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Proposing operational transparency for processes, solutions and decisions in the Catholic Church

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What kind of transparency for the Church? Proposing operational transparency for processes, solutions and decisions in the Catholic Church

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ABSTRACT
Transparency is a modern call for society, and is currently becoming a challenge for the Church. Despite several practical efforts at making the Church more transparent, the question regarding what kind of transparency the Church should apply as a principle seems still to be largely unanswered. In this article, we propose a path of transparent processes, solutions and decisions in the Church that could be put into practice by dioceses, parishes, schools, etc. This article has two objectives. First, we explore the various concepts of transparency in current research. In this part, we stress that although transparency is commonly requested as a necessary policy for organizations, it is a multidimensional concept not easy to put into practice. Second, we suggest that operational transparency, which is an application of the principle of transparency mostly regarding marketing ideas, could be useful for the Church. Certainly, the utility of operational transparency should respect the spiritual mission and the unique focus of the government of the ecclesial institution; the Church cannot be considered a regular business enterprise, although it has a business side. In every step, we relate transparency to stewardship as, in our opinion; they are two dimensions of the same reality.

Abbreviation: CEI: Italy Conference of Catholic Bishops; CIC: Code of Canon Law of the Catholic Church; NGO: Non-profit Organization; USCCB: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

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1. Introduction
1.1. Preliminary notes
The Catholic Church could improve her governance in the midst of a changing world thanks to the concept of transparency. The aim of this article is to develop a reliable...
and valid set of ideas for enhancing transparency in the visible structures of the Catholic Church. Therefore, this article has two objectives.

First, we will try to understand the concept of transparency that social enterprises and NGO’s promote when trying to foster a culture of collaboration and participation among their stakeholders (clients, employees, volunteers, etc.). This culture of collaboration and belonging is called stewardship in the Church (Young 2016, 70). For this reason, transparency and stewardship form a unity and should be complementary dimensions in the Church’s actions and communication.

Second, we will propose which concept of transparency could be applied in the visible structures of the ecclesial institution, respecting at the same time the specific spiritual nature and mission of the Church. This part will lead us to explore the concept of operational transparency and see if it could be used for putting in place better practices of stewardship, for solving problems and for decision making.

Our contribution to current research is the thesis that stewardship in the Church could not only grow from the conviction of each faithful but from the implementation of a greater transparency by the authorities of the ecclesial institution. Transparency in this case should be considered more an institutional policy than a personal decision.

Both objectives mentioned above are ambitious, because the concepts of transparency and stewardship are still in discussion.

With regards to transparency, Schnackenberg and Tomlinson indicate that ‘the state of the existent literature on transparency suggests that it is not clear exactly how the construct should be conceptualized, how it relates to managing trust in the organization-stakeholder relationship, or how organizations manage it’ (Schnackenberg and Tomlinson 2014, 2).

Some authors call for more corporate transparency, or demand a new culture of transparency in society (Berry 2012), while others, on the contrary, put more emphasis on the need for privacy and respect for individuals in the community (Schudson 2016; Zuboff 2018).

Henriques offers a summary of the reasons behind the new call for transparency in the corporate world: ‘For those companies that remain interested in “writing their wrongs”, there is a need to bring a thought-through strategy to bear. This should above all avoid box-ticking. Transparency should be treated as an exercise in communication with stakeholders, not as a formal demand for compliance’ (Henriques 2007, 99).

Contrary to the trend, Zuboff underscores the need for privacy. She points out that this call for transparency is actually negative for human flourishing, as it is devoted to control and surveillance of our personal behaviors. ‘In the larger societal pattern, privacy is not eroded but redistributed, as decision rights over privacy are claimed for surveillance capital. Instead of people having the rights to decide how and what they will disclose, these rights are concentrated within the domain of surveillance capitalism’ (Zuboff 2018, 90).

Schnackenberg and Tomlinson offer a map of current literature regarding transparency from a managerial perspective. Their research is relevant because it shows that transparency is a flexible concept that is used in different fields of study. For them, ‘These diverse applications suggest that, at its core, transparency neither exists within any single domain of research nor operates within any one context of study. Rather,
the emerging consensus is that transparency can exist across contexts and domains of research’ (2014, 5). Moreover, their definitions of corporate transparency are important for our study because the Catholic Church has a business side, although it is not only, nor mainly, a business.

The concept of stewardship also has several meanings. Current research on the relationship between stewardship and transparency ranges from proposals of total openness within corporations (Christensen and Langer 2009) to a sort of standardization of secrecy that would stress personal privacy and corporate order (Florini 1998). In Church communications and Church management, stewardship is sometimes translated as organizational transparency. In this article, we will keep a focus on the authors that think about organizational transparency for promoting collaboration within nonprofit institutions and especially on those that specifically think about religious organizations (Fung, Graham, and Weil 2007; Henriques 2007; Garsten and Lindt de Montoya 2008, etc.).

This focus obviates dealing specifically with some important authors (Armstrong 2011; Elman and Kapiszewisky 2014; David-Barrett and Okamura 2016; Bannister and Connolly 2011; Diakopolus and Koliska 2017), but we have done our best not to compromise the essential reflections on the topic. Moreover, we take into consideration the studies of the research center on stewardship, ‘Co-responsibility, administration and financial aid to the Church’, created by the School of Canon Law at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross (Zalbidea 2011, 2014; Miñambres 2012). Keeping an eye on the studies of this research center helps us to define the concepts of stewardship and transparency that we will use here.

Stewardship in the Catholic Church is commonly used as a macro approach for institutional government. It is specifically translated as the need for a professional administration of the temporal goods of the Church (Miñambres 2012, 279). In other words, stewardship means that church organizations are not called to multiply or become bigger structures, but rather are subordinated to the spiritual mission of the Church. Stewardship and transparency are ordered for the service of those in need, for the government of the Church’s leadership and for the spiritual care of the faithful. In this sense, Miñambres stresses that transparency and stewardship are in place not only for the sake of economic gains (obtaining more income or paying better salaries to employees), but for transmitting Church teachings (catechesis, study groups, etc.) and for promoting participation in the life of the Church (liturgical celebrations, prayers, etc.) (Miñambres 2012; USCCB 1992, 2).

