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The Laity in the Church:
Communion, Participation, Mission (I)



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*The Laity in the Church:
Communion, Participation,
Mission (I)*

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Part One

Ecumenical Theological Thought



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The Place of the Laity in the Synodal Vision of the Church

Abstract: The article examines the place and role of the laity within the synodal vision of the Church developed in the teaching of Pope Francis. It traces and discusses the historical evolution of the relationship between clergy and laity, from the early Christian concept of *laos Theou* to the modern understanding of the People of God. Although the Second Vatican Council and the subsequent apostolic exhortation *Christifideles laici* affirmed the dignity and mission of the laity, their participation in the Church's governance and decision-making remains limited. Synodality – understood as the common journey of the People of God – emerges as a response to this tension. Pope Francis presents it as a new stage in ecclesiological development, in which the laity's shared responsibility for the Church's mission constitutes not a supplement but the very essence of its life and activity.

Keywords: synodality, laity, co-responsibility, evangelization, Church

If one were to ask today what in the pontificate of Pope Francis has proved most significant for the future of the Church and, in turn, will most decisively shape the direction of its further development, the answer would undoubtedly include the concept of *synodality*. This refers not merely to the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, *For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission* – commonly called the “Synod on Synodality” – which lasted three years and concluded on October 27, 2023, in Rome. More important is what this synodality brings to the Church: the new perspective it opens before the ecclesial community at various levels of its life and functioning. Still relevant in this context is the observation once made by the International Theological Commission,

which, in its document *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, points to the fact that although the noun “synodality” appeared relatively recently in theological, canonical, and pastoral literature – as a neologism derived from the adjective “synodal” and ultimately from the term “synod” – “people speak of synodality as a ‘constitutive dimension’ of the Church or *tout court* of the ‘synodal Church’. This linguistic novelty, which needs careful theological clarification, is a sign of something new that has been maturing in the ecclesial consciousness starting from the Magisterium of Vatican II, and from the lived experience of local Churches and the universal Church since the last Council until today.”¹ What, then, does this achievement consist of – one that may be situated at the very centre of the renewal undertaken by the Second Vatican Council and that, in the Synod on Synodality, finds its theological and pastoral grounding and development?

The troublesome word *laos*

Even before the inauguration of the Synod on Synodality, the International Theological Commission connected this achievement with the theological idea of the Church as the People of God, emphasizing the following point: “The ecclesiology of the People of God stresses the common dignity and mission of all the baptized, in exercising the variety and ordered richness of their charisms, their vocations and their ministries. In this [...] ecclesiological context, synodality is the specific *modus vivendi et operandi* of the Church, the People of God, which reveals and gives substance to her being as communion when all her members journey together, gather in assembly and take an active part in her evangelizing mission.”² What is thus meant is the engagement and participation of the entire People of God in the life and mission of the Church – not merely of a certain selected or privileged portion of it, determined by the fact of ordination. In this sense, synodality is inseparably linked to the question of the place

¹ INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION: *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church* (2.03.2018), no. 5. Available online: https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20180302_sinodalita_en.html [accessed 5.11.2025].

² *Ibidem*, no. 6.

and role in the Church of those who, in fact, constitute its great majority: the laity. This raises a key question: Does the synodal vision of the Church imply merely a return to a certain understanding of the involvement of the laity in the life of the ecclesial community, characteristic of the first centuries of its existence, or does the said vision, in fact, point to a new direction? And if so, what is that direction?

There is no doubt that the concept of the People of God has, from the very beginning, retained a clearly defined meaning and rests on the conviction that all the baptized – including the laity – constitute its integral part. Yet, as Jacques Fontaine rightly notes, it also raises the question, “what relation is there in fact between the people of God in Scripture, the *laos Theou*, and that which we call in the twentieth century the laity? [...]. A traditional sociology – adds Fontaine – and one could say clerical sociology, of this people of the church has for a long time defined the laity by a sort of ‘method of the remainder’. From the time of the most ancient Christian communities, the development of individual charisms and of the hierarchy has ‘set apart’ those who have chosen the better part (*klēros*) [...]. There remain then by simple subtraction the ordinary baptized persons, the laity.”³ This condescending and negative view of the laity is ancient. It originates in an elitism, that is to say a dualism that is not the best legacy to Christianity of an aristocratic and Platonizing antiquity, relayed thereafter through the oligarchical and monarchical structures of Germanic societies but also through an encratism just as ancient as Judeo-Christians – that of the second-century sermon on ‘one hundred, sixty, and thirty for one’ (an allusion to the parable in Mark 4:20), which reserved the better spiritual ‘return’ to the martyrs and to continent ascetics (one hundred for one, and sixty for one!). The simple ‘just ones’ of the Christian people were not allocated more than thirty for one.”⁴

It would be a mistake, however, to think that such a depreciating view of the position of the laity in the Church was universally accepted in the first centuries of Christianity. On the contrary, there is clear evidence that the theology taking shape at that time did not seek to diminish the role of the laity on account of their lack of ordination. An example can be found in the words of Saint Augustine, who in *The City of God*,

³ J. FONTAINE: “The Practice of Christian Life: The Birth of the Laity.” In: *Christian Spirituality: Origins to the Twelfth Century*. Eds. B. MCGINN, J. MEYENDORFF, J. LECLERCQ. New York 1985, p. 453.

⁴ Ibidem, p. 454.

commenting on the words of the Book of Revelation (20:6), writes: “Now St John having said, ‘On such the second death shall have no power’, proceeds thus: ‘But they shall be the priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years’. Now this is not meant only of those whom the Church peculiarly calls bishops and priests, but as we are all called Christians, because of our mystical chrism, ‘our unction’, so are we all priests in being the members of one Priest. Whereupon St Peter calls us, ‘A royal priesthood, an holy nation’ (1 Pet 2:9).”⁵ Marie-Françoise Baslez further reminds that the emergence within the Church of the distinction between clergy and laity – appearing from the turn of the second and third centuries and based on the ecclesial model presented in the writings of Saint Ignatius of Antioch – was originally grounded in the definition of a ministerial hierarchy consisting of three levels: the bishop, the presbyter (or elder, who would later become the priest), and the deacon.⁶ Consequently, “clericalization went hand in hand with professionalization, especially in the Churches of Africa. These were the ones that revived, in order to enhance the privileges of the bishop, the Latin word *sacerdos*, which designated one who performed sacred rites, by virtue of his special calling to celebrate the sacrifice. Tertullian distinguished between ‘sacerdotal functions’ and the ‘functions of the laity’. This term, derived from the Greek *laos*, was used by Cyprian to denote the ‘people established in the Church’. As such, they were occasionally consulted by the bishop on matters of discipline and clerical promotion.”⁷ Does this mean, then, that theologically speaking, the lack of ordination – and therefore the inability to exercise the functions derived from it – made the laity a lower category of members within the People of God? Jacques Fontaine recalls that already at the beginning of the 3rd century, Tertullian “reflected the lack of precision at Carthage regarding the distribution of ‘ministerial’ tasks between laity and clergy [...]. Tertullian based on Rev 1:6 the question he posed in chapter 7 of his Exhortation to Chastity: ‘Is it not true that we also, the laity, are priests? [...]. That which constitutes the difference between the order of priests and the people is the authority in the church [...]’. The function of exercising authority – with all the social, judiciary, and, in the large sense,

⁵ SAINT AUGUSTINE: *The City of God*. Trans. J. HEALEY. Vol. 2. Edinburgh 1909, pp. 261–262, [Book XX, Chapter X].

⁶ Cf. M.-F. BASLEZ: “Kościoły w Kościele, stopniowa strukturyzacja.” In: *Po Jezusie. Pierwsze wieki chrześcijaństwa*. Eds. R. DUPONT-ROC, A. GUGGENHEIM. Lutynia 2022, pp. 449, 453 [trans. R. ZAJĄCZKOWSKI, no official English translation available].

⁷ Ibidem, p. 453.

political nuances of the Old Latin word *auctoritas* – is translated visibly by the privileged place that the members of the clergy of the church occupy materially in what will be called the presbyterium, that is, the semicircular bench that surrounds, along the wall of the apse, the ‘cathedra’ of the bishop, in opposition to the *quadratum populi*. Tertullian insisted on the fact that in case of necessity a layperson may just as well baptize as preside over the Eucharist: ‘There where the members of the ecclesiastical order do not sit together, you are alone to make the offering, to baptize, to be priest on your own account, because there where the three are reunited the church is found – even though these are the laity’.”⁸

The Synod and “the lay spirituality”

The tension that had already manifested itself in the first centuries of the Church’s existence, connected with grounding the theology of the People of God in the term *laos* – used to designate the entirety of the faithful – may be summarized as follows: on the one hand, the emerging ecclesiology clearly recognized the equal dignity of all the baptized and presented them as a community of companions on the journey, united by baptism and personal friendship with Christ.⁹ On the other hand, the distinction between laity and clergy – initially introduced to differentiate sacerdotal functions, which conferred the right to celebrate the liturgy, and later, beginning with the time of Emperor Constantine, associated with the gradual granting of specific privileges to the clergy¹⁰ – led to a slow depreciation of the position of the laity in the Church. What was the way out of this situation? It seems that already in the early centuries of the Church, amid the emerging division, an effort was made to discover an authentically ecclesial identity proper to the laity – one that would strengthen their place and role within the community of the People of God. Perhaps for this reason, as Jacques Fontaine finds “interesting to see Clement of Rome, who wrote in

⁸ J. FONTAINE: “The Practice of Christian Life: The Birth of the Laity...,” pp. 455–456.

⁹ Cf. A. PRONIEWSKI, M. ANIKIEJ: “Synodalność Kościoła – czy na dzisiejsze czasy?” *Society: Studies, Research, and Documents in the Field of the Church’s Social Teaching* 157/1 (2022), pp. 44–45.

¹⁰ Cf. B. KUMOR: *History of the Church. Vol. 1: Christian Antiquity*. Lublin 2023, pp. 122–123.

Greek from the city of Rome, employing for the first time the word layman (*laikos*) in a sense that does not differ very much from our own [...]. Clement was drawn to use the word and to define it. If the function of ‘a particular service has fallen upon the high priest’, Levites (the context suggests that he sees in them the ‘figures of bishops, priests, and Christian deacons’), ‘those of the laity are bound by precepts proper to laity’ [...]. Clement’s phrase proposes in the church of Christ a positive specificity for the lay tradition. It postulates the existence of rules of life distinct from those of the future *ordo sacerdotalis* and particular to the lay tradition.”¹¹ What did this mean in practice? Questions such as the celibacy of bishops, priestly continence, the duties of presbyters, and the delineation of typically lay spheres of engagement in the world were only beginning to take shape. Yet there was an awareness that one essential aspect of the role of the laity in the early Church was to support and legitimize the bishop’s authority. “From the beginnings of the organization of the African church – writes Fontaine – the bishop had to be assisted by a council of *seniores laici* elected by the Christian people, a council whose origin may go back to the Jewish community. This council assured, with the bishop, an administrative and governmental function and also jurisdiction and teaching. The correspondence of Cyprian contains the same message. If the bishop of Carthage was convinced that his authority was delegated to him by God, he knew that concretely he held it just as much from the Christian people as from his clergy.”¹² This undoubtedly reflects the same spirit that animated the first synodal gatherings, though it is difficult to identify within it the foundations of a specifically lay spirituality or way of life.

“There remained, then, great permeability between the Christian people and a clergy – notes Jacques Fontaine – that was far from constituting a clerical class. In large part, it was still recruited directly from among the best of the laity.”¹³ This distinction, however, becomes evident in the functioning of the synods that were so crucial to the development of the early Church. “As far as we know – writes Józef Grzywaczewski – synodal sessions lasted only a few days. They were attended principally by bishops, who could be accompanied by priests and deacons as travel assistants, secretaries, or theological advisers. Lower clergy, even if present in the assembly hall, did not have voting rights. Antoni Żurek writes that ‘some assemblies of

¹¹ J. FONTAINE: “The Practice of Christian Life: The Birth of the Laity...,” p. 455.

¹² Ibidem, p. 456.

¹³ Ibidem, p. 460.

bishops were held in churches, and in those cases the faithful could be present' to listen to the proceedings and support the participants with their prayer."¹⁴ Bolesław Kumor makes a similar observation: synods did not gather the general body of the faithful, but bishops. When all the bishops of the East or the West participated, they were called general synods; when they gathered the bishops of a given patriarchate under the leadership of the patriarch, they were patriarchal synods; and when they assembled bishops from a given country, metropolis, or diocese, they were respectively national, provincial, or diocesan synods. Of special significance were the synods of Constantinople, which brought together under the patriarch's leadership the bishops of nearby episcopal sees and those residing in the imperial capital, and likewise the papal synods of Rome, held under the authority of the Bishop of Rome.¹⁵ In the following centuries of the Church's first millennium, the form of the synods changed somewhat, but this did not result in greater participation of the laity. "Catholic diocesan synods were convened for various purposes – primarily to preserve the purity of faith, ecclesiastical discipline, and order. At these gatherings, the clergy were informed of the decrees of the Apostolic See and the resolutions of provincial synods. During the synods, changes to liturgical rubrics were made, and the bishops' own instructions were promulgated. By right, the cathedral chapter, the clergy of the diocesan seat, and representatives of the priests from the territory were to participate. Only the bishop, however, possessed legislative authority. All others had merely a consultative voice."¹⁶ It seems, therefore, that although the synods of that period constituted a very important element of the Church's identity and served as a source of many doctrinal, pastoral, and liturgical developments, they were not, as such, accompanied by any significant increase in lay participation. Synodality, as a valuable and desirable "way of being" of the Church – its *modus vivendi et operandi* – was, in that era, still limited to a chosen and rather elite "segment" of the ecclesial community. Despite this, Jacques Fontaine maintains that even at that time the foundations of a specific spirituality proper to the laity – a distinct "lay spirituality" – were beginning to take shape. "The Constantinian turning point in the first third of the fourth century – argues Fontaine – followed by the official suppression of ancient

¹⁴ J. GRZYWACZEWSKI: "Tradycja synodalna w pierwszych wiekach." In: *Synodalność wyzwaniem dla Kościoła w Polsce...*, p. 73.

¹⁵ Cf. B. KUMOR: *Historia Kościoła...*, p. 139.

¹⁶ A. PRONIEWSKI, M. ANIKIEJ: "Synodalność Kościoła – czy na dzisiejsze czasy?...", p. 47.

paganism in the age of Theodosius (from 379 to 395), started a new course open to the penetration of Christianity in all of Roman society. The laity began to bring to bear all their weight, both for better and for worse. By the beginning of the sixth century, the fall of Rome, which had politically disappeared in 476, handed over medieval society in the West to the spiritual authority and often, involuntarily, to the temporal authority of the clergy, at first of the bishops, but also of the abbots. But the Carolingian 'reform' of the eighth and ninth centuries gave new attention to the laity and to reflection on their way of life. These three great phases are the starting points for [...] the difficult birth of a 'spirituality of the laity' in the life of the Christian people."¹⁷

A specific vocation

Efforts to strengthen the position of the laity in the Church by seeking a spirituality or a particular vocation distinctive to them began to gain momentum during the period of the Counter-Reformation. This process, however, is not always evaluated positively, especially since it ultimately led to a reinforcement of the division between clergy and laity – a division that gradually, more than baptism, became the fundamental point of reference for Catholic identity. "The Spanish theologian José R. Villar notes – observes Janusz Bujak – that the Catholic theology and practice in recent centuries emphasized the distinction between clerics and the faithful, as a reaction to Protestant thought and its assertion of the equality of all the baptized. This explains the weak theological and magisterial references to the idea of a common Christian vocation before the Second Vatican Council. The sharpening of differences between clergy and laity inevitably led to the creation of an image of the Church as a pyramidal institution, divided into two sectors: *ecclesia docens*, the depository of function and authority, and *ecclesiaicens*, composed of the baptized who were subject to the clergy, on whom the primary responsibility for mission rested, while the baptized were to 'help' them, yet without bearing personal responsibility."¹⁸

¹⁷ J. FONTAINE: "The Practice of Christian Life: The Birth of the Laity...", pp. 454–455.

¹⁸ J. BUJAK: "Teologiczne podstawy synodalności." In: *Synodalność wyzwaniem dla Kościoła w Polsce...*, p. 55.

Janusz Bujak adds that, according to Villar, the Second Vatican Council overcame this image of the Church as a *societas inaequalium*, by emphasizing that all the baptized hold equal rights and a common dignity by virtue of their participation in the one priesthood of Christ, which is realized in the Church as the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial priesthood.¹⁹ Yet one might ask whether Villar's thesis regarding this overcoming is not somewhat overly optimistic. Indeed, the Council's *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity* clearly emphasizes that "[a]s sharers in the role of Christ as priest, prophet, and king, the laity have their work cut out for them in the life and activity of the Church. Their activity is so necessary within the Church communities that without it the apostolate of the pastors is often unable to achieve its full effectiveness."²⁰ Similarly, the apostolic exhortation *Christifideles laici* of John Paul II – on the vocation and mission of the laity in the Church and in the world – explicitly reiterates the truth that, by the power of baptism, lay persons receive in their own proper dimension a share in the threefold office of Jesus Christ: priestly, prophetic, and kingly.²¹ The fundamental difficulty, however, lies in the interpretation of what exactly this proper dimension of participation entails. The exhortation *Christifideles laici*, referring to the words of the Council's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*, explains that "[t]he secular character is properly and particularly that of the lay faithful [...]. The 'world' thus becomes the place and the means for the lay faithful to fulfill their Christian vocation. [...] 'The secular character of the lay faithful is not therefore to be defined only in a sociological sense, but most especially in a theological sense. The term secular must be understood in light of the act of God the creator and redeemer, who has handed over the world to women and men, so that they may participate in the work of creation, free creation from the influence of sin and sanctify themselves in marriage or the celibate life, in

¹⁹ Cf. *ibidem*, pp. 55–56.

²⁰ SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL: *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity* "*Apostolicam actuositatem*" (18.11.1965), no. 10. Available online: https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651118_apostolicam-actuositatem_en.html [accessed 1.08.2023].

²¹ Cf.: JOHN PAUL II: *Apostolic Exhortation "Christifideles laici"*, no. 14. Available online: https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_30121988_christifideles-laici.html? [accessed 29.10.2025]; SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL: *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church "Lumen gentium"*, [nos. 10–12]. Available online: https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html [accessed 29.10.2025].

a family, in a profession and in the various activities of society’.”²² In practice, this means that everything which for the clergy may constitute an additional or exceptional task becomes, for the laity, their proper mission: to seek the Kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs such as economics, science, politics, culture, or various forms of social involvement.

Defining the place and role of the laity in the Church through the lens of their specific vocation – as articulated by the Second Vatican Council and further developed in *Christifideles laici* – undoubtedly deepens the understanding of the ecclesial identity proper to the laity. Yet, in a certain sense, it still halts the development of this understanding halfway. For by delimiting a sphere of temporal affairs as specific to the laity – matters which for the clergy may be secondary or exceptional – the remaining domain of “spiritual affairs” in the broad sense becomes effectively reserved for the clergy. This involves not only the governing authority in the Church, sacramental administration, or liturgical preaching, but also many other spiritual activities – pastoral, evangelizing, formative, and devotional. This “half-step” situation means that, apart from defining a specific and distinctive vocation for the laity (concern with worldly affairs) and allowing a relatively narrow range of other forms of engagement (involvement of the laity in liturgy, catechesis, or certain missionary activities), a significant area of participation in the life and mission of the Church still remains inaccessible to them (or accessible only to a limited extent). The fact that, in light of *Christifideles laici*, this area appears as proper to the clergy does not, however, arise necessarily from the nature of their vocation. Rather, it could – and indeed should – constitute a common sphere of mission shared by both clergy and laity, and a space of close collaboration between them. This is particularly true with regard to evangelization, common discernment, and shared participation in the process of decision-making at various levels of ecclesial life. It is precisely this perspective that characterizes the vision of the Church which Pope Francis closely associates with the idea of synodality.

²² JOHN PAUL II: *Apostolic Exhortation “Christifideles laici”*..., no. 15; cf. SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL: *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church “Lumen gentium”*..., no. 31.

A co-shared mission

Already in the first year of his pontificate, in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, Pope Francis set the direction for further reflection on the place and role of the laity in the Church. “In virtue of their baptism – writes the Pope – all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples (cf. Mt 28:19). All the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelization, and it would be insufficient to envisage a plan of evangelization to be carried out by professionals while the rest of the faithful would simply be passive recipients. The new evangelization calls for personal involvement on the part of each of the baptized. Every Christian is challenged, here and now, to be actively engaged in evangelization; indeed, anyone who has truly experienced God’s saving love does not need much time or lengthy training to go out and proclaim that love.”²³ These words of Pope Francis are crucial because they identify evangelization as the vocation that naturally flows from baptism and belongs to all believers – not only to the clergy. Moreover, Pope does not limit the evangelizing activity of the laity merely to the witness of a Christian life; he calls for the courageous proclamation of Christ through word and explicit testimony, in ways adapted to the concrete situations in which believers find themselves.²⁴ Equally significant is the fact that Francis sees the necessity of lay activity not only in the sphere of worldly affairs, but also in the evangelizing and pastoral dimension of the Church’s life, because, as he writes, “in all the baptized, from first to last, the sanctifying power of the Spirit is at work, impelling us to evangelization. The People of God is holy because of this anointing, which makes it infallible *in credendo*. This means that it does not err in belief, even though it may not find words to express its faith. The Spirit guides it in truth and leads it to salvation. As part of his mysterious love for humanity, God furnishes the totality of the faithful with an instinct of faith – *sensus fidei* – which helps them to discern what is truly of God.”²⁵ In this way, Pope Francis unites the universal baptismal call to evangelization with the reality of the *sensus fidei*, which makes the laity natural

²³ FRANCIS: *Apostolic Exhortation “Evangelii gaudium”*, no. 120. Available online: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html [accessed 29.10.2025].

²⁴ Cf. *ibidem*, no. 121.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, no. 119.

partners of the clergy in the processes of discernment and decision-making within the Church. It is precisely this participatory process, grounded in the *sensus fidei* and aimed at building the unity and mission of the Church, that constitutes the essence of synodality.

One may therefore conclude that Francis's vision of shared responsibility between clergy and laity for the Church's mission – centred on the proclamation of the Gospel – finds its deepening and development precisely in the idea of synodality. This means understanding the Church as the pilgrim People of God, in which all the baptized, in addition to their particular vocations according to their state of life, share in a synodal way the responsibility for the essential dimension of the Church's mission. *The Final Document of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops* expresses this clearly: "Synod of Bishops in its two sessions has permitted us today to present to the Holy Father and to all the Churches this witness to what we have experienced and the fruit of our discernment for a renewed missionary impulse. During each stage, the journey was characterised by the wisdom of the 'sense of faith' (*sensus fidei*) of the People of God. Step by step, we came to understand that at the heart of the *Synod 2021–2024. For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission* there is a call to joy and to the renewal of the Church in following the Lord, in committing to service of His mission, and in searching for ways to be faithful. This call is based upon a shared baptismal identity [...]. It challenges all the Baptised, without exception: 'The whole People of God is an agent of the proclamation of the Gospel. Every baptised person is called to be a protagonist of mission since we are all missionary disciples'."²⁶ This is what Jacek Kiciński fittingly calls a co-shared mission,²⁷ whose synodal

²⁶ *Final Document of the XVI General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops "For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission"*, [nos. 3–4]. Available online: <https://www.synod.va/en/news/final-document-of-the-xvi-assembly.html> [accessed 29.10.2025].

²⁷ "Kiciński – writes Ireneusz Werbiński – confronts his reflection here with the contemporary signs of the times in which the Church fulfills its mission [...]. The response to the emerging signs of the times is above all the communion of mission [...]. The author points to the presence of a co-shared mission. Today, the ability to participate and cooperate skillfully in the ministry of evangelization becomes extremely important. Hence the emphasis on the necessity of the ongoing evangelization of culture and the inculturation of the Gospel. This should take place within the space of dialogue with all people. In this way, actions in favour of peace and justice can be undertaken. All of this calls for a holistic vision of the Church community." I. WERBIŃSKI: "Jacek Kiciński CMF: Duchowość misji współdzielonej. Studium w świetle współczesnego Magisterium Kościoła." *Wrocławski Przegląd Teologiczny* 16 (2023), p. 241.

understanding opens the way to completing the step initiated by the Second Vatican Council toward a deeper interpretation of the place and role of the laity in the Church. What does this synodal understanding consist of? Above all, it is not about defining distinctive features that constitute the identity of the laity, but about indicating the manner in which cooperation between clergy and laity should be expressed – precisely in those areas of the Church’s life that they are called to shape together. The point of reference for such an understanding is the historical tradition of the early synods and the synodal heritage of the Church; yet this is not a simple return to the Christian past. Through the unprecedented inclusion of lay people in the entirety of the synodal process – on a scale never before seen in the Church – Pope Francis has demonstrated that his intention is also to advance the very concept of the synod in a way that shapes the Church’s future. This development is both anticipated and reflected in the very idea of synodality itself. In this context, the idea of synodality contributes not only to indicating future directions for the Church’s growth but also opens up new perspectives on looking at the laity

Przemysław Sawa is right to emphasize that the experience of synodality motivates the discovery of the co-responsibility of all the baptized – clergy, consecrated persons, and laity – for the Church, its functioning, and its mission. “This flows directly from the communal nature of the believing community. The first pillar of this understanding is the recognition of the personal subjectivity of the baptized. A proper vision of the Church does not deny this subjectivity to any of its members, and the acceptance of a hierarchical structure can in no way, by its very nature, serve as justification for introducing divisions within the community.”²⁸ This follows directly from the very essence of synodality, which is defined in *The Final Document of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops* as follows: “This *modus vivendi et operandi* works through the community listening to the Word and celebrating the Eucharist, the brotherhood of communion and the coresponsibility and participation of the whole People of God in its life and mission, on all levels and distinguishing between various ministries and roles.”²⁹ It should be emphasized that this co-responsibility, in the case of the laity, embraces a broader field of activity than that

²⁸ P. SAWA: “Synodalność w Kościele katolickim i innych wspólnotach chrześcijańskich. Możliwości i granice inspiracji dla odnowy Kościoła.” In: *Synodalność wyzwaniem dla Kościoła w Polsce...*, p. 247.

²⁹ *Final Document of the XVI General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops* “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission”..., no. 30.

indicated by the Second Vatican Council and post-conciliar documents as characteristic of their “secular character.” In this respect, the idea of synodality not only justifies the participation of the laity in forms of ecclesial activity that have traditionally been attributed to the clergy, but also develops the original idea of the synod by pointing to the need to expand the circle of its full and legitimate participants to include lay persons. For this reason, as Przemysław Sawa observes, “the co-responsibility of the laity cannot be limited merely to the practical or organizational sphere. What is crucial is the participation of the laity in discernment and governance in unity with the bishops and the presbyters sent by them. The challenge remains to maintain a balance between lay involvement and hierarchical ministry. [...] However, there are no theological objections to lay participation in the governance of various ecclesial bodies at the universal, diocesan (e.g. consecrated and lay persons at the head of curial offices), or parish levels. [...] Furthermore, it also seems worthwhile to ask about the participation of the faithful in the selection of candidates for important ecclesial offices – especially that of the diocesan bishop and parish priest – as well as about the right to present such candidates to the appropriate ecclesiastical authority.”³⁰

Conclusions

There is no doubt that synodality, as understood by Pope Francis, and the synodal vision of the Church associated with it, represent a step forward in the understanding of the place and role of the laity within the ecclesial community. At the same time, they signify not only a return to the early Christian idea of the synod but also its genuine development. In this way, the programme announced in the *Preparatory Document* for the Synod on Synodality is brought to realization: “Within this context, synodality represents the main road for the Church, called to renew herself under the action of the Spirit and by listening to the Word. The ability to imagine a different future for the Church and her institutions, in keeping with the mission she has received, depends largely on the decision to

³⁰ P. SAWA: “Synodalność w Kościele katolickim i innych wspólnotach chrześcijańskich...,” p. 249.

initiate processes of listening, dialogue, and community discernment, in which each and every person can participate and contribute. At the same time, the decision to ‘journey together’ is a prophetic sign for the human family, which needs a shared project capable of pursuing the good of all.”³¹ Of course, synodality cannot violate the sacramental and hierarchical structure of the Church and must respect the distinction between the ministry that arises from episcopal and priestly ordination and the service proper to all the baptized. The co-sharing of mission between laity and clergy should never diminish or replace the specific tasks proper to bishops and priests.³² Rather, what is needed is a model of cooperation and co-responsibility for the Church in which the ministries of clergy and laity do not stand in opposition but complement one another – each preserving its proper prerogatives while taking into account individual gifts and charisms. Such a model undoubtedly requires great mutual openness, maturity, trust, and the cultivation of a genuinely synodal culture. Yet if, as Pope Francis has stressed, “[i]t is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium,”³³ then it is the duty of all the faithful to embrace this challenge.

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³¹ *Preparatory Document for the XVI General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission”*, no. 9. Available online: https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/common/preparatory-document/pdf-21x21/en_prepa_book.pdf [accessed 5.11.2025].

³² Cf. P. SAWA: “Synodalność w Kościele katolickim i innych wspólnotach chrześcijańskich...,” p. 251.

³³ FRANCIS: *Address at the Ceremony Commemorating the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops* (17.10.2015). Available online: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco_20151017_50-anni-versario-sinodo.html [accessed 5.11.2025].

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The Participation of the Laity in the Exercise of Jurisdictional Power within the Orthodox Church: A Canonical Study

Abstract: In the specialist literature of the Eastern Orthodox Church, canonical studies devoted to the norms governing the participation of laypeople in the exercise of the Church's jurisdictional power are relatively few and, in most cases, lack a holistic approach that includes references to both the biblical text and the texts of the early liturgical-canonical literature and canonical collections of the third and fourth centuries. Therefore, insofar as time and space have permitted, we have sought in the present study to examine and evaluate the testimonies provided by these sources, correlating them with the provisions of the canonical legislation of the first Christian millennium.

In order to illustrate how the participation of the laity in the exercise of jurisdictional power was understood and implemented throughout history, we have also made use of the canonical doctrine of the Eastern Church, as reflected especially in the commentaries of the twelfth-century Byzantine canonists. Finally, in order to provide the reader with an understanding of how the participation of the laity in the exercise of the Church's jurisdictional power is realised today, we have examined and evaluated the Statute for the Organisation and Functioning of the Romanian Orthodox Church as an example of the normative framework of a local Orthodox Church.

Keywords: canonical collections, Eastern Orthodox Church, ecclesiastical power, jurisdictional power

1. Introduction

Since ancient times, it has been observed that for an author the most important part is the beginning of their work, that is, the Introduction, because this “leads us with pleasure to the reading of the proposed subject matter, and when we reach the core of the issue, it offers us a much clearer understanding of it” (Gaius, *Ad legem duodecim tabularum*, Book I).¹

Aware of this reality, already recognised eighteen centuries ago by the famous Roman jurist Gaius, of Thracian origin, we considered it necessary to make a few preliminary clarifications regarding the concepts of power and jurisdiction and to present the subject matter and content of the work, in order to offer the reader a better understanding of how the laity participated in the exercise of jurisdictional power within the Church through one of its principal acts, namely, participation in the election of hierarchs.

As collaborators of the divinely instituted clergy, the laity participated in the exercise of ecclesiastical power (ἐκκλησιαστικὴ ἐξουσία / *potestas ecclesiastica*) in its threefold manifestation (teaching, sanctifying, and governing), as confirmed both by the text of canonical legislation from the first millennium and by the canonical doctrine of the Ecumenical Church.² But, in the present work, we have presented only the participation of the laity in the exercise of jurisdictional power and its canonical basis.

In the Eastern Church, the hierarchical relationship between the degrees deriving from the *hierarchy ordinis* and those deriving from the *hierarchy jurisdictionis*³ is grounded in the power of governance of the Church, received by virtue of grace through the Holy Sacrament of Ordination.

The jurisdictional power (*potestas jurisdictionis*), known in the specialist literature as *potestas regiminis*, that is, the power of leadership or governance of the Church, has its canonical basis in the text of the canons

¹ Apud *Corpus Iuris Civilis, Editio stereotypa septima*. Volumen Primum. Ed. P. KRUEGER. New Jersey 2010, p. 2.

² N. V. DURĂ: *Le Régime de la synodalité selon la législation canonique, conciliaire, oecuménique, du Ier millénaire*. Bucharest 1999, pp. 287–382; N. V. DURĂ: “Colecții canonice, apusene, din primul mileniu” [Canonical and Western Collections from the First Millennium]. *Analele Universității Ovidius. Seria: Drept și Științe Administrative* 1 (2003), pp. 19–33.

³ C. MITITELU: “The hierarchical relationships between the degrees resulting from the ‘*hierarchy ordinis*’ and the ‘*hierarchy jurisdictionis*’. Canonical-legal study.” *International Journal of Theology, Philosophy and Science* 15/8 (2024), pp. 62–73.

of the Canonical Collection of the first millennium,⁴ which incorporates the Apostolic Canons, the canons of the Ecumenical and Local Councils, as well as those of certain Holy Fathers, whose writings constitute canonical sources of the Orthodox Church.⁵

The first official listing of these canons (ecclesiastical laws) took place at the Sixth Ecumenical Council (Second Session of 691/692), and the process culminated in the Pan-Orthodox Council of Constantinople in 920, which reaffirmed that the *Corpus Juris Canonici* of the Eastern Church constituted the official canonical collection of the Eastern Orthodox Church.

As for the concept of *potestas* (power), this was adopted by the first Christian jurists – that is the Church’s canonists – from the *jus Romanum*, from which the phrase *in potestate episcopi* (under the authority of the bishop), in the sense that any cleric, whether of divine or human appointment, is subject to the canonical obedience of his own bishop and is therefore not *sui iuris*.

The fact that, even in the pre-Nicene period, full authority was exercised by the Synod of Bishops is also confirmed by imperial edicts. Thus, through the Imperial Edict promulgated at Trier on 17 May 376, Emperors Valens, Gratian and Valentinian II decreed that “the custom (*mos*) existing in civil proceedings should also be observed in ecclesiastical matters (*in negotiis ecclesiasticis*). Consequently, if lawsuits give rise to disputes or minor offences, these must be referred to the hearings of the diocesan synods (*dioeceseos synodis*); an exception is, however, criminal proceedings (*actio criminalis*), which must be judged by ordinary and extraordinary judges or by high-ranking magistrates (*potestatibus*) (*illustribus*)” (*Codex Theodosianus*, Book XVI, 2, 2, 23).⁶

The text of this Edict therefore refers to jurisdiction in civil cases, exercised by persons who administered justice because they held the authority to judge. However, the Imperial Edict of 376 also reveals the following two ecclesiological realities, namely:

- a. Whenever a dispute arose between clergymen, the bishops were required to convene the diocesan synod and decide the dispute, thereby putting an end to the disagreements between them.

⁴ C. MITITELU: “‘Corpus Juris Civilis’ and ‘Corpus Juris Canonici’. Legal and Canonical Considerations.” *Teologia* 61/4 (2014), pp. 127–137.

⁵ C. MITITELU: “Internal (Material) Sources of Orthodox Canonical Law.” *Philosophical-Theological Review* 1 (2011), pp. 111–120.

⁶ *Le Code Théodosien, livre XVI. Texte latin et traduction française*, par É. Paris 2002, pp. 135–136.

- b. If the matter concerned criminal law, it had to be brought to the attention of the city judge, who was competent to punish the criminal offence committed. At the same time, the case could also be referred to the Praetorian Prefect, who was one of those *illustribus potestatibus* (high-ranking magistrates).

