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SYNODALNOŚĆ W PRAWOSŁAWNEJ, PROTESTANCKIEJ I KATOLICKIEJ REFLEKSJI TEOLOGICZNEJ

SYNODALITY IN ORTHODOX, PROTESTANT AND CATHOLIC THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

Streszczenie

Celem artykułu jest ukazanie wybranych kwestii z zakresu teologicznej refleksji nad znaczeniem synodów w teologii prawosławnej, luterkańskiej i katolickiej.

Teologowie prawosławni uzasadniają synodalny wymiar Kościoła nauczaniem Chrystusa, praktyką okresu apostołskiego i rozwojem synodalności w pierwszym tysiącleciu Kościoła. W Kościołach prawosławnych synodalność ma charakter episkopocentryczny i wyraża się na poziomie Kościoła lokalnego, z biskupem na czele oraz na poziomie regionalnym. Po zerwaniu jedności z Kościołem rzymskim w roku 1054 Kościoły prawosławne nie odbyły żadnego soboru o wymiarze ekumenicznym. To, co jest charakterystyczne dla wschodniej teologii synodów i soborów, to przekonanie, że ich decyzje nie są obowiązujące *ex sesse*, ale uzyskują swoją ważność po recepcji przez wiernych.

We Wspólnotach kościelnych pochodzących z reformacji mamy różne formy organizacji synodalnej. W luteranizmie niemieckim do XX wieku obowiązywał model Kościoła państwowego, w którym sprawami Kościoła zarządzali władcy świeccy biskupów. Akceptacja takiej formy zarządzania Kościołem wynikała z wielu czynników, m.in. z teologii Marcina Lutra o powszechnym kapłaństwie i braku biskupów, których zastąpili właśnie książęta. W XIX, a zwłaszcza w XX wieku Kościoły luterkańskie w Niemczech wypracowały struktury synodalne, w których główną rolę odgrywają świeccy. Decyzje podejmowane na synodach nie są uznawane za nieomyślne, dlatego mogą podlegać zmianom. Również Wspólnoty luterkańskie nie znają ekumenicznego wymiaru synodów.

W Kościele rzymskokatolickim, podobnie jak w Kościołach prawosławnych, za źródło synodalności uznaje się praktykę Kościoła apostołskiego, zwłaszcza Sobór Apostołski opisany w Dziejach Apostołów w rozdziale piętnastym, i okres pierwszego tysiąclecia Kościoła, w którym rozwinęły się struktury synodalne i soborowe. W Kościele rzymskokatolickim mamy dwa poziomy synodalności: pierwszy dotyczy prymatu papieża i kolegium biskupów będących z nim w jedności, drugi natomiast opiera się na udziale wszystkich ochrzczonych w życiu Kościoła, który polega na ich funkcji doradczej. Charakterystyczne dla Kościoła rzymskokatolickiego jest zachowanie wszystkich trzech poziomów synodalności: lokalnego, regionalnego i powszechnego, dzięki papieżowi, który zwołuje sobory. W Kościele rzymskokatolickim decyzje soborowe nie wymagają zatwierdzenia przez wiernych świeckich, ale uznawane są obowiązujące po przyjęciu ich przez zgromadzenie soborowe i

papieża. Obecnie trwa dyskusja nad większym włączeniem w wiernych świeckich w podejmowanie decyzji dotyczących życia Kościoła.

Słowa kluczowe: synod, sobór, synodalność, katolicyzm, prawosławie, luteranizm

Abstract

SYNODALITY IN ORTHODOX, PROTESTANT AND CATHOLIC THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

The aim of this article is to show some issues of a theological reflection on the meaning of synods in Orthodox, Lutheran, and Catholic theology.

Orthodox theologians justify the synodal dimension of the Church by the teaching of Christ, the practice of the apostolic period, and the development of synodality in the first millennium of the Church. In the Orthodox Churches, synodality is episcopocentric and is expressed both at the local church level with the bishop in the lead and at the regional one. After breaking up of the unity with the Roman Church in 1054 the Orthodox Churches did not hold any council of an ecumenical dimension. What is characteristic of the Eastern theology of synods and councils is the conviction that their decisions are not obligatory *ex sese* but acquire their validity after acceptance by the faithful.

In the ecclesiastical communities dating back to the Reformation, we have various forms of synodal organization. German Lutheranism had a state church model until the 20th century in which the affairs of the Church were managed by the lay rulers of the bishops. This form of Church governance was due to a number of factors including Martin Luther's theology of the universal priesthood and the lack of bishops who were replaced by princes. In the 19th and especially in the 20th century the Lutheran Churches in Germany developed synodal structures in which lay people play a central role. Decisions made at synods are not considered infallible so they can be changed. The Lutheran communities are also unaware of the ecumenical dimension of synods.

In the Roman Catholic Church, as in the Orthodox Churches, the source of synodality is considered to be the practice of the Apostolic Church especially the Apostolic Council described in Acts, chapter 15, and the period of the first millennium of the Church in which synodal and conciliar structures developed. In the Roman Catholic Church, we have two levels of synodality: the first concerns the primacy of the Pope and the Ordo of Bishops who are in communion with him, while the second is based on the participation of all the baptized in the life of the Church, which consists of their advisory function. Thanks to the Pope who convenes councils it is characteristic of the Roman Catholic Church to maintain all three levels of synodality: local, regional and universal. In the Roman Catholic Church conciliar decisions do not to be approved by the lay faithful, but they are considered binding once adopted by the conciliar assembly and the Pope. Currently, there is a discussion on the bigger inclusion of the lay faithful in making decisions regarding the life of the Church.

Keywords: synod, council, synodality, Catholicism, Orthodoxy, Lutheranism

Introduction

In the contemporary ecumenical dialogue that the Catholic Church conducts with Orthodox Churches and ecclesial Communities originating from the Reformation, ecclesiology, including synods and councils, is one of the main topics of the work of theological commissions. Also in the Catholic Church, the topic of synods and synodality is becoming

more and more present, especially since the election of Pope Francis to the See of Peter¹. Also in Orthodox theology, councils and synods became the subject of theological reflection in connection with the Great and Holy Council of 2016. Also in Protestant theology, there is a revival of interest in the topic of synods. The aim of the article is to show selected issues in the field of theological reflection on the meaning of synods in the life of the Church in Orthodox, Protestant and Catholic theology.

1. Synodality in Orthodox theology

One of the essential characteristics of the Orthodox Church, which is present in every study on Orthodox ecclesiology, is its synodality. Pope Francis, in the encyclical *Evangelii Gaudium*, even cited the synodal organization of the Orthodox Churches as a model for Catholics to follow². But what do Orthodox theologians mean by synods and synodality, and how does theory translate into practice?

Johannes Oeldemann notes that when one tries to describe the Orthodox theology of synodality, the difficulty immediately arises in the absence of a single ecclesiology binding all Orthodox Christians. For this reason, the Orthodox theology of synodality can only be presented on the basis of the writings of individual Orthodox theologians and a few principles common to Orthodox theologians can be mentioned³. However, one should not expect a systematic elaboration of this topic even in the works of such theologians as: Afanassieff, Łoski or Meyendorff⁴.

