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Conscience — Synodality — Ecumenism

Abstract: The reference point for deliberations is constituted by two documents: the Apostolic Constitution of Francis *Episcopalis communio* and the final document of XV General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops dedicated to the problems of young people *Young People, the Faith, and Vocational Discernment*. The synodal document presented the issues which were not discussed during the synodal sessions and concern the synodal path of the Church. The author reflects on common elements of both documents and interprets each of them in the light of the other one. He highlights the element of discernment of gifts, charisms, and conscience, which determine the position of the faithful in the ecclesial community and influence the bonds between them and the pastors of the Church. Extending the area of implementation of the synodal character of the Church allows the author to ask the question about the model of the presence of the Church in the world. The author points out similarities between the synodal way and the methodology of ecumenical dialogue, which may affect summoning of the Synod dedicated to ecumenical issues.

Keywords: Synod of Bishops, synodal path, ecumenical dialogue, similarities

1. Synodal novelty

At the time of Pope Francis orientation of expressing synodal reality in the Church is changing. The changes introduced by him take a specific form at summoned assemblies of the Synod of Bishops and they concern the search for new forms of presence and their specific expression. It is caused not only by the change of regulations applying to the ways of conducting a synod but also by reaching to the deep foundations of synodality which are being continuously explored and which are increasingly changing the external forms of the presence and activity of the Church in the world. The expression of these changes is the Apostolic Constitution *Epis-*

copalis communio,¹ whose first echoes can be found in the final document of XV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the theme: *Young People, the Faith, and Vocational Discernment* (3—28 October 2018).² It could seem that during the Synod dedicated to the problems of young people in the Church, issues raised earlier by Pope Francis in *Episcopalis communio* will not be discussed and then included in the final document. During the Synod synodality was not discussed. However, the synod dedicated to the issues of the youth was the first synod after the papal Constitution had been published a month earlier. It came as a surprise to its participants that despite lack of discussion on the synodality of the Church, the final document included the topics concerning the synodal path of the Church. Including these aspects suggests that Francis's Constitution was not a document of a merely declarative character. After just a few weeks it bore fruit in the form of specific reflections, and one may hope that it will be put into practice. After all, the final document contains the whole chapter pertaining to synodality. However, it caused major controversies among bishops — since from 33 to even 51 of them voted against further points included in this chapter. Nonetheless, all the points gained the support of the majority of two-thirds of synodal fathers.³

One of the novelties introduced by the Constitution is establishing consultations preceding the Synod and also a decision that the final document will play a part in the ordinary teaching of the Holy Father. This information caused a stir especially among those who carefully followed the development process of final documents of the previous Synod of Pope Francis, which contained paragraphs allowing divorcees to receive Holy Communion or proposals for amendments concerning the attitude to homosexual relationships, although they did not obtain a majority of votes.

Two issues contained in the aforementioned documents are noteworthy. The first one concerns extending the range of synodal activity so that it embraces the local Churches, and the other pertains to including the content of the final document approved by synodal fathers and the pope in the ordinary teaching of the Church. Thus, if the Assembly of the

¹ FRANCIS: *Episcopalis communio* (15.09.2018) — https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_constitutions/documents/papa-francesco_costituzione-ap_20180915_episcopalis-communio.html [accessed 28.06.2021].

² FRANCIS: *Christus vivit* (25.03.2019) — https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20190325_christus-vivit.html [accessed 28.06.2021].

³ The results of the voting were published on the website of the Holy See: https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2018/10/27/0789/01722.html#_bookmark215 [accessed 28.06.2021].

Synod is granted a casting vote by the Roman Pontiff, in accordance with Canon 343 of the Code of Canon Law⁴ and the document is ratified and promulgated by the pope, its content will be reflected in the papal ordinary teaching. The document has to be signed by the participants of the Synodal Assembly together with the Holy Father.

