

THE MORAL AUTHORITY OF THE BISHOP AND HIS IMPORTANCE FOR THE COMMUNITY OF BELIEVERS. SELECTED ASPECTS

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Abstract. The authority of the bishop, and in particular moral authority, belongs to the essence of the Gospel message, that is, to the nature of the Catholic Church, and is the basis for fulfilling its mission. It means that whoever is considered such an authority has special prerogatives, e.g. he knows more and better, has good will, etc., just like a good parent in a family. In this perspective, the position of the current Pope Francis is important, who, attaching great importance to what bishops in the Church should be like, states that bishops should be obedient to him, have a broad vision of the Church and reality, be men of prayer, should preach the Word of God and contribute to the unity of the faithful. An important answer to why such a requirement is made is given by Cano. 1752 of the 1983 Code of Canon Law, stating: *salus animarum supra lex* (the salvation of souls is the highest law). This passage has in its eloquence a character summarizing the entire legal norm in the Church, built on Catholic theology and ethics. It has indeed been entered into the procedural rules for the transfer of parish priests, but its wording remains (for example, for a moral theologian or canonist) particularly significant. It is based on the fact that if a person is guided by the imperative of conscience, then his obedience results from the fear of sanction, not an external one, but an internal one.

Keywords: authority; bishop; moral crisis; mission of the Church; obedience; education and sanctification; community.

INTRODUCTION

Cardinal Reinhard Marx – writing about bishops in general – in a letter to Pope Francis stated: “I am deeply saddened by the decline of the authority of bishops in the Church and in the world” [Marx 2021]. Archbishop R.F. Prevost, Prefect of the Dicastery for Bishops, expressed his opinion even more strongly: “We must not hide behind the concept of authority, which no longer makes sense today,” in an interview with Andrea Tornelli (May 4, 2023). However, this does not resolve the issue. The point is that Pope Francis’ teaching on this matter (even if it is characterized by a struggle against clericalism)

is nevertheless in line with the traditional position of the Church.¹ One of his characteristic statements is that a bishop should be, among others: “united with the universal Church, listening to the Pope and obedient to him, persevering in the implementation of the Second Vatican Council, rejecting «shortcuts» that lead to self-interest and a comfortable life.”² Simply put, the question of *the exercise of power and authority* in his magisterium and in the life of the Church is both a sensitive and a topical issue. This is the opinion, for example, of a professor from Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana [Imoda 2015, 8].³

1. INTEGRATION AND SANCTIFICATION OF THE FAITHFUL AS A GOAL AND MEANING OF THE MORAL AUTHORITY OF THE BISHOP

Authority, Latin *auctoritas*, is moral authority, recognition [Olejniczak 2013, 41], as well as a person, institution, writing, etc. enjoying special recognition [Piórkowski 2016, 9]. The question of the need for authority on the part of a clergyman (i.e., a bishop) is so complex that the very concept of authority must be considered in two aspects: epistemic and deontological. “Epistemic authority, known as «the authority of the knowledgeable» (from the Greek *episteme*, meaning «knowledge»), is vested in people who know the subject better than we do” [Tofiluk 2008, 163]. Deontological (deontic), from the Greek *deon*, means duty, which refers to a superior, i.e., someone who has authority [ibid.].⁴ This translates into the concept of formal (official) and personal (moral) authority. In the past, this concept was more homogeneous. Today, the layers of this concept are often separated, e.g., intellectual from moral, formal from material, formal from moral, etc., e.g., “someone is an authority due to their knowledge, but not because of their behavior” [Olejniczak 2013, 41]. However, it is recognized that authority is one of the sources of power, which means that those who are trustworthy also have the ability to act, to influence, i.e., to have an adequate impact on others [Szwed 2023; Romano 2013, 195-235]. Thus, although there is “complexity and multidimensionality in the definitions of the concept of authority” (the concept of “social authority of the Church” appears), in the Christian tradition, authority is invariably associated with someone who “works for social order, supporting religion and tradition, [...] fulfilling the educational functions of a good guide” [Tasak 2023, 59].

