions which imply different capacities, an indelible character conferred on the sacred ministers by the Sacrament of Orders” (*In Love with the Church*, no. 30).

<sup>5</sup> “Spreading the kingdom of God isn’t only an official task of those members of the Church who represent Christ because they have received sacred powers from him. ‘You are also the body of Christ’, says the Apostle, with a specific command to fulfil.” (*Christ is Passing by*, no. 121).

<sup>6</sup> *Christ is Passing by*, no. 122.

<sup>7</sup> *Christ is Passing by*, no. 98.

Baptism.<sup>1</sup> It does not derive from a delegation from the hierarchy,<sup>2</sup> though obviously it must be carried out in communion with the hierarchy. Neither is the work of the faithful limited only to participation in the “apostolate of the hierarchy,” according to the common expression of the time period. There is a significant insistence on this point by Saint Josemaría from the first years of his ministry. “In 1932, commenting for my sons and daughters in Opus Dei on some of the aspects and consequences of the special dignity and responsibility which Baptism confers upon people, I wrote for them in a document, ‘The prejudice that ordinary members of the faithful must limit themselves to helping the clergy in ecclesiastical apostolates has to be rejected. There is no reason why the secular apostolate should always be a mere participation in the apostolate of the hierarchy. Secular people too have a duty to do apostolate. Not because they receive a canonical mission, but because they are part of the Church’”.<sup>3</sup>

In reality, it is not the faithful who “help” the ministers so that they may carry out their mission; rather, it is the ministers who, with their specific ministry of the Word and of the Sacraments, serve their brothers and sisters, so that all may display the salvific force of the common priesthood. In the words of Saint Josemaría, “It is the task of the millions of Christian men and women who fill the earth to bring Christ into all human activities and to announce through their lives the fact that God loves and wants to save everyone. The best and most important way in which they can participate in the life of the Church, (...) is by being truly Christian precisely where they are.”<sup>4</sup> In this way, the pastors and faithful together, are carriers of the Church’s mission: the pastors, in an institutional and sacramental manner; and the faithful in a personal and existential manner, in such a way that each Christian may be “the constant presence of the Church in the world.”<sup>5</sup>

The distinction at the heart of the common baptismal vocation is not only limited to the existence of the ministerial priesthood. “In the Church – Saint Josemaría affirms – there are different missions, gifts, and charisms (...) giving rise to the numerous vocations that make the Mystical Body of Christ what it is – an organized body, not an amorphous mass.”<sup>6</sup> The Holy Spirit inspires a variety of vocations and services in the Church. Saint Josemaría focuses on this

<sup>1</sup> “The members of the People of God are (all) responsible for the mission of the Church” (*Conversations*, no. 2). “In the Church there is a diversity of ministries, but there is only one aim: the sanctification of men. And in this task all Christians participate in some way, through the character imprinted by the sacraments of baptism and confirmation. We must all feel responsible for the mission of the Church, which is the mission of Christ.” (*In Love with the Church*, no. 15).

<sup>2</sup> “As Christian faithful, we have heard Christ’s command: *euntes ergo docete omnes gentes!* It is not a function delegated by the ecclesiastical hierarchy, an extension of its own mission to suit particular circumstances; it is the specific mission of the lay faithful insofar as they are living members of the Church of God” (*Letter*, 2 October 1939, no. 3, in P. RODRÍGUEZ, F. OCÁRIZ, J.L. ILLANES, *Opus Dei in the Church. An Ecclesiological Study of the Life and Apostolate of Opus Dei*, Four Courts Press, Dublin 1994, 102).

<sup>3</sup> *Conversations*, no. 21.

<sup>4</sup> *Conversations*, no. 112.

<sup>5</sup> *Christ is Passing by*, no. 53.

