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SYNOD ON SYNODALITY (2021–2024) AND THE EXPERIENCE OF UNITY AND DIVERSITY OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC¹

SYNOD O SYNODALNOŚCI (2021–2024) ORAZ DOŚWIADCZENIE
JEDNOŚCI I RÓŻNORODNOŚCI KOŚCIOŁA KATOLICKIEGO
W CZECHACH

ABSTRACT

With the conclusion of the 2nd Session of the Synod on Synodality, the Catholic Church worldwide enters the implementation phase of synodal conversion, as presented in the *Final Document* of the 2nd Session of the Synod (October 2024). The consultation of the People of God and the *Final Document* emphasise the concept of the Church as a communion of local Churches and, thus, the essentially synodal nature of the Church. This article analyses the progress and results of the initial diocesan and national stage of the synodal process in the Catholic Church in the Czech Republic, understood as the contribution of the communion of local Churches to the two sessions of the Synod on Synodality (2023 and 2024). After an initial description of the socio-cultural context of the Catholic Church in the Czech Republic, I evaluate the course of the consultation of the People of God in the local Churches and then analyse several impulses of the National Synthesis for the synodal conversion of the Catholic Church.

Wraz z zakończeniem II sesji Synodu poświęconego synodalności Kościoła katolicki na całym świecie wkracza w fazę wdrażania przemian synodalnych, przedstawionych w *Dokumencie końcowym* II sesji Synodu (październik 2024 r.). Konsultacje z ludem Bożym oraz *Dokument końcowy* podkreślają koncepcję Kościoła jako wspólnoty Kościołów lokalnych, a tym samym zasadniczo synodalny charakter Kościoła. W niniejszym artykule przeanalizowano postępy i wyniki początkowego etapu diecezjalnego i krajowego procesu synodalnego w Kościele katolickim w Czechach, rozumianego jako wkład wspólnoty Kościołów lokalnych w dwie sesje Synodu o synodalności (2023 i 2024). Po wstępnym opisie kontekstu społeczno-kulturowego Kościoła katolickiego w Czechach oceniam przebieg konsultacji ludu Bożego w Kościołach lokalnych, a następnie analizuję kilka impulsów zawartych w Syntezie Krajowej dla synodalnej przemiany Kościoła katolickiego.

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In recent years, the words of Pope Francis on October 17, 2015, have been quoted frequently, emphasising synodality as the “path (...) which God expects of the Church of the third millennium” (Francis 2015). In his speech, the pope extends the impact of synodality beyond the Christian communities, highlighting the fruits of the synodal conversion over the whole human race: “A synodal Church is like a standard lifted up among the nations” (Francis 2015). The image of the Church as a sign to the nations is a transformation of a biblical quotation (Is 11:12), which has an interesting history in the Magisterium of the Catholic Church. We find it, for example, in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith *Dei Filius* of the First Vatican Council (1869–1870). Here, in the context of the exclusivity of the Catholic Church, to which belong “all the things so numerous and so divinely wondrous which give clear credibility to the Christian faith,” the quotation gave rise to the so-called *via empirica* apologetics of the Catholic Church as the true Church of Christ.²

It is, therefore, interesting to follow the relevance of this quotation in Pope Francis’ 2015 address, as it underscores the authority and civilising impact of “the synodal Church as a banner raised over the peoples of the world, which – though it invokes participation, solidarity and transparency in the governance of public affairs – places the fate of entire nations in the hands of small groups” (Francis 2015).

The Catholic Church has been called to the synodal conversion by Pope Francis by convening the Synodal Process, a consultation of all the faithful, as the first stage of the Synod on Synodality (2021–2024). As we already know, the institution of the Synod thus becomes a *process* more than an isolated *event* (Francis 2018, art. 4). With the Final Document of the 2nd Session of this Synod of October 2024, the Catholic Church has entered the stage of implementation of the insights and decisions emerging from the listening, discernment, and deliberation of the whole People of God. The issue of conversion emerged in the various stages of the listening of the Synod on Synodality and is – as *the* topic for the following years – imprinted in the title of the three parts of the Final Document of the 2nd Session of the Synod on Synodality,³ which Pope Francis has declared “part of the ordinary Magisterium of the Successor of Peter”. As such, added the pope, “I ask that it be welcomed and received,” for “local Churches and groupings of Churches are now called upon to implement, in their different contexts, the authoritative proposals contained in the *Document* through the processes of discernment and decision-making” (Francis 2024, 3).