I regard adding synodality issues to the final document of the Synod dedicated to the problems of young people in the Church as important. Both matters are linked. In this way, young people realise that the Church does not only address her words to them through her pastors in terms of teaching, but invites them to responsibly join in the processes happening in it and the possibility to influence the decisions made in it. Such is the will of Pope Francis expressed in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christus vivit*. By extending the synod to particular Churches, the Pope invites young people, to whom Christ directs the call in the Church, to express themselves and take care of building the Church. Recognising and interpreting the vocation about which Francis writes to the young is faced with the reality of the Church in which it is to be fulfilled. Individual responsibility meets the collective one.

The Synod not only focused on the problems of young people, but also began to put the Church on the new way to synodality. Francis wrote that during the synod views from the whole world were exchanged, also those of young people and non-believers who “wished to share their thoughts, also raised issues that led me to ask new questions.”⁵ The expression of synodality is also addressing the post-synodal message “to the entire People of God, pastors and faithful alike, since all of us are challenged and urged to reflect both on the young and for the young.”⁶

What drew my attention was also combining two elements which this study refers to. It is an attempt to point to the role of conscience in the synodal activity. This inspiration resulted from the layout of the final document itself. The last, fourth chapter in the second part of the document was entitled “The Art of Discernment”, in which synodal fathers emphasised the value of discernment and conscience in building an ecclesial community and fulfilment of vocation in the Church. The first chapter (“The Missionary Synodality of the Church”) of the third part of the document is dedicated to the issues of synodality. The two issues are discussed directly one after the other. For this reason, it seems legitimate to

⁴ Canon 343 — It is the role of the synod of bishops to discuss the question on their agenda and to express their desires about them but not to resolve them or to issue decrees about them, unless the Roman Pontiff in certain cases has endowed the synod with deliberative power, and, in this event, it is his role to ratify its decision.

⁵ *Christus vivit*, n. 4.

⁶ *Ibidem*, n. 5.

analyse the matters of conscience and synodality in their mutual relation. Another issue I would like to focus on is ecumenical activity and the role of Christian conscience in it, the gift of Christian vocation to the Church of Christ. The conscience of a believer is not an identifying element distinguishing him from the community but a reference point for the search for unity expressed in Christian love. It is in the conscience that the ultimate act of obedience to the revealing God and search for the truth in the light of this revelation is fulfilled.

2. *Ecclesialis communio*

In the introduction, which is followed by pope Francis's regulations concerning the course of the synod in accordance with Canon 342 of the Code of Canon Law, the pope recalls but also explains a broader view on the synodal process in the Church. He draws attention to the role and responsibilities which remain with the bishops on the one hand being the exponents of unity with the Roman Pontiff on collegiality terms, and on the other hand, to their role among the faithful entrusted to their care. These are not only the recipients of teaching of their pastors, whom they should respect "as the witnesses of divine and Catholic truth." They "must agree with the judgment of their Bishop on faith and morals" and "must give it their adherence with religious assent of the mind."⁷ The bishop in his service is simultaneously a master and a disciple. Pope Francis draws attention to the latter aspect, in a broader and thus adequate, reaching to its source understanding of synodality, pointing to the fact that it helps everybody to be united in faith. As a disciple, the bishop listens to Christ "speaking through the entire People of God, making it infallible *in credendo*."⁸ The bishop and the community constitute one faith environment, which is expressed in the shared *sensus fidei fidelium*.⁹ Only the community of these two elements: infallibility *in credendo* and shared sense of faith makes our journey of faith transform into *infabilitas in agendo*, leaving at the same time a wide area of freedom to express it in different ways.¹⁰

⁷ *Ecclesialis communio*, n. 5.2.

⁸ *Ibidem*, n. 5.3.

⁹ A. PASTWA: "Sensus fidei fidelium. Legal and Ecumenical Reflection." *Ecumeny and Law* 6 (2018), pp. 225—247.

¹⁰ R. BERTOLINO: *Il nuovo diritto ecclesiale tra coscienza dell'uomo e istituzione. Saggi di diritto costituzionale canonico*. Torino: G. Giappichelli Editore, 1989, p. 119.