In fact, from the time of Emperor Constantine the Great onwards, such cases were also referred to the courts of the Roman State, since, according to Roman law, “religious matters” (*in sacris*) and “the priesthood” (*sacerdotium*) belonged to the sphere of *jus publicum*, as the renowned Roman jurist Ulpian (second–third centuries) likewise observed (cf. *Institutiones*, Book I).⁷ Roman public law also provided for “religious obligations, obedience to parents, and devotion to the fatherland” (Pomponius, *Manual*).⁸

With regard to the concept of *jurisdiction*, derived from the noun *jus* and the verb *dicere*, it means “the declaration or utterance of the law, in the sense of pronouncing or establishing it, an act which is usually carried out through the law,”⁹ so in fact it amounts to “an act of law-making,”¹⁰ which *ipso facto* also implies the application of the law. Hence the fact that the term *jurisdictio* signifies the act by which the law is established, which “involves first the enactment and then the application of the law,” implemented through “the act of governance or administration.”¹¹ The scope of this type of jurisdiction does not include “acts of adjudication or justice, because these concern *iudicium*, which derives from *iudicare*, and not from *ius dicere*.”¹²

In Latin, the word *potestas/-tis* expresses the notion of having something at one’s disposal, the power of dominion, of authority,¹³ whilst the word *jurisdictio/-nis* has three meanings, namely: ‘function and territory subject to jurisdiction’, ‘authority to judge, jurisdiction (in civil cases)’, and ‘competence and authority’.¹⁴ In this article, I have used the concept of *jurisdiction* both in the sense of authority and competence

⁷ Apud *Corpus Iuris Civilis, Editio stereotypa septima*. Volumen Primum..., p. 1.

⁸ Ibidem.

⁹ L. STAN: “Har și jurisdicție” [Grace and Jurisdiction]. In: L. STAN: *Biserica și Dreptul. Principiile dreptului canonic ortodox*, vol. III. Sibiu 2012, p. 311.

¹⁰ Ibidem.

¹¹ Ibidem, p. 312.

¹² Ibidem.

¹³ G. GUȚU: *Dicționar latin-român* [Latin-Romanian Dictionary]. Bucharest 1983, p. 340.

¹⁴ Ibidem, p. 670.

in the administration of jurisdictional power, and in the sense of the authority to judge.¹⁵

According to the canonical doctrine of the Eastern Church, ecclesiastical jurisdictional power – understood as the authority to judge – is based on *divine law*, on the basis of which the exercise of “the function of judge in the Church is held by the bishops”¹⁶ (cf. can. 5 First Ecumenical Council), in their capacity as successors within the sphere of the Apostles’ power. It follows from this that the Synod of Bishops constitutes the supreme governing body of the Church and holds the fullness of ecclesiastical jurisdiction.

Within the Church, the Synod has functioned as a judicial body since the apostolic era, both in civil and criminal matters. Hence, the synodal regime has characterised the system of leadership and governance of each Orthodox local Church, even though councils did not always lead to fortunate solutions. Indeed, if we are to give credence to Saint Gregory of Nazianzus, such councils often created “only additional problems.”¹⁷

In this regard, the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church, held in Crete in 2016, cannot be considered a good example of the freedom of the laity to participate in the exercise of ecclesiastical power. For instance, during this Pan-Orthodox Council, women were permitted to speak during the sessions only after their express insistence.¹⁸

We have also made some brief conceptual clarifications, as these are necessary for a proper understanding of the participation of the laity in the exercise of the Church’s jurisdictional power through the election of the clergy.

¹⁵ C. MITITELU: *Pravilele românești, tipărite, din secolul al XVII-lea. Infrațiuni și pedepse* [Romanian Printed Law Codes of the Seventeenth Century. Crimes and Punishments]. Bucharest 2012, pp. 33–66.

¹⁶ N. MILAȘ: *Dreptul bisericesc oriental* [Eastern Ecclesiastical Law]. Trans. D. I. CORNILESCU, V. S. RADU, rev. I. MIHĂLCESCU. Bucharest 1915, p. 377.

¹⁷ GREGORIUS NAZIANZENUS: “Epistula CXXX ad Procopium.” In: *PG*, t. 37. Ed. J. P. MIGNE. Paris 1862, col. 220A.

¹⁸ N. KAZARIAN: “The Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church (Crete, 2016).” In: *Listening to the East. Synodality in Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Church Traditions*. Ed. INSTITUTE FOR ECUMENICAL STUDIES OF THE ANGELICUM and PRO ORIENTE FOUNDATION. Vatican 2023, pp. 93–101.

2. The role of the laity in the election of the clergy in the pre-Nicene period

The Apostles were called to the apostolate *secundum divina magisteria*,¹⁹ that is, directly by God. Consequently, the word “brethren” in Acts 1:16, used by Saint Peter the Apostle on the occasion of the election of Matthias (Acts 1:23–26) “to take the place in this ministry (διακονίας) and apostleship (ἀποστολῆς) from which Judas turned aside” (Acts 1:25), should not be understood merely as referring to a procedure for the election of clergy established in the apostolic era, but also as an affirmation by the Apostles of “the principle of the people’s participation in the election of those called to ecclesiastical ministry.”²⁰

According to the teaching of the great Ecumenical Father Saint John Chrysostom, the true meaning of the term “brothers” is revealed above all by the manner in which the Apostle Peter acted, namely, “not through authority or domination, but by common consent; he simply said: ‘Let us choose [...] to take Judas’s place.’ Behold the dignity and angelic character of the Church.”²¹

The same Holy Ecumenical Father tells us that the Apostles prayed to God to show them “which of the two (Joseph Barsabbas, also called Justus, and Matthias, n.n.) He would choose”²² to take the place of the ministry and apostleship from which Judas had fallen, and that “they cast lots because the Spirit had not yet been given (οὐπω γὰρ ἦν Πνεῦμα), and the lot fell upon Matthias (ὁ κληρὸς ἐπὶ Ματθίαν ἔπεσεν), and they added him to the eleven Apostles (μετὰ τῶν ἑνδεκα ἀποστόλων).”²³

With the descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost – the Jewish feast (Acts 2:1) commemorating the giving of the Tablets of the Law through Moses, also called the Feast of Weeks, that is, the period of seven weeks considered necessary for the harvest – “they were all filled with

¹⁹ I. CHRYSOSTOMUS: “In Acta Apostolorum,” Homilia III, 1. In: PG, t. LX. Ed. J. P. MIGNE. Paris 1862, col. 34.

²⁰ L. STAN: *Mirenii în Biserică. Importanța elementului mirean în Biserică și participarea lui la exercitarea puterii bisericești. Studiu canonic-istoric* [The Laity in the Church. The Importance of the Lay Element in the Church and Its Participation in the Exercise of Ecclesiastical Power. A Canonical-Historical Study]. Sibiu 1939, p. 254.

²¹ I. CHRYSOSTOMUS: “In Acta Apostolorum,” Homilia III..., col. 34.

²² Ibidem, col. 36.

²³ Ibidem.

the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:4), namely, both the Apostles and the laity. From that moment onwards, the clergy were chosen “by divine grace (κατὰ θεϊαν χάριν)” (can. 80 ap.),²⁴ and the participation of the laity in their election and ordination became an established requirement of ecclesiastical practice.

The elective principle, as an expression of the constitutional principle of the Church’s self-government, was thus concretely affirmed from the very foundation of the Church through the election of the divinely instituted clergy. This was the case in the election of the Apostle Matthias to replace Judas, in which approximately 120 disciples of Christ participated (cf. Acts 1:15), and whom the Apostle Peter addressed as “brothers” (Acts 1:16).

According to the affirmation of the theologians and canonists of the Eastern Church, the Holy Apostles accepted the proposal made by the whole Church “not because they could not have chosen the new Apostle without the consent of the people, but to set an example to all Christians as to the manner [...] in which they were to proceed in the ordination of bishops.”²⁵

We also find lay participation in the election of Simeon, son of Cleopas, as Bishop of Jerusalem,²⁶ following the stoning of the first Bishop of the Holy City, Saint James the Apostle, around the years 62/63, in which participated the entire community (Apostles, priests and laity). The texts contained in the canonical collections of the third and fourth centuries attributed to the Holy Apostles likewise bear witness to this reality.

The biblical text (New Testament) confirms that the Church exercises the power received from its founder, the Lord Jesus Christ, through its members, clergy and laity, called “to work together” for the proper functioning and governance of the Church, and that “therefore their collaboration is a duty both of the hierarchy and of the laity, who, through the profession of the Christian faith,” also contribute to the spread of “Christian teaching.”²⁷

²⁴ Σύνταγμα τῶν Θείων καὶ Ἱερῶν Κανόνων τῶν τε Ἁγίων καὶ πανευφήμεων Ἀποστόλων, καὶ τῶν Ἱερῶν καὶ Οἰκουμενικῶν καὶ Τοπικῶν Συνόδων, καὶ τῶν κατὰ μέρος Ἁγίων Πατέρων [Syntagma of the Divine and Sacred Canons of the Holy and All-Praised Apostles, of the Holy Ecumenical and Local Councils, and of the Individual Holy Fathers] [Athenian Syntagma]. Eds. G. A. RHALLER, M. POTLES. Vol. II. Athens 1852, p. 103.

²⁵ L. STAN: *Mireni în Biserică...*, p. 253.

²⁶ Cf. EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS: “Historia ecclesiastica,” lb. III, cap. XI. In: PG, t. XX. J. P. MIGNE. Paris 1857, col. 246.

²⁷ N. MILAŞ: *Dreptul bisericesc oriental...*, p. 181.

Regarding the participation of the laity in the exercise of the teaching office and their role in this ministry, Saint Paul the Apostle tells us that such participation is in keeping with the spirit of the divine mandate, so that we may all “attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God” (Ephesians 4:13), a sacred duty incumbent upon all members of the Church.

In their capacity as a “royal priesthood” (1 Peter 2:9), the laity participate – insofar as they are able – in the exercise of sacramental power, for through the prayers of the priests they too are “introduced into the mystical aspect of the service of the Altar; through their prayers during the Liturgy, they invoke, in union with the priest, the Holy Spirit upon the Gifts set forth; together with the bishop, they ask for the blessing of heaven upon those being ordained; in a word, the lay faithful cooperate – asserts the renowned canonist Nicodim Milaș – in every general act of the divine service in the Church, and through this they take an active part in that branch of ecclesiastical power for which the members of the hierarchy are particularly destined.”²⁸

3. Testimonies regarding the participation of the laity in the election of bishops in the canonical collections of the fourth and fifth centuries

The canonical collections of certain local Churches from the fourth and fifth centuries also provide conclusive evidence regarding the participation of the laity in the election of bishops. For example, the text of the Apostolic Constitutions states that “the twelve Apostles of the Lord drew up the divine Constitutions (τὰς θείας διατάξεις), and ordained bishops chosen by the people (τοῦ λαοῦ ἐκλεγμένον).”²⁹ In the text of the same Apostolic Constitutions, we also find the specification that ordination took place “on a Sunday, when the people were gathered, together with the presbyters and bishops” (*Constitutiones Apostolorum*, Book VIII, 4, 2–3).³⁰

²⁸ Ibidem, p. 182.

²⁹ *Didascalia et Constitutiones Apostolorum*. Ed. F. X. FUNK. Vol. I. Paderbornae 1905, pp. 470–471.

³⁰ Ibidem, pp. 472–473.

An early collection of canons attributed to the Apostles was that known as the *Canons of Hippolytus*, also called the *Canons of the Church of Alexandria*, attributed to Bishop Hippolytus of Portus Romanus, a native of Alexandria, and regarding which it has been noted that there is a similarity verging on identity between the content of this canonical collection and the collection compiled in Alexandria, known as the *Constitutiones Ecclesiae Aegyptiacae* (Constitutions of the Egyptian Church).

The Egyptian Church's version of the 38 canons of Saint Hippolytus, written in Greek, was subsequently translated into Coptic, Syriac, and Arabic.³¹ In the nineteenth century, the canons – in the Arabic version – were translated into Latin,³² whose editors claimed that they derived from various canonical regulations of the Egyptian Church, such as the “Orders of the Egyptian Church,”³³ that is, that ancient Egyptian “Orders (Διάταξις)” with diverse content (liturgical, canonical, moral, etc.).

The text of the canons is attributed to Bishop Hippolytus of Rome (217–235), a native of the city of Alexandria regarding whose Church we possess testimonies concerning the pastoral and canonical activity of its hierarchs, transmitted through historical and hagiographic tradition.³⁴ The text of the said canons was translated into Arabic by al-Šafī ibn al-‘Assāl,³⁵ and was subsequently rendered into Ge’ez (Old Ethiopian).³⁶ Moreover, the text of these canons is also found – in an abridged form – in the *Corpus Juris Canonici* of the Ethiopian Church, known as the *Ethiopian Sinodos*.³⁷

In the Canons of Hippolytus – compiled in the third century – we find direct documentary evidence of the participation of laypeople in

³¹ First mentioned by J. M. Vansleb, who also provided a summary of it (J. M. VANSLEB: *Histoire de l'Eglise d'Alexandrie, fondée par S. Marc, que nous appelons celle des Jacobites-Coptes d'Egypte. Écrite au Caire même, en 1672 & 1673*. Paris 1677, pp. 280–282).

³² Published in D. B. HANEBERG (ed.): *Canones S. Hippolyti. Arabice e codicibus Romanis cum versione Latina, annotationibus et prolegomenis*. Monachii 1870, pp. 63–96.

³³ R. H. CONNOLLY: *The So-Called Egyptian Church Order and Derived Documents*. Cambridge 1916.

³⁴ N. V. DURĂ: “Biserica Coptă și organizarea ei în lumina mărturiilor Tradiției istorico-agiografice” [The Coptic Church and Its Organization in the Light of the Testimonies of the Historical-Hagiographical Tradition]. *Studii Teologice* XXXIV/3–4 (1982), pp. 200–219.

³⁵ N. V. DURĂ: “Originile nomocanonului «Fetha Nagast». Identificarea canoanelor zise ale împăraților” [The Origins of the Nomocanon *Fetha Nagast*. The Identification of the So-Called Canons of the Emperors]. *Studii Teologice* XXVIII/1–2 (1976), pp. 162–183.

³⁶ M. da LEONESSA: *Testi di diritto antichi riguardanti gli Etiopi, Codificazione canonica orientale*. Fonti, fasc. VI. Vatican City 1932, pp. 15–45.

³⁷ N. V. DURĂ: “Colecția canonică etiopiană (*Corpus Juris Canonici Aethiopici*)” [The Ethiopian Canonical Collection]. *Studii Teologice* XXVI/9–10 (1974), pp. 725–738.

the election of clergy, namely in the texts of Canons 2 and 7, which attest to the existence of this practice in the Church of Alexandria as early as the apostolic era.

In accordance with the provision of Canon 2 of Hippolytus's Collection, "the bishop" has to "be chosen by all the people," and "when he is ordained, all the clergy and the people say: We choose him."³⁸ However, it is further specified that at ordination only "one of bishops and presbyters [...] lays his hand on the head and prays, saying" (can. 2).³⁹

According to the accounts of Egyptian Church historiography, in the first two or three centuries the Bishop of Alexandria was chosen from among the seven priests of the Episcopal Church,⁴⁰ and the presbyters laid their hands on the head of the one being ordained bishop.

With regard to the election of the bishop, Canon 2 of Hippolytus's Collection attests therefore that in the Church of Alexandria in the mid-third century this was done by "all the people," and it was also the *people* who declared: "we choose him."

In the text of the Canon 3, we also note that all, that is, both the clergy and the people, prayed together to God, who "established authorities and powers," that the "Holy Spirit" might descend upon the one who becomes bishop to grant him "authority to forgive sins,"⁴¹ "make him shepherd" of his people, to give him "power to loosen every bond of the oppression of demons"⁴² and, at the end of the "prayer over him," all the people say, "Amen," and then respond: "he is worthy of it (Ἀξίον ἔστιν)" (can. 3),⁴³ that is, *Dignum est*.

As regards the ordination of presbyters, in the text of Hippolytus's canons we find that "the presbyter is equal to the bishop in everything except the seat and ordination, because to him is not given the power to ordain" (can. 4).⁴⁴

³⁸ *The Canons of Hippolytus*. Ed. P. F. BRADSHAW. Trans. C. BEBAWI. New Jersey 2010, p. 11.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 12.

⁴⁰ N. V. DURĂ: "Biserica Alexandriei și activitatea canonică-pastorală a ierarhilor ei până la Sinodul de la Calcedon (451)" [The Church of Alexandria and the Canonical-Pastoral Activity of Its Hierarchs up to the Council of Chalcedon (451)]. *Studii Teologice* XXXIII/1-2 (1981), pp. 5-25.

⁴¹ *The Canons of Hippolytus...*, p. 12.

⁴² *Ibidem*.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, p. 13.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 14.

Regarding the ordination of deacons, from the following canon we may note that, “when a deacon is ordained,”⁴⁵ the same rules apply when “the bishop lays his hand” on his head “and prays over him,”⁴⁶ asking God to bestow upon him the “Holy Spirit” and to “count him among those who serve you.”⁴⁷ The same canon stipulates that the deacon “is not appointed to the presbyterate, but for the diaconate, as a servant of God” (can. 5).⁴⁸

From the text of the prayers for ordination in the three orders of the divinely instituted priesthood (bishop, priest, and deacon) – from the Collection of Canons of Saint Hippolytus – it is clear that the grace-filled power received by each of these is not equal, which confirms that its hierarchical ranks are determined by *potestas ordinis*, and not by *potestas jurisdictionis*. Consequently, it is the power received at ordination that distinguishes the status and authority of the ranks arising from the *hierarchia ordinis* and the *hierarchia jurisdictionis*.

Canon 7 of Hippolytus’s Collection refers to the election of the anagnost (reader) and the hypodeacon. Regarding the reader, the canon states that, when an anagnost is elected, he must possess the qualities of a *deacon*, and that “the bishop is to give him the Gospel” (can. 7).⁴⁹

With regard to the subdeacon, according to the provisions of Canon 7 of Hippolytus’s Collection, “he is not to be ordained still celibate and if he has not married, unless his neighbours bear witness for him and testify that he has kept himself away from women during the time of his maturity.”⁵⁰ And then it is reiterated that “one is not to lay the hand on someone in the state of celibacy, unless he has reached his maturity or is entering into mature age and is thought [worthy], when one bears witness for him.”⁵¹ And, finally, in the same Canon 7 it was also stipulated that “the subdeacon is to serve behind the deacon.”⁵²

It follows unequivocally from the text of Canon 7 of the Collection of Hippolytus that the hypodeacon did not belong to the order of clergy of divine institution, but to that of clergy of human institution, since the *anagnostes* and hypodeacons were not ordained, but instituted

⁴⁵ Ibidem.

⁴⁶ Ibidem.

⁴⁷ Ibidem.

⁴⁸ Ibidem.

⁴⁹ Ibidem, p. 15.

⁵⁰ Ibidem, pp. 15–16.

⁵¹ Ibidem, p. 16.

⁵² Ibidem.

through the laying on of hands (*manus imponatur*) upon their heads, without the recitation of the prayer invoking the Holy Spirit for the conferral of the grace of the priesthood. On the contrary, they were consecrated through a blessing, that is, by *cheirothesia*.

Although the Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council make no express reference to the presence of laypeople at the ordination of bishops, nevertheless, this is also attested to by the ancient liturgical texts concerning the rite of ordination, from which it is evident that it was the Christian laity who gave their public consent to the ordination of the bishop through that “Axios estin!” (Ἀξίός ἐστιν!).

Regarding the participation of the laity in this sublime sacramental act, the commentaries of the twelfth-century Byzantine canonists remain particularly instructive. For example, Theodore Balsamon states that Canon 4 of the First Ecumenical Council “took into account the establishment (τὸ καθίστασθαι), or the election of the bishop (ψηφίζεσθαι ἐπίσκοπον),”⁵³ He then adds the clarification that, “in ancient times, the election of bishops was carried out by the crowds of the cities (τοῦ πλήθους τῶν πολιτῶν),”⁵⁴ but that the Fathers of the Seventh Ecumenical Council did not agree with this, namely that “the life of the consecrated (τῶν ἱερωμένων) should be debased by lay people (παρὰ λαϊκῶν ἀνθρώπων),”⁵⁵ and, consequently, “decided that the bishop should be elected by the diocesan bishops (ἐπαρχιωτῶν) of each diocese.”⁵⁶

From Theodor Balsamon’s commentary, we note that the principle set out in Canon 4 of the First Ecumenical Council did not prohibit the laity from participating in the election of bishops, and that it was only through Canon 3 of the Seventh Ecumenical Council that the interference of “worldly rulers” in the election of bishops was prohibited, and, in general, of all divinely ordained clergy. This testimony confirms that the laity continued to participate not only in the election of divinely ordained clergy, but also in their appointment to office.

The participation of the laity in the election of bishops continued in the Church of Proconsular Africa during the fourth and fifth centuries, as attested by Canon 50 of the Council of Carthage, which stipulated that “for the election of a bishop (*ad eligendum episcopum*), not only three

⁵³ T. BALSAMON: “Commentary on Canon 4 of the First Ecumenical Council.” In: *Athenian Syntagma*, vol. II ..., p. 123.

⁵⁴ Ibidem.

⁵⁵ Ibidem.

⁵⁶ Ibidem.

bishops should presume to declare worthy (*purgandum*) the one who is to be ordained (*ordinandus est*), but that, in addition to the aforesaid number, two or three more should also be summoned; and, within the same community (*in eadem plebe*) for which he is to be ordained, the persons opposing him (*personae contradicentium*) should be examined, together with the accusations brought against him (*etiam quae obiciuntur*); and only after he has been cleared (*purgatus fuerit*) in public (*sub conspectu publico*) should he be ordained (*ordinetur*)” (can. 50 Council of Carthage, *Codex Canonum Ecclesiae Africanae* 419).⁵⁷

From the text of Canon 50 of the Code of Canons of the Church of Proconsular Africa, drawn up in the year 401, we may therefore note the following ecclesiological and canonical realities, namely:

- a. The presence of laypeople at the election and ordination of bishops was a reality in the Church of Proconsular Africa at the beginning of the fifth century.
- b. Lay Christians therefore also had a say regarding the personal life of the candidate for the episcopate, and if they found him to be of irreproachable moral conduct, they declared him “pure,” and thus eligible for election.
- c. At the ordination of a bishop, there had to be – in addition to the three bishops (cf. can. 1 ap.) – a further two or three bishops (cf. can. 4 First Ecumenical Council; 19 and 23 Council of Antioch; 3 Seventh Ecumenical Council). Their presence in the church of the man to be ordained bishop was mandatory.
- d. Those who opposed the election of the proposed bishop had first to be investigated regarding their way of life, and then their objections had to be examined.
- e. The ordination of a bishop took place only after it had been publicly established, that is, before the assembled community, that the accused was blameless and therefore morally worthy of ordination (*ordinetur / χειροτονεῖσθαι*).⁵⁸

By Carthaginian Canon 74 “it was decreed that an interim bishop (*intercessori*) should not be permitted to retain the See (*cathedram*) for which he had been appointed through the support of the people (*populorum studiis*)

⁵⁷ *Codex Canonum Ecclesiae Africanae*, can. 50. In: *PL*, t. 67. Ed. J. P. MIGNE. Paris 1848, col. 230–231.

⁵⁸ *Codex Canonum Ecclesiae Africanae*, can. 50. *Concilium Carthaginense* (a. 419). In: *Sacrorum Conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio*, t. III. Ed. J. D. MANSI. Florentiae 1759, col. 894–895.

or through disturbances (*seditionibus*) but should ensure that a bishop is appointed for them within a year. And if he neglects this, after the year has passed, another deputy (*interventor*) shall be appointed” (can. 74 Council of Carthage, *Codex canonum Ecclesiae Africanae* 419).⁵⁹

Through this canon, the Fathers of the Church of Proconsular Africa forbade the bishop temporarily appointed as *locum tenens* of a vacant See from acquiring it through the support of the people and obliged him to ensure the election of a bishop within one year.

Through the initiative of Saint Dionysius Exiguus,⁶⁰ regarded as the father of Western canon law and of Christian law in the *Pars Occidentis*, the canonical collection of the Church of Proconsular Africa, known as the *Codex Ecclesiae Africanae*, was integrated into the *Corpus Juris Canonici* of the Church of the first millennium, during the period in which the Eastern and Western Churches still breathed with the two lungs of the same Christendom.

Therefore, since the canonical legislation of the local Church of Africa was incorporated into the *Corpus Juris Canonici* of the Ecumenical Church, it acquired the force of *jus cogens* throughout Christendom, remaining in force until our days.

The Fathers of the Fourth Ecumenical Council, however, were to limit the interval for filling the vacant episcopal See to three months, except in exceptional cases, which allowed “the period of postponement to be extended” (can. 25 Fourth Ecumenical Council). And, in the event that “the metropolitan failed to do so, he was to be subject to ecclesiastical penalties (ἐκκλησίας τοῖς ἐπιτιμίαις),” to which the Fathers of the Fourth Ecumenical Council added the clarification that “the income of the bereaved Church (τὴν πρόσδοον τῆς ἱερώσεως ἐκκλησίας) is to be preserved intact by the treasurer (παρὰ τῷ οἰκονόμῳ) of that Church” (can. 25 Fourth Ecumenical Council).

From the commentary of the Byzantine canonists on Canon 25 of the Fourth Ecumenical Council, we note that the period of time for filling the vacant See, “after the death of the bishop (μετὰ τελευτὴν τοῦ ἐπισκόπου),”⁶¹ may “be extended and the ordination postponed” in the event that,

⁵⁹ Ibidem, col. 916–917.

⁶⁰ N. V. DURĂ: “Denis Exiguus (Le Petit) (465–545). Précisions et correctifs concernant sa vie et son oeuvre.” *Revista Española de Derecho Canonico* L (1993), pp. 279–290.

⁶¹ A. ARISTENOS: “Commentary on Canon 25 of the Fourth Ecumenical Council.” In: *Athenian Syntagma*, vol. II..., p. 276.

for example, “that city has been conquered by barbarians and it is not easy for anyone to reach it.”⁶²

Regarding the income of the widowed Church, which must be administered solely by the steward (οικονόμος) of that local Church, the canonist Theodore Balsamon specified that “it is not fitting for the income (πρόσοδον) of the eparchy be conferred upon the metropolitan, but upon the bishop who is to be ordained (τῷ χειροτονηθισομένῳ ἐπισκόπῳ).”⁶³

The same Byzantine canonist, Balsamon, also noted that, “by canon 9 of the first Title of Book III of the Basilicae,” the “investigation of the challenge brought against the elected candidate”⁶⁴ was limited to three months.

In their commentaries on Canon 74 of the Council of Carthage, the Byzantine canonists refer both to the “presence of the people” on the occasion of the election of bishops in the Church of Proconsular Africa,⁶⁵ and to the prohibition that an “interim bishop should retain his See through the insistence of the laity” (can. 74 Council of Carthage).⁶⁶

From the commentaries of Byzantine canonists on Canon 74 of the Council of Carthage in 401, we also note that, in the Church of Proconsular Africa, there was also this custom of appointing an interim bishop at the request of “the multitude of the people (πλήθους λαοῦ),”⁶⁷ but the synod fathers considered it to be antiquated and inoperative in their time.

It is clear from the text of certain canons of the fourth-century councils that the bishop was elected by “the whole people (πᾶς ὁ λαός),” and that his installation in the “Seat (θρόνον)” was the exclusive competence of the “full Synod (συνόδου τελείας) [...], at which the metropolitan is also present” (can. 16 Council of Antioch).⁶⁸

Regarding the election of the bishop, the Fathers of the Council of Sardica decreed that those recruited for the episcopate from among the laity must first fulfil “the office of anagnost, deacon and presbyter, so that after

⁶² I. ZONARAS: “Commentary on Canon 25 of the Fourth Ecumenical Council.” In: *Athenian Syntagma*, vol. II..., p. 274.

⁶³ T. BALSAMON: “Commentary on Canon 25 of the Fourth Ecumenical Council.” In: *Athenian Syntagma*, vol. II..., p. 275.

⁶⁴ Ibidem, p. 276.

⁶⁵ T. BALSAMON: “Commentary on Canon 50 of the Council of Carthage.” In: *Athenian Syntagma*, vol. III. Athens 1853, p. 426.

⁶⁶ *Athenian Syntagma*, vol. III..., p. 493.

⁶⁷ See the commentaries of I. ZONARAS, T. BALSAMON, and A. ARISTENOS on Canon 74 of the Council of Carthage, in *Athenian Syntagma*, vol. III ..., pp. 493–494.

⁶⁸ *Athenian Syntagma*, vol. III..., p. 154.

each rank (καθ' ἑκάστον βαθμόν) [...] they may proceed to the elevation to the episcopate" (can. 10 Council of Sardica).⁶⁹

We also note that the same Fathers of the Council of Sardica decreed that the other clergy of divine institution, namely, priests and deacons, should also be chosen following a prior examination, and only thereafter should the "installations (τὰς καταστάσεις)" take place (can. 10 Council of Sardica).⁷⁰

The Council of Laodicea (343/380) forbade "the multitudes (τοῖς ὄχλοις) [...] from making the elections (τὰς ἐκλογάς) of those who are to be ordained to the priesthood (εἰς ἱερατεῖον)" (can. 13 Council of Laodicea),⁷¹ that is, those who belong to the order of clergy of divine institution. It must be noted, however, that, in principle, the Council of Laodicea did not prohibit the laity from "the right to participate in the election of priests, exercised even during the era of persecutions,"⁷² but only the "mob" (the crowds), so as not to cause disorder during the elections of the divinely instituted clergy.

In his commentary on Canon 12 of the Council of Laodicea, the canonist John Zonaras states that, "in ancient times [...], it was the population of the cities who elected the bishops,"⁷³ regarding whom the same Fathers of the Council of Laodicea were keen to specify that they are appointed "to ecclesiastical leadership (εἰς τὴν ἐκκλησιαστικὴν ἀρχήν) by the decision (κρίσει) of the metropolitans and bishops" (can. 12 Council of Laodicea).⁷⁴

It also follows from the text of Canon 6 of the Council of Sardica (343 AD) that the *multitude* also played a role in the election of the bishop. Indeed, the text of this canon made express mention of the "assembled multitudes" who requested that "the installation of the bishop (τὴν κατάστασιν τοῦ ἐπισκόπου) they desired"⁷⁵ be carried out even if a bishop was absent, because they needed "a shepherd." In the event that the absent bishop does not reply to the letters sent by the "exarch of the eparchy

⁶⁹ Ibidem, p. 256.

⁷⁰ Ibidem, p. 257.

⁷¹ Ibidem, p. 183.

⁷² G. H. WILLIAMS: "The Role of the Layman in the Ancient Church." *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 1/1 (1958), p. 15, n. 10.

⁷³ I. ZONARAS: "Commentary on Canon 12 of the Council of Laodicea." In: *Athenian Syntagma*, vol. III..., p. 182.

⁷⁴ *Athenian Syntagma*, vol. III..., p. 182.

⁷⁵ Ibidem, p. 243; P. P. JOANNOU (ed.): *Discipline générale antique (IVe-IXe s.)*, t. I, 2: *Les canons des Synodes particuliers*, Fonti, fasc. IX. Grottaferrata-Rome 1962, pp. 166-167.

(ἔξαρχος τῆς ἐπαρχίας), that is, of the metropolitan bishop (ἐπισκόπου τῆς μητροπόλεως), the latter must comply with the will of the crowds. However, for the installation of the metropolitan bishop, the bishops from the neighbouring eparchy must also be summoned (*ex vicina provincia episcopi* / ἀπὸ τῆς πλησιοχώρου ἐπαρχίας ἐπισκόπους)” (can. 6 Council of Sardica).⁷⁶

Through the participation of bishops from neighbouring dioceses in the council of bishops of a local Church during the election of one of its bishops, whom the Fathers of the Council of Sardica referred to as the “Exarch of the Diocese” or simply the “Bishop of the Metropolis,” that is, the metropolitan,⁷⁷ the principle of synodality was effectively affirmed, as is also evidenced by the institution of the “Greater Synod” (μείζων σύνοδος), or the “Synod of Neighboring Bishops.”⁷⁸

But, above all, through the decision taken by the Fathers at the Council of Sardica – presided over by Bishop Ossius of Cordoba, who had also been present at the proceedings of the First Ecumenical Council (Nicaea, 325) – the right of the laity to elect bishops was reaffirmed, and, ipso facto, the existence of an elective assembly (*conventus*) composed of “bishops and laity” (can. 6 Council of Sardica).

As Alexander Rentel also noted, the word “multitude” in Canon 6 of the Council of Sardica must be understood not only in accordance with canonical tradition, but also “in a Roman legal sense and not in a modern sense,”⁷⁹ because “what this canon presents to us is the two-stage process of election: a request from the people, and an appointment (καταστάσει) of a bishop by the bishops.”⁸⁰ The same canonist adds that this canon must also be understood in the spirit of legal tradition, as its text “has adopted principles from the Roman legal tradition.”⁸¹

From the text of Canon 6 of the Council of Sardica, we must also note that the bishop holds “authority (*auctoritas* / αὐθεντία),” and for this reason the synod fathers demanded that this should not be diminished

⁷⁶ Ibidem.

⁷⁷ C. MITITELU: “The Council of the Metropolitan See and Its Canonical Basis: An Orthodox Approach.” *Ecumeny and Law* VII/1 (2019), pp. 53–76.

⁷⁸ N. V. DURÁ: *Le Régime de la synodalité...*, pp. 418–421, 438–441.

⁷⁹ A. RENTEL: “The Participation of Lay People in the Election of Primates and Bishops.” In: *Listening to the East: Synodality in Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Church Traditions*. Ed. INSTITUTE FOR ECUMENICAL STUDIES OF THE ANGELICUM and PRO ORIENTE FOUNDATION. Collana *Ut Unum Sint*, vol. 4. Vatican City 2023, p. 199.

⁸⁰ Ibidem.

⁸¹ Ibidem, p. 200.

by the establishment of “a bishopric in a village or a smaller town” (can. 6 Council of Sardica).⁸²

The Code of Emperor Theodosius, promulgated in 438, of which some leading scholars of Roman law have stated that fragments of it “are found in three sources,” namely in “manuscripts of the Code itself, the *Breviarium Alaricianum*, and Justinian’s Code,”⁸³ provides clear evidence not only of the clergy’s involvement in the legal and administrative organisation of Christian communities, but also of the laity’s participation in episcopal elections.

Some researchers have also noted that the edicts of certain emperors, concerning the intervention of imperial authority in episcopal elections, were not incorporated into the Code, because these ones, like the edict of Honorius, were “not in keeping with the custom of the east; the edict of Gratian dealing with the authority of the Bishop of Rome over other churches was likewise omitted.”⁸⁴

The same jurists noted that in the *Codex Theodosianus* we find matters concerning episcopal jurisdiction presented in a language in which “we find such ancient words as *saeculi*, *antistis*, *sacrosancta* converted to an ecclesiastical usage,”⁸⁵ that is, specific to the language of Roman law. This reality remains indeed a “ample evidence that [...] the clergy began that participation in civil legislation which characterised European life for so many centuries.”⁸⁶

The imperial legislation of the fourth and fifth centuries, incorporated into the *Codex Theodosianus*, likewise provides eloquent evidence that imperial authority intervened, in certain circumstances, in the process of episcopal elections. It is precisely in this context that the provisions of certain Church canons must be understood, which prohibit the interference of state authorities in the election of bishops and declare null and void any elections or appointments made through secular power (cf. can. 30 ap.; 12 Fourth Ecumenical Council and 3 Seventh Ecumenical Council).

In the local Orthodox Churches, the election of hierarchs, and of the clergy in general, is carried out in accordance with the provisions of canonical law. For example, in the Romanian Orthodox Church the election of hierarchs (bishop, archbishop, metropolitan, and patriarch) is

⁸² P. P. JOANNOU (ed.): *Discipline générale antique...*, p. 167.

⁸³ *The Theodosian Code: Studies in the Imperial Law of Late Antiquity*, 2nd ed. Eds. J. HARRIES, I. WOOD. London 2010, p. 64.

⁸⁴ Ibidem.

⁸⁵ Ibidem, p. 14.

