



Polonia Sacra



Rev. Adam Kubiś Early Christian prophetesses in the New Testament • **Rev. Stanisław Dyk** The synthesis of the Gospel and life as a goal of evangelization • **Rev. Leszek Szewczyk** Preaching the Word of God in the Polish synodal synthesis • **Rev. Henryk Sławiński** Preparing a homily as an important element of pastoral care • **Ryszard Hajduk CSsR** The truth about man and for man... • **Cezary Smuniewski** The vein of gold. In search of a methodological renewal of dogmatics... • **Rev. Maciej Szczepaniak** The nomination of Rev. Kazimierz Rolewski as bishop of Katowice and the reasons for the refusal • **Rev. Bartosz Trojanowski** John Paul II and Benedict XVI's concern for the protection of the faithful against the most serious crimes, with particular emphasis on the sexual abuse of minors committed by clergy • **Bogdan Kulik MSF** The apocalyptic thought in the early Church as a response to the fears in the 21st century

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The apocalyptic thought in the early Church as
a response to the fears in the 21st century


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Early Christian prophetesses in the New Testament

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Abstract

Early Christian prophetesses in the New Testament

This article presents a characterization of several women identified explicitly in the New Testament as prophetesses: (1) Philip's daughters in Acts 21:9; and (2) the prophetesses in the community in Corinth mentioned in 1 Cor 11:5. The article highlights the historical and theological context of their activity and defines the content and object of Christian prophecy. The presentation of these two groups of prophetesses points out the major exegetical problems presented by the text and contemporary attempts to resolve them.

Keywords: prophetesses, Acts 21:9, 1 Cor 11:5, 1 Cor 14:34–35

Abstrakt

Wczesnochrześcijańskie prorokinie w Nowym Testamencie

Artykuł prezentuje charakteryzację kobiet, które w Nowym Testamencie określone są explicite jako prorokinie: (1) córki Filipa w Dz 21, 9 oraz (2) kobiety-prorokinie we wspólnocie w Koryncie z 1 Kor 11, 5. Autor zwraca uwagę na historyczny i teologiczny kontekst ich działalności oraz definiuje treść i przedmiot chrześcijańskiego prorocstwa. W prezentacji każdej z dwóch grup kobiet wskazano na najważniejsze problemy egzegetyczne i współczesny próby ich rozwiązania.

Słowa kluczowe: prorokinie; Dz 21, 9; 1 Kor 11, 5; 1 Kor 14, 34–35

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The New Testament contains four texts that explicitly point out women prophetesses. The first is Luke 2:36, presenting the figure of Anna. The second is the reference in Acts 21:9 to the prophesying daughters of Philip the Evangelist. The third one, 1 Cor 11:5, indicates the existence of prophetesses within the community at Corinth. The fourth, of a different sort altogether, is the mention of the prophetess Jezebel in Revelation 2:20.¹

This article's focus is on women prophetesses functioning within Christian communities, and for this reason we will omit, first, the person of the prophetess Anna, who still belongs to the economy of the Old Testament.² Her presence in the Jerusalem Temple at the time of the presentation of Jesus, the Messiah, serves as an announcement of the outpouring of the gift of the Spirit on "all flesh" in the Messianic era, including women (Joel 2:28 [3:1]; Acts 2:17). Using his characteristic prolepsis, Luke presents her as the progenitor of the Christian prophetesses. We will also omit the presentation of Jezebel from Revelation 2:20, since she is a decidedly negative figure, an anti-example of Christian prophecy. Indeed, her status as a prophetess is negated by the statement: "Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess" (2:20). The author of Revelation unequivocally suggests that Jezebel is not a prophetess. Interestingly, in the New Testament, it is only in the cases of Anna and Jezebel that the noun *προφῆτις* 'prophetess' is used (Luke 2:36; Rev 2:20); the daughters of Philip and the Corinthian prophetesses are described using other forms of the verb *προφητεύω* 'to prophesy' (see, however, 1 Cor 14:29,32, where *προφῆται* 'prophets' applies to both men and women). If the sign of being a prophet is being filled with the Holy Spirit and uttering words coming from God, including words revealing the mysteries of the present and/or

1 F. Scott Spencer, *Out of Mind, Out of Voice: Slave-Girls and Prophetic Daughters in Luke-Acts*, "Biblical Interpretation" 7 (1999) Issue 2, pp. 133–155, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1163/156851599X00065>; Author perceives the fulfillment of the prophecy of slave women in Acts 2:18 in three texts: Luke 22:56; Acts 2:14–15; 16:17. However, it isn't easy to classify these texts as dealing explicitly with early Christian prophecy.

2 The Old Testament mentions four prophetesses: Miriam—sister of Moses (Exodus 15:20), Deborah (Judges 4:4), Huldah (2 Kings 22:14; 2 Chronicles 34:22) and Isaiah's wife (Isaiah 8:3). Rabbinical writings, e.g. Talmud (*b. Meg.* 16a) and midrashes (Gen. Rab. 67:9; 72:6), add matriarchs (e.g., Sarah—Gen 17), but also Anna (1 Samuel 1), Abigail (1 Samuel 25) and Esther. The false prophetess is Noadiah (Neh 6:14).

future, then the title ‘prophetess’ might equally be applied to Elizabeth (Luke 1:41–45), as well as to Mary (the Magnificat in Luke 1:46–55 meets the criterion of prophetic text, including its reference to the future). Nevertheless, we will deliberately omit the presentation of these two women, successive prophetesses prefiguring (again, Luke’s prolepsis) the charism of prophecy commonly present among the members of the Church. This decision, again, is dictated by the article’s precise subject of interest: the presence of prophetesses in early Christian communities (Elizabeth, like Anna, belongs to the OT economy, while Mary stands astride on the boundary between two eras of salvation history, arguably belonging to both of them).³

The focus of this article, then, is limited to the daughters of Philip the Evangelist and the women of the Church in Corinth, the criterion for our choice being the ecclesial context, i.e. that these women are members of the early Church of apostolic times. By looking at them, we want to gain insight into the early Christian phenomenon of prophecy among women. Therefore, we will present briefly the characterization of these women and various related exegetical problems, including present-day attempts in pursuit of solutions to them. The order in which we discuss the two texts, Acts 21:9 and 1 Cor 11:5, follows the canonical order of the NT books, and not any chronology of the emergence of these New Testament writings. In fact, we may reasonably suppose that 1 Corinthians, written by Paul, predates the Acts, written by Luke, Paul’s disciple.

1. Daughters of Philip the Evangelist

In the Acts of the Apostles we read about Philip, said to have four daughters who were prophetesses (21:8–9). He is presented as one of the seven deacons of the Church in Jerusalem (6:1–6), best known for his mission among the Samaritans (8:5–25) and the evangelization of a high official

³ As for Mary, there is already enough literature dealing with her prophetic identity. Cf. N. Clayton, A. E. Connor, *Mantic Mary? The Virgin Mother as Prophet in Luke 1.26–56 and the Early Church*, “Journal for the Study of the New Testament” 34 (2012) Issue 3, pp. 254–276; D. B. Stinton, *Mary of Nazareth: A Prophetic Voice Calling through the Centuries*, “Crux” 56 (2020) no. 4, pp. 10–20. See also Joseph Ratzinger’s text *Mary as Prophetess*, in: J. Ratzinger, H. U. von Balthasar, *Mary. The Church at the Source*, San Francisco 2005, pp. 70–75.

of the Ethiopian queen (8:26–40). Philip, along with other deacons, is described as a man of “good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom” (6:3). His evangelizing activity is marked by the clear presence of the Holy Spirit, who even takes him to Azotus (8:40). However, this ministry under the influence of the Spirit is not limited to Philip himself, whom we can confidently describe as an early Christian prophet,⁴ but extends also to his daughters, as they are called “prophesying virgins” (παρθέναι προφητεύουσαι – 21:9).

Joel’s prediction (2:28 [3:1]) about the prophesying daughters (mentioned in Acts 2:17) here becomes a reality. Daughters prophesying in the wake of their father’s prophetic activity corresponds to the ancient paradigm, in which children’s activity mirrored the activity or profession of their parents. In a culture that places honor on a pedestal, this appropriate behavior of the daughters adds to the respect and reverence conferred upon Philip, confirming and justifying the father’s status as an “evangelist” and leader of the local community of believers. Philip, who in his ministry experienced the crossing of ethnic, cultural and religious boundaries (Ethiopians, Samaritans), likewise traverses the gender barrier: prophetic activity also becomes the lot of women.⁵

The term “virgin” certainly means that these women were not yet married (thus assuming their actual virginity), although it may also simply point to their young age. However, is a relationship implied here between virginity and the prophetic gift, as in the case of the Pythian priestesses and prophetesses in Apollo’s Delphic sanctuary (Plutarch, *The Oracles at Delphi* 22 [Moralia, 405C]; Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, 10,12,6; Lucian of Samosata, *The Lover of Lies or the Doubter*, 38; *Astrology*, 23)? Further, does the mention of “virgins” refer to their status as “virgins” understood as a distinguished group in the early Church, as

4 See R. Strelan, *The Running Prophet* (Acts 8:30), “Novum Testamentum” 43 (2001) fasc. 1, pp. 31–38. See also the whole chapter *The Acts of Philip: A Charismatic Deacon* (8.1–10), in: R. Stronstad, *The Prophethood of All Believers: A Study in Luke’s Charismatic Theology*, Cleveland 2010, pp. 87–91. For more about Philip, see F. Scott Spencer, *The Portrait of Philip in Acts. A Study of Role and Relations*, Sheffield 1992; T. Yamanaka, *Philip, a Collaborative Forerunner of Peter and Paul. A Study of Philip’s Characterization in Acts*, Rome 2022.

5 C. Keener, *Acts. An Exegetical Commentary*. Volume 3: 15:1–23:35, Grand Rapids 2014, pp. 3093 and 3090, footnote 1434.

referred to in 1 Cor 7:1.8–9.25–38 or the later apocryphal Acts of Paul and Thecla 7?⁶ There are three arguments in favor of a negative answer in both cases: (1) the existence of prophetesses among the Corinthian women (1 Cor 11:5), who presumably would have included both unmarried and married women (see 1 Cor 14:35 in the context of 14:29–37); (2) the figure of Priscilla, who, being married, teaches Apollos (Acts 18:26); (3) Anna the prophetess, who is a widow that had lived with her husband for seven years from the time of her virginity (Luke 2:36).⁷ Instead, Luke’s remark on the virgin status of Philip’s daughters may reflect an interest, on the part of the first generations of Christians, in the ideal of virginity, discernible as early as the writing of 1 Cor 7 and, somewhat later, in Acts.⁸

However, the above three arguments presenting the existence of married women prophetesses may suggest that the mention of the virginity of Philip’s daughters, indicating their maiden life (and therefore still staying at home with their father, Philip), simply serves to emphasize their young age. Craig Keener noted that the Mishnaic definition of “virginity” essentially indicates an age below puberty. (In Palestinian Judaism, a girl was married between 12 and 18; rabbinical texts indicate an age of twelve and a half.) In this light, Philip’s daughters may

6 Darrell L. Bock (Acts, Grand Rapids 2007, p. 637) considers that the title “virgins” here means “pious social status”.

7 Clement of Alexandria (d. ca. AD 212) in *Stromata* 3.52.5 states that not only was Paul the apostle married, but the daughters of Philip the Evangelist were also married. This opinion of Clement is also quoted by Eusebius of Caesarea (*Historia Ecclesiae* 3.30), who, in his work, identifies Philip the deacon with Philip the apostle. As noted by Eusebius (*Historia Ecclesiae* 3.31; pp. 5:24), in the opinion of Polycrates, bishop of Ephesus (d. AD 195), at least one of Philip’s daughters “lived in the Holy Spirit” (ἐν ἁγίῳ πνεύματι πολιτευσαμένη). She was buried in Ephesus, while two others—explicitly described as virgins who have reached old age—are buried with their father in Hierapolis. Eusebius also cites the opinion of the Montanist Proclus, who claimed that Philip’s four daughters, prophetesses, lived, died, and are buried (together with their father) in Hierapolis. Some interpret Polycrates’ note about a daughter who died in Ephesus as indicating the status of a married woman. See B. W. Bacon, *The Authoress of Revelation—A Conjecture*, “Harvard Theological Review” 23 (1930) No. 3, p. 235. More information on this subject is provided by P. Corssen, *Die Töchter des Philippus*, “Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der Älteren Kirche” 2 (1901), pp. 289–299. Philip, along with his daughters, may have left Caesarea to settle in Hierapolis in Phrygia, perhaps due to ethnic tensions in former city that presaged the anti-Roman uprising which broke out there in AD 66. Cf. C. Keener, Acts, p. 3088.

8 C. Keener, Acts, p. 3088, footnote 1415.

have been teenagers or even prepubescent girls.⁹ Luke discloses that the charism of prophecy was not limited to men but was also exercised by women, following Joel's prediction recalled by Peter on the day of Pentecost (see Acts 2:17–18).¹⁰ That oracle of Joel also mentions “young men” (οἱ νεανίσκοι – Joel 3:1 [2:28]; Acts 2:17), however, thus we cannot rule out that Luke here simply highlights the young age of Philip's daughters, especially in contrast to the old (or at least significantly older) prophet Agabus mentioned in the immediate context,¹¹ and to the aged widow, the prophetess Anna (Luke 2:36–37).

The use of the present participle προφητεύουσαι (‘prophesying’) suggests persistence, continuation, and customary practice. It can also indicate a function or ministry in the community rather than an office or position.¹² As Marek Karczewski put it: “It can therefore be assumed that these are four young unmarried women who had the constant ability to utter prophecies.”¹³

According to commentators, the lack of the noun “prophetess” or “prophetesses” to describe Philip's daughters results from Luke's reserving this term for a particular group of prominent and older prophets (Acts 11:27; 13:1; 15:32; 21:10) who also functioned as the community leaders (13:1; 15:22.32). It would therefore be inappropriate to call such young

9 C. Keener, Acts, p. 3101. Adopting a (hypothetical) interpretation of 1 Corinthians 7:36–38 as a text about fathers and virgins, Craig Keener (Acts, p. 3101) suggests that the virginity period of Philip's daughters would be prolonged for “promoting spiritual maturation.”

10 Robert M. Price (*The Widow Traditions in Luke-Acts: A Feminist-Critical Scrutiny*, Atlanta 1997, pp. 64–71) elaborates an argument based in part on *The Testament of Job* 46–51 (three prophesizing daughters of Job) that the daughters were responsible for the prophecy.

11 Craig Keener (Acts, p. 3091, footnote 1444) argues: “We may assume that Agabus is at least not young, on the basis of the span of years that have passed since Acts 11:27–30 (at least in Luke's narrative world, if some would move Agabus's prophecy at that point instead to the later collection).”

12 C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, Edinburgh 1998, p. 994. Craig Keener (Acts, p. 3091) considers such a distinction (ministry versus office) anachronistic early in the Church's existence.

13 M. Karczewski, *Prorocy chrześcijańscy w Dziejach Apostolskich. Prorocy i prorocstwo chrześcijańskie w kontekście literackim Dziejów Apostolskich*, in: „Bóg jest miłością” (1 J 4,16). *Studia dla Księdza Profesora Józefa Kudasiewicza w 80. rocznicę urodzin*, ed. W. Chrostowski, Warszawa 2006, p. 190.

girls prophetesses.¹⁴ However, the suggestion that these women were leaders of the Church in Caesarea¹⁵ does not seem convincing. In Acts 13:1–3, only male “prophets” are mentioned as managing and teaching in the Church in Antioch. A similar picture emerges from the entire Book of Acts.¹⁶

Eckhard J. Schnabel believes that the mention of Philip’s four daughters “prophesying” is probably intended to emphasize the involvement of these women in the life of the community of believers in Caesarea.¹⁷ On the other hand, Luke Timothy Johnson believes that the present participle “prophesying” serves as a means of identifying these women precisely.¹⁸ Indeed, Hans Conzelmann speculates that they may have been well-known in the early Church.¹⁹ This last conclusion can be confirmed by the text of Eusebius (Hist. Eccl. 3.39.9), who quotes information from Papias (a contemporary of Philip’s daughters), who in turn claimed to have heard from these prophetesses a moving testimony about the resurrection of a dead person, which took place in Philip’s time.

The American exegete Gail O’Day believes that the absence of any specific prophecy (about the apostle Paul, or anything else) made by the four prophetic daughters, while the prophecy of Agabus (21:10) is reported in detail, emphasizes the role of the male protagonists and diminishes the status of the four women.²⁰ A similar situation is described in Luke

14 B. Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles. A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, Grand Rapids 1998, p. 662; C. Keener, *Acts*, p. 3091. Luke, therefore, does not deny them this title because of their gender (see Anna in Luke 2:36) but because of their age and role in the Church.

15 In this way E. E. Ellis, *The Role of Christian Prophet in Acts*, in: *Apostolic History and the Gospel*, eds. W. W. Gasque, R. P. Martin, Exeter 1970, p. 55–56.

16 Cf. J. Słomka, *Prorocy chrześcijańscy I–II wieku*, “*Studia Religiológica*” 39 (2006), p. 9–21.

17 E. J. Schnabel, *Acts: Expanded Digital Edition*, Grand Rapids 2012, *ad loc.*

18 L. T. Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Collegeville 1992, p. 370.

19 H. Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, Minneapolis 1987, p. 178.

20 G. O’Day, *Acts*, in: *Women’s Bible Commentary: Expanded Edition with Apocrypha*, eds. C. A. Newsom, S. H. Ringe, Louisville 1998, p. 397. Scott Spencer (*The Gospel of Luke and Acts of the Apostles*, Nashville 2008, *ad loc.*) put it: „Overall the women of Acts remain safely contained in conventional boxes”. Already Origen (*Frag. 1 Cor. 74*) believed that they prophesied only in private and not public contexts. John Calvin also embraced this notion. As Jerome notes (*Ep. 108.8*), his own faithful disciple, Paula, was shown in Philip’s house at Caesarea a room (*cubiculum*) in which they were said to proph-

2:25–28, where the presence of Anna, the woman prophetess, is reported, but the content of the prophecy of the man, Simeon, is quoted.²¹ However, Beverly Gaventa rightly points out that there is no implied rivalry between groups of prophets or individual prophets in the narrative of Acts 21.²² The juxtaposition of the prophet Agabus with the four prophetesses does not have to signify adherence to the convention of patriarchal culture (men over women), or even the depreciation of women in contrast to the exaltation of men. Instead, it may be an allusion to the literal fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy about both sons and daughters prophesying (Acts 2:17). (Of course, the simplest explanation is that Luke was realistically reporting the facts: it was Agabus who made this prophecy, not Philip’s daughters.) According to Craig Keener, mention of the four daughters, juxtaposed with Agabus—besides adding honor and praise to Philip as a good father, and thus worthy of the title of “evangelist”—actually introduces gender balance to the narrative. The American exegete offers a series of arguments for emphasizing the prophecy of Agabus as a climax of prophetic warnings addressed to Paul, without any desire to diminish the role of Philip’s daughters due to their sex. These arguments include Agabus’ more advanced age, his prominence (his famous prophecy of a great famine in Acts 11:28–29), his much wider geographic ministry (e.g., Judea, Antioch), and the dramatic, symbolic prophetic action (binding himself with a belt) akin to the deeds of the Old Testament prophets, which would certainly attract the attention

sy. Remarks of this type are anachronistic because, at this stage in the history of the Church, communities always met (except for the temple in Jerusalem) in a domestic and private context. These home communities, indeed, were called “churches.” In this vein, Craig Keener (Acts, p. 3093, footnote 1456) states: “The suggestion that the women prophesied only in «non-church» gatherings [...] is difficult to sustain, given the issue of head coverings, the appeal to angels (1 Cor 11:10) and appeal to other churches (11:16), and especially the fact that the church was meeting in homes, so that Christian meetings there de facto constituted «church».”

21 R. I. Pervo, *Acts. A Commentary*, Minneapolis 2009, p. 537. More R. I. Pervo, (Acts 21:9) *Four Unmarried Daughters of Philip*, in: *Women in Scripture*, ed. C. Meyers et al., New York 2000, pp. 467–468.

22 B. R. Gaventa, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Nashville 2003, s. 294. Ivoni Richter Reimer (*Women in the Acts of the Apostles: A Feminist Liberation Perspective*, Minneapolis 1995, p. 249) argues that opposition to women “had begun as early as the end of the first century, but there is no trace of it in Acts 21:8–9.”

of those present and, in turn, of Luke's audience. Moreover, Agabus's prophecy is also quoted for geographical reasons: he comes from Judea (and therefore Jerusalem), and his prophecy refers to events that are to take place in Judea/Jerusalem (21:11). Since Philip's daughters may have been among those warning Paul against going to Jerusalem, in opposition to God's plans (21:12), "reporting their words would not in itself honor them".²³ In this context, Johann Albrecht Bengel's (1697–1752) ahistorical interpretation sounds a bit naive, even humorous, or, as Charles Barrett diplomatically puts it, "more interesting": *Philippus evangelista: filiae prophetantes. propheta major est, quam evangelista (Eph. 4:11)*. Indeed, Paul in Ephesians 4:11 lists the ministry of the prophet before that of the evangelist. Bengel seems to imply that the daughters have surpassed the father.

The absence of any quoted prophetic content uttered by Philip's daughters is seen by Frederick Bruce as a sign of the historical credibility of Luke's work. Bruce argued that Luke is a reliable historian and not a romancer: in the context of mentioning four prophetesses, Luke "could hardly have let slip the opportunity of putting some appropriate words into their mouths."²⁴ However, Charles Barrett speculates that the four virgins may not have been in Caesarea during Paul's stay and for this very reason their prophecy is not quoted.²⁵ The mention of Philip and his daughters, without attributing any deeds or words to them, may also be a sign that these people served Luke as a source of information about the Church in Caesarea.²⁶

Marek Karczewski draws attention to another interesting detail: "It is significant that as many as four of Philip's daughters prophesy, which confirms the universal availability of salvation."²⁷ Karczewski probably points to the number four, commonly understood in antiquity as symbolizing universality, based on the notion of four geographical directions.

²³ C. Keener, *Acts*, p. 3092.

²⁴ F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, Grand Rapids 1988, p. 400.

²⁵ C. K. Barrett, *Acts*, p. 994 ("that he [Agabus] makes the prophecy suggests that the daughters were in the Itinerary").

²⁶ B. Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 663.

²⁷ M. Karczewski, *Prorocy chrześcijańscy*, pp. 190–191.

2. Prophetesses in the Pauline Churches

What does it mean to prophesy? Paul in 1 Cor 11:5 speaks of women praying (προσεύχομαι) and prophesying (προφητεύω) during public (i.e., cultic, liturgical) gatherings of believers in Christ. They do this on an equal footing with the men mentioned earlier, who are also praying and prophesying (11:4). Defining women's prayer in this context, its three elements should be stressed: (1) it was aloud (not silent), (2) it was public (not private), and for this reason, (3) it might be connected with leading the congregation. The immediate literary context indicates that this prayer "must be more than silent prayers offered in the separated women's section of the synagogue-church."²⁸ As David Garland aptly noted: "Were it only some private gathering among the family or among only women, their attire would not have been an issue."²⁹ Joseph Fitzmyer argued that the verb προσεύχομαι means "praying aloud to God, possibly even as a leader of the gathering in a house-church."³⁰ The same three aforementioned characteristics of prayer might be applied also to prophetic activity. The verb προφητεύω is understood in 1 Cor as conveying to the community or to individuals words coming from God (inspired by the Holy Spirit). These can take the form of preaching, giving insight into spiritual mysteries (apocalyptic dimension) and into the "secrets of the heart" (14:25). They are based on Holy Scripture ("charismatic exegesis" or creative reinterpretation, providing the so-called *sensus plenior* of the biblical text), they may refer to the past and/or present and/or future, and they have a pastoral dimension (consolation and/or conversion and/or change and/or admonishment). Prophecy is not a permanent property or capacity (not a charism on demand) and should be subjected to examination (the "false prophet" issue).³¹

28 W. F. Orr, J. A. Walther, *I Corinthians. A New Translation, Introduction with a Study of the Life of Paul, Notes, and Commentary*, Garden City 1976, p. 260.

29 D. E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, Grand Rapids 2003, p. 518.

30 J. A. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, New Haven 2008, p. 412.

31 An excellent résumé of contemporary exegetical debates on the New Testament understanding of prophecy are two excursions in A. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians. A Commentary on the Greek Text*, Grand Rapids 2000, pp. 956–965 and 1087–1098. One of the definitions quoted by him (p. 964) seems to be highly accurate: "prophecy, as a gift of the Holy Spirit, combines pastoral insight into the needs of persons, com-

According to 1 Cor, prophecy is one of the ways of spiritual “building” (οικοδομέω) (14:4) of the community, which—according to 14:3—contained three elements: οικοδομή (‘edification’, ‘upbuilding’, ‘strengthening’), παράκλησις (‘rejuvenating’, ‘exhortation’, ‘encouragement’), and to some extent παραμυθία (‘consolation’, ‘comfort’). The gift of prophecy is considered extremely useful for the community because, thanks to it, the members can “learn” (μανθάνω) (14:31). Interestingly, in the hierarchy of charisms and ministries in the Church, Paul places prophets above teachers (Rom 12:6–8; 1 Cor 12:29; Eph 4:11). Only the apostle is above the prophet. The great authority of prophecy in the early Church is confirmed by the formula associated with the prophecy of Agabus: “Thus says the Holy Spirit” (Acts 21:11). The participation of women in the ministry of prophecy undoubtedly translated into their high status in the community of the Church, within the larger patriarchal society.³²

Prophetess and headgear. According to Paul, women are to pray and prophesy with their heads covered and men with their heads uncovered (1 Cor 11:4–7). Indeed, this function for women was a break with synagogue practices well known to Paul, in which women were not allowed to speak in public.³³ If the prayer meetings in question were for women only, or if they were limited to family members only, then the issue of women’s clothing, specifically whether the head was covered or uncovered, would not be worth mentioning. In asking women to cover their heads, Paul suggests that a private home should be treated as a public place during meetings of the Church community, including prayers and the celebration of the Eucharist.

munities, and situations with the ability to address these with a God-given utterance or longer discourse (whether unprompted or prepared with judgment, decision, and rational reflection) leading to challenge or comfort, judgment, or consolation, but ultimately building up the addressees.” A group of exegetes emphatically argue that prophecy is only a spontaneous, unprepared utterance containing the truth received from God. Cf. D. E. Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World*, Grand Rapids 1983; W. Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament Today*. Revised Edition, Wheaton 2000.

³² This is the main emphasis of the study by A. C. Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets*, Minneapolis 1990.

³³ J. A. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, p. 413.

Thus, Paul takes it for granted that women actively participate in worship, provided they cover their heads. It should be emphasized, however, that Paul, recalling the obligation to cover the head (women) or uncover it (men), draws a clear difference between women and men – without, however, doing away with the doctrine of gender equality (see Gal 3:28). In short, gender equality does not negate the existence of gender difference. The blurring of gender differences, however, hurts the honor of women as well as men and was found at odds with the theology of creation.³⁴ In the case of women in Corinth, in the context of the culture of the time, an uncovered head meant sexual “openness.” As a result, it is hard to imagine Paul’s leniency in a situation where a woman prophesying or praying in public, instead of directing attention to God, became the object of sexual desire for congregation members.³⁵

Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza believes that the reason for Paul’s warnings was the loose hair of women, symbolizing their prophetic-charismatic power, and a sign of their ecstatic anointing with Spirit-Wisdom. Thus, Paul wants to counteract prophetic madness and orders the hair to be tied.³⁶ This hypothesis is based on the parallels visible in the loose and uncombed hair of women serving in the cults of Dionysus, Cybele and Isis, and the Pythian priestesses in the temple of Apollo at Delphi. However, as Christopher Forbes has demonstrated, these parallels are anachronistic for the Roman colony of Corinth in the first century AD.³⁷

34 Cf. M. Kowalski, *Changing Gender Roles and the Unchanging Message of 1 Corinthians 11:2–16*, in: *The Word of Truth, Sealed by the Spirit. Perspectives on the Inspiration and Truth of Sacred Scripture*, eds. M. C. Genung, K. Zilverberg, Saint Paul 2022, pp. 130–136.