So stewardship in the Church is not, and cannot, be translated as or identified only as financial aid, but must include a sense of responsibility for the ecclesial institution. The concept of stewardship is relatively recent in Church’s documents (CEI 1988; CEI 2003; USCCB 1992) but the collaboration culture it signifies is very old. That culture was often understood as solidarity. Solidarity has its origin in the establishment of reciprocal responsibilities following an ancient juridical term of Roman Law. At the time of the Roman Empire, the law allowed the establishment of contracts between an individual and a group of people. “The lender would for instance grant a sum of money to several people. However, in the future, each member of the group was responsible to the lender for the whole amount, until the debt was repaid. All of them were
responsible for the debt *in solidum*. This commitment in solidum gave birth to the concept of solidarity’ (Bonfante 1979, 362). This definition of solidarity, *in solidum* (so that each member is responsible for the total amount of the debt), was the concept used before the common use of stewardship. Stewardship in any case may help believers to understand that the time, talent and treasure of each one of the faithful are required for the long-term sustainability of the Church and her mission (USCCB 2003).

Although stewardship is understood as giving away a part of our own goods to others, in this article, we use it as a macro approach because we understand it as a call for personal responsibility for the whole of the institution.

In sum, although the concepts of stewardship and of transparency are still in discussion, following Schnackenberg and Tomlinson, we will use the concept of transparency commonly accepted by corporations: ‘Transparency is the perceived quality of intentionally shared information from a sender’ (2014, 5). And following Miñambres and his research center, we will use the concept of stewardship as a reality linked to the development of the mission of the Catholic Church (with financial, doctrinal and spiritual elements).

In this article, we will try to see if stewardship could be a fruit of transparency, considering the recent scandals of abuse and financial corruption that some church organizations face today. Many among the lay faithful and clergy expect greater transparency and better management of the temporal goods. In our mind, transparency can be considered as the action of the sender (in this case the authorities of the Church) and stewardship the reaction of the receiver of information (in this case the lay faithful). In a way, stewardship and transparency are two moments of the same process.

The attribute of transparency-stewardship in the Church relates to different kind of actions. On the one hand, we know that the Church must engage in some financial activities as any institution with a significant social role. But, on the other hand, Church’s stewardship goes beyond the financial facet of the institution, because of her spiritual mission. Pope Benedict XVI, for instance, recalls that ‘the Church’s deepest nature is expressed in her three-fold responsibility: proclaiming the word of God, celebrating the sacraments, and exercising the ministry of charity’ (2005, 25). Stewardship within the church therefore should be centered on the sacraments, tradition and charity, with the involvement of all the Church’s members: clergy and laity.

In this article, we will focus on institutional transparency, leaving apart the stewardship that regards the administration of sacraments and the proclamation of the Gospel. We intend to enhance transparency-stewardship in the management of information, in the implementation of solutions and in the decision-making process.

Information management is at the center of transparency in corporations. ‘Transparency appears to be a function of three theoretically viable and managerially relevant factors: disclosure, clarity, and accuracy. Disclosure is increased as stakeholders perceive information as more relevant and timely; clarity is increased as stakeholders perceive information as more understandable; and accuracy is increased as stakeholders perceive information as more reliable’ (Schnackenberg and Tomlinson 2014, 11).
For the implementation of solutions, some authors aim to ‘look to other areas of social and organizational life marked by a strong belief in the value of going transparent. Similar processes seem to be at work in current attempts to make police work more accountable through the use of body cameras. Such initiatives seek to remedy problems about accountability, trust, and legitimacy through observational control’ (Flyverbom, Christensen, and Hansen 2015).

And finally, it is commonly stressed that transparency is also intended to contribute to making better decisions. ‘Organizations may recognize that divulging some types of information to stakeholders is appropriate because it allows stakeholders to make informed decisions; yet this information might even be inherently threatening to the organization’s interests’ (Schnackenberg and Tomlinson 2014, 13).

Even considering only the visible structures of the Church, and thus the economic side of stewardship, we observe that the lay faithful expect more information about the ecclesial institution and her projects in order to help them. Likewise, the pastors of the Church seek ways to encourage collaboration and a sense of belonging among the lay faithful (USCCB 1992, 28). In fact, in recent Church documents, stewardship has become a call for living the Christian vocation with a greater commitment.

In conclusion, we will examine if and how the quality of transparency-stewardship in the Church could become a call for good communication practices and operational disclosure, allowing the faithful knows where the institution is heading. The future of the Church depends not only on solving practical problems without delay; it also requires a deeper understanding of the Christian vocation and a greater responsibility in promoting her spiritual mission according to the specific vocation of each of the faithful. Information management should promote more awareness of the spiritual activities of the Church and encourage the faithful to greater commitment in their effort to evangelize, to provide financial help, to participate more actively in their own communities.

In the unfolding of this study, we will make use of the literature of the management world because stressing personal responsibility for the whole institution is an idea first developed in the corporate world. In order to draw their customers and employees to a greater level of commitment, corporations aim to create a sense of community where everyone has a part to play in the mission. Leaders know that ‘successful institutions’ in the current cultural climate ‘need much more openness and transparency than did their predecessors a generation ago’ (McGreevey 2004, 139). Indeed, we live in a cultural context where people want to inform others about their lives and want to know they are appreciated. The corporate world’s way of thinking has enormous influences on how common citizens think about their engagement as a personal choice. Marketing, advertising, cultivation, etc., are regular ways to engage people in the mission of NGO’s, enterprises, associations, etc. Church leaders know that the Church should somehow embrace this emerging principle today, always keeping in mind her spiritual mission.

The mission of the Church is different from those of secular organizations but she could adopt some of the measures these organizations employ. Some authors note that, similarly ‘to the relationship between government and citizens, much time and energy is spent in the church identifying appropriate methods for communicating with the
laity and involving them in church processes’ (Barth 2010, 780). And this is not new: since the first centuries of the Christian Era, the Church leadership has taken into account culture, social interests and the law, in order to make ecclesial structures flourish.

The following discussion aims to understand how the new culture of transparency links today to stewardship in Church institutions. Therefore, we will start with a definition of the main concepts and their elements.

1.2. Defining stewardship in the Church

In the next part, we will describe in general the concept of stewardship in the Church and its relations with institutional transparency.

The pastoral letter on co-responsibility published by the American bishops in 1992 asserted that ‘stewardship is an expression of discipleship, with the power to change how we understand and live out our lives’ (USCCB 1992, 3). It is a biblical concept coming from the first letter of St. Peter: ‘As each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God’s varied grace’ (1 Pt 4:10). Stewardship, thus, is a name for a greater commitment of the faithful in the advancement of the mission of the Church: carrying her pastoral mission, growing her temporal goods, increasing the number and quality of her members, etc.

In the last decades, stewardship has been applied to different fields. ‘Stewardship is a very generic term, used for fields as different as the ecology, fundraising or governance and leadership’ (Miñambres 2012, 278). It is very much in line with the mission of NGO’s and religious institutions, especially those aiming to promote awareness of care for creation or preserving certain cultural traditions.