The supernatural sense of faith is finally revealed through broad consensus in matters of religion and morality. Therefore, the role of a bishop is walking in front of them, walking in their midst, walking behind them. The pope's intention is not only to indicate a bishop's position in the community of the faithful embarking on a journey of faith, but to show that in this community he is supposed "never to lose the scent of the People of God in order to find new roads. A Bishop who lives among his faithful has his ears open to listen to 'what the Spirit says to the churches'."¹¹ Hence, a bishop is not a companion travelling the same road as the faithful walking beside him, but together with them he searches for signs which will guide them and allow them to make unanimous, binding decisions. The community of believers who participate in the prophetic mission of Christ is a teaching environment closely connected with apostolic ministry, which was reminded by St. Paul in The Epistle to the Ephesians 4, 11—13. Participation in the prophetic mission consists of communicating God's words and intentions, His plans at a particular moment of salvation history. However, the prophesy is not limited only to communication, but according to what St. Paul bequeathed, prepares the faithful for life in the prophetic perspective, passes on experience, instills the right attitude, causes individual growth for the common good. Following the path together, believers listen, recognise and share the experience of what God demands from them in the community to which He called them. Synodality understood in this way is the path of the Church, but also its way of functioning, which was mentioned by Francis on the 50th anniversary of establishing the Synod of Bishops.¹²

3. *Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment*

The first synodal event after the announcement of *Episcopalis communio* Constitution was XV General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops dedicated to the problems of young people. Preparations for this Assembly started earlier with recognition of the situation and problems of young people by means of questionnaires sent to particular Churches. The final document of the gathering concerns young people, it should be read in

¹¹ *Ecclesialis communio*, n. 5.3.

¹² FRANCIS: *Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishop* (17.10.2015): https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco_20151017_50-anniversario-sinodo.html [accessed 28.06.2021].

the perspective of the whole Church in what pertains to important issues discussed in this study. It combines two issues: synodality as the path of the Church and also discernment in an ecclesial community on the example of young people. The two elements co-exist, coming directly one after the other, which is worth noting while reading this document in the light of the earlier *Episcopalis communio*. The statement contained in the final document that “participation of the young helped to ‘reawaken’ synodality, which is a ‘constitutive element of the Church’”¹³ confirms the role of the young themselves as well as papal feelings concerning the functioning of the Church, which become a reality. Although in the final document the issue of synodality is a sort of a goal of interpreted earlier role of young people in the Church and it may seem that the phenomenon of synodality is supposed to prove this position, in the light of *Ecclesialis communio* and Francis’s earlier teaching, a view on the young is taken from the perspective of synodality of the Church. Such presentation of the issue indicates not only a feeling but a belief that the Synod looks at the youth in terms of their active and responsible participation in the life of the Church. Young people themselves “have expressed the desire to be involved and appreciated and to feel themselves as having a key role in the life and mission of the Church.”¹⁴ A view on the youth from the perspective of synodality and their desires meet at one point, namely in recognising their situation and appropriate interpretation of what God says to everybody in the dimension of Christian community life.

As it was emphasised in the final document, the path to the conscious attitude of participation and responsibility in the Church is “an effective common mind,”¹⁵ which is realised by conversion of the heart and mutual respect of the faithful and pastors, which finally results in *infallibilitas in agendo*. This is the way which helps to avoid “both clericalism, which excludes many from decision-making processes, and the clericalization of the laity.”¹⁶

Looking at the life and commitment of believers in the Church on the example of young people, in the final document the role of charisms in the life of people called to community was emphasised as well as making the faithful aware that the gifts they receive are not for their individual development but for the growth of the community in which and through which their existence is shaped. This is connected with their individual responsibility for the life of a Christian community. For this reason, recognition of charismatic gifts occurs within the community together with its

¹³ *Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment*, n. 121.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, n. 119.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, n. 123.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*.

