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Preaching the Word of God in the Polish synodal synthesis

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Abstract

Preaching the Word of God in the Polish synodal synthesis

Launched in the Catholic Church by Pope Francis on October 10, 2021, the Synod on Synodality is entering the next stages. Continental syntheses have already been published, preceded by diocesan and national syntheses. The nationwide synodal synthesis and individual diocesan surveys are valuable sources containing numerous opinions on the state of preaching the Word of God in Poland. Despite the noticeable lack of theological references, Polish syntheses are important for the theory and practice of preaching the Word of God. The syntheses were prepared based on the opinions of 65,000 people participating in parish and diocesan meetings and 4,2 thousand people who responded to surveys and written correspondence. This study aimed to extract from the syntheses mentioned above issues concerning the nature of the homily and its position in the liturgy, the preacher of the Word of God, the general assessment of preaching in Poland, as well as the assessment of the content and form of homily preaching. However, the opinions and proposals contained in the syntheses should be the subject of further, in-depth research in the theology of preaching the Word of God.

Keywords: preaching the Word of God, Synod, Polish synodal synthesis

Abstrakt

Przepowiadanie słowa Bożego w polskiej syntezie synodalnej

Synod o synodalności, rozpoczęty w Kościele katolickim przez papieża Franciszka 10 października 2021 roku, wchodzi w kolejne etapy. Opublikowano już syntezę kontynentalną, poprzedzone publikacjami syntez diecezjalnych i krajowych. Cenne źródło, zawierające liczne opinie na temat stanu przepowiadania słowa Bożego w Polsce, stanowią ogólnopolska synteza synodalna oraz poszczególne syntez diecezjalne. Mimo dostrzegalnego braku teologicznych odniesień, syntez polskie mają jednak duże znaczenia dla teorii i praktyki przepowiadania słowa Bożego. Syntezy sporządzono na podstawie opinii 65 tysięcy osób uczestniczących w spotkaniach parafialnych i diecezjalnych oraz opinii 42 tysięcy osób, które udzieliły odpowiedzi w ankietach i korespondencji pisemnej. Celem niniejszego opracowania było wydobycie z wyżej wymienionych syntez problematyki dotyczącej: natury homilii i jej miejsca w liturgii, głosiciela słowa Bożego, ogólnej oceny kaznodziejstwa w Polsce oraz oceny treści i formy przepowiadania homilijnego. Opinie oraz zawarte w syntezach propozycje powinny być przedmiotem dalszych, pogłębionych badań z zakresu teologii przepowiadania słowa Bożego.

Słowa kluczowe: głoszenie słowa Bożego, synod, polska synteza synodalna

Launched in the Catholic Church by Pope Francis on October 10, 2021, the Synod on the issue of synodality in the Church is entering the next stages of deliberations. Continental syntheses have already been published, preceded by diocesan and national surveys. In Poland, most dioceses have published a diocesan synthesis (88%, 37 dioceses). Only five dioceses have not made this document public. Three of them issued a press release or a short overview of the content of the synthesis. The next two did not refer to the completion of this stage of the synodal process.¹ Diocesan syntheses resulted from numerous meetings, surveys, and letters and constituted the basic material for preparing the national synthesis. About 50,000 people participated in parish and diocesan meetings over 15 thousand people. In nearly half of the dioceses, a survey (or surveys) was proposed and completed by approximately 30,000 people. Over half of the dioceses provided e-mail boxes or contact forms, receiving over 12,000 letters.² One of the most frequently discussed synodal topics was preaching the Word of God, especially the homily, which is part of the liturgy.

The Homiletical Directory³ published in 2014 indicates that

a very simple dynamic shapes the homily: it is a reflection on the meaning of the readings and prayers of a given celebration in the light of the Paschal Mystery and leads the assembly to the Eucharistic celebration in which those gathered to share in this mystery (n. 5).

At the same time, the Directory encourages pastoral and scientific research, especially in homiletical theology. One of the important demands of Polish homilists is the need to research the reception of the Church's teaching on preaching the Word of God in Polish preaching practice.⁴ The nationwide synodal synthesis and individual diocesan syntheses are valuable sources containing numerous opinions on the

¹ Statystyki synodalne, <https://synod.org.pl/statystyki-synodalne/> (Aug 6, 2023).

² Synod 2021–2023. Synteza krajowa, https://synod.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Synteza_SYNOD_2021_2023_2.pdf (Aug 6, 2023).