Arrieta argues that stewardship has a specific role regarding the power of the Church government. By power of government he understands a juridical concept meaning that, because of the sacramental consecration, every pastor in the Catholic Church – and especially every bishop – is entrusted with teachings and temporal goods that he has received and must transmit to his successors. On the one hand, stewardship could be understood as different degrees of commitment, as the consecrated members of the Church are called to greater commitment and responsibility than other members; but, on the other hand, the essential call to stewardship is the same for lay people and for the clergy. For instance, the bishop is the administrator and main authority of the local church, but not its owner. This specific power of government in the Church should be exerted according to stewardship, or co-responsibility with the long-term stability of the ecclesial institution (Arrieta 1997, 64).

The dynamic of transparency-stewardship should start from the authorities of the Church (Berry 2012), but at the end it reaches all the faithful (Miñambres 2012). The power of government entrusted to the bishop is not the same that of other members of the Church; nevertheless, it seems clear that the co-responsibility principle could not only become a juridical norm, but a whole organizational culture: ‘Stewardship can lead youth and young adults to a more mature understanding of their lives as a vocation’ (USCCB 1992, 5). While stewardship in some Christian communities typically implies a call for sharing time, talent and treasure, the Catholic Church sees it more
broadly. In the Catholic Church, lay faithful as well as clergy are called to embrace an engaging model of stewardship that aims for a shared responsibility in the Church’s future.

Stewardship in the Church seems to go against the dominant Western culture, which prefers personal spirituality rather than being part of an organized religion. This sort of individualistic and secular culture, particularly in Western Europe, is what Charles Taylor defines as ‘believing without belonging’ (2007, 518). Lowney suggests that stewardship is a key concept for future organizational behavior within the Catholic Church: ‘The principles of human dignity and good stewardship call for the very highest standards of professionalism, transparency and accountability in all we do’ (Lowney 2017, 99). Conversely, Barth observes that one of the greatest challenges of the Church today is not about stewardship but about accountability: ‘When an institution is faced with a serious internal problem, it has a very immediate challenge: how to control the damage in order to preserve public legitimacy and trust’ (Barth 2010, 782).

Due to the new culture of transparency, as well as to the negative news that some members of the Church have sadly created (i.e. sex abuse scandals), the need for professionalism and accountability is emphasized today. But in fact, stewardship has been in place in the Church for a very long time. However, it was called solidarity, co-responsibility or just a sense of belonging. That sense of belonging and of personal responsibility attached to the Christian vocation is today stressed more by social pressures than by the personal conviction of the faithful (Lowney 2017, 45).

The Church authorities are not indifferent to the public concern for transparency and to how its understanding has evolved. The case of financial transparency is a good example. Zalbidea affirms that financial transparency is a novelty for the faithful, as before the code of canon law of 1983, a pastor’s obligation was to report only to the authority (typically the Bishop) but not to the lay faithful. Today every pastor has the obligation to report to the faithful how he uses the Church’s temporal goods (Caparros et al. 2004: CIC 1287, 2). According to Zalbidea, financial transparency increases the quality of the relationship between pastors and the laity in the Church, thus advancing co-responsibility. Financial councils in dioceses and parishes are not in place mainly for controlling but for assuring good planning, and so their function is not about limiting the pastor’s responsibility but about helping him in carrying forward his mission as dictated by the law of the Church—-as in the Code of Canon Law n. 1287, 1 (Zalbidea 2017, 63). Moreover, these councils should aim at the desired outcome of the long-term sustainability of the Church.

In sum, the principles of stewardship in the Church are related to (1) the corporate mission, (2) the expectations of the faithful and (3) the common call for greater organizational transparency in current society. Actually, the stewardship principles contained in most letters from bishops do not focus on the financial side, but mostly regard the spiritual mission of the institution which, eventually, might lead the faithful to a greater commitment in terms not only of treasure but also of time and talent.

At the same time, stewardship not only calls for personal virtue, but it requires a greater corporate transparency in the decision-making, in the use of financial resources and in the motivations for stressing or proposing specific Church teachings. On the
practical side, stewardship could take place alongside of an increase of reciprocal and operational transparency in the Church. Before moving to define these concepts, we will examine more deeply the general concept of transparency in the Church.

1.3. Defining transparency

We defined stewardship in the Church following some bishop’s letters (CEI and USCCB) and other official documents of Magisterium. We cannot do the same with regards to transparency. There are not pastoral letters regarding transparency in the Church, and canon law follows the civil law in what is not specific to the organization of the sacraments, liturgy, clergy, etc. In this section, we will therefore approach transparency starting from the historical origin of the concept, then move on to some authors who speak about transparency in corporations, in society and in the organized religions.

In later decades, the concept of transparency has gained prominence in all sectors of society and ‘has become one of the most cherished and celebrated, yet unquestioned, ideals and aspirations of contemporary society’ (Christensen and Cheney 2015, 70). Its definition has three principal sources: the natural sciences, the social sciences and the most recent management studies.

Transparency is a concept that finds its roots in natural sciences, particularly in the vocabulary of physics, where it signifies a ‘property of a material object to allow light to pass through it without distortion, making the object beyond it entirely visible’ (Young 2016, 13). It was used to mean the potential capacity of chemical formations to show what is ‘in them’ or ‘behind them’. It is a scientific term that is instrumental for observing reality, where what matters is what is observed, rather than the material that is transparent. Thus transparency is used to define a passive characteristic of natural substances, that under light exposure allow to see something beyond or through themselves. Without the addition of light or clarity, transparency is hard to observe.

Later on, the social sciences took up the scientific concept of transparency by analogy. In light of rationalism and illuminism, the concept was applied to the fields of education, economy, political science and medicine. The social term kept its relationship with the natural realm. The German sociologist Luhmann (1927–1998), for example observed that scientific research and humanities ‘converge today in the predictability of the unpredictable,’ aiming in his research to define a general control of ‘intransparency’ (1997, 363). According to Luhmann, natural sciences, such as medicine and biology were constantly trying to define reality by shedding light on obscurities in scientific understanding.

At the bottom of this change from the natural to the social sciences in the application of transparency we can observe the intellectual ambition of French illuminism. The idea that scientific knowledge can advance biological development and control physical movements led some intellectuals, such as Menger and Saint-Simon, to propose that the development of society could be planned and controlled by what they called the government of a council of engineers: ‘these great French thinkers of the 18th century showed scarcely any trace yet of that illegitimate extension to the
phenomena of society of scientistic methods of thought which later became so characteristic of that school’ (Hayek 2010, 173).