35 It is possible that the reason for Paul’s warnings in 1 Corinthians 11:2–16 was an identification of gender equality with gender identity (the absence of gender differences). Cf. J.-M. Gundry-Volf, *Gender and Creation in 1 Cor 11:2–16. A Study in Paul’s Theological Method*, in: *Evangelium, Schriftauslegung, Kirche*, Hrsg. J. Adna, S. J. Hafemann, O. Hofius, Göttingen 1997, pp. 151–171. A related problem resulting from the blurring of gender differences, as Paul mentions, was the shame (κατασχύνω) that such women brought to themselves (1 Cor 11:5), to God (11:7–12), to their husbands or other legal guardians (e.g., father), or more broadly, to their families. Both of the above reasons are discussed extensively by A. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 829.

36 E. Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*, New York–London 1983, pp. 230; cf. also pp. 226–230.

37 C. Forbes, *Prophecy and Inspired Speech in Early Christianity and its Hellenistic Environment*, Tübingen 1995, p. 227; A. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, pp. 830–831. For more on female prophets from the perspective of archaeology and non-biblical

Prophetess: married woman or unmarried virgin? There is a difference of opinion among commentators on the meaning of the term γυνή in 1 Cor 11:5. The lexeme γυνή used here can mean both “woman” (as in 14:34–35) as well as “wife” (as in 7:16). The semantics of this term is essential in the context of the ancient idea of linking virginity with the gift of prophecy (e.g., the Delphic pythoness, the Sibyl, the Muses) and contemporary attempts to view the early Christian prophetesses as unmarried virgins. There are several arguments in favor of seeing women praying and prophesying in public as married women. These arguments, however, can be challenged by concluding that Paul is referring to a woman *per se*, without specifying her status (married, virgin, widow, divorced, etc.).

First, the immediately preceding context undoubtedly speaks of wives, using the same term γυνή (cf. 11:3), since women are here mentioned in contrast to men. This argument is not convincing because the text speaks of “every man” (παντὸς ἀνδρός), implying all men, including both “husbands” and “men” as such.

Secondly, the immediately following context also seems to limit the word γυνή to wives, as it refers to their relationship with men, as exemplified by Adam’s marital relationship with Eve (11:6–12). On the other hand, the reference to Genesis in this passage of Paul’s argument need not presuppose the husband-wife relationship, as it may well be understood as referring, again, to women and men *per se*.³⁸ Moreover, the context of Paul’s argumentation in 11:2–16 concerns the differences between men and women generally, without narrowing the addressees of the letter to husbands and wives.³⁹

Thirdly, the text we are interested in (11:5) discusses women wearing head coverings. Some form of headgear was the custom in Greek and Roman cultures for married women who were away from home (Plutarch, *Mor.* 232C, 267A).⁴⁰ Within the Jewish cultural circle, an identical rule

ancient literature, see J. E. Marshall, *Women Praying and Prophesying in Corinth: Gender and Inspired Speech in First Corinth*. *Gender and Inspired Speech in First Corinthians*, Tübingen 2017, pp. 43–71, 109–156.

38 A. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 832.

39 For more on this subject, see M. Kowalski, *Changing Gender Roles*, pp. 107–143.

40 Horace (*Satires* 1,2,80–108) argued that, looking at a married woman (*matrona*), one can only see her face because other parts of her body were concealed by a large robe.

was in force. As David Garland noted: “For a Hebrew woman to go out uncovered was widely regarded as a disgrace (3 Macc 4:6; b. Ned. 30b) because a covered head was a sign of modesty (b. Yoma 47b).”⁴¹ In the case of a married woman, the lack of headgear in a public place could be sufficient reason for divorce, including the husband retaining his wife’s dowry (m. Ketub. 7:6; b. Ketub. 72a; cf. m. B. Qam. 8:6). This argument does not seem to be valid, however, since a head covering in public characterized both married and unmarried women, regardless of the context of Greco-Roman or Jewish culture (see Philo, *Spec.* 3:56; b. *Nedarim* 30b).⁴²

Fourth, the primary argument for understanding γυνή in 11:5 in a broader sense, i.e. a woman *per se* (including the married), is the expression πᾶσα δὲ γυνή (“every/any woman”) used in this verse. The phrase suggests a broader understanding: married and unmarried women, including widows.⁴³

In conclusion, the arguments presented above support the understanding of the term γυνή in 1 Cor 11:5 in a broad sense, i.e. as gender (“woman”), without reference to marital status.

The prophetess: publicly silent or speaking? The focal passage of 1 Cor 11:5 seems to stand in stark contradiction to another text of Paul in

Pliny the Younger (*The Epistulae* 19,4) mentioned with satisfaction that his wife listened to his works in public hidden behind the veil (*discreta velo*). Livia, the wife of Emperor Augustus, was presented with a head covering as an official model of piety and virtue. After M. Kowalski, *Changing Gender Roles*, p. 129.

⁴¹ D. E. Garland, 1 Corinthians, p. 520.

⁴² G. J. Lockwood, 1 Corinthians, Saint Louis 2000, p. 366 (“There is ample testimony that in general it was customary in Paul’s day for both Jewish and Greek women to wear head-coverings in public”). Marcin Kowalski (*Changing Gender Roles*, p. 129) argues: “Covering the head with a veil or hood signified a respectable female status. [...] A head without cover was a sign of promiscuity and sexual availability. According to Philo, a woman accused of adultery was to be judged without a head covering, a symbol of modesty (*Spec.* 3.56).” Flavius Josephus (*Antiquities* 3,270) also mentions the priest removing a woman’s head covering on trial for adultery.

⁴³ More arguments for seeing wives and husbands in 11:2–16 are presented by A. Isaksson, *Marriage and Ministry in the New Temple. A Study with Special Reference to Mt. 19,12–13 and 1 Cor 11,3–16*, Uppsala 1965, p. 175. Some authors see here an intended ambiguity (*double entendre*). See F. Zerbst, *The Office of Women in the Church*, Saint Louis 1955, p. 34; B. K. Waltke, 1 Corinthians 11:2–16. An Interpretation, “*Bibliotheca Sacra*” 138 (1978) no. 537, p. 51; H. W. House, A Biblical View of Women in the Ministry. Part 2: Should a Woman Prophesy or Preach Before Men?, “*Bibliotheca Sacra*” 145 (1988) no. 578, pp. 152–153.

the very same letter, that is, his prohibition of women from speaking and asking questions in the public assemblies of the Church (14:34–35). The relationship—and apparent discrepancy—between 11:5 (women do speak) and 14:34–35 (women should be silent) has been explained in several ways, which we summarize below.⁴⁴ Indeed, this issue is essential to resolving the dispute between commentators who limit prophecy to the private sphere and those who suggest that women prophesied in the public assemblies of early Christian communities.

(1) Many authors consider verses 14:34–35 to be a later interpolation, and, as Paul’s inauthentic words, these verses should be omitted.⁴⁵ This hypothesis, however, has no basis in the *critica textus*. (2) The first text (11:2–16) belongs to an earlier letter, and the second (14:34–35) was written later, when Paul’s views on women’s participation in assemblies had changed.⁴⁶ (3) The first text expresses Paul’s views, while the second reflects a Corinthian position that the apostle does not share.⁴⁷ (4) The first text deals with the right of women to pray and prophesy in the private sphere, while the second is prohibition of their speaking and prophesying in public gatherings.⁴⁸ (5) The first text refers to women speaking in assemblies in an organized manner. In contrast, the second prohibits women from disrupting the assemblies with their chatter, babble, constant talk, or frenzied shouting that drowns out the words of prayer or prophecy uttered by another person.⁴⁹ (6) The first text dealt with the issue

44 I am following here the *status quaestionis* elaborated by A. D. Baum, *Pauls’ Conflicting Statements on Female Public Speaking* (1 Cor. 11:5) and *Silence* (1 Cor. 14:34–35): *A New Suggestion*, “*Tyndale Bulletin*” 65 (2014) Issue 2, p. 248–251. Another detailed *status quaestionis* provides A. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, pp. 1150–1162.

45 P. B. Payne, *Ms 88 as Evidence for a Text without 1 Cor 14:34–35*, “*New Testament Studies*” 44 (1998), pp. 152–158. David E. Garland (*1 Corinthians*, p. 665, footnote 17) lists 22 authors advocating this solution.

46 D. Zeller, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther*, Göttingen 2010, p. 447.

47 D. W. Odell-Scott, *Let the Women Speak in Church: An Egalitarian Interpretation of 1 Cor 14:33b–36*, “*Biblical Theology Bulletin*” 13 (1983), pp. 90–93; J. Murphy-O’Connor, *Interpolations in 1 Corinthians*, “*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*” 48 (1986), pp. 90–92; D. W. Odell-Scott, *Editorial Dilemma: The Interpolation of 1 Cor 14:34–35 in the Western Manuscripts of D, G and 88*, “*Biblical Theology Bulletin*” 30 (2000), pp. 68–74.

48 A. Schlatter, *Paulus, der Bote Jesu*, Stuttgart 1956, s. 389–390; P. Bachmann, *Der erste Brief des Paulus an die Korinther*, Leipzig 1921, pp. 424–425.

49 K. Bailey, *Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes*, Downers Grove 2011, p. 416.

of women's head coverings (a woman must wear one in order to speak), whereas the second emphasizes a hierarchical order governing the relationship between a man and a woman (a woman must have the man's permission to speak). The first text is for the more progressive domestic church, the second for the more conservative community. However, one principle informs both texts: a woman (wife or leader) cannot speak in public without the permission of a man, understood as her husband and/or a community leader.⁵⁰ (7) The first text affirms the right of women to prophesy, while the second forbids them from expounding publicly upon the prophecies, especially wives passing judgment upon the prophecies spoken by their own husbands, which would bring shame and humiliation to the men themselves.⁵¹ (8) The first text affirms women's right to public prayer and prophecy in church assemblies, while the second forbids them from asking irrelevant and time-wasting questions. Being less educated, women could indeed ask many such questions, disturbing the order of the assembly and inadvertently initiating long discussions. Paul therefore encourages them to ask these questions privately, in their homes. Moreover, a wife who publicly disagreed with her husband's opinion would bring shame and dishonor to such a husband.⁵² (9) The Pontifical Biblical Commission, in the document *Inspiration and Truth of Sacred Scripture* (2014), identifies the motives for Paul's command as (a) respect and (b) harmony between spouses and (c) order in the assembly.⁵³

In addition to the issue of speaking in tongues and prophecy, the case of the dignity and proper order of the assemblies (14:30.33.40) is at the center of Paul's attention in the text of 1 Corinthians. It is possible that

⁵⁰ A. D. Baum, *Pauls' Conflicting Statements*, p. 274 ("female public speaking without male consent is unacceptable whereas female public speaking with male consent is unobjectionable").

⁵¹ D. A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit. A Theological Exposition of 1 Cor 12–14*, Grand Rapids 1987, pp. 128–132; A. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, pp. 1158 and 1160; P. D. Gardner, *1 Corinthians*, ed. C. E. Arnold, Grand Rapids 2018, p. 637 (Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament).

⁵² C. Wolff, *Der erste Brief des Paulus an die Korinther. Teil 2: Auslegung der Kapitel 8–16*, Berlin 1982, pp. 344 and 346 (Theologischer Handkommentar zum Neuen Testament, 7); C. Keener, *Paul, Women, and Wives*, Grand Rapids 1992, pp. 80–88; C. Forbes, *Prophecy*, pp. 273–277; T. R. Schreiner, *1 Corinthians. An Introduction and Commentary*, Downers Grove 2018, p. 297.

⁵³ Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Inspiration and Truth of Sacred Scripture*, § 133.

Paul here is not prohibiting women from speaking (including prophesying) *per se*, but rather is focusing on women's behavior that could be offensive, humiliating, and embarrassing to their husbands and legal guardians (e.g., fathers). It would be uncomfortable, in fact humiliating, for husbands to witness the judgment of their prophecy by their wives, as well as to be questioned by their wives in public. It would be equally demeaning to a husband should his wife ask questions of a male stranger in a public setting.⁵⁴ The same *principium* should be applied to any relationship between a woman and her legal guardian (e.g., daughter-father). Paul clearly distinguishes between two aspects of women's behavior, assigned to two different spaces: the community of the Church (ἐκκλησία) and the community of a private home (οἶκος).

Conclusion

The New Testament, especially in the Acts of the Apostles and the letters of Paul, bears clear witness not only to the participation of women in the mission of preaching the Gospel (e.g., Acts 18:26; Phil 4:2–3)⁵⁵ but also to their use of the charism of prophecy to build early Christian communities. The latter role of women is explicitly mentioned twice in the New Testament writings. In Acts 21:9, Luke mentions four prophesying daughters of the deacon Philip, and in 1 Cor 11:5 Paul writes about prophesying women in the community of Corinth.

The most critical exegetical problems the reader encounters regarding Philip's prophesying daughters are: (1) their relationship to their father, the prophet (according to the customs of the time, they perform the father's "profession" and bring him pride), (2) their status as virgins (unlike the Greco-Roman culture, early Christian prophecy did not assume virginity), (3) their young age (this contrasts with the elderly prophet

54 R. E. Ciampa, B. S. Rosner, *First Letter to the Corinthians*, Grand Rapids 2010, pp. 722–727; M. Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, Nashville 2014, pp. 360–361. See also J. Greenbury, *1 Corinthians 14:34–35: Evaluation of Prophecy Revisited*, "Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society" 51 (2008), pp. 721–731; E. Hiu, *Regulations Concerning Tongues and Prophecy in 1 Corinthians 14:26–40: Relevance Beyond the Corinthian Church*, London 2010, pp. 147–150.

55 Cf. A. Kubiś, *Kobiety głoszące Ewangelię w Nowym Testamencie*, "Polonia Sacra" 26 (2022) no. 3, pp. 7–28.

Agabus and is the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy quoted in Acts 2:17–18), and (4) the connection between prophecy and the status of the community's leaders (only men were leaders). As Paul's letters show (see 1 Cor 14:29–30), prophecy is not directly related to leadership.

Paul's mention of women prophetesses (1 Cor 11:5) occurs in the context of the instruction on head coverings. Paul imposes this requirement on women, following the customs of the time, confirming that prophecy was a public act performed in the community. In Paul's rhetoric, the required headgear emphasized the difference between the sexes (without negating their equality), in line with the theology of creation contained in Genesis 1–2. The second important observation concerns the marital status of the Corinthian women prophetesses. Only in pagan cults (the Delphic Pythias) was prophecy associated with virginity. The context of Paul's statement clearly indicates that the text is about women as such, both married and unmarried. The third crucial exegetical issue concerns the command of women to be silent (1 Cor 14:34–35), which seems to deny their right to speak in public, including prophecy. Paul's chief concern, however, is that any woman prophesying publicly behave so as not to discredit her husband, father, or other legal guardian. The famous tension between the text about women speaking (1 Cor 11:5) and the command of women to be silent (1 Cor 14:34–35) should be seen through the lenses of the problem of discipline or due decorum during community prayer meetings (see 1 Cor 14:30.33.40). The command of silence is best understood as a ban on specific public statements that could offend or humiliate men (husbands, fathers, brothers, legal guardians), which, in the context of the prevailing patriarchal culture, could destroy the due order of assemblies. These forbidden public utterances by women include evaluating prophecies and asking questions.

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The synthesis of the Gospel and life as a goal of evangelization

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Abstract

The synthesis of the Gospel and life as a goal of evangelization

The article presents selected examples of the synthesis of the Gospel and life, which is the goal of contemporary evangelization. In implementing the prophetic purpose, it was emphasized that the proclamation of the Word of God is to illuminate and transform human existence. In implementing the priestly function, the focus was on celebrating the Eucharist, revealing it as a source of human strength and energy, a school of sacramental perception of life and appreciation of matter, as well as a space for forming a new man. In the implementation of the priestly function, however, attention was paid to the presence of the Church in the world and the Christian lifestyle, which is closely related to the promotion of man and the quality of his life. The study emphasizes that the existential orientation of evangelization establishes the proper relationship of the Church with the world. It involves accepting the world, dialogue with it, and transforming it in the spirit of the Gospel.

Keywords: evangelization, preaching, celebration of the Eucharist, the testimony of Christian life, Church, man, world

Abstrakt

Synteza Ewangelii i życia jako cel ewangelizacji

W artykule przedstawiono wybrane przykłady syntezy Ewangelii i życia, która jest celem współczesnej ewangelizacji. W realizacji funkcji prorockiej podkreślono, że głoszenie słowa Bożego ma oświeślać i przemieniać ludzką egzystencję. W realizacji funkcji kapłańskiej skupiono się na celebracji Eucharystii, ukazując ją jako źródło ludzkich sił i energii, jako szkołę sakramentalnego postrzegania życia i dowartościowania materii oraz przestrzeń formacji nowego człowieka. W realizacji funkcji kapłańskiej zwrócono uwagę na obecność Kościoła w świecie i chrześcijański styl życia, który jest ściśle powiązany z promocją człowieka i jakości jego życia. W opracowaniu podkreśla się, że egzystencjalne ukierunkowanie ewangelizacji ustanawia właściwą relację Kościoła ze światem. Polega ona na przyjęciu świata, dialogu z nim i jego przemianę w duchu Ewangelii.

Słowa kluczowe: ewangelizacja, przepowiadanie, celebacja Eucharystii, świadectwo chrześcijańskiego życia, Kościół, człowiek, świat

When determining methods of evangelization, one should start with methodologically important questions: who is being evangelized, and for what purpose? Therefore, the answer to the question “Who is evangelized?” is very important. Talking about God without being aware of “whom you are talking to” is—as Fabrice Hadjadj says—evangelization that is arrogant, pompous, and reminiscent of the work of a road roller. It can easily become the work of a fanatic who will hit others with the word “God” like a headshot, ignoring the difficult questions, doubts, and dilemmas¹. So, who are the recipients of evangelization? Years ago, John Paul II gave a descriptive definition of them, pointing out that these are those who “have lost the living sense of faith [...] leading a life far from Christ and His Gospel”². A life far from the Gospel is a manifestation of secularism that denies the existence of God and the religious nature of man, promotes a completely detached humanism from God, exaggerates man’s cognitive abilities, and consequently radically separates religiosity from human life in all its dimensions³. In such a perspective, God seems unnecessary to save people from ignorance and helplessness, to lead them to “abundant life” (cf. Jn 10:10), to transcend themselves, and to strive for development.

Evangelization in the secular world is an activity that stimulates and enables believers to develop a Christian identity so that it floods their entire lives with a living sense of faith. As John Paul II emphasized, contemporary evangelization is to achieve a “new, creative synthesis between the Gospel and life”⁴. In other words, modern evangelization is about connecting what secularism separates. In the following article, we will understand evangelization broadly and fully, as all activities leading people to participate in the mystery of Christ announced in the Gospel⁵. Thus, this article will present some aspects of the Church’s

1 F. Hadjadj, *Antypodręcznik ewangelizacji. Jak dzisiaj mówić o Bogu?*, Kraków 2016, p. 23. Cf. R. Fisichella, *La nuova evangelizzazione. Una sfida per uscire dall'indifferenza*, Milano 2011, pp. 22–25.

2 Jan Paweł II, *Redemptoris missio*, 33.

3 L. Szewczyk, *Głoszenie słowa Bożego w środowisku zsekularyzowanym*, Katowice 2019, pp. 70–75.

4 Jan Paweł II, *Przemówienie do Episkopatu Skandynawii*, „L'Osservatore Romano” wyd. pol. 10 (1989) no. 6, p. 6.

5 Cf. P. Dyk, *Nowa ewangelizacja—konkretne wezwanie*, Gubin 2015, p. 44.

prophetic, priestly, and royal activity that can contribute to this fusion of the Gospel and life. We will look at the prophetic goings-on of the Church from the perspective of homiletics, dealing with the content of preaching. In terms of the priestly mission, we will focus primarily on the celebration of the Eucharist. When referring to the performance of the royal function, we will consider mainly the Christian lifestyle.

1. Preaching the Word of God

In light of research conducted by Polish homilists, it can be concluded that preaching the Word of God may be, to some extent, responsible for the fact that contemporary baptized people succumb to the pressure of the secular world. Research indicates that preaching often oscillates towards doctrinalism, historicism, generalization, and abstraction⁶. With such a proclamation, listeners may perceive faith mainly as an adaptation of a doctrinal and philosophical system or a catalog of moral virtue. It would be a schizophrenic approach to the faith, which—although it requires understanding—is, above all, life. Henceforth, preaching can promote secularism if it does not facilitate “the full understanding and impact of the word of God on the lives of the faithful”⁷.

The method of evangelization should flow from its natural source, which is the Gospel—Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God. Linking the Word of God with human life is neither a rhetorical device that would convince people to accept the Gospel content nor a manipulative way of favoring the listener nor a manifestation of modern anthropocentrism—as some impetuous commentators predict⁸. This requirement results from the Mystery of the Incarnation, in which Christ took on what is human to redeem what is human. In preaching, we are faithful to this mystery when we enter the spirituality of human life, revealing what is infected with sin and death in order to create a particular

6 Cf. P. Dyk, H. Sławiński, L. Szewczyk, *Przepowiadanie homilijne w Polsce. Analiza aspektów treściowych i formalnych wybranych homilii*, „Collectanea Theologica” 93 (2023) no. 2, pp. 210–213.

7 Benedykt XVI, *Verbum Domini*, 59.

8 Cf. J. P. Strumiłowski, *Bóg czy człowiek. Duchowość, liturgia, sztuka*, Warszawa 2020, pp. 9–11.

breadth for the redemptive work of Christ and spaces for the Word. Through such proclamation, the redemptive purpose of Christ, who “delights to dwell among men,” is fulfilled⁹. Therefore, preaching is supposed to be—as Henri de Lubac says about theology itself—reflecting on the “real encounter between man and God,” on teaching man to accept God, on the transformation taking place in man under the influence of grace and on the intrusion into his life of “the energy God” and “the power of the Spirit”¹⁰.

Jesus’ earthly life also reveals that the word of God is not only doctrine but, above all, life. His proclamation was confirmed by the importance of concrete deeds—Jesus “did and [...] taught from the beginning” (Acts 1:1). Jesus’ authority consisted in the unity of His word and deed, in the impeccable transparency of His life¹¹. However, the word of God does not distinguish between “saying” and “doing”. It is not a “purely verbal word”. The Gospel is inseparably “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). Preaching that does not contribute anything to human life and does not transform it destroys the nature of the word of God. Let us recall that the word of God contains both a noetic and dynamic aspect. The Word of God has the energy that makes the spoken truth, message, prophecy, warning, and consolation become a fact and come to be an event in the one who receives it. Hence, the conciliar Constitution on Divine Revelation emphasizes that in the history of salvation, God reveals himself “through words and deeds that are internally connected” so that one cannot be separated from the other (*Dei verbum* 2). Thus, both are to be present in the Church—teaching (word) and life (action) “internally linked, mutually dependent on each other and pointing to each other. Neither can replace the other nor claim to represent the whole of

⁹ Cf. Kongregacja ds. Duchowieństwa, *Nawrócenie duszpasterskie wspólnoty parafialnej w służbie misji ewangelizacyjnej Kościoła*, n. 5, <https://www.ekai.pl/dokumenty/instrukcja-nawrocenie-duszpasterskie-wspolnoty-parafialnej-w-sluzbie-misji-ewangelizacyjnej-kosciola/> (Sep 20, 2013).

¹⁰ H. de Lubac, *Katolicyzm. Społeczne aspekty dogmatu*, Poznań 2011, p. 214n. The truths of faith are not a deposit of information but an event that transforms and enriches man. Therefore, dogmas are to become spirituality. Cf. P. Boschini, *La questione antropologica come luogo della verità teologica in un contesto plurale*, in: *Teologia dell'evangelizzazione. Fondamenti e modelli a confronto*, a cura di M. Tagliaferri, Bologna 2014, p. 192.

¹¹ B. Sesboüe, *Ewangelia i Tradycja*, Poznań 2012, p. 119.

Christ”¹². The Word of God is proclaimed so that it may once again become an “event” in the existential reality of the people of God. Then—as Benedict VI said— “[it] enters time and space, becoming the interlocutor of the man called to accept His gift in faith”¹³. Preaching is the transposition of biblical truth from Christ (the fullness of Revelation) to the Church and, in it, to each of us.

Therefore, preaching faithful to the nature of God’s Word should affect the listener’s life. It cannot remain without impact on human life. It cannot be just a form of conversation that aims only to interest the listener. Moreover, it cannot be a reference to human life only for illustrative purposes—drawing an example to illustrate the guideline from it¹⁴. It cannot be an abstract instruction, academic lecture, or lesson, although it should contain elements of doctrine. Remember that every truth of faith revealed in the Word of God is not so much for intellectual knowledge as for Christian life. Louis Bouyer aptly expresses this:

The truths of faith were given to us by God primarily so that we could live the life He intended for us. And not that they should serve our speculative knowledge. [...] By speaking to us, He wants to give us life, not food for thought or a toy for imagination¹⁵.

Although every truth of faith first touches the listener’s intellect, it does so in order to encompass his life. It is what Saint is talking about. Thomas Aquinas formulated the definition of faith, which can be expressed as follows: “Faith is accepting the word of God with reason as truth and goodness and making this truth the rule of one’s life” (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 155).

By synthesizing the statements of Church documents and homiletical reflection, it can be said that preaching affects the listener’s life in

¹² H. U. von Balthasar, *Chwała. Estetyka teologiczna*, vol. 1: *Kontemplacja postaci*, Kraków 2008, p. 182.

¹³ Benedykt XVI, *Verbum Domini*, 56.

¹⁴ Cf. R. Hajduk, *Meares agitur. Egzystencjalny aspekt przepowiadania homilijnego*, in: *Homilia integralna. Studium treści przepowiadania homilijnego*, eds. M. Dabówka, M. Klementowicz, Tarnów 2017, pp. 58–60.

¹⁵ L. Bouyer, *Wprowadzenie do życia duchowego. Zarys teologii ascetycznej i mistycznej*, Warszawa 2014, p. 39.

a double way: it illuminates and questions it. Preaching is, therefore, supposed to display the light that the word of God sheds on human existence and helps discover life's depth and meaning. Through preaching, the Word of God enters into a critical and liberating dialogue with human life—it reveals a new, previously unknown perspective to the faithful and helps them overcome human limitations¹⁶. The Council's Decree on Priestly Formation, *Optatam totius*, has a word here of "seeking solutions to human problems in the light of Revelation" (16). Such interpretive preaching reveals human life and vocation in the light of the history of salvation and—above all—in the light of the mystery of Christ, who fulfills this history and recapitulates in Himself the fate of every human being (cf. *Gaudium et spes* 22:38). It also does something more: it forms listeners into the likeness of Christ, persuading them to recreate the fate of Christ in themselves, to fill "what is lacking in Christ's torments" (cf. Col 1:24). Through such proclamation, the preacher brings the word of God closer to human life and confirms that the history of salvation continues in the life of the community, that God acted in it with the same dynamics and purpose with which He worked in the situation outlined in the word of God¹⁷.