<sup>6</sup> *Letter*, 15 August 1953, no. 4, in RODRÍGUEZ, OCÁRIZ, ILLANES, *Opus Dei in the Church*, 106.

variety with an ecclesiological criterion and in terms of mission: diversity exists in order to implement the diverse aspects of mission. Laypersons carry out the task of ordering temporal realities in light of the Gospel. The religious, on their part, are the reminder that we do not have permanent residence on the Earth.<sup>1</sup> It is a complementary and necessary variety so that the Church may be a significant instrument of salvation in the world. Consequently, the states of life in the Church are not distinguished by virtue of a spiritual and moral criterion, that is, in terms of a greater or lesser degree of perfection of one or another Christian. From this standpoint, all of the baptized are called to the fullness of charity, and every special vocation is always a mode of implementing the baptismal ontology.

## II. THE ARTICULATION OF ECCLESIOLOGY

This brief examination of the baptismal perspective from which Saint Josemaría contemplates the Church, invites us to a further ecclesiological reflection. Saint Josemaría was not a professor dedicated to academic activity, but a priest devoted to his pastoral commitment and one who yearned to revitalize in all Christians the radical implications of their Baptism and life in Christ. His intense perception of the novelty of baptismal grace becomes, in our judgment, an ordering function of his vision of the Church, which becomes – translating it into systematic terms – a precious source of inspiration for an articulation of Ecclesiology. Among other systematic consequences, I would like to point out the following three.

In the first place, the substantiality and radicality that Saint Josemaría attributes to the condition of the faithful and to the common priesthood makes manifest that the basic notion from which Ecclesiology must start is not the notion of the lay character, but the notion of the “Christian faithful,” *christifidelis*, a member of the People of God. The condition of the *christifidelis* is common to all: lay persons, religious, or ministers. All of the forms of life contained in the Church assume, in an integrated and intangible way, the baptismal ontology. Put in concrete terms, one is not ‘born’ a lay person through baptism, but is rather born one of the ‘faithful’ and is then, *in addition*, a lay person. This “in addition” means that, with the call to ordained ministry and to religious life, one is no longer a layperson, while not ceasing to be one of the Christian faith-

<sup>1</sup> “The role of the hierarchy is to point out, as part of its Magisterium, the doctrinal principles which must preside over and illuminate the carrying out of this apostolic task (...). The immediate task of directly ordering temporal realities in the light of the doctrinal principles enunciated by the Magisterium corresponds specifically to the laity, who work immersed in all the circumstances and structures of secular life. But, at the same time, they must act with the necessary personal autonomy in making concrete decisions in their social, family, political and cultural life (...). The mission of religious, who separate themselves from secular realities and activities to take up a particular state of life, is to give public eschatological witness, which helps to remind the rest of the faithful that the earth is not their permanent home.” (*Conversations*, no. 11).

ful. For this reason, both notions, that of being one of the Christian faithful and that of being a layperson, are not identical. The explanation and scope of this fact would distance us now from our purpose and we must postpone it.<sup>1</sup> I only want to point out an important clarification. Precisely because the character of being one of the faithful and being a layperson are not identical, the lay condition cannot be reduced to a simple spiritual, pastoral, or canonical category, rather it has a strictly theological relevance. The lay condition as such demands a proper treatment in any Ecclesiology, and it is not enough to reduce it to the common condition of the faithful.

In the second place, the primacy of the condition of the faithful implies the character of service to the *congregatio fidelium* that is proper of the sacred ministers and the *raison d'être* of their ministry. In this sense, the ministry appears in its character as theologically relative to the common priesthood. In the words of Cardinal Wojtyła, "Christ instituted the hierarchical priesthood in function of the common priesthood."<sup>2</sup> To affirm the relative character of ministry does not mean to belittle its necessity. On the contrary, the service of the Word and of the Sacraments that the ministers provide, inasmuch as they represent Christ as Head and Savior of His Body, is an indispensable condition of existence for the faithful. What has been highlighted is affirmed by the Second Vatican Council: "[T]he distinction which the Lord made between sacred ministers and the rest of the People of God bears within it a certain union, since pastors and the other faithful are bound to each other by a mutual need";<sup>3</sup> the common priesthood and the ministerial priesthood are "interrelated [*ad invicem ordinantur*]: each of them in its own special way is a participation in the one priesthood of Christ".<sup>4</sup>

This reciprocal relationship is of great importance for the understanding of the structure of the Church throughout history. I would like to conclude with the third systematic consequence.

