



# The Holy See

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JOHN PAUL II

## **GENERAL AUDIENCE**

*Wednesday 5 August 1998*

1. The New Testament testifies to the presence of charisms and ministries inspired by the Holy Spirit in the various Christian communities. The Acts of the Apostles, for example, describe the Christian community of Antioch in this way: “in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Symeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Man'a-en a member of the court of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul” (*Acts* 13:1).

The community of Antioch appears as a living reality in which two distinct roles emerge: that of prophets, who discern and announce God's ways, and that of *doctors*, that is teachers, who properly examine and expound the faith. In the former, one might recognize a more charismatic aspect, in the latter a more institutional tone, but in both cases the same obedience to God's Spirit. Moreover, this interweaving of the charismatic and institutional elements can be perceived at the very origins of the Antioch community — which came into being after the death of Stephen and following the dispersion of the Christians — where several brothers had even preached the Good News to pagans, bringing about many conversions. Hearing of this event, the mother community of Jerusalem had delegated Barnabus to pay a visit to the new community. Furthermore, says Luke, when he saw the grace of the Lord, “he was glad; and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose; for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith” (*Acts* 11:23-24).

In this episode clearly emerges the twofold method with which the Spirit of God governs the Church: on the one hand, he directly encourages the activity of believers by revealing new and unprecedented ways to proclaim the Gospel, on the other, he provides an authentication of their work through the official intervention of the Church, represented here by the work of Barnabus, who was sent by the mother community of Jerusalem.

2. St Paul, in particular, reflects deeply on charisms and ministries. He does so especially in chapters 12-14 of his First Letter to the Corinthians. On the basis of this text, one can gather certain elements in order to set out a correct theology of charisms.

Primarily the *fundamental criterion of discernment* is established by Paul, a criterion which could be described as “Christological”: a charism is not genuine unless it leads to proclaiming that Jesus Christ is Lord (cf. 12:1-3).

Paul then goes on immediately to stress *the variety* of charisms, and the *unity* of their origin: “There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit” (12:4). The gifts of the Spirit, which he distributes “as he wills” (12:11), can be numerous, and Paul provides a list of them (cf. 12:8-10), which obviously does not claim to be complete. The Apostle then teaches that the diversity of charisms must not create divisions, and for this reason compares them to the various members of the one body (cf. 12:12-27). The Church’s unity is dynamic and organic, and all the gifts of the Spirit are important for the vitality of the Body as a whole.

3. Paul teaches, on the other hand, that God has established a hierarchy in the Church (cf. 12:28): first come the “apostles”, then the “prophets”, then the “teachers”. These three positions are fundamental and are listed in order of importance.

The Apostle then warns that the distribution of gifts is diversified: not everyone has this or that charism (cf. 12:29-30); each has his own (cf. 7:7) and must accept it with gratitude, generously putting it at the service of the community. This search for communion is dictated by love which continues to be the “best way” and the greatest gift (cf. 13:13), without which charisms lose all their value (cf. 13:1-3).

4. Charisms are therefore graces bestowed by the Holy Spirit on certain members of the faithful to prepare them to contribute to the common good of the Church.

The variety of charisms corresponds to the variety of services, which can be temporary or permanent, private or public. The ordained ministries of Bishops, priests and deacons, are permanent and publicly recognized services. The lay ministries, founded on Baptism and Confirmation, can receive from the Church, through the Bishop, official or only *de facto* recognition.

Among the lay ministries we recall those *instituted* with a liturgical rite: the offices of lector and acolyte. Then there are the extraordinary ministers of Eucharistic Communion and those responsible for ecclesial activities, starting with the catechists, but we should also remember the “leaders of prayer, song and liturgy; leaders of basic ecclesial communities and Bible study groups; those in charge of charitable works; administrators of Church resources; leaders in the various forms of the apostolate; religion teachers in schools” (Encyclical *Redemptoris missio*, n.

74).

5. In accordance with the message of Paul and of the New Testament, often recalled and illustrated by the Second Vatican Council (cf. *Lumen gentium*, n. 12), there is no such thing as one Church according to a “charismatic model” and another according to an “institutional model”. As I have had the opportunity to stress on other occasions, opposition between charism and institution is “extremely harmful” (cf. *Address to participants in the Second International Conference of Ecclesial Movements*, 2 March 1987, *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 16 March 1987, p. 12).

It is the task of Pastors to discern the authenticity of charisms and to regulate their exercise in an attitude of humble obedience to the Spirit, of disinterested love for the Church’s good and of docile fidelity to the supreme law of the salvation of souls.

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*To the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors the Holy Father said:*

I extend a special welcome to the many pilgrims present with the Maltese Union for the Transport of the Sick to Lourdes. Upon all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors, especially those from Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Malta and the United States of America, I invoke the joy and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

*After greeting the faithful in various languages, the Holy Father expressed his grief at the assassination of a priest in Haiti on Monday, 3 August.*

Lastly, with deep sorrow I would like to recall that another priest was assassinated last Monday: Fr *Jean Pierre Louis*, from the Archdiocese of Port-au-Prince in Haiti. In view of this new, deprecable episode of violence, I invite you to pray that the Lord receive this brother of ours in his kingdom and that he support the beloved nation of Haiti and all humanity in the commitment to respect every human life.