Vatican



Canadian Cardinal Michael Czerny, prefect of the Vatican Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, is pictured Feb. 12, 2020, at the Vatican. (CNS/Paul Haring)



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The Catholic Church must combat clericalism among its ranks by giving authority to a "responsible and reliable" laity, the head of the Vatican's development dicastery said.

In an article co-written by theology professor Fr. Christian Barone, Cardinal Michael Czerny, prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, wrote that the current Synod of Bishops offers a challenge to "incorporate the witness and action of laypeople in the life and mission of the church at all levels."

The article, published May 18 in the Jesuit publication La Civiltà Cattolica, takes up the central ideas of a speech he delivered April 21 to the Third Latin American and Caribbean Congress on Catholic Social Teaching held in Bogotá, Colombia. In it, he reflected on the effects of synodality on the development and implementation of Catholic social teaching today.

To develop a more circular model of the church's hierarchy, the article said, it is "urgent" the church "overcome the hurdle of clericalism," which in some cases leads to abuse of power and sexual abuse.

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The cardinal recognized that many members of the clergy are reluctant to embrace the spirit of synodality out of fear that giving more responsibility to the laity could weaken the church's structures.

"Even if that were true," wrote Czerny and Barone, "the solution would not be to perpetrate a top-down, authoritarian model of government, but to promote and form the laity to a genuine and authentic spirit of belonging and ecclesial participation."

Addressed to lay and religious researchers, professors and leaders of social movements, the cardinal's message in Bogotá called for bishops' conferences to apply synodal principles within their territories to develop social teaching tailored to the needs of their communities.

"Teaching and diffusing social doctrine is essential to the Christian message, " he said, not just a practical application of dogmatic teachings.

Particularly in Latin America and the Caribbean, which is plagued by socioeconomic inequality and the devastating effects of climate change, Catholics are called to draw upon the "wise tradition of the church's social teaching" to bring about change in social, political, environmental and cultural subjects, said Czerny.