In effect, the binomial of the faithful/ministers shows that the Church is not only made up of the faithful, nor only of ministers, but of a priestly community organically structured through a double participation, common and ministerial, in the priesthood of Christ.<sup>5</sup> It is the entire People of God, *organice exstructum*, the bearer of the message of salvation before the world. Moreover, in the midst of the priestly People, there are the ministers who "serve their brethren, so that all who are of the People of God, and therefore enjoy a true Christian dignity, working toward a common goal freely and in an orderly way, may arrive at salvation".<sup>6</sup> The function of the ministers is, then, to be the channel that Christ the Head utilizes in order to maintain the Church as Church, that is, as en-

<sup>1</sup> On this subject, see the classic work of A. DEL PORTILLO, *Faithful and laity in the Church : the bases of their legal status*, Ecclesia Press, Shannon 1972.

<sup>2</sup> K. WOJTYŁA, *La renovación en sus fuentes*, Bac, Madrid 1982, 183 (our translation).

<sup>3</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, 32.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, 10.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, 11.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, 18.



dowed with its constitutive structure for the sake of mission. This is the reason for which, with the ministers being at the service of others, they must, however, be loved and honored by the community, just as Saint Paul asked of the Thesalonians (cfr. 1 Thess 5: 12-13).

However, the representation of Christ by those who are ministers does not mean that in them is concentrated the reality of being Christian, nor the reality of mission, leaving the faithful in the condition of being simple receivers of the actions of the ministers. "For their pastors know (...) that they were not ordained by Christ to take upon themselves alone the entire salvific mission of the Church toward the world. On the contrary they understand that it is their noble duty to shepherd the faithful and to recognize their ministries and charisms, so that all according to their proper roles may cooperate in this common undertaking with one mind".<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, the action of the minister consists, primarily, in shepherding the faithful by means of Word and the Sacraments; and, at the same time, in recognizing and empowering their services and charisms in such a way that the faithful may fulfill their vocation and make their own contribution. In this way, subsequently, with all in communion, the faithful and the ministers, each exercising his or her own function, unanimously cooperate for the carrying out of Mission.<sup>2</sup>

According to the three consequences that we have mentioned, a possible systematic approach to Ecclesiology, inspired by the message of Saint Josemaría, could provide an exposition of the Sacramental positions of the Christian faithful and of the sacred ministers, and of their reciprocal relationship, in order to then move forward to consider the diverse charismatic forms of the Christian relationship with the world: the lay state and religious life. Naturally, this is a task that we cannot take on here.

#### ABSTRACT

Until the Second Vatican Council, it was habitual to take as starting point the distinction between the clergy and the laity in order to comprehend the Church. It is significant that during this period prior to Vatican II, in his priestly ministry and spiritual message, Saint Josemaría insisted on the common baptismal condition as foundation of the universal call to holiness and apostolate. This perspective highlights that the substantial and radical notion from which Ecclesiology should depart is not that of the laity, but that of the "Christian faithful" and the common priesthood. This primacy of the

<sup>1</sup> *Ibidem*, 30

<sup>2</sup> This double "step" is described in various occasions by Saint Josemaría. It is enough to read these words of his about the priests of the Prelature: "It is in the practice of that ministry—*ministerium verbi et sacramentorum*— that they are to show themselves to be God's ministers and servants of all souls, especially those of their brothers and sisters (...). Servants, I say, because, forgetting themselves, they should concern themselves primarily (...) with the holiness of their brethren [first 'step'], and active co-operation with them in all the apostolates proper to our spirit [second 'step']" (*Letter*, 2 February 1945, no. 25, in RODRÍGUEZ, OCÁRIZ, ILLANES, *Opus Dei in the Church*, 40-41). Obviously he is referring to two conceptual, and not chronological, "steps."

condition of the Christian faithful implies that the reason for being of the ministerial priesthood is one of service to the *congregatio fidelium*. Moreover, the consideration of the binomial faithful/ministers shows that the Church is not only faithful, nor only ministers, but the priestly community organically structured by a double participation, common and ministerial, in the priesthood of Christ.