pastors, since both charismatic and hierarchical gifts have a common origin and purpose, which is building the community.¹⁷ Both kinds of gifts constitute at the same time the source of rights and duties in the Church which guarantee the community of responsibility¹⁸ created by justice in its most fundamental meaning *suum quique tribuere*. It concerns all the gifts, also those most ordinary, because each of them gives rise to the right and duty of using them in the Church and the world.¹⁹

Recognition and evaluation of charismatic gifts influences the determination of rights and responsibilities in the Church, which are an expressed and visible form of existence of the Church as a sacramental, charismatic, and institutional community. As the faith of each member of the Church is the faith of the Church, the rights and responsibilities of a believer always remain the rights and responsibilities of the community in their correlation.²⁰ At the same time it excludes a pretentious willingness to influence the community by exercising the rights to which one is entitled in the community and one's own prerogatives, losing sight of the perspective of following the common pathway due to proportionally common vocation. The community is prior to the received gifts and those are granted for its sake. The community is a gift and at the same time a responsibility.²¹

The issue of recognising the conscience and charisms and responsible position of young people in the Church resulting from it was presented in the final document of XV Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops at nos. 106—109. However, the earlier part of the document emphasised accompanying this process role of the Church in its maternal function and leading to shaping God's children in freedom.²² Recognition of what happens in the Church and for the Church is not reducible only to an individual dimension. It always entails commitment of the community who listens to what the Holy Spirit addresses to it through individual

¹⁷ It is clearly revealed in the documents of the Second Vatican Council: *Lumen gentium*, n. 12, *Ad gentes*, n. 28 or above all *Apostolicam actuositatem*, n. 3.

¹⁸ L. GEROSA: *Carisma e diritto nella Chiesa. Riflessioni canonistiche sul «carisma originario» dei nuovi movimenti ecclesiali*. Milano: Jaca Book, 1989, pp. 46—57; R. SOBAŃSKI: *Charisma et norma canonica*. In: *Ius in vita et in missione Ecclesiae. Acta symposii internationalis Iuris Canonici occurrente X anniversario promulgationis Codicis Iuris Canonici diebus 19-24 aprilis 1993 in Civitate Vaticana celebrati*. Città del Vaticano 1994, pp. 75—90.

¹⁹ *Apostolicam actuositatem*, n. 3.4.

²⁰ T. GAŁKOWSKI: *Prawo-Obowiązek. Pierwszeństwo i współzależność w porządkach prawnych: kanonicznym i społeczności świeckiej*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo UKSW, 2007, pp. 384—385.

²¹ R. SOBAŃSKI: "W sprawie zasady formalnej prawa kościelnego." *Prawo Kanoniczne* 30 (1987) 1—2, pp. 25.

²² *Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment*, n. 91.

experience of its members. “The Church too is always in discernment.”²³ Thus, in the spiritual discernment of the position in the Church a believer is not left alone. The Church assists in recognising authentic gifts through which a believer’s vocation is fulfilled in the community, in its tradition of faith making God present in Christ. Discernment in terms of Christian tradition “corresponds to the spiritual dynamic by which a person, a group or a community seek to recognize and to follow the will of God in their particular situation: ‘test everything; hold fast to what is good’ (1 Thess 5:21).”²⁴ Such discernment was described in the document “as a sincere work of conscience.”²⁵ The aim of discernment taking place in the conscience is to “make responsible decisions as to the right exercise of practical reason, within and in the light of our personal relationship with the Lord Jesus.”²⁶

Conscience shaped under the influence of God’s word expresses itself in reference to different ways of understanding it (a psychological, moral, ontological conscience). God’s Word remains a direct reference point for making a decision making a human conscience theonomic.²⁷ This dimension of reference to God combines individual conscience of a believer with its ecclesial application.

The matters of conscience concerning the position and role of a believer in an ecclesial community remain closely related to ecclesial conscience. This element of individual and communal responsibility cannot be overlooked in implementing the synodal path. The relationship between the two realities sheds a different light on the issues which are the subject matter of a dispute between lay people and the clergy, or in the ecclesial perspective between local Churches (e.g. the German one) and the universal Church. Existing differences, which met with the reaction of the Holy See, mainly refer to the decisive and binding moments on which the lay faithful would like to have a considerable influence. In this process, the issues significant for the synodal form of the existence and operation of the Church: Christian conscience and community discernment were put aside.