¹ Cf. Maier, Mattasoglio, and Serrano 2024.

² See <https://deon.pl/kosciol/wzor-katolickiego-biskupa-wedlug-papieza-franciszka-jakie-cechy-powinien-miec,2741207> [accessed: 12.11.2024].

³ Ibid.: “Nel magistero di Papa Francesco e nella vita della Chiesa il tema qui proposto costituisce un punto nevralgico ed attuale che, se ha innescato attuazioni aberranti, può anche ispirare guarigioni efficaci e nuove modalità di esercizio.”

⁴ Cf. Kobiela 2016, 123-39.

1.1. Mission of the Church as the basis of the bishop's authority and responsibility

In the Magisterium of the Church, as in theological and canonical literature, “authority” is a concept that is part of the Church’s mission and has at least several overlapping meanings [see Kamiński 2020, 91-112; Milgram 2008]. Authority is the social recognition and prestige of persons and institutions due to their competence and power [Jacko 2007, 19]. Authority is a person or institution that enjoys recognition or one of the means of legitimate power. The issue of a bishop’s authority refers primarily to the person on whose behalf he acts⁵ (cf. the issue of apostolic succession for the good of the Church, etc.) [Wroceński 2016, 4]. The Petrine key – cf. Cano. 331 of the 1983 Code of Canon Law⁶ – “can resemble a symbol of supreme authority, of opening and closing spiritual goods” [Brinda 2019, 10]. Already, “the medieval ideal of authority arises from the conviction that we are not the first: the search for truth does not begin with us” [Roszak 2011/2012, 75].

The importance of this perception can be found in St. Thomas Aquinas, who is considered an (angelic) doctor of the Church, i.e., one of the most outstanding thinkers of the West. His doctrine was adopted by the Church. He emphasizes the original nature of authority. It is God who is “first in the order of importance and therefore has the ultimate authority to judge (*auctoritas iudicandi*), which demands obedience. Therefore, in the *Summa contra gentiles*, it is possible to find formulas referring to the conformity or contradiction of a given thesis with regard to *auctoritas divina*” [ibid., 77]. For St. Thomas, the authority of the bishop is the authority of a person who represents the Church of Christ and acts only on its behalf. His function of exercising authority is carried out in the name of Christ’s mission and it is something that participates in God’s authority on the basis of obedience, fidelity, transparency, holiness, etc. This, in turn, points to a close relationship between the fidelity of the bishop’s teaching (Magisterium) and the correct exercise of his authority (jurisdiction)⁷ [Roszak 2011/2012, 77-78].

Moreover, if Christ granted the apostles and their successors, when sending them on their mission to preach the Gospel, a threefold authority: i.e., teaching, governing, and sanctifying [Jódar-Estrella 2023, 21-39],

⁵ Ioannes Paulus PP. II, *Constitutio apostolica de Romana Curia Pastor Bonus* (28.06.1988), AAS 80 (1988), pp. 841-912; Idem, *Constitutio apostolica de Sede Apostolica vacante deque ROMANI pontificis electione Universi Dominici Gregis* (22.02.1996), AAS 88 (1996), pp. 305-43; Francis, *Costituzione apostolica Praedicate Evangelium sulla Curia Romana e il suo servizio alla Chiesa nel mondo* (19.03.2022), “*Communicationes*” 54 (2022), pp. 161-93.

⁶ *Codex Iuris Canonici auctoritate Ioannis Pauli PP. II promulgatus* (25.01.1983), AAS 75 (1983), pars II, pp. 1-317 [hereinafter: CIC/83].