The general social challenge in place after the French Revolution was about knowledge – under the Latin expression sapere aude – and this made transparency one of the greatest social expectations, to the point that some citizens argued that political authorities should make information, decisions and personal behavior available to the public (Fazio 2006, 174). Secrecy does not make sense for the modern man. Today, what is not transparent is immediately assumed to have an illegitimate secrecy. It is interesting to note that the natural concept of transparency in physics not only became part of social metaphors but it came to define what is legitimate. The evolution from the natural to the social sciences and then to the system of law, has made of transparency a common term for defining fair government and good organization today.

After its definition by the natural sciences and social sciences, the concept of transparency has been expanded within modern management theories keeping its meaning as way of disclosing reality (Schnackenberg and Tomlinson 2014, 11). Management theories see transparency like a specific participation capable of bringing good understanding in business, since ‘collaboration is the glue that provides information and insights that cannot be achieved by one individual’ (Castrilli and Zech 2016, 6).

‘Transparency is closely linked to a neoliberal ethos of governance that promotes individualism, entrepreneurship, voluntary forms of regulation and formalized types of accountability. It is powerful in that it is inscribed in political, financial and cultural documents, processes and policies that not only suggest, but push for, a certain normative order.’ (Garsten and Lindt de Montoya 2008, 3)

Not every scholar thinks that social transparency is the best value to be pursued today. For Taylor, for example current society has lost ‘a human sense for secret and mystery and for what is not immediately rational’ (2007, 41). Michael Schudson affirms that, despite the general increase in expectation of ‘the right to know’ in our relationships, ‘everyday uses of non-transparency lubricate all the small encounters of life that make society function’ (Schudson 2016, 176). If I read Schudson correctly, he is making the point that social courtesy in speech and behavior is a human good, necessary for keeping up a kind dialogue and mutual understanding.

Robert Eccles, on the contrary, stresses that transparency is a contributing factor to potentially persistent superior performance in the long-term for any institution (Eccles, Ioannou, and Serafeim 2014, 19). Under his organizational theory for businesses, one of the principal ways in which a company reaches intergenerational development is by setting up transparency processes. Transparency leads to creating a sort of operations manual for explaining present decisions and strategic choices that every worker should know and share with others. And so it is understood as ‘a commitment to openness in process, methods and decisions’ (Castrilli and Zech 2016, 6).

In sum, transparency is a concept born in the natural sciences, adapted by the social sciences and finally applied by management theories as disclosure, clarity and accuracy. When applied to Church issues, it’s then easy to see that management of information is always related to stewardship.

It is interesting to note that the dynamic transparency-stewardship is affirmed also for other organizations As Schnackenberg and Tomlinson observe, ‘transparency
perceptions (an evaluation of the quality of information provided by the organization) are used in determining trustworthiness perceptions (conclusions about the organization’s ability, benevolence, and integrity)’ (2014, 12). These authors recognize that it is not clear how the relationship is established, because transparency is not always in place before trustworthiness.

Likewise, in the Church transparency and stewardship are related, and they increase or decrease together, but one is not necessarily dependent on the other. Stewardship and transparency do not have a consequential order, because good stewardship could lead to more transparency and the other way around. But our thesis is that today what is needed is better institutional transparency for increasing personal stewardship among the faithful of the Church.

1.4. Fostering stewardship in processes, solutions and decision making

According to the concepts hitherto discussed, transparency should be an effective tool for generating stewardship. Carnevale affirms that in the corporate world stewardship appears in the form of trust: ‘An organization’s willingness to use participative processes, to involve people in decision making, is the primary way of building trust’ (1995, 75). This author indicates some ways for making transparency concrete in an organization: creating participative processes, setting up solutions and public decision-making. We will here explore these possible ways for later determining which aspects of each could be better applied today in the Church.

1.4.1. Transparency in management processes

Transparency could be in place for creating better managerial practices in an organization, and for enhancing trust and collaboration within the members of a corporation. For example when people know how to advance their own careers and which are the goals to reach, they could be motivated to work better and in a more orderly way. That is why transparency, when applied to corporative processes, involves the promotion of personnel, earning bonus and trusting responsibilities. People are eager to know who gets responsibilities and the reasons for their achievements.

The principle of transparency that is associated with the concepts of participation and freedom of expression has been fostered by the new media technology and the speed with which we share information today. ‘First, it was the new interest in processes that were associated with democracy in the late 1980s and 1990s, this new nuance has also increased the prominence of the concept of ‘transparency’ in governance and politics; and, a second factor was the rapid development of information technology and the emergence of the Internet which became a potent vehicle for transparency through which world leaders and multinational corporations were made more accountable to global audiences’ (Michener and Katherine 2013, 235).

Another good practice is setting up communication channels with internal stakeholders (employees, collaborators, etc.). Living in a democratic society makes it reasonable that the leaders of a corporation explain to their constituencies the key elements of their government. For instance, many employees want to know how governing boards are constituted, the reasons leading to the choice of new leaders within the
company or for certain investments, etc. This information is, or should be, given taking for granted that sharing it will be beneficial for everybody in the organization. When company leaders share information regarding these kinds of processes, it makes it easier than to enact them, as people often will assume them as their own instead of imposed from above.

But there is a need for a process (specific times to give the information, the right people to give it, what expectations should be in place, etc.) because ‘more information often leads to less understanding, and therefore can lead to less trust. Therefore, transparency is only useful when it enhances understanding, not just when it increases the flow of information’ (Rawlins 2008, 74).

In this sense setting up transparent processes not only helps to prevent problems when putting in place new corporate decisions, it also enables good governance and engenders trust. In the end, ‘issues of trust are very similar as well—that is, how does an institution lose trust with its constituency and then restore it, whether it is a congregation, citizens, or nonprofit donors?’ (Barth 2010, 780).

Transparency should give place to mechanisms for organizational effectiveness. It must be in place when making relevant investments, establishing participatory or non-participatory governing bodies and when taking decisions regarding people or economic resources. It seems reasonable that a Bishop for example tells why he has designated a specific person to his advisory board or to explain the reasons for appointing someone to the pastoral council. There is not a juridical obligation for this kind of transparency, but nowadays a new mindset is needed for enhancing trust for some social institutions, and the Church is not relieved from this need.

Some governments grow in public trust when the political leaders decide to publish the names of the owners of private firms seeking economic dealings with the State. This process of transparency when dealing with the government is needed to avoid corruption (Henriques 2007, 143). In some cases, the government would not be in a position to accept economic proposals from private firms, but already the fact that every appointment would be published may lead some individuals to think twice before proposing unclear businesses to the political sphere.