The Synod on Synodality has become an opportunity to embark on a journey of *ecclesiogenesis* of local Churches through listening and consulting all the faithful

² The Latin version is as follows: „Quo fit, ut ipsa veluti signum levatum in nationes (Is 11:12) et ad se invitet, qui nondum crediderunt, et filios suos certiores faciat, firmissimo niti fundamento fidei, quam profitentur“. In: DH 3013. For a pre-conciliar way of apologetics of the Catholic Church, see Fenton 1943.

³ The three parts (II-IV) are titled as follows: II. *On the Boat, Together. The Conversion of Relationships*; III. “*Cast the Net*”. *The Conversion of Processes*; IV. *An Abundant Catch. The Conversion of Bonds*. In: Synod of Bishops 2024.

in their socio-cultural contexts and, consequently, creatively receiving the suggestions of the Final Document in the situation of the local Churches of the Catholic Church. Therefore, as it was stated at the beginning of the synodal process (October 2021), “the Church of God is convoked in Synod” (Synod of Bishops 2021a, p. 1), in which the Catholicity of the Church is mirrored as an “exchange of gifts” of the various local and regional Churches, as diversity in unity, led by the Bishop of Rome, guaranteeing “the harmony that the Spirit brings about in the Church, the One who is harmony in person” (Final Document 2024, No. 42).

While the Catholic Church entered the implementation stage, the interim results of the synodal process expressed in the diocesan, national or continental syntheses in 2022–2023 are still important to discuss. They are still valuable for at least two reasons. Firstly, they witness the first steps of the *consensus Ecclesiae* in the Final Document describing the reality of the Catholic Church worldwide. Secondly, they focus on pressing topics of the single Church regions.

For this reason, in the following text, I will discuss the experience of synodal consultation within the Catholic Church in the Czech Republic. The conciseness of the text does not permit a broader quantitative or qualitative analysis of the individual diocesan syntheses. I will limit myself to describing 1) a brief cultural and historical context of the Catholic Church in the Czech Republic, then 2) the working method and the process of the diocesan and national phase of the synodal process in the Czech Republic, and 3) I will briefly review several impulses for *ecclesiogenesis* within the Catholic Church based on the consultation of the People of God in the Czech Republic.

1. Brief cultural and historical context

The Czech Republic is one of the smaller countries in Central Europe, with a population of ten and a half million. The Catholic Church is the biggest of the religious confessions in the country. There are eight Latin Catholic dioceses in two ecclesiastical provinces, while the Eastern rite Catholics form the Apostolic Exarchate (created by John Paul II in 1996).⁴

The beginning of the synodal process in October 2021 coincided with the state census in the country (March 27–May 11, 2021). These events brought about an occasion for a deeper comparison of qualitative and quantitative elements of the life of the Catholic Church in the country. The Czech Republic is usually listed among the countries with the smallest population belonging to a state-recognised religion. However, sociologists point out that this fact is based on the inaccurate methodology used in the census, where it is facultative to indicate one’s religious affiliation since 2001 (cf. Hamplová – Nešpor 2009). It is, therefore, possible to observe a shift of declarations from religious to spiritual people, which resulted in the

⁴ See the official website of the Catholic Church in the Czech Republic: <https://www.cirkev.cz> (access: 24.01.2025).

fact that 30.5% of respondents in the 2021 census did not answer the question about their religion, while 9.2% of the population declared themselves religious without indicating their affiliation to a specific Church or religious society.⁵ The latest census also confirms a decreasing tendency in the number of Catholic Church members, namely less than ten per cent of the population (7.1%). Despite the declining number of practising (Catholic) Christians, it is necessary to highlight the very positive reputation of Church-run institutions such as schools, charitable institutions, hospitals and hospices.

What could be said about the history of synodality in the Catholic Church in the Czech Republic? Although there was a relatively rich experience with synodal events in the previous centuries (cf. Petráček 2022; Němec 2021), decades of the communist regime and oppression of the Christian religion before 1989 made it impossible to celebrate synodal events. This fact also caused the absence of a deeper awareness of the ecclesiology of Vatican II, of which the synodality is an important element when it emphasises the role of the *sensus fidei* in the life of the Church as an expression of the “whole peoples’ supernatural discernment in matters of faith” when “from the Bishops down to the last of the lay faithful they show universal agreement in matters of faith and morals” (LG 12).