⁷ See Ś. Tomasz z Akwinu. 2011. *Summa contra gentiles. Prawda wiary chrześcijańskiej w dyskusji z paganami, innowiercami i błądzącymi*, vo. III, Wydawnictwo „W drodze”, Poznań 2011.

then “modern man trusts witnesses more than teachers, experience more than doctrine, life more than theory.”⁸ Therefore, the Magisterium should not be confused with the power of governance (i.e., jurisdiction) aimed at the realization of the common good and directly concerning human external acts [Lucien 2012, 25]. Pius XII writes about this in his encyclical *Mystici Corporis Christi*: “The authority proper to the Magisterium derives from the inviolable order of truth: the teaching authority is engaged insofar as the Magisterium defines or sets forth the truth which it communicates. The authority of governance is reflected in morality, as well as in those who teach and those who are taught.”⁹ The legislator in CIC/83 expresses a similar view when it states that in order for ecclesiastical office to be entrusted to someone, “he must remain in communion with the Church and be suitable, that is, possess the qualities required for that office by universal, particular, or foundational law” (Cano. 149 § 1).

The authority of the bishop must always be regarded in terms of the fulfillment of God’s intentions for the people. “If, therefore, the bishop replaces Christ in the Church, this means that the mission proper to Christ of gathering, sanctifying, and leading the people on the way to the Lord now becomes in a special way the mission and task of the bishop and determines the scope of his responsibility” [Dołganiszewska 2004, 73].

1.2. Canon law as the foundation and definition of the bishop’s authority

Even if, in the light of canon law, authority in the Church comes down (primarily) to formal matters, i.e., it concerns the rules for holding office (cf. Can. 146 CIC/83 – “an ecclesiastical office cannot be validly obtained without canonical conferral”), in the sense of effectively gathering the faithful into one family of God (the meaning and spiritual purpose of authority), it translates into the quality and zeal of the ministry performed, and clearly depends on these realities¹⁰ [Królikowski 2019, 117]. The point is that, according to Cano. 145 § 1 CIC/83, “an ecclesiastical office is any task established permanently by divine or ecclesiastical decision for the achievement of a spiritual end” [Dryja 2019, 32]. Thus, the community should (in principle) be headed by a special person (like a father in a family), i.e.,

⁸ Ioannes Paulus PP. II, *Litterae encyclicae de perenni vi mandati missionalis Redemptoris missio* (07.12.1990), AAS 83 (1991), pp. 249-340, no. 42; cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium Oecumenicum Vaticanum II, Decretum de Presbyterorum ministerio et vita Presbyterorum ordinis* (07.12.1965), AAS 58 (1966), pp. 991-1024.

⁹ Pius PP. XII, *Litterae encyclicae de mystico Iesu Christi Corpore deque nostra in eo cum Christo coniunctione Mystici Corporis Christi* (29.06.1943), AAS 35 (1943), pp. 193-243.

¹⁰ *Sacrosanctum Concilium Oecumenicum Vaticanum II, Constitutio dogmatica de Ecclesia Lumen gentium* (21.11.1965), AAS 57 (1965), pp. 5-71 [hereinafter: LG], nos. 26, 28, 35, 67.

someone who, in accordance with the mission of the Church, has the authority to sanctify¹¹ as one who is *peritus in re* (an expert in knowledge) and *peritus in usu* (an expert in management) [Kamiński 2021, 113-23]. Ultimately, when it comes to the bishop's role as a moral authority, this translates into legislative power [Dzierżon 2010, 45-55]. Hence, the 1983 Code of Canon Law, using the terms "authority" and "power," uses them interchangeably, indicating that these are attributes very typical of human relations [Żurowski 1985, 33]. However, the authority of the bishop, like the law of the Church, is not based solely on the social nature of the Church, but also on the power granted to the bishop by Christ Himself [Idem 1967, 7]. That is, on faith and trust in God.