It is not an indifferent matter if the congress receives millions from the weapon industry or from a specific pharmaceutical firm when dealing with legislation and trade contracts. In a similar way in the Church, authorities could decide to make public the names of those people or organizations offering financial assistance, so that in case the gift were accepted, it would be transparent who is supporting the Church and the amount of money given for a specific project.

1.4.2. Transparency in solutions

In the past section, we stressed how transparency could become a guide for better management in an organization. Now we underscore that transparency could be needed not only for enhancing good practices but also for solving problems. Some authors, as we will see, would argue that when transparency is applied for cleaning up a problem, it has arrived too late.
According to Ball, the original concept of transparency did not refer to solving problems: ‘It was Transparency International who defined the word and set the public or systemic agenda for fighting corruption’ (Ball 2009, 295).

Transparent processes should be established from the beginning of the operation of an institution, and are linked to its mission. But transparency as a method for solving problems is applied at the end of a process, once a certain issue arises and needs a solution. It is commonly understood today that transparency is mostly a method for fighting corruption or for dealing with abuses. One example of this approach to transparency in the Catholic Church is the ‘zero tolerance’ policy with regard to certain cases of scandal: the solution to be applied is total transparency and immediate action against the offenders or potential offenders.

From this perspective transparency goes beyond the concept of managing information and rather becomes a shortcut for solving a problem. Transparent processes constitute an ordinary way for having healthy institutions, and transparent solutions are part of the answer to a crisis. It is also for this reason that specific solutions could change with time while processes become part of the traditional way of Church’s government. For instance, removing a priest from his parish when someone indicates him as a potential aggressor for young people without any investigation, is a method for solving problems that could change in the future. Establishing a process for having priests always in the company of adults when they exercise their pastoral ministry for youth may be always reasonable.

Transparent solutions are needed when an institution needs to manage a very complex set of issues. According to Castells, the Toyota Company is the benchmark for transparency on how to manage complex problems. Their solution did not come from courses of government or public policy but in the simple planning of manufacturing cars. Toyota was using assembly lines created by Ford and Taylor on time-sequence studies to organize every single step in the production. Toyota found out that this was very inefficient. No worker knew how to repair a machine when it was broken and so stuff was accumulating. Therefore, they created the Kanban information system that is essentially a ‘demand determined system’: you only produce in this part of the line if the one next to you asks you to produce (Castells 2010, 170–172).

Every Toyota worker had some expectations of how normal production should be. The company then empowered people with an emergency button, by which everybody in the system had the right to call for an emergency. The transparency method in this case was to empower every individual. Toyota democratized the identification of problems and created teams prepared to respond to problems: simple problems for ‘green belt’ teams and more complex problems for ‘black belt’ teams. Those teams needed to answer several whys: (1) Why did you stop? Because the machine broke. (2) Why did the machine break down? Because it was overused. (3) Why it was over used? Because … etc. In that way, the Kanban system showed all the roots of the problem.

The result allowed Toyota to fix not a specific problem but a whole class of problems. They did not want these problems to occur again. Every time someone at Toyota found a problem, the whole company had an opportunity to implement solutions to similar kind of problems. The outcome is that Toyota plant managers did not need to
know what needed to be fixed but only the process to solve problems. They ensured that the system fixed itself.

‘Thus ‘Toyotism’ is a transitional model between standardized, mass production and a more efficient work organization characterized by the introduction of craft practices, as well as by workers’ and suppliers’ involvement, in an assembly-line-based, industrial model’ (Castells 2010, 179).

In sum, transparency as method for solving problems means that the authority does not need to know about every single problem because individuals within the company could know how to fix it by themselves or with the help of the special teams. Toyota is a perfect example of fostering personal responsibility to cope with the company’s problems, making every individual capable for solving them for the better functioning of the chain of production. This empowerment required a way for figuring out what is happening and how to fix it, which was answered by asking several questions with the goal of finding the root of every single problem.

Likewise, Church authorities could define a way to find out the roots of the organizational problems, whether they might be financial, pastoral or moral issues. And to set up communication channels with the faithful (lay and clergy) for making them responsible for the solutions. The task of a bishop would be therefore not to know how to solve every single problem, but to know how to make all of the faithful capable of solving eventual problems in their diocese, parish, Catholic school, etc.

1.4.3. Transparency in decision-making

Transparency is not only the result of a plan as in the case of management processes, nor only a solution for problems. It is also a corporate strategy, and strategic transparency is in place when it refers to decision-making. When leaders of an institution decide to explain the reasons for their decisions, they link together the solutions and processes of corporate transparency.

Yukl observes that a decision is taken when there is a need for it. In his view, a decision is effective when it is explained to those who would be involved in it. It is more important for him to make the institutional decision public, than to do it faster. The reason for that could be that the leaders of a company understand the strategy but those who should put it in place may not, and therefore it could result in no action or failure. ‘This recognition may occur as a result of an obvious crisis, or it may result from an effort to describe threats or opportunities not evident to most people in the organization’ (Yukl 2013, 286). Showing that an opportunity or a problem is evident is an exercise in transparency and it has to do with decision-making.

It is hard to take decisions while ignoring the origin of some procedures inside an institution, or without knowing the roots of some cultural behaviors, or when internal communications are lacking. Transparency leads to efficiency in decision-making as it clarifies the reasons for corporate changes, for instance in the appointment of key people in the top level of management. Decision-making for Yang and Holzer is a ‘social-learning process involving the evaluators and the evaluated. Participation, interaction and communication are essential characteristics of such a process’ (2006, 123). Better decision-making can be put in place when the leadership takes into consideration opinions of experts and of those working ordinarily with the issues, who are usually located
at the bottom of the pyramid of the organization. In this sense, active participation in decision-making promotes institutional transparency.

Transparency in this case answers to a common challenge: ‘If you want to count on me, count with me.’ It is about participation. Those who will take an important part in communicating decisions should be in the room when decisions are taken and not just learning about them afterwards. Transparency in decision-making is also time-efficient as it helps the leadership of the organization to make things happen, as the personnel resistance and organizational problems related to bad decision-making are frequently costly to solve in terms of time.

The pastors of the Church have created different councils helping them to take decisions in a more transparent way. When having a pastoral council in place, decisions regarding catechesis programs or religious education within schools can be more easily transmitted and accepted than when it is only a restricted group proposing these educational plans. Likewise when putting real estate management councils in place, decisions regarding selling of old or important buildings like a seminary or a historical church can be better understood and transmitted to the public, precisely because some of the experts belonging to these councils can explain the reasons for the decisions, calling upon their professional experience.