⁸⁶ Ibidem.

carried out “by the Holy Synod, after consultation with the clergy and laity within a maximum of 60 days of the vacancy of the respective See or the establishment of a new diocese” (Art. 126, 1 *Statute of the Romanian Orthodox Church*).⁸⁷

Through such a provision, the Romanian Orthodox Church has in fact reaffirmed the fundamental provisions of canonical legislation from the first millennium (cf. can. 4 and 6 First Ecumenical Council; 25 Fourth Ecumenical Council; 3 Sixth Ecumenical Council; 19 and 23 Council of Antioch; 6 Council of Sardica and 50 Council of Carthage), which attests to the fact that the canonical norms of the Ecumenical Church of the first millennium are still respected and applied today, including in matters concerning the election of bishops.

4. Some provisions of the canonical legislation of the Roman Catholic Church concerning the participation of the laity in the election of the clergy

According to the canonical legislation of the Roman Catholic Church, the baptised “are joined with Christ in its visible structure by the bonds (*vinculis*) of the profession of faith, the sacraments, and ecclesiastical governance (*ecclesiastici regiminis*)” (can. 205).⁸⁸ In other words, through Baptism, Christians are united with Christ through the profession of faith, the sacraments, and ecclesiastical governance.

In their commentary on this canon, Roman Catholic canonists state that the bond between the laity and the Church’s governance nevertheless requires “careful interpretation and application,” since “this bond reflects union with the visible or societal structure of the Church, including its hierarchical constitution with the Petrine ministry at the centre of the communion.”⁸⁹

⁸⁷ *Statutul pentru organizarea și funcționarea Bisericii Ortodoxe Române. Text adnotat* [Statute for the Organisation and Functioning of the Romanian Orthodox Church. Annotated Text]. Bucharest 2022.

⁸⁸ Code of Canon Law, https://www.vatican.va/archive/cod-iuris-canonici/cic_index_en.html [accessed 22.10.2025].

⁸⁹ R. J. KASLYN: “Commentary on Canon 205.” In: *New Commentary on the Code of Canon Law*. Eds. J. P. BEAL et al. New York–Mahwah, NJ 2000, p. 249.

It follows from the text of the same Code of Canon Law that the Roman Pontiff obtains the supreme authority of the Church by virtue of his ordination as “the bishop of the Roman Church” (can. 331), and that he “obtains full and supreme power in the Church by his acceptance of legitimate election together with episcopal consecration (cum episcopali consecratione)”⁹⁰ (can. 332 § 1).

In his commentary on this canon, the renowned canonist Michael R. Moodie S.J. noted that its text “expresses the preeminence of the orders over the power of jurisdiction,”⁹¹ which confirms that the ranks resulting from the *hierarchia ordinis* take precedence over those resulting from the *hierarchia jurisdictionis*.

Regarding the relationship between the power conferred through episcopal ordination and the power of governance (*potestas regiminis*), another renowned Roman Catholic canonist underlined the fact that “Lumen gentium 21b and canon 375 § 2 both state that all bishops by consecration receive the offices of sanctifying, teaching and governing,” and that “the pope receives full (and supreme) power by acceptance of a legitimate election together with episcopal ordination (c. 332 § 1).”⁹²

According to others Roman Catholic canonists, the 1917 Code of Canon Law “limited its specific treatment of the laity to two canons affirming the rights of all the Christian faithful to receive the Sacraments (CIC 682), and prohibiting them from wearing ecclesiastical garments (CIC 683),”⁹³ hence their conclusion that “these canons exhibit a relatively new view of rights for the laity in the Church, but much remains to be explored before their implications are fully realised. Defining the concept of ministry for the laity, in contrast to the ministry of the ordained, continues to be a major topic of discussion in the Church.”⁹⁴

In accordance with the provisions of the new Code of Canon Law of the Roman Catholic Church of 1983,⁹⁵ “lay persons are designated by God

⁹⁰ Code of Canon Law...

⁹¹ K. WALF: “Commentary on Canon 332.” In: *New Commentary on the Code of Canon Law...*, p. 438.

⁹² K. WALF: “Commentary on canon 331.” In: *New Commentary on the Code of Canon Law...*, p. 433.

⁹³ D. L. BARR: “The Obligations and Rights of the Lay Christian Faithful [cc. 224–231].” In: *New Commentary on the Code of Canon Law...*, p. 291.

⁹⁴ Ibidem.

⁹⁵ N. V. DURĂ: “Noul Cod canonic al Bisericii Catolice. Reflecții ale canoniștilor și ecleziologilor catolici” [The New Canonical Code of the Catholic Church: Reflections of Catholic Canonists and Ecclesiologists]. *Ortodoxia* XXXV/4 (1983), pp. 621–625.

for the apostolate through baptism and confirmation” (can. 225 § 1).⁹⁶ As such, the layperson is “called to exercise the mission which God has entrusted to the Church to fulfil in the world” (can. 204 § 1),⁹⁷ that is, to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ to all creation.

5. Conclusions

From the hermeneutical analysis of certain canons contained in the *Corpus Juris Canonici* of the Eastern Church of the first millennium, we have been able to observe that the participation of the laity in the exercise of the Church’s jurisdictional power constituted an indisputable reality. Indeed, the Epistles of Saint Cyprian, the Apostolic Constitutions, the Canons of Hippolytus of Rome, and the canons contained in the canonical collections of the Eastern Church clearly attest that the participation of the laity in the election and ordination of bishops was an unquestionable ecclesiastical reality.

For example, Chapter IV of Book Eight of the *Apostolic Constitutions* shows that the Holy Apostles decided “together” that a bishop “should be ordained (χειροτονεῖσθαι) and appointed [...] by the whole people (ὕπὸ παντὸς τοῦ λαοῦ)” (Book VIII, 4, 2).⁹⁸

It is likewise clear from the text of the *Apostolic Constitutions* that lay Christians, as members of the Church, also participate in the Divine Liturgy of Ordination. On that occasion, “all the faithful (πάντες οἱ πιστοί) pray to God with all their mind (κατὰ διάνοιαν)” (Book VIII, 6, 4),⁹⁹ so that the power of the Holy Spirit may be conferred upon the one being ordained.

From the same text of the *Apostolic Constitutions*, we learn that all the Churches prayed “for the Holy Church of God, catholic (καθολικῆς) and Apostolic, spread from one end of the world to the other (τῆς ἀπὸ περάτων ἕως περάτων τῆς οἰκουμένης)” (Book VIII, 10, 4),¹⁰⁰ that is, for her catholicity,

⁹⁶ Code of Canon Law...

⁹⁷ Ibidem.

⁹⁸ E. M. METZGER: *Les Constitutions apostoliques*, vol. III, coll. *Sources chrétiennes* 336. Paris 1987, pp. 140–141.

⁹⁹ Ibidem, pp. 152–153.

¹⁰⁰ Ibidem, pp. 166–167.

and for “the entire episcopate (πάσης ἐπισκοπῆς) [...] which proclaims the word of Your truth (τὸν λόγον τῆς σῆς ἀληθείας)” (Book VIII, 10, 6).¹⁰¹

The text of the *Apostolic Constitutions* also mentions four bishops, namely “Bishop James (of Jerusalem)” († 62), a relative of the Lord; “Bishop Clement of Rome,” the third or fourth bishop of Rome (c. 97–101); “Bishop Evodius of Antioch” (c. 53–59), ordained by Saint Peter the Apostle; and “Bishop Anianus of Alexandria” (62–82), ordained by Saint Mark the Apostle (Book VIII, 10, 7).¹⁰² In this case, we are therefore dealing with one of the earliest diptychs (δίπτυχα)¹⁰³ of the Ecumenical Church, containing the names of the primates of the Apostolic Churches commemorated during the Divine Liturgy celebrated on the occasion of a bishop’s ordination. In this diptych were mentioned the bishops of the first four Apostolic Sees: Jerusalem, Rome, Antioch, and Alexandria.

That the laity are entitled to participate in the exercise of the Church’s governing authority by virtue of the two sacraments of Christian initiation (Baptism and Confirmation) is also confirmed by documentary evidence from the Church of Rome, which had the foremost among the Apostles, namely the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, as its founders. For example, the *Liber Pontificalis* attests that those chosen to become popes first had to be ordained bishops.

One such case was that of Pope Adrian II (867–872), formerly a priest, who was brought from the Basilica of *Santa Maria ad Praesepe* to the Lateran Palace by “bishops, priests, nobles, and the people,” and was subsequently ordained bishop “by three bishops”¹⁰⁴ in Saint Peter’s Basilica in Rome. Therefore, even in the second half of the ninth century, popes continued to be elected by both the clergy and the laity, in accordance with the ancient canonical tradition and the legislation of the Church.

That the procedure for the election of the clergy was established already in the apostolic era is confirmed, first of all, by the New Testament text itself, through which both the elective principle, as a constitutive element of the Church, and the principle of synodality were enunciated and affirmed, the latter being expressed even from that period in its mixed form (clergy and faithful). Moreover, the text of the canonical legislation

¹⁰¹ Ibidem, pp. 168–169.

¹⁰² Ibidem.

¹⁰³ N. V. DURĂ: “Dipticele. Studiu istoric și canonic” [The Diptychs. A Historical and Canonical Study]. *Studii Teologice* XXIX/9–10 (1977), pp. 636–659.

¹⁰⁴ H. K. MANN: *The Lives of the Popes in the Early Middle Ages*, vol. III. London 1906, p. 155.

of the early Church also confirms that the laity did indeed participate in the election of clerics.

In this regard, a paradigmatic case remains that of the Church of Carthage during the time of Saint Cyprian († 258), the primate (*prima sedis episcopalis*) of the Church in Proconsular Africa. From his Epistles and from the decisions of the Synods presided over by him, we may observe that the participation of the laity in the election of the clergy constituted a *sine qua non* condition, grounded both in the biblical text and in the apostolic tradition of the Church.

Moreover, the obligatory participation of the laity in the election and ordination of the clergy was also attested by the canonical legislation of the Ecumenical Church of the first millennium, including during the pre-Nicene period. Exemplary testimony in this regard is provided by the Canons of Saint Hippolytus and, for the subsequent period, by the canons promulgated by the Fathers of the Ecumenical and Local Councils.

Concerning the presence of the laity at the election of the clergy, as a manifest form of their participation in the exercise of the Church's jurisdictional power, eloquent testimonies were likewise left by the Byzantine canonists of the twelfth century (Zonaras, Balsamon, and Aristenos), although it may be observed that their interpretation of certain canons was sometimes related to the ecclesiological realities of the Byzantine era.

With regard to the participation of the laity in the election and ordination of the clergy, both the provisions of certain canons of the current Code of Canon Law of the Latin Church and the commentaries of certain Roman Catholic canonists on these canons confirm that, through the Sacrament of Baptism, the laity are entitled to participate also in the exercise of jurisdictional power, including through their presence at the election and ordination of the clergy.

We may therefore conclude that the participation of the laity in the election of the clergy indeed constituted a reality attested since the apostolic era. However, from the fourth and fifth centuries onwards, the Church no longer permitted the participation of the entire community, but only that of certain representatives thereof, until eventually this presence of the laity came to be represented almost exclusively by the emperor and his dignitaries. Hence, for the sake of greater clarity, in the pages of this interdisciplinary study (theological and canonical-juridical), we have sought to present the reader with several of the most representative testimonies of the Church of the first millennium concerning the participation of the laity in the election of the clergy.

From the hermeneutical analysis of the text of the canonical legislation of the Eastern Church, we have also been able to observe that, gradually, within ecclesial consciousness, the idea became accepted that the participation of the laity in the election of clerics had been reduced merely to a passive presence at the ordination of clerics, manifested exclusively through the proclamation of “Axios” (‘He is worthy’), uttered together with the clergy of the respective Church.

Indeed, as a result of this non-canonical practice established during the second millennium, the fact that the laity participated in the election of the Apostle Matthias, and that such participation possesses both a biblical and a liturgical-canonical foundation, came to be ignored or obscured, even though it is attested by the Canons of Saint Hippolytus, the *Didascalia Apostolorum*, the Apostolic Canons, the *Apostolic Constitutions*, and the canons of the local and ecumenical councils of the first millennium.

Hence arises the necessity of returning *ad fontes* (‘to the sources’). Likewise, there is a need for the order established by the canons of the local and ecumenical councils of the Church during the first millennium to be once again known, understood, and observed, including with regard to the participation of the laity in the exercise of the Church’s jurisdictional power.

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Σύνταγμα τῶν Θείων καὶ Ἱερῶν Κανόνων τῶν τε Ἁγίων καὶ πανευφύμων Ἀποστόλων, καὶ τῶν Ἱερῶν καὶ Οἰκουμενικῶν καὶ Τοπικῶν Συνόδων, καὶ τῶν κατὰ μέρος Ἁγίων Πατέρων [Syntagma of the Divine and Sacred Canons of the Holy and All-Praised Apostles, of the Holy Ecumenical and Local Councils, and of the Individual Holy Fathers] [Athenian Syntagma]. Ed. G. A. RHALLS, M. POTLES, vol. II. Athens 1852.

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Priesthood of All Believers and Church Ministry in Lutheranism

Abstract: The article presents a Lutheran approach to the issues of priesthood of all believers and church ministry. It does so in three steps. In the first part, it reaches into the theological legacy of Martin Luther and his writings. In the second part, it analyzes the Lutheran confessional writings collected in *The Book of Concord*. In the third part, it refers to the contemporary Lutheran discussion in the forum of the Lutheran World Federation and the resulting documents.

Keywords: priesthood of all believers, church ministry, Lutheranism

We will look at the issue of the priesthood of all believers and church ministry in Lutheranism in three areas of reference. In the first part, we will look at the theology of Martin Luther, in the second, we will reach for the confessional books of Lutheranism, that is, *The Book of Concord*, and in the third we will deal with the studies on this issue that have been prepared over the last 30 years by the largest international organization associating Lutheran churches, namely, the Lutheran World Federation.

1. The theology of Martin Luther

The starting point for our considerations will be the question of the priesthood of all believers. Its formulation comes from the relatively

early writings of the Reformer. It was first discussed in *A Treatise on the New Testament, That Is, the Holy Mass* of 1520:

Thus it becomes clear that it is not the priest alone who offers the sacrifice of the mass; it is this faith which each one has for himself. This is the true priestly office, through which Christ is offered as a sacrifice to God, an office which the priest, with the outward ceremonies of the mass, simply represents. Each and all are, therefore, equally spiritual priests before God [...] For all those who have the faith that Christ is a priest for them in heaven before God, and who lay on him their prayers and praise, their need and their whole selves, presenting them through him, not doubting that he does this very thing, and offers himself for them – these people take the sacrament and testament, outwardly or spiritually, as a token of all this, and do not doubt that all sin is there forgiven, that God has become their gracious Father, and that everlasting life is prepared for them. All such, then, wherever they may be, are true priests. They truly observe the mass aright and also obtain by it what they desire. For faith must do everything. Faith alone is the true priestly office. It permits no one else to take its place. Therefore all Christian men are priests, all women priestesses, be they young or old, master or servant, mistress or maid, learned or unlearned. Here there is no difference, unless faith be unequal.¹

In a similar spirit, Luther spoke in the same year in his work *The Freedom of a Christian*, writing about the effects of faith:

Now just as Christ by his birthright obtained these two prerogatives, so he imparts them to and shares them with everyone who believes in him [...]. Hence all of us who believe in Christ are priests and kings in Christ, as I Pet. 2[:9] says; “You are a chosen race, God’s own people, a royal priesthood, a priestly kingdom, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” The nature of this priesthood and kingship is something like this: [...] for as priests we are worthy to appear before God to pray for others and to teach one another divine things.²

¹ M. LUTHER: *A Treatise on the New Testament, That Is, the Holy Mass*. Trans. J. J. SCHINDEL. Vol. 35 of *Luther’s Works*. Eds. J. PELIKAN, H. T. LEHMANN. Philadelphia 1960, pp. 100–110.

² M. LUTHER: *The Freedom of a Christian*. Trans. W. A. LAMBERT, revised by H. J. GRIMM. Vol. 31 of *Luther’s Works*. Eds. J. PELIKAN, H. T. LEHMANN. Philadelphia 1960, pp. 354–355.

In both quoted statements, the universal priesthood of all believers is rooted in faith.

This view is supplemented by a fragment considered to be classic in the context of the common priesthood, contained in one of the so-called programmatic writings from 1520, *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate*. In it, Luther begins by tearing down the three walls with which the papacy secured its power:

The Romanists have very cleverly built three walls around themselves. Hitherto they have protected themselves by these walls in such a way that no one has been able to reform them. As a result, the whole of Christendom has fallen abominably. In the first place, when pressed by the temporal power they have made decrees and declared that the temporal power had no jurisdiction over them, but that, on the contrary, the spiritual power is above the temporal. In the second place, when the attempt is made to reprove them with the Scriptures, they raise the objection that only the pope may interpret the Scriptures. In the third place, if threatened with a council, their story is that no one may summon a council but the pope.³

The Reformer uses the doctrine of the common priesthood to break down the first of the three aforementioned walls:

It is pure invention that pope, bishop, priests, and monks are called the spiritual estate while princes, lords, artisans, and farmers are called the temporal estate. This is indeed a piece of deceit and hypocrisy. Yet no one need be intimidated by it, and for this reason: all Christians are truly of the spiritual estate, and there is no difference among them except that of office. Paul says in I Corinthians 12[:12–13] that we are all one body, yet every member has its own work by which it serves the others. This is because we all have one baptism, one gospel, one faith, and are all Christians alike; for baptism, gospel, and faith alone make us spiritual and a Christian people.⁴

³ M. LUTHER: *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate*. Trans. Ch. M. JACOBS. Vol. 44 of *Luther's Works*. Eds. J. PELIKAN, H. T. LEHMANN. Philadelphia 1960, p. 126.

⁴ M. LUTHER: *To the Christian Nobility...*, p. 127.

In this fragment, we can see that Luther connects priestly dignity not only with faith, but also with baptism.

Baptism and faith are therefore two points of reference for the universal priesthood in the Reformer's reflections. The universal priesthood makes Christians equal before God, regardless of age or gender, which is confirmed by the words of the Reformer from the *A Treatise on the New Testament* quoted above: "Therefore all Christian men are priests, all women priestesses, be they young or old, master or servant, mistress or maid, learned or unlearned."⁵ It also abolishes the medieval divisions into the clerical and secular states. However, this teaching is not the foundation of the egoistic individualism of Christians, who, drawing on the dignity granted to them, consider themselves self-sufficient and do not look back to the church to which they belong. The common priesthood is an obligation that strengthens the bonds between believers, because the priestly *communio* has not only a vertical dimension – communion with Christ, who gives Christians his dignity, but also a horizontal dimension, binding those who have received this dignity. It is no coincidence that in Luther's statements on the common priesthood in the cited writings, references to the place of Christians in the church were placed immediately next to the definition of what this priesthood is.

This is perfectly visible in the tasks assigned to priests by the Reformer. In the fragment of the work *The Freedom of a Christian* quoted above, it was stated that it entitles one to stand before God and intercede in prayer for others.⁶ In the work *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation...*, the right to baptize and grant absolution is associated with the common priesthood.⁷ Luther summed up this issue in a work referring to the issue of the established servants of the church under the title *Concerning Ministry* from 1523, formulating seven rights belonging to priests: 1) preaching the Word of God, 2) baptizing, 3) administering the Lord's Supper, 4) administering the power of the keys, 5) intercessory prayer for others, 6) offering oneself as a sacrifice to God, and 7) deciding and judging on doctrine and spirit.⁸ This last aspect is also expressed already in the title of another letter from 1523: *That the Christian Assembly or Congregation has*

⁵ M. LUTHER: *A Treatise on the New Testament...*, p. 101.

⁶ M. LUTHER: *The Freedom of a Christian...*, p. 355.

⁷ M. LUTHER: *To the Christian Nobility...*, p. 128.

⁸ M. LUTHER: *Concerning Ministry*. Trans. C. BERGENDOFF. Vol. 40 of *Luther's Works*. Eds. J. PELIKAN, H. T. LEHMANN. Philadelphia 1960, p. 21.

*the Right and Power to Judge All Teaching and to Call, Appoint, and Dismiss Teachers. Established and Proven by Scripture.*⁹

Luther clearly distinguished between the priests in the church, that is, all baptized/believers, and the ministers of the church, that is, those who hold offices in it. In the work *Concerning Ministry* from 1523 he wrote: “A Priest is not identical with Presbyterian or Minister – for one is born to be priest, one becomes a minister.”¹⁰ He makes this distinction even more clearly in his exposition of Psalm 82 from 1530: “It is true that all Christians are priests, but not all are pastors. For to be a pastor one must be not only a Christian and a priest but must have an office and a field of work committed to him. This call and command make pastors and preachers.”¹¹

In the writings of the Reformer we find two lines of argumentation in favour of appointing servants of the church who hold church office. One can be described as running from the bottom up, the other as the opposite, “from the top down.” It seems that Luther saw no contradiction between them, since both appear already in his early writings, in which the emphasis is placed on the issue of the effects of the common priesthood of believers, and thus on the first line of argumentation. The justification from below refers to what believers received in baptism. In *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation...* we read: “For whoever comes out of the water of baptism can boast that he is already a consecrated priest, bishop, and pope, although of course it is not seemly that just anybody should exercise such office.”¹² The reservation that it is not appropriate for everyone to perform this office results from the fact that, as we read in the letter *Concerning Ministry* from 1523, already quoted: “For since we have proved all of these things [i.e. the above-mentioned seven rights resulting from the common priesthood] to be the common property of all Christians, no one individual can arise by his own authority and arrogate to himself alone what belongs to all. [...] But the community rights demand that one, or as many as the community chooses, shall be chosen or approved who, in the name of all with these rights, shall perform these functions publicly. Otherwise,

⁹ M. LUTHER: *That the Christian Assembly or Congregation has the Right and Power to Judge All Teaching and to Call, Appoint, and Dismiss Teachers. Established and Proven by Scripture*. Trans. E. W. and R. C. GRITSCH. Vol. 39 of *Luther's Works*. Eds. J. PELIKAN, H. T. LEHMANN. Philadelphia 1960, pp. 301–314.

¹⁰ M. LUTHER: *Concerning Ministry...*, p. 18.

¹¹ M. LUTHER: *Psalm 82*. Trans. C. M. JACOBS. Vol. 13 of *Luther's Works*. Eds. J. PELIKAN, H. T. LEHMANN. Philadelphia 1960, p. 65.

¹² M. LUTHER: *To the Christian Nobility...*, p. 129.

there might be shameful confusion among the people of God...”¹³ Luther reasoned similarly already in *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation...*: “Therefore, when a bishop consecrates it is nothing else than that in the place and stead of the whole community, all of whom have like power, he takes a person and charges him to exercise this power on behalf of the others.”¹⁴ The same reasoning also appeared in the criticism of the sacramental dimension of ordination in the third of the programmatic writings of 1520, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*:

Let everyone, therefore, who knows himself to be a Christian, be assured of this, that we are all equally priests, that is to say, we have the same power in respect to the Word and the sacraments. However, no one may make use of this power except by the consent of the community or by the call of a superior. (For what is the common property of all, no individual may arrogate to himself, unless he is called.) And therefore this “sacrament” of ordination, if it is anything at all, is nothing else than a certain rite whereby one is called to the ministry of the church.¹⁵

It is worth recalling another quote from *Concerning Ministry*, with which Luther supplemented the abovementioned argument: “For it is one thing to exercise a right publicly; another to use it in time of emergency. Publicly one may not exercise a right without consent of the whole body or of the church. In time of emergency each may use it as he deems best.”¹⁶ The Reformer therefore knows the distinction between an ordinary situation, in which it is necessary to maintain the proper order of ordination, and an extraordinary situation, in which every Christian has the right to use his or her priestly rights.

The church therefore needs to delegate to service. This was done in the rite of ordination. The issue of its course was not a primary one for Luther. In the first years of the Reformation, ordinations were not necessary because a sufficient number of clergy joined the reformed church. With the need for new servants, Luther decided to ordain servants for the church – the first ordination in Wittenberg was the calling of Georg

¹³ M. LUTHER: *Concerning Ministry...*, p. 34.

¹⁴ M. LUTHER: *To the Christian Nobility...*, p. 128.

¹⁵ M. LUTHER: *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*. Trans. A. T. W. STEINHDÉUSER, revised by F. C. AHRENS, A. ROSS WENTZ. Vol. 36 of *Luther's Works*. Eds. J. PELIKAN, H. T. LEHMANN. Philadelphia 1960, p. 116.

¹⁶ M. LUTHER: *Concerning Ministry...*, p. 34.

Rörer as a deacon. The ordination form from 1539, according to which clergy were ordained in Wittenberg, referred to baptism, in accordance with the order of calling and the intercessory prayer of the congregation. The laying on of hands did not convey any special gifts or authorization, but was considered an appropriate liturgical gesture combined with the Lord's Prayer and the singing of the hymn *Veni creator spiritus*.¹⁷

The content of this service in ministry, as can be seen in the fragments quoted above, is the Word of God, proclaimed in the sermon and administered in the sacraments. This service of office entails the fact that it is not accompanied by any kind of ontological change, there is no *character intelligibilis* in those who hold this office. In early writings from 1520, Luther even states that a minister should be treated as a civil servant, who remains so as long as he serves. A rite is also necessary, which will publicly introduce him to the exercise of office.

The same content of the church office is foreseen in those fragments of the Reformer's writings in which he included a second line of argument for the existence of the church office, led from top to bottom. In the work *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation...*, next to fragments about the election of the ecclesiastical office holder understood as the delegation to the public exercise of the rights that every Christian received in baptism, namely, the right to baptize and absolution, we also read: "I want to speak only of the ministry which God has instituted, the responsibility of which is to minister word and sacrament to a congregation..."¹⁸ The view about the divine establishment of the church office was found in the Reformer's confession of faith in the letter *Confession Concerning Christ's Supper* from 1528: "But the holy orders and true religious institutions established by God are these three: the office of priest, the estate of marriage, the civil government."¹⁹ This type of argumentation for the establishment of a church office came to the fore most fully in the letter *On the Councils and the Church* from 1539, where it was mentioned among the *notae ecclesiae*. Luther characterizes this note as follows:

Fifth, the church is recognized externally by the fact that it consecrates or calls ministers, or has offices that it is to administer. There must be

¹⁷ Cf. M. LUTHER: *The Ordination of Ministers of the Word*. Trans. P. ZELLER STRODACH. Vol. 53 of *Luther's Works*. Eds. J. PELIKAN, H. T. LEHMANN. Philadelphia 1960, pp. 124–126.

¹⁸ M. LUTHER: *To the Christian Nobility...*, p. 176.

¹⁹ M. LUTHER: *Confession Concerning Christ's Supper*. Trans. R. H. FISCHER. Vol. 37 of *Luther's Works*. Eds. J. PELIKAN, H. T. LEHMANN. Philadelphia 1960, p. 364.

bishops, pastors, or preachers, who publicly and privately give, administer, and use the aforementioned four things or holy possessions [i.e., the preaching of the Word, baptism, the Lord's Supper, absolution] in behalf of and in the name of the church, or rather by reason of their institution by Christ, as St. Paul states in Ephesians 4 [:8], "He received gifts among men..." – his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some teachers and governors, etc. The people as a whole cannot do these things, but must entrust or have them entrusted to one person. Otherwise, what would happen if everyone wanted to speak or administer, and no one wanted to give way to the other? It must be entrusted to one person, and he alone should be allowed to preach, to baptize, to absolve, and to administer the sacraments. The others should be content with this arrangement and agree to it.²⁰

Thus, one can see the consistency not only in the content of the church office, but also, regardless of the argument used, in the indication that the church office has the task of ordering the life of the congregational community. Such a role of the office was connected with the necessity

For Luther, the key was of course the fundamental task of the church ministry, that is, the proclamation of the Word in sermon, administration of sacraments and absolution. The issues of the structure of this ministry were secondary to him. In *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, writing about the ministry, he mentions the priestly office (i.e. presbyters) and bishops: "the priesthood is properly nothing but the ministry of the Word – the Word, I say; not the law, but the gospel. [...] Whoever, therefore, does not know or preach the gospel is not only no priest or bishop."²¹ It is therefore clear that he does not actually make a distinction between the tasks of the bishop and the presbyter. The office of bishop is in principle a special case of the church office, the only special element, described in the letter *Exempel, einen rechten christlichen Bischof zu weihen* (Example of consecrating a true Christian bishop) from 1542,²² which roots the understanding of the episcopal ministry in the texts of the New Testament letters (1 Tim 3:2, Tit 1:7, 9), is the supervision of parish priests,

²⁰ M. LUTHER: *On the Councils and the Church*. Trans. Ch. M. JACOBS. Vol. 41 of *Luther's Works*. Eds. J. PELIKAN, H. T. LEHMANN. Philadelphia 1960, p. 154.

²¹ M. LUTHER: *The Babylonian Captivity...*, p. 116.

²² Own translation based on: M. LUTHER: *Exempel, einen rechten christlichen Bischof zu weihen*. Vol. 53 of *D. Martin Luther Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*. Weimar 1920, pp. 231–260.

without, however, assigning the bishop any special jurisdiction. The development of the practice of appointing princes as evangelical *Notbischof* – ‘bishops out of necessity’, resulted from the fact that none of the bishops joined the Reformation. At the same time, there are attested cases that suggest that this was not the only model in the Reformer’s thinking, as evidenced by Luther’s consecration of Nicholas von Amsdorf as bishop of Naumburg. The office of the deacon is also present in Luther’s reflections – let us again recall the fragment from *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*:

And the diaconate is the ministry, not of reading the Gospel or the Epistle, as is the present practice, but of distributing the church’s aid to the poor, so that the priests may be relieved of the burden of temporal matters and may give themselves more freely to prayer and the Word. For this was the purpose of the institution of the diaconate, as we read in Acts 5 [6:1–6].²³

He therefore demands a reform of the diaconate in the spirit of its genesis described in the Acts of the Apostles. These three services associated with the office do not exhaust the issue of the structure of the office in Luther’s thought. In the already quoted confession of faith from *Confession Concerning Christ’s Supper* (1528), the issue of the divinely established ecclesiastical office was developed as follows:

All who are engaged in the clerical office or ministry of the Word are in a holy, proper, good, and God-pleasing order and estate, such as those who preach, administer sacraments, supervise the common chest, sextons and messengers or servants who serve such persons. These are engaged in works which are altogether holy in God sight.²⁴

He also saw a place for school leaders within the ecclesiastical office. He himself, when referring to his office, often did not refer to the priestly orders he had received, but to the fact that he was a doctor of Holy Scripture.

At the end of the considerations on the theology of the universal priesthood and ministry in the thought of the Reformer, it is worth quoting a fragment of the description of the service contained in the writing on *Von der Winkelmesse und Pfaffenweihe* (On the Secret Masses and the Ordination

²³ M. LUTHER: *The Babylonian Captivity...*, 116.

²⁴ M. LUTHER: *Confession Concerning Christ’s Supper...*, p. 364.

of Priests) from 1533, which shows the relationship between the officiants and the congregation on the basis of the universal priesthood:

Behold, our priest, bishop or servant in the priestly office approaches the altar, properly and honestly and publicly called, but previously consecrated in baptism, anointed and born to the priesthood of Christ [...]. He sings publicly and clearly the order of Christ, established in the [Holy] Supper, takes bread and wine, gives thanks, breaks them and gives them [...] to us, to those who wish to receive them. And we, especially those who wish to receive the sacrament, kneel beside, behind and around him, man, woman, young, old, master, servant, lady, maid, parents, children, as God gathers us all there, all true holy co-priests, sanctified by the blood of Christ, Christ and anointed by the Holy Spirit and sanctified in baptism. And we are there in such an innate, hereditary priestly honour and adornment we are [...] and we allow our priest to speak the order of Christ not for himself, as his own person, but he is the mouth of all of us and we all speak with him from the heart and with an encouraging faith to the Lamb of God.²⁵

2. Lutheran confessional writings

The analysis of the issue of church ministry in the context of Lutheran confessional books cannot begin anywhere else than with Article V of the “Augsburg Confession,” whose title in Latin translates as “Concerning Ministry in the Church” and in German as “Concerning the Preaching Office.”²⁶ These two interpretations of the title complement each other well. They are concerned with a church office that is primarily a service, which is clearly expressed in the Latin text of CA V: “[...] the ministry of teaching the gospel and administering the sacraments was instituted.”²⁷ The German text adds that it is “God instituted the office of preaching.”²⁸

²⁵ Own translation based on: M. LUTHER: *Von der Winkelmesse und Pfaffenweihe*. Vol. 38 of *D. Martin Luther Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*. Weimar 1912, p. 247.

²⁶ “The Augsburg Confession.” In: *The Book of Concord. The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. Eds. R. KOLB, T. T. WENGERT. Minneapolis 1966, pp. 40–41.

²⁷ Ibidem, p. 41.

²⁸ Ibidem, p. 40.

In order to answer the question of why a church office or service of the church understood as a service of preaching/teaching the gospel and administering the sacraments is needed, we should refer to the preceding Article IV. We read in it:

Likewise, they teach that human beings cannot be justified before God by their own powers, merits, or works. But they are justified as a gift on account of Christ through faith when they believe that they are received into grace and that their sins are forgiven on account of Christ, who by his death made satisfaction for our sins. God reckons this faith as righteousness (Rom 3[:21–26] and 4[:5]).²⁹

To arouse faith, an office/ministry was established, referred to in the Article V of the “Augsburg Confession”: “So that we obtain this faith, the ministry of teaching the gospel and administering the sacraments was instituted,”³⁰ these are means of grace: “For through the Word and the sacraments as through instruments the Holy Spirit is given, who effects faith where and when it pleases God, in those who hear the gospel.”³¹

It is worth noting that the aforementioned means of grace: the preached Word of God and the sacraments are listed in Article VII of the “Augsburg Confession,” “Concerning the Church” as *notae ecclesiae*, that is, marks of the church, which are also conditions of its unity. If there is agreement in the purely taught/preached gospel and the sacraments are administered rightly, that is, in accordance with the gospel, then there is true unity of the church. All other aspects of its functioning constitute a space of freedom and are not factors dividing the church.³²

Importantly, Article VIII of the “Augsburg Confession” adds that sacraments are effective because of the ordination and command of Christ. Consequently, the effectiveness of a sacrament is not dependent on the dignity of the person administering it.³³ The issue of office in the first part of the “Augsburg Confession” is supplemented by Article XIV, which states in the Latin version: “Concerning Church order they teach that no one should teach publicly in the church or administer the sacraments unless

²⁹ Ibidem, pp. 39, 40.

³⁰ Ibidem, p. 41.

³¹ Ibidem.

³² Ibidem, pp. 42–43.

³³ Ibidem.

properly called.”³⁴ In the German version, both the title of the article and the content itself clearly indicate that the reservation of Article XIV refers to those holding a church office. The content of Article XIV, referring to the conditions of the unity of the church in Article VII, raises the question of the relationship between church office and *notae ecclesiae*. Modern commentators recognize that the office is included in *notae implicite*, and it is clearly subordinate to them, which protects the church from the independence of the office from the means of grace to which it was called by God.³⁵

Before we discuss the elements concerning the ecclesiastical office in the second part of the “Augsburg Confession” devoted to abuses that have been corrected, it is worth reaching for the noteworthy elaborations of the abovementioned themes of the first part in the “Apology of the Augsburg Confession.” Undoubtedly, the fragments of Articles VII and VIII, which strengthen the anti-Donatist argument of CA VIII, is worth mentioning herein. We read there in point 28:

Nor does this detract from efficacy of sacraments when they are distributed by the unworthy, because they represent the person of Christ on account of the call of the church and do not represent their own persons, as Christ himself testifies [Luke 10:16], “Whoever listens to you listens to me.” When they offer the Word of Christ or the sacraments, they offer them in the stead and place of Christ.³⁶

Also important is Article XIII of the “Apology of the Augsburg Confession,” in which Philip Melanchthon considers the sacramentality of the office. It should be recalled in this context that this question does not appear in the confessional writings authored by Luther, who limits the sacraments to two: Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, referring to the Augustinian definition of the sacrament: “The Word comes to the element; and so there is a sacrament.” Melanchthon represents a different approach: “[...] we do not think that it makes much difference if, for the purpose of teaching, different people have different enumerations [of sacraments], as long as they properly preserve the matters handed down in Scripture.”³⁷ Hence his

³⁴ Ibidem, p. 47.