In this context (it seems), the Congregation for Catholic Education in Instruction *Studio del diritto canonico alla luce della riforma del processo matrimoniale* states that bishops do not govern or "teach by their own authority, but on the basis of their mission."¹² This is defined in theology, and the conclusions are communicated to canon law. "If, therefore, God is the highest authority for theology, if he is «the Authority of authorities, that is, perfect perfection»" [Pańkowski 2008, 154], then the purpose and nature of the bishop's authority follow from his revelation. The point is that the need for the bishop's authority is part of soteriology, i.e., the sanctification of the faithful. Hence the norm that "only what helps man on his way to salvation can bear the mark of authority for him" [ibid.]. Hence, in Canons 834-1253 CIC/83, in Book IV entitled *The Sanctifying Task of the Church*, "the ecclesial mission of sanctification is presented in its legal aspect" [Kamiński 2021, 113].

The authority of the bishop, in accordance with the aforementioned Instruction, is part of the close relationship between canon law and theological teachings, showing the bishop in his most important role for the community of the faithful, the family, the individual, etc. "Church law plays a secondary role in the life of faithful, as it is not primarily responsible for defining the Church and determining the principles of its proper role, but rather theological teachings formulate a broadly understood doctrine, which canon law seeks to guarantee a proper place and respect in the life of the community of faithful" [Wróbel 2016, 126]. Therefore, an important condition here is "reference to the sources that shape the life of the Church as the People of God, i.e., to the teaching of the Church and about the Church,

¹¹ Franciscus PP., Adhortatio apostolica *Evangelii gaudium* de Evangelio Nuntiando nostra aetate (23.11.2013), AAS 105 (2013), pp. 1019-138, no. 23.

¹² Congregation for Catholic Education, Instruction *the Study of Canon Law in Light of the Reform of the Matrimonial Process* (29.04.2018), https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc_con_ccateduc_doc_20180428_istruzione-diritto-canonico_en.html [accessed: 29.03.2025].

along with the theologically defined authority of the legislator” [ibid.]. The specific expression of these foundations in the Code of Canon Law is “the detailed hierarchical structure of the Church, the role of the pope, the place and mission of clergy in the Church,” etc. [ibid.].

Pope Paul VI recalled this in his *Speech to the members of the Pontifical Council for the Reform of the Code of Canon Law*.¹³ He addressed the erroneous concept that the letter of canon law requires only external obedience. According to him, “this is not the attitude required by canon law.”¹⁴ A bishop derives his moral authority from the fact that he is *peritus in re*, i.e., that he is distinguished by unwavering faith, good morals, zeal, pastoral wisdom, prudence, and human virtues. That he knows how to listen, mediate, etc. That he enjoys a good reputation. Another important issue is obedience. A bishop should be obedient to the Church, just as the Church requires obedience to the bishop – whether from clergy or from the faithful [Gręzlikowski 2021, 333]. It is in the context of personal commitment that formal requirements are inscribed, and not the other way around [Romanko 2016], e.g. when it is stated that: “a candidate for bishop should have at least 5 years of priesthood and at least 35 years of life,” and Cano. 378 § 1, 5^o CIC/83 requires a doctorate or at least a licentiate in Sacred Scripture, theology, or canon law, or true proficiency in these disciplines.

2. RELATIONSHIP OF MORAL AUTHORITY AND FORMAL AUTHORITY

The formal authority of the bishop is to possess the related powers of teaching, sanctifying, and governing conferred on him by particular canons of canon law. According to the CIC/83: “by divine institution, the following offices are in the Church: the office of the Bishop of Rome (Canons 330-333), the office of the College of Bishops (Cano. 330, also Canons 336-337) and, as such, the office of a bishop (Canons 375 § 1, 381 § 1 and 391). All others derive from Church law” [Sitarz 2015, 94]. Therefore, if the effectiveness of the bishop’s ministry thus established depends largely on his moral authority, it is because the faithful, being scandalized by his immoral behavior, for example, could renounce his ministry or abandon the practice of the faith. Such authority of the bishop can be referred to as explicit or known. Everyone knows what is expected of a given person. Erich Fromm, an American philosopher and psychologist, notes that “the

¹³ Paulus PP. VI, *Ad E.mos Patres Cardinales et ad Consultores Pontificii Consilii Codici Iuris Canonici recognoscendo* (20.11.1965), AAS 57 (1965), pp. 985-89.