In sum, the awareness and prominence of the concept of transparency have continued to grow, and organizations and their leaders as well as scholars have been following this trend, stressing the need for processes, solutions and decision-making strategies. Transparency has been ‘interpreted, reinterpreted, and expanded its meaning from a means to battle corruption to a means to encourage open decision-making and public disclosure, to increase accountability, and as a value to incorporate in policies and by which to evaluate policies’ (Ball 2009, 24).

2. Transparency applied

From the three different practical perspectives hitherto noted, i.e. processes, methods for solutions and decision-making, we can observe a common characteristic: it regards complete and relevant information. Transparency could be a continuous strategic style of corporate government but it also has its own special moments, so for instance during a crisis transparency should be used wisely and in a timely manner. Consequently, efforts to improve institutional transparency are typically in the hands of the highest authorities of the corporation.

At the same time, due to ease of access to information and to the channels of communication, every member of the organization can generate new requests for transparency. The overwhelming amount of information available and the availability of social media and internal communication tools in hands of the average worker is now pushing organizations to embrace new communication methods aiming for ‘transparency’. These methods in some ways have democratized the flow of information and taken it away from corporate leaders.

Another perspective for applying transparency regards not the flow of information but the creation of specific projects within the company. This is commonly called ‘operational transparency,’ as it discloses internal processes to the clients of the
organization in order to better understand and accept the company’s work. Applying transparency for stewardship requires creativity, which many times come from outside the organization itself. However, we will focus next on these two fields aiming for transparency and stewardship: communications and operations.

2.1. Transparency as a communication effort

Schudson observes that in the last few decades we have experienced a rise of the ‘right to know,’ meaning a great increase in information availability, information sharing and expectations for both of them (Schudson 2016, 3). In this context stewardship has to do with all institutional information, respecting the stakeholders and the specific scope of every social actor in the public square. Das Neves argues that:

> Information disclosure should be moderated between the two extremes of information opacity, i.e. the situation when people have the right to know but the information is not disclosed, and information overflow, when information is disclosed with no consideration to its usefulness or appropriateness. Equilibrium between these extremes can be measured, therefore, by two variables–completeness and relevance. Lack of completeness is associated with opacity while the disclosure of irrelevant information is associated with information overflow. (Neves and Vaccaro et al. 2013, 645)

When useless or irrelevant information is disclosed there is a risk to harm the public image of an institution. An act of institutional communication finds its origin in its own leaders’ decisions or on the pressure of social expectations. But when institutional communications does not respect the scope and aims of an organization, it could harm its public perception. For instance, a government stressing its economic policies rather than its educational efforts and its plan for taking care of local natural resources becomes not a transparent government but a distracting one. Citizens would not find an answer to the real responsibility that the government has regarding public common good. In this case, the disclosure of useless information is not an act of transparency, as it is unable to generate stewardship.

A business communicating to its investors more about its social-relief programs than about its profit is not being transparent, but distracting. Conversely, when a faith-based institution is required by civil law to make explicit its economic activity in a daily basis, an inquiry on the nature of the institution should be in place. That is because for a religious institution it would be a disorder to devote as large an amount of time and resources to have its financial accounts as updated as an investment firm should do.

This does not mean that one of the largest organizations in the world, such as the Catholic Church, does not have an obligation to be transparent in the countries in which it operates. The question is about the nature of a religious institution and, therefore, about the degree of transparency and disclosure of information it should put into practice. A balance is needed between how people manage and oversee for-profit institutions and the way in which the leaders of religious organizations should use information and approach transparency as a way to establish and maintain stewardship.

Transparency in the Church, thus, should be translated into advancing its spiritual mission and creating ways to foster long-term information transparency in financial and personnel flourishing strategies.
Now we can analyze the second organizational field in which fostering stewardship and transparency that pertains to every institution, that is, its daily operations.

2.2. Operational transparency

When the principle of transparency is applied mostly for marketing purposes, it becomes operational transparency. Operational Transparency is born on the understanding ‘that transparency (1) allows customers to observe operational processes and (2) allows employees to observe customers not only improving customer perceptions, but also increases service quality and efficiency’ (Buell, Tamy, and Chia-Jung 2014, 1). Norton observes that transparency in organizations is today mostly about operations: it is needed for telling people what you and your company do in order to offer a better service (Martin and Norton 2009).

Operational transparency is in place when an organization transforms waiting time into valuable time. While time may be necessary to provide better service to a customer, explaining the use of waiting time could transform the experience of the customer. For instance, when someone expects to receive an answer about a personal inquiry, he would prefer to wait if that wait means more or better choices for him. This happens constantly in online activities and operational transparency is the way for making this waiting time more acceptable.

Bowen links customer service and profitability for providers. For him, time becomes key for long-term relationships with customers, and then customer service is translated into long-term profits for the company (Bowen 1994, 169). On the one hand, customers expect an answer if they have paid for a service; for instance, when shopping online people expect to know if their product was delivered and how much time it will take to arrive. On the other hand, if customers have not paid for a service but are likely to make a buying decision, they would also expect to receive adequate information.

Operational transparency as making sense of waiting time in the case of enterprises is closely linked to a customer service system, which is ‘any action, or set of actions, that a business executes consistently over time to emotionally engage the customer and make the experience of doing business with them warmer, faster, easier, or better’ (Buell, Porter and Norton 2013, 913).

In regard to identification with a brand or corporate mission, ‘making operations transparent can be a simple and effective way to build this relationship, by improving customer perceptions of the service provider’ (Buell, Porter and Norton 2013). According to Jolie Martin and Michael Norton, most people would rather prefer to wait longer and being informed about what is going on, rather than just waiting less time but not knowing anything about the process. They conducted an experiment on booking online flights and hotels to prove that assumption: they found that customers would prefer to wait longer and if they see that the search engine is looking for more sites and flight companies. The waiting time became confidence about receiving a better service (Martin and Norton 2009).

Operational transparency is also useful for enhancing trust in current processes, making them reasonable. Courier website companies, such as DHL or Fedex, apart from their commercial contents, mainly offer information on the tracking of packages.
Tracking activities is an essential part of operational transparency, allowing public functionaries to explain their ordinary activities and the reason for their timeline.

This aspect of operational transparency aims only to tell customers what the corporation is actually doing, in the most essential way. For example some pizza restaurants have put online a pizza track for their costumers where they explain how the process functions: it is ordered, baked, put in a box moved in its way and finally delivered. The importance of this field of operational transparency derives from the fact that people always want to receive and to give more information, and doing so means engaging and communicating with the organization providing the service. So these kinds of processes for disclosure generate trust in a very efficient way.