Preaching is also intended to influence the lives of listeners by pointing out how God's word questions some aspects of their lives. The point is to expose those dimensions of community life that are inconsistent with the spirit of the Gospel, contrary to the "aspirations" of Christ (cf. Phil 2:5)—with His holiness, with perfect love, with obedience to the will of God, with the fruits of the Holy Spirit (cf. Gal 5:22–23), with humility, love of enemies, etc¹⁸. The preacher must grasp how the word of God exposes the listener's sinfulness, penetrates his interior (cf. Heb 4:12), and reveals in him the remains of the "old man" (cf. 1 Cor 15:31). The Word of God then becomes a criterion of discernment, suggesting what conversion of mind, heart, and life the Lord requires from us. Preaching helps us discern "what God's will is: what is good, what is acceptable

16 Cf. C. Dotolo, *L'annuncio del vangelo. Dal Nuovo Testamento al. Evangelii Gaudium*, Assisi 2015, pp. 102–114.

17 Cf. Franciszek, *Evangelii gaudium*, 47.

18 Cf. Paweł VI, *Evangelii nuntiandi*, 19.

and perfect” (Rom 12:2)¹⁹. The preacher’s function is to bring out the “moment of claim” contained in the word of God, to show the specificity of moral life that requires transformation. Above all, it encourages listeners to be faithful to Christ, who, as a new man, is the model and personal norm of Christian life. Every act and word of Jesus Christ is to be presented as a saving appeal “for us today,” an appeal calling us to conversion and obedience. The life of Christ then becomes the life of a Christian, and the Pascha of Christ becomes the Pascha of a Christian, according to the words of St. Paul: “It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me” (Gal 2:20).

2. Celebration of the Eucharist

In a secularized world, the fact that the Eucharist is celebrated so that God’s action can transform a person becomes even more important. From the very nature of the liturgy, “it is clear that knowing the mystery of Christ, which determines our lives, does not consist in the mental assimilation of an idea, but in a real, existential commitment to His person”²⁰. If the liturgy were celebrated without any connection with life, in the eyes of the faithful, it would appear like a solemn ceremony, an empty rite, or the sacred rituals of natural religions. Liturgy, however, concerns God and man. God is at its center—the liturgy is a “holy sacrifice of praise” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2643). This adoration is achieved through thanksgiving for the great works of creation and redemption and through offering a sacrifice in which the Church unites herself with her Savior (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1360–1361)²¹. This spiritual sacrifice of the Church also includes the lives of the faithful who are sanctified in the Eucharist, glorify God through good deeds, and are unified in the paschal act of Christ (cf. Rom 12:1; 1 Pt 2:5). Liturgical worship of God therefore leads to life—to the transformation of man. The liturgy—as Francis says—

¹⁹ Cf. Benedykt XVI, *Verbum Domini*, 87.

²⁰ Franciszek, *Desiderio desideravi*, 41.

²¹ Cf. W. Nowak, *Liturgia jako pieśń nowa ku czci Pana*, „Roczniki Liturgiczne” 1 (2009), pp. 314–315, 318.

gives glory to God not because we can add something to the beauty of the inaccessible light in which He dwells (cf. 1 Tim 6:16), or to the perfection of the angelic song that resounds eternally in the heavenly abode. The liturgy gives glory to God because it allows us here on earth to see God in the celebration of the mysteries and, seeing Him, to become alive with His Pascha: we, who were dead in transgressions, have been made alive again with Christ by grace (cf. Eph 2:5) and we are glory God²².

In contemporary evangelization, the point is that the liturgy also becomes a formative space for existential knowledge of God.

The Eucharist is an inexhaustible source of strength and energy for everyday life. It sustains the new life received in baptism, enabling us to become like Christ. Pope Francis emphasizes: “The celebration concerns the reality of our acquiescence to the action of the Spirit who works in it until Christ is formed in us (cf. Gal 4:19). The fullness of our formation is becoming like Christ. I repeat: it is not about the thought process, an abstract, but becoming Him”²³. However, it should be remembered that God is the primary subject of this formation of man. We do not create union with God and conformity to Christ ourselves, but we receive from Him. “The Eucharistic liturgy is, by its very nature, *actio Dei*, which involves us in Jesus through the Spirit”²⁴. The Eucharist is “a holy and divine liturgy” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1330). This unification and similarity, however, does not take place automatically. Touching the mystery of the Eucharist, man’s effort is needed to open himself to the saving mystery of God: “The temptation is always present in man to reduce the Eucharist to human dimensions, when in fact it is he who should open himself to the dimensions of the mystery”²⁵. This opening to the mystery is an effort to catch Christ, embrace Him, and join Him. Here we touch on the *ars celebrandi* – the art of proper

22 Franciszek, *Desiderio desideravi*, 43. As Pope Francis states: “The glory of God is the manifestation and communication of His goodness, for the sake of which the world was created. God’s plan of kindness was to make us ‘adopted sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to praise the majesty of his grace’ (Eph 1:5–6). It was God’s plan of kindness” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 294).

23 Franciszek, *Desiderio desideravi*, 41.

24 Benedykt XVI, *Sacramentum caritatis*, 7.

25 Jan Paweł II, *Mane nobiscum Domine*, 14.

celebration, which must be understood in unity with the full, active, and fruitful participation of all the faithful²⁶. In contemporary evangelization, there is a need for liturgical celebration – as Gianfranco Ravasi says – with its *numen* (mystery) and *lumen* (luminosity). It cannot be too “mysterious” at the risk of being reduced to some magical sacramentalism. It cannot be too simplified and aimed only at intellectual understanding, at the risk of reducing it to the rank of a secular party or happening or, on the other hand, to a theological lecture or catechetical instruction. The celebration should be clear, understandable, essential, and existential. At the same time, it should guard mystery, truth, and transcendence²⁷. The observance may only include activities that help open man to the *mysterium*, leading to Christification and divinization, which are the goals of every evangelization²⁸.

The Eucharist also teaches the sacramental perception of human life. The liturgy is enriched by the memory that God entered the history of humanity. It translates into the intensity of feeling and becoming aware of this presence in everyday life²⁹. Pope Francis expressed this awareness: “Look at your own history, and you will find much mercy in it. At the same time, it will strengthen your awareness that the Lord remembers and never forgets you”³⁰. Therefore, it will also be possible to restore to our culture the ability to “notice the particular presence of God and His action in the world”³¹. In other words, it is about faith – “a companion in life that allows us to see anew the miracles that God performs for us constantly”; which convinces us of the truthfulness of Jesus’ words: “My Father is working until now, and I am working” (John 5:17). Such faith does not allow us to look at the world as one that moves forward on its own, chaotically, in a way that makes no

²⁶ Cf. Benedykt XVI, *Sacramentum caritatis*, 37.

²⁷ Cf. G. Ravasi, *Dire Dio in modo bello. Evangelizzazione, arte ed estetica*, in: *Vino nuovo in otri nuovi? Sfide pastorali e giuridiche della nuova evangelizzazione*, a cura di M. Draulich, J. Pudumai Doss, Città del Vaticano 2013, p. 355n.

²⁸ Cf. M. Sodi, *La „nova evangelizatio” comincia anche dall’educazione alla liturgia?*, in: *Vino nuovo in otri nuovi? Sfide pastorali e giuridiche della nuova evangelizzazione*, p. 327.

²⁹ Cf. A. Żądło, *Egzystencjalno-pedagogiczny wymiar Eucharystii*, „Przegląd Homiletyczny” 11 (2007), p. 131.

³⁰ Franciszek, *Gaudete et exultate*, 153.

³¹ Franciszek, *Lumen fidei*, 17.

sense. Our life—our little world shifts according to God’s providential plan³². Human life is full of God’s traces, an example of which can be every crumb of selfless goodness or sacrificial love. Noticing these traces helps a person become rooted in God, “touch” the living God through experiencing His saving action in the world and in one’s own life, and “settle in His mystery,” which encompasses the whole of life. From such a perspective, the liturgy is a symbolic experience of what a person has already experienced in everyday life³³.

The Eucharist also teaches the proper approach to matter. The liturgy consists of elements that are exactly the opposite of spiritual abstractions: bread, wine, oil, water, scent, fire, ash, stone, fabric, colors, body, words, sounds, silence, gestures, space, movement, action, „order, time, and light”³⁴. Matter becomes the material of the Eucharist. It is done under the pedagogy of the Incarnation, in which all creation is accepted and attracted by God’s love. The Gospel says that the Logos did not despise taking a human body and made such peace with it that he could raise it from the dead. We receive part of this peace when we are immersed in Christ’s existence to experience it ourselves. Therefore, a Christian does not view the matter as “something” alien or threatening to his holiness. Eucharistic spirituality teaches that matter can be used for liturgical purposes—to glorify God and sanctify man, that it is possible to reconcile spirit with soul and body, eternity with time, and heaven with earth³⁵. However, this truth is strongly emphasized in the teaching of the Church: “God therefore wills creation as a gift addressed to man, as an inheritance intended for him and entrusted to him. The Church has had to repeatedly defend the truth about the goodness of creation, including the material world” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 299).

³² Cf. H. Stawiński, *Homilia w wprowadzaniem w doświadczenie Boga a kontekst sekularyzmu*, „Przegląd Homiletyczny” 16 (2012), pp. 126–128; L. Szewczyk, *Głoszenie słowa Bożego w środowisku zsekularyzowanym*, pp. 217–218.

³³ Cf. R. Hajduk, *Ewangelia na forum świata. Od apologetyki do marketingu narracyjnego*, Kraków 2013, p. 167.

³⁴ Franciszek, *Desiderio desideravi*, 42.

³⁵ Cf. D. W. Fagerberg, *Consecration of the World as liturgical Act*, „Roczniki Teologiczne” 64 (2017) Issue 8, p. 24.

The Eucharist is, after all, the formation of man so that his entire existence takes on a liturgical shape. Communion with Christ, union with God, is not the ultimate goal of the Eucharist. Getting to know Christ and becoming like Him is completed in everyday life. By its essence, the Eucharist aims to spill the mystery of Christ into the daily life of the faithful. It is the ultimate reality of the Eucharist. First, it is about thanking for the great work of salvation accomplished for us in Christ. It is also expressed in the readiness to recreate the attitude of Christ—the Servant towards the brothers, especially towards the weakest members of the Church. Ultimately, it involves co-offering oneself to God—as is done during the Eucharistic prayer—after anamnesis (cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 48). This offering of oneself to God is a constant process that goes beyond the framework of every Eucharistic celebration and consists of presenting love in life through all attitudes and actions³⁶.

3. “Diakonia” as the formation of the world in the spirit of the Gospel

Christian evangelization has always been alien to isolationism and exclusivism. The Church has been and should always be open to the world³⁷. This openness should not be understood in the sense of moral liberalism or progressivism, as is sometimes claimed in journalistic discourse. This openness to the world means, first of all, presence in the world in order to bring into it the newness contained in the Gospel. A Christian is always alien to rejecting and exorcising the world and matters as evil in themselves. It is worth recalling that the Christian tradition assesses the world in two ways. Sometimes, it is an object of acceptance: “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son” (John 3:16),

36 G. Strzelczyk, *Sakrament Eucharystii*, in: *Znaki tajemnicy. Sakramenty w teorii i praktyce Kościoła*, eds. K. Porosło, R. J. Woźniak, Kraków 2018, p. 387; A. Żądło, *Egzystencjalno-pedagogiczny wymiar Eucharystii*, p. 133.

37 Andrzej Zuberbier notes that “the dualism of temporal and eternal life, earthly and heavenly life, but not of the ‘Church’ and the ‘world,’ was strongly expressed in the Christian consciousness”. Only the process of de-Christianization and secularization in modern times contrasted the Church with the world and led to the Church closing in on herself. A. Zuberbier, „Człowiek droga Kościoła”: o eklezjologii Jana Pawła II, „*Studia Theologica Varsaviensia*” 28 (1990) no. 1, p. 159.

and sometimes of rejection: “Do not love the world or the things in the world! If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15). This means that God can love the world, can be divine and sacramental. It may also be corrupt and evil. It all depends on how a person uses the world. The world can be holy and theophanic if a man makes it as God wanted it, if he treats matter, himself, and other people with love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, etc. (cf. Gal 5:22–23). In other words: “faith in the One God allows us to use everything that is not God to the extent that it brings us closer to Him” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 226). The world can be corrupt and only temporal when man functions in it without reference to God when he treats himself and matters as an end in itself when he distorts everything towards himself in egoistic desire and absorption to satisfy his frightened “I”, when in his life—as Francis says—there are “nervous and violent anxiety [...], negative attitudes and sadness; convenient consumption and selfish acedia; individualism and many forms of false spirituality devoid of encounter with God”³⁸. In other words, the world becomes evil when man infects it with sin—when he brings pride, lust, greed, unhealthy ambition, strife, envy, drunkenness, etc. (cf. Rom 13:13).

Evangelization and Christian holiness, therefore, do not involve an escape from the world to some “holy ghettos” but mean the re-establishment of proper relationships between everything in the world and God. As Fabrice Hadjadj emphasizes, Christianity does not tear us away from the world and transport us “into space” or make us think only about life after death, nor does it make us push away creation to make room for the Creator. This approach to faith is the easiest way for atheists to be born—they move the Creator away to make room for creation. They think that Christianity despises life and is against the body. On the other hand, Christianity is so concerned with life that it wants to preserve and transform it. When we think about eternity, it is to bring it into the present and everyday life. So, God expects us to love creation as He does and to contribute to its development according to God’s thought³⁹.

³⁸ Franciszek, *Gaudete et exultate*, 111.

³⁹ Cf. F. Hadjadj, *Antypodęcznik ewangelizacji*, p. 51–64.

The realization of Christian holiness consists in courageously turning to the world and being present in it to make it what God wanted it to be⁴⁰. As the American liturgical theologian David W. Fagerberg says, we are not torn from this world like a tooth being pulled from its socket. This understanding is the mistake of Gnostic spirituality, which has never learned how to reconcile spirit with soul, eternity with time, and heaven with earth⁴¹. It is secularism that tries to disconnect the world from God. Modern evangelization protects man from this diabolical (divisive) approach that prevents heaven and earth from uniting. The contemporary style of evangelization consists of introducing the glory of God into the material world following the words of St. Paul: “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do everything to the glory of the Lord” (1 Corinthians 10:31). You can be a Christian, therefore, in everything you do and wherever you are (cf. *Ad gentes divinitus*, 11). The point is simply to—to quote Francis—“fill all ordinary things with extraordinary perfection”⁴². This perfection is only sacrificial and unconditional love—the Love of the Risen One⁴³. Then, the heavenly liturgy of the Lamb permeates every aspect of people’s life. It is why *Lumen gentium* describes lay Christians as those bound to Christ’s mission and anointed by the Holy Spirit. As a result, they consecrate the world where they live, and “all their works, prayers and apostolic undertakings, married and family life, daily work, rest of spirit and body” become spiritual sacrifices (cf. *Lumen gentium*, 34). These offerings are offered with the utmost reverence to the Father during the celebration of the Eucharist, together with the offering of the Lord’s Body. In this way, lay people, as pious worshipers of God everywhere, sanctify the world for Him⁴⁴. It is the priestly task to which all the baptized are called. Saint Gregory the Great

40 Cf. J. Scott, *Tutta la chiesa deve portare tutto il Vangelo a tutto il mondo. Un commento al patto di Losanna*, Chieti–Roma 2010, p. 17.

41 Cf. D. W. Fagerberg, *Consecration of the World as liturgical Act*, 24.

42 Franciszek, *Gaudete et exultate*, 17.

43 In his exhortation on holiness, Francis indicates several “wonderful ways” of manifesting this perfection: patient perseverance in goodness, gentleness, humility, joy that is a consequence of love, community life, and constant prayer. Cf. Franciszek, *Gaudete et exultate*, 112–157.

44 Cf. D. W. Fagerberg, *Consecration of the World as liturgical Act*, p. 28.

will say that if there is love, mutual respect, and care among believers, then “they will lead a life on earth worthy of angels”⁴⁵.

Through baptism, however, God created new people who, through sacrificial love, make this world divine. And God doesn’t put these people on some holy shelf. He wants to populate the earth with them so they may be there as a sign of life. God placed Christians on earth to bring the Gospel into this world, which is the power of life and an explosion of newness. God’s word can penetrate, interpret, and save every generation, place, and culture. “It can relativize and deepen each generation’s values and behavioral norms”⁴⁶. The Second Vatican Council, displaying the internal reason for the existence of the Church, indicates that the point is to bring God’s holiness into this world. The fact is that capacity and space be made in the world for God to dwell there and that this world may become His “kingdom” (cf. *Lumen gentium*, 4–7). Therefore, evangelization does not promote secular humanism but the pursuit of such a transformation of man’s relationships with creatures and other persons that they gain divine depth. Only by being in this world can Christians become its “leaven,” “salt” and “light” (cf. Mt 5:13–16). It is one of the reasons why Pope Francis talks about parrhesia—about evangelizing “boldness and enthusiasm.” Parrhesia is also the ability to live an open life available to God and brothers (cf. Acts 4:29; 9:28; 28, 31; 2 Cor 3:12; Eph 3:12; Heb 3:6; 10, 19). Parrhesia is the boldness of evangelization that forces us to overcome fear and temptation so that we do not get used to “moving only within safe limits” so that we do not run away “to a safe place”, “to an area we know”, to “lock ourselves in small worlds”⁴⁷.

When justifying the above style of evangelization, we should again refer to its source—the Gospel. In the mystery of the incarnation, Christ assumed human nature and everything related to life at a given time and history (culture). At the same time, Jesus introduces the newness of the Gospel into the religious and social context of his time and people. Jesus’ attitude towards the culture of his time can be expressed in three words: presence, universality, and transcendence. Jesus engaged

45 Św. Grzegorz Wielki, *Walcz dzielnie w obronie wiary*, in: *Liturgia godzin*, vol. 4, Poznań 1998, p. 51–64.

46 Papieska Komisja Biblijna, *Interpretacja Biblii w Kościele*, 87.

47 Franciszek, *Gaudete et exultate*, 129.

and was fully present in the culture of his people and time. By assuming human nature in a specific time and place, Jesus united with every person living in history (universality). By accepting human nature, he does not destroy it but elevates it in dignity and sublimates it (cf. *Gaudium et spes*, 22). Therefore, Jesus “cannot seem a stranger to anyone and in any place” (*Ad gentes divinitus*, 8). Universality is a characteristic feature of Christianity, which can settle into the culture of any time and place because nothing alienates it⁴⁸. Transcendence is expressed in the fact that Jesus does not accept every form of culture, including religious culture. He severely criticizes formalism – “human traditions” (Mark 7:8) and the hypocrisy of contemporary religiosity. He clearly and decisively reveals the transcendence of all cultures, including Hebrew, which he often contests and purify. We can, therefore, say that Jesus transcends all culture⁴⁹ by striving to consecrate and divinize it. Thus, presence, universality, and transcendence are eternally valid features of church evangelization.

* * *

The synthesis of the Gospel and life as the goal of evangelization is part of the realization of the modern Church, for which “man is the first and fundamental way”⁵⁰. Man is also the basic path for evangelization. Not in the sense that he was its only and most important point of reference, its only principle and reason. Its source, norm, and end is always the life of the Triune God. Its starting point and basis is always the Gospel, which has eternal potential for novelty and originality. Man is the path of evangelization in the sense that its main goal is to lead man to participate in the life of God. Evangelization aims to transform man and, through him, the entire world in its axiological, ethical, social, economic, and political dimension. In other words, the reason for the existence of the Church is to bring God’s life into the world around it, to inculturate the Gospel. Without this goal, evangelism would be merely

48 Cf. P. L. Cabri, *Provocazioni dell’inculturazione al magistero e della teologia*, in: *Teologia dell’evangelizzazione. Fondamenti e modelli a confronto*, a cura di M. Tagliaferri, Bologna 2014, p. 347.

49 P. Dyk, *Nowa ewangelizacja – konkretne wezwanie*, p. 235n.

50 Jan Paweł II, *Redemptor hominis*, 14.

superficial indoctrination. Without knowing the main motive of evangelization, its starting and reaching point, all diagnoses and evangelization initiatives may be “external” or oscillate towards fundamentalism and moralism.

The following article presents some aspects of the existential orientation of contemporary evangelization. In implementing the prophetic function, it was emphasized that the proclamation of the Word of God is to illuminate and transform human existence. Christ is proclaimed in order to become the center of human existence. Yet, it requires overcoming the intellectualist view of faith. In implementing the priestly function, the focus was on celebrating the Eucharist, showing it as a source of human strength and energy, a school of sacramental perception of life and appreciation of matter, and a space for forming a new man. In the implementation of the priestly function, attention was paid to the presence of the Church in the world and the Christian lifestyle, which is closely related to the promotion of man and the quality of his life.

The existential orientation of evangelization establishes the proper relationship of the Church with the world, which consists in welcoming it and dialogue with it, as suggested by the Second Vatican Council. Evangelization occurs in listening and dialogue with specific manifestations of culture through which a person expresses himself. To reject the modern world from above would mean denying the goodness of creation, the mystery of the Incarnation, the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, and the universality of the Church. Thus, the church must be open, hospitable, and close but simultaneously authentic. The Church is present in the world in order to cleanse the world of what is alien to the spirit of the Gospel and make it pleasing to God. Hence, the world is the basic path on which the work of man’s salvation and liberation is to be accomplished.


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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 42 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 nieojobytnie*, 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 pierwszą 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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Preparing a homily as an important element of pastoral care

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Abstract

Preparing a homily as an important element of pastoral care

The homily, which the Second Vatican Council assigned a special role among various forms of preaching the Word of God, is an important task for those, who are entrusted with pastoral care. The faithful eagerly listen to homilies, but at the same time, they often complain that their level is too low and expect homilies on the good level. Yet, the solution to the problem lies in good preparation of the homily. Also, preachers must be convinced that the time allocated for this is one of their most important pastoral duties. We have evidence of how the last popes, Benedict XVI and Francis, prepared their homilies. Working on a sermon is a creative process that goes through the following phases: research and collection of materials, incubation, illumination, and verification. The fruit of reflection and prayer is a homily characterized by Christocentrism, a positive message from which a moral call arises; it contains the teaching of the Church, actualizes the word of God, introduces the celebrated liturgy, and is single-thematic. Hence, in the pastors' belief in the important role of the sermon and its reliable preparation, there is an opportunity to improve the quality of the homily.

Keywords: preparation, homily, Benedict XVI, Francis

Abstrakt

Przygotowanie homilii jako istotny element postęgi duszpasterskiej

Homilia, której Sobór Watykański II przyznał szczególną rolę pośród różnych form przepowiadania słowa Bożego, jest ważnym zadaniem duszpasterzy. Wierni chętnie słuchają homilii, a jednocześnie narzekają często na ich zbyt niski poziom i oczekują, by były one lepsze. Rozwiązanie problemu tkwi w dobrym przygotowaniu homilii. Duszpasterze muszą się przekonać, że czas na to przeznaczony jest jednym z ich ważniejszych obowiązków duszpasterskich. Dysponujemy świadectwami o tym, jak ostatni papieże, Benedykt XVI i Franciszek, przygotowywali swoje homilie. Praca nad homilią jest procesem twórczym, który przechodzi przez fazy: kwerendy i zbierania materiałów, inkubacji, iluminacji oraz weryfikacji. Owocem przemyśleń i modlitwy jest homilia odznaczająca się chrystocentryzmem, pozytywnym przekazem, z którego wynika moralne wezwanie; zawiera nauczanie Kościoła, stanowi aktualizację słowa Bożego, wprowadza w celebrowaną liturgię i jest jednotematyczna. To właśnie w przekonaniu duszpasterzy o ważnej roli homilii i w rzetelnym jej przygotowaniu tkwi szansa poprawy jakości homilii.

Słowa kluczowe: przygotowanie, homilia, Benedykt XVI, Franciszek

Preaching the word of God is a divine-human event. It means that its effectiveness is determined by both God and man. However, human effectiveness depends on the preacher's good preparation and the appropriate disposition of the listeners. The good preparation of the preacher includes both his prior human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral formation, the right intention, i.e., preaching for the glory of God and the spiritual benefit of the listeners, as well as prayerful, thoughtful, and organized content.

This article aims to highlight and appreciate the important role of preparing homilies in the service of those entrusted with pastoral care. Pastors are obliged to preach homilies, and the audience has the right to receive spiritual food from their spiritual leaders. Although on the one hand, many voices are complaining about the low level of homilies, on the other hand, there are voices demanding that they be preached, even every day. An antidote that can be used to reduce the gap between the poor qualities of homilies expounded, and the demand for them is to increase the value of the preparation of homilies in the ministry of pastors. The source of the analysis will be the popes' statements and surveys conducted in Poland before the synod on synodality.

First, let's discuss the paradox of complaining about the quality of homilies and the demand for listening to them. Secondly, we will point out the importance of preparing a homily in the ministry of pastors. Thirdly, we will present different ways of preparing a homily using the example of Pope Benedict XVI and Francis. Fourth, we will deliver features of a well-prepared homily.

1. The paradox of complaining about the quality of homilies and the demand to listen to them

Pope Francis, who can easily be considered the "Pope of homilies," expressed criticism at least twice during 2023 about the quality of the homilies he preached. Once, he called it a "disaster", and another time he called it a "torture." In a speech on January 20, 2023, to a group of priests, diocesan liturgical directors, who participated in Rome in the course "Full participation in the liturgical action" conducted by the Pontifical

Institute of Liturgy at the University of San Anselmo,¹ Francis spoke about the need to improve the quality of sermons and proposed that they last eight, ten minutes, no more! He emphasized that homilies are not lectures.

At times I hear someone [say]: ‘Yes, I went to Mass in that parish ... yes, a good lesson of philosophy, forty, forty-five minutes ... Eight, ten, no more! And always a thought, a sentiment and an image. Let people take something home with them.’²

In a comment on this statement, Christopher Lamb quoted an observation from the listener of the homily, Ellen Lynch, a communications professional living in Raleigh, North Carolina, in the United States, who wrote on Twitter: “It is so true. I once was at a Mass where the homily was 50 minutes!!! Do I remember anything beyond how it felt like torture? Nope.”³

Francis made a second critical assessment of the homily during a press conference on the plane, returning from World Youth Day in Lisbon.

Some of you, through Matteo [Bruni], asked why I cut short the homilies that you received. When I speak—not the “academic” addresses, those I try to do more clearly—when I speak, I always make an effort to communicate. You have seen how even in the “academic” addresses I make some joke or comment that brings a smile, in order to keep communication open. With the young people, the long addresses contained the essence of the message, and I took from them what I felt served communication. You saw how I asked some question, and immediately

1 Ch. Lamb, *Catholic homilies are often a ‘disaster’ says Pope*, “The Tablet”, Jan 24, 2023, <https://www.thetablet.co.uk/news/16448/catholic-homilies-are-often-a-disaster-says-pope> (Aug 2, 2023). The meeting concerned implementation, i.e., putting into practice the conciliar liturgical reform in individual dioceses and liturgical formation under the indications contained in the apostolic letter of Francis *Desiderio desideravi* of June 29, 2022.

2 Ch. Lamb, *Catholic homilies are often a ‘disaster’ says Pope*, “The Tablet”, Jan 24, 2023, <https://www.thetablet.co.uk/news/16448/catholic-homilies-are-often-a-disaster-says-pope> (Aug 2, 2023). There is a clear reference here to *Evangelii gaudium*, 157.