¹⁴ Ibid.

individual does not fear explicit authority,” but rather “is ruled by the fear of anonymous authority of conformity” [Paszenda 2017, 68].

The bishop’s authority, both moral and formal, is based on his personal fidelity to the teaching of the universal Church and derives from it. This implies that he must be sufficiently committed to his ministry in order to be recognized as sufficiently good. In exercising his authority, “the bishop must always respect God’s law, the hierarchical community, and the rights of the faithful” [Krukowski 2005, 241]. This cannot be achieved without an adequate moral attitude on his part. The very concept of authority in the Church is defined as “moral authorization to perform managerial functions in a specific social system” [Sitarz 2015, 94] and refers to the moral dispositions of authority. Every office is “a permanent task, whether divine or ecclesiastical, for the realization of a spiritual goal” (Cano. 145 § 1 CIC/83). The bishop is a servant (LG 28, 56) exercising authority in the community of the Church [Dryja 2019, 31], i.e. he always aims to ensure that “it can fulfill its specific task and mission set by Christ” [Wroceński 2018, 230]. The salvation of the community of faithful is part of his responsibility and orthodox mission. Hence, his responsibility cannot result “solely from his position of hierarchical authority in the Church and is not a simple consequence of the principle of «respondeat superior», but is based on his duty of pastoral care for the faithful entrusted to the bishop” [Majer 2023, 7].

When bishops, for example, present rules that apply to clergy speaking in the mass media, they also express their awareness that these rules apply first and foremost to themselves. All this is done out of concern for the good of the faithful, the recipients of the media. This situation arises in the *Norms of the Polish Episcopal Conference on the Appearance of Clergy and Religious Persons as well as the Transmission of Christian Doctrine in Radio and Television Broadcasts*.¹⁵ These norms include: “1) the duty of clergy to be faithful to the teachings of the Gospel (points 3, 19); 2) the duty to speak only within the limits of own competence, which is particularly important in relation to «difficult and controversial’ programs» (point 8); 3) the duty to faithfully communicate the doctrine of the Church and to respect the official positions of the Polish Bishops’ Conference, with the appropriate renunciation of the dissemination of «personal opinions» by clergy (point 9)” [Wróbel 2016, 69].

¹⁵ See <https://episkopat.pl/doc/167574.norms-konferencji-episkopatu-polski-dotyczace-wystepowania-duchownych-i-osob-zakonnych-or-przekazywania-nauki-chrzescijanskiej-w-audycjach-radiowych-i-telewizyjnych> [accessed: 22.11.2024]; see also https://episkopat.pl/files/24/08/19/11/060324_qN2h_Dekret_ogolny.pdf [accessed: 22.11.2024].

2.1. Moral and formal authority of the bishop and the manner of exercising his authority: the requirement of obedience and respect and the establishment of adequate relationships

Authority as the exercise of a bishop's function, i.e., as the exercise of superior authority in the Church, if it is formal authority, it is also moral authority. It begins to belong to the bishop at the moment he takes office and refers to the expectation that his orders will be carried out. Hence, the existence of such authority presupposes (as is often formulated *ex lege*) showing reverence to the bishop and then obedience by respecting his orders [Tofiluk 2008, 172]. However, the special nature of such authority stems from the obligation of fidelity to legal norms, where such an obligation lies with both the subject and the object of authority. The point is that "all those who enjoy authority received from Christ are obliged to exercise it, assuming that the sole and fundamental goal is the good and benefit of the faithful, in accordance with the principle: *salus animarum suprema lex*" [Kamiński 2020, 98]. Basically, both the power and the entire program of the bishop's activity are a search for and implementation of God's will. Obedience is achieved on the principle of "not being guided by own ideas, but listening to the Word and the will of the Lord with the whole Church and allowing oneself to be guided by Him."¹⁶ This principle also includes the bishop's legislative prerogative – decreeing, nominating, establishing, erecting, etc. (cf. Cano. 466, 470, 475, 492, 515, 579 CIC/83). Being aware of its content, the bishop should take into account the possibility of objections of conscience on the part of the faithful. This aspect also includes the concept of the People of God and the right to a just trial. According to Cano. 204 CIC/83, the faithful are not random people, but those who, through baptism, are incorporated into Christ. They constitute a community of persons equal in dignity, who are entitled to certain rights. An important element complementing this approach is Cano. 221 § 1 CIC/83, which lays down the principles of a fair trial [Leszczyński 2012, 159-60].