³⁵ Cf. bibliography in: J. SOJKA: *Widzialne Słowo. Sakramenty w luterńskiej „Księdze zgody”*. Warszawa 2016, pp. 338–343.

³⁶ “Apology of the Augsburg Confession.” In: *The Book of Concord...*, p. 178.

³⁷ Ibidem, p. 219.

considerations on the possibility of assigning the name sacrament also to priesthood. They begin with a clear opposition to understanding priesthood in sacrificial categories similar to the Levitical priesthood. Melancthon, however, understands it as “the ministry of the Word and the sacraments administered to others,”³⁸ and in view of the fact that justification was accomplished through the one sacrifice of Christ: “Thus priests are not called to offer sacrifices for the people as in Old Testaments law so that through them they might merit the forgiveness of sins for the people; instead they are called to preach the gospel and to administer the sacraments of the people.”³⁹ In the situation, however:

If ordination is understood with reference to the ministry of the Word, we have no objection to calling ordination a sacrament. For the ministry of the Word has the command of God and has magnificent promises like Romans 1[:16]: the gospel “is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith.” Likewise, Isaiah 55[:11], “... so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose...” If ordination is understood in this way, we will not object to calling the laying of hands a sacraments. For the church has the mandate to appoint ministers, which ought to please us greatly because we know that God approves this ministry and is present in it.⁴⁰

The polemical fronts on which Melancthon appears in Article XIV of the “Apology of the Augsburg Confession” are meted out not only against Rome. On the occasion of the discussion on priesthood, he emphasizes once again the conviction expressed in Article V of the “Augsburg Confession” that “[t]hey condemn Anabaptists and others who think that the Holy Spirit comes to human beings without the external Word through their own preparations and works,”⁴¹ stating:

Indeed, it is worthwhile to extol the ministry of the Word with every possible kind of praise against fanatics who imagine that the Holy Spirit is not given through the Word but is given on account of certain preparations of their own, for example, if they sit idle and silent in dark places

³⁸ Ibidem, p. 220.

³⁹ Ibidem.

⁴⁰ Ibidem.

⁴¹ “The Augsburg Confession...,” p. 41.

while waiting for illumination – as “Enthusiasts” formerly taught and the Anabaptists now teach.⁴²

The second part of the “Augsburg Confession” on the church ministry addresses two issues. First, the issue of permission for priests to marry. Melancthon here provides a broad argument that refers both to the apostle Paul and to the history of creation. The conclusion is:

It is not humanly possible to change creation without a singular gift and work of God. Accordingly, those who are not suited for celibacy should marry. For no human law or vow can nullify a command and institution of God. For these reasons our priests teach that it is lawful for them to have wives.⁴³

This argument is supported by examples from church history that prove priests could marry. A similar argument is found in “The Smalcald Articles” in Part III, Article XI:

Now, as little as the power has been given to them or to us to make female out of male or a male out of female – or to abolish sexual distinction all together – so little did they have power to separate such creatures of God or to forbid them from living together honestly in marriage.⁴⁴

The ban on marriage is also defined in this article as evidence of tyranny exercised by bishops loyal to the Pope.

The more important thread, however, is Article XXVIII at the end of the “Augsburg Confession,” entitled in Latin “Concerning the Church’s Power,” and in German “Concerning the Power of Bishops.” In it, Melancthon defines the power of the keys, or the power of the bishops. It is “[...] according to the gospel, the power of the keys or the power of the bishops is the power of God’s mandate to preach the gospel, to forgive and retain sins, and to administer the sacraments.”⁴⁵ Bishops were granted it by divine law, and in addition to the elements mentioned above, it also consists of the following tasks: rejecting teachings that are incompatible with the gospel and excluding from society the godless, whose godlessness

⁴² “Apology of the Augsburg Confession...,” pp. 220–221.

⁴³ “The Augsburg Confession...,” p. 63.

⁴⁴ “The Smalcald Articles.” In: *The Book of Concord...*, p. 324.

⁴⁵ “The Augsburg Confession...,” p. 93.

is obvious. This power, however, has its limits. If the bishops establish something against the gospel, then the churches have not only the right, but the command of God to refuse to obey them.

The limit of obedience to the authority of bishops also determines the attitude of the Lutheran Reformation towards the issue of maintaining the ordination provided for in canon law, as well as the church order resulting from it. Article XIV of the “Apology of the Augsburg Confession” declares its readiness to maintain the ordination and the existing church government, even knowing that it was introduced by human authority. However, the obstacle here was the fact that the bishops persecuted the reformed congregations that want to adhere to the true, godly and catholic “Augsburg Confession.”⁴⁶

Martin Luther refers to this matter in a similar way in his “Smalcald Articles” from 1536, in which he admits that if bishops cared about the church and the gospel, they could be allowed, in the name of love and peace, but without coercion, to ordain evangelical preachers, provided that the accompanying “unchristian ceremony and pomp” were abandoned. However, the lack of will to do so on the part of bishops, who are more political rulers than performing church service in the sense already understood by the “Augsburg Confession,” cannot become a reason for the lack of servants in the church performing their proper service of Word and sacrament. Therefore, the Reformation side, referring to examples from the history of the church, decided to independently ordain those who are suitable for such service.⁴⁷

Similarly, the issue of ordination is developed by Melanchthon in “Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope” from 1537, a work that was a supplement to the “Augsburg Confession.” In addition to a broad discussion of the title issue, it also contains a section entitled “The Power and Jurisdiction of Bishops.” Melanchthon begins it by repeating a set of tasks that the gospel assigns to those “who preside over the churches.”⁴⁸ It is identical to the list already specified in the “Augsburg Confession,” so it includes the preaching of the Word, the administration of the sacraments, and jurisdiction in the form of excluding from the community those whose crimes are known and granting absolution to those who want to repent. The abovementioned authority “is shared by divine right by all

⁴⁶ “Apology of the Augsburg Confession...,” pp. 222–223

⁴⁷ “The Smalcald Articles...,” pp. 323–324.

⁴⁸ “Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope.” In: *The Book of Concord...*, p. 340.

who preside in the churches, whether they are called pastors, presbyters, or bishops.”⁴⁹ At the same time, Melanchthon emphasizes that there is no difference in degree between bishops, presbyters (and shepherds). There is therefore one, non-hierarchical spiritual office. He sees the difference between bishops and presbyters in their tasks, and specifically in the reservation of the right of ordination to the former. However, in a situation where bishops betray the gospel, according to Melanchthon, the congregations retain the right to ordain their clergy, because there is no such difference in degree between presbyters and bishops. It is worth noting here that this is actually the only mention in *The Book of Concord* referring to the argument from the universal priesthood. The context for the entire argument is again the question of the limit of obedience to bishops. It is fidelity to the gospel. This criterion of obedience to episcopal authority in the “Treatise...,” similarly to the earlier Article XXVIII of the “Augsburg Confession,” does not concern only the issue of ordination, but the entire episcopal ruling. If it proceeds from premises that are contrary to the gospel, there is no obligation to obey it.

3. Reflection of the Lutheran World Federation

In case of the Lutheran World Federation (hereafter: LWF), the history of documents devoted to the church office dates back to the 1980s. Three fundamental documents were issued at that time. The first of them was entitled “Lutheran Understanding of the Episcopal Office.”⁵⁰ Its first part contains basic considerations. Episcopal office is rooted in the mission of Jesus Christ and placed within the concept of one ordained office. It is a response to the supra-local nature of the church. Episcopal office as an office of pastoral guidance and spiritual oversight was adopted by the Lutheran churches from the earlier tradition of the church. It is present in them in various forms and under different names. It is ecumenically significant that these differences do not constitute a factor dividing the unity of the church. The ecumenical commitment of Lutherans encourages reflection on the structure and understanding of the episcopal ministry. Such

⁴⁹ Ibidem.

⁵⁰ “Lutheran Understanding of the Episcopal Office.” *LWF Studies* (1993), pp. 55–65.

reflection touches, for example, on the issue of apostolic succession understood from a Lutheran perspective primarily as fidelity to the apostolic faith and its continuity, and not a formal succession of episcopal ordinations.

The second part of the document is devoted to the responsibility and function of the episcopal office. It refers broadly to ecumenical arrangements (Lima Document,⁵¹ dialogue with Roman Catholicism⁵²). The key task of the office is to preach the pure gospel and to administer the sacraments in accordance with it. From these, specific tasks and the authority of the episcopal office were derived. An important one among them is the care for the unity of the church. The episcopal office does not perform its tasks in isolation from the community. The form of their implementation is shaped by cultural factors. It is important in this context that the episcopal office is shaped in a way that allows for the effective implementation of the tasks assigned to it.

The second of the 1980s' documents is entitled, "Women in the Ministries of the Church."⁵³ It begins with a discussion of the Reformation concept of the common priesthood of all believers rooted in baptism. The ordained ministry is placed against this background in a way that directly refers to Luther's theology and the "Augsburg Confession." The first part ends with an attempt to describe the common priesthood and the ordained ministry in the contemporary church. Attention is drawn to the need for their mutual conditioning; otherwise, the church risks falling into excessive egalitarianism or autonomous authoritarianism.

Part two of the said document analyzes the situation of women in ministries and offices in Lutheran churches. It points out that most large Lutheran churches have decided to introduce women's ordination. Its importance is evidenced by the fact that it has become a symbol of recognizing women as equal human beings and is an expression of responsibility to the gospel, because it makes it clear that there are no elements in the life and mission of the church that are not intended for everyone. It is emphasized that neither the Bible nor the confessional writings include content that directly negates the ordination of women, and according to Gal 3:26ff. all are equal on the basis of the baptism. The mission of the church – the proclamation

⁵¹ Cf. WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES: *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*. Geneva 1982.

⁵² Cf. "The Ministry in the Church." In: *Growth in Agreement. Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level. 1972–1982*. Eds. H. MEYER, L. VISCHER. Geneva 1984, pp. 248–275.

⁵³ "Report from the LWF Workshop on 'Women in the Ministries of the Church,' Le Cénacle, Geneva, February 25–28, 1983." *LWF Studies* (1983), pp. 63–93.

of the gospel – therefore demands that the question is not whether women should be ordained, but whether there are reasons to refuse them ordination. The decision to ordain women should entail a renewal of the pastoral office. Part two ends with an analysis of the broad involvement of women in various forms of the church's ministry.

The most extensive part third of the said document deals with factors influencing the practice of church life, which have an impact on the decision to ordain women: theology, the issue of socialization, understanding power and authority and leadership style, structures, systems and values in the life of the church, feminization in various areas of social and church activity, the context of the functioning of the church as an organization and employer, education necessary for competent involvement in the activities of the church. This part, focused mainly on practical factors (social and organizational), ends with an analysis of ecumenical challenges related to the decision to ordain women.

The last of the 1980s' LWF documents, "The Lutheran Understanding of Ministry,"⁵⁴ begins by defining the concepts of ministry, ordained ministry, and episcopal office. Part one of the document deals with the People of God, starting from the understanding of ministry proposed by the ecumenical Lima Document.⁵⁵ The foundation of the People of God is their calling by God through the power of the Holy Spirit. Through the gospel of Jesus Christ baptism creates their community, those people are endowed with the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and their ministry is closely linked to the ministry of Christ. Worship, witness, and service play an important role in their life. Part two discusses the ministry of the church, rooted in the ministry of Jesus Christ, which is realized in the various ministries of individual Christians.

Part three of "The Lutheran Understanding of Ministry" deals with the ordained ministry. Starting from the confessional writings, the document places it in the context of one ministry of the church. The key tasks of the office are indicated as follows: preaching and teaching the Word of God and administering the sacraments, as well as conducting the services of worship, witness and service in the congregation. The ordained ministry is also important for the unity of the church. It is also diverse in form and manner of organization already on the basis of the New Testament, as well as in the contemporary church. In this context, the openness to updating

⁵⁴ "The Lutheran Understanding of Ministry." *LWF Studies* (1983), pp. 37–54.

⁵⁵ Cf. WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES: *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*...

the understanding of the ordained ministry in new historical and cultural contexts is emphasized. In dealing with the episcopal office, the findings of the document "Lutheran Understanding of the Episcopal Office"⁵⁶ are repeated. A similar approach is taken in part four, which, speaking about the ordained office of women, refers to the document "Women in the Ministries of the Church."⁵⁷ Part five, dealing with the introduction to ordination, indicates the necessity of calling and ordination. Ordination is an act of God and the church, it is lifelong and does not equal full-time employment in the church, and it does not involve separation from other members of the church, the granting of any special characteristics, or a higher status. The last part deals with the issue of apostolic succession, indicating the self-perception of the Lutheran churches as successors of the authentic apostolic tradition. The task of the ordained is to serve this preserved continuity, even when a given church has not preserved the continuity of the succession of episcopal positions. The openness of the Lutheran churches to apostolic succession is emphasized, understood as a sign of the apostolicity of the life of the church, but only in a situation where it does not question the validity of previous offices. In the summary of the document, it is indicated that it is a summary of the Lutheran understanding of office at that time. Among the topics requiring further, also ecumenical, reflection, the following are indicated: the performance of offices by women and the triple ministry of bishop, presbyter and deacon.

Work on the issue of ministry in the LWF continued in the 1990s during the consultations at Cartigny (1992).⁵⁸ Its work can be seen as an extension of the work of the 1980s, primarily in two areas: the ordained ministry of women and the episcopal ministry. The section on the ordained ministry of women⁵⁹ begins with a summary of the state of acceptance of women's ordination by LWF member churches and an indication of the interplay of theology and cultural environment that comes into play in this context. It then addresses the following issues: the reasons for ordaining women, resistance and opposition to women in ordained ministry, the ecumenical implications of the decision to admit women to ordained ministry, and the challenges facing churches ordaining women in terms of their full integration into the life of the church. The second section concludes with

⁵⁶ Cf. "Lutheran Understanding of the Episcopal Office...", pp. 55–65.

⁵⁷ "Women in the Ministries of the Church...", pp. 63–93.

⁵⁸ "Report: Consultation on the Ordained Ministry of Women and the Episcopal Ministry." *LWF Studies* (1993), pp. 7–36.

⁵⁹ "Report: Consultation on the Ordained Ministry...", pp. 11–19.

references to the LWF General Assembly resolutions calling for the ordination of women to the pastoral ministry (1984,⁶⁰ 1990⁶¹), indicating that this practice is an expression of obedience to the gospel. Those churches that have not yet implemented it were called upon to make appropriate changes, and those that have already done so were called upon to ensure the full integration of women pastors and to support with their experiences those churches that are still facing this decision.

The section on the episcopal ministry⁶² begins with an indication of the meeting of evangelical convictions and historical context in the debate on the structure of the church. Then, selected issues concerning the episcopal ministry are presented: its presence and form in the 20th-century Lutheranism, its understanding as an ministry of oversight (referring to New Testament and Reformation sources and the LWF's previous findings). Finally, the office is placed in the context of its role in the unity, continuity and identity of the church. The summary of the entire document⁶³ recalls the Reformation principle of evangelical freedom of the Christian and the church, indicating the process of change regarding the ministries of ordained women and the episcopal office, for which the Lutheran communion worldwide is seeking appropriate forms and practices. It is emphasized that the trust in this process is not placed in human wisdom and competence, but in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The first of the documents on church ministry created after the year 2000 deals with the issue of the diaconate. It is a report from the 2005 consultation: "The Diaconal Ministry in the Lutheran Churches."⁶⁴ The task of this consultation was to identify the theological parameters of the diaconal ministry guaranteeing its solid biblical foundations, its shaping by the Lutheran Reformation and its openness to changes depending on the ecclesiastical and social context. The report begins with a discussion of the basic context, that is, the issue of diaconate. After clarifying the terminology, the report presents the diaconal ministry in the Bible and the pre-Reformation and Reformation history of the church. Then the diaconal ministry is considered in relation to specific issues of theology

⁶⁰ Cf. "Working Group 6: Partnership of Women and Men." *LWF Report* 19/20 (1985), p. 227.

⁶¹ Cf. "I Have Heard the Cry of My People... The Message." *LWF Report* 28/29 (1990), p. 82.

⁶² "Report: Consultation on the Ordained Ministry...", pp. 19–32.

⁶³ *Ibidem*, pp. 32–33.

⁶⁴ "The Diaconal Ministry in the Lutheran Churches." *LWF Studies* 1 (2006), 81–89.

and church-social life, including the priesthood/deaconhood of all believers, the pastoral ministry, the Eucharist, and the relationship between the church and the world, that is, the issue of authority. The final conclusions include a call for the LWF member churches to review their ways of organizing church ministry, so that the diaconal ministry can take its proper place in the perspective of fulfilling the responsibility of the church's diaconal mission. Such an effort is not a universal remedy for the challenges facing the church as it confronts the changing reality, but it can be a significant contribution to the credibility and effectiveness of the one church ministry. These indications do not, of course, negate the fundamental necessity for God himself to lead and authenticate the church's mission through the power of the Spirit.

The second document from the 2000s is a response to the need to clarify the Lutheran position in light of the topics raised in ecumenical dialogues. It is entitled: "Episcopal Ministry within the Apostolicity of the Church"⁶⁵ (2007). It begins by indicating the importance of the topic for the Federation's ecumenical dialogues,⁶⁶ as well as the multitude of Lutheran traditions regarding episcopal ministry.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ "Episcopal Ministry within the Apostolicity of the Church." *LWF Documentation* 52 (2007), pp. 135–160.

⁶⁶ Besides the most important multilateral report entitled *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* following bilateral reports were mentioned at the global level: "The Ministry in the Church...", pp. 248–275; "Episcopate. Niagara Falls, September 1987 [i.e. The Niagara Report]." In: *Growth in Agreement. Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level. 1982–1998*. Eds. J. GROS, H. MEYER, W. G. RUSCH. Geneva–Grand Rapids–Cambridge, MI 2000, pp. 11–37; "Church and Justification. Würzburg, Germany, 11 September 1993." In: *Growth in Agreement (1982–1998)*..., pp. 485–565; "Called to Communion and Common Witness. Geneva 1999–2001." In: *Growth in Agreement. International Dialogue Texts and Agreed Statements, 1998–2005*. Eds. J. GROS, T. L. BEST, L. F. FUCHS. Geneva–Grand Rapids, pp. 449–476; "Growth in Communion. Porto Alegre, Brazil, 2002." In: *Growth in Agreement (1998–2005)*..., pp. 375–423; at the regional level: "On the Way to Visible Unity – A Common Statement. Meissen, 18 March 1988." *LWF Documentation* 49 (2004), pp. 129–145; "The Porvoo Common Statement." *LWF Documentation* 49 (2004), pp. 145–176; "Called to Witness and Service. The Reuilly Common Statement." *LWF Documentation* 49 (2004), pp. 201–230; "Called to Common Mission: A Lutheran Proposal for a Revision of the Concordat of Agreement." *LWF Documentation* 49 (2004), pp. 231–242; "Called to Full Communion: The Waterloo Declaration." *LWF Documentation* 49 (2004), pp. 243–248; BILATERALE ARBEITSGRUPPE DER DEUTSCHEN BISCHOFSKONFERENZ UND DER KIRCHENLEITUNG DER VEREINIGTEN EVANGELISCH-LUTHERISCHEN KIRCHE DEUTSCHLANDS: *Communio Sanctorum. Die Kirche als Gemeinschaft der Heiligen*. Paderborn–Frankfurt am Main 2000.

⁶⁷ For the documents discussed in this analysis, cf.: "The Lutheran Understanding of Ministry...", pp. 37–54; "Lutheran Understanding of the Episcopal Office...", 55–65;

After presenting terminological considerations on the concept of *episkope*, the authors move on to the second part concerning the biblical and historical foundations of the episcopal ministry. It contains an overview of New Testament references, selected traditions of Christian antiquity and the teaching of the Reformation on the office, including the episcopal ministry, as well as the circumstances of the Reformation criticism aimed at the then form of this ministry. It is emphasized that the Reformation transformation of the *episkope* ministry resulted from both the theological views of the Reformers and the historical circumstances in which they had to act. Attention is also drawn to changes in the perception of the ministry of *episkope* – for example, in the 16th century, the issue of apostolic succession did not play any role.

The next part, devoted to the mission and apostolicity of the church, begins with a presentation of the Christ-based mission of the church, that is, the proclamation of reconciliation with God and the practice of God's saving love in the world. Next, an understanding of the apostolic tradition in its context is presented, which is defined as the continuation of the marks of the church of the apostles. The fundamental role of baptism, which incorporates one into the church, is also indicated, and an understanding of how apostolic teaching comes to the fore. The Lutheran churches claim the right to this apostolic identity. This part ends with a presentation of the evolution of the understanding of the concept of apostolic succession.

The fourth part deals with the ordained ministry in the service of the mission of the apostolicity of the church, discussing successively such issues as: the relationship between the ordained ministry and the apostolicity of the church; the ordained ministry of women and men, the ministry of *episkope* exercised as an episcopal ministry, and the relationship of the episcopal ministry and the synodal structures of church authority. Next, the relation of the episcopal ministry to the unity of the church is addressed, focusing on two fundamental issues: unity as an attribute of the church and the mutual relations of the episcopal ministry, apostolic succession and the constitutive elements of the church.

The penultimate part deals with perspectives for the future, indicating the ecumenical importance of the reconciliation of the ministry of Word and sacrament. It is emphasized that further Lutheran debate is necessary, also taking into account ecumenical references in such topics as:

"Women in the Ministries of the Church...", pp. 63–93; "Report: Consultation on the Ordained Ministry of Women and the Episcopal Ministry...", pp. 7–36.

the power and role of ordination; the relationship of the ministry of *episkope* to the diaconal dimension of the mission of the church; the practical realization of the personal, collegiate and communal nature of the episcopal ministry; questions related to the realization of spiritual supervision and secular administrative tasks; and also, which is particularly important in the ecumenical context, the personal life and faith and the manner of exercising the episcopal ministry by those who have been called to it.

The document ends with a brief summary focused on the significance of apostolicity for the Lutheran churches, as well as on the importance and role of the analyses presented for the development of an understanding of the practice of the episcopal ministry in the interest of developing forms and practices that serve God's mission. As in earlier documents, the document concludes with a declaration of trust not in the wisdom of human analyses, but in the Lord Jesus Christ.

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An Outline of the Development of Evangelical Social Teaching: The Study of the Lausanne Movement's Core Documents

Abstract: The Lausanne Committee for World Evangelisation (the Lausanne Movement), representing global Evangelicalism, is becoming an increasingly important place for the conceptualisation of Christian social teaching. An analysis of the movement's four international conferences, held in 1971, 1989, 2010, and 2024, shows a clear development in the scope and significance of systematic social thought within Evangelical theology. It is important because, until recently, Evangelicalism did not develop systematic social teaching, concentrating rather on evangelisation. In answering the question about the reasons for this development, it can be assumed that it is the result of the Christian mission encountering the social, cultural, political, and economic conditions of the places to which it is directed. Evangelical theologians are increasingly mindful that evangelisation also requires solid instruments to shape the social environment. One such instrument is systematic social teaching, which links the Christian mission with the quest for a more just and peaceful society that opposes poverty and exclusion.

The article aims to present the social teaching of the Evangelical Churches as formulated by the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelisation, with special emphasis on the four core documents of the movement: the Lausanne Covenant, the Manila Manifesto, the Cape Town Commitment, and the Seoul Statement. Literary analysis is the primary method employed in this article.

Keywords: Lausanne Committee for World Evangelisation, Lausanne Movement, Evangelicalism, ecumenism, social thought, Christian mission

Introduction

Until recently, Evangelical Christians did not develop systematic social teaching, concentrating on evangelisation. Rather, Evangelicalism was sceptical of such reflection on society, drawing on the tradition of distinguished competencies of the state and the Church. Something, however, has begun to change. The global expansion of the Evangelical Churches and a confrontation with local poverty and exclusion in many corners of the world have led many Evangelical theologians to foster a social doctrine grounded in Evangelical Christianity. This is the case of the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelisation, an organisation that, over more than 50 years, has brought together Evangelical communities worldwide. As a place of encounters and shared experiences among Christians, the Lausanne Movement has fostered an original teaching that reflects not only the zealotry and dynamism of Evangelicals but also the advancement of their social thought. Of course, Evangelicalism encompasses different strands, differing from each other, including stances towards systematic social doctrine intended to impact on the institutions of state in order to shape the desired social order (it is, indeed, one of the heaviest factors of division). Yet, the Lausanne Movement, with its global reach and insightful recognition of the processes at the junction of culture, society, economy, and mission, offers an essential contribution to global Christian social teaching.

When introducing the problem, it is worth noting that Evangelical social teaching, as developed by the Lausanne Movement, is primarily about the theological interpretation of contemporary processes and phenomena. Thus, Evangelical theologians consider what happens in society, the economy, science, and culture, shedding theological light on the most burning issues of our time (most recently, the AI revolution). Yet they do not refuse to develop an original theological theory of society that would demonstrate a desired social order based on Christian values.

The article aims to present the social teaching of the Evangelical Churches as formulated by the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelisation, with special emphasis on the four core documents of the movement: the Lausanne Covenant, the Manila Manifesto, the Cape Town Commitment, and the Seoul Statement. Their literary analysis will be the primary method employed in this article.

1. The theological marks of Evangelicalism

Of course, it is superfluous to start with an extended presentation of Evangelical Christianity. There is already a large repository of sources that showcase what Evangelicalism is and its key marks. Given this article's purpose, it is worth noting two schemes of attributes that define Evangelicals. First, by David Bebbington, is a more overall and drawing attention to the inherent features when distinguishing four "special marks" of Evangelicalism: biblicism (the Bible as the ultimate religious authority), conversionism (a stress on the New Birth), activism (a dynamic and individualistic approach to religious duties and social involvement), and crucicentrism (a focus on Christ's redeeming work as the core of Christianity).¹ Many other schemes point out at the same or at least similar features like this by Bebbington, albeit sometimes differently named.

The above list should be completed by a more descriptive definition, such as one by David Bosch, a prominent South-African Evangelical missiologist who formulated the concept of six strands of Evangelicalism. Even though the list is roughly thirty years old, it still reliably showcases a diversity of Evangelical families that goes far beyond stereotypes about Evangelicals. Bosch, therefore, distinguished: "[F]irstly, 'confessional evangelicals,' who emphasise their position in the Reformation tradition with its doctrines of *sola gratia*, *sola fide*, and *sola scriptura*. Secondly, 'pietist evangelicals,' who have inherited the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century revivals and protests against Protestant scholasticism's 'dead orthodoxy.' The Holiness movement is a more recent manifestation of this. Thirdly, 'fundamentalists,' who develop their identity out of the fundamentalist/modernist controversy in North America in the first decades of this century. Fourthly, the Pentecostals, who are the fastest-growing Christian group in the world. Fifthly, 'conservative Evangelicals' or 'neo-Evangelicals,' a loose grouping which has developed, particularly in the USA, since World War II. It has subsequently grown through large-scale missionary efforts in many other countries, particularly in the Two-Thirds World. Neo-Evangelicals comprise groups as wide-ranging as Fuller Theological Seminary, the Billy Graham Organisation, the World Evangelical Fellowship (WEF), the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelisation (LCWE), and the American Southern

¹ D. BEBBINGTON: *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s*. London 1989, pp. 2–17.

Baptist Convention. Sixthly, ‘ecumenical evangelicals,’ who either have evangelical principles and remain within churches affiliated to the conciliar movement or, if they are not in those churches, are open to work with the World Council of Churches. An extension of this would be ‘radical evangelicals,’ who are particularly concerned with issues of social justice.”² This extended excerpt provides an encyclopaedic description of Evangelicalism worldwide, demonstrating a profound knowledge of the then trends within the global Evangelical family.

2. An outline of the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelisation

Among many strands, Bosch mentioned the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelisation. Nowadays, one of the most significant organisations gathering Evangelical Christians traces its history back to two events within global Evangelicalism, both in 1966: the missiological congress held in Wheaton College and the conference on worldwide Evangelicalism organised in Berlin, Germany, by the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. The first gathering emphasised the necessity of an Evangelical consensus grounded in faith in God’s words in the Bible and in Jesus Christ’s second coming. The conference in Berlin, while being critical of a merely humanistic interpretation of the Holy Scripture, stressed the ways of using social science outcomes and technological progress.³ However, both meetings revealed an increasing institutional rapprochement and a theological maturity of Evangelical Christians, enabling them to constitute a global community and develop a complex vision of the Christian mission worldwide. Both preceded the International Congress on World Evangelisation, organised in Lausanne, Switzerland, in 1974 by the aforementioned Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. Billy Graham himself was a leading figure of this event, and his theological thought strongly influenced the congress’s main topics. The Protestant Pope, as Graham was sometimes called,

² D. J. BOSCH: “Ecumenicals and Evangelicals: A Growing Relationship.” *The Ecumenical Review* 40/3–4 (1988), p. 458.

³ R. A. HUNT: “The History of the Lausanne Movement, 1974–2011,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 35/2 (2011), pp. 81–84.

had been concerned for decades about the moral condition of Western societies and culture, insisting that they were spiritually “empty”; he also believed in the approaching Armageddon and had repeatedly insisted that only the Bible could answer the people’s ultimate questions. He also argued that the missionary commandment for the Churches has entailed a quest for Evangelical unity, which, however, should be more spiritually and doctrinally than institutionally regarded.⁴

Although Graham’s theological thought shaped both the congress itself and the follow-up movement, it did not address certain divisions within global Evangelicalism. They can have been denoted (obviously, in general) as running among Evangelicals from the USA and other world regions, mainly Europe and South America. It is worth noting, from the perspective of this article, that one of the most crucial factors of division was social involvement. Whereas Evangelicals from North America were reluctant to intervene in the area traditionally perceived as an autonomous field of the state, those from the UK or Latin America accentuated systematic social teaching leading to solving social problems as an integral part of the Christian mission.⁵

Moreover, since the very beginning, the Lausanne Movement has recognised the growing significance of the ecumenical movement and the need for a common response from the Evangelical Churches to the challenges of a changing world. The organisation helped Evangelical Christians to become mindful of their cultural, political, and spiritual diversity within a profound cultural transformation. Among factors of this transformation the founder of the movement listed such phenomena as a growing impact of social sciences on a theological thought, a global political situation marked by the Cold War, a global Christianity’s shift to the global South, Christian fundamentalism, especially in the USA, countercultural Revolution in the Western countries as well as citizen’s rights movement and its influence on American Evangelicalism.⁶

Even though the Lausanne Movement was somewhat sceptical as to the ecumenical vision of the World Council of Churches, it has sometimes expressed eagerness to cooperate with the WCC as well as with other ecumenical bodies. All in all, the Evangelical Christians sought forms of a unity

⁴ W. H. FULLER: “From the Evangelical Alliance to the World Evangelical Fellowship: 150 Years of Unity with a Mission.” *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 20/4 (1996), p. 160.

⁵ R. A. HUNT: “The History of the Lausanne Movement...,” p. 81.

⁶ M. CLAVSON: “Misión Integral and Progressive Evangelicalism: The Latin American Influence on the North American Emerging Church.” *Religion* 3 (2012), p. 97.

of Evangelical family, especially in the face of difficulties raised by contemporary world and because of barely acceptable mainstream of ecumenism.⁷ John Stott, one of the most prominent leaders of the Lausanne Movement and an outstanding theologian defined this peculiarity of the Lausanne Movement “functionally,” as a place of raising new missiological and ecumenical ideas at the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. It was more important as this place was emerging against the backdrop of prevailing religious pluralism. In other words, the Lausanne Movement is faithful to the Christocentric core of Christianity.

The gathering in Lausanne, which brought together more than 2,700 delegates from 150 countries, is deemed a symbolic starting point for the Lausanne Movement. The congress produced the Lausanne Covenant, a final document, groundbreaking in the history of global Evangelicalism. Moreover, it entailed a call for establishing a continuation committee that one year later, during the meeting in Mexico City, brought to life the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelisation.⁸ Leighton Ford, the first leader of this organisation, became a charismatic missionary who has not hesitated to resist political authorities in world’s countries defending Christian rights to confess their faith.

In the years that followed, the institution strengthened the Committee, even though numerous consultations (on topics such as the homogeneous unit principle, the Gospel and culture, Evangelism, and social responsibility) revealed internal disagreements. Besides these consultations, the movement set up several working groups (on intercession, theology, strategy communication, leadership development, resource mobilisation and technology, a joint business, government, education, media, and medical working group) that ensured a continuity of functioning. In addition, regional teams and working groups have been established in order to coordinate the movement’s efforts at the local level.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the Lausanne Movement was undergoing changes caused by different factors, both internal and external, such as Pentecostalism, growing divergences among leaders from the USA on the one hand and Latin America on the other, implementation of Evangelisation strategies (e.g. window 10/40)⁹ and some institutional and financial problems.

⁷ S. CUEVA: *Mission Partnership in Creative Tension*. Langham 2015, p. 39.

⁸ R. A. HUNT: “The History of the Lausanne Movement...,” p. 83.

⁹ E. GRISWOLD: *Dziesiąty równoleżnik. Doniesienia z pogranicza chrześcijaństwa i islamu*. Warszawa 2013, p. 137.

Nowadays, the Lausanne Movement showcases its truly global reach. Its structure consists of the board of directors who constitute a central executive body, regional directors, catalysts (leaders responsible for specific targets, such as media engagement, creation care, cities, diasporas, tent-making, Jewish Evangelism, least reached people, to mention but a few), advisory leaders (among them is Leighton Ford, a Honorary Lifetime Executive Chair) and members of the three working groups (for theology, intercessory, and communication).¹⁰ The structure of the governing body is, therefore, corporation-like.

But the movement's central moments are marked by the global congresses. The Lausanne gathering in 1974 was the first. The next were in Manila, Philippines, in 1989, Cape Town, South Africa, in 2010 and Incheon, South Korea, in 2024. In addition, four global thematic conferences took place: the Forum for Global Evangelisation in Pattaya, Thailand, in 2004; the Global Leadership Forum in Bangalore, India, in 2013; the Younger Leaders Gathering in Jakarta, Indonesia, in 2019; and the Global Workplace Forum in Manila, Philippines, in 2019. All these events impressed by their reach, number of participants, and theological maturity, and all fostered the movement, producing the documents that give insight into Evangelicalism and its theological interpretation of reality.

3. The Lausanne Covenant: a declaration of systematic social teaching

As already mentioned, Evangelical Christians have differed on systematic social teaching, and the dividing line has run roughly between Evangelicals from the USA on the one hand and from Europe and Latin America on the other. Yet from the very beginning, the Lausanne conference accentuated that Christian mission is not only about proclaiming the Gospel to those who do not know Jesus Christ (so-called unreached people) but also about Christian social involvement and responsible teaching in society. The four documents, being the fruits of the global conferences: the Lausanne Covenant, the Manila Manifesto, the Cape Town Commitment, and the Seoul Statement, clearly showcase it.

¹⁰ *The Lausanne Movement*, <https://lausanne.org/leader> [accessed 5.10.2025].

The Lausanne Covenant manifested such an integral approach and, at the same time, a self-criticism when stating: "Because men and women are made in the image of God, every person, regardless of race, religion, colour, culture, class, sex or age, has an intrinsic dignity because of which he or she should be respected and served, not exploited. Here too we express penitence both for our neglect and for having sometimes regarded evangelism and social concern as mutually exclusive. Although reconciliation with other people is not reconciliation with God, nor is social action evangelism, nor is political liberation salvation, nevertheless, we affirm that evangelism and socio-political involvement are both part of our Christian duty."¹¹

The above excerpt from the Lausanne Covenant introduces an Evangelical concept of social thought. It is based on the interpretation of the four theological fields: teaching about God, human being, salvation, and God's Kingdom that, when brought together, determine its inherent causes. So, first, Christian social involvement is based on a belief that the Bible shows God as wanting people who are happy and seeking justice, liberty, and reconciliation.¹²

Therefore, Christians must participate in God's plan for the world. Second, it draws on a truth about unconditional human dignity stemming from the teaching about man and woman created in God's image and likeness, which does not allow for any reduction of the human being, whether economic, social, or cultural. Third, by locating salvation at the very centre of Christian theology, the Lausanne theologians emphasise that it must be confined to neither its secular nor its eschatological dimensions. They perceive salvation as a consequence of God's intention for man and woman, a liberation from evil, both individually and socially, eschatologically, and worldly. Salvation is, therefore, transformative.