Orthodox theologians, speaking about the sources of the synodal structure of the Church, point to the words and deeds of Christ and the practice of the apostolic Church, emphasizes the Orthodox theologian Leb Ioan-Vasile⁵. The most important texts of the New Testament that speak of synodality are the words of Jesus from Mt 18:15-18, where fraternal

¹ Paweł Rabczyński, *Synodalność według papieża Franciszka*, in: *Synodalność. Perspektywa polskokatolicka i rzymskokatolicka*, ed. Paweł Rabczyński (Pelplin: Wydawnictwo Bernardinum, 2020), pp. 115–125.

² Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium: To Bishops, Priests and Deacons, Consecrated Persons, and Lay Faithful: Proclaiming the Gospel in the Modern World* (Częstochowa: Ed. św. Paweł, 2013), no. 246, "To give just one example, in dialogue with our Orthodox brethren, we Catholics have the opportunity to learn something more about the importance of episcopal collegiality and their experience of synodality. Through the exchange of gifts, the Spirit can lead us ever more to truth and goodness"; Janusz Bujak, *Pope Francis' teaching on synodality in the context of contemporary theological and ecumenical reflection*, *Collectanea Theologica* 1 (2021): pp. 64–65.

³ Johannes Oeldemann, *Die Sinodalität in der Orthodoxen Kirche*, *Catholica* 2, 70 (2016): p. 133.

⁴ Mikołaj Afanasjew, *Kościół Ducha Świętego* (Białystok: Bractwo Młodzieży Prawosławnej w Polsce, 2002); Włodzimierz Łoski, *Teologia dogmatyczna* (Białystok: Bractwo Młodzieży Prawosławnej w Polsce, 2000); John Meyendorff, *Teologia bizantyjska. Historia i doktryna* (Warszawa; Instytut Wydawniczy PAX, 1984).

⁵ Leb Ioan-Vasile, *La signification théologique-ecclesiale de la synodalité: points fortes et questions ouvertes; un point de vue orthodoxe*, *Path* 13, 1 (2014): pp. 137–146.

admonition is mentioned. The term *ekklesia* (v. 17), the community of believers, presupposes the presence of Jesus Christ. The Church has a certain responsibility for her brethren and may exclude some from her midst (vv. 17-18). Other texts at the origin of the Orthodox concept of synodality are found in the Acts of the Apostles, e.g. Acts 1:15ff. (Matthew's choice), Acts 6:2ff. (election of seven deacons), Acts 11:1–8 (admission of the first pagans to the Christian community); Acts 15:1–35 (Apostolic synod, decision made with the assistance of the Holy Spirit)⁶.

The apostolic period did not end the development of synodal structures, but it was its beginning and foundation. In the first millennium, the keystone of unity in the local Church is the bishop, who is primarily responsible for preaching the Gospel, preserving the doctrine of faith and ensuring that the sacraments are properly administered by the priests in his diocese. The bishop was elected by the people and received his office by ordination (ordained) by several bishops who represented the episcopal college. The newly elected bishop professed the faith and promised to pass it on and preserve it in communion with the universal Church. Thanks to the power conferred on him sacramentally, the bishop proclaims the faith of the Church to those to whom he is bound by ordination. The community of believers, presbyters and lay faithful, accepted his preaching if it was consistent with the faith of the Church and opposed it when the bishop's teaching was not consistent with it⁷.

In the Orthodox Church, the highest authority is the ecumenical council, although no ecumenical council was held in the East in the second millennium, so this statement applies to the first seven councils of the first millennium so far, since the eighth, or the Fourth Council

⁶ Ioan-Vasile, *La signification théologique-ecclesiale de la synodalité: points fortes et questions ouvertes; un point de vue orthodoxe*, p. 138; Marek Blaza, "Synodalność (soborowość) w Kościołach wschodnich", *Studia Bobolanum* 31, 2 (2020): p. 90; Janusz Bujak, "Etapy rozwoju synodalności Kościoła pierwszego tysiąclecia w dokumentach dialogu katolicko-prawosławnego", *Ateneum Kapłańskie* 3 (2005): pp. 525–544. The Romanian Orthodox theologian Liviu Stan writes in the article "Sinodalită", part. 1, *Oriente Cristiano* 2 (1970): pp. 84, 87, that the synodal form of Church governance has its foundation above all in those speeches of Christ in which He emphasizes the necessity of cooperation between the members of the Church, such as "where two or three are gathered in the name of mine, I am there among them" (Mt 18:20); "Whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave" (Matthew 20:27). For the synodal organization of the Church, the "new commandment" that Jesus gave to his disciples in the Upper Room is also important: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another as I have loved you" (Jn 13:34). From these commandments follows the necessity of living in community and building the life of the Church according to the teaching of Jesus Christ. This model of life, Stan confirms, is most fully actualized in synodality, which means walking the same path together, making decisions together and governing the whole life of the Church according to the common criterion of those who are bound by the same faith and live in ecclesial assemblies, small or large, up to the level of the universal Church; Konstantin Nikolakopoulos, *Prinzipien der Synodalität nach dem Neuen Testament. Insbesondere am Beispiel des Apostelskonzils*, *Orthodoxes Forum* 2 (1991): pp. 193–205; Pierre Duprey, "La structure synodale de l'Eglise dans la théologie orientale", *Proche-Orient Chretienne* (1970): pp. 123–145

⁷ Ioan-Vasile, *La signification théologique-ecclesiale de la synodalité: points fortes et questions ouvertes; un point de vue orthodoxe*, pp. 138–139; Janusz Bujak, *Komunia Kościołów lokalnych a kolegialność episkopatu w dokumentach dialogu katolicko-prawosławnego*, *Studia Koszalińsko-Koło-brzeskie* 9 (2004): pp. 67–79.

of Constantinople, is not recognized by the Orthodox Churches as ecumenical⁸. According to Orthodox theologians, the bishops gathered in an ecumenical council have the task, if necessary, to formulate the doctrine of the faith, always in union with the Tradition of the Church. Contemporary Orthodox theologians emphasize that bishops do not fulfill their mission as delegates of the faithful, but by virtue of the ministry conferred on them by ordination. This is especially true of preaching the Gospel, administering the sacraments and watching over the doctrine of the faith in the dioceses for which they have been ordained and of which they preside. Thanks to this, they are both representatives of the faithful and part of them. But just as in the dialogue between the bishop and the church community, the faithful have the right to object to the bishop when his preaching is not in accordance with the doctrine of the Church's faith, the same principle applies to decisions made in ecumenical councils. The Church community receives new formulations with the right to determine their compatibility with the faith of the Church. The College of Bishops has *ex sese* the task of formulating the doctrine of faith, and the task of the Church community (priests and faithful) is *ex sese* to find its identity in new formulations. Both sides of the dialogue are closely related to Sacred Scripture and the Tradition of the Church. If the new formulation of the faith is accepted by the ecclesial community, it means that it recognizes in this new confession its conformity with the faith of the Church. In this case, the formulation becomes dogmatically valid until a new one appears⁹.

Oeldemann emphasizes that the synodality of the Church in the Orthodox perspective does not end with regularly convened synods, but is expressed in many other forms: in relationships between bishops, such as the exchange of messages, in episcopal consecrations in which two or three other bishops of the region take part, or in informing other bishops about the assumption of the episcopal chair by a new bishop. The synodality of the Church is, from the Orthodox point of view, a fundamental expression of ecclesial *communio*¹⁰.

Nowadays, three models of synodality in Orthodox theology can be mentioned: eucharistic, trinitarian and pneumatological.