However, bishops in the exercise of their office – in accordance with the Apostolic Constitution *Sacrae disciplinae leges* – may be "confident of the help of God's grace, supported by the authority of the holy Apostles Peter and Paul, relying on certain knowledge and on the task of the bishops of the whole world" (no. 2). This conviction is also the basis for establishing adequate relationships between individual hierarchical levels: bishop, priest, and deacon, but also mutual relationships among bishops, priests,

¹⁶ Benedictus PP. XVI, Homilia (24.04.2005), AAS 97 (2005), pp. 707-13; Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, Instruction the Service of Authority and Obedience *Faciem tuam, Domine, requiram* (18.05.2008), https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccsclife/documents/rc_con_ccsclife_doc_20080511_autorita-obbedienza_en.html [accessed: 29.03.2025], no. 12.

or deacons. And this is why “the canons that protect the dogmatic teaching of the Church very clearly define the dependence of the latter two hierarchical levels on the bishop” [Tofiluk 2008, 168; cf. Gręzlikowski 2021, 321].

In the case of the bishop of Rome, the moral and formal nature of his ministry is well reflected in the principles governing relations with secular institutions. In this regard, “the sovereignty of the Apostolic See is defined by canon law, according to which it possesses moral personality by divine institution” (Cano. 361 and 1290 CIC/83) [Świst 2017, 701]. John Paul II referred to this principle of spiritual sovereignty in his speech at the United Nations on October 2, 1979. He emphasized its importance as an attribute of the international sovereignty of the Holy See, which “is not based on economic or military power, but on moral authority” [ibid.]. The *raison d'état* of a bishop's ministry consists (among others) in the fact that “he avoids confusion between faith and politics, and serves the freedom of all” [ibid.]. However, the relationship between these two realities should also assume that “leadership in service does not mean fear or submission to evil, but the exercise of moral authority when secular authorities become persecutors.”¹⁷

In accordance with the provisions of Cano. 287 §2 CIC/83, clerics may not take an active part in political parties or in the management of trade unions” [Grabowski 2018, 66]. If this prohibition is relative, it is because clergy are not subject to this restriction when undertaking the aforementioned tasks is necessary for the defense of the rights of the Church or the development of the common good. “The *ratio legis* of the prohibition in Can. 287 § 2 CIC/83 lies in particular in the provision of § 1 of this canon, which verbalizes the obligation of clergy to act for the preservation of peace and harmony among people, based on justice. Therefore, it is the task of clergy to build unity as an element of the common good” [Grabowski 2018, 66].

2.2. Moral and formal authority of the bishop and moral negligence of the bishop

The bishop's role as an authority in the service of his faithful can also be seen in the fact that he understands the dignity of his vocation as a sacrifice of his life in the service of God alone. The basic condition for fruitful episcopal ministry is internal communion with Jesus Christ, creating unity with him. This is reflected in the CIC/83 (Canons 834-1253), where in Book

¹⁷ See Gallagher: *l'autorità di un vescovo, intreccio di coerenza e pazienza* (05.07.2024), <https://www.vaticannews.va/it/vaticano/news/2024-07/gallagher-visita-filippine-messa-vescovi-malaybalay-autorita.html> [accessed: 06.04.2025]: “L'arcivescovo segretario per i Rapporti con gli Stati e le Organizzazioni Internazionali in visita nelle Filippine ha incontrato i vescovi locali a Malaybalay: la leadership di servizio non significa timidezza o silenzio di fronte al male, ma esercizio dell'autorità morale quando i poteri del mondo diventano persecuzione.”