3 K. Duffy, *Pope Francis and the Search for Solutions to the Bad Sermon Phenomenon*, Mar 27, 2023, <https://churchlifejournal.nd.edu/articles/pope-francis-and-the-search-for-solutions-to-the-bad-sermon-phenomenon/> (Nov 20, 2023).

the response showed me where things were going, whether I was on track or not. Young people don't have a great attention span. Think that, if you make a clear address with an idea, in image, and emotion, they can follow you for eight minutes. Parenthetically, in *Evangelii Gaudium*, which was my first Exhortation, I wrote a long, long chapter on the homily. Because, homilies—there is parish priest here and he knows this—homilies are sometimes a torture, blah blah blah..., and the people... In some countries, the men leave church to have a smoke and then come back. The Church needs to be converted on this aspect of the homily. Homilies need to be brief and clear, to have a clear message and to be affectionate.⁴

It may sound paradoxical, but the fact is that, on the one hand, there are so many critical comments about homilies. On the other hand, wishes are expressed for homilies to be preached often, even daily, because people want to listen to them. This is evidenced by surveys collected in Poland among respondents during preparations for the synod on synodality in the Church.

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. The moralizing tone of homilies in which there is no place for the Good News and the *kerygma* is also discouraging. In many cases, priests are unprepared to preach the word of God. Homilies often lack a deep explanation of the Word read, the truths of faith, and any reference to the Bible. Celebrants often read other people's texts downloaded from the Internet and preach too short or too long and complicated sermons or homilies, thus disregarding or even insulting the listeners. The faithful greatly appreciate these places where a short homily is preached daily during Holy Mass, explaining the word of God being read. The need to preach brief homilies on weekdays and meditate on the word of God every day for at least three minutes was emphasized.⁵

4 Francis, *Papal Speeches*. In-Flight Press Conference, Sunday, Aug 6, 2023, <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2023/august/documents/20230806-portogallo-voloritorno.html> (Sep 10, 2023).

5 Synod 2021–2023. Synteza krajowa. Ku Kościołowi synodalnemu: komunია, uczestnictwo, misja, koordynacja A. J. Galbas, Ruda Śląska 2022, p. 21, https://synod.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Synteza_SYNOD_2021_2023_mobile.pdf (Aug 6, 2023).

Also, a working document prepared in October 2022 by the synod secretariat for the continental stage—based on the syntheses of all Episcopal Conferences of the Universal Church, as well as the Eastern Churches and other groups of the faithful such as religious institutes and lay movements—took up the issue of homilies. In the context of shortcomings related to celebrating the liturgy, the poor quality of homilies was also mentioned. Respondents accuse them of shallow thematic content, expecting them to focus on the biblical texts proclaimed in the liturgy, the liturgical celebration, and the social life of the listeners.

The reports do not fail to point out the main shortcomings of the actual celebratory praxis, which obscure its synodal effectiveness. In particular, the following are emphasized: the liturgical protagonism of the priest and the risk of the passivity of the wider liturgical community; poor preaching, including the distance between the content of the sermon, the beauty of faith and the concreteness of life; and the separation between the liturgical life of the assembly and the family network of the community. The quality of homilies is almost unanimously reported as a problem: there is a call for *deeper homilies, centered on the Gospel and the readings of the day, and not on politics, making use of accessible and attractive language that refers to the lives of the faithful* (Maronite Church).⁶

This statement proves that listeners value homilies and expect appropriate quality from their preachers. High-quality homilies cannot be expected if the pastors called to preach them do not devote adequate time to their preparation.⁷

2. The importance of preparing a homily in pastoral care

Since the homily is the weekly food of the faithful, its preparation is a constant responsibility of pastors. The Council of Trent (1545–1563)

6 General Secretariat of the Synod, *Synod 2021–2024. For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission. “Enlarge the Space of Your Tent” (Is 54:2). Working Document for the Continental Stage*, Vatican City, October 2022, 93, see 64; <https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/common/phases/continental-stage/dcs/Documento-Tappa-Continental-EN.pdf> (Sep 7, 2023).

7 See H. Sławiński, *Konieczność przygotowania homilii. Na kanwie aktualnych polemik o pomocach kaznodziejskich*, „Przegląd Homiletyczny” 12 (2008), pp. 17–24.

already attached great importance to pastors zealously and systematically preaching the Word of God to the faithful. This council reprimanded the negligence of pastors in this respect, imposing canonical and financial penalties on the lazy: lazy pastors who neglected their duty to preach were to be deprived of their financial benefits. However, it was necessary to support financially those who duly contributed to this service.⁸

The last council, the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), does not say anything about sanctions against pastors who neglect the preaching of the Word of God. Still, it treats the tasks of pastors positively: it emphasizes that preaching the Word of God is a priority function in the ministry of priests. In the *Decree on the Ministry and Priestly Life*, we read:

The word of the living God unites the People of God, rightly demanded from the lips of priests. Since no one can be saved unless he first believes, priests, as collaborators with bishops, have the duty of preaching the Gospel of God to everyone [...]. Therefore, Priests are indebted to all to share with them the truth of the Gospel they enjoy in the Lord.⁹

8 “Archpriests, curates, and all those who [...] have the cure of souls, shall, at least on the Lord’s days, and solemn feasts, either personally, or if they be lawfully hindered, by others who are competent, feed the people committed to them, with wholesome words, according to their own capacity, and that of their people; by teaching them the things which it is necessary for all to know unto salvation, and by announcing to them with briefness and plainness of discourse, the vices which they must avoid, and the virtues which they must follow after, that they may escape everlasting punishment, and obtain the glory of heaven. And if any one of the above neglect to discharge this duty [...] let not the watchful pastoral solicitude of the bishops be wanting, [...]; lest that word be fulfilled; The little ones have asked for bread, and there was none to break it unto them. Wherefore, if, after having been admonished by the bishop, they shall neglect this their duty for the space of three months, let them be compelled by ecclesiastical censures, or otherwise, at the discretion of the said bishop; in such wise that even-if this seem to him expedient-a fair remuneration be paid, out of the fruits of the benefices, to some other person to discharge that office, until the principal himself repenting shall fulfil his own duty” (The Council of Trent, Session 5, II: *On preachers of the word of God, and on Questors of alms*, 11, <http://www.thecounciloftrent.com/ch5.htm> (Oct 9, 2023)).

9 Second Vatican Council, *Presbyterorum ordinis*, Dec 7, 1965, 4.

The obligation to preach the Word of God results from the identity of the priest received in the sacrament of Holy Orders, as well as from the right of the faithful to be provided with the spiritual food by their pastors. Let us add that the priestly service is carried out by both priests and their superiors—bishops, and in their case, the proclamation of the Word of God is a priority task too. *The Council’s Decree on the Pastoral Functions of Bishops in the Church*, “*Christus Dominus*,” states: “In fulfilling their duty to teach, let them announce the Gospel of Christ to people—which is at the forefront among the essential tasks of bishops.”¹⁰

Good and effective performance of the ministry of preaching is impossible without direct, regular preparation prior to it. Pope Francis highlighted the importance of preparing a homily in pastoral service in his programmatic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*. He considered this preparation so important that even other religious services should give way to it, not to mention other pastors unrelated to pastoral care activities.

Preparation for preaching is so important a task that a prolonged time of study, prayer, reflection and pastoral creativity should be devoted to it. With great affection I wish to stop for a moment and offer a method of preparing homilies. Some may find these suggestions self-evident, but I consider it helpful to offer them as a way of emphasizing the need to devote quality time to this precious ministry. Some pastors argue that such preparation is not possible given the vast number of tasks which they must perform; nonetheless, I presume to ask that each week a sufficient portion of personal and community time be dedicated to this task, even if less time has to be given to other important activities. Trust in the Holy Spirit who is at work during the homily is not merely passive but active and creative. It demands that we offer ourselves and all our abilities as instruments (cf. Rom 12:1) which God can use. A preacher who does not prepare is not spiritual; he is dishonest and irresponsible with the gifts he has received.¹¹

In such an important document, Francis considered programmatic for his pontificate, the entire third point of the third chapter of the

¹⁰ Second Vatican Council, *Christus Dominus*, 12.

¹¹ Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, Nov 24, 2013, 145.

exhortation was devoted to the preparation for preaching.¹² From a negative perspective, however, it must be admitted that homilies are becoming one of the causes of apatheism, or indifference, especially among young people. Francis mentioned this in his exhortation *Christus vivit*. He linked the fact that many young people do not expect anything from the Church, among other things, to the laziness and superficiality of priests and, more precisely, to the lack of “care in preparing homilies and preaching the Word of God.”¹³ Bishop Robert Barron made similar annotations: research conducted in 2012 among Catholics who left the Church showed that one of the reasons was the poor quality of homilies.

Preparing a homily turns out to be one of the fundamental issues of homiletics as a field of practical theology. Moreover, the entire study of theology, properly understood, is a preparation for preaching the Word of God. Theology is for preaching, not the other way around. According to Francis, a homily must be well prepared in prayer and study of the word of God, and it should be able to be expressed in a clear and short summary.¹⁴ Francis emphasizes that preparing a proclamation is a creative process.¹⁵ A good pastor is a creative artist, and each well-prepared homily is a work of art. Does not world literature contain sermons as great speeches that shaped history: from the Sermon on the Mount

¹² Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, 145–159.

¹³ Francis, *Christus vivit*, 40; see H. Sławiński, *Inspiracje Franciszka dla postugi słowa*, „Polonia Sacra” 25 (2021) no. 4, p. 59; K. Duffy, *Pope Francis and the Search for Solutions to the Bad Sermon Phenomenon*, Mar 27, 2023, <https://churchlifejournal.nd.edu/articles/pope-francis-and-the-search-for-solutions-to-the-bad-sermon-phenomenon/> (Nov 20, 2023).

¹⁴ “And the homily must be prepared well; it must be brief, short! A priest told me that once he had gone to another city where his parents lived, and his father told him: ‘You know, I am pleased, because my friends and I have found a church where they say Mass without a homily!’. And how often do we see that during the homily some fall asleep, others chat or go outside to smoke a cigarette.... For this reason, please, make the homily brief, but prepare it well. And how do we prepare a homily, dear priests, deacons, bishops? How should it be prepared? With prayer, by studying the Word of God and by making a clear and brief summary; it should not last more than 10 minutes, please” (Francis, General Audience, Feb 7, 2018, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2018/documents/papa-francesco_20180207_udienza-generale.html (Nov 10, 2023)).

¹⁵ Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, 145.

delivered by Jesus of Nazareth, through Bernard of Clairvaux, Martin Luther King to John Paul II!

Like any creative process, preparing a homily takes place in successive stages described by the psychology of creativity. These are: material collection, “incubation period”, illumination period, and verification stage. Let’s discuss them briefly.

(1) Collecting material first involves getting acquainted with the biblical and liturgical texts intended for a given celebration, taking into account the periods of the liturgical year. We should consider the possibility of selecting appropriate prayers, songs, and possibly fragments of literature for the holy texts. Then, one must find points of contact between sacred texts and what concerns man and society. It is about real-life experiences, observations, conversations with people, and information from TV, radio, newspapers, and the Internet.

(2) Then comes the time of incubation, which is a frustrating stage: we don’t know what kind of homily one can create. Nevertheless, you have to learn to endure these frustrations. While the previous stage, i.e., collecting information, occurs on the conscious level, the incubation stage occurs on the unconscious plane. It precedes the next stage, which involves relieving tension due to illumination, sometimes during the most routine activities, such as a walk or preparing for rest.

(3) The illumination stage is, in other words, finding an idea for a homily, creating a connection between the text and the listeners, and discovering the direction in which the text is to be updated. Not every idea is right; it may turn out to be dreadful. One then needs to look for new solutions and take further considerations. It is best to consider several ideas that can be compared with each other and then decide on the best one at a given moment.

(4) The final stage of creative work on the homily is the verification phase. It is about giving the selected idea an appropriate structure and linguistic form. Jan Twardy undertook an in-depth discussion of the individual stages of creative work in his dissertation “The Concept of Creative Work on a Sermon.”¹⁶

16 J. Twardy, *Koncepcja pracy twórczej nad kazaniem. Inspiracje psychologiczne w niemieckojęzycznych publikacjach homiletycznych 1970–1996*, Rzeszów 1998, pp. 157–174.

3. The example of the preparation of a homily by Benedict XVI and Francis

A good homily can only be delivered by a well-prepared preacher. This is the purpose of the human, intellectual, spiritual, and pastoral formation of candidates for the priesthood and the permanent formation of priests. Although every priest is a theologian by profession, it must be emphasized that theology serves preaching. The purpose of the entire formation of the pastor finds its synthetic expression in the gesture of the cross on the lips and the prayer of the pastor, who begins the day with the Liturgy of the Hours: “Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare Your praise” (cf. Ps 51:17).

In addition to further preparation of the pastor, each preaching service requires reliable, direct preparation of each homily. Each pastor develops his own method of immediate preparation based on the homiletical education he has received and the experiences of other masters of the word.

Having testimonies from recent popes, one knows how they prepared their homilies. In his interesting doctoral dissertation entitled *Homily in the Theory and Practice of Benedict XVI*, Jakub Wiśniewski included a letter he received from Pope Benedict XVI on November 7, 2019 in response to a question about how the Pope prepared his homilies:

Unfortunately, I cannot answer your question about the method of preparing sermons and the entire process. I simply prayed for enlightenment first, then read the biblical text in German and Greek, and then looked through the commentaries as my time permitted, which seemed useful for that matter. Then, I wondered what this text had to say to me personally and how it affected people listening to my sermon. The confrontation between the living reality of today and the Word of Scripture should ultimately bring that Word to me and the congregation. Unfortunately, I cannot tell you more about my preparation for preaching. Of course, their background is the effort to live according to the Word of God.¹⁷

17 J. Wiśniewski, *Homilia w teorii i praktyce Benedykta XVI*, Kraków 2021, pp. 288–289.

Benedict XVI tried to live by what he taught. The testimony of his work in preparing a homily reflects his teaching in *Verbum Domini*.¹⁸

Pope Francis uses another, less academic, method of preparing a homily. We got to know it thanks to the record of Diego J. Fares, who conducted numerous conversations with Franciszek. In one of them, when asked about the method of preparing homilies, the popes confessed:

I start preparations the day before. At noon the day before the morning Holy Mass. I look through the next day's readings and usually choose one of the two. Then, I read aloud the text I had chosen. I need to hear sounds and listen to words spoken aloud. At that time, I marked the words that moved me the most in my recently reading book. I circle these words that move me. For the rest of the day, these words and the thoughts associated with them ebb and flow as I do my thing. At the same time, I meditate, reflect, and enjoy things... However, there are days when nothing comes to my mind until evening when I have no idea what to say the next day. Then I do what Saint says. Ignacy: I'm going to sleep on it. And then, as soon as I wake up, inspiration strikes. The right thoughts come to mind, sometimes sounding strong or a little weaker. But it is so. I feel like I'm prepared.¹⁹

Both the first and second testimonies mention the previously discussed stages of creative work on the homily: collection and analysis of source material, incubation, illumination, and verification.

18 "Hence, it is necessary for preachers to 'remain familiar' and to engage frequently with the sacred text; they should prepare for the homily in meditation and prayer so that they preach with conviction and passion. The Synod Assembly encouraged us to ask ourselves: 'What do the texts we read say? What do they tell me myself? What should I say to the community regarding its specific situation?' The preacher should 'be the first to apply to himself the word of God that he preaches' because—as St. Augustine—'the action of one who preaches the word of God externally and does not listen to it internally is undoubtedly fruitless.' We need to prepare Sunday and holiday homilies with particular care" (Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*, Sep 30, 2010, 59).

19 J. M. Bergoglio, *Nei tuoi occhi è la mia parola. Omelie e discorsi di Buenos Aires 1999–2013*, Milano 2016; quote by D. J. Fares, *Dziesięć rad papieża Franciszka*, Łódź 2018, pp. 79–80.

4. Features of a well-prepared homily

A well-prepared homily, which is the result of meditation and reflection, is characterized by the following features: it is Christocentric, it contains a positive message, it preserves the priority of the Good News to the moral obligation, it includes the teaching of the Church, it is an update of the Word of God, it contains an element of mystagogy, and it is single-thematic.

In contemporary theology, it is emphasized that Christ—the Incarnate Word of God—is the main preacher of the Word of God and, simultaneously, the basic content of preaching, including the main content of homilies. He is the Good News that the first witnesses of His life proclaimed, and the Evangelists recorded His words and deeds. The same Christ lives and works among believers both during the liturgy and in everyday life.²⁰ As Benedict XVI wrote in *Verbum Domini*, “It must be clear to the faithful that the preacher is interested in presenting Christ, who should be at the center of every homily.”²¹ When speaking about the Christocentrism of preaching, one should add that one means Trinitarian Christocentrism. Thanks to Christ, it has been revealed that God is one in Three Persons: God the Father, God the Son, and the Holy Spirit. All Christian worship is directed to God the Father, in the Holy Spirit, through Christ, with Christ, and in Christ.

The second feature of a well-prepared homily is the transmission of a positive message. The entire history of God with people is filled on the one hand with human infidelity and sin and on the other with God’s faithfulness: the whole history is subordinated to the almighty God who loves His creation and is faithful to His promises. Indeed, our world is not perfect, but it is the best possible, and is in a constant state of development. Everything will be fine in the end. No situation is hopeless. Even the message about Christ crucified is complemented by the message about His resurrection and glorification. God’s plan to save people is an entirely positive message.

²⁰ H. Sławiński, *Chrystus urzeczywistnił Pismo*, Kraków 2007, p. 16.

²¹ Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*, 59; por. Ch. Smith, *The Sociology of a Superb Sermon*, Apr 30, 2019, <https://churchlifejournal.nd.edu/articles/the-sociology-of-a-superb-sermon/> (Nov 20, 2023).

Before Jesus ascended to heaven, the disciples received encouragement from the Master to preach the Gospel, that is, the Good News, and not to complain about reality and to proclaim disasters, following the example of the mythological Cassandra of Troy, who prophesied misfortunes. The homily, like the word of God announced before it, is the Good News.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* reminds us, “that in everything God works for good for those who love him”. The constant witness of the saints confirms this truth: St. Catherine of Siena said to “those who are scandalized and rebel against what happens to them: Everything comes from love, all is ordained for the salvation of man, God does nothing without this goal in mind”. St. Thomas More, shortly before his martyrdom, consoled his daughter: “Nothing can come but that that God wills. and I make me very sure that whatsoever that be, seem it never so bad in sight, it shall indeed be the best.”²²

Even if, in the homily, it is necessary to respond to dramas, condemn sin, and apply admonitions and warnings—all this does not lose the character of a positive message because all admonitions take into account the chance of man’s conversion. God, rich in mercy, never doubts in man, which is the basis of the hope that permeates the homilies.

The third feature of a well-prepared homily is the priority of the saving indicative over the moral imperative. As in the Decalogue, also in a homily, it must first be said what God does for man, and only then can moral instructions resulting from God’s gift be drawn. All human morality is a response to God’s calling, as Stanisław Olejnik put it in the title of his post-conciliar textbook on moral theology: *In response to God’s gift and calling*.²³ The proclaimed word of God is related to life and human

²² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_P19.HTM, 313.

²³ *W odpowiedzi na dar i powołanie Boże. Zarys teologii moralnej*, Warszawa 1979; see L. Szewczyk, *Chrystocentryczne głoszenie zasad życia chrześcijańskiego*, in: *Głosimy Pana Jezusa Chrystusa. Treść przepowiadania*, ed. by H. Sławiński, Kraków 2017, pp. 173–196; M. Orzoł, *Odpowiedź na wezwanie. Treści parenetyczne przepowiadania homilijnego*, in: *Homilia integralna. Studium treści przepowiadania homilijnego*, eds. M. Dąbrówka, M. Klementowicz, Tarnów 2017, pp. 117–130; A. Derdziuk, *Treści teologicznomoralne w homilii*, in: *Homilia integralna*, pp. 107–116.

morality: “The word of the Lord enters through the ears, reaches the heart and passes into the hands, into good deeds.”²⁴

The fourth feature of a good homily is the transmission of the message of salvation following the teachings of the Church. It is beneficial to deepen the content of the sermon by referring to the Fathers of the Church and good theologians, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and documents of the Holy See. Since a homily is not a lecture but a liturgical act, the necessary doctrinal explanations cannot become independent of the life of the listeners and the context of the liturgy but only constitute an explanation of the salvific message. Filling homilies with the catechism content is not easy, but it is necessary. Pope Benedict XVI postulated in the exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis*:

The catechetical and encouraging purpose of the homily should be kept in mind. It is advisable that—starting from the three-year cycle of the lectionary—appropriate thematic homilies should be presented to the faithful in which the great issues of the Christian faith are discussed during the liturgical year. Their content must be drawn reliably from the Magisterium based on the four “pillars” defined by the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and the recently published *Compendium*: profession of faith, celebration of the Christian mystery, life in Christ, and Christian prayer.²⁵

Before the Second Vatican Council, it was popular to preach thematic catechism sermons independent of the liturgy. Currently, it is not about returning to them but about preaching homilies enriched with the content contained in the *Catechism of the Church*, in its compendium, as well as in the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*.²⁶ As recent re-

²⁴ “the Word of the Lord enters through the ears, goes to the heart and passes to the hands, to good deeds” (Francis, *General Audience*, Feb 7, 2018, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2018/documents/papa-francesco_20180207_udi-enza-generale.html (Nov 10, 2023)).

²⁵ Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum caritatis*, Mar 13, 2007, 46.

²⁶ Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html (Aug 6, 2022).

search has revealed, the doctrinal content in homilies is very modest.²⁷ Also, the 2022 working document for the continental stage of the synod on synodality—based on syntheses of all Episcopal Conferences of the Catholic Church, as well as the Eastern Churches and other groups such as religious institutes and lay movements—stated that “The quality of homilies is almost unanimously indicated as a problem: calls for ‘deeper homilies, focused on the Gospel and the readings of the day, not on politics, using accessible and attractive language that relates to the lives of the faithful.’”²⁸ The catechetical goal of the homily remains a postulate to be developed: how to include catechetical elements that are didactic in a short speech that is not a lecture but part of the liturgy.

The fifth feature of a good homily is updating the word of God and addressing life issues. Therefore, a good sermon conveys words that matter to the audience and helps interpret reality through God’s presence and action in the world. In addition to developing biblical exegesis, analyses of social problems and the culture of the addressees are useful in preparing homilies.²⁹ According to Pope Francis, preachers should listen to the people to discover what the faithful need to hear. In this way they learn “of the aspirations, of riches and limitations, of ways of praying, of loving, of looking at life and the world, which distinguish this or that human gathering.”³⁰

In the contemplation of the people, the idea is to connect the message of the biblical text with the human situation. In other words, discerning the needs of homily recipients is about reading God’s message in events,

and this is much more than simply finding something interesting to say. What we are looking for is what the Lord has to say in this or that particular circumstance.

27 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.

28 General Secretariat of the Synod, *Synod 2021–2024*, 64, 93.

29 H. Sławiński, *Kultura lokalna jako kontekst przepowiadania globalnego orędzia*, „Roczniki Teologiczne” 66 (2019) fasc. 12, pp. 95–106; A. Draguła, *Chrystocentryczna interpretacja ludzkiej kultury*, in: *Głosimy Pana Jezusa Chrystusa. Treść przepowiadania*, ed. by H. Sławiński, Kraków 2017, pp. 295–308.

30 Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, 154; The Bishop’s Committee on Priestly Life and Ministry, *Fulfilled in Your Hearing. The Homily in the Sunday Assembly*, Washington 1982, p. 14.

Preparation for preaching thus becomes an exercise in evangelical discernment, wherein we strive to recognize—in the light of the Spirit—a call which God causes to resound in the historical situation itself. In this situation, and also through it, God calls the believer.³¹

Recognizing the listeners' needs includes their experiences, joys, disappointments, fears, suffering; of their own and those of others, a sense of uncertainty, and worries about their loved ones. At the same time, "one never has to answer questions that no one asks themselves,"³² and also one has to remember that there are questions to which there are no easy, unambiguous answers, for example, the question about the suffering of innocent children.

The sixth feature of a good homily is mystagogy. The homily is an integral part of the liturgy, which means that it grows out of it and leads to it; it is part of the liturgical dialogue, enriches it, and creates an opportunity to experience the mystery being celebrated more consciously. The atmosphere of the liturgy of the day permeates the homily, which is particularly clear in the direct references to liturgical texts and symbols. A good homily points to God's current action, to the fact that He is present and active, especially in the liturgical assembly. Mystagogy in the homily allows listeners to be touched by the closeness and action of God and respond with repentance, request, propitiation, thanksgiving, and praise.³³

Finally, the seventh feature of a good homily is its single-topic nature. In this context, Pope Francis laconically expressed it after his homiletic master: "A good homily, as the old master told me, should contain 'one thought, one feeling, and one image.'"³⁴

So much for the content. When it comes to form, the homily should be spoken from the heart, with passion, conviction, commitment, kindness towards the listeners, and respect for the pluralism of the congregation.

³¹ Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, 154.

³² Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, 154–155.

³³ See S. Dyk, *Homilia w osmozie z teologią liturgiczną*, „Polonia Sacra” 21 (2017) no. 2, pp. 27–43; M. Dąbrówka, „Zaprowadzi ich do tryskających źródeł”. Treści mistagogiczne przepowiadania homilijnego, in: *Homilia integralna*, pp. 149–170.

³⁴ Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, 157.

It is best when it is spoken or secondarily spoken—it is a term used by Walter Ong, who dealt with orality. The primary form of interpersonal communication was speech and orality. After the invention of writing, the way people communicate changed. The text written and delivered is secondary orality. The idea is not to read in a boring way but to speak, even if the speech has been written down beforehand.

Conclusion

The homily restored by the Second Vatican Council contributed to making God's word more abundantly available to the faithful. They value homilies and expect them from their pastors, and at the same time, they complain about the poor quality of the content they hear and expect the level of sermons to be higher. The way to do this is to convince pastors that the time devoted to preparing a homily is as important as other pastoral duties and even comes to the forefront of these duties. To a large extent the chance to improve the quality of sermons lies in the pastors' belief in the important role of the homily and its consistent preparation.


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The truth about man and for man. Practical implications of John Paul II's encyclical “Fides et ratio”

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Abstract

The truth about man and for man. Practical implications of John Paul II's encyclical "Fides et ratio"

Twenty-five years ago, John Paul II's encyclical *Fides et ratio* was published, where the question of truth occupies a central place. The task of the Church is to transmit to people the truth revealed by Jesus Christ, which discloses the mystery of God and man, is accessible in faith, and appeals to the intellect to accept it. In these times, dominated by a pragmatic approach to reality, a question arises about the practical, existential meaning of the truth proclaimed by the Church. The content analysis of the papal teaching in "*Fides et ratio*" leads to the conclusion that the truth cannot be reduced to a set of ideas that enrich human cognition. Therefore, the ecclesial 'diakonia' of truth serves human life because it helps man use his freedom properly and leads him to the fullness of humanity. The truth allows man to protect himself from relativism and religious egalitarianism threats. The communication of truth should consider people's needs to perceive it as a precious gift from God, not as a yoke.

Keywords: John Paul II, the Church, pastoral ministry, freedom, pragmatism, relativism

Abstrakt

Prawda o człowieku i dla człowieka. Praktyczne implikacje encykliki Jana Pawła II „Fides et ratio”

Dwadzieścia pięć lat temu ukazała się encyklika Jana Pawła II „*Fides et ratio*”, w której centralne miejsce zajmuje kwestia prawdy. Zadaniem Kościoła jest przekazywać ludziom prawdę objawioną przez Jezusa Chrystusa, która odsłania tajemnicę Boga i człowieka, jest dostępna w wierze i apeluje do intelektu o jej przyjęcie. W obecnych czasach, w których dominuje pragmatyczne podejście do rzeczywistości, pojawia się pytanie o praktyczne, egzystencjalne znaczenie prawdy głoszonej przez Kościół. Przeprowadzona pod tym kątem analiza treściowa nauczania papieskiego w „*Fides et ratio*” prowadzi do wniosku, iż prawdy nie można sprowadzić do zbioru idei, wzbogacających ludzkie poznanie. Kościelna diakonia prawdy służy ludzkiemu życiu, gdyż pomaga człowiekowi właściwie wykorzystać jego wolność i prowadzi go do osiągnięcia pełni człowieczeństwa. Prawda pozwala człowiekowi uchronić się przed zagrożeniami wynikającymi z relatywizmu i egalitaryzmu religijnego. Jej przekaz winien uwzględniać potrzeby ludzi, aby była postrzegana przez nich jako cenny dar Boga, a nie jako jarzmo.

