



GRAND MAGISTERIUM – VATICAN
EQUESTRIAN ORDER OF
THE HOLY SEPULCHRE OF JERUSALEM

At the service of the living stones in the Holy Land

What does it mean for the Order to be “a Central Body of the Church”?



With the approval of the new Constitution of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem, which makes explicit the principle that our Institution is a "Central Body of the Church", this aspect needs some explanation. In a separate article, S. E. Mgr. Tommaso Caputo, Assessor of the Order, who contributed to the drafting of the Constitution, explains clearly what this means.

Here, I would simply like to summarise the aspects that relate to what constitutes a Central Body of the Church.

The first fundamental element which creates a Body lies in the **consent** of the Authority which establishes the Institution itself, which, for this reason, assumes a legal “status”.

The second element is found in the **objectives** set by the Constituent Authority itself and assumed by it. This means that the Body is recognised as promoting the public interest, and that is why it is recognised as having a “public” status.

The third element lies in the fact that the Body is **competent** to carry out acts and transactions to achieve the objectives set for it.

This is why the Institution must have an identified **seat** or office, a **Statute** and **Rules** which determine its life.

If we translate all this in terms adapted to our Institution, we can say that our Order is a central Body of the Church insofar as it is established by the Supreme Authority of the Church, the Pope, who recognises its public status, with the intention of responding permanently and adapted to the needs of the Church in the Holy Land and in collaboration with the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, for the

support of pastoral, liturgical, educational, and social life in the Land of Jesus; therefore, to achieve these objectives, the Order is able to perform the material acts necessary for the achievement of said objectives. Its head office is in Rome, and it is endowed with the legal instruments which govern its life.

The Apostolic See has intrinsically linked to our particular Institution, as a specific condition, the Christian formation of its members, because the Order takes its name and its inspiration from this Sepulchre which testified to the presence of the dead Jesus and saw his resurrection.

It is therefore not just any entity, but an Institution that is rooted in the mystery of the Redemption which is intended for the salvation of peoples of all times and all places. The Church therefore wants this Land not simply to be a sacred archaeological place but a living one, thanks to the presence of Christian communities, the resident and pilgrim ones, who truly give it life; in this, we are honoured not only to participate, but also to contribute to the mission of Christ which the Church and the Holy Father have entrusted to us. It is here where the source of this “noble Institution” is found, in the attire of the Dames and Knights of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem.

Cardinal Fernando Filoni

(January 2021)

Here in the Vatican, you are, in a certain way, at home

“Here in the Vatican, you are, in a certain way, at home, as you constitute an ancient Pontifical institution under the protection of the Holy See.”[1] These affectionate words, which Pope Francis addressed to the Members of the Consulta of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem on November 16, 2018, emphasise its identity and mission.

The Order, by its very nature, is an instrument for the specific activities of the Holy See for the maintenance of the Latin Church in the Holy Land. This characteristic that our “ancient Pontifical institution”[2] has always had is now specified in the Statutes approved by Pope Francis on May 11, 2020, with the specific mention of “Central Body of the Church”[3], highlighting the constitutive contribution of the Order in the service of the Holy See in the government of the universal Church.

Indeed, since time immemorial, «the Order has participated directly in the Holy See’s concern for the holy places and has embraced the Catholic institutions which work on the ground, as expressions of the Body of Christ present in the most vibrant reality: families, children, school pupils, pilgrims, works of charity and places of worship. We understand, then, the reason why the Holy Father wished to formally explain that the Order is a Central Body of the Catholic Church, that it has a public legal status in the canonical Order and that it is a legal entity of the Vatican.”[4] It is therefore necessary to rightly underline the ecclesial and pastoral character of this statutory clarification, because of the purposes of the Order.

Saint John Paul II, in the Apostolic Constitution *Pastor Bonus*, recalls that “the activity of all who work at the Roman Curia and the other institutes of the Holy See is a true ecclesial service, marked with a

pastoral character, that all must discharge with a deep sense of duty as well as in a spirit of service, as it is a sharing in the world-wide mission of the bishop of Rome.”[5]

Moreover, Saint Paul VI had already affirmed: “In fact, how could the Supreme Pontiff, already so busy, carry out alone, without the help of other people [...] the tasks that relate to the care of all the Churches [...] in the exercise of the supreme power which ‘according to the institution of Christ himself ... is his in the universal Church?’”[6].

In this context, it is easier to understand the nature of the mission of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem in the Church and in the world. To shed light on this point, we might again quote the *Speech of the Holy Father Francis to the Members of the Consulta* on November 16, 2018. «Since the last Consulta of 2013 the Order has grown in its membership, in its geographical expansion with the creation of new peripheral divisions, in the material assistance that it has offered the Church in the Holy Land, and in the number of pilgrimages made by your members. I thank you for your support of beneficial pastoral and cultural programmes [...] Then, with regard to your mission in the world, do not forget that you are not a philanthropic entity committed to promoting the material and social improvement of recipients. You are called to place the evangelical love of neighbour as the central and final aim of your works, to bear witness everywhere to the goodness and care with which God loves everyone. Admission into your Order of Bishops, Priests and Deacons [...] is part of their duties of pastoral service to assist those among you who have a role of responsibility by providing opportunities for community and liturgical prayer at every level, continuous spiritual opportunities, and catecheses for ongoing formation and for the growth of all members of the Order»[7].

The presence of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem on all continents highlights its international and Catholic dimension. Thanks to the spiritual, moral, and charitable contribution of each Knight and each Dame, this *ancient pontifical institution* is committed to meeting the Catholic Church’s expectations towards the Holy Land, in total adherence to the mandate that Pope Francis has lately given it through the recent approval of the Statutes[8].

+ Tommaso Caputo

Assessor

[1] Pope Francis, from the *Address to the Members of the Consulta of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem*, November 16, 2018.

[2] Ibid

[3] Art. 2§1: *The Order is a public juridical person in the canonical order [...], and a legal entity of the Vatican [...]. By virtue of its activity, the Order works as a Central Organ of the Catholic Church [...].* The category of Central Bodies of the Church, fruit of the Lateran Agreements, designates not only the Bodies that make up the Holy See in the broad sense, or the Roman Curia (can. 360-361 CIC), but also a set of others. Bodies which contribute at the constitutional or instrumental level to the service of the Holy See in the government of the universal Church. And the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem, for its part, intervenes in an instrumental way in the development of the activities which are specific to the Holy See, by contributing to the functions of government of the universal Church in the maintenance of the Latin Church in the Holy Land. The Order is (in the sense that it always has been) the central body of the Church. So, this is not something new, but the explanation of a pre-existing state.

[4] Cardinal Fernando Filoni, Preface to the Statutes approved by Pope Francis on May 11, 2020.

[5] Apostolic Constitution *Pastor Bonus*, promulgated by Saint John Paul II on June 28, 1988, n. 33.

[6] Introduction of the Apostolic Constitution *Regimini Ecclesiae Universae* of August 15, 1967.

[7] Pope Francis, extract from the *Address to the Members of the Consulta*, 16th November 2018.

[8] Cf. Cardinal Fernando Filoni, Preface to the Statutes approved by Pope Francis on 11th May 2020.