³ Kongregacja ds. Kultu Bożego i Dyscypliny Sakramentów, *Dyrektorium homiletyczne*, Poznań 2014.

⁴ H. Simon, *Homiletyka polska 1965–2005*, in: *Polska bibliografia homiletyczna 1945–2005*, eds. W. Przyczyna, L. Szewczyk, Kraków 2007, s. 40–41; L. Szewczyk, *Kierunki badań*

state of preaching the Word of God in Poland. This study aims to extract from the syntheses mentioned above issues concerning the nature of the homily and its place in the liturgy, the preacher of the Word of God, the general assessment of preaching in Poland, and the assessment of the content and form of homily preaching.

1. Liturgical context of the homily

Faith and the sacraments are two complementary aspects of church life; Faith, aroused by the proclamation of the Word of God, is nourished by grace and grows in the encounter with the Risen Lord, which occurs in sacramental signs. Faith is expressed in a rite, and the rite increases and confirms faith.⁵ The homily, therefore, explaining the words of Holy Scripture or a liturgical text should lead the community of the faithful to the active celebration of the Eucharist so that those gathered keep in their lives what they have received through faith.⁶ Thanks to this lively lecture, “the word of God read, and the liturgical rites of the Church become more effective, especially if the homily is well prepared.”⁷ Liturgy is “a privileged environment in which God speaks to us in the present of our lives; speaks today to his people who listen and respond,”⁸ and “the liturgical framework is the key to interpreting biblical fragments read during the celebration.”⁹

Synodal syntheses repeatedly address the issue of concern for the beauty of the liturgy and its importance for the experience of faith. The national synthesis identified the liturgy as the center of the faith experience.

w homiletyce polskiej na podstawie zawartości „Bibliografii homiletycznej”, „Polonia Sacra” 21 (2017) no. 2, pp. 45–62.

5 Benedykt XVI, Adhortacja apostolska o Eucharystii, źródle i szczyt życia i misji Kościoła *Sacramentum caritatis*, 2007, 6.

6 Sobór Watykański II, Konstytucja o liturgii świętej *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 1964, 10.

7 Kongregacja Kultu Bożego, Wprowadzenie teologiczno-pastoralne do Lektionarza mszalnego, 1981, 24.

8 Benedykt XVI, Adhortacja apostolska o Słowie Bożym w życiu i misji Kościoła *Verbum Domini*, 2010, 52.

9 Kongregacja ds. Kultu Bożego i Dyscypliny Sakramentów, *Dyrektorium homiletyczne*, 2014, 15.

The beauty of the liturgy lived in the community helps us experience God, is a source of communion with Him, and helps us stay in it daily. Liturgy builds the parish community. Thus, Evangelization also depends on the beauty of the liturgy. During the liturgy, regardless of formation, commitment, priorities, and everyday choices, we can be together and build a sense of unity in our diversity (2.7).¹⁰

In diocesan syntheses, attention was paid to proper experience and personal involvement during the liturgy (14.4.4) and the need to care for the beauty of the liturgy, which is expressed in good preparation of services, singing lessons, and attention to the appropriate level of liturgical music (33.4). Participants of synod meetings pointed to the frequent misunderstanding of the liturgy (33.4), the lack of proper reading of liturgical signs (2.7), and poor preparation for accurate involvement in the liturgy (33.4). An important role in the fitting participation of the liturgy is played by its presider, the celebrant, who—through how he celebrates the liturgy and arrangement for it, demonstrates a level of commitment to the development of faith. The celebrant helps you experience the beauty and depth of the liturgy. “When a priest is real at the altar, when ‘one feels’ his authentic involvement in the celebration, he is building a genuine relationship with God” (20.4). The attitude of the celebrant: concentration, lack of rush, maintaining silence—all this is very helpful in deeply experiencing the Eucharist (37.4).

