"Material goods and their stewardship may not constitute the central mission of the Church, yet their significance must neither be overlooked nor underestimated." With these words, delivered to the distinguished participants of the 2014 international symposium on 'The administration of the ecclesiastical goods of the institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life,' the *Vatican Secretary of State*, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, illuminates the nuanced role that financial resources play within the church's life – a reality shared by every individual and institution, whether physical or juridical. Over its two-thousand-year history, the church has relied upon diverse methods of financing, adapting to the evolving needs and circumstances of its communities.

However, the dawn of the 21st century has ushered in profound transformations across social and cultural landscapes. These changes compel particular churches, regional groupings, and the universal church itself to confront the urgent challenge of reimagining their financial foundations. This necessity is further intensified by the rise of so-called 'cultural Christians' and the pervasive secularization affecting societies worldwide.

In response to these pressing realities, the *Global Church Leadership Junior Professorship* of the *Faculty of Catholic Theology* at LMU inaugurated its first annual academy under the theme 'Financing the Church.' Through rigorous interdisciplinary inquiry, the academy sought not only to analyze the complexities of church financing but also to propose innovative solutions and fresh perspectives. The ultimate aim was to translate these insights into practical strategies, tailored to the unique circumstances of local churches and religious orders, while remaining adaptable to the ever-changing context in which they operate.

A number of thought-provoking observations and fundamental questions arise from the contributions featured in this edition of the MThZ. In numerous local churches – whether rooted in centuries-old Christian traditions or emerging from more recent waves of evangelization – the primary financial supporters are often individuals in their sixties and seventies. Inevitably, this generation will pass away within the next two to three decades, presenting a significant challenge: How can local churches inspire and empower younger generations to assume the mantle of financial stewardship? The reality is sobering – many young people are less engaged in religious practice, and even among those who do participate, there is a diminished sense of responsibility or willingness to contribute financially to the church. This trend aligns with the increasing prevalence of so-called 'cultural Catholics,' whose connection to the church is more nominal than active. The pressing question, therefore, is what strategies and approaches might effectively address this generational shift and secure the church's financial future.

In light of these changes, fundraising has emerged as a promising solution. Indeed, in many contexts, targeted fundraising initiatives have demonstrated tangible success. Yet, fundraising is not a panacea; it tends to be episodic rather than continuous, frequently appealing to the same circle of donors. This repetition risks donor fatigue, as individuals may feel overburdened by repeated requests for support. Thus, it is essential to critically examine the future of fundraising: Can it serve as a sustainable alternative for church financing in the contemporary era? What innovative models or best practices might ensure their effectiveness and longevity?

Moreover, the challenge of church financing transcends mere financial mechanisms. There is a profound need for catechesis that elucidates the spiritual significance of offerings, fostering a deeper understanding among the faithful. Experience has shown that fruitful outcomes arise when pastoral decision-making is informed by financial expertise, and conversely, when financial decisions are guided by pastoral insight. The key question becomes: How can this integrative approach be institutionalized, and how might church leaders at all levels be persuaded of its transformative potential?

Each contribution in this volume offers a distinct perspective on the multifaceted issue of church financing, exploring potential solutions and the conditions necessary for their success. A recurring theme is the absence of a universal or ideal system; rather, each juridical entity within the church must discern what will best ensure its own financial stability, especially in an era marked by rapid and far-reaching societal change. In the spirit of the guiding principles 'Ecclesia semper reformanda est' and 'Ius semper reformandum est,' the *Global Church Leadership* initiative, through events such as its *Yearly Academy*, not only fosters ongoing reflection but also equips the church with practical and effective tools – both locally and globally – for navigating the complexities of the present and future.

The present issue of the MThZ enriches the documentation of the 2024 *Academy* by including three additional articles that broaden the scope to ecclesiology in a wider context. While the conference proceedings focus specifically on the challenges and prospects of church financing – examined through the lenses of canon law, missiology, pastoral ministry, and church history – the supplementary papers offer complementary perspectives. They explore the canonical implications of inculturation, address the unique political challenges confronting the Catholic Church in the United States, and present a somewhat programmatic vision for the future of evangelization within the distinct framework of the German context of the Catholic Church.

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