This deficiency was to be supplemented – as the response of the Catholic Church in the Czech Republic “to the desires and searches of our contemporaries” (Česká biskupská konference 1997) – by holding the Plenary Council of the Catholic Church in the Czech Republic. The Czech Bishops’ Conference declared the Plenary Assembly the culmination of the “Decade of Spiritual Renewal of the Nation” in the 1990s. The Plenary Council was held from 1997 to 2005, and now, twenty years after its conclusion, we can assess its results. How? Mainly negatively. There was no real reception of the Plenary Council in the life of local Churches in the country because the assembly did not set clear and bold priorities for the Catholic Church in a society changing its form under the influence of secularisation processes and the decline of interest in institutionalised forms of religion.⁶ The Plenary Council was retrospectively judged mainly as a missed opportunity for the Catholic Church in the Czech Republic.⁷ This was due to the inner rules of the assembly (each Council commission was chaired exclusively by a bishop, and only bishops had *votum deliberativum* while all other delegates had only *votum consultivum*), the choice of topics (the pressing issues of co-responsibility of the laity in the Church or the relationship between Church and civil society were marginalised) or because the Council had no aspiration to create a systematic particular law as an expression of the legitimate autonomy of the Czech Bishops’ Conference. (cf. Menke 2020 and Němec 2021).

⁵ For detailed information see: Český statistický úřad 2024.

⁶ On the importance of the stage of the reception of doctrine in the life of the Church, see Rush 1997.

⁷ A more positive picture of the Plenary Council is presented in the recent text Šustr – Czudek 2025).

2. The local and national stage of the Synod on Synodality (2021–2024) in the Czech Republic

Critical voices and negative memories of the Plenary Council began to resurface when the consultation of the People of God, as the first stage of the celebration of the Synod on Synodality (2021–2024), was launched globally by Pope Francis at the Vatican (October 9, 2021) and a week later in the dioceses (October 16, 2021). In addition to this, it was also possible to notice a certain confusion among people due to the short period for consultation⁸ or the helplessness of some in the face of the ten topics for consultation, formulated too theologically, without an intuitive ability of some to understand the topics of ecclesial discernment and to start the consultation spontaneously.

Despite the initial difficulties, the consultation of the People of God started in all local Churches of the Latin Rite and the Apostolic Exarchate. Due to Russia's violent attack on Ukraine, many Eastern Catholic communities were involved in refugee assistance, and the synodal consultation was not completed in the Exarchate. Within many diocesan syntheses, people expressed joy as they appreciated being invited into the synodal process.

Some diocesan reports have expressed gratitude for the “conversation in the Holy Spirit” (Synod of Bishops 2021b, Appendix B) as an effective “spiritual management” during synodal meetings. This method allowed equal status and time for all members of the Synod groups. It would be possible, however, to critically assess whether the chronology of the synodal process, especially the very brief period of the diocesan phase, actually allowed for the maturation of the *sensus fidei fidelis* of the individual and, therefore, the *sensus fidei fidelium* of the whole Church.

Approximately 40% of the Catholic parishes participated in the consultation of the People of God, as well as groups of students and teachers in Church schools, groups within the Caritas, groups within the Ecumenical Council of Churches and the LOGOS Community (LGBTQ+ Christians).

The diocesan stage revealed several weaknesses in the synodal nature of the Catholic Church in the country. I list the following three that have significantly influenced the process of consultation:

1) Weak involvement of priests accompanied by their reticence or outright aversion to consultation of the faithful is a serious indicator of the ignorance of the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council, especially about chap. 2 of *Lumen Gentium*.

2) Only 10% of the Synod groups involved Christians of other Christian denominations or members of other religions in the Czech Republic. This indicates a low ability to dialogue with both Christians of other denominations and other religions.

3) The General Secretariat of the Synod instructed that people on the margins of society and the Church be involved. This has not been fulfilled. It could point to

⁸ The first, diocesan, stage of the synodal process was originally set for October 2021–March 2022, later extended to May 2022.

a deeper disconnection between the Church's life and civil society, which certainly cannot be generalised but rather stated as a certain mental pattern of action of many Catholic Christians.