The dominant postulates from the synodal syntheses included the request to conduct liturgical catechesis and explain the liturgy’s purpose and meaning, gestures, symbols, and signs (2.7; 33.4). There was also a repeated suggestion of greater involvement of lay people in the

¹⁰ The study uses the numbering of individual syntheses following the notation used in the List of published diocesan syntheses: (2) national synthesis, (3) Archdiocese of Białystok, (4) Diocese of Bielsko-Żywiec, (5) Diocese of Bydgoszcz, (6) Archdiocese of Częstochowa, (9) diocese of Ełk, (11) archdiocese of Gniezno, (12) diocese of Gliwice, (14) archdiocese of Katowice, (18) diocese of Łomża, (20) archdiocese of Łódź, (21) diocese of Opole, (22) diocese of Pelplin, (23) diocese Płock, (25) Diocese of Radom, (27) Diocese of Rzeszów, (29) Archdiocese of Szczecin-Kamień, (30) Diocese of Świdnica, (33) Archdiocese of Warmia, (34) Archdiocese of Warsaw, (35) Diocese of Warsaw-Praga, (36) diocese of Włocławek, (37) archdiocese of Wrocław, (38) diocese of Zielona Góra-Gorzów, (39) military diocese in Poland.

liturgy (including as part of the service of cantors and lectors) (14.4.4; 37.4). The liturgical formation of the faithful should come to pass through homilies and catechism conferences, adult catechesis, and biblical formation (14.4.5). The Liturgy of the Word is an important didactic element of the Holy Mass. “It is there that God and the Church speak to man” (3.4.2). According to diocesan syntheses, the homily has special significance during the Eucharist (18.3.1).

2. Preacher of the Word of God

The effectiveness of preaching the Word of God depends largely on the preacher, on his competence, zeal, and knowledge. This effectiveness is influenced by the preacher’s testimony of faith, knowledge of the message being preached, the problems affecting the listeners, and the ability to use the word.¹¹ Thus, the purpose of priestly life is to proclaim the Gospel to the world, and the priest is to be, above all, a dispenser of the word of God and is sent to proclaim the Gospel to everyone.¹² It is through the preaching of the word of God that faith is born in people (Rom 10:14–17). However, it is very important that the preacher of the Word of God in every environment and at every time

places the Word of God at the center of his own spiritual life, knows his people well, reflects on the events of the times, constantly strives to develop skills that help him preach effectively, and, above all, everything so that in his spiritual poverty he calls on the Holy Spirit with faith, because it is mainly thanks to Him that the hearts of the faithful open to the mysteries of God.¹³

11 L. Szewczyk, *Głoszenie słowa Bożego w środowisku zsekularyzowanym*, Katowice 2019, p. 125; por. H. Sławiński, *Ludzki wkład w skuteczność przepowiadania słowa Bożego*, „Polonia Sacra” 72 (2011) no. 28, pp. 227–241.

12 Jan Paweł II, *Adhortacja apostołska o formacji kapłanów we współczesnym świecie Pastores dabo vobis*, 1992, 15, 26.

13 Kongregacja ds. Kultu Bożego i Dyscypliny Sakramentów, *Dyrektorium homiletyczne*, 2014, 3. Cf. L. Szewczyk, *Głosić odważnie na rozstajach dróg. Zadania głosiciela słowa Bożego w środowisku zsekularyzowanym*, „Polonia Sacra” 25 (2021) no. 4, s. 5–21; H. Sławiński, *Homilia w zgromadzeniu eucharystycznym. Recepcja współczesnego nauczania Kościoła w „Dyrektorium homiletycznym”*, Kraków 2018.

Yet, much attention was paid to the preacher of the Word of God in the synodal syntheses. Firstly, the need for proper preparation for preaching the word was pointed out. A change was proposed in the seminary formation of graduates, in which it is important to “substantive preparation for preaching the word (quality of homilies) and sensitivity to other people so that the priesthood is a service and not an authority (suggestions of practices in hospitals, nursing homes, families and communication workshops)” (20.3.3). It is also important to include workshops on homiletics and preaching in the permanent formation of priests, “so that sermons are not read from paper, but spoken words are thoughtful, and coming from the heart and mind of the preacher” (23.2.3). An important element of pastoral service is the careful preparation of individual preaching units. Appropriate homily preparation expresses the preacher’s concern for the beauty of the liturgy (14.4.4; 39.8). When preparing a homily, one should take into account the need to use language understandable to the current listeners, content adapted to the level of experience of the addressees and consistent with the teachings of the Church, “no cult of announcements and avoidance of unnecessary digressions” (37.4).