Słowa kluczowe: John Paul II, Kościół, duszpasterstwo, wolność, pragmatyzm, relatywizm

The issue of truth is the main topic of John Paul II's encyclical *Fides et ratio*, published twenty-five years ago.¹ It is primarily about the truth the Church received as a gift. It is the truth that comes from God, preceding all human intellectual pursuits. Its source is the Person of the Son of God, who shows people “who a man is and what he should do to be a man truly.”² It is the ultimate truth about human life and its goal, which is salvation.³ This truth becomes available in faith, sheds light on the mystery of existence, and appeals to the intellect to accept it.⁴

The mission of the Church is to convey to people the truth hidden in the Christian faith. Many contemporaries approach the Church's mission understood in this way with skepticism. In their opinion, the experience of the past century shows that it is impossible to build a civilization defending man and his dignity on the truth proclaimed by Christianity. They point to totalitarian systems and the Holocaust as evidence for this thesis.⁵ There is also a widespread belief that no single objective truth exists, or at least humans cannot know it. Ultimately, everyone can intuitively decide what is true for them, and all views have the same value and deserve respect.⁶ Then “relativism triumphs, in which the question about the truth of all reality no longer arises, which is, in fact, also a question about God.”⁷

One of the essential criteria for recognizing certain beliefs as truth is their functionality. Nowadays, everything—including scientific research—is subject to the dictatorship of pragmatism. People are not interested in learning about reality if it does not improve their actions and

1 John Paul II, Encyclical *Fides et ratio*, Sep 14, 1998, 2; J. Ratzinger, Enzyklika *Fides et ratio*, „Deutsche Tagespost” 126 (1998), p. 3; B. de León, Algunos sentidos del término “verdad” en la “*Fides et ratio*”, “*Scripta Theologica*” 2 (2002), p. 643.

2 Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Spe salvi*, Nov. 30, 2007, 6.

3 John Paul II, Encyclical *Fides et ratio*, 2.

4 F. Schüssler Fiorenza, *Systematic Theology. Task and Methods*, in: *Systematic Theology. Roman Catholic Perspectives*, eds. F. Schüssler Fiorenza, J. P. Galvin, Minneapolis 2011, p. 44.

5 P. Wielgus, *Postmodernizm*, in: *Katecheza wobec wyzwań współczesności*, ed. by R. Czekański, Płock 2001, p. 52; B. C. Stiller, *Preaching Parables to Postmoderns*, Minneapolis 2005, p. 4; G. M. Hoff, “Es gibt keinen Gott und wir sind seine Propheten”. *Atheismen des 21. Jahrhunderts*, “*Lebendige Seelsorge*” 6 (2009), p. 381.

6 B. C. Stiller, *Preaching Parables to Postmoderns*, p. 26.

7 Francis, Encyclical *Lumen fidei*, Jun 29, 2013, 25.

make them effective.⁸ This expectation also appears towards Christianity because many moderns are ready to accept religion only if they can achieve some practical benefit with its help.⁹

In this context, the issue of the relevance and importance of the Church's mission arises, the important goal of which is to bring the light of God's truth to the world. Treating the pragmatic approach of today's people to Christianity as a pastoral challenge, we should look for an answer to the existential meaning of Christ's truth and then about how the Church should understand its ministry defined as the "diakonia of truth."¹⁰ It is led by practical and theological reflection on the teaching of John Paul II in the encyclical *Fides et ratio*, which results in conclusions aimed at adapting the style of communicating truth to both the requirements of the Gospel and human needs.¹¹ All this allows one to see how the magisterium of John Paul II has been constantly of great value for contemporary man and how valuable a source of inspiration it remains for the pastoral activity of the Church to this day.

1. The existential nature of truth

In John Paul II's encyclical, truth is perceived in two basic aspects: as revealed truth¹² or God's truth¹³ and as philosophical truth¹⁴, i.e., truth known due to the activity of the human intellect. The point connecting both "truths" is a man searching for the meaning of life.¹⁵ The revealed truth, coming from God, is addressed to man, who, thanks to his rational abilities, can strive to discover its fullness. God's truth cannot be opposed to the truth revealed in human inquiry because "there is one truth,"¹⁶ and man finds the essence of his existence in their

8 P. M. Mazanka, *Prawda o osobie ludzkiej w ujęciu personalizmu amerykańskiego*, "Fides et ratio" 4 (2018), p. 97.

9 L. Mödl, *Wenn's ums Überleben geht*, "Klerusblatt" 84 (2004), pp. 200–201.

10 John Paul II, Encyclical *Fides et ratio*, 2.

11 Francis, Exhortation *Amoris laetitia*, Mar 19, 2016, 308.

12 John Paul II, Encyclical *Fides et ratio*, 11, 30, 35, 49, 50, 73, 79, 83, 97, 105.

13 John Paul II, Encyclical *Fides et ratio*, 6, 44, 54, 66.

14 John Paul II, Encyclical *Fides et ratio*, 30, 54.

15 B. de León, *Algunos sentidos del término „verdad” en la “Fides et ratio”*, p. 649.

16 John Paul II, Encyclical *Fides et ratio*, 51.

mutual connection. Therefore, by accepting God's revelation in faith, man comes to the certainty of truth.¹⁷

The gift of faith, as an obedient response to God, allows us to accept Revelation. It has consequences for human existence. In an act of faith, a person entrusts himself and his mind to God as the guarantor of truth. The intellect will move towards God in faith, resulting in the obligation to live in truth.¹⁸ The gradual encounter with truth develops within the horizon of personal self-awareness: the better a person gets to know reality and the world, the more evidently he sees its uniqueness. The purpose of life becomes increasingly clear to man, and as he enriches his knowledge, he discovers that his deepest desire is to find the truth about himself.¹⁹

Every human effort to reach the truth indicates his unsatisfied desire for fulfillment. However, only in the light of faith does he learn what the fullness of life is, thanks to which his anxiety ceases, and the uncertainty about the possibility of finding the authentic meaning of existence disappears. Faith answers the question about the origin and vocation of man, who is neither a lonely individual, left to his own devices, nor a being thrown into a world without reason for existence and purpose, but someone who is created to live and to live forever. Man can ultimately discover the significance of his existence in the light of God's truth and thus outside himself.²⁰

Modern people consider freedom to be the most important value. For them, appealing to the truth is tantamount to striving to limit freedom. Objective truth is treated as a threat to man because it determines his view of reality and deprives him of the ability to make choices. Proclaiming objective truth is perceived as tantamount to an attempt to

17 John Paul II, Encyclical *Fides et ratio*, 13.

18 E. J. Weringer, "Fides et ratio". *The Perpetual Journey of Faith and Reason*, "The Linacre Quarterly" 4 (2000), p. 60.

19 John Paul II, Encyclical *Fides et ratio*, 1; L. Flamarique, *La defensa de la verdad*. "Fides et ratio", in: *Fe y razón*, eds. M. L. Baixauli, J. de Aranguren, J. J. Borobia, Pamplona 1999, p. 290.

20 E. Jüngel, *Wertlose Wahrheit. Zur Identität und Relevanz des christlichen Glaubens*. *Theologische Erörterungen*, vol. 3, Tübingen 2003, p. 104.

attack the absolute nature of human freedom.²¹ Meanwhile, truth and freedom go hand in hand or die together.²² Thus, freedom needs truth so that it can be used by people with responsibility and give them a sense of fulfillment. If there is no single truth that unites all people, it is unclear what the true purpose of human freedom is. So, only the truth makes people truly free (cf. Jn 8:32). When human reason is enlightened by truth, man can use his freedom to achieve good.²³

Truth is not just something that satisfies man's intellectual needs. Unlike the laws and phenomena discovered by natural sciences, truth in its ultimate dimension takes on the character of a call addressed to a human person endowed with freedom. However, it appeals to recognize it as a mystery beyond the capacity of the human mind, as well as to accept it and obediently adapt to the imperatives arising from it. Human freedom is then realized through consent to a life corresponding to the truth, thanks to which man achieves liberation.²⁴

The above encyclical clarifies that truth is not only of interest to philosophy, every person, by his nature, asks about the truth.²⁵ The question about truth appears in the human search for meaning, happiness, and self-fulfillment.²⁶ Everyday life reveals people's interest in discovering the truth about reality and what is happening in it. Man is the only creature on earth who is not only capable of knowing truth, but also

21 H.-G. Nissing, "Was ist Wahrheit?". Josephs Ratzingers Einsprüche gegen den Relativismus, in: *Was ist Wahrheit? Zur Kontroverse um die Diktatur des Relativismus*, ed. by H.-G. Nissing, München 2011, p. 21; O. Alves Aguiar, *Philosophia Ancilla Theologiae? A propósito da Encíclica "Fides et ratio"*, do papa João Paulo II, „Revista De Ciências Sociais” 1-2 (2019), p. 135.

22 John Paul II, Encyclical *Fides et ratio*, 90.

23 L. M. Pastor García, *Reflexiones sobre la Encíclica "Fides et ratio"*, „La Razón Histórica” 15 (2011), p. 15; P. Blanco Sarto, *La teología de Joseph Ratzinger. Una introducción*, Madrid 2011, p. 176.

24 John Paul II, Encyclical *Fides et ratio*, 90; M. A. Kopiec, *The Main Aspects of John Paul II's Encyclical "Fides et ratio" in the Current Historical and Theological Environment*, „Wrocławski Przegląd Teologiczny” 1 (2020), p. 124; O. Alves Aguiar, *Philosophia Ancilla Theologiae?*, p. 135.

25 John Paul II, Encyclical *Fides et ratio*, 64.

26 John Paul II, Encyclical *Fides et ratio*, 28; H.-G. Nissing, „Was ist Wahrheit?”, p. 23.

knows that he wants to know the truth. Therefore, he does not agree to be fed lies but clings to the truth.²⁷

This desire is met by God, who reveals to man the indisputable truth that transcends history and time. Revelation introduces a universal and ultimate truth into human history, inspiring man to seek and explore it constantly. That is why people continuously strive to expand their knowledge and acquire wisdom that soothes their worries and brings happiness of spirit.²⁸

Every person wants to find the answer to basic existential questions: “Who am I? Where do I come from, and where am I going? Why does evil exist? What awaits me after this life?”²⁹ Moreover, these questions reveal that the human person is open to something that transcends him as a rational being. The shape and direction he will give to his life depends on where he finds the answer.³⁰

The truth that man longs for cannot be reduced to knowledge; it's more than just specific content. Truth is not merely conceptual apprehensions or verbal reflections of some reality (Thomas Aquinas) or evidence obtained from experience or consensus about a statement about some object (Jürgen Habermas).³¹ It reveals what is certain and what transcends the reality available to the human intellect. A force in it pushes man to find what his nature longs for. The truth offers itself to man and draws him to himself so that he can find himself in its light.³²

God's truth is not a set of definitions of objects that fill reality but—first of all—defines the purpose of his life, showing him the path leading to happiness and perfection. Thanks to it, he learns authentic values, the implementation of which allows him to become better and fully develop his nature.

27 John Paul II, Encyclical *Fides et ratio*, 25.

28 John Paul II, Encyclical *Fides et ratio*, 6; J. M. Barrio Maestre, *La filosofía como búsqueda de la verdad. Un comentario a la “Fides et ratio”*, “Acta Philosophica” 2 (2004), p. 273; L. Flamarique, *La defensa de la verdad. “Fides et ratio”*, p. 293.

29 John Paul II, Encyclical *Fides et ratio*, 1.

30 J. M. Barrio Maestre, *La filosofía como búsqueda de la verdad*, p. 272.

31 E. Arens, *Zur Struktur theologischer Wahrheit*, “Zeitschrift für Katholische Theologie” 1 (1990), p. 3.

32 John Paul II, Encyclical *Fides et ratio*, 2; B. de León, *Algunos sentidos del término “verdad” en la “Fides et ratio”*, p. 652.

The truth of these values is to be found not by turning in on oneself but by opening oneself to apprehend that truth even at levels which transcend the person. This is an essential condition for us to become ourselves and to grow as mature, adult persons.³³

The ultimate goal of human pursuits is God. Man seeks the truth, and the truth is God. Since man is not God, his relation to truth can never be reduced to possessing it. A person with limited cognitive abilities cannot have unlimited, complete knowledge. However, lack of full knowledge does not mean ignorance. Pursuing comprehensive knowledge—so deeply rooted in human nature—is not in vain. “The first answer is the ability to seek the truth and ask questions. Man would not seek what he was unaware of or considered completely unattainable. Only hoping to get answers can make him take the first step.”³⁴ Man is the only creature on earth that can seek the truth. A person who sincerely seeks the truth with his whole heart and pure mind is already on the right path. In this circumstance, the way itself is already the goal.³⁵

Man reaches the truth not only through his intellect. He can discover the truth about his own existence, which exceeds his cognitive capabilities, when he allows himself to be found. It happens when it is passed from person to person. A person reaches it in spirit by entering into relationships with other people who are credible as transmitters of certain and authentic truth. He then finds the answer to what “deep down in his heart he already recognizes as the truth and what he has been looking for for a long time.”³⁶

When truth becomes a common goal for people, “they can overcome divisions and strive to know the whole truth, traveling the paths that only the Spirit of the Risen Christ knows.”³⁷ Truth as logos leads to dialogos—meeting, communication, and communion. “When the truth

33 John Paul II, *Encyclical Fides et ratio*, 25.

34 John Paul II, *Encyclical Fides et ratio*, 29.

35 J. Gnilka, *Johannesevangelium*, Würzburg 1989, p. 112; M. A. Kopiec, *The Main Aspects of John Paul II's Encyclical "Fides et ratio" in the Current Historical and Theological Environment*, s 113.

36 John Paul II, *Encyclical Fides et ratio*, 32; B. de León, *Algunos sentidos del término "verdad" en la "Fides et ratio"*, p. 647.

37 John Paul II, *Encyclical Fides et ratio*, 92.

frees people from opinions and subjective views, it allows them to rise above cultural and historical conditions and meet at the level of assessing the value and essence of things.”³⁸ Truth can unite all those who strive for it—even if they look for it only within themselves and are critical of the existence of objective and absolute truth.³⁹ When the dialogue brings up the deepest and most important issues for each person, a community of spirit can be born, filled with respect for other people and readiness to learn about their position, in which there is no room for indoctrination, manipulation, and demonstrating superiority towards others.⁴⁰

Many modern people treat the issue of knowing the truth, thanks to God's Revelation, as a purely theoretical issue with no practical consequences.⁴¹ Meanwhile, the proper place for truth is not only intellectual speculation. It also has practical and existential value. It is a principle and criterion for assessing human action in society, culture, politics, and economics.⁴² It allows a person to gain moral certainty when deciding on issues fundamental to his life. This knowledge implies all important dimensions of human existence: intelligence, memory, will, feelings, senses, body, and the world of spiritual and ethical values. Only then does the truth revealed to people by God achieve its goal when it perfects human nature, shapes social relationships, and contributes to the multiplication of good in the world.⁴³

2. Church — servant of truth

The truth of God, transmitted to the world through Christianity, was revealed in the historical Person of Jesus Christ, who lives in his Church

³⁸ Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Caritas in veritate*, Jun 29, 2009, 4.

³⁹ Vatican Council II, The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et spes*, Dec 7, 1965, 92; John Paul II, Encyclical *Fides et ratio*, 107.

⁴⁰ Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Caritas in veritate*, 4.

⁴¹ E. Jüngel, *Wertlose Wahrheit*, p. 92; H.-G. Nissing, “Was ist Wahrheit?”, p. 16.

⁴² Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Caritas in veritate*, 2–3; H.-G. Nissing, “Was ist Wahrheit?”, p. 10.

⁴³ John Paul II, Encyclical *Fides et ratio*, 4; M. A. Kopiec, *The Main Aspects of John Paul II's Encyclical “Fides et ratio” in the Current Historical and Theological Environment*, p. 125; J. M. Barrio Maestre, *La filosofía como búsqueda de la verdad*, p. 276.

and constantly draws people to himself as the perfect source of understanding reality.⁴⁴ Jesus Christ—the incarnate Logos and the resurrected Lord—is Truth in Person. The Church serves the truth when it recalls the words of Jesus, who announces the truth to people (cf. Jn 8:40, 44; 16:7) and bears witness to the truth (cf. Jn 18:37). In Him you can see and hear the truth. The truth revealed in the Person of Jesus reveals Satan’s lie and frees us from him (cf. Jn 8:32).⁴⁵

The Church’s vocation is to reveal to people “the truth of Christ, which is crowned by his Paschal Mystery: only in Christ is it possible to know the fullness of the truth that saves (cf. Acts 4:12; 1 Tm 2:4–6).”⁴⁶ Revealing himself in Christ, God does not oppose what human reason seeks. Moreover, revealed truth can only be accepted by a person endowed with intellect. Faith assumes the existence of reason, needs it, as well as defends it. Faith is trust in the Truth—the divine Logos. In this sense, faith—like reason—turns to truth, and it is Christ himself, towards whom all human searches for truth are ultimately aimed.⁴⁷

The mission of the Church in the world is to proclaim the Gospel of Christ to all people, adapting the message of salvation to their cognitive capabilities.⁴⁸ The proclamation of the Gospel is essentially the proclamation of “the word of truth” (cf. 2 Cor 6:7), which gives people a new existence, “creates facts and transforms life.”⁴⁹ Therefore, man discovers his destiny and goal, which is to remain in communion with God. By serving the truth, the Church reveals to people the way to the truth as

44 J. Gnilka, *Johannesevangelium*, p. 112; J. Aznar-Sala, *La encíclica “Fides et ratio” XX años después (1998–2018)*, “*Revista Iberoamericana de Teología*” 28 (2019), p. 31.

45 E. Arens, *Zur Struktur theologischer Wahrheit*, p. 11; Ch. Dietzfelbinger, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes*, vol. 1, Zürich 2001, p. 255.

46 John Paul II, *Encyclical Fides et ratio*, 99.

47 John Paul II, *Encyclical Veritatis splendor*, Aug 6, 1993, 83; J. M. Barrio Maestre, *La filosofía como búsqueda de la verdad*, p. 269; L. M. Pastor García, *Reflexiones sobre la Encíclica “Fides et ratio”*, p. 13.

48 Vatican Council II, *The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World Gaudium et spes*, 44; J. Ratzinger, *Eklezjologia Soboru Watykańskiego II*, in: *Kościół—ekumenizm—polityka*, ed. by L. Balter, Poznań–Warszawa 1990, p. 17 (Kolekcja Communio, 5).

49 Benedict XVI, *Encyclical Spe salvi*, 2.

a source of authentic knowledge and priceless wisdom that they cannot acquire on their own.⁵⁰

Christianity is the only religion whose constitutive element is neither a book nor a teaching but a personal relationship.⁵¹ Christ as a person is “the Way, the Truth, and the Life” (cf. Jn 14:5), and his imitation of Christ is a way of Christian existence. By proclaiming Christ to the world, the Church meets man as a relational being who strives for union with God. Man is not only looking for some truth “reified” or enclosed in concepts but is focused on meeting the living Truth. In the person of Christ, it is a value that meets him,⁵² illuminates his path, and “gives life a new perspective and thus a decisive direction.”⁵³ In an encounter with Jesus, full life is revealed to man and a path that can be safely followed in mortality. The Son of God exposes the way, walks it first, and constantly strengthens people with his presence in faithfully implementing His truth in everyday life.⁵⁴

Knowing the truth in the person of the Son of God leads to loving it, and thus to love Jesus himself, in whom God’s love, and with it the truth, took on a human form. Loving God gives people in Christ his truth because he is Love, and this wants to give them a share in the fullness of life, introducing them into a relationship with the One who is Life, Love, and Truth.⁵⁵ God’s gift provokes man to respond. Knowing the truth about God, who is Love, compels us to love Him. Then love also leads a person to identify with the One he loves, which in practice means wanting the same thing as the Beloved and rejecting the same thing together.⁵⁶ By loving God, however, man becomes more and more like Jesus Christ,

50 M. B. Yarnell, *The Formation of Christian Doctrine*, Nashville 2007, p. 68; P. W. Hahn, *Covenant and Communion. The Biblical Theology of Pope Benedict XVI*, Grand Rapids 2009, p. 84; M. A. Kopiec, *The Main Aspects of John Paul II’s Encyclical “Fides et ratio” in the Current Historical and Theological Environment*, p. 126.

51 W. Beinert, *Befreiende Wahrheit*, “*Stimmen der Zeit*” 4 (2002), p. 263.

52 John Paul II, Encyclical *Fides et ratio*, 7.

53 Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Deus caritas est*, Dec 25, 2005, 1.

54 B. de León, *Algunos sentidos del término „verdad” en la “Fides et ratio”*, p. 663; H.-G. Link, *Wahrheit*, in: *Theologisches Begrifflexikon zum Neuen Testament*, vol. 2, eds. L. Coenen, E. Beyreuther, H. Bietenhard, Wuppertal 1979, p. 1351.

55 Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Spe salvi*, 27.

56 Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Deus caritas est*, 17.

and thus, his life becomes an increasingly perfect realization of the truth.⁵⁷

Hence, by Christ's will, the Church is to reveal to people the path to salvation. It does so when it shows man the fundamental truths about his existence: the spirituality and immortality of the soul, the ability to do good and obey the natural moral law, the ability to formulate truthful judgments, and the freedom and dignity of the human person.⁵⁸ The truth proclaimed by the Church is identical to the message of redemption, which is, in its essence, the liberation of people from the slavery of evil, including lies, so that they can live in the truth (cf. Phil 4:8), as well as and in the freedom and faithfulness of the children of God (cf. Gal 4:7).⁵⁹ The one who accepts the gift of Christ's redemption and allows himself to be embraced by the truth becomes a participant in the salvation that was achieved once and for all in Christ.

The Church, which proclaims the truth of Christ to people, serves man by meeting his desire to know himself. He achieves this by accepting God's truth, which is revealed to him when the Divine Logos itself offers itself to him as a gift. This gift demands a response from man, stimulating his intellect and will to make a conscious, free, and responsible act of faith.⁶⁰ Pointing to Christ as the embodiment of the truth about God and man, the Church presents the most perfect model of humanity.⁶¹ The truth of the Gospel is consistent with the deepest aspirations of human nature, and the consequence of accepting it in faith is a more human life. Thus, through her service in the world, the Church contributes to the promotion of authentic humanism. The truth communicated to the world by the Church is like a mirror in which man can see his most beautiful face (cf. James 1:23). It appeals to people to strive to become more

57 B. de León, *Algunos sentidos del término "verdad" en la "Fides et ratio"*, p. 663.

58 J. Ratzinger, *Enzyklika Fides et ratio*, p. 3.

59 M. A. Kopiec, *The Main Aspects of John Paul II's Encyclical "Fides et ratio" in the Current Historical and Theological Environment*, p. 111; J. Ardui, *Truth, Rock Music and Christianity. Can Truth Be Maintained in the Dialogue Between Theology and Rock Music?*, in: *Theology and the Quest for Truth. Historical- and Systematic-theological Studies*, eds. M. Lamberigts, L. Boeve, T. Merrigan, Leuven 2006, p. 209.

60 M. A. Kopiec, *The Main Aspects of John Paul II's Encyclical "Fides et ratio" in the Current Historical and Theological Environment*, p. 110.

61 John Paul II, *Encyclical Redemptor hominis*, Mar 4, 1979, 8.

and more like the Creator. He calls them to make an effort of spiritual transformation and to implement in their lives what they receive in the message of the Gospel. God's truth is a light for man that allows him to free himself from the illusion that he is the absolute master of himself, from focusing only on himself, and from the false belief that his possibilities are unlimited.⁶²

Through the Church, God addresses people to convey to them his deepest secrets in a way adapted to their level of understanding.⁶³ The revelation of God's truth does not make man a passive recipient of the content nor exempt him from seeking an ever deeper understanding of it. Pope John Paul II, in this context, emphasizes the role of theologians in the Church, whose important task is to help people understand "God's kenosis, which is a great mystery for the human mind, which finds it difficult to understand that suffering and death can express love that, without demanding anything, in return, he gives himself as a gift."⁶⁴ This truth, however, is of great importance not only in the perspective of faith in redemption as a work of love expressed in the humility of the Son of God, offering his life for sinners, but also because of man's vocation to love his brothers, even to the point of giving his life for them (cf. 1 Jn 3, 16). Then God's truth is reflected in the attitude of Christ's disciples, who confirm their faith in God—Love with their love for their neighbors, and thus certify by their actions the truthfulness of the words they preach.⁶⁵

3. Communicating Christian truth in the modern world

The encyclical *Fides et ratio* refers to the first centuries of Christianity when it was considered *religio vera*—the victory of knowledge and truth.⁶⁶ The faith of Christ is spreading throughout the world because it is a true philosophy that reaches the truth. Its source is the Divine Logos. In this sense, all truth has a divine origin. In Jesus, people receive perfect knowledge of it. Whoever accepts the revealed truth with faith

62 B. de León, *Algunos sentidos del término "verdad" en la "Fides et ratio"*, pp. 653–654.

63 John Paul II, *Encyclical Fides et ratio*, 94.

64 John Paul II, *Encyclical Fides et ratio*, 93.

65 Benedict XVI, *Encyclical Deus caritas est*, 16.

66 John Paul II, *Encyclical Fides et ratio*, 37–38.

becomes a philosopher. Philosophy is an academic discipline and the art of living and dying properly, which can only be acquired in the light of God's truth.⁶⁷

According to Joseph Ratzinger, from the very beginning, the strength of Christianity's conviction lies in the combination of faith with reason and action expressed in selfless and sacrificial love, that is, in generous care for the suffering, the poor, and the weak (*caritas*).⁶⁸ Christianity is a synthesis of reason, faith, and life. It is not an ideology that looks at man only in some selected aspect of his existence but a truth that covers all dimensions of his presence and a path that allows him to achieve the fullness of life.⁶⁹

However, as the recently deceased Pope Benedict XVI notes, this synthesis is no longer convincing today. In his opinion, this results from today's widespread belief that the truth is hidden and inaccessible. As for knowing the truth and God himself, there is never certainty; a person can only form opinions. Moreover, God's great mystery cannot be reduced to one figure. Many paths lead to God's truth, and man can always discover only part of it.⁷⁰ Yet, this approach to the Truth leads to the so-called religious egalitarianism, according to which all religions are equal and the instructions of each of them regarding achieving salvation are of equal value. Each religion has its own path to the ultimate goal, its own myths, and even its own "savior." No matter what beliefs they profess, every person can find something of truth in any religion and achieve salvation.⁷¹

In such an ideological and religious context, Christianity, with its saving message, is treated as one of many paths that cannot aspire to proclaim objective and absolute truth. Proclaiming Jesus as the only Savior

67 J. Ratzinger, *Wahrheit des Christentums?*, in: *Weg und Weite. Festschrift für Karl Lehmann*, ed. by A. Raffelt, Freiburg im Breisgau 2001, p. 636; E. G. Hinson, *The Evangelization of the Roman Empire. Identity and Adaptability*, Macon 1981, pp. 259–262.