The teaching on salvation entails the fourth motive, that is, God's Kingdom. Opposing any reduction of this Kingdom to merely a social and political idea (which is sometimes imputed to some liberal theological circles, including the World Council of Churches), the Lausanne theologians understand it as a spiritual space in which salvation is carried out and which is concomitantly a fruit of salvation. Christians become, in a sense, citizens of this Kingdom, subjected to its principles and striving for its broadening. Hence, the God's Kingdom (somewhat like in nineteenth-century liberal

¹¹ J. R. W. SCOTT (ed.): *The Lausanne Covenant. Complete Text with Study Guide*. Peabody 2012, p. 27.

¹² Ibidem, p. 30.

theology) contains a normative potential to external actions, including mission and social involvement.¹³

It is easy to guess that the Lausanne Covenant goes the middle way between Evangelical fundamentals who were reluctant to develop a theology of transformative social and political involvement and theological liberals who reduced Christian liberation and salvation to worldly dimensions. Consequently, the Covenant plays a significant role in a conceptualisation of Evangelical social thought.

4. The Manila Manifesto: development of social teaching

The next global gathering of the movement, held in Manila, Philippines, in 1989, reflected its growth in numbers: more than 4,000 delegates from 170 countries participated. The conference happened on the threshold of a collapse of the communist bloc (e.g. Christians from many republics of the Soviet Union came to Manila) and a prevailing feeling of an oncoming global change. In addition, some internal divisions and original approaches to Church mission transformed the movement from inside. In this regard, Samuel Escobar distinguished the three principal missiological trends within the movement: the first, “a *postimperial missiology* coming from both continental Europe and Britain that interrogates both past and present mission practice in light of the demands of God’s reign for liberation and ecumenism. The second, *managerial missiology*, associated with a false urgency, an uncritical reliance on technology, and the instrumental use both of the social sciences and of spiritual practices. The third, that is a *critical missiology*, emerging in a variety of forms from Two-Thirds World theologians and church leaders who are particularly concerned with the poor and marginalised as agents of God’s mission rather than as merely recipients of evangelistic outreach” (emphasis in the original). It is worth noting that the term “Two-Third World” used in Evangelistic missiology was said to replace a stigmatising “Third World.”¹⁴

¹³ P. KOPIEC: *Spółeczeństwo w teologicznej refleksji organizacji ekumenicznych. Panorama ujęć*. Lublin 2019, p. 214.

¹⁴ L. E. KEYSES, L. D. PATE: “Two-Thirds World Mission: The Next 100 Years.” *Missiology: An International Review* 21/2 (1993), pp. 187–206.

Nonetheless, Manila was in line with the gathering in Lausanne. The theologians in the Philippines explicitly affirmed “continuing commitment to the Lausanne Covenant as the basis of our cooperation in the Lausanne Movement (the first affirmation).”¹⁵ This declaration of continuity referred to the whole of theological teaching, including social commitment. Of the twenty-one affirmations and their elucidations (of which the manifesto comprised), the two prove it emphatically. Primarily, it is the ninth affirmation in which the Lausanne theologians “affirm that the proclamation of God’s kingdom of justice and peace demands the denunciation of all injustice and oppression, both personal and structural; we will not shrink from this prophetic witness.”¹⁶ Secondly, it is the fourth point of the elucidation, under the telling title “The Gospel and social responsibility,” which, in a relatively short way, confirmed a theological mandate for Christian social involvement. Since, in light of the article’s purpose, this text is crucial, it is worthwhile to cite it *in extenso*: “The proclamation of God’s Kingdom necessarily demands the prophetic denunciation of all that is incompatible with it. Among the evils we deplore are destructive violence, including institutionalised violence, political corruption, all forms of exploitation of people and of the earth, the undermining of the family, abortion on demand, the drug traffic, and the abuse of human rights. In our concern for the poor, we are distressed by the burden of debt in the two-thirds world. We are also outraged by the inhuman conditions in which millions live, who bear God’s image as we do. Our continuing commitment to social action is not a confusion of the Kingdom of God with a Christianized society. It is, rather, a recognition that the biblical Gospel has inescapable social implications. True mission should always be incarnational. It necessitates entering humbly into other people’s worlds, identifying with their social reality, their sorrow and suffering, and their struggles for justice against oppressive powers. This cannot be done without personal sacrifices.”¹⁷

The authors of the manifesto successfully present the crucial tenets of an Evangelical approach to social commitment in this short excerpt. In addition, between the lines, they referred to two theological issues, touching on the primordial fundamentals of Protestant theology. It is, first,

¹⁵ *The Manila Manifesto*. In: *New Directions in Mission and Evangelization, 1: Basic Statements 1974–1991*. Eds. STEPHEN B. BEVANS and JAMES A. SCHERER. Maryknoll 1992, p. 293.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 294.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 302.

about the value of good deeds and their connection to God's grace. Not compromising the traditional Protestant teaching on the primacy of grace over every human deed, the Lausanne theologians highlighted their interdependence and state that Evangelisation and diakonia must go hand in hand. Second, it is about the Kingdom of God and how it is understood in the Church's teaching. The manifesto, when emphatically rejecting any reduction of God's Kingdom to a merely socio-political idea,¹⁸ accentuated that its proclamation entails social involvement, not only through a daily charity, but also through a promotion of social and political models inspired by a Christian message. It also declared openness to cooperating with secular institutions in striving for human rights and a more just social order, even though more conservative Evangelical Christians have been sceptical of such cooperation. Finally, it included a clear, although diffident mention about ecological consciousness in Evangelical theology, missing in the previous document.¹⁹

5. The Cape Town Commitment: deepening of Evangelical social thought

The Cape Town Commitment, as the fruit of the global conference in the South African city, demonstrated further advancement, greater maturity, and greater complexity in Evangelical social thought. It also reflected an awareness of global heterogeneity and directly emphasised that social involvement must not consist merely in daily charity but should include a steady quest for values such as social justice and solidarity.

The Preamble introduces the document by pointing out that human life happens in a weave of what is changeable and unchangeable. The former refers to social and cultural dimensions; the latter concerns the truths of faith. So, Christians live in a world where there is a permanent clash of rapid global changes on the one hand and the human condition on the other.

¹⁸ D. A. LUIDENS, ROGER NEMETH: "Public and Private Protestantism Reconsidered. Introducing the Loyalists." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 26/4 (1987), pp. 450 (450–464).

¹⁹ J. STOTT, C. J. H. WRIGHT: *Christian Mission in the Modern World*. London 2015, p. 36.

The Commitment examined many issues that had hitherto been either not considered or merely touched on in the teaching of the Lausanne Movement. This is, first, a care for an integrity of creation that the Lausanne theologians deemed as integral part of a Christian mission,²⁰ and distinguished the three ways of action: Christian self-confession of guilt for destroying natural environment and for consumerism, a commitment for ecological responsibility and a support of those who work for preservation of nature, including taking political decisions. Second, this is an affirmation of ethic, cultural and racial diversity, which is deemed God's gift²¹ but also a task for Christians who must oppose any racism, ethnocentrism, and relationship of dominance or exploitation of one over another. However, the Lausanne theologians rejected cultural relativism that was at times discerned in some ecumenical organisations, arguing that cultures are not morally neutral: they can be more or less close to the Gospel and more or less sinful. Third, it is an involvement in countering social exclusion, regarding both individuals and whole groups and nations that must encompass not only a sphere of daily diakonia but also a systematic reflection on Christian social order entailing systemic political changes.²² Thus in this point the Lausanne theologians declared political involvement that nevertheless must have been accompanied by the two theological "conditions": that a just and peaceful social order needs standing individual conversion, moral and spiritual; and that social involvement must reject any compromise with a sin and sinful world.²³

A memorable illustration of how the Lausanne theologians have perceived contemporary societies and the need for social involvement is their rejection of four idolatries that hinder the Christian socio-economic order: idolatry of sexuality, power, success, and greed. In the first case, they referred to a biblical teaching on human sexuality and stated that it is in accordance with human vocation and dignity only in marriage. They also drew attention to a profound contemporary crisis of family and identity reflected in many evils, such as involuntary loneliness, pornography, prostitution, adultery, and promiscuity, to mention but a few. The idolatry of power may take place in all relationships of dominance and submission

²⁰ "The Cape Town Commitment: A Confession of Faith and a Call to Action. The Third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization, Cape Town, 16–25 October 2010," *KAIROS – Evangelical Journal of Theology* 5/1 (2011), pp. 166 (165–224).

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 181.

²² *Ibidem*.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 183.

or differences among genders, races, and social status. Interestingly, the commitment paid particular attention to marital relationships: “Any form of abuse of one’s wife – verbal, emotional or physical – is incompatible with the love of Christ, in every culture.”²⁴ The idolatry of success is regarded as an inherent trait of contemporary dominant culture, subduing values such as confidence and honesty. Finally, the idolatry of greed refers to a peculiar trend within global Evangelicalism, that is, the so-called Prosperity Gospel, “the teaching that believers have a right to the blessings of health and wealth and that they can obtain these blessings through positive confessions of faith and the ‘sowing of seeds’ through financial or material gifts.”²⁵ The issue of Prosperity Gospel would need a more thorough examination; nevertheless, the Lausanne theologians joined other Evangelical theological circles that categorically oppose this teaching as being at odds with a commitment to the Bible as God’s authoritative word.

6. Today’s Lausanne perspective on Christian social commitment

Merely fourteen years after the Cape Town gathering, the Lausanne theologians met in Incheon, South Korea. Yet, when reading the final document from this conference, one gets the impression that the world has changed a lot. The Seoul Statement is somewhat different from previous declarations, unveiling both self-criticism by Evangelical theologians and their still-growing theological maturity, combined with intercultural experience. In terms of social commitment, the document appears less declaratory and conceptual than the texts from Lausanne, Manila, and Cape Town, and focuses more on specific issues.

Nonetheless, it is not a rupture. The statement declares a standing continuity of the Lausanne tradition. In other words, Seoul stands in line with Lausanne, Manila, and Cape Town, and does not reject or invalidate any paragraph of the previous core documents. The theologians state it clearly in the document’s Preamble: “For fifty years, the Lausanne Movement has been guided by the Lausanne Covenant (1974), the Manila

²⁴ Ibidem, p. 216

²⁵ Ibidem, p. 217.

Manifesto (1989), and the Cape Town Commitment (2010). The Seoul Statement of the Fourth Lausanne Congress fully affirms those earlier Congress documents and builds on their firm foundation by renewing our commitment to the centrality of the Gospel and to the faithful reading of Scripture.”²⁶

However, as already mentioned, when aligned with the previous Lausanne documents, the statement somehow settles on successes and failures in the realisation of Christian mission. The words of self-criticism appear surprisingly often, setting the tone for the entire document. Actually, at the beginning of the Preamble, the Lausanne theologians admit that: “The Church has often failed to nurture new believers to obey Christ’s call to radical discipleship at home, at school, in the Church, in our neighbourhoods, and in the marketplace. It has also struggled to equip its leaders to respond to trending social values and to distortions of the Gospel, which have threatened to erode the sincere faith of Christians and to destroy the unity and fellowship of the Church of the Lord Jesus. Consequently, we are alarmed by the rise of false teachings and pseudo-Christian lifestyles, leading numerous believers away from the essential values of the Gospel.”²⁷

The statement draws special attention to issues such as the cultural and geographical contextualisation of Christian mission and the need to develop ecclesiology. The document overtly states a negligence in this field: “We recognise that the doctrine of the church has received little attention during these decades of extraordinary Christian expansion in the world, and there is little consensus about what the church is, its importance in the life of the Christian, and its relevance to our world.”²⁸

An observation that the statement contains fewer theoretical concepts than previous documents, refers also to the theory of social teaching. It considers social commitment indirectly, in the backdrop of a theological lecture, self-criticism, or the discussion of new phenomena and trends shaping the life of the Church. For example, point 15, when describing the significance of faith for Christian life, states that “by faith, we steward and care for God’s creation and one another; work for his justice in our societies; and seek to live peaceable lives of faithful service.”²⁹

²⁶ *The Seoul Statement*, <https://lausanne.org/statement/the-seoul-statement#vii-technology-the-accelerating-innovation-we-discern-and-steward> [accessed 14.10.2025].

²⁷ Ibidem.

²⁸ Ibidem.

²⁹ Ibidem, para. 15.

Instead of social involvement theory, the document focuses on specific trends that, according to widespread belief, determine the contemporary world. It is about sexual identity, technological progress, including AI and wars. In the first case, the statement affirms the biblical teaching on human sexuality and points out the detrimental consequences of sexual freedom and gender fluidity. It also extensively (compared to the previous core documents) dealt with same-sex relationships, holding that sexual intercourses between persons of the same sex seriously distort God's design, and, nevertheless, that homosexual persons should find their place and support in the Church. Interestingly, the Evangelicals from the Lausanne Movement are remarkably close to the teaching of the Catechism of the Catholic Church in this field.

Compared to the previous core documents, the statement focuses more on the criticism of ideologies and values that lead to unjust violence and oppression, and it describes the current political situation, indicating where wars, political conflicts, persecutions, and violations of human rights occur. In this regard, the statement directly refers to nationalism, ethnonationalism, racism, and casteism, to mention but a few.

Finally, the Lausanne theologians address the unprecedented technological progress the world faces, discerning the growing danger of technological domination over humans (particularly stemming from areas such as genetic engineering, cloning, biotechnology, mind-uploading, digital media, virtual reality, and artificial intelligence). The theologians remind us that technological progress is good in itself, reflecting God-given human creativity. Yet, because the sin is in the middle of reality, technology can be sinful as well, distorting human relationships and self-understanding, becoming idolatrous by worshipping produced things (consumerism), and disembedding people, especially the young, from their social environments. When examining peculiar threats posed by technological advancement, the statement carefully considers the questions Christians must ask. This part of the document demonstrates the Lausanne theologians' profound knowledge of the aftermaths (both successes and failures) of the clash between the Church's vocation and technological potential.³⁰

Overall, the Lausanne Movement often and with expertise addresses technological progress, exploring topics such as online Christian communities (online parishes), discipleship in the context of an AI revolution, and the ethics of AI, to mention a few.

³⁰ Ibidem, para. 95.

Conclusions

The Lausanne Movement, representing global Evangelicalism, is becoming an increasingly important place for the conceptualisation of Christian social teaching. An analysis of the movement's four global conferences, held in 1971, 1989, 2010, and 2024, a clear development can be seen in the scope and significance of systematic social thought in the context of Evangelical theology. In answering the question about the reasons for this development, it can be assumed that it is the result of the Christian mission encountering the social, cultural, political and economic conditions of the places to which it is directed. Evangelical theologians are increasingly mindful that evangelisation also requires solid instruments to shape the social environment to which it is directed. One such instrument is systematic social teaching, which links the Christian mission with the quest for a more just and peaceful society that opposes poverty and exclusion. In this way, the Lausanne Movement also brings Evangelicalism it represents closer to the ecumenical movement.

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The Mission of Lay Theologians in the Contemporary Church

Abstract: The article focuses on the issue of the theologically educated laity and the growth in their number and of their role since the 20th century. It shows their peculiar role: they are not mere substitutes for the lack of clerical theologians, they have specific missions. The lay theologians can also reflect theologically on the contemporary Church and the world from different standpoints than the clerics and thus enrich the development of theology as a discipline and of the Church and contribute to the announcement of the Gospel in the contemporary world.

Key words: theology, laity, theological faculty, synodality, contemporary evangelization

Introduction

The question of the laity in the Church, developed after the Second Vatican Council and, increasingly discussed in the current synodal paradigm, covers a wide range of areas: from their involvement in liturgical ministries, through the various possibilities of preaching and evangelization and the position of women in the Church, to the participation of the laity in the Church's governance. In this contribution I want to focus on the peripheral issue of the theologically educated laity, their specificities, their gradual development, and what are particular ways in which they can contribute to the overall development of theology as a research field and as a church. From the point of view of canon law, I draw here on the rights

and duties contained above all in canons 208, 218, 225, 229 §§ 2 and 3, which describe the fundamental rights with regard to theological education, research, secularity or dignity of the laity in the Church. In this article I also want to take into account the statements in recent documents of the Popes or the Council of Bishops on the topic, such as: the instruction *Donum veritatis*, the exhortation *Evangelia gaudium*, the motu proprio *Ad theologiam promovendam*, or the conclusions of the Synod on Synodality in 2024.

Secularity and the mission of the theologian-layperson

The evolution of the Church's approach to laity, especially in the 20th century, has been described in many publications, so it is not the focus of this article. The influence of the great theologians, especially Yves Congar, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Karl Rahner and others, led already during the Council and continues to lead to an ever-deepening understanding of the place of the laity, who are no longer defined only negatively, as "persons without ordination" or persons who are neither clerics nor religious, but in the context of the theology of the People of God (LG¹ 38) as members of this People of God and members of the mystical Body of Christ. This dignity of the laity derives from their baptismal consecration and election. In contrast to canon 207 § 1 of the CIC² the text of the exhortation *Christifideles laici*³ which is already a few years younger, speaks of the need to define and present a positive description of the vocation and mission of the laity (and then develops various characteristics of the laity in the text of the exhortation). The text of the CCEO⁴ also presents

¹ Dogmatic constitution on the Church "Lumen gentium" promulgated by His Holiness Pope Paul VI. November 21, 1964 (hereinafter: LG), https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html [accessed 4.07.2024].

² Codex iuris canonici auctoritate Ioannis Pauli PP promulgates (25.01.1983). *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 75, pars II (1983), pp. 1–320; corrections: *Appendix de die 22 Septembris* 1983, pp. 321–324.

³ IOANNES PAULUS II: *Adhortatio apostolica post-synodalis "Christifideles laici" de vocatione et missione Laicorum in Ecclesia et in mundo* (30.12.1988). *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 81 (1989), n. 9.

⁴ Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium auctoritate Ioannis Pauli PP. II promulgatus (18.10.1990). Roma 1990.

the conciliar reference in a somewhat different way from the Western Code, in a more positive way, when in canons 399 and following it speaks of the specificity of the laity, consisting in their own vocation (*indoles saecularis vocatio propria*). Pope Francis' new and deeper reflection on the concept of ministerium (in the case of acolyte, lector, catechist)⁵ also goes in this direction, referring to the lay faithful as a person who lives his or her baptism in fruitful collaboration and co-responsibility⁶ and not as a mere substitute in cases of clergy shortage. These ministries are also vocational in nature, as they are a permanent, lifetime ministry to local (particular) churches. The bearers of these ministries are not to see themselves as privileged and superior to other believers, but as persons serving with a specific gift to this community and, in liturgical ministries, primarily for the glory of God. A similar development can be seen in the involvement of the laity in the governing authority of the Church, especially in the judicial or executive sphere.⁷ Theological reflection is also defined by the Second Vatican Council. It is the task of the whole People of God, and especially of spiritual pastors and theologians, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to listen to, understand and interpret all that our times say and to judge it in the light of God's Word, so that the revealed truth may be ever more deeply understood, better known and more adequately presented

⁵ Pope Francis' revision seeks to follow the theological direction already outlined in the Apostolic Letter of Pope Paul VI *Ministeria quaedam* of 15 August 1972. Cf. FRANCIS: *Litterae apostolicae motu proprio datae Spiritus Domini quibus canonis 230 § 1 Codicis Iuris Canonici normae de aditu personarum feminini sexus ad institutum ministerium Lectoratus et Acolythatus mutantur* (10.01.2021), https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/la/motu_proprio/documents/papa-francesco-motu-proprio-20210110_spiritus-domini.html [accessed 4.07.2024]; Cf. FRANCIS: *Apostolic Letter issued "motu proprio" by the supreme pontiff Francis "Antiquum ministerium" instituting the Ministry of Catechist* (10.05.2021), https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/motu_proprio/documents/papa-francesco-motu-proprio-20210510_antiquum-ministerium.html [accessed 4.07.2024].

⁶ Cf. CONGREGATION FOR DIVINE WORSHIP AND THE SACRAMENTS: *Letter to the Presidents of the Episcopal Conferences on the Rite of the Ordination of Catechists* Prot N. 627/21 (3.12.2021), n. 12, which, although it speaks of catechists, we can apply this to other ministries of the acolyte and lectorate.

⁷ For instance, the enabling of lay prefects of the dicasteries of the Roman Curia after the promulgation of the Apostolic Constitution of Pope Francis *Praedicate Evangelium* in 2022, or the already common participation of the laity in the judicial power of the Church as judges, defenders of the union, lawyers, notaries, etc. Cf. also CIC, can. 228 § 1 according to which suitable lay persons may be entrusted with certain ecclesiastical offices and tasks (*officia et munera*) which they may hold according to juridical provisions, namely, they may, for example, be ecclesiastical judges according to can. 1421 § 2.

(GS⁸ 44). It is very difficult to distinguish conceptually between the cleric theologian and the lay theologian. Many of the clerics are religious and so proceed from the theological charism of their own order or congregation. Diocesan clerical theologians often come out of the influence of some new movement or community in the Church. And in essence, each priest has his own specific personal spirituality with which he approaches his theological expression. Clerical theology should always be influenced by the pastoral wisdom of the cleric, by his ministry and proclamation of the Word of God, by the Eucharist which is the heart and life-centre of the priestly ministry⁹ or by his closer attachment to the superior through the vow of obedience before ordination. There are also various influences of particular spirituality or personal piety among lay theologians, but their specific characteristic is secularity. The life situations of the laity are even more diverse than those of clerics: they may be married, parents, but they may also be celibate and involved in many social or cultural spheres. A true and authentic theology must always grow out of a deep inner spiritual life, even for the laity. The layperson is called to infuse his Christian life into the everyday existence that places him or her at the center of the hopes and tensions of the life of people and the structures of society. It is the following of Christ in the ordinary life of man, in their work of striving for change and improvement of the conditions of life, which presupposes social, cultural, political, etc., dimensions.¹⁰ We can say that Christian laymen are responsible for this world more specifically than clerics; they are more called to secular matters, so they can retroactively enrich theology with this secular (but not lightened, ChL 4)¹¹ view. The secularity of

⁸ *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the modern world "Gaudium et spes"* promulgated by His Holiness Pope Paul VI. December 7, 1965, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html [accessed 4.07.2024].

⁹ Cf. BENEDICTUS XVI: *Adhortatio apostolica postsynodalis "Sacramentum caritatis"* (22.02.2007). *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 99 (2007), pp. 166–167, n. 80.

¹⁰ A. BARRUFFO: "Laici." In: *Slovník spirituality*. Eds. S. DE FIORES, T. GOFFI. Kostelní Vydří 1999, pp. 443–444.

¹¹ Cf. *Postsynodal Apostolic exhortation "Christifideles laici" of his Holiness John Paul II on the vocation and the mission of the Lay faithful in the Church and in the world* (herein-after: ChL) https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_30121988_christifideles-laici.html [accessed 4.07.2024]. But it is not possible to confuse secularity with the negative term secularism. On the contrary – in contrast to secularism, secular society is Christianized and theologically interpreted the basic concepts of society. Because even today's human world is opening more and more widely to a spiritual

the laity is described above all by the texts LG 31 and ChL 15: The common dignity by virtue of baptism contains a limitation which, although it distinguishes the layman from the priest, religious or nun, does not separate him from them. The Second Vatican Council teaches that this special manner consists in the temporal disposition of the laity: “The proper and special distinction of the laity is their temporal character. And so to be – to act in the world is for the laity not only an anthropological and sociological fact, but also (and above all) a specifically theological and ecclesial fact. In the world, God reveals to them his will and their particular vocation to? seek the kingdom of God by working on temporal values by directing them according to God’s will.” In the light of the text of ChL 24, we can see in the lay theologians the persons whose gifts and charisms enrich the Church in various forms. However, no charism dispenses from feedback and submission to the Pastors of the Church. The theologian, then, interprets the Word of God and the teaching of the Church, which must not be his own intellectualism and search for his own glory,¹² but is meant to serve, in the context of the treasure of the Church’s teaching, a better understanding of God and his purposes with creation. The mission of the lay theologian can go either “to the world,” seeking to interpret the Gospel message in more theologically understandable language in purely secular areas (culture, politics, economics, social justice, media, ecology, etc.), or “inward” of the Church community, seeking a better or more up-to-date expression of the doctrine of God for contemporary Catholics. And to do this, he or she can then bring inspiration from things secular for the good of the Church. The CIC contains provisions for theologians (i.e. also lay theologians) mainly in canon 218: Those engaged in the sacred disciplines have a just freedom of inquiry and of expressing their opinion prudently on those matters in which they possess expertise, while observing the submission due to the Magisterium of the Church. Lay people are also entitled to acquire a broader knowledge of the sacred science taught at the Church’s universities and faculties or institutes of religious studies by attending lectures and obtaining academic degrees. They may also, while observing the provisions of the statutes regarding the required qualifications, receive a commission from the lawful ecclesiastical superior

and transcendent understanding of life, to a new search for religious values, to a renewed sense of the sacred.

¹² Pope Francis also warns against spiritual worldliness and its concrete hidden manifestations in the ecclesial community in his Apostolic Exhortation on the proclamation of the Gospel in the contemporary world, *Evangelii gaudium*, especially in nn. 93–95.

to teach sacred science.¹³ The guarantee of the faithfulness of a theologian (at least of one who lectures in a seminary or ecclesiastical faculty) is then to be secured by the provision of canon 833 n. 6, which contains the obligation to make a personal profession of faith in the wording approved by the Apostolic See for teachers of theology at the beginning of the exercise of the office assumed. Since the Catholic Church is a hierarchical community lay and clerical theologians alike must be aware, on the one hand, of their subordination to the magisterium (in researching and proclaiming the new discoveries legitimately) and, on the other hand, of the sacramental role of the clergy, which the laity cannot replace; but theology as such is neither lay nor clerical. It is to be above all true. In this area, too, we can see the development of canon 208 CIC, according to which all Christians are equal in dignity and action. On the basis of this equality, all collaborate in the development of the Body of Christ, each according to his or her own position and tasks. We can therefore summarize that the lay theologian is a person who has a specific charism and a specific sensitivity to view and scientifically interpret God's revelation in the context of the secular environment, culture, and times. Another document that describes the mission of the theologian in the contemporary Church is the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's Instruction *Donum veritatis* on the ecclesial vocation of the theologian (May 24, 1990),¹⁴ which also does not distinguish between the lay theologian and the cleric, but further develops the line of collaboration with the magisterium and the ecclesiality of theology: "Among the vocations awakened in this way by the Spirit in the Church is that of the theologian. His role is to pursue in a particular way an ever deeper understanding of the Word of God found in the inspired Scriptures and handed on by the living Tradition of the Church."¹⁵ The actual aim of theology is to understand the sense of revelation better and better, and the task of the theologian is to select from the culture of his environment elements that would allow him to better illuminate this or that aspect of the mystery of faith. The freedom of inquiry manifests itself in the context of the People of God, a gift that is exercised within the framework of rational knowledge, the object of which is given by revelation, transmitted and interpreted in the Church under the authority of

¹³ CIC 1983, can. 229 §§ 2 and 3.

¹⁴ CONGREGAZIONE PER LA DOTTRINA DELLA FEDE: *Istruzione »Donum veritatis« sulla vocazione ecclesiale del teologo*. Città del Vaticano 1993 (hereinafter: DoV).

¹⁵ DoV 6.

the teaching office and received by faith. For the teaching office is that which is endowed with the charism of infallibility in the power of the Holy Spirit.¹⁶ The International Theological Commission recalls that a significant number of lay theologians have specific experience in the areas of interaction between Church and world, Gospel and life which may not be experienced by clerical or religious theologians, and so it is often the case that in new situations theologians provide the initial setting out of a “faith seeking understanding.” Therefore, the prayer of the community is needed for theologians to work for the benefit of the Church. They should cling to the basic criteria of Catholic theology and realize that their work (questions, discussions, seeking expression) is by its intrinsic nature provisional, and therefore they should submit their work to the whole Church for examination and evaluation.¹⁷

The development of lay theologians in a secularized society

Already the early Church knew lay theologians (the apologists Justin, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria), they also appeared (though less so) in the Middle Ages or in the modern period (e.g. Marsilius of Padua, Thomas Morus). Many began as lay theologians, philosophers, historians (Jerome, Gregory of Nazianzus, Augustine). A kind of monopoly of the clergy in theology developed in connection with the development of universities and church schools, but after the secularization of society and schools, especially in the early 20th century, the situation began to open up again to lay theologians, who are now a normal part of the Church and society again.¹⁸ Lay students of theology begin to reappear in some universities (Leuven, Dublin, New York, Chicago, Montreal, Milan, Nijmegen) at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries; they usually study primarily in other faculties and study theology in addition, in order to be able to

¹⁶ Cf. DoV 10, 12, 15.

¹⁷ INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION: *Theology today: perspectives, principles and criteria*, n. 47, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_doc_20111129_teologia-oggi_en.html [accessed 4.07.2024].

¹⁸ For more details on the topic see: J. MIKOŁAJEC: *Posługa teologów świeckich w Kościele w Polsce*. Opole 2000, pp. 26–29.

teach religion as a school subject.¹⁹ The first female students of theology appear in the 1920s (taught by Professor M. Schmauss in Münster). The first doctorate in theology in Germany was awarded to a layperson in 1952. Around 1968, however, the number of academically theologically educated laypersons begins to grow. They were mostly former seminarians who decided to have left the preparation for the priesthood but still wanted to graduate from a theological school and work in the church. As the number of clergy declined, the demand for such lay personnel in Germany began to grow.²⁰ The study of theology, which was historically associated primarily with preparation for the priesthood, has gradually been opened to the laity since about the 1960s. Among them, lay theologians have gradually established themselves as teachers in theological faculties and scholars in sacred theology, in addition to professionals working for the Church.²¹

Pope John Paul II, in the context of the need for catechesis and professional education of the laity, also writes about the need for their theological education: “The theological education of the laity is becoming more and more urgent today, not only because of the natural dynamism of deepening their faith, but also so that they can give the world, with its difficult and complex problems, an answer to the question of the hope they have.”²² The fact that the theological sciences are attracting an increasing number of lay people in addition to seminarians was already acknowledged in John Paul II’s 1979 Apostolic Constitution on the Church’s Universities and Faculties *Sapientia christiana*: “Ecclesiastical Faculties are open to all, whether ecclesiastics or laity, who can legally give testimony to leading (*testimonium legitimum*) a moral life and to having completed the previous studies appropriate to enrolling in the Faculty.”²³

Pope Francis’ constitution *Veritatis gaudium* also envisages both clerics and laity as students and teachers: “[Ecclesiastical studies] in fact, are

¹⁹ Cf. *ibidem*, p. 31

²⁰ M. KAPLÁNEK: “Místo teologicky vzdělaných křesťanů-laiků v pastoraci.” *Studia theologica* 30/4 (2007), p. 48

²¹ For instance, pastoral assistants, catechists, employees of church courts, workers in missions and evangelization activities, lay workers in episcopal curia, workers in social services, non-profit organizations, etc. Their growth in the Czech Church occurred with the increase in the freedom of the Church after 1990. In the German-speaking area, this increase in pastoral vocations by lay people has been occurring since the 1950s.

²² Cf. ChL 60.

²³ IOANNES PAULUS II: *Constitutio apostolica “Sapientia christiana”* (15.04.1979). *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 71 (1979), p. 484, n. 31.

called to offer opportunities and processes for the suitable formation of priests, consecrated men and women, and committed lay people. At the same time, they are called to be a sort of providential cultural laboratory in which the Church carries out the performative interpretation of the reality brought about by the Christ event and nourished by the gifts of wisdom and knowledge by which the Holy Spirit enriches the People of God in manifold ways – from the *sensus fidei fidelium* to the magisterium of the bishops, and from the charism of the prophets to that of the doctors and theologians.”²⁴

Cardinal Ratzinger, then Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and future Pope Benedict XVI, states in the introduction to the instruction *Donum veritatis* that the importance of the theologian and theology for the whole community of believers became evident in a new way on the occasion of the Second Vatican Council. Until then, theology had been considered the work of a limited number of clerics, an elite and abstract work that could hardly attract the interest of the general Church. The new way of looking at the faith and its expression, which was confirmed at the Council, was perceiving it as the fruit of a drama, hardly contemplated before, of a new theological reflection which began after the First World War in conjunction with new spiritual and cultural movements.²⁵ The Directory for Bishops *Apostolorum successeurs* reminds bishops that although it is they who, by participating in the apostolic ministry, have a certain charism of truth under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, it is incumbent upon them to preserve and interpret the Word of God and to judge with authority what is consistent with it and what is not,²⁶ they need the help of theologians to do so. They are called to acquire, in union with the magisterium, an ever deeper knowledge of the Word of God contained in Sacred Scripture and handed down by the living tradition of the Church. Theological investigations, even if they do not constitute a norm of truth, enrich and clarify the depth of the magisterium.²⁷ The bishop is therefore to collaborate with them and to engage in a fruitful

²⁴ FRANCIS: *Apostolic Constitution “Veritatis gaudium” on Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties* (27.12.2017), https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_constitutions/documents/papa-francesco_costituzione-ap_20171208_veritatis-gaudium.html, n. 3 [accessed 4.07.2024]; http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/apost_constitutions/documenti/papa-francesco_costituzione-ap_20171208_veritatis-gaudium.html [accessed 4.07.2024].

²⁵ Cf. DoV 1.

²⁶ DoV 8, DoV 40.

²⁷ DoV 6, DoV 40.

dialogue, in mutual respect and love.²⁸ In his 2004 exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, Pope Francis does not speak of lay theologians, but of theologians in general. He turns the discourse around by saying not so much who is to evangelize but how, and in doing so he emphasizes charisms, among which we can count the charism of being a theologian. According to the Pope, theology takes on considerable importance in dialogue with other sciences, especially in the way it communicates the Gospel to diverse cultural contexts and addressees. The evangelizing Church appreciates and encourages the charism of theologians and their efforts in the field of theological research, which contribute to dialogue with the world of culture and science. The Pope invites theologians to fulfil this ministry as part of the Church's salvific mission. To this end, however, it is essential that they keep at heart the evangelizing focus of the Church and of theology itself, and not be content with a desk-bound theology.²⁹ In November 2023, Pope Francis decided to update the statutes of the Pontifical Academy of Theology, and in the *motu proprio* *Ad theologiam promovendam*, he calls for a "courageous cultural revolution" to make theology prophetic and to dialogue with different traditions and disciplines in the light of Revelation. It encourages a contextual epistemology by understanding human life as a theologically indispensable resource. According to the Pope, "Good theologians, like good shepherds, smell the fragrance of ordinary life, people and the street, and by their reflection they pour oil and wine on the wounds of the people."³⁰ Theology must show that it is a true critical knowledge as a knowledge of reason, not abstract and ideological, but spiritual, worked out on its knees, a knowledge that is full of adoration and prayer; a knowledge that is transcendent and at the same time attentive to the voice of the people, and therefore a theology "of the people," mercifully turned to the open wounds of humanity and creation and to the folds of human history, to which it prophesizes the hope of the final

²⁸ Cf. CONGREGAZIONE PER I VESCOVI: "Direttorio Successori degli apostoli (*Apostolorum successores*) per il ministero pastorale dei Vescovi" (22.02.2004). *Enchiridion Vaticanum* series, vol. 22. Bologna 2006, n. 126.