The first is related to the emergence of Eucharistic ecclesiology, which is the work of the Russian *émigré* theologian Nikolai Afanassieff (1893–1966), who was a long-time

⁸ Oeldemann, *Die Synodalität in der Orthodoxen Kirche*, pp. 143–146. In the second and third millenniums of the Church, no Orthodox council was held to bring together representatives of all the local Churches. Also, the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church of 2016 cannot be considered ecumenical, as representatives of four of the fourteen canonical Orthodox Churches were absent.

⁹ Ioan-Vasile, *La signification théologique-ecclesiale de la synodalité: points fortes et questions ouvertes; un point de vue orthodoxe*, pp. 139-130; on the reception of the decisions of the ecumenical councils by the faithful in the Orthodox Church, compare Blaza, *Synodalność (soborowość) w Kościołach wschodnich*, pp. 97–99.

¹⁰ Oeldemann, „Die Synodalität in der Orthodoxen Kirche”, p. 135.

lecturer at the famous Saint-Serge Institute of Orthodox Theology in Paris. Afanassieff on the inseparable relationship of the Church and the Eucharist and developed the concept of "Eucharistic ecclesiology". Afanassieff was in constant contact with representatives of the French "nouvelle théologie" and was the only contemporary Orthodox theologian cited in the documents of the Second Vatican Council¹¹. His ideas were developed by Alexander Schmemmann (1921–1983), who was a student of Afanassieff, and the Greek theologian and bishop Ioannis Zizioulas. The latter, unlike Afanassieff, more strongly emphasized the role of the bishop in celebrating the Eucharist. While Afanassieff emphasized the priesthood of all believers, Zizioulas emphasized the office of bishop. What the different models of Orthodox Eucharistic ecclesiology have in common is that they take the local Church as their starting point. Synodality in this perspective is "bottom-up", having its origin in the Eucharist of the local Church¹².

The second model of synodality is based on Trinitarian ecclesiology, which considers the Church to be an "icon of the Holy Trinity". Thanks to this, unity and multiplicity are harmoniously combined in the Church. The various local Churches form a unity by analogy with the three different Persons of the Holy Trinity, who are one God. Unity and plurality within the Holy Trinity are the image and theological foundation of unity and plurality within the Orthodox Church. One of the most famous representatives of this trend was Dumitru Stăniloae (1903–1993). He emphasized the synodality of the episcopate, which, however, is rooted in the local Church. The Romanian theologian also spoke about the synodality of the Church as a whole¹³.

The third model of synodality stems from pneumatological ecclesiology, which (like Eucharistic ecclesiology) has its source in the thought of the Russian poet, Slavophile and philosopher Alexei Khomyakov (1804–1860). The starting point for his reflections was the encyclical of the Greek Orthodox patriarchs of 1848, which was a response to Pius IX's encyclical of January 6 of the same year *In suprema Petri*¹⁴. Khomyakov developed his ecclesiology of the "conciliarity" of the Church, which term means catholicity or council-

¹¹ Richard Gaillardetz, *The Eucharistic Ecclesiology of Nicolas Afanassieff: Prospects and Challenges for Contemporary Ecumenical Dialogue*, *Diakonia* 27 (1994): pp. 18–44.

¹² Oeldemann, *Die Synodalität in der Orthodoxen Kirche*, pp. 135–136; Andrzej Baczyński, „Kościół jako Eucharystia”, *Rocznik Teologiczny* 2 (2014): pp. 117–135; Henryk Paprocki, *Prawosławne rozumienie związku Eucharystii z Kościołem*, *Symposium* 1 (2011): pp. 49–59; Wojciech Słomski, *Eklezjologia eucharystyczna Mikołaja Afanasiewa*, *Collectanea Theologica* 3 (1997): pp. 97–105.

¹³ Oeldemann, *Die Synodalität in der Orthodoxen Kirche*, pp. 136–138; Zoltán József Bara, *La Santissima Trinità come fonte e modello di sinodalità della Chiesa secondo Dumitru Stăniloae*, *Studia Koszalińsko-Koło-brzeskie* 29 (2022): pp. 41–70.

¹⁴ Elżbieta Przybył, *Wyznania wiary. Kościoły orientalne i prawosławne* (Kraków: Partner, 2006), pp. 328–363.

conciliarity¹⁵. His idea of the sobority of the Church was developed by Sergei Bulgakov (1871–1944) and Georgy Florovsky (1893–1973). Especially the latter emphasized the synodal nature of ecclesiology¹⁶.

Oeldemann notes that in the practice of synodal leadership of the Church in Orthodoxy there are two main models today: one hierarchical, purely episcopal (e.g. the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople and the Serbian Orthodox Church), in which the ultimate responsibility for the Church rests solely with the bishops. The second model (Russian Orthodox Church and Romanian Orthodox Church), where representatives of the clergy, monks and laity sit in the synod next to the bishops. However, the reforms of the early 21st century have meant that representatives of the clergy and laity are gradually being pushed aside in favor of the greater importance of bishops and episcopal synodal bodies. The "Holy and Great Synod" of Crete in 2016 was an example of the increasing "primatization" of the Orthodox Church. Although the patriarch or the first hierarch in the autocephalous Church is included in the synodal structures as before, in recent years one can notice the increasing importance of the primate and centralization within individual patriarchates. This is especially clear in Russia and Romania, but also in other patriarchates. This confirms that the topic of synodality cannot be considered in isolation from the understanding of primacy. Primacy and synodality form two fields of ecclesial order. For a "healthy" ecclesial structure, a balance between the two fields is required, as confirmed by the *Chieti Document* (September 21, 2016) prepared by the Joint International Commission for Catholic-Orthodox Dialogue¹⁷. However, the agreement of the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches on the primacy of the Bishop of Rome will not be possible until Eastern theology develops a clear position regarding the role of the protos within Orthodoxy itself, which is currently impossible due to the disputes between the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople and the Patriarchate of Moscow¹⁸.

¹⁵ Jarosław Moskałyk, *Funkcja soborności Kościoła*, *Colloquia Theologica Ottoniana* 1 (2011): pp. 116–119; Tomáš Špidlík, *Myśl rosyjska. Inna wizja człowieka* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Księży Marianów, 2000), pp. 149–155.

¹⁶ Oeldemann, *Die Synodalität in der Orthodoxen Kirche*, p. 138; Zdzisław Kijas, *Zasada «sobornosti» w teologii i życiu Wschodu prawosławnego*, *Studia Theologica Varsaviensia* 2 (1995): pp. 36–41.

¹⁷ Oeldemann, *Die Synodalität in der Orthodoxen Kirche*, 143, 147; Mutual International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church. *Synodalność i prymat podczas pierwszego tysiąclecia: ku wspólnemu rozumieniu w służbie jedności, Chieti, 21 września 2016 r.*, transl. E. Sojka, *Studia i Dokumenty Ekumeniczne* 2, 83 (2018): pp. 122–129; Janusz Bujak, *Synodalność i prymat jako wyzwanie w ekumenicznym dialogu katolicko-prawosławnym*, *Symposium* 26, 1 (2022): 94, 101–102.

¹⁸ *Stanowisko Patriarchatu moskiewskiego w kwestii prymatu na poziomie Kościoła powszechnego (28.12.2013)*, in: Janusz Bujak, *Dialog katolicko-prawosławny w latach 2005–2015*, *Studia i Rozprawy* 40 (Szczecin: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Szczecińskiego, 2016), pp. 176–184; "«Pierwszy bez równych». Odpowiedź Patriarchatu Ekumenicznego na stanowisko Patriarchatu moskiewskiego w kwestii prymatu w

2. Synodality in Lutheran theology

The Waldensian theologian Fulvio Ferrario emphasizes that the institution of the synod played a key role in the Reformation of the 16th century, and that the synod was considered the best tool for reforming the Church *in capite et in membris* if it followed the path of conciliarism¹⁹. However, the Council of Trent (1542–1563) did not adopt the principles of conciliarism, and synods in the Lutheran Churches were practically unknown until modern times.