Finally, operational transparency is also about making clear why an organization is not doing what it is supposed to do. This happens when an enterprise or institution discloses its available resources, allowing people to understand that there is a plan of action that is not yet in place for a specific reason. For example when a local government should be taking care of a street that is damaged due ice or water, people expect their local government to take action by repairing the damage. If it does not, dissatisfaction rises among citizens, especially among those who see the hole in the street every day.

One solution is for the local government to post a map online where people could track all the current action points. In this case, operational transparency can help citizens see that action is being taken on their behalf and the process is in place. In these types of cases, operational transparency can help restore an organization’s reputation especially if, from time to time, corruption scandals appear and it seems that little or no effort is made to eliminate them. It can be argued then that ‘the only way to restore trust and moral authority is to remove any discretion in addressing each case so that there is no doubt about the future handling of such cases’ (Barth 2010, 783). In this case, the challenge is to disclose not only the specific actions in place but also to show all the problems present in a certain institution.

The last aspect of organizational transparency could be the simplest but the least obvious. It does not aim to disclose the use of waiting time, nor is it about underscoring the process in action or explaining the solutions to problems currently being experienced. It is simply is about communicating to people what the organization does, because people want to know about it.

The information flow increases especially in places where people have time to observe, as for instance happens in airports or postal offices. The assumption of marketing experts is that in places where people wait, they have time to receive information. Likewise, they assume that usually when people wait, they look at their phones. The consequence is the understanding that if people wait by looking at their phones, then the digital world becomes a huge waiting room where marketing has great space for action (Steinhoff et al. 2019).

Exploring the world makes sense for a society that is always online and has ever more interest in what is happening in distant places. It definitely happens in the commercial world, with the creation of many websites for making comments and rating products and services of all kinds (TripAdvisor, etc.) People love to know and tell others the distance they have traveled in a year, or the money they have spent, how
and where. In the religious realm, they may like to know how many churches are open in a specific time, how many people attends Mass, the state of a Church’s building renovations, etc.

Setting up operational transparency in the Church is, however, not easy, because it is not part of her organizational culture. In the case of corporations, there are often consultant and audit firms in place, who ensure that companies – their clients – embrace transparency in sharing power, information and goods with others in society. Likewise, inside every enterprise transparency in financial reporting, information and authority are in place, thanks to the help of audit companies and systems of checks and balances that give order and harmony to the internal development of different economic and social activities.

With regards to non-profit organizations and even more when considering the case of religious institutions, transparent processes are usually in place due to the desire of the leadership to respect the mission of their institution and fulfill their responsibility toward its members.

3. Transparency-stewardship in the Catholic Church

As we have stressed before in this article, stewardship is the fruit of transparency in planning, solving problems and taking decisions. Moreover, we described operational transparency as a new way for reaching stewardship. In this paragraph, we observe that transparency can also have a more spiritual meaning. Transparency ‘is not just a set of policy measures enacted by governments to prevent bribery and punish nepotism. It is also a moral force, reflecting the indignation among ordinary people and among articulated elites that things are not right’ (Sampson 2005, 105). The Church uses this moral or spiritual approach also when the dynamic for transparency-stewardship calls everyone to be responsible for material things like community needs and long-term financial sustainability of church initiatives.

Following a moral approach, the teachings of the Church value the rise of the notion of the ‘right to know’ and the importance of transparency for improving society. These are positive social movements, although in some extreme cases (like public security or public health) the human individual could be deprived of his fundamental privacy and challenged by anxiety and distraction (Alter 2017). At the same time, modern Popes have often indicated that a problem to face in society is the availability of only fragmented knowledge (Pope John Paul II 1998). People are harder to reach and harder to engage, because they are distracted. This is likewise a challenge for the Church nowadays.

The problems that the Church faces are not unique to her; the issue of social distraction also requires transparency under this spiritual approach for providing corporations’ stakeholders with relevant information and also for sharing ever more knowledge and know-how with others. With regards to relevant information, the issue of social distraction also challenges the relationship between customers and corporations. Cremer’s argues that transparency is needed today as corporations develop in the midst of important differences of information availability. There seems to be an always growing gap in the influence that any organization can exercise on others through
contractual agreements; and the result is that corporations have continually less and less autonomy from other corporations.

It is only after acknowledging the role of limited information, limited completeness, and limited independence that it becomes clear that certain market participants may very well have information, power, or control that can be abused at the expense of others, especially those with the least information, power, and control. (Cremers 2016, 715)

The corporate world is facing social distraction with a shared service model. Its purpose ‘is to improve service quality and reduce costs, but the benefits are now significantly expanded and includes e.g. standardization of services and processes, reducing administrative costs; or grouping similar tasks and dismantling of redundant tasks; supporting corporate strategy’ (Marciniak 2016, 192). In other words, the shared service centers aim to let the leadership of an organization take care of the strategic part of the firm, leaving to the shared services centers the care of all the rest.

Whereas the shared service model might find an ecclesial application, it would depend on the social context where the Church flourishes. Even in places where the organizational development of the ecclesial institution is high, a shared service model might impair the mission of the Church. For instance, hiring functionaries to manage parishes and running the finances of diocesan hospitals and schools should not lead the pastors to forget their responsibility for governing the Church. Transparency on financial and other issues should not constitute a risk for the necessary freedom that ecclesial leadership needs to carry forward the spiritual aims of the Church.

3.1. Increasing transparency in the Church

The Church, and other religious institutions, could have a specific perspective with regards to stewardship and transparency, which would come from the spiritual mission and the social consequences that the mission may bring about. Setting up standards of stewardship and transparency for an institution with a spiritual mission could be hard, but with the right processes and checks and balances, religious organizations could—and should—be able to meet the challenge.

Society in general expects transparency from the Church, especially in light of recent scandals in some ecclesial organizations. There is an expectation of transparency, and a deliberate sense trust needs to be increased across the Church. Moreover, the goal of corporate transparency is to keep up with the moral authority of an institution, but even when for instance a political party loses its moral authority, it may keep its political power. In the case of the Church, whose mission is mainly spiritual, when she loses moral authority, there is almost nothing left that legitimates her action in the public square.