²⁹ Cf. FRANCIS: Apostolic exhortation "*Evangelii gaudium*" of the Holy Father Francis to the bishops, clergy, consecrated persons and the lay faithful on the proclamation of the Gospel in today's world (24.11.2013), https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html, n. 133 [accessed 4.07.2024]

³⁰ Cf. FRANCIS: *Motu proprio* "*Ad theologiam promovendum*" (1.11.2023), n. 3, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/motu_proprio/documents/20231101-motu-proprio-ad-theologiam-promovendam.html [accessed 4.07.2024].

consummation.³¹ The Pope therefore points out that it is necessary to combine the theoretical and experimental components of science, that the great theologians were also men of prayer or mysticism, and that this connection is missing today. The theologian of today, more than before, should therefore go out among the people and seek among them the motives for his work and also the answers to his questions. In this context, we can reflect on how the secularity and experience of the lay theologian can help here, and whether it does? So if the reflections of theologians were the ground on which the Council grew, we might ask, what about the Synod now?

The place of theologians and their participation in the prophetic ministry after the Synod on Synodality

Church synodality thus obliges theologians to practice theology in a synodal form, and to promote among themselves the ability to listen, to dialogue, to discern, and to integrate the multiplicity and diversity of judgments and contributions. It is therefore important that there are places, including institutional spaces, in which the experience of collegiality and theological fraternity is lived and realized.³² The summary report after the first part of the Synod on Synodality, entitled *The Synodal Church in Mission*, issued on October 28, 2023, recalls several aspects concerning theologians. Theological inquiry must be characterized by a logic of dialogue that manifests itself in mutual learning and common journeying.³³ The theological foundations of integral ecology are to be incorporated into the Church's doctrine, liturgy, and practice.³⁴ There is a need for theologians to reflect anew and deepen the reciprocity between the bishop and the local church on a theological level.³⁵ There is also a need for new

³¹ Cf. *ibidem*, n. 7

³² *Ibidem*, n. 6

³³ SYNOD23: *Relazione di Sintesi della prima Sessione della XVI Assemblea Generale Ordinaria del Sinodo dei Vescovi (4–29 ottobre 2023) e risultati delle Votazioni* (28.10.2023), n. 2, e, <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2023/10/28/0751/01653.html> [accessed 2.04.2025].

³⁴ *Ibidem*, n. 4, q.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, n. 12, f.

reflection on how theologians and canonists can contribute to the work of the synodal assembly and to the processes of the synodal church.³⁶ Finally, the specificity of women theologians (missionaries, saints, mystics) who can be a source of inspiration and strength and an incentive for women and men of our time is not neglected.³⁷ After the Synod on Synodality in the autumn of 2024, the Pope decided not to publish an apostolic exhortation directly as a final document,³⁸ which should have both practical and normative impact: its implementation is entrusted to the General Secretariat of the Synod, together with the various dicasteries of the Roman Curia.³⁹ The mission of theologians is summarized in the second part of this document, which describes the conversion of relationships and the various charisms as follows: “Among the many ministries of the Church, the Assembly has valued the contribution of the various theological disciplines to understanding faith and discernment. Theologians, men and women, help the People of God develop an understanding of the reality illuminated by Revelation and formulate appropriate responses and appropriate language for the mission of the Church. In the synodal and missionary Church, “the charism of theology [...] is called to a specific ministry [...]. Together with the experience of faith and the insight of truth on the part of the faithful people and the proclamation of the pastors, it contributes to penetrating ever more deeply into the depths of the Gospel.” Moreover, “like every other Christian vocation, the ministry of theologians, besides being personal, also has a communal and collegial character,” especially when it is exercised on the basis of the canonical mission entrusted to them in the form of teaching in the Church’s academic institutions. In the Church, therefore, “synodality obliges theologians to cultivate theology in a synodal way, whereby they should cultivate the capacity to listen, to dialogue, to discern and to process the many different pressing tasks and contributions. In this regard, it is urgent to promote dialogue between

³⁶ Ibidem, n. 20, g.

³⁷ Ibidem, n. 9, d.

³⁸ XVI ASSEMBLEA GENERALE ORDINARIA DEL SINODO DEI VESCOVI: *Seconda Sessione (2–27 ottobre 2024). Per una Chiesa sinodale: comunione, partecipazione, missione, Documento finale* (26.10.2024), https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20241026_doc-final-sinodo2024-chiesa-sinodale_it.html [accessed 2.11.2024] (hereinafter: *Documento finale* 2024).

³⁹ Cf. FRANCIS: *Apostolic Constitution “Episcopalis communio” of the Holy Father Francis on the Synod of bishops* (15.09.2018), https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost-constitutions/documents/papa-francesco_costituzione-ap_20180915_episcopalis-communio.html [accessed 2.11.2024].

pastors and those who develop theological research through appropriate institutional platforms. The Assembly encourages theological institutions to continue research aimed at clarifying and deepening the meaning of synodality and at accompanying the formation of the People of God in local churches.”⁴⁰ This dimension concerns clerical and lay theologians, and if they are able to communicate and look at specific topics together it can be an inspiration for other groups in the Church. If they will be able to “live synodality”? in already existing councils (pastoral councils, economic councils of parishes or dioceses, diocesan synods, parish councils, etc.) or in councils newly created, this will be a certain model of communication for other structures in dioceses and parish communities.

The laicization of theological faculties (illustrated by an example)

For some time now, therefore, there has been a certain laicization of theological faculties. The environment that used to serve exclusively for the formation of future priests and deacons has gradually opened up again to lay people who want to serve the Church practically or through theological reflection. We will illustrate this change by looking at the situation of the Faculty of Theology in Olomouc. The development of theological faculties in the Czech secularized environment was interrupted during the totalitarian era and resumed after 1990.⁴¹ I will try to summarize the aspects of the said process that are related to lay theologians. The Olomouc Faculty of Theology developed successfully after its restoration in the autumn of 1990 and theological disciplines prevailed at that time. They provided for the formation of candidates for priesthood from the Moravian ecclesiastical province and some religious institutions, as well as for the formation of lay students. In the Czech Republic, the Catholic Faculty of Theology of Charles University in Prague has also been restored (although the opportunities for lay studies here were very limited until 2003). In 1990–1991, another theological faculty was established in

⁴⁰ *Documento finale* 2024, n. 67

⁴¹ On this topic cf. M. MENKE: “Pozycja prawna katolickich wydziałów teologicznych na terytorium Republiki Czeskiej od 1950 roku.” *Kościół i Prawo* 21/1 (2019), pp. 29–50.

České Budějovice, focusing mainly on the study of the laity. As of 2024 the dean of this faculty is a lay pastoral theologian Michal Opatrný. Due to the higher religiosity in Moravia, the Olomouc faculty enjoys a somewhat higher number of theology students than the other two faculties, but there is also a visible crisis of spiritual values and vocations, and the number of theological students has declined rapidly over the last 20 years. Olomouc is also the seat of the Olomouc Seminary (where candidates from the dioceses of Brno, Ostrava-Opava and the Archdiocese of Olomouc are prepared for the priesthood) and the national Theological Convict.⁴² In 2024, there are 16 seminary students in the theological seminary and about ten students in the Convict. This is a drastic decrease not only compared to the post-revolutionary years, but also after the wave of enthusiasm subsided, and the initial wave of candidates who could not study theology during the totalitarian era. By comparison, in 1990, 130 diocesan seminarians and 52 religious entered the seminary in all five years, who had not yet reestablished their monasteries and therefore lived in the seminary with the diocesan seminarians.⁴³ Since about the turn of the millennium, there has been a decline in the spiritual vocations and in the desire of the laity to study theology, and the faculty has been forced to offer more and more study programs related in whole or in part to theology: in the field of charity, social and humanitarian work, and in the field of social pedagogy. However, the faculty has become prominent due to the fact that in 2006–2010 the first woman in Czech history, the Dominican biblical theologian Gabriela Vlková OP, held a post of dean there. In 2024 the dean of the faculty is a layman, a psychologist and patrologist Vít Hušek. For comparison: in 1999, the CMTF conducted scientific research and education in three accredited disciplines: theology, teaching for the second level of primary schools and Christian education. A total of 678 students studied at the faculty: 601 in master's and 77 in doctoral programmes. There were 28 academic staff, most of them around 40 years of age at the assistant professor level (there were only two full professors).⁴⁴ In 2010, the faculty had ten (or eleven, if the cooperation with the Higher Vocational School of Social

⁴² There are no minor seminaries (*seminaria minora*) in the Czech Republic, as referred to in can. 234 CIC. Instead, all dioceses in the Czech Republic have established a preparatory year prior to entry into the seminary and theological faculty, called Theological Convict.

⁴³ See: <https://www.knezskyseminar.cz/o-seminari/bohoslovci/> [accessed 2.04.2025].

⁴⁴ Cf. *Annual report on the activities of the CMTF in 1999, dated 20 March 2000*. Report provided to the author by the Dean's Office, as it is no longer available on the faculty website.

Sciences in Olomouc Caritas is taken into account in this regard) study fields and programmes with 1,373 students: 935 in bachelor's, 408 in master's, and 30 in doctoral programmes. In addition to theological studies and religious pedagogy, these were more disciplines and programmes, such as: charity and social work, social policy and social work, international humanitarian and social work. There were 60 academic staff, 24 research staff, most of them around 40 years of age at the assistant professor level (there were already five full professors). The faculty published two professional journals, *Studia Theologica* (in cooperation with the Faculty of Theology of the University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice, the Catholic Faculty of Theology of Charles University in Prague and the Faculty of Theology of Trnava University in Bratislava) and *Theologica Olomucensia* (*Acta Universitatis Palackianae Olomucensis, Facultas theologica Cyrillo-methodiana*). The faculty introduced lifelong learning programmes and participated in the lectures of the University of the Third Age. International cooperation (participation in international programmes and international mobility) has increased.⁴⁵ In 2022 (after the end of the Covid-19 epidemic), the Faculty had nine departments, two research centres (the Centre for Work with Patristic, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and the Institute of Social Health OUSHI), ten study fields (or eleven in cooperation with the Higher Vocational School of Social Sciences in Olomouc Caritas), with a total of 1,582 students: 1,108 in bachelor's, 415 in master's, and 61 in doctoral (already mostly non-theological) programmes. New disciplines and programmes were developed, such as Ethics and Culture in Media Communication, Online Theology, Applied Psychotherapy and Innovation in Social Work, and Social Work with Children and Youth. The faculty had 66 academic staff, 26 researchers, most of them around 40–60 years of age at the assistant professor level (there were five full professors). International mobility was high, with the International Teaching Week lecture series underway and an increasing number of grants and projects submitted.⁴⁶

Thus, we can summarize that despite the decline in theology students and seminarians, especially during the first 20 years after the Velvet Revolution, the faculty also generated a certain number of lay theologians.

⁴⁵ Cf. *Annual report on the activities of the CMTF in 2010*, 27 April 2011. Report provided to the author by the Dean's Office, as it is no longer available on the faculty website.

⁴⁶ Cf. *Annual report on the activities of the CMTF in 2022*, dated 22 March 2023. See: <https://files.upol.cz/sites%2Fpub%2FpubNormy%2F2023%20-%20VZ%20CMTF%20o%20%C4%8Dinnosti.pdf> [accessed 2.04.2025].

These were not only “former theologians,” but also more lay people who in the early days of Sts Cyril and Methodius Faculty of Theology studied theology as a primary discipline. Out of these, a number of pastoral workers emerged (e.g. in the areas of marriage formation, family and youth pastoral care, health and social services, etc.), catechists, workers in diocesan curia, ecclesiastical courts, workers in the social and non-profit spheres, in the media and political sphere, culture, but also some theologians who continue as teachers and researchers in many theological disciplines at theological faculties in the Czech Republic. From laypersons who formerly were passive consumers of the study and proclamation of the Church, they have become active personalities in the public sphere. The involvement of the laity in theology is part of the perspective of a missionary Church, a Church open to the world, as postulated by the late Pope Francis. The contribution of lay theologians can be decisive in this regard, as they are more involved in the world through their professional and family life. The participation of lay theologians may also help to counter the criticism of the clericalism of the Church (unless, of course, the opposite occurs and a kind of “clericalization” of the laity occurs, for example, in the desire for power). All Czech theological faculties operate in public universities, and as such they have to fulfil the same requirements as other university disciplines, for example, the requirement to publish their study/research results, where peer-reviewed articles in foreign journals are highly valued. The reason for the existence of theologically educated laity in the ecclesial environment is provided by the Czech pastoralist Michal Kaplánek: the Church today needs many men and women who are able to reflect theologically on the reality in which we live and thus, on the one hand, offer the richness of the Gospel to their surroundings and, on the other hand, bring into their lives and into the Church what we can discover as the work of the Holy Spirit outside the confines of the Church.⁴⁷ His view is also guided by the practical necessity of the laity in the pastorate, because of the ever-increasing shortage of clergy. The second dimension of his reflections goes towards the renewal of the Church from within, based on the reflections of the Austrian pastoralist Paul Zulehner. If we define the Church as the New People of God entrusted with many charisms, we can count among them also the gift of theology set in the context of everyday life. It is precisely in such a theology that there is a hidden

⁴⁷ M. KAPLÁNEK: “Místo teologicky vzdělaných křesťanů-laiků v pastoraci.” *Studia theologica* 30/4 (2007), p. 50.

reforming potential that contributes to the renewal of the Church. Theological education enables both priests and laity to discover the values of the Gospel where they are hidden, while at the same time courageously exposing what is not Gospel within the Church. It is in this way that theologians can participate in the prophetic mission of the Church.⁴⁸ Pope Francis is also about a paradigm change. This is a challenge for (not only lay) theologians to find ways to shape theology so that it is an essential part of contemporary culture, so that it is intelligible both for the Church and for society, so that it can respond with profound reflection also to current problems and life.

Conclusions

The evolution of recent years in the understanding of the position of the laity in the Church shows more and more deeply their dignity, their specificities, admits them to more and more activities and notes the specific gifts they may have. However, it tends to highlight the role of sacred service (as opposed to the pre-conciliar emphasis on sacred power): and this is the main task of lay theologians as well. They are to develop and proclaim the doctrine of the Church through their charisms, to serve the needs of the local churches and the universal Church. A positive aspect may be their greater connection with real contemporary life (life in relationships of marriage, family, at work as team members, but also the secular space of the media, new technologies etc.). The negatives are the forgetting of the connection with the clerics, the hierarchy, the clericalization of the laity. The hope for the future, however, may be the mutual collaboration of lay theologians and clerics, in subordination to the teaching office of the Church (magisterium), as a guarantee of the truth of the theological statement over the centuries, whereby they can enrich each other (not fight with each other) and thus arrive at a better form, content and clarity of the theological message conveyed. Greater involvement of lay theologians may not only be a way of modernizing the Church in the spirit of liberalism of secular society, but also a way of enriching and finding new tools for evangelization in understanding the contemporary mentality of those

⁴⁸ Ibidem, p. 50.

around us. The lay theologian should be there to help the theologians to the clerics, through a true theological reflection of reality from a different perspective, on a common path to proclaim more effectively the Good News of Christ in contemporary society.

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The Role of Laity in the Catholic Church in Poland from the Second Vatican Council to the Death of Primate Wyszyński

Abstract: The role of the laity in the Church has been changing over the previous century. An important impetus for change was the Second Vatican Council. Local churches in different countries implemented the Council's provisions to varying degrees. Poland had special systemic conditions because of the communist rule. The Primate of the Polish Church Stefan Wyszyński led a bold and consistent effort to renew the face of the Church and increase its moral and social role. He implemented the model of the folk Church, based on traditional forms of religiosity, respect for the hierarchy, and a clear division of roles between the clergy and the laity, where there was no room for dialogue. The Primate's programme of rebuilding the Church centred around the idea of the Great Novena preparing the entire nation for the festive celebration of the millennium of Poland's baptism. At the same time, it was a great national examination of conscience, aimed at individual and communal struggle against sin and the restoration of the moral authority of the Church as the spiritual guide of all Poles.

At the same time, however, a second trend appeared and developed in the Polish Church, consciously and directly referring to the conciliar teaching on the role of the laity in the Church. This current used new forms of pastoral work, different from the traditional forms of piety, activating the laity to a greater extent, preferring dialogue over leadership, and aimed at deepening religious awareness by spreading knowledge and encouraging the intellectual development of faith (*fides quaerens intellectum*). An important precursor and creator of this trend was Rev. Franciszek Blachnicki, founder of the Light-Life Movement, also known as the Oasis of the Living Church. A characteristic feature of Polish post-conciliar religiosity was the complementary coexistence of these two currents, which, thanks to their rather radical differences, were able to encompass with their influence the vast majority of the nation.

Keywords: laity, Church, Second Vatican Council, Stefan Wyszyński, Franciszek Blachnicki

Introduction

The model of pastoral work in the Catholic Church has changed many times throughout history. It has also taken various forms depending on the conditions prevailing in a given place and time. The subject of this article is the transformation of the role played by the Catholic laity in Poland under the influence of the new vision of the Church developed by the Second Vatican Council and as a result of the creative tension between the style of ministry of the Primate of Poland Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński and the growing subjectivity and deepening religious awareness of individual secular communities. The basic idea is to show that a unique social climate developed in post-war Poland, one that could not be found in any other European country, and that this specific situation had a significant impact on the model of relations between the clergy and the institutional Church on the one hand, and practicing believers on the other. This uniqueness stemmed from the fact that, on the one hand, the Polish state found itself on the eastern side of the Iron Curtain, within the immediate sphere of political and ideological influence of the Soviet empire, but on the other hand, the Catholic Church in Poland enjoyed much greater freedom and autonomy than it did in other countries of the communist bloc. Another significant factor was the outstanding personality and consistent manner in which Primate Wyszyński conducted the affairs of the Church in Poland, and an additional important variable – something that Wyszyński called “the soul of the nation,”¹ namely, a strong attachment to the traditions of independence and religion, which Poles had to defend for centuries. The interaction of these key elements paints a dynamic picture of the changes that shaped the face of the Catholic Church in Poland at the end of the 20th century.

The debate about the role of the laity in the Church began as early as the end of the 19th century, during the pontificate of Leo XIII, who addressed the subject, among others, in his 1901 encyclical *Graves de communi re*.² Subsequent popes added their bricks to the construction of a modern awareness of the ways in which the laity can participate in the life

¹ See: S. WYSZYŃSKI: *Kazanie*. Warka, May 7, 1961, <https://idziemy.pl/kosciol/prymas-wyszynski-o-kosciele-ktory-jest-sila-narodu> [accessed 18.12.2025].

² “*Graves de communi re*.” *Encyclical of Pope Leo XIII on Christian Democracy*, https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_18011901_graves-de-communi-re.html [accessed 6.03.2025].

of the Church,³ but the real progress in this matter was made through the work of the Second Vatican Council. As Paul Skibiński writes, “The Second Vatican Council was undoubtedly an important moment in the history of Catholic theology and spirituality, especially when it came to defining the place and function of the laity in the Church. One of the factors that distinguished the Second Vatican Council from previous Universal Councils was its attention precisely to the place and tasks of the laity in the Church.”⁴

The Council’s deliberations took place from October 11, 1962 to December 8, 1965. Delegations from almost all countries of the world took part in them: cardinals, archbishops, bishops, prelates, religious superiors, experts, laity auditors and observers. Sixty-seven people came from Poland: nineteen ordinaries (including Stefan Wyszyński, Primate of Poland since 1948, Karol Wojtyła, archbishop of Kraków, and Archbishop Antoni Baraniak of Poznań), forty-two auxiliary bishops, including Herbert Bednorz, two bishops residing in Rome – Józef Gawlina and Władysław Rubin, one Polish missionary bishop, an employee of the Press Office of the Council Secretariat Rev. Szczepan Wesoły; three higher religious superiors; Council experts from Poland: Fr. Feliks Bednarski OP, Rev. Andrzej Maria Deskur (later a cardinal) and Rev. Bolesław Filipiak; laity auditors: Stefan Swieżawski, Mieczysław Habicht (an emigrant living in Belgium). As Ewa Czackowska writes, “In addition to Wyszyński, eight more Polish hierarchs took part in all the sessions of the Council: Archbishop Antoni Baraniak, Archbishop Karol Wojtyła, Bishop Herbert Bednorz, Bishop Franciszek Jop, Bishop Piotr Kałwa, Bishop Michał Klepacz, Bishop Kazimierz Kowalski, Bishop Antoni Pawłowski. Only to them the PRL authorities issued passports for all sessions.”⁵ The others participated only in some of the Council events.

³ “The process of laicization of society, which has taken place over the past two centuries, has presented the Church with the task of fighting to preserve and reclaim social space for Catholicism and for Catholics, so as not to be ‘locked in a porch’, which was strenuously pursued by anti-clerical circles of liberal, Masonic or socialist and communist provenience. In this area, the Popes recognized the special role of the laity and sought their religious activation on the one hand, and on the other, for lay Catholics to occupy the most central place in social life.” – P. SKIBIŃSKI: “Soborowa teologia świeckich i jej paradoksalne skutki.” *Christianitas* 10 (2016), <https://christianitas.org/news/soborowa-teologia-swieckich-i-jej-paradoksalne-skutki/> [accessed 6.03.2025].

⁴ Ibidem.

⁵ E. CZACKOWSKA: “Ojciec Soboru Watykańskiego II,” <https://przystanekhistoria.pl/pa2/tematy/watykan/82946,Ojciec-Soboru-Watykańskiego-II.html> [accessed 6.03.2025]. The reason was that “the Communists used the obligation of their participation in

Some of them, however, took an active part in editing the Council documents, including those that included new thoughts on the place and role of the laity in the Church (these were the dogmatic constitutions *Lumen gentium* and *Gaudium et spes*, the decree on the apostolate of the laity *Apostolicam actuositatem* and the declaration on Christian education *Gravissimum educationis*. On occasion, they demanded that the documents take into account the special situation of Catholicism in communist countries: “Cardinal Wyszyński and the Polish bishops were among some 450 participants in the Council from 86 countries around the world who demanded that the chapter [of the Declaration on Religious Freedom *Dignitatis humanae*] on atheism include an amendment containing the Church’s position on communism. The Poles even addressed a petition to the Pope on this issue.”⁶

The Council’s ideas gradually spread throughout the world, generating curiosity, healthy intellectual ferment, but also resistance and opposition at times. The Vatican was like an epicentre from which seismic waves spread, causing upheavals in various countries and environments. Such a wave also reached Poland, despite communist censorship. The most active preachers of the new trend in the Church were Karol Wojtyła, the Metropolitan of Kraków, and Stefan Swieżawski, a professor at the Catholic University of Lublin (the only lay conciliar auditor from all of Eastern Europe), while the main centres of consideration and dissemination of the conciliar ideas were the curia of Kraków and its guests, the Clubs of Catholic Intelligentsia in Warsaw, Kraków, Wrocław, Poznań, and Toruń, and the progressive part of the academic community of the Catholic University of Lublin, from where – through Rev. Franciszek Blachnicki, then an assistant professor at the Faculty of Theology, the spirit of the Council penetrated the Oasis movement throughout Poland.

Primate Wyszyński was also aware of the importance and significance of the Council’s deliberations and their results. This is evidenced, among other things, by the fact that (taking up Maria Okońska’s initiative⁷) he

the Council for a kind of ‘passport game’.” When asked by the secretary of the Episcopate, Bishop Zygmunt Choromański, whether the bishops would receive passports to go to the Council, the then director of the Office of Religious Affairs, Tadeusz Żabiński, replied: “Not all of them deserve it.” A. WARSO: “The Sandomierz bishop and his auxiliary bishops in the era of Vatican II.” In: *Studia Soborowe. Historia i recepcja Vaticanum II*. Ed. M. BIAŁKOWSKI. Toruń 2014, p. 183.

⁶ Ibidem.

⁷ Krystyna Czuba writes: “The Bishops’ Conference took up Maria’s idea, and regulations were issued. Poland lived the Council. [...] The Vigils of the Council revived the Great

introduced a programme of Parish Council Vigils at Jasna Góra, inaugurated on December 8, 1962, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary and also the day of the Primate's arrival in Poland after the first Council session. The prayerful content of the vigils included two slogans: "pojednanie między ludźmi w intencji Soboru" (reconciliation among people for the sake of the Council) and "zwycięstwo nad sobą na rzecz Soboru" (victory over self for the sake of the Council). The fact that the thought of reconciliation between people was close to the Primate and his entourage is clearly evidenced by the unprecedented appearance at the end of the Council's deliberations of the Message of the Polish Bishops to the German Bishops, published on November 18, 1965, signed by 34 bishops present in Rome, edited in the spirit of the evangelical reconciliation of the Polish and German peoples. The slogan about victory over self can be understood in at least two ways: either in the spirit of the Great Novena of the Polish Nation, as a call for a national examination of conscience from common sins, or as a proclamation of intellectual-spiritual victory over the idea of the pre-conciliar Church.

Another initiative worth noting, undertaken by the Primate in cooperation with his closest circle, was the proclamation of 1965 as the Year of the Polish Woman, in reference to the millennium of the arrival at the court of Mieszko I of Princess Doubravka of Bohemia, called the "Godmother of Poles." It is significant, after all, that the leading theme and event in the Year of the Woman was to become the act of surrender into the Maternal Bond of Mary. This sheds some light on the perception of the role and position of women at the time.

The Polish reception of the Council's ideas took place in a rather peculiar set of political and ideological circumstances,⁸ the culmination of

Novena and gave a new current to the work of the Church in Poland." – K. CZUBA: *Maria Okońska. Święci są wśród nas*. Warszawa 2020, p. 120.

⁸ "The Second Vatican Council, which became a remarkable event in the history of the universal Church, began from the point of view of our history at an unfavourable moment. Unlike many of the world's Catholic nations, including those outside Europe, Polish Catholics and their bishops had to contend in the 1960s with a communist regime whose religious policy was fixated on trying to eliminate Catholicism from public space and constantly harassing the Church. The October days of 1962, therefore, were for the Polish episcopate a period of, on the one hand, final preparations for participation in the historic event of the universal Church, and on the other hand, persistence in a daily life marked by vigilance against the repression applied by the Communists." J. ŻARYN: "Otwarcie Soboru Watykańskiego II w perspektywie zniewolonej Polski." *Studia Prymasowskie*, t. VII–VIII (2022–2023), pp. 100–101.

which was to be the year 1966. According to the findings of historians, that very year was the thousandth anniversary of the baptism of the Polanian prince Mieszko I and his court, an event to which two radically different meanings were attributed: for the Church it was the date of the baptism of Poland and the beginning of the work of Christianization of the Polish lands, for the state authorities – the symbolic beginning of the Polish State, whose first historical ruler was Mieszko.

Both the Church and the state authorities prepared for the millennium celebrations with great vigour, but by no means in cooperation and harmony. On the contrary: the party-state apparatus tried to do everything to diminish the religious significance of the anniversary, while for the Church authorities it was an excellent opportunity to expose the strength of the Polish people's attachment to the Catholic faith, and at the same time to strengthen this faith and link its moral requirements to the everyday life of Poles. This was largely the purpose of the pastoral programme devised by the Primate while he was still interned, covering the period from September 25, 1953 to October 28, 1956.⁹ Even before his release, on the Feast of Our Lady of Częstochowa on August 26, 1956, the Jasna Góra Vows were made at Jasna Góra, which initiated the Great Novena preparing the Polish nation for the 1966 celebration of the Millennium of Polish Baptism.

During this – crucial for the post-war history of Poland – period of the ongoing conciliar deliberations at the Vatican and simultaneous preparations for the solemn Millennium celebrations, two tendencies collided sharply within the bosom of the Polish Church. One was an invigorating wave of conciliar inspiration, carrying with it a project for a new face of the Church: integrated horizontally rather than vertically, open to grass-roots initiatives of the faithful, developing activities in the lay apostolate, the universal priesthood, building a broad dialogue and community based on reciprocity rather than subordination.¹⁰ The other wing was the perfectly prepared programme of Primate Wyszyński – the programme of the Great

⁹ In the *Kalendarzyk łaski* (The Pocket Diary of Grace), written during his internment, dated August 26, 1956, Wyszyński noted: "I did what I could for your glory: on May 16, I prepared the text of the oath, I wrote state adorations: for priests, for young people, for husbands and mothers. These words will speak for me to the people." – S. WYSZYŃSKI: *Z głębi duszy. Kalendarzyk łaski*. Warszawa 2019, p. 151.

¹⁰ See D. LIPIEC: "Apostolskie zaangażowanie laikatu w Kościele w Polsce." In: *Duszpasterstwo w Polsce. 50 lat inspiracji Soboru Watykańskiego II*. Ed. M. FIAŁKOWSKI, Lublin 2015, <https://wydawnictwo.kul.pl/teologia/2816-duszpasterstwo-w-polsce-50-lat-inspiracji-soboru-watykanskiego-ii.html> [accessed 6.03.2025].

Novena of the Church in Poland,¹¹ which was written out with bookkeeping precision for the entire decade of 1956–1966, and implemented with great passion, commitment, a lot of daily sacrifices and enormous risks.

This programme was created and implemented with an in-depth knowledge of the realities of the People's Republic of Poland¹² – both geopolitical and moral and cultural. It was oriented toward two main goals, both extremely important: the first was the restoration of morality in a highly demoralized postwar society and the revival of religious life on a nationwide scale, using mass forms of piety and drawing on the traditions of popular religiosity. The second – to regain the “government of souls” in the broad strata of the nation, that is, the power over the consciences and beliefs of the Poles, badly strained and overblown for many decades, largely as a result of confrontation with various currents and variants of leftist sensibilities.

Wyszyński alone found himself in an extremely difficult position. On the one hand – he was at the head of a small, but very dedicated and faithful staff of people, thanks to whom the programme of the Great Novena gained tremendous momentum and impetus at the end.¹³ On the other hand, he witnessed and actively participated in an unprecedented process of change in the perception of the Church and its place in the modern world, in the definition of new pastoral tasks and the emergence of new tools for formation work. He must have known that these two currents could not be harmoniously reconciled, but he also realized – thanks to his system of communication with the “periphery” – that the breath of post-conciliar hopes could not be contained. He knew that he had to lead his Church to another Victory on the ramparts of Jasna Góra,¹⁴ but he also

¹¹ See B. CZYŻEWSKI: “Wielka Nowenna 1957–1965,” <https://nawiedzenie.archidiecezja.pl/wielka-nowenna/> [accessed 6.03.2025].

¹² Anna Rastawicka writes about how deep and grounded in both experience and intellectual reflection was Wyszyński's knowledge of the daily concerns of the people and the problems of the working world in People's Poland: “The Social Formation of Father Wyszyński.” In: A. RASTAWICKA: *Ten zwycięża, kto miłuje*. Warszawa 2020, pp. 253–272. Ewa Czaczkowska underscores: “The Primate towered over other members of the episcopate. He developed an offensive programme in the form of the Great Novena and had a holistic vision of the Church.” – E. CZACZKOWSKA: *Kardynał Wyszyński*. Warszawa 2009, p. 384.

¹³ The history of Primate Wyszyński's cooperation with his closest circle of devoted collaborators is described by Jadwiga JEŁOWICKA: *Wspomnienie po pół wieku. Na 60-lecie istnienia Instytutu Świeckiego Pomocnic Maryi Jasnogórskiej, Matki Kościoła*. Warszawa 2002.

¹⁴ This phrase alludes to the frequent references in pastoral language of the time to the reign of King John II Casimir Vasa from 1648 to 1668, when the Polish nation,

did not want to lose his influence on the native intelligentsia once again – for it was in this stratum that the greatest enthusiasm for post-conciliar renewal was born.¹⁵

Looking from a historical perspective, we can see this split and, to a certain extent, understand the motives guiding the Primate. He felt a great degree of personal responsibility for the work that he himself had begun, fighting despair and a sense of hopelessness in the dark hour of internment, and which, thanks to the mass involvement of a large number of Polish Catholics, grew and flourished. So, it was apparent that the strategy employed was working, and that the means and tactics used – mass, popular, traditional piety, centralization and hierarchization of authority in the Church – were yielding unexpectedly good results. But he must also have known that the world is evolving, times are changing, and the changes initiated by the Council, pointing in directions different from those contained in his vision of the Church, cannot be stopped in the long run. Perhaps his statesmanlike wisdom consisted in the fact that (in accordance with the principle of personalism) he “allowed to be” those movements and circles in the Church that enthusiastically joined the current of post-conciliar renewal, and this current – especially in the 1970s and later, already after the Primate’s death – flowed in an ever wider and faster current.¹⁶ The following will present the most important features characterizing the two visions of the place of the laity in the Church under Primate Wyszyński, which coexisted in the post-conciliar Polish reality.

First current – around the Great Novena

The programme developed by the Primate and carried out under his spiritual and institutional leadership was aimed primarily at the spiritual and moral renewal of the entire nation. It had a mass character, was not differentiated or nuanced so as to reach different environments through

plagued by numerous invasions by enemies, united and won under the slogans of defending the Catholic faith (*in hoc signo vinces*).

¹⁵ See M. LIBISZOWSKA-ŻÓŁTKOWSKA: *Postawy inteligencji wobec religii. Studium socjologiczne*. Warszawa 1991.

¹⁶ See M. BIAŁKOWSKI: “Recepcja Soboru Watykańskiego II w latach 1972–1978.” *Studia Pelplińskie* (2018), pp. 29–80.

different routes, but operated in a language that was simple and understandable to everyone and used forms of mass pastoral care. These included pilgrimages, peregrinations of images, large gatherings at national shrines, letters and messages addressed to all Poles. The impact of this programme was very wide indeed. Pastoral actions gathered millions of the faithful, participating in them with great commitment. The religious, moral and social content proclaimed in the Primate's programme directly addressed human sins, weaknesses and negligence – both individual and collective – and called for fighting them through conversion, persistent work on oneself and active participation in religious practices.¹⁷

At the same time, this trend had a second, hidden face. It was clear to most of its participants and recipients that the undercurrent, but equally important meaning of all the activities undertaken, was to constantly oppose the propaganda efforts of the communist government, aimed at remodeling the consciousness of society in the direction set by socialist ideals in their current version and conjunctural interpretation, imposed by the ideological line of the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR) – the party holding real power in the country. This was a very serious, powerful and strenuous struggle, in which both sides engaged all available forces and resources, because the stakes in this game were very high.¹⁸ It was about the “government of souls” of the entire nation – a motif that refers to the Romantic tradition, deeply rooted in the consciousness of Poles, associated with the struggle for spiritual and national independence, but also about the legitimacy of spiritual leadership in this struggle. In the 1960s, every high school student in Poland learned by heart excerpts from the monologue of Konrad, the hero of Adam Mickiewicz's drama *Dziady* (*Forefathers' Eve*): “Give me souls'-rule! / [...] 'Tis rule I want; such power is my lot – Give it to me, or but point out the road / [...] I want to rule as Thou dost, / from on high, and as Thou dost, / I want to rule the soul.”¹⁹

¹⁷ See content of the Jasna Góra Vows of the Nation, written personally by Stefan Wyszyński, solemnly made on August 26, 1956: <https://liturgia.wiara.pl/doc/419339.Jasnogorskie-Sluby-Narodu> [accessed 11.03.2025].

¹⁸ “Now face the reality of your homeland and ask yourselves: What kind of Poland do I want? [...] A son of the nation who loves his homeland is speaking to you. And to love it means to love everything that constitutes Poland. [...] Respect this heritage of the nation! Open your hearts to it, love it, and defend it” (author's own trans.). S. WYSZYŃSKI: *Kocham Ojczyznę więcej niż własne serce*. Częstochowa 2020, p. 71.

¹⁹ A. MICKIEWICZ: *Forefather's Eve: Dresden Text*. Trans. CH. S. KRASZEWSKI. London 2016, pp. 51–52.

The communist authorities were extremely anxious to control the consciences of citizens, but they lacked the courage to openly and frontally attack the Church. This is because the rulers knew that a full-scale war against Church structures would have to end in their defeat. This fact distinguished People's Poland from all other countries in the so-called camp of people's democracy, namely, those politically subordinate to the Soviet Union. Therefore, the Polish authorities used the most varied tactical maneuvers and resorted to limited but severe and precisely targeted violence on a case-by-case basis, hoping to gradually and slowly gain the upper hand.²⁰ This tactic was recognized fairly quickly by Church leaders, and the response to it included a nationwide pastoral programme, disseminated through Church channels and sent for implementation in local structures, primarily parishes. The programme was conceived and planned in such a way as to expose the faithful as little as possible to persecution by state authorities; explicit provocations and unambiguous political emphases were therefore avoided.