²³ Ibidem, n. 105.

²⁴ Ibidem, n. 104.

²⁵ Ibidem, n. 109.

²⁶ Ibidem.

²⁷ R. BERTOLINO: *Il nuovo diritto ecclesiale...*, p. 114.

4. Synodal path and ecumenical path

In the final document of the Synod dedicated to young people synodal fathers drew attention to the role of conscience in shaping a responsible approach to the Church. It is a new reference point for the discussion on forms of expressing synodality, which is not reduced to the issues of doctrinal or moral character. The starting point for developing the process of functioning of the Church presenting its synodal character is common for all the faithful listening to and recognising what God planned for everybody within His Church.

Can the experience of synodality contribute to the growth of ecumenical dialogue and be the point of reference for it expressing the approach of the Catholic Church in it? To what extent can the methodology of the synodal process be reflected in the ecumenical activity?²⁸ A binding and at the same time common element for these two processes is the starting point, what God tells everybody deep within their heart and what is recognised in the conscience. “In the conscience we gather the fruit of encounter and communion with Christ: a salvific transformation and acceptance of a new freedom [...] it testifies to a transcendent presence, which each person discovers in his own interiority, but which he does not control.”²⁹ The role of conscience in both making the synodal character of the Church real and on the path of ecumenical dialogue is crucial. One can spot in it the element which goes beyond dogmatic expressions and leads into the process of direct contact with God’s word and directs towards specific steps. It also allows us to look at the issue of unity between the followers of Jesus not from the point of view of its loss but as a goal. If the gift of a received community is an objective to realise it which a Christian faces, then also the unity becomes an objective which is continuously being fulfilled. This work has not been finished and is still being continued. The Church is learning unity. Perpetuating the patterns from the past does not contribute to it. Christ’s appeal “May they all be one” is connected with the call to mutual love as He loved (Jn 13, 34). Love is not static. It is developing while being the principle of unity which does not interfere with diversity. Striving for unity is the fulfilment of Christ’s call to love which makes this unity real despite its lack in the theological, sacramental or organisational area.

The answer to the question concerning the new way of pursuing the path of synodality as a reference point for ecumenical dialogue was

²⁸ T. GAŁKOWSKI: “Christian Conscience as a Sign of Unity in the Ecumenical Dialogue.” *Ecumeny and Law* 6 (2018), pp. 269—282.

²⁹ *Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment*, n. 107.

outlined by Pope Francis in *Ecclesialis communio*. It can also be noticed in the current papal statements prioritising the synodal process in the Church and also in the contacts and meetings of the Pope with the representatives of other Christian religions, including the significant presence of the Pope at the ceremony of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in Lund (31 October 2016)³⁰ or the address to the Delegation of the Lutheran World Federation on 25 June 2021.³¹ The synodal path and ecumenical contacts of the Pope suggest a few conclusions combining these two areas of papal activity and bring one closer to answering the aforementioned question about synodal methodology in the ecumenical dialogue.

The first conclusion results directly from the new decisions concerning the realisation of synodality in the Church and the ways of organising further assemblies of the Synod of Bishops. Francis orders in Article 1 §3 of *Ecclesialis communio*: “If he considers it opportune, especially for reasons of an ecumenical nature, the Roman Pontiff may summon a synodal Assembly according to other formats established by himself.” A novelty which has not occurred before is a statement that it is possible to summon another gathering of bishops due to ecumenical reasons. Ecumenism has entered the orbit of synodality. It does not seem in this context that the phrase referring to the ecumenical character of the Synod should mean the Council of the whole ecumene, that is the Universal Council.