According to participants of synod meetings and surveys, the preacher of the Word of God for listeners should be an authority who testifies on God. The foundation of this witness is “personal prayer, openness to the Holy Spirit, and readiness for constant conversion” (37.5). The faithful look for authorities and want to follow and listen to them. The condition of the community and the possibility of following Christ together depends on the qualities of pastors (openness, tendency to dialogue, readiness to listen and devote time to the faithful, attention to the beauty of the liturgy, and the way of preaching the Word of God). They also allow them to be admonished and shown the way, but only on the condition that their attitude and testimony of life are clear” (21.4). For the listeners of the Word of God, the service of priests is very important, “who are endowed with the gift of the word and know how to share it” (25.2). In Christian formation, the spirituality of “walking together” is very important. Such formation takes place when, in the priestly ministry, one joyfully witnesses to the living God and “realizes the community’s obligations through expressive service, through apostolic involvement,

e.g., in charity activities; when he cares about the transmission of the kerygma (prepared homilies, refined and enriched retreats)” (27/04/10).

3. General assessment of preaching the Word of God in Poland

Preaching the word of God is one of the elements of priestly activity that is often the subject of criticism. Gerard Siwek says whoever wants to criticize priests “aims at this very spot, hoping not to miss, and will always be somewhat right.”¹⁴ Hence, harsh criticism of the preachers of the Word of God has become a manifestation of a kind of political correctness. In popular opinion, “proselytization” and “preaching the word of God” often evoke negative associations.¹⁵ So, listeners of the word preached in the church often express the opinion that church speakers use archaic language, additionally embellished with excessive and incomprehensible seriousness. The reason for a negative opinion about the preachers of the Word of God may be the reprehensible way of preaching, lack of sufficient knowledge of the content of the message and the problems of the listeners, revealed personal shortcomings, but also, and perhaps above all, the reprehensible lifestyle of the preachers.¹⁶

The presented synodal syntheses are dominated by a very low assessment of contemporary preaching in Poland. In the national synthesis, this critical voice is very clear.

During the synod, the problem of the low standard of homilies was raised. The issue of inappropriate presentation of Catholic social teaching was introduced, which is why many people perceive the discussion of this topic as political sermons, sometimes even with personal references. [...] In many cases, priests are unprepared to preach the word of God [...]. Celebrants often read other people’s texts downloaded from the Internet and preach sermons or homilies that are too short or too long and complicated, thus disregarding or even insulting the

14 G. Siwek, *Głosiciel słowa Bożego*, in: *Sztuka bycia księdzem*, ed. by J. Augustyn, Kraków 2010, p. 73.

15 G. Siwek, *Osobowość kaznodziei. Rozważania nieojobyżne*, Kraków 2014, pp. 174–175.

16 G. Siwek, *Osobowość kaznodziei*, p. 102.

listeners (2.7). Much of the above critical opinion was taken from the synodal synthesis of the Archdiocese of Częstochowa.¹⁷

Participants of synod meetings and respondents complained about shortcomings and mistakes made during the liturgical celebrations. They are particularly offended by “preaching homilies that are too short, general, not based on biblical texts, devoid of examples, and not very engaging” (38.4). Moreover, the factors that make it difficult for the faithful to participate actively in the liturgy include rush and routine, unprepared homilies, homilies without valuable content, moralizing, and “politicizing” while preaching the Word of God (22.1).

Subsequent diocesan syntheses also indicate the poor level of preaching in Poland. The syntheses reveal “dissatisfaction regarding the word of God preached in temples. It was painfully pointed out that not all priests were properly preparing for this task. (36.2.2). The faithful attach great importance to the quality of the word preached, and when it does not meet their expectations (“bad, boring, sermons read from paper”), they look for other parishes to attend (35.3.18.1). The reasons for the decline in the number of participants in the Eucharist and services included, among others, “lack of awareness of what is happening, e.g., during the Eucharist, lack of silence after the homily and reception of the Eucharist” (11.3.1). The relationship between parishioners and priests is vital in assessing individual clergy members’s preaching service. Synodal surveys show that the evaluation of individual parishes is based on evaluating the pastors serving in them.

If priests in the parish (especially the parish priest) enable the faithful to express themselves, listen to them, devote their attention and time, ask for their opinion, allow them to co-decide about the parish, pay attention to the content of homilies and catechesis, do not treat parishioners in advance based on I know everything

¹⁷ “In many parishes, the problem of low levels of homilies was noticed. They lack a deep explanation of the Word of God and the truths of faith, and often any reference to the Bible. The problem of inappropriate preaching of Catholic social teaching was also raised in many parishes, which is why many people perceive it as preaching political sermons, sometimes even with personal references” (6.2.1.1).

best, they will be perceived positively, and thus the assessment of the Church changes (35.3.2).