2.1. Historical outline of the synodal structure in the Lutheran Churches

The assumptions of the synodal structure of the Lutheran Church are found primarily in Martin Luther's letter *Daß ein christliche Versammlung oder Gemeinde Recht und Macht habe, alle Lehre zu urteilen und Lehrer zu berufen, ein und abzusetzen, Grund und Ursach aus der Schrift* (A congregation or a Christian congregation has the right and the authority to judge all teachings and to appoint, appoint and remove teachers – basis and reason from Scripture) from the year 1523²⁰. In it, Luther develops the teaching of the universal priesthood, through which Christ grants to all the baptized equally the power to preach and teach. All Christians have the same right to assume the office of preaching the word. Delegates to the ministry, however, should be distinguished by skill and understanding.

Luther's teaching on the common priesthood is related to the congregation's participation in the selection of clergy and in the shaping of church order. Since in the Lutheran Churches secular authorities, princes and city councils, were perceived as the legitimate representatives of Christian society, the responsibility for governing the Church from the beginning rested not on synods, but on secular rulers (landesherrliche Kirchenregiment), who were considered the most eminent members of the Church, had the rights of a bishop (Notbischof) and governed the Church in their territory²¹. The German

Kościół powszechnym (8.01.2014) ", in: Janusz Bujak, *Dialog katolicko-prawosławny w latach 2005–2015*, Studia i Rozprawy 40 (Szczecin: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Szczecińskiego, 2016), pp. 185–191.

¹⁹ Fulvio Ferrario, *Il significato teologico-ecclesiale della sinodalità: punti fermi e questioni aperte. La prospettiva protestante*, pp. 147–148

²⁰ Jerzy Sojka, *Czym jest sobór dla Kościoła? Perspektywa ewangelicka*, in: *Przed Soborem Wszechprawosławnym*, ed. Tadeusz Kałużny, Zdzisław Józef Kijas (Kraków: Uniwersytet Papieski Jana Pawła II, 2016), p. 62.

²¹ Christoph Dinkel, *Synode III. Reformation bis zur Gegenwart*, in: *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, Band 32 (Berlin–New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2001), pp. 572–573. The author emphasizes that the synodal models

Lutheran theologian Friedrich Hauschildt emphasizes that Philip Melanchthon's Augsburg Confession of 1530 does not mention either the common priesthood or synods. The actual establishment of synods is a fairly young practice, dating back to the mid-20th century. As the reasons for the lack of synods at the beginning of the Reformation, the author mentions:

- a) Too great social differences and the recognition of the need to submit to authority as an expression of God's will. For this reason, the Lutheran Churches assigned to the princes as *praecipuum membrum Ecclesiae*, as representatives of the laity, the function of *summus episcopus*.
- b) Awareness that baptism alone is not enough to fulfill certain social functions. It should be taken into account that many people at that time could not read and write. Ability and experience are required to perform managerial functions.
- c) Luther was not in favor of rapid structural change. The German Peasants' War (1524–1526) confirmed his reluctance to introduce synods²².

At the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries, the call for the Lutheran Church to become independent from the state became louder and louder in Germany. These trends were prepared by theories emphasizing the collegiate structure of the Church, the American Declaration of Independence (1776), the French Revolution (1789–1799), and the rapprochement between the Lutheran and Reformed churches, where synodal structures were well established. The political reason for the intensification of demands for the churches to become independent from the secular authorities was the collapse of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation as a result of the lost wars with Napoleon in 1806. In Prussia, Friedrich Schleiermacher had a great influence on the reforms of the Lutheran Church. In 1799, in the fourth speech, *Über die Religion*, he directly demanded a departure from the existing model of relations between the state and the Church. Schleiermacher wrote of a Church in which all distinctions between clergy and laity would be abolished. In 1808, Schleiermacher developed *Vorschlag zu einer neuer Verfassung der protestantischen Kirche im preußischen Staate*. It proclaimed that ecclesiastical autonomy and democratic governance in the Church could only be realized through a Presbyterian-Synodal ecclesiastical constitution. Ultimately, Presbyterian views did not find favor in society and among the clergy. King Frederick

developed by David Hollaz (1648–1713) and Johann Andreas Quenstedt (1617–1688) will not have a great impact on the structure of church governance. If there were synods in Lutheranism, it was only at the parish level. It was only collegial thinking from the Enlightenment period that introduced some changes in the relationship between the state and the Church. The latter was considered a corporation built by its members and having its own laws. This collegiate theory of church structure was the starting point for the development of synods in the early 19th century in the Lutheran Churches; Otto Hermann Pesch, *Zrozumieć Lutra* (Kraków: W drodze, 2008), pp. 330–333.

²² Friedrich Hauschildt, *Synodalität (in) der evangelischen Kirche*, *Catholica* 2, 70 (2016): pp. 125–126.

William III of Prussia (reigned 1797–1840) was against the reforms proposed by Schleiermacher. Only in the western part of Prussia (Rhine-Westphalia) was an order introduced in 1835 in which there was a strong Presbyterian-Synodal element²³.

With the end of the German Empire, established in 1871, in 1918 and the decision to end the existence of the "state church", the system of governing the Church by secular rulers disappeared. The alliance between the altar and the throne is over. Synods and consistories appeared in its place²⁴.

2.2. Theological foundations and tasks of synods

The theological basis of the synods in the Lutheran Church, in which lay people play the most important role, results from the basic equality of all believers coming from the fact of creation and from the sacrament of baptism.

God created man as male and female (Genesis 1:27). Both were given the task of preaching the Gospel. The differences between them, between the clergy and the laity, are secondary. This is important for evangelicals. The words "I have called you by name; you are mine!" (Isaiah 43:1) applies to all people. Offices created by people with their differences are fundamentally historically conditioned and therefore subject to change. In their changing aspects, they should not be too "sacralized", made inaccessible or immutable, because then the basic relationship between God and man in His Church becomes obscured. The principle that all people are children of God should be adhered to²⁵.

Martin Luther emphasized that all the baptized are spiritual priests before God, all have the authority to preach the word and administer the sacraments. According to Luther, there is also a priestly ministry in the Church of Christ, but it is not a mediator between God and believers. Being a priest is nothing more than being a Christian, Luther believed. It is the

²³ Dinkel, *Synode III. Reformation bis zur Gegenwart*, pp. 574–576.

²⁴ Dinkel, *Synode III. Reformation bis zur Gegenwart*, pp. 576–577; Anderea Schwarz, *Verfassung der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche im rechtsrheinischen Bayern, 1921*, access 9.01.2023, https://www.historisches-lexikon-bayerns.de/Lexikon/Verfassung_der_Evangelisch-Lutherischen_Kirche_im_rechtsrheinischen_Bayern,_1921: „Im Gefolge der Revolution von 1918 endete wie im übrigen Deutschland in Bayern das landesherrliche Regiment über die evangelische Kirche“. When Adolf Hitler became Chancellor of the Reich in 1933, there was great enthusiasm among German Lutherans. There was hope for a new close relationship between the state and the Church. Christian Berndt, „Gründung des Deutschen Reichs 1871. Protestantischer Jubel und katholische Skepsis“, access 13.01.2023. <https://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/gruendung-des-deutschen-reichs-1871-protestantischer-jubel-100.html>; Stefan Loubichi, „Die unrühmliche Rolle der Evangelischen Kirche im Dritten Reich“. Dostep 13.01.2013. <https://www.zukunft-braucht-erinnerung.de/die-unruehmliche-rolle-der-evangelischen-kirche-im-dritten-reich>. The Protestant Church thus expected Hitler to create a new alliance between Protestantism and the state.