It was noticeable that the arrangement of organizational and communication structures within the Church was generally more efficient and effective than the nationwide network of party cells and executive branch institutions. This was partly due to the strongly instilled obedience among the clergy, and partly due to the strong and sincere commitment of the faithful, while only fear of persecution, or opportunism and careerism had an effect in party work, which did not provide such a strong motivation. Therefore, instructions and suggestions for pastoral work, coming from "headquarters," that is, from the Primate's Palace in Warsaw, were actually taken up and implemented in the "field," that is, in the local diocesan and parish structures. However, the situation of constant confrontation on the ideological front had a strong influence not only on

²⁰ "The Communists did not seize power in Poland, [...] but they got it from Stalin. [...] Poles understood that it was an imposed power, and they did not accept it. This real weakness of the communists, the fairly widespread public resentment they faced, meant that they initially played a game of pretenses. They hid their real goals and programme [...]. At the same time, however, the authorities tried to limit the influence of faith on people's lives. The new 'belief' was to become a communist ideology, the citizens of post-Yalta Poland – under the guise of 'liberation' – should reject faith in God, and accept 'faith' in the inevitability of historical necessity and communist slogans. [...] The communists began to intensify their terror against the Church in Poland from the autumn of 1947." – F. MUSIAŁ: "Proces kurii krakowskiej. Komuniści w walce z Kościołem." *Biuletyn IPN* 1–2 (2023), <https://ipn.gov.pl/pl/historia-z-ipn/archiwum/179745,Filip-Musial-Proces-kurii-krakowskiej-Komunisci-w-walce-z-Kosciolem.html> [accessed 6.03.2025].

the forms, but also on the content of pastoral activities – this is where their mass and popular character came from: it seemed natural that in People's Poland a popular Church should develop, which meant in particular that the pastoral programme was to be universal, not intelligentsia-elite. To sum up, this made profound sense and ensured that pastoral work was highly effective.²¹

What was the “folk character” of the Church in the People's Republic supposed to consist in? The answer to this question requires a brief reconstruction of the model of the Church, assumed in the pastoral programme of Primate Wyszyński.²² This programme, officially inaugurated with the solemn Jasna Góra Vows in front of the image of Our Lady of Częstochowa in the chapel of the Jasna Góra Sanctuary on August 26, 1956, despite the absence of the Primate (who at that time was still – until October 28, 1956 – in the internment centre in Komańcza), was aimed

²¹ Aniela Dylus writes: “I have long argued [...] about the condition and potential of the folk Church in Poland. I myself grew up in such a Church; in a family and social environment where religion was the air – one inhaled it, and the saying ‘without God nor to the threshold’ was fulfilled every bit as much. The religiosity formed in the folk Church was colourful, lively, laced with various customs, novena, processions, pilgrimages. Within its framework, God was present in everyday life: in the sign of the cross made by a mother on the foreheads of children leaving for school or on a loaf of bread before it was sliced, in prayer before and after meals, and in many other small and serious matters. It was something natural to invite God to accompany people ‘in the hours of respite, in the days of work’ – as sung in a popular religious song. Although I also knew the weaknesses of this religiosity, I did not understand a certain distance and skepticism towards it. Yes, the folk Church, abandoned by elites who had largely succumbed to the ‘Hegelian bite’ during the communist period, needed intellectual deepening, and mass, traditional, emotional religiosity needed to be balanced by individual, conscious faith decisions. Nevertheless, it seemed that the nation-bound folk Church in Poland, which had happily survived partition by non-Catholic powers and two anti-Christian totalitarianisms, was also capable of defending itself against secularizing pressures.” A. DYŁUS: “Z troską o Kościele (ludowym) i o Polsce z nim związanej.” *Chrześcijaństwo Świat Polityka. Zeszyty społecznej myśli Kościoła* 22 (2018), p. 132.

²² The Primate explained his understanding of the “folksiness” of the Church in, among other places, his Second St. John's Day Sermon on January 6, 1980, where he said: “Today, I would like to look at the most general principles of the existence and activity of the Holy Church in our baptized homeland, at our lives and the cooperation of God's people with reality. [...] The essential elements are: God – recognized and loved; man – respected; the homeland – served; authority on earth – exercised in love, justice, and truth. [...] Hence – the primacy of man in the universal and national system of life and work. We must concern ourselves most with man, his place in the national community” (author's own trans.) – S. WYSZYŃSKI: *Drugie Kazanie Świętojańskie Prymasa Polski*. Poznań–Warszawa 1980, pp. 3–5, 11.

at the Jubilee of the Millennium of the Baptism of Poland, scheduled for May 3, 1966. Behind the totality of this programme is a specific vision of the hierarchical Church. It was to be a Church that was both hieratic and majestic, in which priests, by the power of the sacrament of the priesthood elevated to a higher level than the lay faithful, because they had been called to higher purposes – one might even say, “a little lower than the heavenly beings” (Psalm 8) – play a primary role.

Indeed, at the time, the general perception of the Polish masses was that the priest was an extraordinary person, belonging to the sphere of the sacrum, excluded from the everyday order of the *profanum* and endowed *a priori* with considerable authority. In contrast to the position of the priest, the lay faithful, that is, the People of God, were almost completely deprived of causality and subjectivity within church structures; it is true that they kept hearing from the pulpits that they were called to salvation, but this was accompanied by a full awareness that the indispensable intermediary on the road to salvation was the institutional Church and its pastoral instruments – from the sacraments to the liturgy to various organized and communal forms of piety. This model generally met with approval, as “the religiosity formed in the popular Church was colourful, lively, laced with various customs, novena, processions, pilgrimages,”²³ and therefore – attractive.

A frequent motif in the sermons and public statements of Primate Wyszyński, compatible with the discussed model of the Church, are the figures of the shepherd and his sheep. This symbolism carries a twofold content. On the one hand – the priest is the evangelical Good Shepherd, who loves and knows his sheep, smells them, and is willing to die for them or take great risks to follow a strayed sheep and bring it back to the flock [John 10:11–16; Luke 15:4–6]. On the other hand – the shepherd is the one who knows the way and the intentions of the Host, knows everything better, leads his sheep to their appointed goals and demands obedience from them. Admittedly, not obedience to himself, but to the Supreme Authority, which, however, in practice comes out the same, since he – the shepherd – is the representative of the Divine will and Divine majesty on earth, so all causality is in his hands, and the sheep are to listen and obey.

Behind the relationship of the clergy and laity within the Church community, so framed, lies a centuries-old tradition of feudal system, preserved

²³ A. DYŁUS: “Z troską o Kościele (ludowym) i o Polsce z nim związanej.” *Chrześcijaństwo Świat Polityka. Zeszyty społecznej myśli Kościoła* 22 (2018), p. 132.

in the structures of *Sanctae Romanae Ecclesiae*, in which Poland has been stuck since the time of Mieszko I. This is evidenced, among other things, by the etymology of the basic terms of the Polish language that describe this reality. The word “priest” is a circumflex form of the term “prince” and originally meant “ruler.”²⁴ In turn, the word “church” is a Polonized form of the Czech “kostel,” derived from the Latin *castellum*, meaning ‘castle, castle, residence’²⁵. In harmony with this Roman tradition is the institutional model, in which the pastor, or – literally: the shepherd of souls, or in other words, the “master priest,” exercises authority (spiritual and formal) over the people, or sheep.

However, it is important to keep in mind the fundamental difference that separates the communist-era Church from the feudal Church of centuries past. It is about the relationship between the laity (state) authority and the Church hierarchy. In pre-communist times, not much has changed from the era of Mikołaj Rej (1505–1569) to the time of Stanisław Wyspiański (1869–1907), since a character in Rej’s *Krótką rozprawą między trzema osobami, Panem, Wójtem a Plebanem* complains with the words: “Ksiądz pana wini, pan księdza, a nam prostym zewsząd nędza” (The priest blames the lord, the lord blames the priest, and to us simple people there is misery everywhere).²⁶ And in Wyspiański’s *Wesele* (The Wedding), more than 350 years later, Czepiec complains: “Who’s stealing all my hard-earned pelf? The Jew or you, reverend shelf?”²⁷ These utterances prove that the people for centuries remained in double dependence, and their oppressors pursued common interests at the expense of the people. In the communist state, the situation was radically different: it was the Church and the people who formed a united front, largely united against – imposed by force and against the will of the majority of the people – a form of state system. Therefore, the “sheep” were relatively eager to follow their shepherds, knowing that the latter were leading

²⁴ “Ksiądz oznaczał jeszcze w XVI wieku nie tylko duchownego, lecz [i] świeckiego panującego” [‘Ksiądz’ denoted still in the 16th century not only a clerical, but [also] a secular ruling] – *Słownik etymologiczny*. Ed. A. BRÜCKNER. Warszawa 1957, p. 277.

²⁵ See ibidem, p. 260. For comparison, in the Cyrillomethodian tradition, the term “orthodox church” (*cirkev*) became widespread; it derived from Greek *kyriakon*, from: *kyriake oikia* = ‘house of the Lord’.

²⁶ M. REJ: *Krótką rozprawą między trzema osobami, Panem, Wójtem a Plebanem*, <https://wolnelektury.pl/katalog/lektura/krotka-rozprawa-miedzy-trzemi-osobami.html> [accessed 10.03.2025].

²⁷ S. WYSPIAŃSKI: *The Wedding: a drama in three acts: first presented in Cracow, 1901*. Trans. C. NOEL. London 1998, p. 54.

them in the right direction, and, moreover, clearly feeling that they were genuinely committed to pastoral work to the point of willingness to make the supreme sacrifice.

On this occasion, it is worth exposing one more feature conducive to the persistence of the clerical model of the Church during and after the Council. Both the Primate and most of the bishops regarded with great resistance and reluctance attempts to involve the laity more deeply in formation work. This was most often due not so much to distrust of the laity, but rather to fear of unnecessarily exposing those not belonging to the clerical state to repression by the authorities. Priests were sometimes entrusted with dangerous tasks, the performance of which could draw the ire of party and state functionaries, and consequently, persecution and harassment.

The reason for such risky decisions may have been the fact that not many years earlier, during the Nazi occupation of 1939–1945, priests had repeatedly given evidence of heroism and steadfast fidelity to the Gospel, exposing themselves to arrest, exile to a camp or martyrdom; so even in the new, post-war times, one could count on the steadfastness and loyalty of the clergy. It was something else, however, from a moral point of view, to expose the ordinary faithful to the risk of persecution, which could be even more severe than in the case of the clergy due to a kind of unwritten immunity, which from the post-conciliar years onward was violated rarely and rather only in exceptional cases.

This is the picture of the Church, guided by the strong will and firm hand of Stefan Wyszyński. The Primate of the Millennium was an exceptionally independent person, yielding neither to foreign influence nor to political pressure, threats and blackmail. He was guided by his own authorial vision of the theology of the nation, taking into account the political and historical conditions of a particular historical moment. However, gradually another new tendency began to overlap this picture, directly related to the wave of spiritual upheaval triggered by the Council's final resolutions and the post-conciliar documents promulgated at the Vatican, and their subsequent progressive reception in Polish Catholic circles.

The second current – around the ideas of the Second Vatican Council

Poland has become one of the countries where, slowly and not without resistance, but systematically, there has been a growing readiness on the part of the laity to make changes in living and practicing the faith, as well as introducing new forms of organizing religious life. This became apparent primarily in the growing circles of committed Catholic intelligentsia, both among adults and youth. The persistent reaching back to traditional forms of popular piety and the firm domination of a simple, catechismic, heavily dogmatized and increasingly archaic style and language for the transmission of religious and ethical content began to raise questions and objections.

Aniela Dylus writes: “The folk Church, abandoned by elites who had largely succumbed to the ‘Hegelian bite’ during the communist period, needed intellectual deepening, and mass, traditional, emotional religiosity – balanced by individual, conscious decisions of faith.”²⁸ So it turned out that “Christianity for all” was not necessarily “Christianity for everyone.” There was a growing need to develop special forms of pastoral work for communities that needed in-depth reflection and wanted to see in the institution of the Church a partner for open dialogue, not avoiding difficult questions and capable of providing thoughtful answers, and not just a top-down authority operating with ready-made, well-worn formulas.

This current of “contestation” dovetailed perfectly with the new spirit of faith flowing from the Second Vatican Council. Paweł Skibiński notes that the most important result of the Council was the real empowerment of the laity, which made it possible to formulate their expectations more easily and effectively, including in the spheres of formation and liturgy.²⁹ The bigger problem was on the side of the clergy, where the ideas of emancipating the laity encountered great resistance and numerous

²⁸ A. DYLUŚ: “Z troską o Kościele (ludowym) i o Polsce z nim związanej...,” p. 132.

²⁹ A new perspective on the role of lay people in the Church is presented by *Dogmatic Constitution “Lumen gentium.”* For example: “Fortified by so many and such powerful means of salvation, all the faithful, whatever their condition or state, are called by the Lord, each in his own way, to that perfect holiness whereby the Father Himself is perfect” (no. 11), https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html [accessed 10.03.2025]. See also P. SKIBIŃSKI: “Soborowa teologia świeckich i jej paradoksalne skutki...,” p. 247.

misunderstandings. The result of the grassroots activation of the laity – it should be added, however, that actively supported by priests, more sensitive than others to the “breeze of the conciliar spirit” – was, among other things, the emergence (from different motivations and inspirations) of a whole series of movements and communities, pursuing their own path to deepen their faith and practice Christian virtues in connection with the institutional Church.

This process can be shown using the example of the Upper Silesian Church. Stanisław Puchała, a long-time academic pastor of the Archdiocese of Katowice, in his article on Catholic associations and religious movements in the Diocese of Katowice, lists and describes some thirty forms of lay activity in the local Church: Academic Pastoral Care, the Caring for Life movement, the Society for Responsible Parenting, Marriage Encounter Retreats, Hospice, Catholic Academic Union “Gaudeamus,” Catholic Intelligentsia Club, Caritas Academica, the Light-Life Movement, Domestic Church, the Children of Mary Movement, the Movement for Renewal in the Holy Spirit, the Focolari, the Legion of Mary, the Pontifical Missionary Works, the Apostolate of the Sick, the Neocatechumenal Movement, the Schoenstatt Movement, the Movement of the Families of Nazareth, the “Toward a Civilization of Love” Movement, the “Faith and Light” Movement (so-called Moomins), the Family of Our Lady of Sorrows, the Franciscan Ecological Movement, the Confraternities of Sobriety, the Association of Catholic Families, the Catholic Association of Polish Physicians, state pastoral ministries, such as those for families, teachers, working people, health care, lawyers, business and creative circles.³⁰ The post-conciliar achievements of the Church in other dioceses are similar (or even richer).

As an example of a new model of thinking and acting on the question of the place of the laity in the Church, let us use the Light-Life Movement (ΦΩΣ-ΖΩΕ), initiated and moderated for many years by Father Franciszek Blachnicki (1921–1987), born in Rybnik in the Katowice diocese. From the first years of his priestly ministry, the young pastor put a lot of effort into searching for new methods of work, which he began with young people – first with altar boys, then also with girls, then gradually with more and more groups and communities. After several years of pastoral

³⁰ See S. PUCHAŁA: “Związki katolickie i ruchy religijne w Diecezji Katowickiej.” In: *Kościół Śląski wspólnotą misyjną*. Eds. W. ŚWIĄTKIEWICZ, J. WYCISŁO, Katowice 1995, pp. 221–261.

experience, he began efforts to create a diocesan centre that “[would] become a place of activity and intensive cooperation between clergy and laity. One of the goals of the centre was to educate lay leaders for parish life.”³¹ At the same time, he began developing a new form of youth retreats, which he called “experiential-educational” and was based on careful listening to the spiritual needs of children and young people.

These needs precluded “conducting retreats in the traditional form [...] of silence, inner recollection, reflection on the state of the soul, prayer and listening to retreat teachings.”³² The intense search for new forms that would enable active experience of religious practice and conscious growth in faith led in time – through a number of forms of pastoral activity and scientific reflection in the area of pastoral theology – to the creation of the Oasis movement, which spread to more and more dioceses until it became one of the most popular forms of active participation of children, youth and adults in the life of the Church. By the mid-1970s, the movement, by then known as the Light-Life Movement, covered all dioceses, and its forms of work included both summer Oasis retreats and year-long cycles of meetings in individual parishes involving different age groups. One of these forms was the “Domowy Kościół,” which consisted of circles of families – small communities of two to five families with their children, meeting regularly throughout the year under the pastoral care of one of the parish priests and following a specific formation programme.³³

At the core of the movement’s pastoral idea is Rev. Blachnicki’s original theological and philosophical anthropology, a systematic exposition of which is contained in his book *Kim jest człowiek* (Who the Human Being Is),³⁴ a succinct characterization of which is as follows: “He characterized the new Man as a person who possesses himself in the giving of himself. The addressee of this going outward can only be the other person, hence the conclusion that man can really be himself only in dialogue with his neighbour – this is how Rev. Blachnicki defined the relationship of love. This dialogue is most fully realized in relation to God [...]. Through faith in Him, man is born again to life. The principle of this [new life] is the Holy Spirit, who empowers one to make one’s own life a gift

³¹ A. ADASZYŃSKA-BLACHA, D. MAZUR: *Ks. Franciszek Blachnicki. Biografia i wspomnienia*. Kraków 2016, p. 51.

³² *Ibidem*, p. 52.

³³ See P. WOLSKI: “Domowy Kościół – gałąź rodzinna Ruchu Światło-Życie,” <https://www.dk.oaza.pl/> [accessed 10.03.2025].

³⁴ F. BLACHNICKI: *Kim jest człowiek*. Krościenko 1999.

to others and to God. [...] It is worth resounding here the key term for Oasis pedagogy: agape, or selfless love of neighbour.”³⁵ As the authors of the *Biography* add, “the thoughts quoted above were translated into specific attitudes that Oasis formation was to transmit, especially to the youngest retreatants, in order to protect them from the dangers of the world in which they live.”³⁶

The second foundation for the formation of the Light-Life Movement is the spirit of the Vatican Council. At the second meeting of the National Congregation of Responsible of the Living Church Movement, which he appointed, in Krościenko in 1977, Blachnicki “defined the Light-Life Movement as a movement of conciliar renewal in Poland. [...] He postulated that all [...] renewal movements present in the contemporary Church [...] gathered together serve the renewal of the parish, [and] to recognize the teaching of the Council as the great Word of God addressed to the Church.”³⁷

As an interesting fact, it is worth noting that Rev. Blachnicki – like Primate Wyszyński – in his pastoral work abundantly benefited from the help of a group of dedicated women who, over time, formed a community, first called the Team of the Immaculate and then the Institute of the Immaculate Mother of the Church.³⁸ Its co-founder and long-time leader Zuzanna Podlewska in her memoir about the priest emphasizes the innovative role played by the works he moderated in the Polish Church: “He was characterized by an extraordinary gift for convincing [the laity] to get involved [in various concrete works and tasks]. [...] The evangelical way of life releases

³⁵ A. ADASZYŃSKA-BŁACHA, D. MAZUR: *Ks. Franciszek Blachnicki...*, pp. 113–115.

³⁶ Ibidem, p. 115.

³⁷ Ibidem, p. 130. He was referring primarily to the summons: “The term *laity* is here understood to mean all the faithful except those in holy orders and those in the state of religious life specially approved by the Church. These faithful are by baptism made one body with Christ and are constituted among the People of God; they are in their own way made sharers in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly functions of Christ; and they carry out for their own part the mission of the whole Christian people in the Church and in the world. [...] Therefore, since they are tightly bound up in all types of temporal affairs it is their special task to order and to throw light upon these affairs in such a way that they may come into being and then continually increase according to Christ to the praise of the Creator and the Redeemer” (*Lumen gentium*, no. 31). Cf. F. BŁACHNICKI: *Aktualna świadomość zadań Ruchu Światło-Życie. Wskazania II Krajowej Kongregacji Odpowiedzialnych Ruchu Światło-Życie*, in: *Światło-Życie. Teczka Oazy Żywego Kościoła*. Krościenko 1977.

³⁸ One of the Institute’s co-founders Dorota Seweryn talks about the circumstances of its inception and constitution in her memoir “Dziewczęta z Tychów,” published in: A. ADASZYŃSKA-BŁACHA, D. MAZUR: *Ks. Franciszek Blachnicki...*, pp. 178–184.

joy, enthusiasm and is something contagious. This experience later proved to be very effective in [different] age groups. And so, slowly, youth oases, adult oases, family oases, that is, the Light-Life Movement, were formed. All this was of great importance for the Church in Poland, which was then restricted in its activities by the totalitarian system. The movement also played an important role in disseminating the thoughts of the Second Vatican Council. Father Francis [...] was, in a sense, a prophet who sees farther and wider; he sees the dangers that must be countered and the calls that must be taken up.”³⁹

I think that the words about living the Gospel, which releases joy, enthusiasm and is something contagious, could just as well come from the lips of one of the ladies who actively accompanied the initiatives and works of Rev. Stefan Wyszyński for many years. Just as the Institute of the Immaculate Mother of the Church gathered around Blachnicki, so in the life and pastoral work of the Primate a huge role was played by the ladies of the Primate’s Institute of the Vows of the Nation at Jasna Góra, established on May 3, 1957, and still operating today under the new name of the Primate’s Institute of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, and which is a continuation of the lifelong commitment of a group of women who, even before the end of World War II, associated their activity and ministry with the person of Rev. Wyszyński.

The work began with the programme of the “New Mobilization of Fighting Warsaw” during the Warsaw Uprising, then in 1945 a group of “eight girls who adopted the programme of the eight beatitudes”⁴⁰ was constituted at Jasna Góra and were called the “Eight”. From the very beginning, the group was associated with Stefan Wyszyński, whom Maria Okońska – the leader of the Ósemka – met on November 1, 1942, in Laski, where he was then chaplain of the Home Army and gave underground lectures on Catholic social teaching.⁴¹ After the war, “when Bishop Stefan Wyszyński became Primate of Poland, Maria and all of the Eight gave their all to God through the mediation of Mary for his mission in the Church and Poland. They understood that the rebirth of the Fatherland would come through Jasna Góra and the ministry of Primate Wyszyński.”⁴²

³⁹ Z. PODLEWSKA: “Miał w sobie coś tajemniczego.” In: A. ADASZYŃSKA-BŁACHA, D. MAZUR: *Ks. Franciszek Blachnicki...*, pp. 173–177.

⁴⁰ J. JEŁOWICKA: *Wspomnienie po pół wieku*. Warszawa 2002, p. 11.

⁴¹ See K. CZUBA, M. OKOŃSKA: *Święci są wśród nas*. Warszawa 2020, p. 47.

⁴² S. BUDZYŃSKI: “Posłowie.” In: M. OKOŃSKA: *Wszystko postawił na Maryję*. Warszawa 2021, pp. 76–77.

The above fragment begs for a comment: Stefan Wyszyński – in accordance with his own declaration, which he made on February 14, 1953 – put everything on Mary⁴³; but at the same time – exactly like Franciszek Blachnicki – he put a lot on Polish women, entrusting them with important, often crucial tasks, without the implementation of which it would be impossible to fulfill the pastoral programme of the spiritual rebirth of the Fatherland. This undoubtedly testifies to his courage and innovative thinking about the Church as a community of the faithful of all states.

So much for the similarities. Unfortunately, there were also differences, and they were so profound that they apparently prevented a deeper cooperation based on the merging of the two great visions of Church renewal. The impossibility of agreement is evidenced, among other things, by the following fact: in August 1960, there was a massive action by the Citizens' Militia (MO) against the Temperance Crusade, the latter led by Blachnicki. The Temperance Crusade headquarters was closed and sealed, its employees were thrown into the street, the work itself was declared illegal and anti-state, and Rev. Blachnicki was taken into custody.

Before his arrest, with the support of the Bishop of Katowice Herbert Bednorz, he decided to intervene in the situation with the highest church authorities: "he asked the chairman of the Pastoral Commission of the Polish Episcopate, Bishop Bolesław Kominek, to include the Crusade in the work of this Commission, and Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński to approve the activities of the Crusade as an auxiliary work of the Jasna Góra Vows. Both hierarchs did not agree [...]. Their reserve in approaching the matter was most likely due to fear of overly inflaming the dispute between the Church and the communist authorities."⁴⁴ It cannot be ruled out, however, that this was not the only reason for the Primate's distancing himself from the actions of the rebellious priest from Silesia and, consequently, his passive approval of his imprisonment, *nota bene* in the same prison in Katowice where he was incarcerated in 1942 for actively speaking out against the German Reich.⁴⁵ An additional reason may have been the divergence of assessments as to the preferred strategy for adapting the pastoral mission of the Church in Poland to current realities.

The question of who was right in this dispute is meaningless. From a historical perspective, it is clear that Poland and the Church needed both

⁴³ See S. WYSZYŃSKI: *Wszystko postawiłem na Maryję*. Warszawa 2007.

⁴⁴ A. ADASZYŃSKA-BLACHA, D. MAZUR: *Ks. Franciszek Blachnicki...*, pp. 70–71.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 11.

ways, so that every believer and seeker of mature faith could find the most appropriate path for himself. However, the emergence of many currents of renewal at the time testifies quite clearly that the model of a centralized Church, controlled from above and managed by directives and pastoral guidelines, proposed as the only solution to the coming changes, did not stand the test of time. The Church had to open up – and indeed did so – to new challenges and new forms of work in which the faithful themselves co-shape and animate the various tasks.

How could the difference between the two formations be most briefly conveyed? It can be stated that the Church, carrying out its mission as a “family of families,” has gradually transformed into a “community of communities.” Of course, this diagnosis is accurate, provided that we understand “family” in a way that is already archaic today, as a hierarchical institution in which supreme power is exercised by the father who has the prerogative to decide on all matters, and family members are obliged to obey in a dimension that depends on the position occupied, stronger or weaker, while by “community” we will understand a collectivity of people based on a conscious and voluntary bond, respecting without coercion a set of the most important values that make up the community ethos. It is worth considering on this occasion what is evidenced by the seemingly minor fact that Cardinal Wyszyński was called Father by all those closest to him,⁴⁶ and Cardinal Wojtyła was called Uncle.⁴⁷ Does this not prove that the relationship model was different?

In conclusion, I would like to recall an excerpt from Chapter 18 of John Paul II’s Encyclical *Redemptoris missio*: “People today put more trust in witnesses than in teachers, in experience than in teaching, and in life and action than in theories. The witness of a Christian life is the first and irreplaceable form of mission. [...] Christians and Christian communities are very much a part of the life of their respective nations and can be a sign of the Gospel in their fidelity to their native land, people and national culture, while always preserving the freedom brought by Christ. Christianity is open to universal brotherhood, for all men and women are

⁴⁶ “I never addressed him: ‘reverend professor’, but immediately said: ‘father’,” mentioned Maria Okońska – M. PIWOWAR: “Prymas był jak ojciec,” <https://www.rp.pl/kosciol/art7371921-prymas-był-jak-ojciec> [accessed 6.03.2025]. Similarly, Jadwiga Jełowicka, also a “dziewczyna z Ósemki”: “Nasz Ojciec, czyli ksiądz Stefan Wyszyński...” – cf. J. JEŁOWICKA: *Wspomnienie po pół wieku...*, p. 13.

⁴⁷ See P. ZUCHNIEWICZ: *Wujek Karol. Kapłańskie lata Papieża*. Warszawa 2007.

sons and daughters of the same Father and brothers and sisters in Christ. The Church is called to bear witness to Christ.”⁴⁸

Witnessing, freedom, fraternity, subjectivity and causation are words that aptly characterize today's way of active laity presence in the Church – and praise be to God that we have lived to a time when such a lifestyle is possible and acceptable.

Conclusions

The article examines how church authorities in Poland and certain secular circles, particularly among the Catholic intelligentsia, responded in the 1960s to news from the Vatican regarding the work of the Second Vatican Council and subsequently to the content of the post-conciliar documents. The key role of Stefan Wyszyński's pastoral initiatives is highlighted. Their format testifies to the Primate's profound understanding of the spiritual needs of the Polish nation, his diplomatic finesse in dealing with the communist authorities, and his great sensitivity in responding to the changing dynamics of the universal Church. An analysis of the course of historical events and their spiritual significance leads to the conclusion that the personal charisma and diplomatic genius of the Primate of the Millennium contributed significantly to strengthening the social position and moral and intellectual authority of the Church in Poland throughout the history of the Polish People's Republic. Thanks to this, the Church was also able to play a leading role in the next era, when, after the fall of communism, a process of political transformation began, accompanied by a spiritual crisis and doubt afflicting many citizens.

The author also draws attention to the tension that began to grow in the course of the Primate's pastoral plan between his vision of the folk Church and the specific forms of mass action adapted to this vision, and the growing aspirations of an increasing number of modern-minded Catholics who expected a significant expansion of the repertoire of pastoral measures and a change in the clerical model of relations within

⁴⁸ JOHN PAUL II: *Redemptoris missio*. On the Permanent Validity of the Church's Missionary Mandate, 42, 43, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_07121990_redemptoris-missio.html [accessed 11.03.2026].

the community. The conclusion from these considerations is that, thanks to this tension and, at the same time, thanks to Wyszyński's high personal authority, the Church in Poland managed to develop a successful model of *modus vivendi* between seemingly contradictory visions of the Church. There was room both for forms of mass piety, which attracted large numbers of the faithful focused on cultivating age-old traditions, and for a whole range of new forms of work carried out in small communities and adapted to the specific expectations of those communities. This made possible the harmonious coexistence of those who saw the Church as a "family of families" and those for whom it became a "community of communities."

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Part Two

Reviews



Pentekostalizm w Polsce. Historia i współczesność
[Pentecostalism in Poland: Past and Present].

Eds. W. GAJEWSKI, J. MIRONCZUK

Ostrołęka–Warszawa: Ostrołęckie Towarzystwo
Naukowe – Wyższa Szkoła Teologiczno-Społeczna,
2024, pp. 607

In 2024, the Polish market of theological and religious studies publications saw the publication of a long-awaited monograph entitled *Pentekostalizm w Polsce. Historia i współczesność*, edited by Wojciech Gajewski, Prof. UG, and Jan Mironczuk, Prof. WSTS, reviewed by prominent experts in Protestant theology and culture Zbigniew Pask (AGH University of Kraków) and Tadeusz Zieliński (Christian Theological Academy in Warsaw). Among the authors are theologians, religious scholars, cultural scholars, and clergy of some evangelical communities. The monograph presents various aspects of the problem of Pentecostal communities in Poland. The intended purpose is reflected in the structure of the book: a historical outline, a description of the present state, and the theological and pastoral dimension. The whole is complemented by annexes (pp. 515–603) containing: photographs of the statutes and confessions of faith of the Union of Congregations of Christians of the Evangelical Faith, photos of various events of evangelical communities. An important part of the appendices is the “Kalendarium Kościoła Pentekostalnego w Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej” [The timeline of the Pentecostal Church in the Republic of Poland], compiled by Marcin Dabek, notes about the authors, bibliography, list of abbreviations, brief summary, and personal index and geographical indices.

An important place in the monograph is taken by an introduction (pp. 5–10) by the Editors. They present the context of the book's creation: the centennial of the convention of Pentecostal activists in Krzemieniec, Volhynia, on May 1–3, 1924. The goal is to show the contemporary diversity of Pentecostal Christians, taking into account the broader charismatic movement (communities within the Roman Catholic Church, non-denominational communities). The authors also justify the proposed structure of the work: from history through the present to doctrine and pastoral care.

The first part, *Ruch pentekostalny na przestrzeni dziejów* [The Pentecostal movement throughout history] (pp. 10–212), shows the biblical and historical context of contemporary Pentecostalism in Poland. The foundation is laid by the text by Wojciech Gajewski entitled “Charyzmaty w historii chrześcijaństwa: przegląd świadectw” [Charisms in the history of Christianity: An overview of testimonies]. The value of the article lies in its presentation of biblical and historical messages regarding charisms and various supernatural abilities granted by God to different individuals. The synthetic presentation of biblical, pre-Nicene, post-Nicene, medieval and modern testimonies shows the importance of charismatic reality in the life of Christian communities. At the same time, it is a significant voice against the cessationist theories prevalent in some Christian currents.

In the text, “Ruch zielonoświątkowy w okresie II RP” [The Pentecostal movement during the Second Polish Republic], Jan Mironczuk analyzes archival materials presenting the development of Pentecostalism as a new movement in the interwar period in many areas: legal (the path of legal recognition of new challenges), theological, and structural (Catholic Apostolic Church – New Apostolic Church, Church of God; tensions between the Evangelical Church and Pentecostal communities; Christian Community, the Association of Steadfast Christians; Christians in the Spirit; Muraszkowcy; Evangelical Christians in the Apostolic Spirit; the Union of Churches of the Evangelical Faith); reluctance on the part of various Evangelical-Baptist denominations; difficulties on the part of the Orthodox Church; the formation of the Union of Churches of the Evangelical Faith; difficulties on the part of state administration entities. A valuable part of the article is the detailed list of the number of churches, believers and leaders, showing the development of Pentecostalism despite obstacles created by both state authorities and the leaders of other denominations.

The third article, “Związek Stanowczych Chrześcijan – wspólnota zielonoświątkowa na Śląsku Cieszyńskim” [The Association of Steadfast Christians – a Pentecostal community in Cieszyn Silesia], by Sławomir

Witkowski, shows the formation of the Pentecostal movement in the Lutheran environment, and its subsequent development outside these structures due to accusations by members of the said Union of practicing spiritually unhealthy practices. The author points out the importance of representative figures of the Union. The author then depicts the development of the Association of Steadfast Christians in the interwar period, the difficult time of the German occupation, and then in the period of communist Poland the co-founding with other evangelical denominations of the United Evangelical Church.

The historical theme is also taken up by the fourth article, “Wyznania ewangeliczne na Kresach Wschodnich w okresie drugiej wojny światowej” [Evangelical denominations in the Eastern Borderlands during the Second World War], by Jan Mironczuk. It shows the difficult, and sometimes dramatic, situations of the faithful (e.g., the Soviet occupiers accusing the faithful of having contacts with people from abroad, repression of Baptists in Białystok, repression of Pentecostals in Polesie), the improvement of the situation during the German occupation, as the evangelical movement was tolerated in Germany, but at the same time repression of those evangelicals who somehow acted earlier on behalf of the Soviet authorities or spoke out against the Nazis. The author also points out the different situations in different local contexts.

The article, “Kościół Chrześcijan Wiary Ewangelicznej w latach 1945–1953” [The Church of Evangelical Christians between 1945 and 1953], by Przemysław Gola, takes up the subject of the uneasy post-war years in the context of building a socialist Poland. Initially, the authorities did not make difficulties for the worship of evangelical religious communities, especially since they did not oppose the communist authorities. However, in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the authorities’ hostility toward evangelical communities was already noticeable, especially because of suspicions of contacts with foreign circles, which led to the incorporation of the Evangelical Faith Christians Church into the United Evangelical Church.

This theme is continued in the article that follows, “Ograniczanie działalności zielonoświątkowców w Zjednoczonym Kościele Ewangelicznym” [Restricting the activities of Pentecostals in the United Evangelical Church], by Leszek Jańczuk. The text shows tensions in this church congregation, especially in the context of the approach to charismaticism and the experience of baptism in the Holy Spirit, marginalizing radical Pentecostals. In some churches there were conflicts between representatives of free Christians and Pentecostals. There were also expectations that

Pentecostal Christians would become more like other groups. Also difficult were the contacts of some leaders of the United Evangelical Church with the communist authorities, including Pastor Stanisław Krakiewicz (he claimed to the authorities that Pentecostals were a violent movement). The author also presents complaints directed at Pentecostal pastors Edward Czajka and Kazimierz Sosulski as well as other local activists.