In addition to the negative assessment of the state of the preaching ministry in Poland, which dominates in Synodal syntheses, positive opinions should also be noted. Yet, it was pointed out in the diocesan syntheses that “in many parishes, priests celebrate Holy Masses and liturgical services with due respect and piety. Homilies are based on the Word of God, are preached in an understandable language, refer to the problems of the faithful, and are free from political commentaries” (9.2.4). “Many priests reach out to their listeners in their homilies and discuss important, existential, and contemporary topics” (34.4).

Many syntheses also contain particular conclusions and postulates regarding the renewal and improvement of the quality of preaching the Word of God in Poland. To strengthen the co-responsibility of the parish community, the faithful should be allowed to comment on the level of the homilies delivered (29.4). The surveyed faithful pointed out the need for priests to “care for the quality of the liturgy and the preached Word of God, which should be free from political references, moralizing and lack of respect for the views of others” (21.4). Listeners expect short, thoughtful sermons that help them better understand the Word of God they have heard (36.2.4). The faithful perceive the homily as an important source of inspiration for understanding the Word and translating it into their own life experiences (20.3.3). The homily should be prayerful and thoughtful, having a deep message that will help listeners understand the readings they have heard and put them into action (36.2.2), and should also be based on the Word and result from his meditation, refer to the problems of the faithful and be a response to political comments (11.3.1; 20.3.3). According to respondents, homilies should provide “movements, emotions, inspiration, words that [listeners] can reflect on and that change their lives” (35.3.18.1). “The faithful believe that broadcasting the Mass could improve the quality of parish homilies” (35/03/17). Among the synodal postulates regarding preaching the Word of God, the dominant one was a general encouragement to increase concern for improving the quality of sermons (e.g., 11.3.5; 14.4.3; 39.2).

4. Content of the homily

The preaching content is constant and unchanging because the essence of the Gospel remains unchanged, which is still the good news transmitted by God. Thus, in preaching the word of God, we must always consider the unchanging Gospel and the current life of the Church and theology, which is the correct interpretation of the revealed word of God. The content of preaching the word of God is the good news about Jesus Christ, the Lord and Savior, and more broadly—the revelation of God and man’s existential problems. And therefore, preaching God’s word draws its content from the Bible and observations of the world where modern man lives and creates. Thus, the preacher is tasked with conveying the truths of faith as well as the principles of Christian life.¹⁸

Polish synodal syntheses, containing the voices of participants of synodal meetings and statements of survey participants, also referred to the content of the homily. Some syntheses included suggestions regarding the general scope of the content of the sermon, while others paid particular attention to the presence of biblical, liturgical, existential, and moral elements. According to the participants of synod meetings, it is necessary to “explain basic concepts such as love, sin, sacrifice, fasting and to preach the word of God more often in a historical and contemporary context, as well as taking into account existential and social factors” (18.3.1). For that reason, homilies should include “Sitz im Leben” of a specific parish, answering biblical, theological, moral, and canonical questions that concern people” (23.2.3). The disturbing phenomenon of emerging discrepancies in the presentation of the Church’s teaching was also noticed, “especially on the level of morality” (39.2).

Referring to the contents of the homilies, the lack of a biblical element was pointed out. The national synthesis noted that the sermons preached “lack not only a deep explanation of the Word read and the truths of faith, but also any reference to the Bible” (2.7). This time, though, the editors of

¹⁸ L. Szewczyk, *Głoszenie słowa Bożego w środowisku zsekularyzowanym*, Katowice 2019, p. 125; S. Dyk, H. Sławiński, L. Szewczyk, *Przepowiadanie homilijne w Polsce. Analiza aspektów treściowych i formalnych wybranych homilii*, „Collectanea Theologica” 93 (2023) no. 2, p. 192. Cf. *Głosimy Pana Jezusa Chrystusa. Treść przepowiadania*, ed. by H. Sławiński, Kraków 2017.

the national synthesis used the content from the synthesis of the Archdiocese of Częstochowa.¹⁹ For respondents, Sunday homilies should build Christian identity and strengthen their affiliation with the Church. They should also “translate the Bible, biblical symbols, and explain the motives of biblical heroes” (3.5.5). The faithful expect a greater presence of the Word of God not only in preaching but also in the entire pastoral activity of their clergy. “They want to get to know the Bible even better and learn to discern reality in a biblical key” (6.2.1.2). Participants of the synod teams also appealed to strengthen the liturgical element of the homilies. Liturgy of the Word Homilists should more often explain individual parts of the Holy Mass as well as the signs, gestures, and attitudes occurring during the liturgy (18.3.1). To deepen conscious and active participation in the Holy Mass among the faithful, it is proposed to preach homilies and conferences on liturgical topics (3.4.3). The synodal syntheses also referred to existential content in homily preaching.