Despite these procedural shortcomings, a 12-page National Synthesis was sent to the General Secretariat of Synod in August 2022 (cf. National Synthesis 2022), concluding the first (diocesan and national) stage of the Synod on Synodality. The text of the Synthesis was the work of a seven-member National Synodal Team (composed of clergy, laity and religious) who, in its preparation, sought to faithfully transmit topics from the diocesan Syntheses in a way that expressed both majority and minority views on the key topics of communion, participation and the mission of the Church.⁹ The brevity of the document, requested by the General Secretariat, thus did not allow for a deeper theological or sociological argumentation of each topic.¹⁰ On the other hand, the text shows an effort to describe a “polyhedron” of the life of the Catholic Church in the Czech Republic. While the initial stimulus for the consultation of the faithful in the first stage was the ten topics presented by the General Secretariat,¹¹ the Czech National Synthesis is structured through the three dimensions of the life of the Church in the subtitle of the Synod on Synodality, namely, communion, participation and mission. The document concludes by presenting the key spiritual-structural impulses for the synodal renewal of the Catholic Church.

3. Unity and diversity in the Czech National Synthesis

In this section, I will briefly present – based on an intratextual reading of the three parts of the Czech National Synthesis – several themes that have emerged in the context of the Czech Republic as sensitive topics and places of tension.

3.1. The Church (un)able to communicate

The Final Document of the 2nd Session of the Synod on Synodality is carefully woven along several Gospel narratives describing the encounters of the Risen

⁹ “In this sense, the synthesis does not only report common trends and points of convergence, but also highlights those points that strike a chord, inspire an original point of view, or open a new horizon. The synthesis should pay special attention to the voices of those who are not often heard and integrate what we could call the «minority report.» The feedback should not only underline positive experiences but also bring to light challenging and negative experiences in order to reflect the reality of what has been listened to.” In: Synod of Bishops 2021b, 29.

¹⁰ “The goal of these syntheses, at any level, is not to produce a generic summary of everything that was said or to carry out an academic exercise. Rather, the synthesis is an act of discernment in choosing and writing what will contribute to the next stage of the Synodal Process.” In: Ibidem.

¹¹ Let us add that at the same time it was said: “The fundamental question that guides this consultation of the People of God, as mentioned at the beginning, is the following: *A synodal Church, in announcing the Gospel, journeys together: «How is the ‘journeying together» happening today in your particular Church? What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our «journeying together?»*” In: Synod of Bishops 2021a, 16, No. 26.

Lord with his disciples.¹² These divine-human encounters with their transformative power are the principle of the Church's mission.

As the National Synthesis shows, an interpretative key of the synodal consultation was the topic of communication covering both vertical (divine-human) and horizontal (intra-ecclesial and extra-ecclesial communication) axes of the Christian life. Specifically, horizontal communication (its promotion or its limitation) was seen by many groups as the key element for developing a synodal Church. The relevance of the topic is much deeper than a pastoral-theological topic.¹³ Communication in the Church is rooted in our understanding of the communication between God and the Church. Therefore, vertical and horizontal communication are intertwined, conditioning and illuminating each other.¹⁴ Many National Syntheses highlight the desire for another form of intra-ecclesial communication, rather than relying solely on a *top-down* model. Here, the specific meaning of *conversion* appears in the titles of three of the five chapters of the Final Document. The conversion of Church communication has clear structural elements (cf. National Synthesis 2022, 1.5).

The stages of consultation during the synodal process between local Churches and Church regions, on the one hand, and the General Secretary of the Synod, on the other hand, helped to illuminate and understand the dynamics of *conversion* and *conversation*, words of the same etymological basis (Lat. *cum-versare*: “to turn to the other”). Conversion is a stepping out of the individual self into the “we” of the Church. It manifests itself in conversation as turning to the other to listen and understand, not just the words of men but what the Holy Spirit says through the people. Thus, the synodal groups themselves experienced what Christians understand to be the ultimate meaning of the word *dialogue*, as Pope Benedict XVI. wrote: “*Truth (...) is logos which creates diá-logos, and hence communication and communion*” (CV 2009, No. 4). The words later emphasised in the *Instrumentum laboris* for the 1st Session of the Synod on Synodality – “love and truth shall meet” (Synod of Bishops 2023, B 1.2) – were for many the starting

¹² At the very beginning of the Final Document, we read: “Every new step in the life of the Church is a return to the source. It is a renewed experience of the disciples’ encounter with the Risen One in the Upper Room on Easter evening”. In: Synod of Bishops 2024, No. 1.