²⁵ "Synodalität nach evangelischen Verständnis und im Hinblick auf die Debatte in der römisch-katholisch Kirche". *Catholica* 2, 74 (2020): pp. 115–116.

sacrament of baptism that makes a person a priest. However, even though every Christian is responsible for preaching the Gospel and is a priest as a result of the sacrament of baptism, this does not make unnecessary the special priesthood that is still necessary for the proclamation of the Gospel. The ordained represents a task that everyone has. He does not preach his own word, but *verbum alienum*, a word he has received from someone else²⁶.

So what is the priesthood according to Martin Luther? According to him, the special office and the common priesthood have the same content and power, they are not in competition with each other. The difference is public action and only that. According to Luther, the call to the office comes from the community, which asks the bishop to confirm the person chosen by it. It is a kind of delegation, but it does not weaken the sovereignty of God. It is God who establishes a special priesthood. Luther claimed that the same happens in the Catholic Church, where bishops and the Pope are elected²⁷.

All statements about the Church have a dialectical structure. The Church can only be adequately described in a contradictory double statement. The church as well as an earthly reality is always and inevitably present in some empirically perceptible way, but also, according to Protestant teaching, it is not merely a sociological structure. Luther understood the Church as *creatura verbi divini*, as the creation of the word. Before the Church develops organizational structures, it is already fully present: Word and sacrament happen, they touch people, they involve them in the process of communication. Of course, there is also human participation in this, but the word and the sacrament play a primary role. This dialectic is discernible in Sacred Scripture. Lk 10:16: "Whoever listens to you listens to me", and at the same time Christ makes us say: "We are useless servants" (Lk 17:10). Both sentences are true. Paul writes, "We have this treasure in earthen vessels" (2 Corinthians 4:7). This treasure does not belong to us. God's power works *sub contrario*, 2 Corinthians 12:9: "For power is made perfect in weakness," it is also weak. Preachers of the word are necessary in a sense, witnesses are needed, but the essence of witnesses is that they point to an experience that does not come from them. They are not its author, but its transmitter. God uses our human action,

²⁶ Hauschildt, *Synodalität (in) der evangelischen Kirche*, pp. 118–119.

²⁷ Hauschildt, *Synodalität (in) der evangelischen Kirche*, pp. 120–121; John Theodore Mueller, *Dogmatyka chrześcijańska. Podręcznik dla duszpasterzy, nauczycieli i laików* (Warszawa: Lutheran Heritage Foundation, 2008), pp. 875–881. On page 875 you can read: "Therefore, the relationship between the public ministry of preaching and the spiritual priesthood of all Christians in the light of Scripture does not cause any problems. Public ministry and spiritual priesthood are not the same, for the Bible distinguishes between Christians as such and Christians as servants of the Word who care for other Christians."

in a sense he binds himself to it, without becoming dependent on it, he retains his sovereignty²⁸.

The question about the governance of the Church can be answered dialectically, on two levels, as in the case of a vocation to the pastoral ministry.

On the first level, God Himself directs His Church. He is the Good Shepherd who feeds his people. Feed him with your word. However, he does not do it directly, in an empirical way, but in a hidden way. This means that the leadership of the Church by men is secondary and derivative. However, since the Church exists in time and space, there must also be human guidance in the Church in presiding over services, answering ethical questions, managing buildings and finances, and other matters related to the organization of the life of the Church. The common priesthood means that all Christians are essentially responsible for the transmission of the Gospel. The governance of the Church also essentially belongs to the whole community, as Luther wrote in 1523. He rejects the authoritarian structures that have been present in the world of politics, but he does not abandon the structures as such if they serve the guidance of the Church²⁹.

The participation of the laity in the synodal governing bodies of the Church, which is characteristic of Protestantism, is possible where the existence of the Church is not considered to be dependent on a previous endowment with an office endowed with special spiritual power, but positively: where the Church is considered to be the creation of the word of God (*creatura verbi*) and the servant of the word of God, a service essentially performed by all believers. The ministry is understood as a special form of the common priesthood, responsible, with the consent of the community and for its benefit, for the public proclamation of the word and the administration of the sacraments. With a different understanding of the Church (as in the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches), synods may be merely a collegiate body supporting and advising a clerical authority to make joint decisions.

The synod is the most important governing body in the Church, as it decides not only on the order of church life, church institutions, church laws, taxes, deals with the state and other churches, but also makes personnel decisions by selecting bishops or presidents of the church. Synods are bound in their decisions to the teaching of their churches: to the Gospel, to

²⁸ Hauschildt, *Synodalität (in) der evangelischen Kirche*, pp. 115–116; Hauschildt, *Synodalität nach evangelischen Verständnis und im Hinblick auf die Debatte in der römisch-katholisch Kirche*, pp. 115–117.

²⁹ Hauschildt, *Synodalität (in) der evangelischen Kirche*, pp. 122–123.

confessional writings. The Evangelical Church adapts its teaching to the situation, wants to "interpret" the Gospel³⁰.

When asked whether synods are something like parliaments and therefore democratic systems, or fundamentally different from them, the answers are ambiguous.

Some synods resemble parliaments: they have legislative powers, decision-making powers, electoral powers and budgetary powers. However, unlike in the political parliament, there is no opposition whose aim is to bring about the resignation of the government. There is a general will to decide by consensus, typical of synods. There is also an advantageous constraint that applies to all church governing bodies: all their decisions are related to the creed. Nobody can invalidate it. Synods, apart from organizational issues, also deal with spiritual issues (e.g. the order of services, songbook, catechism, reception of ecumenical texts, etc.), in which matters decisions are made in the awareness of responsibility before God. Political calculation or human official authority is replaced by the authority of Scripture and creed, and a sense of accountability to God. Therefore, there is an awareness that majority decisions are not a guarantee of truth, because "even councils can err", as Luther said³¹.

Fulvio Ferrario notes that the members of the synod, regional and national, are most often (some of them *ex officio* members) elected by the local Churches. It is a ministry that requires responsibility. In fact, the synodal assembly is opened with prayer and is aware of being an assembly of believers listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit. Debate is a place of discernment. It may therefore happen that a given member of the synod during the discussion changes the opinion with which he came to the synod or which was expressed by his local community. For this reason, debate and voting are analogous to democratic practice, but they are different in essence. The church sees itself as theocratic, ruled by God, which is why it is not hierocratic, ruled by the clergy. Therefore, it is imprecise to say that decisions at the synod are taken "from below". Conversely, they are taken "from above" as they appeal to the authority of God acting in the assembly through the power of the Holy Spirit. The "bottom up" dimension (that is, coming from the congregation, not from the hierarchy) is the process of discernment.

Being the highest authority in the Church does not mean that the synod is "infallible." This concept in Protestantism is incomprehensible or indicates a confusion of the human and divine plans. Synodal decisions are in principle fallible and open to revision. The process of

³⁰ Dinkel, *Synode III. Reformation bis zur Gegenwart*, p. 578.