The same author, in the text “Kościół Zielonoświątkowy w RP wobec kwestii współpracy swoich duchownych ze służbą bezpieczeństwa” [The Pentecostal Church in Poland on the issue of cooperation between its clergy and the security services], confronts the uneasy history of the relations of church leaders with the authorities of communist Poland as well as different approaches to the issue of inspection. The position of the Supreme Council of the Pentecostal Church, calling for those caught up in collaboration with the security service to come forward, prevailed on this issue. At the same time, it was advocated not to rely solely on the fact of registration of secret collaborators (the registration did not necessarily indicate genuine cooperation). A valuable part of this study is a table listing the names of secret collaborators and the nature of their activities.

The second part of the monograph is entitled *Kościół i wspólnoty pentekostalne we współczesnej Polsce* [Pentecostal churches and communities in contemporary Poland]. The conceptual foundation is the article by Leszek Jańczuk entitled “Wspólnoty pentekostalne w Polsce i ich klasyfikacja” [Pentecostal communities in Poland and their classification] (pp. 215–231). From the text one can learn about the first wave of Pentecostalism (classical communities), the second wave (the so-called faith movement of 1950–1960), the third wave of the 1980s and 1990s (New Pentecostal Reformation, postdenominational churches; spiritually unusual manifestations, theology of success, minimal form of church structure). The text attempts to specifically classify the various communities of the first wave, the second wave, and the third wave. The author also points out communities that are difficult to classify, as well as non-trinitarian communities.

The second article is a text by Zbigniew L. Gadkowski and Henryk Wojciechowski titled “Od pięćdziesiątników przez nogoumywalców i prostaków do Chrześcijańskiej Wspólnoty Zielonoświątkowej” [From the Pentecostals, through foot-washers and simpletons, to the Christian Pentecostal Community]. The authors show the history and main principles of the nascent communities, especially particular ones, such as starting the service with the Lord’s Prayer recited on one’s knees, manifestations of a certain religious austerity. In turn, Andrzej Stachowiak in his text

“Protestancka wspólnota regionu bieszczadzkiego – Ewangeliczna Wspólnota Zielonoświątkowa” [The Protestant community of the Bieszczady region – Evangelical Pentecostal Community] shows the history of the community born during the time of religious awakening in the Evangelical Augsburg Church in Cieszyn Silesia – the Christian Community. As a result of a prophecy in 1962 that the community should leave the previous area (due to persecution in the area of Zaolzie in Czechoslovakia). One of the places was the Beskid Niski. The community took the name Evangelical Pentecostal Community.

The fourth article, by Andrzej Nędzusiak and Wojciech Gajewski, is titled “Kościół Boży w Chrystusie: historia i współczesność” [The Church of God in Christ: History and present day]. This church is associated with the Pentecostal awakening in the Second Polish Republic, and the community-building by Bolesław Dawidow in the 1980s. Initially, there was also cooperation within the Church of Christ. Through the experience of baptism in the Holy Spirit and contacts with American Pentecostals, the emerging community became part of the so-called second wave. In time, the church obtained the right to function and in 1990 was registered in the register of religious associations as the Church of God in Christ. Gradually, too, the number of churches increased and central organs and agencies were constituted. The text closes with a list of churches, with names, addresses, service times, and pastors.

The fifth article, “Kościół Zielonoświątkowy w RP” [Pentecostal Church in Poland], by Leszek Jańczuk, shows the circumstances of the establishment of this community, the history of its development, the difficulties of affiliation with the Polish Ecumenical Council, the formation of the Evangelical Alliance in Poland, and tensions with the Church of Christ. The text shows the Church’s involvement in the Bible Society in Poland, in Pentecostal European Fellowship and World Assemblies of God Fellowship. The author presents the Pentecostal Church’s legal issues, structure, and specific issues such as demonology, the problem of inspection, ordination of women, and involvement in refugee ministry. The text also presents the numerical growth of churches and members (in 1988, 88 churches and about 10,000 believers; in 2023, 288 churches, 27,309 believers), structure, agencies, missions, universities, and a list of churches grouped into 7 districts.

The sixth text, “Kościół Chrześcijan Wiary Ewangelicznej w Polsce po 1987 roku” [The Evangelical Christian Church in Poland after 1987], by Mariusz Orłowski, shows another Pentecostal denomination, its organizational and territorial structure, issues of legal empowerment. From

the text one can learn about the church's catalog of congregations, its former and current agencies, associations and foundations cooperating with the church, social and charitable activities and cooperation with other evangelical Christians. Also important is the ecumenical theme with non-evangelical churches.

The seventh text, by Marcin Rzepka, entitled "Kościół Boży w Polsce. Historia, misja, tożsamość" [The Church of God in Poland. History, mission, identity] shows the specifics of the next Church, which is part of the international Church of God. The author presents the historical background of the establishment of the Church of God in Poland, but also internationally (in the United States). An important aspect is the fact that part of the community in Poland originated from Catholic charismatic communities, as well as the influence of independent charismatic churches of the so-called third wave is noticeable. The article further includes a description of the structure, numerical development, social, cultural, educational, development, and missionary involvement. The church's participation in international projects is also highlighted.

The text, "Kościół 'Chrystus dla wszystkich' w Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej" [The Church of "Christ for All" in the Republic of Poland], by Marcin Głowacki, shows the challenges, difficulties, anxieties, and successes of the denomination. The organizational structure, cooperation of churches, splits, list of agendas, and forms of involvement of the Church are shown in historical and current dimensions.

The third part of the monograph is entitled *Doktryna i praktyka* [Doctrine and practice] (pp. 365–514), consisting of six articles. The first of these, "Chrzest w Duchu Świętym w polskiej tradycji pentekostalnej" [Baptism in the Holy Spirit in the Polish Pentecostal tradition], by Leszek Jańczuk, provides a theological foundation (the history of the Pentecostal awakening in Poland, discussions about baptism in the Holy Spirit within the United Evangelical Church, the opposition of some factions to the subject, including free Christians). Only after the breakup of the United Evangelical Church and the formation of the Pentecostal Church does the clarification of the issue of baptism in the Holy Spirit appear in official documents; the same is true of the principles of faith of other Pentecostal churches. At the same time, the first-wave communities do not resolve whether the manifestation of the experience of baptism in the Holy Spirit must be speaking in tongues. Only third-wave denominations, such as the Church of Praise, see glossolalia as a sign of the experience of baptism in the Holy Spirit.

The second text of the part in question is the one by Andrzej Migda entitled “Osobliwości pentekostalnego doświadczenia wiary” [The peculiarities of the Pentecostal experience of faith]. The author attempts to describe a multifaceted Pentecostal spirituality. He notes that the religious experience becomes crucial, and only later comes the theological elaboration. It is primarily about new birth, personal conversion. In Pentecostal thought, this gives a person the opportunity for direct contact with God. It is not just something spiritual. For it is about repairing one’s life with the help of the Holy Spirit. In building a relationship with God, revelation from Him is essential. Among the basic components of Polish Pentecostalism, the author enumerates: the recognition of the four Reformation principles (*sola Scriptura*, *sola fide*, *sola gratia*, *solus Christus*), biblicism, cross-centrism, conversionism, activism, *sola experientia*, charismatic spiritual phenomena, the necessity of external manifestations of the Holy Spirit in the personal and communal dimensions. The author also describes the evolving Pentecostal ritual, the importance of worship, the different understandings of the Lord’s Supper (there is essentially no single interpretation). He also highlights the influence on Polish Pentecostalism of converts from the Catholic Church.

The third text is an article by Wojciech Leszczyński entitled “Misja i ewangelizacja Chrześcijan Wiary Ewangelicznej – zielonoświątkowców na ziemiach polskich do roku 1939” [The mission and evangelisation of Evangelical Christians – Pentecostals in Poland until 1939]. It is an overview of the work of evangelists and preachers, living out the universal priesthood of believers, and the activities of missionaries from other countries.

The intellectual dimension of Polish Pentecostalism is taken up by Piotr Nowak’s article entitled “Uczelnie biblijno-teologiczne Kościoła Zielonoświątkowego w RP i instytucji go poprzedzających (1930–2024)” [Biblical and theological colleges of the Pentecostal Church in Poland and its predecessor institutions (1930–2024)]. In the historical aspect, the author presents the scholarly and evangelistic activities of the Bible Institute in Gdańsk, the Bible School of the United Evangelical Church, the Warsaw Theological Seminary. The text also brings an enumeration of the many people involved in this educational activity. Piotr Nowak then discusses the wide-ranging activities of the Warsaw School of Theology and Social Sciences (WSTS), the Capital Bible Institute, WSTS’s cooperation with the Christian Academy of Theology in Warsaw (graduate studies in evangelical theology, Pentecostalism Research Laboratory), the Theological Seminary in Ustroń and the Kraków Bible Seminary.

The fifth text, by Elżbieta Bednarz, is entitled “Katechizacja dzieci i młodzieży w Kościele Zielonoświątkowym w RP” [Catechism for children and young people in the Pentecostal Church in Poland]. The author draws attention to the primary role of the family in the process of passing on the faith, and then to the important function of the church, where not only the preaching of the truths of faith takes place, but brings the experience of living in community. Thus, the essence of Pentecostal catechization is not teaching alone, but the introduction to discipleship, so it also has a dimension of education. For this reason, it is important “for students to master knowledge, skills and attitudes, to improve their motivation and inner convictions, their view of their place, tasks and responsibility before God, and their value system according to biblical indications” (p. 445). This path is closely related to the Church’s profession of faith. The author also reports on the concepts of catechetical teaching in the Pentecostal Church: hermeneutical-existential and thematic-problem-based. The scheme is a didactic path: evoking experience, discovering light (the Word of God), shaping a person’s response.

Finally, the last article of the volume is “Zakładanie nowych wspólnot kościelnych w Polsce w świetle badań” [The establishment of new church communities in Poland in the light of research] by Agnieszka Prokopczuk. The starting point is to define the church. Basically, it is a local community, a place of growth and charismatic service. While structure is important, institutional minimalism is essential. In this context, the author indicates the theoretical basis for the establishment of communities and presents statistical data. At the same time, she lists the key factors for the formation of church communities: motivation, endowment for service and evangelism, guidance of the Holy Spirit, faithfulness to the calling, commitment of the founding team, pastoral competence, the need of the church in a particular place, competence of the leader, mobilization for action, relationships, unanimity, friendship, cooperation, clear vision, goals, values, structure, prayer, fasting, worship, mentors, support of the mother church. Among the factors for development, the author lists: the work of the Holy Spirit, awareness of the call to establish a church, a permanent meeting place, persistent evangelism, a team of co-workers, the skills of leaders, team-building events, evangelistic gifting of leaders, mentoring, financial support. Among the challenges in development, the author lists the following: lack of suitable premises, financial problems, inadequate teams, reluctance of other churches, immature leaders, inability to evangelize, lack of relationships, poor communication, pressure of professional

work, splits, insufficient leadership team, loneliness, lack of support, discouragement, toxic influence of scarred people. The sociological analysis of the reasons for the disappearance of existing communities is also interesting. Among them are leader incompetence, conflicts, broken relationships, excessive ambition, leader dishonesty, lack of grounding in the Word, lack of finances, lack of help from other communities, lack of guidance by the Holy Spirit, leader burnout, theological differences, lack of committed people, migration of people, secularism, unbiblical teaching, premises problems. Finally, the author reports on the reasons for not starting a new community (e.g., the pastor taking over an existing community, multiple responsibilities of the pastor, lack of people to work with, no need for a new church, etc.) and the motivating factors for starting churches (including a team of people, leaders, external support, substantive and financial support).

Analyzing the presented monograph, it is necessary to emphasize its substantive qualities. The goal set by the authors has been achieved, namely, the multifacetedness of Pentecostal communities, in the historical and contemporary, action and theological aspects, resounds. The multiplicity of authors, their scientific and pastoral specialization shows the multidimensionality of Polish Pentecostalism. The structure of the book is logical: from the historical part, through the description of the contemporary state to the presentation of doctrinal and pastoral issues. The individual parts, and within them the subsequent articles, are properly organized and coherent. Analysis of historical sources, sociological research and theological reflection played a major role in the creation of the monograph. The language of the monograph is correct, accessible to scholars and readers without special conceptual training. The brevity of the texts is also conducive to this. Of course, the enumeration of historical details in some texts can be tedious, but this factuality helps to understand the importance of the reality discussed.

The presented monograph is genuine and is an important component of the theological, cultural, and sociological analysis of Polish Pentecostalism. A thorough analysis of the texts provokes further research questions in the areas of doctrine, ritual, the influence of other churches and communities, the issue of conversion, ecumenism, spirituality (healthy and dysfunctional), confrontation with the problem of secularization of society. For this reason, the book *Pentekostalizm w Polsce. Historia i współczesność* should be considered essential reading for scholars of Polish spirituality and ecumenism, for students of theology, cultural studies and religious

studies, as well as for all others interested in the issues of Pentecostalism. It is all the more important because, globally, Pentecostalism is the most dynamically developing current of Christianity.

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Piotr NOWAK:
*Kształcenie teologiczne w Zjednoczonym
Kościele Ewangelicznym (1948–1988)*
[Theological Education in the United
Evangelical Church (1948–1988)]
Warszawa: Wyższa Szkoła Teologiczno-Społeczna
w Warszawie, 2024

In June 2024, the academic press of the College of Theology and Social Sciences in Warsaw published a monograph by Piotr Nowak entitled *Kształcenie teologiczne w Zjednoczonym Kościele Ewangelicznym (1948–1988)* [Theological Education in the United Evangelical Church (1948–1988)]. It is simultaneously the first volume in the “Studia Pentecostalia” series, which promotes dissertations produced within academic circles affiliated with the said college and with the Christian Academy of Theology in Warsaw.

The Pentecostal movement is currently the most dynamically developing branch of Protestantism worldwide; nevertheless, scholarly literature describing the cultural mosaic and spirituality exhibited across the many Polish communities and churches contained within the Pentecostal movement remains scarce. The 361-page volume in question is the first comprehensive study devoted to the educational institutions functioning within the United Evangelical Church (UEC) in the People’s Republic of Poland. The very choice of research subject attests to the author’s scholarly maturity and sensitivity to the issue: rather than limiting himself to a simple

reconstruction of denominational history, he analyzes it through the prism of the educational system – institutions forming clergy and lay leaders who played a fundamental role in maintaining religious identity under an authoritarian state.

For decades, the institutional dimension of education in evangelical circles remained at the margins of research. The existing literature contains only passing references in the works of Henryk Ryszard Tomaszewski, Jan Mironczuk or Wojciech Trybek, but no monograph had yet been published on the forms of clerical education, the organizational structure of Bible schools, or their role in shaping the community's theological background. Nowak fills this gap by combining the perspectives of a church historian, a researcher of religious education, and an analyst of state–church relations in the communist era. Theological education has always played a fundamental role in all Christian communities. Regardless of confession and of how the clerical office is understood, the preparation of competent leaders and pastors has been – and remains – a priority. Protestantism – and within it, evangelicalism – attaches particular importance to the systematic training of personnel. In this tradition, which emphasizes personal conversion and the authority of the Bible, biblical education is regarded as an indispensable element of healthy church life.

The author undertakes the ambitious task of reconstructing more than forty years of educational activity within a small yet significant evangelical community functioning under a communist regime. He precisely defines the subject and aim of his research, justifying them on solid historical and methodological grounds. Nowak's analysis of the UEC's educational institutions is not merely a description of structures; it is also an attempt to understand the community's adaptive strategies to the political conditions of the socialist state. In this context, despite its theological and denominational diversity, the United Evangelical Church served as a platform for cooperation in religious education. Bible courses, seminars, and other forms of instruction were organized to sustain faith and transmit Christian values in a society subjected to atheization. Although this activity often encountered state-imposed obstacles, it played a crucial role in preserving the religious and cultural identity of evangelical communities in Poland.

The United Evangelical Church, active from 1947 to 1988, functioned as a federation of diverse evangelical environments, including Pentecostals, Baptists, and Evangelical Christians, becoming in the communist era the principal representative of this branch of Protestantism in Poland. Its history largely overlapped with that of the People's Republic: it arose

shortly after the war and ceased operations just before the fall of communism. The communist authorities, suspicious of any independent social initiatives, closely monitored church education, perceiving it as a potential threat to state ideology. Despite the relatively small number of believers – no more than several tens of thousands – a network of educational institutions was established within the UEC, whose very existence faced numerous challenges.

The activity of the United Evangelical Church, including the launch of each course organized by the church, was subject to intense supervision and surveillance by the Office for Religious Affairs and the Security Service. Archival documents preserved in the Central Archives of Modern Records and the archives of the Institute of National Remembrance (IPN) reveal the meticulousness with which the authorities analyzed curricula, academic staff, and student life. Educational activity played a key role in the preservation and growth of the Polish evangelical movement. Under these demanding circumstances, a generation of church ministers was formed who, after 1989, took leadership in the re-emerging evangelical churches. Reconstructing this fragment of history is not only a contribution to church history but also a testimony to the determination of a religious community which, under a totalitarian regime and despite difficulties, effectively defended its right to educate future leaders and to pass the faith on to the next generation.

Piotr Nowak's book constitutes a significant contribution to documenting the history of religious thought in the People's Republic of Poland. The publication portrays resistance as manifested through persistent efforts in education and the formation of future evangelical leaders. Theological training, carried out under constant pressure from the authorities – who could at any moment revoke permission to operate schools – served to lay new foundations for ecclesial structures. Although the authorities were able to hinder graduates from obtaining clerical status or withdraw authorization for the schools themselves, the determination of those who conducted classes – often subjected to repression – ensured the continuity of educational processes, which church leaders regarded as essential for the survival of the Church.

The book's greatest strength is its extensive use of primary sources. The author employs a historical-theological method, combining analysis of archival materials (from the holdings of the Central Archives of Modern Records, through the collections of the Institute of National Remembrance, to church archives and others) with research in printed sources (church

press, internal denominational publications) and interviews with witnesses to the events. Interviews with participants – school directors, professors, and graduates such as Edward Czajko, Mieczysław Kwiecień, and Michał Weremiejewicz – contribute a valuable documentary dimension to the study, lending it an almost ethnographic and humanistic character. Through the voices of these witnesses, institutional history emerges as both vivid and authentic.

Particularly noteworthy is Nowak's examination of dispersed documents preserved, among other places, in the Pentecostal Church Archives (the UEC's successor), the Archives of the College of Theology and Social Sciences in Warsaw, the Theological Seminary in Ustroń, the Christian Bible Institute, and many private archives. Such a broad source base – encompassing official documents, formative texts, and oral testimonies – constitutes an undeniable asset of the work and enables a critical view both of the UEC's activity and of the state's policy toward religious minorities.

The primary objective of the monograph is to reconstruct and thoroughly describe the UEC's educational practices in the context of the state's repressive policy toward religious communities and their attempts at autonomous organization of ecclesial life and schooling. This fits perfectly within both the field of research on the history of Protestant churches in Poland and broader reflection on the role of education in sustaining the identity of ecclesial communities. Combining the methods of classical historiography with elements of theological and pedagogical analysis, the author draws – coherently and thoughtfully – on the interdisciplinary tools of the history of ideas, church history, and the history of education. The narrative is analytical and document-based, yet free of unnecessary hermetic jargon.

Another advantage of Nowak's presentation is his scholarly detachment, avoiding apologetics for any of the ecclesial environments discussed. His language is marked by stylistic culture and care for terminological precision. Although the book rests on abundant source material, it does not feel overloaded with facts. The narrative is clear and rhythmic, and the author successfully combines an academic tone with an accessible presentation of complex theological issues for readers outside the specialist circle. As a result, Nowak's book can be read both as a scholarly study and as a compelling story about the fate of a little-known religious community.

This study addresses a long-standing lacuna in the historiography of Polish Protestantism. Earlier works touched on the topic of education in the UEC only marginally, whereas Nowak presents it comprehensively and critically, showing the origins and development of Bible-school structures

from both intra-church and socio-political perspectives. In his work he not only reconstructs the past but also interprets events connected with the struggle to preserve evangelical identity during a period of ideological repression. Thus the study goes beyond a simple chronicle, becoming a reflection on the continuity and adaptation of religious experience in an unfavourable context.

The structure and composition of the dissertation are logical and transparent. The extensive introduction precisely defines the subject, aim, and methodology, as well as the state of research and the source base; it also aptly identifies the existing research gap and justifies the need to fill it. The author deliberately maintains the classical layout of a historical monograph, which supports clarity of exposition and makes it easier to follow the development of the main research thread. The main part of the work consists of five substantive chapters, supplemented by a conclusion, a list of sources and literature, and a name index.

The first chapter offers a concise account of the history and doctrine of the United Evangelical Church, which is essential for understanding the specificity of education in this community. Among the key aspects to which the author devotes attention is the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, which had a direct impact on the church's educational philosophy and hermeneutics. Within this theological framework, clerical training was regarded less as the acquisition of qualifications than as a process of spiritual formation. The chapter also includes an overview of the evangelical groups that constituted the UEC. Thus we find descriptions of circles associated with the Pentecostal movement, the Church of Christ, Evangelical Christians, and Free Christians. Also presented are the basic symbols of faith such as the Creed, the approach to the sacraments, and the understanding of the meaning of baptism and the Lord's Supper.

In the second chapter of his dissertation, Nowak describes the educational traditions of Bible schools in Radość, Gdańsk, and Warsaw, as well as seminaries in Malbork and Lidzbark Warmiński. Later UEC educational initiatives were directly rooted in the pre-war and post-war experiences of Polish evangelicalism, which provides an essential context for understanding the church's post-war activity.

The core of the book is found in the third and fourth chapters. Here the author examines the history of the UEC Bible School – the denomination's most important formative institution, founded in 1948. The school is presented not only as a didactic institution but also as a space for spiritual maturation and mutual inspiration. It operated both as a full-time

and a correspondence programme, which greatly facilitated the preparation of future church ministers; in this way the School exerted a significant influence on the theological consciousness of the entire evangelical church in Poland.

Nowak does not overlook the dramatic events associated with Stalinist repressions and the resumption of teaching after 1968. The story of the School is arranged in accordance with the chronology of successive heads of the institution (Józef Mrózek, Edward Czajko, Mieczysław Kwiecień, Włodzimierz Rudnicki), giving a functional and transparent view that allows the reader to grasp the changing didactic concepts and political conditions in which the institution operated.

The fifth chapter expands the reader's perspective by examining additional forms of training, including Bible-theological courses, programmes for Sunday School teachers, music instruction, and correspondence seminars. These initiatives constituted a response both to the restrictions imposed by the communist authorities and to the geographical dispersion of believers throughout the country.

As a result, theological education became significantly more accessible, enabling participants from various regions of Poland to pursue studies through correspondence. Among these, we should mention the Correspondence Bible Course in Ustroń and the Correspondence Bible Seminary of the Evangelical Christians. Alongside these were shorter courses, trainings, and conferences that helped deepen the competencies of clergy and lay leaders. This extensive educational system – aptly described by the author as a “forge of cadres” – was crucial to the strength and durability of the UEC under unfavourable political conditions. In 1954–1967, due to the absence of the Bible School, such short-term trainings were the only forms of ministerial education in the United Evangelical Church acceptable to the authorities of the People's Republic. It should also be noted that great importance was attached to the education of children in Sunday Schools; for this reason regular courses were organized for catechists, covering not only biblical topics but also pedagogy, methodology, and developmental psychology.

The work closes with a concise Conclusions in which the author formulates the most important findings and points to the continuity of educational traditions within Polish evangelicalism. We should not overlook the rich set of unique archival photographs from private collections that illustrate the activities described, beginning in the early 1970s. The meticulously compiled name index that concludes the publication also deserves recognition.

In summary, while the book provides a detailed analysis of the structures and curricula of the United Evangelical Church, it pays less attention to the dynamics of relations between this institution and other educational entities, both ecclesial and secular – an angle that could shed further light on the socio-political context of its functioning. In addition, the careful analysis of statistics on student and graduate numbers could be complemented by qualitative research into their career paths and social engagement after graduation, which would allow for a fuller assessment of the impact of UEC education on their lives and activities.

Kształcenie teologiczne w Zjednoczonym Kościele Ewangelicznym (1948–1988) represents a work of substantial scholarly and documentary significance. It successfully integrates the characteristics of a source-based monograph with those of a problem-oriented study, exemplifying research conducted with methodological rigour and conscious scholarly reflection. The author not only reconstructs the history of one of the most important institutions of Polish evangelicalism but also interprets it as a microcosm of church–state relations during the communist era. By doing so, Nowak opens new perspectives for the study of religious education and the life of Polish Protestant communities during the 20th century. This work merits the highest scholarly recognition and should, deservedly, secure a lasting place within the canon of studies on the history of evangelical Christianity in Poland.

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*Ekumenizm jako dialog
oraz spotkanie religii i kultur
Wokół teologii ekumenicznej
ks. prof. Józefa Budniaka*
[Ecumenism as dialogue
and the meeting of religions and cultures
Around the ecumenical theology of
Rev. Prof. Józef Budniak]
Eds. W. ŚWIĄTKIEWICZ, A. KASPEREK
Katowice: Studio NOA, 2022, pp. 126

The reviewed multi-author work, edited by W. Świątkiewicz and A. Kasperek, was initiated by significant academic circles in Poland: the Commission for Polish-Czech and Polish-Slovak Relations of the Polish Academy of Sciences, Katowice Branch; the Faculty of Arts and Educational Sciences of the University of Silesia in Katowice; and the Sociology of Religion Section of the Polish Sociological Association. The aim is to honour the distinguished Polish ecumenist Rev. Prof. Józef Budniak, PhD, on the occasion of his 70th birthday. “The leading idea of the Jubilarian’s scholarly activity is reflection on the meeting and dialogue of religions and cultures” (p. 7), where ecumenism in its broad sense, with its historical, cultural and social connotations, occupies a special place. The scientific editors of the work are Prof. Wojciech Świątkiewicz, PhD, and Prof. Andrzej Kasperek,

PhD. The general structure of the publication is as follows: editorial pages (pp. 1–4), table of contents (p. 5), introduction (pp. 7–11), congratulatory letters (pp. 13–27), biography of Rev. Prof. Józef Budniak (pp. 31–33), eight substantive studies (pp. 35–107), an interview with Rev. Prof. Józef Budniak (pp. 109–117), notes on contributors (p. 119), conference programme (pp. 121–122), photo gallery (pp. 123–126).

In the “Introduction,” its authors (W. Świątkiewicz, A. Kasperek) outlined the connections of Rev. Prof. Józef Budniak with the initiating bodies of this project. They emphasised that for many years Rev. Budniak served as chairman of the Commission for Polish-Czech and Polish-Slovak Relations of the Polish Academy of Sciences, Katowice Branch. He collaborated scientifically, didactically and organisationally with the units of the University of Silesia branch in Cieszyn (now the Faculty of Arts and Educational Sciences). He also actively participated many times as a speaker and expert in projects carried out by sociologists of religion (see p. 7). Thanking Rev. Prof. Budniak for his creative contribution to the development of Polish science and his multifaceted activity in promoting it, the editors invoked the Seneca’s maxim: *Memoria gratiam facit* – ‘Memory gives rise to gratitude’ (see p. 10).

The first part of the publication consists of “Congratulatory Letters” from eminent representatives of Polish science and church-ecumenical bodies: the President of the Polish Academy of Sciences, Katowice Branch, Prof. Andrzej Więcek, MD, PhD (p. 14); the Dean of the Faculty of Theology of the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, Rev. Prof. Przemysław Kantyka, PhD (p. 15); the Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Silesia in Katowice, Prof. Zenon Gajdzica, PhD (p. 16); the Dean of the Faculty of Theology of the University of Silesia in Katowice, Rev. Jacek Kempa, PhD, Associate Professor (p. 17); the Rector of the WSB Academy, Zdzisław Dacko-Pikiewicz, PhD, Professor of AWSB (p. 18); the Chairman of the Sociology of Religion Section of the Polish Sociological Association, Rev. Paweł Prüfer, PhD, Associate Professor (p. 19); Archbishop Prof. Alfons Nossol, PhD, a distinguished ecumenist and long-standing chairman of the Polish Episcopal Conference’s Council for Ecumenism (p. 20); the Metropolitan of Katowice, Archbishop Wiktor Skworc, PhD (p. 21); the Metropolitan of Wrocław, Archbishop Józef Kupny, PhD (pp. 22–23); the Coadjutor Archbishop of the Diocese of Katowice, Adrian Galbas, PhD (p. 24); the Chairman of the Council for Ecumenism of the Polish Episcopal Conference, Bishop Jacek Jezierski, PhD (p. 25); the Bishop of the Evangelical-Augsburg Church in Poland,

Jerzy Samiec (p. 26); and the Bishop of the Evangelical-Augsburg Diocese of Katowice, Marian Niemiec, PhD (p. 27).

A detailed "Biography of Rev. Professor Józef Budniak" (pp. 31–33) was prepared by Prof. Wojciech Świątkiewicz. It precedes the substantive part of the publication (pp. 36–107), which consists of scholarly studies in the fields of ecumenism, philosophy of religion, sociology of religion and interreligious dialogue. Rev. Prof. Zygfryd Glaeser presented "Ekumenizm w naukowej twórczości księdza profesora Józefa Budniaka" (Ecumenism in the Scholarly Work of Rev. Professor Józef Budniak) (pp. 35–44). He emphasised that "the matter should be treated as a broadly understood 'event' connected with the professor's person, his scholarly work, and his pastoral-social ministry" (p. 35). He justified his conviction by stating that Rev. Prof. Budniak "not only presents ecumenical views [...] of various Churches and social circles, but is an ecumenist as a person: open to the diversity of thought, experience of faith and social attitudes, attentively listening to others, presenting a partnership-based attitude in relations with people, always ready to help everyone without exception who needs spiritual, social, material, or scientific-organisational support. [...] He is therefore an ecumenist to the very core of his life" (p. 35). The author of the study considered the following to be essential components of Rev. Prof. Budniak's scholarly output: publications in the broadly understood field of ecumenism (see p. 39); historical-hagiographical works concerning St. John Sarkander, St. Melchior Grodziecki and St. Adalbert (see pp. 37–38); those related to European integration (see p. 38); the phenomenon of the borderland (see pp. 41–42); and processes of reconciliation (see p. 41). The author concluded his discussion of Rev. Prof. Budniak's scholarly work by stating that this is an outstanding scholar, whom he called "an ecumenist of heart and deed," who "thinks ecumenically, experiences his faith and shapes interpersonal relations" (p. 44).

In the next study, its author, Rev. Prof. Zdzisław Kijas, posed the research question: "Czego nauczył nas dialog ekumeniczny? W związku z sześćdziesiątą rocznicą rozpoczęcia Soboru Watykańskiego II" (What has ecumenical dialogue taught us? On the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary of the start of the Second Vatican Council) (pp. 45–50). He considered that the most adequate answer to his own question is encapsulated in the word "surprise" (p. 45). What we have experienced in the area of ecumenism over the past six decades has been surprisingly novel and enduring in many ways (see p. 45). He referred here to the monumental work *Encyclopedia of Ecumenism in Poland (1964–2014)*, which documents

many groundbreaking ecumenical events in Poland and the individuals with particular merits in this regard (see pp. 44–45).

Rev. Robert Samsel, PhD, is the author of a text entitled “Ku jedności w różnorodności. Zaangażowanie ekumeniczne księdza profesora Józefa Budniaka na terenie diecezji bielsko-żywieckiej w latach 1992–2022” (Towards Unity in Diversity. The Ecumenical Involvement of Rev. Professor Józef Budniak in the Diocese of Bielsko-Żywiec in the Years 1992–2022) (pp. 51–60). He emphasised Rev. Prof. Budniak’s significant contribution to research on the Cyril and Methodius tradition in the context of the Velehrad phenomenon (see pp. 51–52). His involvement in numerous ecumenical structures at the international and national levels has left a lasting mark on the building of good interdenominational and interreligious relations at the local level. He has been an initiator of significant undertakings of a scholarly, pastoral, and social nature.

The author of the next study, entitled “Człowiek drogą ekumenizmu – doświadczenia Kościoła na Śląsku na tle aktywności naukowej i duszpasterskiej księdza profesora Józefa Budniaka” (Man as the Path of Ecumenism – The Experience of the Church in Silesia against the Background of the Scholarly and Pastoral Activity of Fr. Professor Józef Budniak) (pp. 61–71), is Rev. Adam Palion, PhD, a student of Prof. Budniak. He lists many of Budniak’s valuable ecumenical initiatives, from his period of study at the Upper Silesian Theological Seminary, through his work within the Faculty of Theology of the University of Silesia in Katowice, to pastoral-social initiatives.

Rev. Marek Jerzy Uglorz, PhD, is the author of a text entitled “Znaczenie religijnych wspólnot dla światowego pokoju” (The Significance of Religious Communities for World Peace) (pp. 73–78). He draws attention to the great and causative power of religious communities in civilisational transformations, especially in building world peace.

The Chairperson of the Jewish Religious Community in Bielsko-Biała, Dorota Wiewióra, described the important achievements of Catholic-Jewish dialogue in the Diocese of Bielsko-Żywiec (pp. 79–82). She outlined the historical contexts of the Jewish community’s settlement in the Cieszyn Silesia region (see p. 79) and contemporary local initiatives for building good Christian-Jewish relations, especially those initiated by or with the participation of Rev. Prof. Józef Budniak (see pp. 80–82).

The author of the next text is Ondrej Štefaňák, PhD, from the Faculty of Philosophy of Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra. He describes “Kult męczenników koszyckich na Słowacji” (The Cult of

the Košice Martyrs in Slovakia) (pp. 83–90), in particular, Stefan Pongracz, Marek Križ, and Melchior Grodziecki. He presented their profiles and the special places and forms of their veneration. He noted that in Slovakia these martyrs are always venerated together (see pp. 83, 90), unlike in Croatia, where Marek Križ is venerated primarily. In Hungary, the cult of Stefan Pongracz is particularly alive, while in Poland it is Melchior Grodziecki (see p. 90).

The scholarly part of the work under discussion concludes with a chapter by Prof. Janusz Mariański from the Catholic University of Lublin on “Godność osób w starszym wieku i osób z niepełnosprawnościami w narracji społecznej...” (The Dignity of Elderly People and People with Disabilities in Social Narrative...) (pp. 91–107). This is a sociological-theological study, concluding with the following statement: “Respecting human dignity offers a chance to build a society guaranteeing a good and happy life, in which people make free and responsible choices in accordance with moral values of a universal nature. It is also important that the specific individual expression of one’s own dignity should not be freed from the normative dimensions of the dignity of the human person” (p. 107).

The final part of the work is an interview entitled “Wokół ekumenizmu” (Around Ecumenism), conducted by Prof. Wojciech Świątkiewicz with Rev. Prof. Józef Budniak. He posed several important questions about the essence of understanding ecumenism, its theological assumptions and socio-ecclesial implications. Rev. Prof. Budniak also answers questions related to difficulties in ecumenical relations. He also presents the ecumenical situation in Cieszyn Silesia.

The presented publication is a collective work. It is an expression of recognition for the achievements of Rev. Prof. Józef Budniak, an outstanding Polish theologian and activist, multi-dimensionally engaged in processes integrating Christians and aiming to actually actualise the full visible unity of Christ’s Church. It was prepared and published on the occasion of Rev. Prof. Budniak’s seventieth birthday. The studies included in it are substantively focused on ecumenism as a space for dialogue between different denominations, religions, and cultures, particularly in the context of Cieszyn Silesia. The authors of individual chapters analyse the theological, sociological and historical aspects of interdenominational, interreligious, and social cooperation, citing numerous initiatives of the Jubilarian that promote peace and mutual understanding among people and communities. The publication includes both scholarly studies and personal congratulatory letters in which various circles expressed their appreciation and respect

for the Jubilarian as well as an extremely interesting interview with Professor Budniak on his vision of ecumenism. The publication in its entirety presents a portrait of a scholar and pastor who devoted his life to building bridges and fostering unity in diversity. Through this multifaceted narrative, the reader has the opportunity to learn not only about the biography of an outstanding ecumenist, but also about the contemporary challenges facing both Churches and communities: globally, internationally, and locally.

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