Transparency plays a key role for preserving the moral authority, as no enterprise or group of people would make their corruption transparent. When stewardship is in place it is because it is possible to show real goods and true values in the organization. On the contrary, ‘companies that tout their social responsibility are being scrutinized more thoroughly than companies that make no such claim. Any behavior found to be inconsistent with company claims becomes news’ (Hanson 2006, 181).
Transparency in the Church aims at creating human relations. But disclosing information to groups that are not interested or involved in the life of the Church is not transparency; giving power to groups that will not respect the fundamentals of the Christian message is not stewardship but could even be irresponsibility. In the case of sharing temporal goods, the Church carries forward a service not for marketing purposes but for charity reasons, stressing the dignity of all, especially of those in need. Even more, as Pope Benedict XVI said, this charitable action is a service not only to the Church but to humanity, ‘since we all have the same fundamental motivation and look towards the same goal: a true humanism, which acknowledges that man is made in the image of God and wants to help him to live in a way consonant with that dignity’ (Pope Benedict XVI 2005, 30).

### 3.2. Increasing participation in the Church

In most organizations, or even in more informal associations, participation is key for making the common entity accountable. The more participative a collectivity is, the more accountable their leaders must be. But in the Church this accountability and the respective transparency are very specific and should not be immediately identified with that of other institutions. In the Church, the participation of the faithful does not exist as a tool for representation. The Pope is not a representative of the bishops, but he is a bishop with them. The bishop is not a representative of the priests of the diocese, but guides them as their leader. The parish priest is not a representative of the faithful of the parish, but serves them. The Catholic Church, in short, is not a structure to which the rules of political democracy apply.

Taken as a social expectation, participation in the life of the Church is currently moving farther as a concept. Participation is no longer only the normal way of belonging to the Church as a result of personal choice. In fact, it seems harder every day to engage people in spiritual and religious activities within a community; fostering participation is today an institutional need. It is a modern challenge for the ecclesial institution, as it is a public organization grounded on faith and with spiritual aims, aiming for reaching communion among its faithful without changing her ecclesial laws and embracing the way of majorities and democracy. This challenge regards three main fields: the administration of temporal goods, the availability of information and the giving of spiritual attention and sacraments to the faithful.

With regards to the administration of the temporal goods, the leadership of the Church faces the issue of changing its administration style for a more professional one, including the help of financial counseling. A further step would be to reach greater operational transparency on a number of social projects currently in place: charity efforts, education and schooling, social development and promoting the dignity of the human being.

Participation – as contribution to transparency – in information requires the consideration that no corporate leadership has full information availability, unlimited power or complete autonomy. The same happens to the Church in society: she has to act rather as an individual taking part in a shared community. In this community, every actor gives information but also receives information, and this sharing is considered
always positive. It is better to know and to let others know what we do, although people may not like it, rather than being hidden from the public square. It seems a paradox, but if someone disagrees with an institution and the institution does not tell in public what it is doing, and then the disagreement increases.

According to Cremers, a corporation sharing power and autonomy can multiply its actions. As history shows, concentration of power does not necessarily provide a positive outcome for the common good of society. ‘The social purpose of private goods has as its foundation our nature as social creatures, for whom everything—including ourselves—is a gift’ (Cremers 2017, 718). But the solution is not an indiscriminate sharing of power by the leaders of the institution. Actually, in the corporate world, research on distributed leadership and its impact on the sharing of power and autonomy explains that this model is not good for every context or situation (Porter and Kramer 2011).

4. Recommendations for increasing transparency and stewardship in the Church

From the different definitions of transparency that we studied in the first part of this article, we claim that although some of them are already in practice, operational transparency could still be widely used. And from the different uses of operational transparency—making waiting time reasonable, explaining process, indicating current activities, etc. —, the most important for the Church is to let people know what the ecclesial institution is doing. Providing everybody with smart and timely information about ecclesial tasks and services could foster stewardship in the Church.

This seems especially important as the Catholic Church today is often given the stereotype and prejudice of a secret institution (Shaw 2008). The way to change this perception is using the commonly accepted symbols of transparency: participation, clarity and openness.

To make use of those symbols as part of my final reflections, and as a way of conclusion, I would like to propose five recommendations to those aiming to increase the standard of transparency for stewardship in the ecclesial institution.

1. Listening to the youth. As a concept, transparency needs to recall positive realities. Today lack of transparency is linked with negative ideas like punishment and correction. When an institution claims or upholds transparency as part of its identity then there is nothing to fear as there is nothing to hide. One good example of this effort is putting in place hackathons for understanding social expectations from young faithful of the Church.

2. Count on consultants. As a plan, transparency needs the collaboration of external agents. The 1983 code of canon law spelled out the need of lay experts who could collaborate with pastors in the financial and pastoral challenges of the Church. However, there is a great need for better coordination of those groups and maybe there is also a need for media consulting groups for the dioceses.

3. Partner with others. As a method for solving problems, transparency needs higher professionalism. Due to recent scandals in the Catholic Church in North America, some bishops are calling for the formation of lay committees able to
oversee church activities. This accountability would bring interesting processes of reform, but at the same time important challenges to the nature of the Church. For instance, the National Review Board report of the bishops in the United States addresses the need for ‘fraternal correction,’ described as a ‘private process in which brother bishops may offer criticism of each other’ (2004, 49). I do not mean that only bishops can correct other bishops. My recommendation is rather reframing it as ‘coaching’ or ‘advising’ could help to diminish some defensiveness around the term correction. High-level executives on coaching and changing behavior in the business world can understand that the level and work of a bishop is similar to other top managers. Adequate transparency standards could help in coaching Church leaders to ‘course correct.’

4. Ask for advice. With regards to decision-making, transparency is a good way to ensure that the best decisions are sponsored by the authorities. In the case of financial decisions, one good example is the crowdfunding being put in place by the church in Germany.

5. Institutional communication is part of government. Transparency as a communication strategy requires collaboration with media practitioners and communication experts. Dioceses and other church institutions need to leverage the expertise of professionals, such as communications directors, to manage the corporate communication of the Church. The communications director should not be instructed on what to say, as a mere speaker, but should be a key participant on the board or committee that evaluates the Church’s communication strategy.

In sum, to enhance transparency and stewardship in the Church, all the faithful are called to tell others about their activities in and for the Church. Increasing awareness of the Church’s activities within a responsible framework for the sharing of information would help people to better understand and value the activities of the institution. Depending on the culture of every nation this can be done in a more explicit or implicit way. Some examples of this variety are online initiatives, such as ‘Catholics Come Home’ (United States) or the phone apps created by experts for parishes and dioceses, like Geoconfess, a French app for easily finding a priest confessor.

The challenge for the dynamic of transparency-stewardship is not only about transmitting the mission of the Church. Enhancing stewardship requires that the Church leverage modern corporate strategy methods including technology, media and processes to increase brand awareness, so to cultivate trust with the faithful and increase engagement.

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