At the same time it indicates that the current ecumenical path faces new challenges. On the one hand, it is connected with transcending the hitherto forms of ecumenical dialogue organisation taking place mainly during representative meetings of theologians of Christian Churches or organised prayer meetings. On the other hand, it entails the possibility of adopting synodal methodology in the ecumenical dialogue. Both possible solutions mentioned above are reflected in what is Francis’s desire expressed during the meeting in Lund. He pointed out that the division of Christianity “was perpetuated historically by the powerful of this world rather than the faithful people.” Thus, he emphasised that a return to the path of unity can happen where the will of the faithful people is to remain together in a Christian community which does not perpetuate divisions but overcomes them and “always and everywhere needs to

³⁰ FRANCIS: “Abide in me as I abide in you” (Jn 15, 4). Homily. Common Ecumenical Prayer at the Luteran Cathedral of Lund (31.10.2016): https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2016/documents/papa-francesco_20161031_omelia-svezia-lund.html [accessed 1.07.2021].

³¹ FRANCIS: “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (Rm 1, 7). Address to the Delegation of the Lutheran World Federation (25.06.2021): <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2021/june/documents/20210625-federazione-luterana.html> [accessed 1.07.2021].

be guided surely and lovingly by its Good Shepherd.” Cardinal Walter Kasper described it as a spiritual ecumenism and ecumenism of life. He drew attention to the value and indispensability of ecumenical dialogue conducted by theologians, at the same time emphasising that ecumenical dialogue is not only an exchange of ideas but first of all an exchange of gifts.³² The content of the final document of the Assembly of the Synod dedicated to the problems of young people, in which synodal fathers emphasised the role of gifts, charisms through which believers recognise their place in the Church and open themselves to the community of other people’s gifts, excellently corresponds with the cardinal’s statement. The cardinal, engaged in the matters of ecumenical path’s movement, points out that ultimately the present and future of the ecumenical path is the ecumenism of life arising from spiritual ecumenism and “finally has to be the object of reception of all God’s people,”³³ about whom Pope Francis said in Lund that they cannot accept “the division and distance that our separation has created between us.”

The second conclusion that can be drawn after reading both documents, which are a point of reference for the above deliberations concerns extending the ways of conducting the sessions of the Synod of Bishops, through which the principle of synodal form of the presence of Church in the world and her mission of evangelisation will become more fully expressed. The pope stresses that the Church presently enters “a new chapter of evangelization requiring her to be throughout the world [...] permanently in a state of mission.”³⁴ The new chapter of evangelisation also requires new forms and effective involvement of institutions already existing in the Church. Francis planned such an evangelistic role for the Synod of Bishops as well. This institution combines responsibility for evangelical activity which lies on the bishops with the dimension of ecclesial synodality. In the new resolutions of the pope the diocesan dimension of episcopal service takes not as much a new direction as is able to express it more effectively. The pope notes that bishops carry out their educational mission remaining in communion with the pope and with one another, but the condition of fulfilment of the educational mission is “the life of the Church and life in the Church.”³⁵ A bishop, while being a master is at the same time a disciple. The two dimensions of a bishop’s presence intertwine but also condition each other. Pastors’ evangelical activity requires listening to the faithful’s voice and giving adequate recommendations.

³² W. KASPER: *Kościół Katolicki. Istota, rzeczywistość, posłannictwo*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo WAM, 2014, p. 546.

³³ *Ibidem*, 546.

³⁴ *Episcopalis communio*, n. 1.3.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, n. 5.2.

Definitely it does not only involve presenting the doctrine of the Church, which the faithful know and accept. The condition of effective evangelization is following the same path “in order to find new roads [...] promoting a loyal and constructive dialogue.”³⁶ The content of this mutual process is also arousing responsibility of believers themselves whose position is not only limited to the particular Church, but through listening to the Word together with pastors they express their concern about the universal Church. Completion of this task is facilitated by the preparatory phase of the Synod of Bishops which is implemented in the local Churches through seeking opinions and consultations by means of available legal measures. One of them is also the possibility to use other, additional measures which are considered adequate and useful in the process of listening to what the Spirit says to the Churches as well as those which can be indicated by the Secretariat of the Synod.³⁷

The mutual dialogue, consultations between pastors and the lay faithful give a dialogical and not only doctrinal dimension to an ecclesial community, whose obligation to the doctrine of the Church remains constant. Standing fast in the same truth is one thing, and another thing is finding the ways to express and attain it. In a joint pursuit of pastors and the lay people, mutual concern not to leave anyone behind, in consultations, dialogue and exchange of thoughts a consensus is effectively achieved by taking into account the argumentation of other people in one’s own way of thinking and operating.