¹³ A decade after the Second Vatican Council highlighted the importance of the communication topic the German theologian Karl Rahner in the following words: “If the Church today is to conduct a dialogue with the world, then it must not be overlooked that this «world» is not simply «outside,» but is rather present in the Church itself. *This means that the first, and perhaps the decisive dialogue with the world is that which takes place precisely within the Church*” (emphasis mine). In: Rahner 1977, 106.

¹⁴ See how the divine-human communication is described in the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei verbum*: “In His goodness and wisdom God chose to reveal Himself and to make known to us the hidden purpose of His will by which through Christ, the Word made flesh, man might in the Holy Spirit have access to the Father and come to share in the divine nature. Through this revelation, therefore, the invisible God out of the abundance of His love speaks to men as friends and lives among them, so that He may invite and take them into fellowship (Lat. *societatem*) with Himself”. In: DV 2.

point for communication that can only be fruitful if it is true and stemming from real experience and real conditions in which the Catholic Church finds herself.

The incomprehensibility of a “Church language” as well as of some elements of Catholic liturgy and symbolic non-verbal communication is described as a potential barrier to the effectiveness of the Christian mission and the relationship between the Church and civil society. These suggestions were heard not only as a critical voice towards those who, by their ministry, have a mandate for the preaching mission in the Church but as awareness by all the faithful of the need for a christologically and biblically grounded content of the faith based on what the Second Vatican Council’s Decree on ecumenism *Unitatis redintegratio* describes as the “hierarchy of truths in Catholic doctrine” (UR 11).¹⁵ Hand in hand with this, participants reflected on the need to transform communication in the space of the *lex orandi*, specifically in the common liturgy, which is the first place of realisation of the synodal Church. This topic is globally present and, due to its importance in the life of the Church, will require further reflection, as the Final Document states (Synod of Bishops 2024, No. 27).

3.2. Authority in the Catholic Church

The desire for communication encountered various obstacles during the first stage of the synodal process. There were both external obstacles (such as the partial impossibility of meetings due to the persistent fear of the COVID-19 pandemic) and communication, or rather non-communication, within the Church itself. The experience of some lay men and women who entered into the synodal consultation was painfully shared as an experience of reticence or resistance by some ordained ministers to the invitation of Pope Francis to the synodal process. One of the “issues under issues” of the Synod on Synodality is the topic of human authority in the Church.

The resistance of some ordained ministers to the consultation of the *sensus fidei* has revealed a serious deficit in the *lex vivendi* of the Catholic Church in the Czech Republic. The absence of the ecclesiological framework of *Lumen Gentium* in the minds of many members of the hierarchy showed that this particular aspect of the reception of the Second Vatican Council – and specifically its ecclesiological doctrine – has not yet occurred. For some priests and bishops in the Czech Republic, embracing the ecclesiological teaching and drawing pastoral implications from *Lumen Gentium*, chap. 2, framing the whole people of God and each Christian as a “spiritual house” and “holy priesthood,” is still a distant reality (cf. LG 10). What may seem hard to believe has its roots in recent practice. For example, classes of dogmatic ecclesiology were introduced only a decade ago at one of the theological faculties where candidates for the priesthood are intellectually formed. Until then,

¹⁵ I tried to offer a deeper analysis of the principle of “hierarchy of truths” in a synodal perspective in Mikulášek 2024.

ordained ministry candidates concluded their formation equipped just with their idea of the life and structure of the Catholic Church.

Thus, diocesan reports witness a low involvement of priests in Synod groups and an absence of groups made up of priests. Why, if the whole People of God were invited into the Synod process? The lack of an ecclesiological realism grounded in *Lumen Gentium* chap. 2 is unmistakably evident here. The *societas perfecta* mental framework of the Church as divided between the *Ecclesia docens*, formed by those who have received the sacrament of ordination, and the *Ecclesia discens* of all those who are understood as “passive” subjects led by ordained ministers, is easily traceable here.¹⁶

This was also critically reflected by some Synod groups who expressed their personal experience of the priest’s role in pastoral ministry as “a guardian of the doctrine” of the Church rather than as a shepherd of the people entrusted to him.¹⁷ The issue of authority in the Church (at the level of parishes and dioceses) was therefore voiced as necessary for revision. Questions such as “Are priests prepared for teamwork and the promotion and development of the charisms of the faithful?” (National Synthesis 2022, No. 2.2.5) were often raised, without diminishing the role the ordained ministers take on. All the diocesan syntheses stressed the need for an ongoing formation of ordained ministers, especially concerning the competencies for community leadership (cf. National Synthesis 2022, No. 2.2.2).