³¹ Hauschildt, *Synodalität (in) der evangelischen Kirche*, p. 128.

listening and discernment cannot be considered closed by synodal decisions: reception by the Church is an integral part of it, as is theological debate.

Should we, then, confirm that any decision taken at the synod is devoid of institutional guarantees? The answer to this question is that every decision, even at the highest level, always remains just a human word. The decision, if made with the expectation of the help of the Holy Spirit, is accompanied by the promise of God's fidelity. In this context, Evangelical faith speaks of a "promise", while Roman Catholic theology speaks of a "guarantee". But God's promise is nothing but a guarantee. The term "promise", however, emphasizes the gratuitous and voluntary action of the Holy Spirit. The institution of the Church is obliged to invoke His help, but it will always remain an "event" and will not be concretized in the institution of the Church.

Certainly the Holy Spirit works in history and in time. It does not succumb to "ecclesiological docetism", but its action always remains a "promise" of God, which institutions cannot appropriate. For the synod, the word of God is like manna in the desert, which is given day by day, but which cannot be saved for later. God's word must be trusted, but it cannot be held firm. It is not about depriving the ontological presence of God of its power, but about respecting the way it is given to us. God does identify with his Church, but because he does so by virtue of his promise, the Church cannot identify with God. This results in the possibility of changing synodal decisions, including those of a dogmatic nature. The opposite (Catholic) approach is the error of the *petitio principii*³².

3. Synodality in Catholic theology

As can be read in the document of the International Theological Commission Synodality in the life and mission of the Church, the Council of Jerusalem should be considered the first synodal assembly, which is the source of synodal practice in the Church (No. 22; cf. Acts 15; Gal 2:1-10). Valuable information about the development of synodal assemblies in the first three centuries of the Church is provided by the testimony of St. Ignatius of Antioch and St. Cyprian of Carthage (No. 25). From the 4th century, the development of diocesan and metropolitan synods can be observed, but a special place is occupied by ecumenical councils, convened from 325 (no. 26–30). It should also be recalled that "from the very beginning, the Church in Rome enjoyed special esteem because of the martyrdom suffered in it by the

³² Fulvio Ferrario, *Il significato teologico-ecclesiale della sinodalità: punti fermi e questioni aperte. La prospettiva protestante*, Path 1 (2014): pp. 151–153.

apostles: Peter – whose successor is recognized as the Bishop of Rome – and Paul. The apostolic faith firmly guarded in her, the ministry of authority exercised by her Bishop at the service of communion between the Churches, the rich practice of synodal life confirmed: all this makes the Church of Rome the point of reference for all the Churches that turn to her for the settlement of disputes, with the result that functioned as an appellate body” (no. 28).

In the second millennium, after the dissolution of communion between the Church of Constantinople and the Church of Rome (1054), synodal practice gradually took on different procedural forms in the West and the East. In the Eastern Churches, patriarchal and metropolitan synods continued to be convoked, while in Constantinople the practice of the permanent synod known as *endemousa* (cf. no. 31) was established³³.

3.1. The doctrine of the First and Second Vatican Councils on the primacy and collegiality of bishops

In the Roman Catholic Church we have two types or levels of synodality: the first concerns the primacy of the Pope and the College of Bishops (Ordo of Bishops) in union with him, and the second is the participation of all the baptized, all the lay faithful, in the life of the Church. The First and Second Vatican Councils focused primarily on the primacy of the Pope and the collegiality of bishops, but Vatican II included the College of Bishops in the context of the ecclesiology of communion.

The First Vatican Council, due to unforeseen circumstances, failed to develop a comprehensive ecclesiological vision, but only the doctrine of the papal office and to promulgate two dogmas: the infallibility of the teaching of the Pope and his universal jurisdiction³⁴. There was not enough time to develop a broader ecclesiological context in which the papal primacy could be presented in relation to the College of Bishops. This does not mean, however, that the Pope and the bishops did not present an ecclesiology according to

³³ Walenty Szymański, *Kompetencje konstantynopolińskiego synodu endemousa (do XI w.) odnośnie do sakramentów*, *Studia Warmińskie* 16 (1979): pp. 400–404; Błaza, *Synodalność (soborowość) w Kościołach wschodnich*, pp. 93–96.

³⁴ Dario Vitali, *Il Concilio Vaticano I nel contesto ecclesiologicalo del secolo XIX*, *Path* 13 (2014): pp. 69–76; Janusz Bujak, *"Idźcie do Józefa". Nauczanie papieży o św. Józefie. Od bł. Piusa IX do Franciszka* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Pallottinum, 2021), pp. 23–24. The First Vatican Council began on December 8, 1869. Four conciliar sessions were held during which two dogmatic constitutions were promulgated: *Dei Filius* on the Catholic Faith of April 24, 1870 and *Pastor Aeternus* on the Church of July 18, 1870. The first of them explains the relationship between faith and reason, while in the second, *Pastor Aeternus*, two dogmas were proclaimed: about the infallibility of the Pope in matters of faith and morals and about his universal jurisdiction. After the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War and the capture of Rome by the troops of Victor Emmanuel II on September 20, 1870, on October 20, 1870, with the document *Postquam Dei munere*, the Council was suspended by Pius IX sine die, although there were still 51 schemes to be discussed.

which the infallibility of the Pope is based on the infallibility of the Church and on the communion of the Pope with the episcopate, considered an institution by divine right. On the contrary, the awareness of this was widespread, as demonstrated by the dispute between the German bishops and the Chancellor of the Reich, Otto von Bismarck. In 1872, Bismarck, wanting to strike at the Catholic Church in Germany during the Kulturkampf period, spread false information among European governments that, as a result of the dogmatic definitions of the Council, the jurisdiction of the bishops was absorbed into the jurisdiction of the papacy, and the Pope, thanks to the dogma of infallibility, became the most absolutist monarch in the world. In response to Bismarck's slander, the German bishops in 1875, with Pius IX's knowledge and permission, sent a letter to the German chancellor in which they explained that "the Vatican decrees are wholly misunderstood when it is claimed that by them "the episcopal jurisdiction has dissolved into papal jurisdiction." » that the Pope « basically stood in the place of every single bishop », that bishops are only « tools of the Pope, and officials with no personal responsibility ». According to the constant teaching of the Catholic Church, which was also explicitly stated by the Vatican Council, bishops are not only instruments of the Pope, they are not "officers of the Pope with no personal responsibility", but "they are appointed by the Holy Spirit to be the successors of the Apostles"³⁵.

The Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) recognized that the relationship between the primacy of the Pope and the College of Bishops were among the main topics of the conciliar deliberations. Gianfranco Calabrese emphasizes that the Second Vatican Council placed the doctrine of the primacy and infallible magisterium of the Bishop of Rome in the context of service to the communion of the Church and fidelity to Christian revelation, but also in the sacramental context that justifies both the doctrine of the sacramentality of the episcopate and the Petrine ministry, as he says Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* No. 12³⁶.

The Vatican Council enabled the proper reception of both the primacy and teaching ministry of the Bishop of Rome, as well as the sacramental theology of the episcopate in the

³⁵ *Breviarium Fidei. Wybór doktrynalnych wypowiedzi kościoła*, ed. Stanisław Głowa, Ignacy Bieda (Poznań: Księgarnia św. Wojciecha, 1989), pp. 62–64; Antò Angel, *El misterio de la Iglesia*, vol. 2 (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos; Toledo: Estudio teológico de San Ildefonso, 1986), pp. 476–478.