IV “The Sanctifying Task of the Church”, the Church’s mission of sanctification is presented [Kamiński 2021, 113]. Hence, the arrangement of books in the CIC/83 is not random. Following Book III “The Teaching Mission of the Church”, Book IV addresses the “sanctifying mission of the Church” [ibid., 114]. If a bishop fulfills the pastoral mission entrusted to him in the name of Christ, he does so (in accordance with the Magisterium of the Church) in the form of three interrelated tasks: teaching, sanctifying, and governing, from which it follows that he must be internally subject to these principles and experience their benefits.

There is a very close relationship between power (and its authority) in the Church and its effectiveness, i.e. between command, justice, truth, etc., and the outcome of their application in life, i.e. in practice. An analogy that may confirm this relationship is the fact of misunderstanding canon law (i.e., in the spirit of legal positivism) [Rozkrut 2012, 125], and attempts to justify moral crimes by so-called authorities. This must result in the scandal of the faithful and similarly violate the aforementioned principle of *salus animarum suprema lex*. It is understood that if the various rights of the faithful correspond to the obligations of hierarchical Church, spiritual issues are of particular importance [Luňo 2023, 135-45]. This principle applies to the bishop’s authority as the one who, in exercising this office and ministry, should in many ways protect this order. And if “all the faithful have the right to receive help from their pastors” (Can. 213 CIC/83) [Mazur 2020, 96], the effectiveness of this obligation is based on the principle of a relationship that exists between the ministry and moral and formal authority of the superior (i.e., the bishop) and the obedience of the faithful [Berlingeri 2016, 11-15]. In terms of faith, such obedience and its effectiveness do not result from fear of punishment or external reward, but are an internal matter that has its reference in salvation in the conscience [Gręzlikowski 2021, 321-50].

A special dimension of the necessity for a bishop to maintain moral authority over the community of the faithful is the fact that when a given bishop violates it (e.g., in a manner of *graviora peccata delictus*¹⁸), he may, and in some cases must, be removed from office. In the document *motu proprio* *Come una madre amorevole*, the current pope, clarifying the norms set out in Canons 193 and 975 CIC/83, strictly provides for this possibility. “A diocesan bishop, an eparch, or any other cleric who, even temporarily, governs a particular Church or another community of the faithful equivalent to it, can be removed from office if, through negligence or omission of specific acts, significant harm has been caused to a person or to the community of the faithful”¹⁹ [Stokłosa 2017, 133-34]. In accordance with the

¹⁸ Congregatio pro Doctrina Fidei, *Normae de gravioribus delictis* (21.05.2010), AAS 102 (2010), pp. 419-30.

¹⁹ Franciscus, *Letterae apostolicae motu proprio Come una madre amorevole* (04.06.2016), AAS 108 (2016), pp. 715-17.

above, it can be argued that a violation of duties by a bishop (whatever they may be) has negative legal and moral consequences, which, in the light of Catholic morality, can be called a moral violation of the bishop's authority by the bishop himself [Bertomeu 2023, 117-33].

CONCLUSIONS

An analysis of the bishop's authority based on the norms of the 1983 Code of Canon Law and the relevant theological and canonical literature (aided by family studies, etc.) leads to the conclusion that the bishop, in his formal function, is a representative of the Church who builds his moral authority on his own competence and his faith, which consists in fidelity to the teaching of Jesus Christ. Just as the mission of the Church: teaching, educating, sanctifying, disciplining (canonical), etc., requires authority as its source and constant point of reference (which is Christ), thus the function of the bishop retains characteristics identical or very similar to it. What applies to the Church and its law (authority, etc.) also applies to the bishop and his role as a special pastor in that Church. The requirement to care for the good of God's people is so far-reaching here that the Church is not afraid to resort to punishment, not excluding the prerogative of removing from office those who offend this mission. It does so in the belief that punishment has the power to heal, i.e., the power to repair [Bronk 2020].

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