3.3. The Local Church

The topic of authority – its form and distribution in the Catholic Church – is closely linked to another pressing issue in the Czech National Synthesis. It is precisely the one that the Final Document now accentuates: The priority of the local Church in Catholic ecclesiology. All Czech diocesan syntheses point to very weak awareness of the whole People of God of the reality of the local diocese; this level is often very distant for the Catholic faithful. The centuries-long one-sided emphasis on a universalist vision of the Catholic Church, based on the Gregorian Reform and the early modern era *societas perfecta* vision of the Church, is still manifested through the experience of the cultural and social “uprootedness” of the faithful, the *portio Populi Dei* of a particular diocese, but also with the form of the pastoral ministry of diocesan bishops “over the portion of the People of God committed to their care”.¹⁸

For years to come, it will be necessary to awaken this “local” consciousness in the bishops’ and all the faithful’s minds. This includes, among other measures,

¹⁶ “The *sensus fidei* prevents a rigid separation between an *Ecclesia docens* and an *Ecclesia discens*, since the flock likewise has an instinctive ability to discern the new ways that the Lord is revealing to the Church”. In: Francis 2015.

¹⁷ “A shepherd stands in front of the people to mark the way, in the midst of the people as one of them, and behind the people in order to be close to the stragglers. A shepherd is not above, like a fisherman, but in the midst”. In: Francis 2022.

¹⁸ See LG 23 and, also, ChD 11.

decentralising and transferring legitimate autonomy for decision-making processes to the local Churches and the episcopal conferences in each country. What is described here is a realisation of *Lumen Gentium*, chap. 3, in its doctrine of the Church as the Church of the Churches (*communio ecclesiarum*). If, on the level of the social sciences, one speaks today of the necessary tendency towards globalisation as a balancing act between extreme patriotism (localism) and unbridled globalisation, this dynamics of glocalisation as a (permanent search for) balance between uniformity and anarchy is preferred by the synodal vision of the Church.¹⁹ The first important step of this vision took place during the various stages of the Synod on Synodality, emphasising the *restitutio*²⁰ of the interim results back to the local Churches for subsequent deeper verification based on local experience.

Synodal conversion transforms one-sided top-down communication into a circular *all–some–one* scheme in which all its actors become active subjects of an ecclesiological genesis based on a realistic appreciation of the local conditions and possibilities of the local Church, in synergy and communion with surrounding Churches and with the whole Church in an “exchange of gifts”.²¹ The Final Document uses the expression “exchange of gifts” 25 times. This term is crucial for building a synodal form of the Church as a communion of local Churches (*communio ecclesiarum*). It develops what *Lumen Gentium* emphasises in its description of the catholicity of the Church, when it states that by her universality (catholicity) each local Church “contributes through its special gifts to the good of the other parts and of the whole Church”. Thus, “through the common sharing of gifts and through the common effort to attain fullness in unity, the whole and each of the parts receive increase” (LG 13). In this regard, it is very telling how the Final Document innovates ecclesiological terminology by replacing the term “universal Church” with “the whole Church,” emphasising the bonds between local Churches (cf. Synod of Bishops 2024, No. 11, 32 etc.).

For many people, the synodal process has opened up a new way of seeing and being aware of local belonging in the Church, where a place means not only a territory but spiritual roots of the local Christians as well as the pressing pastoral issues of the people of the place. This aspect has been very strongly emphasised since

¹⁹ See, e.g., the work of R. Robertson (Robertson 1995) or, recently, Roudometof – Dessi 2022.

²⁰ This theological-canonical term has been, for the first time during the synodal process, quoted in the Document for the Continental Stage entitled “*Enlarge the space of your tent*” (October 24, 2022): “The DCS (= Document for the Continental Stage), which gathers and restores to the local Churches what the People of God from around the world said in the first year of the Synod, is meant to guide us and enable us to deepen our discernment, keeping in mind the basic question that animates the entire process: “How does this «journeying together,» which takes places today on different levels (...), allow the Church to proclaim the Gospel in accordance with the mission entrusted to Her; and what steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow as a synodal Church?”. In: DCS 2023, No. 105. For a discussion about the theological-canonical relevance of the term *restitutio*, see Luciani 2023, esp. 42-47.