According to the respondents, “the best sermons are born from the priests’ ability to listen to the faithful and authentic understanding of their problems [...]. Haste and the lack of ability to accompany listening mean that attempts to respond to the faithful’s difficulties are taken out of context and do not address the essence of the problems they are experiencing, becoming empty moralizing (37.2). Thus, homilies should be understandable as well as uplifting and display the connection of God’s Word with the everyday life of listeners (37.4). At the same time, participants of synod meetings and surveys warned against moralizing from the pulpit. In the synthesis of the Archdiocese of Częstochowa, there are words, later repeated by the national synthesis,²⁰ that some of the faithful are “discouraged by preaching homilies only in a moralizing tone; those that lack the Good News and the kerygma” (6.2.1.1). The synthesis of the Archdiocese of Częstochowa raises the issue of “incompetent preaching of Catholic social teaching, which is why many

¹⁹ They [homilies] lack not only a deep explanation of the Word of God being read and the truths of faith, but also often any reference to the Bible (6.2.1.1).

²⁰ The moralizing tone of homilies in which there is no place for the Good News and the kerygma is also discouraging (2.7).

people perceive it as preaching political sermons, sometimes even with personal references” (6.2.1.1). The national synthesis also follows this statement.²¹

5. The formal side of the homily preaching

The specificity of church preaching lies in its precisely defined content, different from all other public speeches. This proclamation, which in terms of substance (content) is the word of God, and in terms of form (form)—a human word, can be described as “the word of God in a human word.”²² Thus, there is a dependence between the effectiveness of God’s word and its human, linguistic shape. The formal side of a sermon is not just an addition to the actual content, “clothing the message,” but is an integral part of it. Contemporary preaching should be characterized by a courageous search for “new signs, new symbols, and new ways of transmitting the Word.”²³ The message proclaimed is effective if it can arouse attention and interest. An interesting form of expression becomes useful for listeners because it encourages them to change, pointing to new possibilities in life.²⁴ The document *Instrumentum laboris* prepared for the first session of the 16th General Assembly of the Ordinary Synod of Bishops in October 2023, analyzing national and continental synodal syntheses, recognizes the need for an effort to renew the language used by the Church in the liturgy, in preaching, in catechesis as well as in sacred art.

Without weakening or diminishing the depth of the mystery proclaimed by the Church or the richness of her traditions, the renewal of language must aim to

²¹ „The issue of inappropriate presentation of Catholic social teaching was raised, which is why many people perceive the discussion of this topic as political sermons, sometimes even with personal references” (2.7).

²² W. Przyczyna, *Słowo Boże i ludzkie w kazaniu. Charakterystyczne cechy kazania jako utworu mówionego*, in: *Współczesna polszczyzna w odmianie opracowanej (oficjalnej)*, eds. Z. Kurzowa, W. Śliwiński, Kraków 1994, p. 167.

²³ Franciszek, *Adhortacja apostołska o głoszeniu Ewangelii we współczesnym świecie Ewangelii gaudium*, 2013, 167.

²⁴ L. Szewczyk, *Głoszenie słowa Bożego w środowisku zsekularyzowanym*, Katowice 2019, p. 234.

make them accessible and attractive to the men and women of our times, without constituting an obstacle that keeps them away.²⁵

Much attention was devoted to the formal side of the sermon in synodal syntheses in Poland. The main focus was on the language of homilies, sermons, and pastoral letters. In the synodal syntheses, the preaching language was described as incomprehensible, hermetic, unreal (4.3; 11.3.1; 18.3.1), “hermetic” and “detached from life” (34.4). The language of pastoral letters and homilies “is often completely incomprehensible to the faithful and is often the object of ridicule among young people. The Church is completely unable to keep up with the changes in interpersonal communication, and in this respect, the clergy should also be supported by lay people. The bubble in which priests are confined does not allow insight into the everyday lives of their parishioners” (20.3.3). It was pointed out that “the Church often uses a stigmatizing and aggressive voice (14.4.3). The need to adapt the language of preaching (“theological and ecclesiastical”) to the realities of modern times (4.3), to avoid platitudes (5.2), and the need to improve the skills of seminarians and clergy in the field of preaching and using the appropriate language of expression, especially during the liturgy (23.2.3), were emphasized. According to the members of the synod teams, “the language of kerygma, fact, and testimony should dominate in preaching the Word of God” (14.4.4).