The way of experiencing synodality in the Church outlined by Francis is an expression of unity of an ecclesial community. Christians gathered in different Churches and Christian communities pray for and aim at such a unity. The synodal path indicates the similarities to ecumenical ways of striving for unity, for which the starting point are not doctrinal differences but the common foundation of faith and common Baptism. It indicates the possibility of summoning a Synod dedicated to ecumenical issues. It is difficult to imagine that on the agenda of the planned assembly there would be no place for ecumenical dialogue between particular Churches. It would also be hardly acceptable for the ecumenical matters to be discussed only from the point of view of the Catholic Church, without participation of Christians belonging to other Christian denominations. When I say a dialogue I mean more than a commonly used name describing contacts between Christian Churches. If a Synod can be summoned for reasons of ecumenical nature, then its very course assumes the process of dialogue planned on this path. Ecumenical dialogue is an

³⁶ *Ibidem*, n. 5.3.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, Articles 5—6.

exchange which happens in truth and love. Listening to the other side of the dialogue allows first understanding the differences, noticing similarities and accepting the wealth expressed in the testimony of faith.³⁸ Both the synodal and ecumenical process do not focus on reaching a compromise leading to creation of a new truth but aim at expressing it in the most accurate way, perfecting specific aspects of being the Church. It is definitely a two-way path based on the exchange of ideas and above all gifts which contribute to the development of what requires discernment and concern.

The third statement concerns the issue of common paths in the field of ecumenical activity in the spirit of papal understanding of the unity of Christians, which Francis repeatedly expressed during his meetings with the representatives of other Christian Churches. Within the scope of ecumenical activity many different areas of joint operation have emerged, and new ones are constantly outlined and proposed.³⁹ A practical reflection of Christian unity through joint action at the same time can become a reference point for the synodal path, on which emerging differences should not be treated as hostile positions. Similarly to ecumenical path, specific ways of being the Church and expressing the Church, although at first may seem inadequate, in the further process of mutual understanding can be perceived as complementary and enriching. It pertains to both particular Church as well as other Churches. The phenomenon of reception in its fundamental and original meaning, understood as accepting in a particular Church what arose in a different Church is the expression of her unity. Furthermore, the acceptance of jointly undertaken actions within the scope of activity going beyond the framework of the local Church in one's own Church reflects this unity. The actual development of Christian life progresses in the practical dimension and becomes a sign of Christianity in accordance with Christ's words "[b]y this it will be clear to all men that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another" (Jn 13, 35). Christian unity is not an expression of uniformity but is shaped through unity and diversity, diversity creates unity and unity expresses itself in diversity.

³⁸ W. KASPER: *Kościół Katolicki...*, p. 541.

³⁹ W. REES: "Ecumenical Cooperation in the Field of Catechesis, Religious Education, and Universities as well as *Communicatio in Sacris* according to the *Ecumenical Directory*." *Ecumeny and Law* 6 (2018), pp. 131—185.

5. Conclusions

Drawing upon the considerations presented in the article, the following conclusions can be arrived at:

1. Pope Francis, while reforming the way the Synod is carried out, indicated the possibility of adopting specific regulations concerning its course if he considers it appropriate, especially for ecumenical reasons. This resolution was contained in Article 1 of the Apostolic Constitution *Episcopalis communio*, whose title concerns the format of the synod assemblies. In this way, ecumenical dialogue to which Francis dedicates his responsibility for the Church of Christ entered a wider perspective of involvement of the whole Church. It is not only the focus of discussion groups of theologians but requires engagement of the whole Church according to the method of carrying out the Synod going beyond the hitherto meetings of bishops respecting the collegiality existing between them.