68 J. Ratzinger, *Wahrheit des Christentums?*, p. 638.

69 John Paul II, *Encyclical Fides et ratio*, 107; L. M. Pastor García, *Reflexiones sobre la Encíclica Fides et ratio*, p. 11.

70 J. Ratzinger, *Wahrheit des Christentums?*, p. 639; R. Lenaers, *Der Traum des Königs Nebukadnezar. Das Ende einer mittelalterlichen Kirche*, Kleve 2010, p. 37.

71 A. Dulles, *Evangelization for the Third Millennium*, New York 2009, p. 85; H.-G. Nissing, "Was ist Wahrheit?", p. 20.

of the world then means a lack of tolerance for other beliefs. Moreover, it manifests the haughtiness of Christ's followers towards other religions, their symbols, and wisdom. The best thing the Church could do in such a situation is to step aside, timidly adding her voice to the chorus of those who are convinced of the value and truthfulness of the (religious) beliefs they proclaim.

Objections to Christian truth also arise when it seems to people to be too demanding, binding, and limiting.⁷² The term "absolute truth" apparently has an oppressive flavor; behind it lies the desire to impose a specific view of reality on others. The Church, which proclaims objective and final truth to people, is an attack on human freedom because it leaves people no choice—the absolute, unique, and indisputable truth excludes the existence of other truths and forces people to accept it if they do not want to live in a lie.⁷³ People who believe that Christianity cannot help them properly shape their everyday lives also distance themselves from the truth proclaimed by the Church. In their opinion, it declares content not adapted to modern times because it belongs to the pre-scientific era, to a culture dominated by heteronomous ways of thinking.⁷⁴ Meanwhile, today's people are interested in what gives them autonomy and subjectivity in action, is useful in life, and guarantees success. The basic criterion for the acceptance of truth is currently its relevance.⁷⁵

Can aversion to the truth proclaimed by Christianity and the fear of considering it as final and absolute weaken the Church's enthusiasm to transmit it? If the truth is one and objective, it does not cease to be so, regardless of the opinions and attitudes of people living in a given era and culture. Yet, today's scientific progress humanity boasts of is not an opponent of truth but its ally when it helps people learn about the objective

72 M. Kehl, *Kirche in der Fremde. Zum Umgang mit der gegenwärtigen Situation der Kirche*, in: *Wozu Kirche? Wozu Gemeinde? Kirchenvisionen*, eds. G. Koch, J. Pretschner, Würzburg 1994, p. 49.

73 H. Schöndorf, *Ist die Wahrheit intolerant?*, „*Stimmen der Zeit*” 2 (2009), p. 128.

74 R. Lenaers, *Der Traum des Königs Nebukadnezar*, p. 28.

75 M. Albus, *Kirche nach dem Infarkt. Von der Zukunft der Religion*, Gütersloh 2007, p. 69; M. Wildl, *Die Lebensrelevanz des Evangeliums erschließen. Ökumene angesichts postmoderner Religiositäten*, „*Theologisch-Praktische Quartalschrift*” 1 (2006), p. 26.

state of affairs.⁷⁶ However, searches in the field of natural sciences or humanities do not provide an answer to the question about the value of human existence and his final destiny. The Church proclaims this truth to the world, aware that faith and reason need each other to discover the essence of things and the secrets of human existence. Thus, there is no evangelization effectiveness or certainty of faith without appeal to the intellect and its cognitive abilities. Proclaiming the Christian truth continues to be an urgent challenge, even in times of intense search for new technical solutions, because people still need the truth about the purpose and meaning of life.⁷⁷

In his encyclical, John Paul II draws attention to the fact that many paths lead to the truth. At the same time, he emphasizes that “since Christian truth has saving value, one can follow any of these paths, provided that they lead to the ultimate goal, that is, the revelation of Jesus Christ.”⁷⁸ The truth that is the goal of the human search is one; therefore, the Church cannot deny Jesus and give up the proclamation of the truth revealed by Him. Respect for man—everyone without exception, even those who think differently, seek or wander—cannot mean giving up proclaiming the truth, of which the Church is not the owner, but a servant. Hence, there is no room for demonstrating his superiority over others in his activities. The Church’s mission should be characterized by humility and humility because only in this way can it “continue the work of Christ himself, who came into the world to bear witness to the truth, to save, not to judge, to serve, not to be served.”⁷⁹

Christian truth, defined as absolute and objective, does not threaten human freedom; on the contrary, it sustains and guarantees its respect. It is a universal truth, pure and independent of other factors, individual desires, or interests. This type of truth can never be subordinated to anyone and is no one’s property because it is above what is private and individual. No one can appropriate it and dispose of it. It can only

76 John Paul II, Encyclical *Fides et ratio*, 25.

77 L. M. Pastor García, *Reflexiones sobre la Encíclica „Fides et ratio”*, p. 13; R. Inglehart, *Modernisierung und Postmodernisierung. Kultureller, wirtschaftlicher und politischer Wandel in 43 Gesellschaften*, Frankfurt am Main 1998, p. 471.

78 John Paul II, Encyclical *Fides et ratio*, 38.

79 Vatican Council II, *The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World Gaudium et spes*, 3.

be recognized and respected. Therefore, any attempt to control or lift it would attack its absolute and transcendent character.

However, the Church does not intend to enslave anyone by proclaiming absolute truth. Transmitting the truth requires “doing” it, respecting the dignity of a man endowed with intellect and free will. Since God’s truth answers the deepest desires and human needs, it must not be imposed on anyone. It corresponds to human nature, and man can know and accept it as a rational and free subject.⁸⁰ When conveying the truth to someone, you cannot try to take over the other person by using propaganda tricks or any special rhetorical means. Various forms of manipulation, inducing fear, censorship, or the so-called black PR, use lies to deceive and enslave people. The Church that preaches the truth is never about subjugating another person to itself but about giving him the truth that will allow him to use his freedom in such a way that he can achieve full humanity and find happiness.⁸¹

As presented earlier, Christian truth has an existential character. Hence, in people’s eyes, it is something alien, anachronistic, exotic, and far from life. It is because it is communicated to people in the wrong way. It is not only about clichéd, empty formulas, complicated trains of thought, or theological terms incomprehensible to people but also about the tone of the Christian message. If Christian truth is liberating, it cannot be presented to people as a factor complicating moral choices and a yoke depriving them of life’s joy.⁸² Living in a pluralized reality, in which worldviews and values compete with each other, and moral relativism and permissivism take away the certainty of the correctness of the decisions made, people look for support to free themselves from the burden of contingency.⁸³ Truth helps as a light that allows a person to discern as fully as possible and make rational and responsible decisions. Then people discover its binding nature, the source of which is no longer just some external instance endowed with exceptional authority,

80 John Paul II, *Encyclical Fides et ratio*, 4.

81 G. Weigel, *Katedra i sześcian. Europa, Stany Zjednoczone i polityka bez Boga*, Warszawa 2005, p. 88.

82 Francis, *Exhortation Amoris laetitia*, 62.

83 N. Luhmann, *Funkcja religii*, Kraków 1998, pp. 181–202; H. Haslinger, *Das Handeln des Menschen zwischen System und Lebenswelt*, in: *Handbuch Praktische Theologie. Durchführungen*, t. 2, ed. by H. Haslinger, Mainz 2000, p. 192.

but the inner power of conviction hidden in the truth, the clarity of argumentation and compliance with their deepest desire “to achieve the unquestionable truth that has absolute value.”⁸⁴

At the center of the Christian message is always Christ, the Truth and Redeemer. Therefore, the Church cannot forget that His role in people’s lives should not be limited to transmitting catechetical content and teaching moral principles. Thus, the mission of the Church is to bear witness to the truth, following the example of Jesus, and this is something different than presenting the results of scientific research or reproducing the definitions it has adopted. Man is not only an intellect, and the delight in the Christian truth is possible only when embodied in an encounter with a Person, the Risen and Living Lord, who loves man and is with him daily to enlighten, strengthen, and liberate him.⁸⁵

For the truth of Christ to liberate people, the Church that proclaims it must consider man and his life, and in it what limits his personal development and what enslaves him: sin, sadness, inner emptiness, or isolation.⁸⁶ Such service initiates life processes that allow people to discover the essence of the Christian faith, which “gives truth as a way, and only as a way does it become human truth. Truth as mere knowledge, as a very idea, has no power. It becomes man’s truth only as a path that places demands on him, on which he can and must enter.”⁸⁷ It is not the path of a loner but of a community member who realizes the truth in his life and thus bears witness to it, showing the world an alternative model of existence for the modern era.⁸⁸

* * *

In his encyclical *Fides et ratio*, John Paul II displays that God’s truth, proclaimed by the Church, cannot be separated from life. Just as Jesus Christ, Truth takes on a human body and offers people the truth in their humanity, so the truth proclaimed by the Church wants to be

84 John Paul II, Encyclical *Fides et ratio*, 27.

85 Francis, Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, Nov 24, 2013, 164.

86 Francis, Exhortation *Christus vivit*, Mar 25, 2019, 119.

87 J. Ratzinger, *Wprowadzenie w chrześcijaństwo*, Kraków 1970, p. 58.

88 J. Ratzinger, *Comunicazione e cultura. Nuovi percorsi per l’evangelizzazione nel Terzo Millennio*, „Nuova Umanità” 1 (2003), p. 5.

constantly incarnate in the life of the world. Christianity does not bring people a set of lofty ideas and instructive stories. Still, the testimony of a living God and his presence in their history allows people to look at human existence and the surrounding reality from God's perspective and inspires them to act following the truth. It does not depend on the level of human knowledge and does not change under the influence of fashion, philosophical trends, or ideologies promoted in the world. It is a certain, transcendent, objective, and universal truth. Only this value exposes people to the path to the fullest of life.

Many people reject the truth proclaimed by the Church because they fear losing their freedom and independence. *Zeitgeist* forces us to view human freedom as an absolute value to which truth is to be subordinated, which means questioning or privatizing it. In these circumstances, the Church proclaims God and only truth is accused of fear of freedom. Meanwhile, his calling is to reveal to man the truth that liberates. The truth found its embodiment in Christ—the only Redeemer of man. Hence, Christianity is essentially a religion of freedom. People who want it will find it in following Jesus.

It is, therefore, important that the teaching and pastoral activity of the Church puts the event of Jesus and His work of liberation first rather than definitions and norms, duties and procedures. Freedom—like truth—is a gift of God. Then, they are not in opposition to each other. The Church is a servant of truth and freedom by proclaiming Jesus and his work of salvation to the world.

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The vein of gold. In search of a methodological renewal of dogmatics based on the reading of Lech Wołowski's book entitled "The problematics of paradox in the thought of Henri de Lubac and Hans Urs von Balthasar"

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Abstract

The vein of gold. In search of a methodological renewal of dogmatics based on the reading of Lech Wołowski's book entitled "The problematics of paradox in the thought of Henri de Lubac and Hans Urs von Balthasar"

This study is presented in the form of a research-review article and consists of reflections informed by a reading of Lech Wołowski's monograph "The Problematics of Paradox in the Thought of Henri de Lubac and Hans Urs von Balthasar", while simultaneously drawing from other works by the same researcher. The aim of this article is to present the paradox method as a means to deepen theological research. This method is portrayed as a proposition that can be applied in theological research, much like in other scientific domains. This approach may contribute to addressing the contemporary crisis in dogmatics and serve in formulating responses to current "profound" questions posed by individuals and society.

Keywords: theology, dogmatics, methodology, paradox, cross-disciplinary dialogue

Abstrakt

Żyła złota. W poszukiwaniu metodologicznej odnowy dogmatyki w oparciu o lekturę książki Lecha Wołowskiego pt. „Problematyka paradoksu w myśli Henriego de Lubaca i Hansa Ursa von Balthasara”

Opracowanie ma formę artykułu badawczo-recenzyjnego i zawiera refleksje oparte na lekturze monografii Lecha Wołowskiego pt. „Problematyka paradoksu w myśli Henriego de Lubaca i Hansa Ursa von Balthasara” z równoczesnym odwołaniem do innych tekstów tego badacza. Celem niniejszego artykułu jest przedstawienie metody paradoksu jako sposobu na pogłębienie badań teologicznych. Metoda ta jest pokazana jako propozycja, która może być wykorzystana w badaniach teologicznych, tak jak to ma miejsce w innych dziedzinach nauki. Takie rozwiązanie może przyczynić się do zaradzenia współczesnemu kryzysowi dogmatyki i posłużyć do wypracowania odpowiedzi na aktualne „głębokie” pytania człowieka i społeczeństwa.

Słowa kluczowe: teologia, dogmatyka, metodologia, paradoks, dialog nauk

In my quest to renew the methodology of dogmatics, I stumbled upon a “vein of gold,” which I consider as a theological reflection on paradox and the application of paradox itself to dogmatics, that is, the “method of paradox.” Lech Wołowski captures the essence of paradox with his assertion:

Today’s physics is replete with paradoxes. Do physicists shy away from them? Not in the least! Each discovered paradox becomes another “vein of gold,” leading to the disproving of erroneous theories and beliefs while simultaneously illuminating new avenues for discovery and a deeper understanding of reality. These paradoxes, which physicists constantly confront, impart a valuable lesson—that we should never remain steadfastly attached to a single theory, regardless of its initial efficacy in describing a facet of reality. Sooner or later, a paradox emerges, such as the revelation of an uncharted phenomenon or law, which disrupts the framework of prior findings. This forces a revision, expansion, or deepening of the prevailing theory to accommodate what once appeared as an antithesis within the new, enriched theory.¹

This quote, drawn from a theological work, serves as a thought-provoking challenge to theologians. The author appears to address them directly, urging them to recognize that paradox is a “vein of gold” in the methodological renewal of dogmatics.

The aim of this paper is to introduce the method of paradox as a means to enhance theological research. This arises from a desire to address contemporary reluctance towards dogma and the widespread misconceptions surrounding dogmatic theology, and to explore the answers to two fundamental questions—why and how should we seek a methodological renewal in dogmatics, and what does Wołowski’s proposal entail, and what prospects does it offer for the future of theological research? To tackle these questions, we will embark on a journey through an examination of the crisis within dogmatics and the method of paradox as analyzed and elucidated by Wołowski. It is evident that the core concept for the analyses presented in this paper is “paradox.” Already in the introductory section, let us refine this term. When defining the term more

¹ L. Wołowski, *Problematyka paradoksu w myśli Henriego de Lubaca i Hansa Urs von Balthasara*, Kraków 2023, pp. 310–311.

precisely, I follow Wołowski, who positions the paradox problem at the core of his intellectual pursuits. As he articulates in his work:

When we speak of paradox, we refer to the genuine paradoxes encountered by science in its cognitive endeavors. However, we do not delve into purely formal, so-called logical paradoxes, such as various antinomies (e.g., the liar's paradox). Paradox, as we understand it here, diverges from what it is often, and unfortunately, colloquially mistaken for—it is not absurdity, it is not an internal contradiction, nor is it an antinomy. [...] The essence of paradox lies in the apparent contradiction that arises between common beliefs and a profound hidden truth, only unveiled through scientific exploration.²

1. Why pursue the “vein of gold”?

The question of method in scientific research and the acquisition and dissemination of knowledge has commanded profound interest ever since the publication of René Descartes' treatise, *Discours de la méthode* (1637). Subsequently, the various sciences, both traditional and those emerging as offshoots of established disciplines, have solidified their identities and flourished by giving dedicated thought to their research methodologies. It was the identification of their own “veins of gold” that enabled them to yield abundant harvests. Hence, in the realm of theology, we should not sidestep the crucial question—why should we endeavor to unearth this metaphorical “vein of gold”? In other words, why should we actively seek a methodological renewal of dogmatics?

Wołowski presents a case for a genuine program of methodological renewal within dogmatics. This endeavor necessitates a fresh, daring perspective on the overarching issue of scientific inquiry, considering the role that dogmatics currently occupies or, more importantly, should occupy within this context. Elaborating on this notion, Wołowski astutely postulates:

² L. Wołowski, *Od Cantora do Balthasara, czyli słowo o roli paradoksu w naukach ścisłych i w dogmatyce*, in: *Dogmat i metoda. Wprowadzenie do badań interdyscyplinarnych w teologii dogmatycznej*, ed. R. J. Woźniak, Kraków 2021, pp. 416–417. Cf. L. Wołowski, *Problematyka paradoksu*, pp. 11–12.

The situation in which theology, including dogmatics, is often relegated, unfortunately, at times with its own complicity, to the periphery or even the “waiting room” of scientific inquiry, is quite evident in today’s scientific landscape, demanding immediate and resolute remedial action.³

Robert J. Woźniak, like Wołowski, hailing from the Kraków circle, has also repeatedly written about the crisis faced by dogmatics and the urgent necessity for its renewal. Woźniak asserts that one of the Church’s foremost missions is to “reclaim dogma” as the focal point of Christian experience and practice. He firmly believes that dogma must be reclaimed because unfortunately it has acquired negative connotations and has become an unwelcome presence in large segments of theology, Church life, not to mention its associations beyond ecclesiastical and theological circles.⁴ The need to contemplate the methodology of theological research is a recurring concern. In the introductory volume of *Catholic Dogmatics* published in 1965, Wincenty Granat included a piece by Stanisław Kamiński, a methodologist and historian of science. Kamiński concluded his discourse on theological methodology with two key points. First, he highlighted the absence of concise textbooks on the methodology of theology (“When you encounter even a very promising title, it fall short in content.”) Second, he identified the most pressing necessity within theology—utilizing the outcomes and tools provided by the methodology of contemporary sciences to explore theological method. He regarded this as a crucial condition for a “modern” and “communicative” treatment of

3 L. Wołowski, *Od Cantora do Balthasara*, p. 415.

4 Cf. R. J. Woźniak, *Dogmatyka w perspektywie interdyscyplinarnej. Prolegomena teoretyczno-metodologiczne*, in: *Dogmat i metoda. Wprowadzenie do badań interdyscyplinarnych w teologii dogmatycznej*, ed. R. J. Woźniak, Kraków 2021, p. 17. Drawing from my own experience, I can confirm R. J. Woźniak’s observation. Working in an academic environment, though outside the Church and theology, I have often found myself in a situation where I introduced myself by saying that I am a dogmatic theologian by first education. The verbal reactions to such self-presentation were usually similar. Their meaning could be summarized in the following doubts: “does that mean we cannot conduct scientific research together with you because you already know the answer?”, “...we cannot talk to you because you can only teach”, “...your task in science is to repeat content known for years, not to develop science.”

methodological issues in theology.⁵ The reference to scientific methodology and the pursuit of a “modern” and “communicative” approach to theological methodology gains particular significance. This text was penned during the Second Vatican Council, a time when expectations were high for a more profound and extensive theological ferment than that which followed the Council of Trent.⁶ Kamiński was unafraid of grappling with questions regarding the method of theology, drawing upon the results and tools created by the contemporary methodology. Remarkably, the reflections born in the 1960s continue to hold relevance today.

Returning to the insights of Woźniak, who, several decades after the postulates of Kamiński, echoes the call for similar strides, unafraid of engaging with other sciences: “At present, an exceedingly pressing need is to demonstrate the receptiveness of dogmatic thought to the full spectrum of contemporary knowledge concerning humanity and the world it inhabits.”⁷ Expanding on this notion, Woźniak specifies that the renewal of dogmatics, through its openness to other disciplines and a transformation of its internal dynamics, should not signify a rupture from its traditional heritage. Such a break could threaten its intrinsic identity. Instead, it should entail a revitalization and a broadening of its traditional content into new contexts. This transformative step should lead to the “reintegration of dogmatics” into the discourse of science, culture, and society, thereby restoring its rightful place within the realm of human intellectual discourse.⁸ For Woźniak, it is evident that the present state of dogmatics is both novel and distinct from its origins, which is why he speaks of “reincorporating dogmatics” and “restoring its proper place.” In delving into history, at least before Descartes, there is no element of turning dogmatic research into archaeology or traditionalizing theological thought. The researcher’s focus is not on confining dogmatic research to biblical words and sentences, nor in formulas developed by

5 Cf. S. Kamiński, *Metoda w teologii*, in: *Dogmatyka katolicka. Tom wstępny*, ed. W. Granat, Lublin 1965, p. 162.

6 Cf. W. Granat, *Przedmowa*, in: *Dogmatyka katolicka. Tom wstępny*, ed. W. Granat, Lublin 1965, p. 5.

7 R. J. Woźniak, *Czy możliwa jest niedogmatyczna dogmatyka? Wprowadzenie i zarys nowej perspektywy badawczej*, in: *Dogmat i metoda. Wprowadzenie do badań interdyscyplinarnych w teologii dogmatycznej*, ed. R. J. Woźniak, Kraków 2021, p. 8.

8 Cf. R. J. Woźniak, *Czy możliwa jest niedogmatyczna dogmatyka?*, p. 8.

the early councils, patristic ideas, or scholastic reflections. The mission of dogmatics is to expound and present the truths of faith from a conceptual, content, and historical perspective. It involves a profound comprehension of these truths of faith and reflections on their inner and reciprocal connections (Latin: *nexus mysteriorum*) in a specific context. Therefore, dogmatics not only possesses the appropriate hermeneutical emphases but, precisely as a hermeneutics of texts, can and should engage in a methodological dialogue with other sciences, particularly literature studies and philosophy.⁹ While highlighting these disciplines may seem evident, the scholar, in one of his texts, also mentions sociology, psychology, and political science, the latter providing the tools necessary for a proper understanding of the political context in which dogmas were formulated.¹⁰ Woźniak advocates inviting these sciences to collaborate with theology, a trend not widely endorsed in theological circles. This methodological shift within theology, as he suggests, can yield multiple benefits, both for theology itself and the broader scope of science in comprehending reality. In his words:

The widespread call for interdisciplinarity in scientific methodology demands the consolidation of knowledge, including theology. The challenge is not merely to unite theology and the sciences, but rather to unify theology itself. The various theological disciplines should begin to incorporate their distinct perspectives in the pursuit of a synthesized theological knowledge. Modern physics and cosmology aspire to achieve grand unification. True grand unification, however, must encompass more than just the fusion of the macro- and micro-worlds. It should also entail cooperation between theology and the sciences. This cooperation, in turn, can only be realized if theology, on its part, initiates its own consolidation. This does not imply

⁹ Cf. R. J. Woźniak, *Czy możliwa jest niedogmatyczna dogmatyka?*, pp. 11–12. Regarding the need to understand the truths of faith along with their internal and mutual connections (Latin: *nexus mysteriorum*), cf. R. J. Woźniak, *Przyszłość, teologia, społeczeństwo*, Kraków 2007, p. 110: “Theology today needs to articulate its core significance much more than ever before. The treaty vision, in which individual topics and the realities of faith are treated as separate entities capable of existing and functioning independently, is no longer acceptable due to its hermeneutical inadequacy. [...] Such a theology devoid of meaning has become one of the causes of the problem of the impenetrability of faith and knowledge, faith, and ordinary human existence.”

¹⁰ Cf. R. J. Woźniak, *Dogmatyka w perspektywie interdyscyplinarnej*, p. 41.

a rejection of the modern division into disciplines, but rather an opportunity for the rediscovery of the core of reflection and the mutual inclusion of methods.¹¹

Woźniak's argument in favor of methodological partnership between theology and various sciences draws strength from the dutiful mission of theology. According to him, the "reintegration of dogmatics" into the broader scientific, cultural, and social discourse and the restoration of its rightful place in the realm of human thought are prerequisites for any comprehensive evangelization effort, including efforts that encompass concerns for culture. He emphasizes that "it is imperative to attempt to present traditional dogmatic truths from fresh perspectives, allowing the insights of other disciplines to reveal entirely new nuances of meaning that correspond to new contexts (be they scientific or cultural)."¹² The core idea is that changes in methodology should actively serve the practical applications in the life of the Church.¹³

Dogma is the record of life as participation and the experience of that participation" [representing an intimate union with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—CS]. As such, it embodies the miracle of the divine-human relationship and stands as a precious treasure of the Church. Dogmatics must, therefore, find its place within the Church to help individuals navigate their lives towards God in an existential and integral manner. Yet, this can only happen if it undertakes a reevaluation of its nature, purpose, and method.¹⁴

In light of the above, the question "why is it necessary to seek a vein of gold?" can be answered as follows—dogmatics has distanced itself (and/or been distanced) from the world of sciences, and sustaining this trend removes theology from the space of formulating responses to the most

11 R. J. Woźniak, *Dogmatyka w perspektywie interdyscyplinarnej*, p. 48.

12 R. J. Woźniak, *Czy możliwa jest niedogmatyczna dogmatyka?*, pp. 8–9.

13 Cf. R. J. Woźniak, *Praca nad dogmatem. Wybrane aspekty odnowy teologii dogmatycznej*, Kraków 2022, p. 17: "Reclaiming a space for dogma within the Ecclesia is contingent upon our ability to expose the profound existential underpinnings and its practical relevance. This endeavor is unattainable without entering into a dialogue with contemporary knowledge culture. Such a dialogue can potentially be redemptive for culture itself, and it holds immense importance for theology and the faith it serves."

14 Cf. R. J. Woźniak, *Praca nad dogmatem*, p. 345.

significant queries of contemporary individuals and societies, and, ultimately, it denies individuals and societies the opportunity to encounter and learn about God and His love.

2. How should one seek the “vein of gold”?

Now, let’s delve into the methodological pursuit of a “vein of gold” – a way to renew and deepen dogmatic research. First, we should consider Wołowski’s synthetic proposition. He contends that there is a compelling need for a “shift in the paradigm that governs the standards of scientific rigor, transitioning from the classical triad (object, method, purpose) to the modern triad (truth, paradox, mystery).”¹⁵ According to Wołowski, this shift should serve as a catalyst for a substantial reinvigoration in theology and, most significantly, dispelling any reservations about the scientific nature of dogmatics within the methodological landscape of modern sciences.¹⁶ Woźniak also encourages us to reflect on the role of paradox in the methodological renewal of dogmatics. He believes that dogmatics, by drawing on interdisciplinarity in its thinking, is inherently a synthetic science, allowing for the integration of human experience within the perspective of meaning. Consequently, it becomes a point of convergence for the synthesis of two distinct modes of thinking and two corresponding methodologies—the rigorous (empirical) and the humanistic. He explains,

The comprehensive practice of dogmatic theology necessitates not a unification but a reconciliation of thought cultures that have historically been divergent in human intellectual history. Dogmatics, therefore, stands as a potential meeting point between the empirical and formalized approach and the spiritual emerging from humanistic thought.¹⁷

However, this paradox is merely an outgrowth of the fundamental paradox within dogmatics itself: “God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—the paradox of the three persons and one nature originates in the inner life of God, and through the advent of the Son and the Spirit, it firmly

¹⁵ L. Wołowski, *Od Cantora do Balthasara*, p. 416.

¹⁶ Cf. L. Wołowski, *Od Cantora do Balthasara*, p. 416.

¹⁷ R. J. Woźniak, *Praca nad dogmatem*, p. 173.

intertwines with the course of world history.”¹⁸ The exploration of the profound depths of this central paradox remains an ongoing mission for dogmatists. It’s worth recalling that Joseph Ratzinger articulated this paradox through three theses:

Thesis No. 1. The paradox “una essentia tres personae” – one Being in three Persons – is associated with the question of the original meaning of unity and plurality. [...] Thesis No. 2. The paradox “una essentia tres personae” is a function of the concept of person and is to be understood as an intrinsic implication of the concept of person. [...] Thesis No. 3. The paradox “una essentia tres personae” is connected with the problem of absolute and relative and emphasizes the absoluteness of the relative, of that which is in relation.¹⁹

In light of the above, one can infer that in the attempts to answer the question “how should we search for the ‘vein of gold,’ i.e., a methodological way to renew and deepen dogmatic research?” there is guidance, a direction to follow, without apprehension of contradictions or diverse perspectives. This direction encourages us to embrace paradox as a promising method of inquiry. Consequently, it becomes evident that Wołowski’s monograph *The Problematics of Paradox in the Thought of Henri de Lubac and Hans Urs von Balthasar* is already enticing by its very title.