Several diocesan syntheses also included comments on the language of the pastoral letters. Attention was drawn to the “low pastoral effectiveness of reading any pastoral letters from the pulpit” (23.2.3). These letters “are not always edited in a way that is understandable to the average recipient” (6.2.1.1). The letters note “the lack of a coherent message, contradictory messages and anachronistic and incomprehensible language” (14.4.3). It was also postulated that “bishops should make teaching and decisions at the level of the Episcopal Conference in the spirit of synodality and inspiring unity, as well as communicate this teaching in homilies and pastoral letters more concisely and in simple and understandable language” (21.5).

²⁵ XVI Zgromadzenie Ogólne Zwyczajne Synodu Biskupów, „Instrumentum laboris” na pierwszej sesję, październik 2023, p. 60.

6. Other conclusions and proposals

Among the conclusions and proposals dominating the national and diocesan synthesis, the first one to mention is the postulate of preaching a daily homily. In the national synthesis, this time referring to the text of the synthesis of the Archdiocese of Częstochowa, it was pointed out that “the faithful greatly appreciate those places where a short homily is preached every day during the Holy Mass, in which the word of God is explained” (2.7). Many diocesan syntheses emphasized that the faithful expect short daily homilies from priests (4.3; 12.4; 18.3.1; 30.3.2; 33.4; 39.2). A daily homily allows the faithful to understand better the meaning of the word of God addressed to them and makes it easier to find answers to their questions (3.4.2), encourages reflection and improvement of life (11.2.4), uplifts the spirit and shows the connection of the Word of God with the everyday life of listeners (37.4). The conclusions also include the need to “organize evangelization missions and retreats in parishes” (14.4.5), reflections on the current method of “conducting Advent and Lent retreats” (23.2.3), the need for catechism sermons (25.2) and liturgical catechesis (4.3). The Church’s greater use of new means of communication than before was also appreciated (such as social media, online broadcasts, YouTube videos)” (14.4.3).

Conclusions

This study aimed to extract issues related to preaching the Word of God from the national and diocesan synthesis. The analyzed syntheses do not have the character of theological texts. The coordinator of the work of the Synod on Synodality in the Church in Poland, Archbishop Adrian Galbas, noted

that during the continental and previously national meetings, practical issues came to the fore [...]. Meanwhile, theology must be the foundation. Good theology shapes practice, not the other way around, so it cannot be that some practical demands influence theology – and I feel such a threat exists.²⁶

²⁶ Abp Galbas: w pracach synodalnych trzeba pamiętać o teologii, <https://www.ekai.pl/abp-galbas-w-pracach-synodalnych-trzeba-pamietac-o-teologii/> (Sep 6, 2023).

Despite the noticeable lack of theological references, Polish syntheses are important for the theory and practice of preaching the Word of God. It's hard to ignore the voice of 65,000 people. Faithful participating in parish and diocesan meetings and 42 thousand people who responded to surveys and written correspondence. Both in the national synthesis, which in the matter of preaching the Word of God essentially duplicates the content of the synthesis of the Archdiocese of Częstochowa, and in the vast majority of diocesan syntheses, the “low level of homilies preached,” the lack of a biblical element,²⁷ the frequent “politicizing” and moralizing, and the language of the letters were pointed out pastoral messages and homilies, which is incomprehensible, hermetic and detached from the lives of the listeners. However, it is also worth noting many positive opinions in which the homily is perceived as an important source of a better understanding of the Word of God and helps obtain answers to questions bothering listeners. Hence, the common expectation is that it be preached every day. It is also important that many applications and proposals contain contradictory suggestions regarding the length of the sermon. Therefore, the above opinions and recommendations in the syntheses should be the subject of further, in-depth research in the theology of preaching the Word of God.

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²⁷ A different opinion is presented by the authors of the study, who examine the content and formal aspects of contemporary homily preaching in Poland: S. Dyk, H. Sławiński, L. Szewczyk, *Przepowiadanie homilijne w Polsce. Analiza aspektów treściowych i formalnych wybranych homilii*, „Collectanea Theologica” 93 (2023) no. 2, pp. 189–225.

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