²¹ The doctrine of “exchange of gifts” has been developed originally in ecumenical theology. Pope John Paul II. wrote in the Encyclical Letter *Ut unum sint*: “Dialogue is not simply an exchange of ideas. In some way it is always an ‘exchange of gifts’” (John Paul II. 1995, 28).

the beginning of the synodal process in October 2021 through one specific principle: not only Catholic Christians but also members of other Christian denominations and even members of different religions or non-religious people have been invited to participate in the synodal consultation. We can see in it an important application of chap. 2 of *Lumen Gentium* (art. 14-16) on concentric focus and belonging to the people of God as well as the practical impact of the confession on *semina Verbi* present in all cultures and religions of the world (cf. LG 14-16).

3.5. Christian identity and formation

In the last four years, Pope Francis insisted that the current synodal process is primarily a spiritual experience in all its stages.²² The emphasis on the spiritual dimension of the People of God's consultation has led many to realise the need for a formation towards a synodal form of life and ministries. It was in the course of the conversation in the Spirit that many of the participants realised the situation in which they live is more akin to a "consumerist religion", corresponding to the concept of the Church as an institution of service in the form of sacraments, accompanied by an individualistic conception of faith and the passivity of a large part of the faithful. The Czech National Synthesis expresses awareness that this concept diminishes the weight of Christ's words in the Gospel: "Go into all the world!" (Mc 16:15). The Final Document of October 2024 emphasises: "In the Church, no one simply receives formation: everyone is an active subject and has something to give to others" (Synod of Bishops 2024, No. 144). The challenge of formation towards a synodal style of living – and in a special manner of pastoral workers, ordained ministry candidates, and permanent formation of clergy – is expressed as follows:

Shared synodal formation for all the baptised constitutes the horizon within which to understand and practise the specific formation required for individual ministries and vocations. For this to happen, it must be implemented as an exchange of gifts between different vocations (communion), in the perspective of a service to be performed (mission) and in a style of involvement and education in differentiated co-responsibility (participation). This request, which emerged strongly from the synodal process, often requires a demanding change of mentality and a renewed approach to both formation contexts and processes (Synod of Bishops 2024, No. 147).

Among these, a special role is played by the formation of lay men and women to their participation and co-responsibility in the mission of the Church according to what the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity *Apostolicam actuositatem* expressed 60 years ago:

²² "The Synod is not a parliament; it is something else. The Synod is not a gathering among friends to resolve some current problems or to give opinions; it is something else. Let us not forget, brothers and sisters, that we are not the protagonist of the Synod: it is the Holy Spirit." In: Francis 2023.

In the manner of the men and women who helped Paul in spreading the Gospel the laity with the right apostolic attitude supply what is lacking to their brethren and refresh the spirit of pastors and of the rest of the faithful. Strengthened by active participation in the liturgical life of their community, they are eager to do their share of the apostolic works of that community” (AA 10).

Conclusion

As Pope Francis said in 2015, “Synodality is the path which God expects of the Church of the third millennium”. Some may have expected a more rapid and decisive transformation after the Synod on Synodality. The implementation phase of the Synod on Synodality is just beginning within a synodal conversion of all persons, structures and working methods. It will be a period of bearing fruit, in which it will be necessary to find “a way to let the word take flesh in a particular situation and bear fruits of new life, however imperfect or incomplete these may appear” (EG 24). How then, with a very short distance, can we assess the current impact of the Synod on Synodality on the life of the Catholic Church in the Czech Republic?

One of the local Churches most visibly affected by the secularisation currents, the Diocese of Pilsen, has launched its own diocesan Synod entitled *Together with Hope: Living in Christ in Today’s Reality* (2024–2026). In some dioceses, diocesan pastoral councils have been created, and there has been reflection on the form of their composition and functioning, as well as encouragement to form parish pastoral councils. In one diocese (Olomouc), there has been an intense discussion about the need to restructure parish administration for the years to come. Formation projects for communities and synodal bodies in parishes are beginning to emerge in several dioceses. An effort to develop a systematic approach to the permanent formation of priests is also emerging in several local Churches.

The synodal process was the first opportunity and experience of discussing and listening for Catholic Christians involved. In conclusion, we can only express the hope that the reception of the Church’s synodal conversion in the Czech Republic will be reflected, for example, in the courage to celebrate diocesan and provincial synods capable of implementing the principles of synodal life in response to concrete pastoral situations.

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Słowa kluczowe: Kościół katolicki w Republice Czeskiej, Synod o synodalności, teologia Kościoła lokalnego, autorytet w Kościele lokalnym, teologia ludu Bożego

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