3. Lech Wołowski’s research methodology

The aim of Wołowski’s research, which resulted in the monograph *The Problematics of Paradox in the Thought of Henri de Lubac and Hans Urs*

18 R. J. Woźniak, *Metafizyka i Trójca. Teo-ontologia trynitarna pomiędzy apofatyką i katafatyką*, in: *Metafizyka i teologia. Debata u podstaw*, ed. R. J. Woźniak, Kraków 2008, p. 294. Cf. R. J. Woźniak, *Metafizyka i Trójca*, p. 304: “Ontology, to be useful in Trinitarian theology, should be capable of harmoniously combining both the apophatic and cataphatic dimensions, meaning that, without relinquishing the formulation of ontologically strong statements about the being of God and the world, it should encompass a sense of the inadequacy of its own declarations. The unity of these two moments is radically crucial here. Without their paradoxical and balanced relationship, there is no Christian doctrine of God.”

19 J. Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, transl. by J. R. Foster, San Francisco 2004, pp. 178–180.

von Balthasar, was to explore the role of paradox in dogmatic reflection, using the works of two of the most prominent theologians of the 20th century, Henri de Lubac (1896–1991) and Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905–1988). Wołowski pursued this objective on two distinct levels. The first level involved a systematic examination of the role of paradox in the dogmatic thoughts of both Lubac and Balthasar. This entailed identifying the specific theological paradoxes that these authors delved into and contemplated. The second level was theological and methodological in nature. It necessitated a meta-reflection on the place of paradox, first in the writings of these two theologians and then in the broader context of dogmatic reflection. To provide a comprehensive picture of his research, it is worth mentioning that Wołowski's work culminated in a precise definition and presentation of the *status quaestionis*.²⁰ Regarding the issue of paradox in Lubac's thought, notable contributions come from two doctoral dissertations. The first is by Nicola Ciola,²¹ and the second by Janet Haggerty.²² Similarly, when considering Balthasar's work on paradox, two noteworthy studies emerge. The first, by Cyrus P. Olsen,²³ and the second authored by Edward T. Oakes.²⁴ In the interest of fairness, it's important to acknowledge that the contributions of both Lubac and Balthasar have been and continue to be subjects of scholarly exploration primarily by theologians and philosophers, leading to numerous academic works in various languages.

4. The structure of Lech Wołowski's monograph

The structure of Wołowski's work, titled *The Problematics of Paradox in the Thought of Henri de Lubac and Hans Urs von Balthasar*, closely aligns

²⁰ Cf. L. Wołowski, *Problematyka paradoksu*, pp. 14–17.

²¹ Cf. N. Ciola, *Paradosso e mistero in Henri de Lubac*, Roma 1980.

²² Cf. J. Haggerty, *The centrality of paradox in the work of Henri De Lubac*, PP.J., New York 1987.

²³ Cf. C. P. Olsen, *Remaining in Christ. A Paradox at the Heart of Hans Urs von Balthasar's Theology*, „Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture” 13 (2010) no. 3, pp. 52–76, <https://doi.org/10.1353/log.0.0077>.

²⁴ Cf. E. T. Oakes, “He descended into hell”: *The Depths of God's Self-Emptying Love on Holy Saturday in the Thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, in: *Exploring Kenotic Christology. The Self-Emptying of God*, ed. C. P. Evans, Oxford 2006, pp. 218–245.

with the research's intended objectives. The initial two chapters are parallel and focus on the exploration of paradox within the dogmatic reflections of Lubac and Balthasar, respectively. Each of these chapters is further divided into two subsections. In the first subsection, Wołowski discusses the origins of interest in the paradox problem and provides a general characterization of how each of these theologians approached the research topic. The second subsection in both chapters is organized into four paragraphs, each dedicated to the analysis of specific paradoxes. For Lubac, these paradoxes include: "The Theoretical and Practical Paradox of Knowing God,"²⁵ "The Paradox of the Church,"²⁶ "The Paradox of Atheistic Humanism,"²⁷ and "The Paradox of Man."²⁸ Regarding Balthasar, Wołowski distinguishes the following varieties of paradox: "The Paradox of Unity and Multiplicity in God and Creatures,"²⁹ "The Paradox of Freedom in Obedience and Responsibility,"³⁰ "The Trinitarian-Christological Paradox of Hope, Faith, and Love,"³¹ and "The Paradox of the Kenosis of God."³²

The third chapter of the monograph adopts a distinct structure as the author takes on a challenging task. Within this chapter, Wołowski engages in a meta-reflection on the paradox problem. He prudently divides this chapter into three subsections. In the first subsection, he delves into the relationship between paradox, synthesis, and mystery, drawing from Lubac's reflections. The second subsection, grounded in Balthasar's ideas, explores the interplay between paradox, dialectics, and the principle of analogy. The final section focuses on the implications of unraveling paradox as a methodological key in dogmatic reflection. This part of the monograph holds exceptional value. It not only attests to the author's profound passion and research acumen but also to his courage. The content presented therein is thought-provoking and alluring, without leading the readers astray. Wołowski crafts individual

25 Cf. L. Wołowski, *Problematyka paradoksu*, pp. 34–57.

26 Cf. L. Wołowski, *Problematyka paradoksu*, pp. 58–84.

27 Cf. L. Wołowski, *Problematyka paradoksu*, pp. 84–114.

28 Cf. L. Wołowski, *Problematyka paradoksu*, pp. 114–158.

29 Cf. L. Wołowski, *Problematyka paradoksu*, pp. 175–184.

30 Cf. L. Wołowski, *Problematyka paradoksu*, pp. 184–199.

31 Cf. L. Wołowski, *Problematyka paradoksu*, pp. 199–224.

32 Cf. L. Wołowski, *Problematyka paradoksu*, pp. 224–262.

syntactic constructions that resonate with prudence and sharpness, a particularly valuable combination in the contemplation inherent to the study of dogmatic theology. Particularly in the third chapter, the author emerges as an inquisitive and diligent researcher, always searching and discovering, debating and persuading. Above all, Wołowski emerges as a researcher who proposes a novel methodological approach within systematic theology. He recognizes that he has discovered a “vein of gold” and possesses the capability to extract the most valuable insights from it, which, once processed, can be utilized in a variety of ways.

5. The “vein of gold”. A proposal for the advancement of dogmatic theology methodology

Wołowski’s work has revealed the potential for a pioneering approach in theological research. I am referring to a distinct methodological classification that the author aptly terms the “method of paradox.” In light of this significant contribution to the development of theology, it is imperative to acknowledge the historically overlooked importance of paradox within theological research and literature. Research focused on the philosophies of Henri de Lubac and Hans Urs von Balthasar, as extensively affirmed by Wołowski’s monograph, demonstrates the remarkable sensitivity of these eminent theologians to the concept of paradox. Paradox serves as a central and unifying element that threads through their perspectives. The author’s methodological reflection on the place and role of paradox in theology is profoundly intriguing. What sets it apart is the comprehensive exploration of how the category of paradox relates to synthesis and mystery, as well as dialectics and analogy within the philosophies of both Lubac and Balthasar.³³ With deep conviction, we can assert that Wołowski’s research has provided a solid foundation

³³ On the subject of analogy and paradox cf. L. Wołowski, *Cztery kategorie analogii i ich relacja do zagadnienia paradoksu w myśli Hansa Ursa von Balthasara*, „Polonia Sacra” 26 (2022) no. 4, pp. 47–72, <https://doi.org/10.15633/ppp.26403>. In this work, we read: “The method of analogy employed by Balthasar leads him to the discovery of increasingly deeper layers of reality. Simultaneously, a new method begins to emerge, involving the recognition of paradox and the exploration of the mystery concealed within it. This, in turn, leads to the perception of yet another, even deeper analogy” (p. 55).

in theological research for the development of contemplation, with the path forward guided by the application of the method of paradox.

Wołowski's monograph, for the first time, comprehensively demonstrates that key aspects of the work of Hans Urs von Balthasar and Henri de Lubac should be examined through the lens of the paradox problem. While it was not Wołowski who initially recognized the role of paradox in the scholarly inquiries of these two thinkers, he stands out for juxtaposing their approaches. He did not simply "mix" or "fuse" them together, but instead, he illustrated how they can complement each other, how they can jointly illuminate paths of cognition, and how they can contribute to the development of research methodology.

Considering that these two thinkers are continually being discovered in subsequent theological research, Wołowski's reflection represents a significant step forward in the development of theology and the study of the history of dogma. The method of paradox can encourage the popularization of going beyond the analysis of a single selected paradox in theological research. Paradoxes need each other, just as the Trinitarian and Christological paradoxes do. However, the relationship between these two elements, the dyad of theological paradoxes, should not be the final destination. It appears that such dyads inherently possess a force directed toward something "greater," or at least some form of a triad. For example, consider the dyad of the Trinitarian and Christological paradoxes, which tend toward the ecclesial paradox. The Trinitarian, Christological, and ecclesial paradoxes resonate together throughout Church history and theology. Christ, through His incarnation, word (teaching), and redemption, extends the Trinitarian paradox into the economic order, bringing it into the world and giving rise to the Church. The incarnate Son of God, the One whose presence in the world is elucidated through paradoxes, embodies the revelation of God's love and reveals the paradoxes of both the immanent Trinity and the Church. Therefore, rather than a dyad, a triad of paradoxes is simultaneously unveiled. The strength of the ecclesial paradox lies in the fact that the Church, in the world, extends the order inherent to the immanent Trinity. Consequently, the paradoxes of the economic Trinity shed light on the paradoxes of the immanent Trinity. This illumination also occurs in the opposite direction – the paradoxes of the immanent Trinity

continuously enlighten the paradoxes of the economic Trinity, facilitated through Christological paradoxes. It may not be an exaggeration to assert that the One who is the light of the world, (cf. John 8:12),³⁴ and the One who is theology because He reveals the Father (cf. Matthew 11:27; John 1:18), is also the Light of paradoxes. Christology possesses the capacity to become not just a discourse about the Incarnate Son of God but a method for understanding God and humanity, temporality and eternity, beginning and end, Spirit and matter (cf. Genesis 1:2), freedom³⁵ and obedience,³⁶ justice and mercy,³⁷ and above all, the inner love of the Holy Trinity and the inner love of the human heart.

The precise formulation proposed by Wołowski to define paradox in his research deserves considerable recognition. The accepted definition is as follows: "A paradox is a phenomenon, situation, judgment, or claim originating in reality and expressing a truth that conceals an apparent contradiction, contradicts common opinion, or points to a deeper aspect of reality than previously commonly perceived."³⁸ In this definition, I acknowledge a significant contribution to the advancement of theology due to its considerable research utility. It is likely to prove highly effective when applied in the investigations of many theologians and may continue to reveal its potential over time. Therefore, it is essential to promote this definition in academic studies published in various languages, a commitment I also uphold through this text.

Wołowski employed an unconventional approach in his research. He conducted an analysis and synthesis not only of the content of the works of the two eminent theologians but also delved into the underlying content. I am thinking about the methods employed by Lubac and Balthasar,

34 Cf. J. Salij, *Dogmaty i wolność sumienia*, in: *Dzieła wybrane*, vol. 3: *Nasza wiara*, ed. by J. Salij, Warszawa 2021, p. 81: "The most significant truth does not need to be sought in darkness because it comes to us in the light."

35 Cf. L. Wołowski, *The Paradox of Freedom in the Theodramatic Reflection of Hans Urs von Balthasar against the Background of the Thought of Henri de Lubac and Józef Tischner*, „*Verbum Vitae*” 40 (2022) no. 2, pp. 303–333, <https://doi.org/10.31743/vv.12916>.

36 Cf. L. Wołowski, *Paradoks najwyższej wolności w największym posłuszeństwie według H. U. von Balthasara*, „*Seminare*” 41 (2020) no. 2, pp. 37–47, <https://doi.org/10.21852/sem.2020.2.03>.

37 Cf. L. Wołowski, *The paradox of mercy as the greatest attribute of God*, „*Gregorianum*” 102 (2021) no. 1, pp. 47–63.

38 L. Wołowski, *Problematyka paradoksu*, p. 12.

which, when further refined and specified, were found to be juxtaposable, revealing an unexpected logicity inherent in paradox. This logicity mirrors the Divine Economy that was manifested in the incarnate Son of God, the Logos, who in turn revealed and manifested another paradox—the Trinitarian one. The subsequent paradoxes that Wołowski extracted from the thoughts of Lubac and Balthasar both confirm the Trinitarian and Christological paradoxes and draw strength from them. Thus, it is conceivable that if the method of paradox were more widely applied in theological research, not only would new content and solutions gain clarity that enables understanding, explanation, and description, but something greater could also occur. I refer to the two foundational paradoxes—the Trinitarian and Christological, which, when seen through the lens of numerous other recognized paradoxes, could attain new brilliance and a heightened logicity. This perspective encompasses not only the intellectual satisfaction experienced by theologians focusing on the study of the Trinity but also the life of the Church itself. The Church, while striving to manifest God's love in the world and provide a space for encountering God-Love, needs to be profoundly immersed in awe before the beauty of God. I allude to the type of wonder that captivates, ignites the pursuit of knowledge, and leads to the profound exploration of truth, thereby dissolving the cognitive barriers between faith and reason without diminishing their respective identities.³⁹

To conclude, let us examine atheistic humanism as described by Wołowski. The author, while referencing Lubac's ideas, effectively outlined the origins of modern atheism by analyzing the philosophies of Ludwig Feuerbach, Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, and August Comte. With the fluency of military lexicon, he adeptly portrayed this triad:

These are like three different fronts of a single program that set itself the ambitious goal of overthrowing and combating everything that was previously built on God or even referred to Him and creating a new absolutely atheistic reality. [...] We will begin our review of these three fronts with the one that reached

39 I discussed the significance of wonder in the theological method before. Cf. C. Smuniewski, "Et stupebant super doctrina ejus" (MK 1:22). On the Role of Wonderment in the Theological Method, „Teologia w Polsce” 14 (2020) no. 2, pp. 49–62.

the farthest east, then stop for a moment at the central German front, followed by a glimpse at the French front stretching west of the Rhine.⁴⁰

Wołowski proceeded to conduct a highly engaging analysis in three segments, ultimately leading to two conclusions: “Summarizing the discussed paradoxes of the three anti-theistic proposals of the 19th and 20th centuries, it is worth noting that the common final paradox of atheistic humanism is revealed here. Namely, no matter how great the efforts to remove the notion of God from both individual and social consciousness are made by anti-theists, all this effort, the more intense and authentic it becomes, the more it confirms the authenticity of His existence. This paradox can be formulated as follows: “it is difficult for anything to be more offensive to people who have devoted their entire lives to fighting a certain ‘object’ than to claim that this ‘object’ does not exist.”⁴¹ As an addendum to this final paradox, another thought amplifying the potency of failure and the internal contradiction of atheistic humanism emerges:

For in the mind of the anti-theists, their program was supposed to be the “final solution” to the question of God. However, as one can see, history—not only in this case, by the way—does not allow such “final solutions.” One can guess why—because God himself does not allow them. [...] Even if these anti-theistic “God-hunters” would finally succeed in the preposterous art of putting Him to death and depositing Him in some tomb, they will unfortunately prove too small to be able to close its lid. Only God could “seal the stone of His tomb.”⁴²

It is worth noting that the power of these statements is heightened by the use of a phrase that evokes unambiguous, profoundly anti-human associations. Mentioning the “final solution” for the God question inevitably brings to mind the “final solution of the Jewish question” (German: *Endlösung der Judenfrage*)—the plan for the extermination of the Chosen People presented at the Wannsee Conference (on January 20, 1942). Reflecting on atheistic humanism in this context, we can readily discern the foundational elements of significant totalitarian ideologies that led

40 L. Wołowski, *Problematyka paradoksu*, pp. 93–94.

41 L. Wołowski, *Problematyka paradoksu*, pp. 113–114.

42 L. Wołowski, *Problematyka paradoksu*, p. 114.

to World War II and the subsequent expansion of deadly communism, underscoring the theologians' responsibility to confront contemporary forms of Marxism, neomarxisms, nationalisms, and potentially even pacifisms.⁴³ Perhaps it is theologians willing to collaborate with philosophers, historians, political scientists, and security experts who will be able to find the answer to the question that I pose, drawing on a military-derived lexicon, much like Wołowski – with what weapons should we go to the modern frontlines? Given the power inherent in paradoxes, it is conceivable that the method of paradox could not only serve as a guide to selecting the right tools but may even become a weapon that contributes to the salvation of humanity and humankind.

Conclusion

A “vein of gold” for the methodological renewal of dogmatics is the theological reflection on paradox and the application of paradox to dogmatics – i.e. the method of paradox. Wołowski's research, as evidenced in his monograph *The Problematics of Paradox in the Thought of Henri de Lubac and Hans Urs von Balthasar*, along with the supporting articles addressing paradox in various ways, attests to this concept. Wołowski urges dogmatics to fulfill a scientific role, akin to other disciplines, by acknowledging a paradox identified at a particular stage that compels us to perceive and continually explore the mystery.⁴⁴ However, because it may happen that those who opt for the paradoxical method might face disillusionment, I will cite another statement by Wołowski as an incentive for perseverance. It suggests that after the initial frustration with paradox, there comes a sense of fascination:

The frustrating aspect of paradox is that it appears to contain a mark of apparent inconsistency. The intriguing part is that it hides the depth of a mystery and

43 Cf. A. Fiala, *Religious and Secular Visions of Peace and Pacifism*, „Religions” 13 (2022) no. 11, pp. 1–14; B. Bado, *Directions of Peter Brock's Research on Pacifism. The Security Studies Perspective*, in: *Person, Nation, State: Interdisciplinary research in security studies*, eds. C. Smuniewski, A. Massa, A. Zanini, Warszawa 2021, pp. 147–166; C. Smuniewski, *Church and Pacifism: The Role of Religion in the Face of Security Threats*, „Politeja” (2019) no. 4, pp. 341–357, <https://doi.org/10.12797/Politeja.16.2019.61.19>.

44 L. Wołowski, *Od Cantora do Balthasara*, p. 435.

at the same time unveils a truth that differs from initial perceptions, or more precisely, reveals itself as distinct from what so-called common sense, rooted in everyday, practical experiences, might try to convey.⁴⁵


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The nomination of Rev. Kazimierz Rolewski as bishop of Katowice and the reasons for the refusal

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Abstract

The nomination of Rev. Kazimierz Rolewski as bishop of Katowice and the reasons for the refusal

Rev. Kazimierz Rolewski (1887–1936)—parish priest in the Archdiocese of Poznań, rector of the theological seminary, and radio preacher—remains an inspiring figure to this day, as evidenced by the ongoing beatification process. Many people remember him as a priest who refused to accept the episcopal nobleness. This article refers to this common opinion in light of the Vatican archives. It is an attempt to highlight the important character traits of the discussed figure, especially his humility and sincerity. Based on the source analysis method, the article presents facts about Rev. Rolewski before and after the proposal to take over the bishopric of Katowice. This article presents the genesis of the interest in the parish priest from Ostrów Wielkopolski as a candidate for the diocesan bishop in 1925–1926. It describes the circumstances of the negative decision made at the apostolic nunciature in Warsaw. The above piece, which attempts to highlight the character traits important for the discussed character—his humility and honesty—fills the current biographical gap of Rev. Rolewski.

Keywords: Kazimierz Rolewski, August Hlond, Lorenzo Lauri, Katowice diocese

Abstrakt

Nominacja ks. Kazimierza Rolewskiego na biskupa katowickiego i przyczyny odmowy

Ksiądz Kazimierz Rolewski (1887–1936)—proboszcz w archidiecezji poznańskiej, rektor seminarium duchownego, kaznodzieja radiowy—pozostaje do dziś postacią inspirującą, o czym świadczy trwający proces beatyfikacyjny. W pamięci wielu osób zapisał się jako ksiądz, który odmówił przyjęcia godności biskupiej. Niniejszy artykuł odnosi się do tej obiegowej opinii w świetle archiwaliów watykańskich i jest próbą uwydatnienia istotnych dla omawianej postaci cech charakteru—pokory i szczerości. Autor artykułu w oparciu o metodę analizy źródeł prezentuje faktografię dotyczącą ks. Rolewskiego przed i po propozycji objęcia biskupstwa katowickiego, przedstawia genezę zainteresowania proboszczem z Ostrowa Wielkopolskiego jako kandydatem na biskupa diecezjalnego w latach 1925–1926 i opisuje okoliczności odmownej decyzji podjętej w nuncjaturze apostolskiej w Warszawie. Artykuł, który stanowi próbę uwydatnienia istotnych dla omawianej postaci cech charakteru—pokory i szczerości, wypełnia dotychczasową lukę biograficzną ks. Rolewskiego.

Słowa kluczowe: Kazimierz Rolewski, August Hlond, Lorenzo Lauri, diecezja katowicka

Reverend Kazimierz Rolewski—a priest of the Archdiocese of Poznań, a devoted pastor, a cheerful and pleasant man, a parish priest sensitive to human poverty, a rector and professor of a theological seminary involved in the education of students, a radio preacher—remains an inspiring, remembered and important figure for the contemporary history of the Church. It is evidenced by the ongoing beatification process, the cult surrounding the priest's grave in the parish church in Ostrów Wielkopolski, and numerous statements by witnesses of his life included in biographical studies. A priest born in Poznań in 1887, he died in 1936 in the capital of Greater Poland at the age of only forty-eight.

He is remembered by many people, including priests, as a priest who refused to accept the episcopal dignity. The authors of biographical texts about him note this fact.¹ This article refers to this common opinion in light of the Vatican archives. Yet, it is an attempt to highlight the important character traits of the figure discussed—humility and sincerity.

1. Factography (1887–1926)

Kazimierz Rolewski's biography has been presented in detail in publications about him.² For the purposes of this article, however, it seems necessary to recall the most important facts from his life chronologically.

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- 1 M. Banaszak, *Rolewski Kazimierz Jan Adam*, in: *Słownik polskich teologów katolickich*, vol. 7, ed. L. Grzebień, Warszawa 1983, p. 38; A. Franc, M. Juda-Mieloch, R. Kania-Weiss, A. Kraska, A. Mąka, *Apostoł wielkiej dobroci. Sługa Boży ksiądz Kazimierz Rolewski*, Ostrów Wielkopolski 2014, p. 121, 132; S. Jezierski, *Rolewski Kazimierz Jan Adam*, in: *Hagiografia polska. Słownik bio-bibliograficzny*, vol. 2, Poznań–Warszawa–Lublin 1972, p. 277; F. Lenort, *Rolewski Kazimierz Jan Adam*, in: *Polski słownik biograficzny*, vol. 31, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków–Gdańsk–Łódź 1988–1989, p. 556; *Mowa żałobna na pogrzebie śp. x. prałata dr. Kazimierza Rolewskiego*, Potulice 1936.
 - 2 M. Banaszak, *Rolewski*, pp. 38–39; A. Franc i in., *Apostoł wielkiej dobroci*, p. 132; S. Jezierski, *Rolewski*, pp. 271–283; F. Lenort, *Rolewski*, pp. 556–557; *Mowa żałobna na pogrzebie śp. x. prałata dr. Kazimierza Rolewskiego*, pp. 5–16; W. Padacz, *Z polskiej gleby*, Kraków 1973, pp. 331–334; M. Straszewicz, *Rolewski Kazimierz*, in: *Encyklopedia katolicka*, vol. 17, ed. E. Gigilewicz, Lublin 2012, col. 251–252; *Śp. Ks. Kazimierz Rolewski*, „*Miesięcznik Kościelny. Organ Archidiecezyi Gnieźnieńskiej i Poznańskiej*” 51 (1936) no. 6/7, pp. 206–207; A. Wietrzykowski, *Sylwetka duchowa Sługi Bożego ks. Kazimierza Rolewskiego 1887–1936*, „*Miesięcznik Kościelny Archidiecezyi Poznańskiej*” 19 (1968) no. 10, pp. 274–282; no. 11, pp. 295–306.

Jan Kazimierz Adam, son of Stanisław Rolewski and Elżbieta née Kinowska, was born on June 2, 1887, in Poznań and was baptized on June 19, 1887, in the Catholic parish of the Royal Prussian 10th Division – his father was then a sergeant in the Prussian army.³ He was the son of a railway official, so the Rolewskis often changed their residence. Jan Kazimierz Adam had two younger siblings – brother Władysław and sister Zofia. Kazimierz studied at schools in Mąty, Inowrocław, Kostrzyn nad Odrą, Kwidzyn, and Leipzig, where he passed the secondary school graduation exam. Over there, he also wrote an application for admission to the Archbishop’s Theological Seminary in Poznań but clearly stated that he would like to become a priest “in his homelands.”⁴ After four years of formation and studies, on January 22, 1911, he was ordained a priest by Bishop. Edward Likowski.

After being ordained a priest on March 1, 1911, he was sent to pastoral work in the Kingdom of Saxony – in Meissen and Dresden. During the war, he also served in the POW camp in Königsbrück.

On March 1, 1911, immediately after receiving priestly ordination, at the order of the Archbishop Dr. Likowski, I went to the Saxon Kingdom as a pastor for Polish emigrants. I have been working here for five years up to now, amid great difficulties and efforts. I am glad that I can serve thousands of souls longing for salvation and content the Supreme Spiritual Authority, which has honored me with so much trust by placing on my shoulders an office of such responsibility abroad,⁵

he wrote from Dresden to Archbishop Consistory in Poznań in 1915, asking for material support for his ministry.

In March 1916, he asked to be dismissed from his current position as soon as possible and to be given a job in his home diocese. He declared his readiness to take up the benefice in Niechanów, “if I do not receive the

3 Archiwum Archidiecezjalne w Poznaniu, Konsystorz i Kuria Arcybiskupia, 976, Mar 11, 1907, s.n.f.: copy of baptism certificate.

4 Archiwum Archidiecezjalne w Poznaniu, Konsystorz i Kuria Arcybiskupia, 976, Mar 15, 1907, s.n.f.: A request from a junior high school graduate, Kazimierz Rolewski, for admission to the theological seminary in Poznań.

5 Archiwum Archidiecezjalne w Poznaniu, Konsystorz i Kuria Arcybiskupia, 976, Jun 17, 1915, s.n.f.: Rev. Kazimierz Rolewski to the Archbishop’s Consistory in Poznań.

Niechanów benefice, I dare to ask for a vicariate humbly.”⁶ He took up the position of vicar in Głuszyn—a church incorporated into the Poznań parish provostry on May 1, 1916.⁷

He takes care of the parish zealously in the church and social organizations outside the church. He leads an impeccable life and is of pure morals, and in everyday life, he is a polite and cheerful companion. Having worked abroad for a long time, he got to know the local organizations and the hardships of pastoral work there, and with the knowledge he acquired from there, he zealously *mutatis muntandis* and, as far as possible, uses it on the spot with great benefit for pastoral work,⁸

wrote in his opinion to the Consistory, Rev. Wacław Mayer, dean and pastor of Saint Marcin in Poznań.