³⁶ Gianfranco Calabrese, *Il «significato» teologico-ecclesiale della sinodalità: punti fermi e questioni aperte. Prospettiva cattolica*, *Path* 13, 1 (2014): p. 158. "The whole of the faithful, anointed by the Holy One, cannot err in faith, and this peculiarity is revealed by the supernatural sense of faith of the whole people, when "from the bishops down to the last of the lay faithful" it reveals its universal agreement in matters of faith and morals. For thanks to this sense of faith, aroused and sustained by the Spirit of truth, the People of God, under the guidance of the sacred teaching office – following which they no longer receive the word of man, but truly of God – steadfastly abide in the faith once delivered to the saints", penetrate more deeply into it with right judgment and apply it more fully in life" (LG 12).

synodal perspective, because it placed both within the framework of the Church, described as a filial and fraternal community, and the hierarchy, understood as a servant service to the Church. Indeed, the common baptismal dignity of all Christians and participation in the mystery of the communion of the Holy Trinity is at the root, in the theological and ecclesiological sense, of the common dignity of all the baptized and of the vocation of all Christians to holiness and common participation in the prophetic, priestly and kingly office of Christ, as can be read in *Lumen Gentium* No. 9: "For believers in Christ, born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible through the word of the living God, not of flesh, but of water and the Holy Spirit, are finally constituted "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a purchased people ... which once was not a people, but is now the people of God" (1 Pt 2:9-10) (LG 9).

The Second Vatican Council took over the teaching of the First Vatican Council on the primacy and infallible teaching of the Pope, but included them in the framework of a new vision of the Church, thanks to which the exercise of the Petrine ministry appeared in a new light, in synodal tension within the common priesthood of all the baptized, in relation to both the charism of all Christians, as well as to the hierarchical charisms of the bishops. The synodal perspective concerns both the common journey of all the baptized, which can be defined as "communal or baptismal synodality", and the ministries resulting from the ordination of the Bishop of Rome, bishops, priests, deacons, which can be defined as "ordained or hierarchical synodality". The common synodality of all the baptized and the ministerial or hierarchical synodality that manifests itself in the collegiality of the bishops with the Pope, and in a personal way in the Petrine ministry, are an expression of the communion of the People of God and the hierarchical ministry for the good of the universal Church, stresses Calabrese³⁷.

The author cites the opinion of Cardinal Walter Kasper, who notes that the Second Vatican Council confirmed the doctrine of the First Vatican Council, at the same time confirming the sacramental dimension of episcopal ordination³⁸, which does not come from the Pope and does not mean that the bishop is the representative of the Pope. The Council also reaffirmed the dignity of the laity's ministry, the importance of the local Church³⁹, and, above all, the concept of the Church as *communio*. As a result, synodal elements were restored,

³⁷ Calabrese, *Il «significato» teologico-ecclesiale della sinodalità: punti fermi e questioni aperte. Prospettiva cattolica*, pp. 160–164.

³⁸ Janusz Bujak, *Sakramentalność święceń biskupich w Konstytucji dogmatycznej o Kościele «Lumen gentium» nr 21, Colloquia Theologica Ottoniana* 1 (2006): pp. 17–29.

³⁹ Janusz Bujak, *Pierwszeństwo Kościoła powszechnego wobec Kościołów lokalnych, Collectanea Theologica* 76, 1 (2006): pp. 39–55.

especially at the level of synods and episcopal conferences. However, despite these achievements, the Council was unable to fully reconcile the new elements – which corresponded to the older tradition – with the teaching of the First Vatican Council. Many themes remained in isolation from one another, so that some speak of two ecclesiologies in the Council texts. This may be a bit of an exaggeration, but the compromise nature of many texts is obvious, giving rise to controversies in their interpretation after the end of the Council, which to some extent continue to this day. In this sense, not only Vatican I, but also Vatican II remain unfinished. The integration of the Petrine ministry within ecclesiology, the relationship of primacy and collegiality, the universal Church and the local Church, the interpretation of the direct authority of the Pope in all local churches, the question of the application of the principle of subsidiarity, and other theological and practical questions remained unresolved, writes Walter Kasper⁴⁰.

3.2. Synodality of the entire People of God

Calabrese notes that there is an essential relationship between the universal or baptismal synodality and the hierarchical synodality, which is expressed by the relationship between the common priesthood and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood: "The common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood, although they differ in essence and but they are ordered to each other, since both share in their own way in the one priesthood of Christ" (LG 10). Also, the 2018 document of the International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, also confirms that: "All the faithful are called by baptism to bear witness and proclaim the Word of truth and life, because they are members of the prophetic, priestly and kingly People of God" (no. 56).

Indeed, universal synodality results from the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation. Through Baptism, the faithful are personally and synodally involved in the prophetic, priestly and kingly office of Christ.

Above all, the prophetic function is exercised through the supernatural gift of faith (cf. LG 12). It is the fundamental source of universal synodality *in credendo*, as emphasized by Pope Francis in the Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* No. 119. The priestly function of the faithful places synodality in the mystery and liturgical dimension of the Church, not in the

⁴⁰ Walter Kasper, *Vie dell'unità. Prospettive dell'ecumenismo* (Brescia: Queriniana, 2006), 205, za: Calabrese, *Il «significato» teologico-ecclesiale della sinodalità: punti fermi e questioni aperte. Prospettiva cattolica*, pp. 163–164.

socio-political dimension⁴¹. Finally, baptismal and ecclesial synodality is related to the royal function of the People of God, which leads to witness and evangelization, teaches Pope Francis⁴².

3.3. Hierarchical and collegial synodality

By virtue of the sacrament of Holy Orders, bishops continue in time and space the apostolic ministry of the Twelve, and as the successors of the apostles, they continue the sacramental ministry of Christ, the Head of the Church: with him and to send them out to proclaim the Kingdom of God, he appointed these apostles as a college, that is, as a permanent body, at the head of which he placed Peter, chosen from among them" (cf. Jn 21:15-17) (LG 19)⁴³.

Hierarchical and collegial synodality is realized in two ways, emphasizes Calabrese, equal in sacramental and episcopal origin, synergistic in synodal and communal tension, different and asymmetrical in pastoral and ecclesial practice.

The first way to implement episcopal collegiality is to gather at an ecumenical council in communion with the Bishop of Rome, Peter's successor.

⁴¹ "Thus, through Baptism, people are grafted into the paschal mystery of Christ: in him, those who died together, who were buried together and who rose again, receive the spirit of adoption as children, "in which we cry: Abba, Father!" (Rom 8:15), and so they become the true worshipers that the Father is looking for. Likewise, whenever they eat the Lord's Supper, they herald the Lord's death until He comes. Therefore, on the very day of Pentecost, when the Church appeared to the world, "those who received the word" of Peter "were baptized". "And they persevered in the teaching of the apostles, in the breaking of bread and in the prayers... praising God and gaining favor with all the people" (Acts 2: 41-42, 47). Since then, the Church has never stopped coming together to celebrate the Paschal Mystery." (LG 6).