2. Ecumenical issues can become the topic of the Synod in the form of ordinary, extraordinary or special assemblies. They were not reduced to one of them. It is another confirmation and proof that they are not limited only to local or special problems, which require extraordinary proceedings, but they are an element concerning the whole Church in her dimension of universality in accordance with synodal teaching about the Church of Christ, whose “many elements of sanctification and of truth [...] as gifts belonging to the Church of Christ, are forces impelling toward catholic unity.”⁴⁰

3. The possibility of summoning the Synod of Bishops, if it is considered appropriate for ecumenical reasons, also indicates that the synodal path is becoming the right path of ecumenical dialogue including practical forms of its implementation in the idea of ecumenism. They actually already exist at the level of local Churches or cooperation of various Christian communities. The synodal path becomes a reference for ecumenical dialogue and can contribute to strengthening it.

4. Synodal character of the Church in the ontological order is primary in relation to ecumenical dialogue. However, in the chronological order ecumenical dialogue considerably exceeded the realization of synodality in the forms presently expressing it. Two dimensions of the presence of the Church in the world neither remain indifferent towards each other nor constitute two parallel areas of ecclesial activity. In the practical aspect as well as theological perspective in the ecumenical dialogue one can find a point of reference for the ecumeny of synodal dialogue.

⁴⁰ *Lumen gentium*, n. 8.2.

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Conscience — synodalité — œcuménisme

Résumé

L'article contient les considérations concernant deux documents: la Constitution apostolique du pape François *Episcopalis communio* et le document final de la XV^e Assemblée générale du Synode des évêques consacrée aux problèmes des jeunes intitulé *Jeunesse, foi et discernement vocationnel*. Le document synodal contient des questions qui n'ont pas fait l'objet de délibérations synodales, mais concernent le chemin synodal de l'Église. L'auteur réfléchit sur les éléments communs des deux documents et interprète chacun d'entre eux à la lumière de l'autre. Il attire l'attention sur le discernement des dons, des charismes et de la conscience, qui déterminent la position des fidèles dans la communauté ecclésiale et affectent les liens entre eux et les pasteurs de l'Église. L'élargissement du champ de réalisation de la nature synodale de l'Église permet à l'auteur de poser une question sur le modèle de présence de l'Église dans le monde. L'auteur souligne les similitudes entre la voie synodale et la méthodologie du dialogue œcuménique, qui peuvent influencer la convocation d'un synode consacré aux questions œcuméniques.

Mots-clés: Synode des évêques, chemin synodal, dialogue œcuménique, similitudes

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Coscienza — sinodalità — ecumenismo

Sommario

Il punto di riferimento per le considerazioni sono due documenti: la Costituzione apostolica di Papa Francesco *Episcopalis communio* e il documento finale della XV Assemblea generale del Sinodo dei Vescovi dedicata ai problemi dei giovani, la fede e il discernimento vocazionale. Il documento sinodale presenta questioni che non sono state oggetto delle deliberazioni sinodali, ma riguardano il cammino sinodale della Chiesa. L'autore riflette sugli elementi comuni di entrambi i documenti e interpreta ciascuno alla luce dell'altro. Richiama l'attenzione sull'elemento del discernimento dei doni, dei carismi e della coscienza, che determinano la posizione dei fedeli nella comunità ecclesiale e incidono sui legami tra loro e i pastori della Chiesa. L'ampliamento dell'area di realizzazione della natura sinodale della Chiesa consente all'autore di porre una domanda sul modello della presenza della Chiesa nel mondo. L'autore sottolinea le somiglianze tra il cammino sinodale e la metodologia del dialogo ecumenico, che possono influenzare la convocazione di un Sinodo dedicato alle questioni ecumeniche.

Parole chiave: Sinodo dei Vescovi, cammino sinodale, dialogo ecumenico, somiglianze