⁴² Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*: To Bishops, Priests and Deacons, Consecrated Persons, and Lay Faithful: On Proclaiming the Gospel in the Modern World (Częstochowa: Edycja św. Paweł, 2013), No. 239: "Proclaiming Jesus Christ, who is peace in person (cf. Eph 2:14), the new evangelization strongly encourages every baptized person to be an instrument of peace and a credible witness to a reconciled life. It is time, bearing in mind a culture that recognizes the value of dialogue as a form of encounter, to strive for consensus and common understanding, without isolating ourselves from the concern for a just society, capable of remembering and without excluding anyone. The main author, the historical subject of this process is people and their culture, not some class, group or elite. We do not need projects prepared by the few and addressed to the few, to the enlightened minority that wants to take over the monopoly on expressing the collective feelings of nations or societies. It's about an agreement to live together, it's about a social and cultural pact."; Calabrese, *Il «significato» teologico-ecclesiale della sinodalità: punti fermi e questioni aperte. Prospettiva cattolica*, pp. 173–175.

⁴³ Calabrese, *Il «significato» teologico-ecclesiale della sinodalità: punti fermi e questioni aperte. Prospettiva cattolica*, pp. 175–176; International Theological Commission, *Synodalność w życiu i misji Kościoła*, nr 62: "The Church is apostolic in three ways: because she was and continues to be built on the foundation of the apostles (cf. Eph 2:20); because, with the help of the Holy Spirit, he preserves and transmits their teaching (cf. Acts 2:42; 2 Tim 1:13-14); because it continues to be guided by the apostles through the College of Bishops, their successors and pastors in the church (Acts 20:28). We focus here on the relationship between the synodal life of the Church and the apostolic ministry, which is realized in the ministry of bishops in collegial and hierarchical communion with each other and with the Bishop of Rome. (own translation)

The second way of implementing hierarchical synodality is the service of the successor of St. Peter, carried out in a personal and direct way. The Bishop of Rome has received the charism of synodality within the *communio Ecclesiarum* and is called to strengthen the other particular Churches and their bishops in faith, in truth, in unity and in love. From the first centuries, the local Church of Rome with its bishop was recognized by other Churches and their bishops as the first see. The Petrine ministry thus has a synodal dimension, since its source is collegial, episcopal and ecclesial. As the Bishop of Rome, the Pope is in the College of Bishops, and as the successor of St. Peter is called to strengthen his brothers in fidelity to revelation and in the unity of the episcopal college and the communion of Churches in the universal Church. The Bishop of Rome serves the collegiality of bishops and the infallibility of the People of God. Bishops are called by the will of Christ to preside over their local Churches and find in the Bishop of Rome, the successor of Peter, the support to maintain fidelity to revelation and unity. Episcopal synodality is realized in many ways and institutions: ecumenical council, synod of bishops, bishops' conferences at the regional, national and continental levels, the College of Cardinals, the Roman curia, pastoral councils at various levels. All these forms serve the People of God in a liturgical perspective⁴⁴.

3.4. Synodal communion of the entire People of God and of the hierarchy: all, some, one

The document of the International Theological Commission Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church emphasizes that: "On the foundation of the doctrine of the *sensus fidei* of the People of God and the sacramental collegiality of the episcopate in hierarchical communion with the Pope, we can better understand the theology of synodality. The synodal dimension of the Church expresses the subjective character of all the baptized and, at the same time, the specific role of the episcopal ministry in collegial and hierarchical communion with the Bishop of Rome. This ecclesiological vision invites us to foster synodal communion between "all", "some" and "one". At different levels: of the particular Churches, at the level of their regional organization, and finally at the level of the universal Church, synodality presupposes the exercise of the *sensus fidei universitas fidelium* (all), the ministry of the College of Bishops together with the presbytery (some), and the ministry of unity between the bishop and the Pope (one). In this way, the synodal dynamic combines the communal

⁴⁴ Calabrese, *Il «significato» teologico-ecclesiale della sinodalità: punti fermi e questioni aperte. Prospettiva cattolica*, pp. 176–178; Rüdiger Althaus, *Die Synodalität (in) der Kirche aus Sicht des katholischen Kirchenrechts*, *Catholica* 2, 70 (2016): pp. 101–113.

dimension that embraces the entire People of God, the collegial dimension of the exercise of the episcopal ministry, and the primal ministry of the Bishop of Rome. This interdependence supports the *singularis conspiratio* between the faithful and pastors, which is an icon of the eternal conspiracy lived in the Holy Trinity” (n. 64).

The document specifies that: “In the Catholic and apostolic vision of synodality, there is a reciprocal relationship between *communio fidelium*, *communio episcoporum* and *communio ecclesiarum*. The concept of synodality is broader than that of collegiality, since it includes the participation of everyone in the Church and of all Churches. Collegiality expresses in the strict sense the confirmation and realization of the communion of the People of God within the episcopate, that is, through the College of Bishops *cum Petro et sub Petro*, and through it the communion between all the Churches. The concept of synodality implies the concept of collegiality, and vice versa, because these two realities, being different from each other, mutually support and validate each other. The teaching of the Second Vatican Council on the sacramentality of the episcopate and collegiality is the basic theological presupposition for a correct and comprehensive theology of synodality” (no. 66).

The document also emphasizes that synodality means listening to the pastors for the voice of the faithful, while accepting the distinction. A synod or council cannot make decisions without legitimate pastors. In a diocese, for example, it is necessary to distinguish between decision-making through a collaborative work of discernment, consultation and collaboration, and pastoral decision-making, which is under the authority of the bishop, the guarantor of apostolicity and catholicity. Preparing for a decision is a synodal task, and the decision itself falls within the competence of the bishop (no. 67–69).

Conclusion

The aim of the article was to show selected aspects of the theology of synods/councils in Orthodox, Lutheran and Roman Catholic theology. From the content of the article, certain conclusions can be drawn regarding the similarities and differences in the understanding of synodality in Churches and Christian Communities. Speaking of similarities, we can say that the current synods are considered an integral part of all three church structures discussed. At the latest, the institution of synods appeared in the Lutheran Communities, which until 1918 were governed by state authorities, with small exceptions that appeared in the nineteenth century. It was different in the Reformed Communities, which had a synodal organization from the beginning, and in the Church of England, which retained the pre-Reformation

synodal tradition. Most similarities exist between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches, because they share a common source of synodal organization, which is the first millennium of the Church and the role of bishops, who have always played a primary role in synods and councils. On the other hand, in the Lutheran Communities, synods are primarily a matter for the laity, which results from the theology of the common priesthood. Added to this is the lack of apostolic succession in Protestant Communities, and thus of the episcopate. Further differences concern the scope of synods. Synodality at the universal level has not existed in the Orthodox Churches since the “Eastern Schism” of 1054. This is mainly due to the lack of a primate (protos) who would be recognized as an authority by all other hierarchs of the Orthodox Churches. The Patriarch of Constantinople is treated as *primus inter pares*, but his position as the "first" among the bishops is questioned, primarily by the Patriarch of Moscow and other hierarchs associated with the Russian Orthodox Church. Lutheran Communities also do not have synodal structures at the universal level, perhaps with the exception of the Leuenberg Concordia, in which there are voices about the need to convene an Evangelical European Synod. However, such a synod would be difficult to reconcile with the various national ways of governing the churches. For example, the Danish National Church does not have the institution of a synod and does not plan to establish one, emphasizes Hauschildt⁴⁵. Thus, in the current situation, only the Catholic Church convenes ecumenical councils. A considerable theological challenge for the Eastern Churches and the Catholic Church is to find an answer to the question about the participation and role of the laity in synodal and conciliar assemblies.

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⁴⁵ Hauschildt, *Synodalität nach evangelischen Verständnis und im Hinblick auf die Debatte in der römisch-katholisch Kirche*, 114–115.

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