The pastoral ministry in Głuszyn also included Mała Starołęka, where in April 1920, the clerical authorities appointed Rev. Rolewski administrator.⁹ A former restaurant was adapted for the needs of a temporary chapel, with a tower added—its consecration took place on April 11, 1920. Soon, however, Rev. Rolewski left the archdiocese, and in the autumn of 1920, he went on a mission to Germany “to investigate the state of pastoral work among Polish emigrants.”¹⁰ In December 1920, he returned to Mała Starołęka, but on April 3, 1922, he first became an administrator, and on May 5, 1922, a parish priest (commander) in Ceradz.¹¹

6 Archiwum Archidiecezjalne w Poznaniu, Konsystorz i Kuria Arcybiskupia, 976, Mar 5, 1916, s.n.f.: Rev. Kazimierz Rolewski to Archbishop Edmund Dalbor.

7 Archiwum Archidiecezjalne w Poznaniu, Konsystorz i Kuria Arcybiskupia, 976, Apr 9, 1916, s.n.f.: Rev. Kazimierz Rolewski to Archbishop Edmund Dalbor; Archiwum Archidiecezjalne w Poznaniu, Konsystorz i Kuria Arcybiskupia, 976, Apr 10, 1916, s.n.f.: Decree of the Archbishop’s Consistory in Poznań.

8 Archiwum Archidiecezjalne w Poznaniu, Konsystorz i Kuria Arcybiskupia, 976, Sep 16, 1917, s.n.f.: Rev. Wacław Mayer to the Archbishop’s Consistory.

9 “We hereby appoint you, the Vicar, as administrator in Mała Starołęka, and we appoint you to take up your intended position since Rev. Kanikowski will come to Głuszyna”: Rev. “Weimann”, Archiwum Archidiecezjalne w Poznaniu, Parafie, 146/237, Apr 17, 2023, s.n.f.: a copy of the decree of the Archbishop’s Consistory.

10 Śp. Ks. Kazimierz Rolewski, p. 205.

11 Archiwum Archidiecezjalne w Poznaniu, Konsystorz i Kuria Arcybiskupia, 976, Apr 3, 1922, s.n.f.: decree of the Archbishop’s Consistory in Poznań; Archiwum Archidiecezjalne w Poznaniu, Konsystorz i Kuria Arcybiskupia, 976, May 5, 1922, s.n.f.: decree of the Archbishop’s Consistory in Poznań.

In the same year, 1922—from October 1—Cardinal Edmund Dalbor entrusted Rev. Rolewski the office of commander and benefice in Ostrów Wielkopolski.¹² In the local parish of Saint Stanisław Bishop, Rev. Rolewski spent nearly six years. In 1926, just after the death of Primate Dalbor from Ostrów Wielkopolski (died February 13, 1926), Pope Pius XI intended to appoint him bishop of Katowice.

2. The candidacy of Rev. Rolewski for bishop

The person of Rev. Rolewski, as a possible candidate for the episcopal dignity, was indicated to the apostolic nunciature in Warsaw by Rev. August Hlond, an apostolic administrator in Katowice. The parish priest in Ostrów Wielkopolski made a great impression on him as the organizer of the Catholic Congress held in this city on June 27–29, 1925. The context of this candidacy was the expected changes in the territorial division of dioceses in Poland, including the creation of new episcopal sees. Shortly after the issuance of the bull *Vixdum Poloniae unitas*¹³, Archbishop Lorenzo Lauri sent an extensive report to the Secretariat of State on candidates for ordinaries of new or vacant dioceses. For the newly established diocese in Częstochowa, the nuncio proposed Cardinal Pietro Gasparri to Rev. Teodor Kubina—a pastor from Katowice, and Rev. Kazimierz Rolewski.

A pious priest, with an exemplary life, loved by his people regardless of class, extremely active, an organizer with initiative and unrelated to politics,¹⁴

characterized Rev. Rolewski, Archbishop Lauri. He was based on the opinion of Rev. Hlond, whose recommendation was attached to the report.

¹² Archiwum Archidiecezjalne w Poznaniu, Konsystorz i Kuria Arcybiskupia, 976, Oct 1, 1922, s.n.f.: decree of the Archbishop's Consistory in Poznań.

¹³ *Vixdum Poloniae unitas*, *De nova dioecesium latini ritus circumscriptione in ditone Polonica*, Oct 28, 1925, „Acta Apostolicae Sedis” 17 (1925) no. 13, pp. 521–528.

¹⁴ Segreteria di Stato, Sezione per i Rapporti con gli Stati, Archivio Storico, Congregazione per gli Affari Ecclesiastici Straordinari, Polonia, 1923–1933, Pos. 75, fasc. 104, Oct 29, 1925, k. 51: Nuncio Lorenzo Lauri to Cardinal.

He is intelligent and a good speaker. With his initiative, activity, and prudence, he greatly revitalized the religious life of the parish, especially through Catholic organizations. He takes special care of his workers, who love him very much. Having a friendly, cheerful, and agreeable character, he gained the sympathy and respect of people who held him in high esteem,¹⁵

wrote Rev. Hlond. The Katowice administrator reported that—outwardly—after the Catholic Convention in Ostrów, Rev. Rolewski couldn't even go on vacation because he spent all his private funds on organizing the event. "He is of average height, quite charming, with mild manners; he gives the impression of a refined and cultured person,"¹⁶ Hlond noted.

In connection with this proposal, the nuncio asked for the opinion of the auxiliary bishop in Poznań, Stanisław Łukomski, and attached it to the report.

Rev. Kazimierz Rolewski, dean of the parish priest of Ostrów, belongs to the group of priests who stand out for their piety, exemplary life, and pastoral prudence. [...] He has a serious character, rather short than average height. He does not engage in politics, but instead develops vigorous activity among the people and the working class to support their morality,¹⁷

wrote Łukomski. He mentioned that due to excessive activity, he had difficulty speaking and had a slightly muffled voice. Nuncio Lauri consulted this remark with Rev. Hlond.

He assured me that he had heard more than one speech by Rolewski at the Congress in Ostrów and had never noticed that Rolewski had any voice defect. So it seems that Bishop Łukomski saw and talked to Rev. Rolewski shortly after the

15 Segreteria di Stato, Sezione per i Rapporti con gli Stati, Archivio Storico, Congregazione per gli Affari Ecclesiastici Straordinari, Polonia, 1923–1933, Pos. 75, fasc. 104, b.d., k. 58: Rev. August Hlond to Nuncio Lorenzo Lauri.

16 Segreteria di Stato, Sezione per i Rapporti con gli Stati, Archivio Storico, Congregazione per gli Affari Ecclesiastici Straordinari, Polonia, 1923–1933, Pos. 75, fasc. 104, b.d., k. 58: Rev. August Hlond to Nuncio Lorenzo Lauri.

17 Segreteria di Stato, Sezione per i Rapporti con gli Stati, Archivio Storico, Congregazione per gli Affari Ecclesiastici Straordinari, Polonia, 1923–1933, Pos. 75, fasc. 104, Oct 27, 1925, k. 57: Bishop Stanisław Łukomski to Nuncio Lorenzo Lauri.

congress, when, as a result of the great effort he suffered, his voice may have lowered, which was only temporary and did not cause the slightest concern,¹⁸

concluded the nuncio.

The candidacy of Rev. Rolewski returned a few months later due to the need to fill the vacant episcopal sees in Gniezno and Poznań, as well as in Vilnius—after the death of Cardinal Edmund Dalbor and Archbishop Jan Cieplak. Initially, to the Primate See, Cardinal Gasparri considered the Bishop of Płock, Antoni Julian Nowowiejski, and for Vilnius—Rev. Euzebiusz Brzeziewicz, pastor of Saint Aleksander in Warsaw.¹⁹ After hearing the opinion of Archbishop Laurie²⁰, in the first days of March 1926, the choice fell on Rev. Brzeziewicz as the future primate bishop,²¹ Romuald Jałbrzykowski as bishop of Vilnius, and bishop Łukomski as an ordinary in Łomża.²² However, the holy priest from Warsaw asked Pius XI not to entrust him with this dignity, explaining his poor health.²³

18 Segreteria di Stato, Sezione per i Rapporti con gli Stati, Archivio Storico, Congregazione per gli Affari Ecclesiastici Straordinari, Polonia, 1923–1933, Pos. 75, fasc. 104, Oct 29, 1925, k. 57: note by nuncio Lorenzo Lauri.

19 Segreteria di Stato, Sezione per i Rapporti con gli Stati, Archivio Storico, Congregazione per gli Affari Ecclesiastici Straordinari, 1926, Polonia, Pos. 66, fasc. 76, Feb 26, 1926, k. 72: Cardinal Pietro Gasparri to Nuncio Lorenzo Lauri (cifra).

20 Segreteria di Stato, Sezione per i Rapporti con gli Stati, Archivio Storico, Congregazione per gli Affari Ecclesiastici Straordinari, 1926, Polonia, Pos. 66, fasc. 76, Feb 26, 1926, k. 74–78: Nuncio Lorenzo Lauri to Cardinal Pietro Gasparri.

21 Segreteria di Stato, Sezione per i Rapporti con gli Stati, Archivio Storico, Congregazione per gli Affari Ecclesiastici Straordinari, 1926, Polonia, Pos. 66, fasc. 76, Mar 10, 1926, k. 80: Cardinal Pietro Gasparri to Nuncio Lorenzo Lauri (cifra).

22 Segreteria di Stato, Sezione per i Rapporti con gli Stati, Archivio Storico, Congregazione per gli Affari Ecclesiastici Straordinari, 1926, Polonia, Pos. 66, fasc. 76, Mar 10, 1926, k. 81: Cardinal Pietro Gasparri to Nuncio Lorenzo Lauri (cifra).

23 Segreteria di Stato, Sezione per i Rapporti con gli Stati, Archivio Storico, Congregazione per gli Affari Ecclesiastici Straordinari, 1926, Polonia, Pos. 66, fasc. 76, Mar 15, 1926, k. 94–96: Rev. Euzebiusz Brzeziewicz to Pope Pius XI; Segreteria di Stato, Sezione per i Rapporti con gli Stati, Archivio Storico, Congregazione per gli Affari Ecclesiastici Straordinari, 1926, Polonia, Pos. 66, fasc. 76, Mar 16, 1926, k. 92: Nuncio Lorenzo Lauri to Cardinal Pietro Gasparri. Consequently, Nuncio Lauri, who had already sent a *sub secreto* letter to Bishop. Łukomski about his nomination as Ordinary in Łomża, he asked for his immediate return, Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, Archivio Nunziatura Varsavia, b. 224, fasc. 169, Mar 22, 1926, k. 20: Nuncio Lorenzo Lauri to Bishop Stanisław Łukomski.

Therefore, in an extensive report from April 12, 1926, the apostolic nuncio considered further candidacies—for Gniezno and Poznań, bishop Hlond, bishop Łukomski, or the provincial of the Jesuits, Stanisław Sopuch.²⁴ At the end of April, Cardinal Gasparri requested that Nuncio Lauri ask bishop Hlond whether he would see anyone who could continue his mission in Upper Silesia without major difficulties.²⁵ Hlond suggested the bishop Kubina, recently the ordinary in Częstochowa.²⁶

At the beginning of May, the idea of leaving bishop Łukomski in Poznań returned. It was then that the candidacy of Rev. Rolewski, this time as a possible bishop of Łomża. “The Holy Father expects, still *sub secreto*, a final opinion from Your Excellency regarding the following nomination intentions: I. Poznań—Łukomski, II. Vilnius—Jałbrzykowski, III. Łomża—Rolewski”²⁷—wrote the Secretary of State to the nuncio.

Analyzing in a several-page report—in the rather specific circumstances of the 1926 May Coup²⁸—the possible consequences of the proposed decisions, Archbishop Lauri confirmed that “according to the information received about this clergyman and already indicated by me [...] he provides a sufficient guarantee of good management of the

24 Segreteria di Stato, Sezione per i Rapporti con gli Stati, Archivio Storico, Congregazione per gli Affari Ecclesiastici Straordinari, 1926, Polonia, Pos. 66, fasc. 77, Apr 12, 1926, k. 4–12: Nuncio Lorenzo Lauri to Cardinal Pietro Gasparri.

25 Segreteria di Stato, Sezione per i Rapporti con gli Stati, Archivio Storico, Congregazione per gli Affari Ecclesiastici Straordinari, 1926, Polonia, Pos. 66, fasc. 77, Apr 26, 1926, k. 18: Cardinal Pietro Gasparri to Nuncio Lorenzo Lauri (cifra).

26 Segreteria di Stato, Sezione per i Rapporti con gli Stati, Archivio Storico, Congregazione per gli Affari Ecclesiastici Straordinari, 1926, Polonia, Pos. 66, fasc. 77, Apr 28, 1926, k. 37: Nuncio Lorenzo Lauri to Cardinal Pietro Gasparri.

27 Segreteria di Stato, Sezione per i Rapporti con gli Stati, Archivio Storico, Congregazione per gli Affari Ecclesiastici Straordinari, 1926, Polonia, Pos. 66, fasc. 77, May 15, 1926, k. 38: Cardinal Pietro Gasparri to Nuncio Lorenzo Lauri.

28 This is how the nuncio in Warsaw described the situation: “Pilsudski’s coup d’état took place with the participation of a large part of the army: after two days of fierce fighting and shelling, as a result of which about two hundred people died, and many were wounded, Belvedere was occupied last evening. It is unknown where the president and ministers are now; they say they are in Poznań. Nunciature in the besieged region made it impossible to telegraph in advance. Today, there is a meeting of the diplomatic corps. Lauri”; Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, Archivio Nunziatura Varsavia, b. 219, fasc. 118, May 15, 1926, k. 16: Nuncio Lorenzo Lauri to Cardinal Pietro Gasparri (cifra).

diocese, and, therefore, being a good bishop of Łomża.”²⁹ He listed the priest’s advantages: great activity and commitment to workers. These qualities—according to Lauri—would, however, speak for another diocese where

the need for social action and organization of the working class is more urgent, as, for example, in the diocese of Łódź or Częstochowa, and that is why I pointed him to the Holy See as an excellent suffragan of the bishop of Łódź, who repeatedly expressed the urgent need for help, or for the diocese of Częstochowa if Rev. Kubina would not be appointed there.³⁰

The nuncio in Warsaw also noted that few clergy persons devote themselves to social activity and work for workers’ organizations in Poland. Yet, these few are not always suitable to become bishops.

That is why Rev. Rolewski seems to be a valuable candidate for those dioceses where the working-class element predominates. Since the diocese of Łomża is currently the most peaceful of Polish dioceses, without the presence of many workers, without at least a significant socialist or otherwise subversive element, Rev. Rolewski would seem to me a bit wasted for this diocese, which would be easier to fill by finding the right person,³¹

Archbishop Lauri said. In his opinion, for a priest who was only forty years old Rolewski may have a more favorable opportunity to serve the Church so as to make good use of its “extraordinary strengths”.

The opinions sent by the apostolic nuncio influenced Pius XI’s decisions. At the beginning of June 1926, the Secretary of State asked Lauri for his opinion on the following “arrangement”: “Poznań Hlond,

²⁹ Segreteria di Stato, Sezione per i Rapporti con gli Stati, Archivio Storico, Congregazione per gli Affari Ecclesiastici Straordinari, 1926, Polonia, Pos. 66, fasc. 77, May 22, 1926, k. 45: Nuncio Lorenzo Lauri to Cardinal Pietro Gasparri.

³⁰ Segreteria di Stato, Sezione per i Rapporti con gli Stati, Archivio Storico, Congregazione per gli Affari Ecclesiastici Straordinari, 1926, Polonia, Pos. 66, fasc. 77, May 22, 1926, k. 45: Nuncio Lorenzo Lauri to Cardinal Pietro Gasparri.

³¹ Segreteria di Stato, Sezione per i Rapporti con gli Stati, Archivio Storico, Congregazione per gli Affari Ecclesiastici Straordinari, 1926, Polonia, Pos. 66, fasc. 77, May 22, 1926, k. 45: Nuncio Lorenzo Lauri to Cardinal Pietro Gasparri.

Katowice Rolewski, Łomża Łukomski, Wilno Jałbrzykowski,”³² and then asked for a *nulla osta* from the President of the Republic of Poland.³³ The nuncio considered this solution appropriate, also due to the current political situation,³⁴ and notified the cardinal. Gasparri about the lack of opposition from President Ignacy Mościcki.³⁵ In this situation, the Secretariat of State sent a telegraphic inquiry to the bishop. Łukomski attending the Eucharistic Congress in Chicago, about which the nunciature in Warsaw was informed.³⁶ “The candidates for Poznań and Vilnius expressed their consent,”³⁷ reported the nuncio to the Secretary of State. The situation differed with Rev. Rolewski, who refused to accept the episcopal nobleness. “Rolewski, who was interrogated yesterday, categorically refuses, giving serious reasons, which Rev. Sopuch, with whom he consulted, and Bishop Hlond, who is present in Warsaw, consider highly justified,”³⁸ the nuncio wrote to Rome.

In this situation, the Secretariat of State asked the Congregation of the Holy Office for *nulla osta* for Rev. Arkadiusz Lisiecki, nuncio’s candidate for the bishopric in Katowice,³⁹ and then for the approval of the

32 Segreteria di Stato, Sezione per i Rapporti con gli Stati, Archivio Storico, Congregazione per gli Affari Ecclesiastici Straordinari, 1926, Polonia, Pos. 66, fasc. 77, 2.06.1926, k. 50: Cardinal Pietro Gasparri to Nuncio Lorenzo Lauri (cifra).

33 Segreteria di Stato, Sezione per i Rapporti con gli Stati, Archivio Storico, Congregazione per gli Affari Ecclesiastici Straordinari, 1926, Polonia, Pos. 66, fasc. 77, Jun 8, 1926, k. 52: Cardinal Pietro Gasparri to Nuncio Lorenzo Lauri.

34 Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, Archivio Nunziatura Varsavia, b. 219, fasc. 118, Jun 9, 1926, k. 90: Nuncio Lorenzo Lauri to Cardinal Pietro Gasparri.

35 Segreteria di Stato, Sezione per i Rapporti con gli Stati, Archivio Storico, Congregazione per gli Affari Ecclesiastici Straordinari, 1926, Polonia, Pos. 66, fasc. 77, Jun 11, 1926, k. 53: Nuncio Lorenzo Lauri to Cardinal Pietro Gasparri (cifra).

36 Segreteria di Stato, Sezione per i Rapporti con gli Stati, Archivio Storico, Congregazione per gli Affari Ecclesiastici Straordinari, 1926, Polonia, Pos. 66, fasc. 77, Jun 13, 1926, k. 54: Cardinal Pietro Gasparri to Nuncio Lorenzo Lauri.

37 Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, Archivio Nunziatura Varsavia, b. 219, fasc. 118, Jun 13, 1926, k. 99: Nuncio Lorenzo Lauri to Cardinal Pietro Gasparri (cifra).

38 Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, Archivio Nunziatura Varsavia, b. 219, fasc. 118, Jun 13, 1926, k. 99: Nuncio Lorenzo Lauri to Cardinal Pietro Gasparri (cifra).

39 Segreteria di Stato, Sezione per i Rapporti con gli Stati, Archivio Storico, Congregazione per gli Affari Ecclesiastici Straordinari, 1926, Polonia, Pos. 66, fasc. 77, Jun 14, 1926, k. 56: Congregation for Extraordinary Affairs to the Congregation of the Holy Office; Segreteria di Stato, Sezione per i Rapporti con gli Stati, Archivio Storico, Congregazione

President of the Republic of Poland.⁴⁰ Just after bishop Łukomski's consent and receiving the long-awaited *nulla osta* of President Mościcki as the new candidate for Katowice⁴¹, on June 24, 1926, Pope Pius XI announced four related nominations in a secret consistory: Bishop August Hlond was appointed archbishop in Gniezno and Poznań, Bishop Romuald Jałbrzykowski—archbishop in Vilnius, Bishop Stanisław Łukomski—ordinary in Łomża, and Rev. Arkadiusz Lisiecki—bishop in Katowice.⁴²

3. Reasons for the negative decision

The correspondence between the nunciature in Warsaw and the Secretariat of State allows us to learn the real reasons for the resignation of Rev. Rolewski from taking over the proposed bishopric of Katowice. In the first days of June 1926, nuncio Lauri invited the parish priest from Ostrów to the apostolic nunciature in Warsaw under the pretext of talking about the pastoral care of youth, to which the Polish bishops would like to devote more attention.

Since Your Eminence asked me, on behalf of the Holy Father, for my opinion on the selection of the priest as mentioned above for such an important and delicate see of Katowice, I wanted to meet this parish priest personally,⁴³

he explained to the Secretary of State.

one per gli Affari Ecclesiastici Straordinari, 1926, Polonia, Pos. 66, fasc. 77, Jun 16, 1926, k. 57: *nulla osta* of the Congregation of the Holy Office.

40 Segreteria di Stato, Sezione per i Rapporti con gli Stati, Archivio Storico, Congregazione per gli Affari Ecclesiastici Straordinari, 1926, Polonia, Pos. 66, fasc. 77, Jun 16, 1926, k. 60: Cardinal Pietro Gasparri to Nuncio Lorenzo Lauri (cifra).

41 „Only now, at 15, can I forward the receipt of *nulla osta* and the candidate's consent to Katowice”, Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, Archivio Nunziatura Varsavia, b. 219, fasc. 118, Jun 23, 1926, k. 111: Nuncio Lorenzo Lauri to Cardinal Pietro Gasparri (cifra).

42 Segreteria di Stato, Sezione per i Rapporti con gli Stati, Archivio Storico, Congregazione per gli Affari Ecclesiastici Straordinari, 1926, Polonia, Pos. 66, fasc. 77, Jun 24, 1926, k. 48: Cardinal Pietro Gasparri to Cardinal Gaetano de Lai.

43 Segreteria di Stato, Sezione per i Rapporti con gli Stati, Archivio Storico, Congregazione per gli Affari Ecclesiastici Straordinari, Polonia, 1923–1933, Pos. 75, fasc. 105, Jun 24, 1926, k. 30: Nuncio Lorenzo Lauri to Cardinal Pietro Gasparri.

I must say that I had a good impression because Rolewski presented himself to me as a pious, modest, active, and practical man in the field of Christian social organizations, exactly as Bishop Łukomski and Hlond described him to me.⁴⁴

After the papal decision to appoint, Rev. Rolewski was again invited to the nunciature. The meeting took place on Saturday, June 12, 1926. The pope's decision – wrote the nuncio – was received by the parish priest from Ostrów “with deep astonishment.”⁴⁵ Archbishop's report Laurie described in detail the course of the interview with the candidate for the bishopric in Katowice. Rev. Rolewski argued his resistance first with his own unworthiness and smallness in the face of such a great honor and such a serious office. He claimed that with God's help, he could be a good parish priest but probably not a good bishop. The priest's next arguments were more specific. First, he talked about financial problems – due to the crisis of the Polish currency, a loan of fifty thousand zlotys taken out for the construction of a new church had not yet been repaid, and personally, he still had to repay four thousand zlotys for the renovation and enlargement of the parish house; he expressed hope that he would be able to repay them over the next two years, remaining the parish priest in Ostrów.

Then he raised the priest. Rolewski asked about diabetes, which he suffered from, and the lack of a scientific degree. His studies at the Poznań Seminary did not give him an academic degree, which – in his opinion – would put him in a situation of an inferiority complex concerning Katowice clergy who have academic diplomas after studying in Wrocław, where there is a theological faculty with the privilege of awarding them. “I tried to reassure him of his fears, which seemed to me a bit exaggerated and caused by a strong sense of humility,”⁴⁶ wrote the

44 Segreteria di Stato, Sezione per i Rapporti con gli Stati, Archivio Storico, Congregazione per gli Affari Ecclesiastici Straordinari, Polonia, 1923–1933, Pos. 75, fasc. 105, Jun 24, 1926, k. 30: Nuncio Lorenzo Lauri to Cardinal Pietro Gasparri.

45 Segreteria di Stato, Sezione per i Rapporti con gli Stati, Archivio Storico, Congregazione per gli Affari Ecclesiastici Straordinari, Polonia, 1923–1933, Pos. 75, fasc. 105, Jun 24, 1926, k. 30: Nuncio Lorenzo Lauri to Cardinal Pietro Gasparri.

46 Segreteria di Stato, Sezione per i Rapporti con gli Stati, Archivio Storico, Congregazione per gli Affari Ecclesiastici Straordinari, Polonia, 1923–1933, Pos. 75, fasc. 105, Jun 24, 1926, k. 31: Nuncio Lorenzo Lauri to Cardinal Pietro Gasparri.

nuncio, but he was unable to overcome his reservations before taking up the office and knowing that he knew the Jesuits in Warsaw, including some of Rev. Sopucha, he advised him to go and talk to them.

Rev. Rolewski returned to the nunciature in the afternoon of the same day. Bishop Hlond was already there, and further talks were conducted in his presence. Rev. Rolewski asked to speak Polish to be more precise in expressing his feelings, and Bishop Hlond was to translate his statement. The priest noted that he used the time given to him well – he adored the Blessed Sacrament for an hour, then made a general confession to one of the Jesuits, and then talked to Rev. Sopuch about his doubts. The Jesuit convinced him their worries were of little importance, except for one, which he should present to the nuncio for clarity. A long speech by Rev. Rolewski focused on the issue that has troubled him for several years. A clerical court also considered it and was his main obstacle in assuming the episcopal dignity. It was related to defamation against him, which could make it difficult for him to hold this office in the future.

The case concerned the parish in Głuszyn, where in 1920, a young woman, giving birth to a child only four months after marriage, accused the parish priest of paternity to her husband, who was surprised by this fact. The Poznań clerical court initiated an investigation, but it turned out that the slander concerned not the current parish administrator but the priest. Rolewski, who was on a mission in Germany. He immediately declared his innocence and asked for the case to be fully explained by the church court. However, after hearing the witnesses, the clerical court in Poznań saw no grounds to address this issue. Rev. Rolewski's requests, sent to court in 1924 and 1925, remained unanswered. Only a month after the conversation with the nuncio, on July 15, 1926, the priest received confirmation from the Archbishop's Spiritual Court in Poznań that it would no longer deal with this case. "We completely trust Rev. Rolewski, our Dean, and are convinced of his innocence."⁴⁷

47 „In response to the letter of Rev. Dean of April 10, 1924 and January 22, 1925, we repeat our decree of February 17, 1923, that 'his statement satisfies us completely,' which means that we have complete trust in Rev. Dean and belief in his innocence:" Archiwum Archidiecezjalne w Poznaniu, Konsystorz i Kuria Arcybiskupia, 976, Jul 15, 1926, s.n.f: Rev. Stefan Zwolski to Rev. Kazimierz Rolewski.

Rev. Rolewski confirmed in the nunciature his lack of guilt; “his words and the way he expressed himself reflected the sincerity of his statements,”⁴⁸ the nuncio wrote in the report. He emphasized that although the rumors did not reach Ostrów Wielkopolski, they were known in the Głuszyń parish and could be spread after the episcopal nomination, disturbing and casting a shadow on his good name. Archbishop Lauri thanked Rev. Rolewski for explanations and asked him to return to the nunciature a few hours later, after which he held a conference with Rev. Sopuch and Bishop Hlond. “None of us believed in Rolewski’s guilt: he honestly revealed these facts himself, even though Bishop Łukomski, when providing me with detailed information about Rev. Rolewski, didn’t mention it; This proves the subtlety of this priest’s conscience,”⁴⁹ the nuncio wrote in the report. However, considering all the circumstances, it was decided to accept his resignation for the good of the Holy See and the person concerned. “Reverend Rolewski was very pleased with this decision,”⁵⁰ the nuncio noted in the report.

It is possible that due to the attitude of Rev. Rolewski received accusations against Bishop Stanisław Okoniewski, coadjutor in Pelplin, of taking too “careful” care of the sister of his deceased colleague priest. According to Archbishop Lauri, publicity of alleged moral matters concerning Bishop Okoniewski had a political background. He mentioned Józef Prądyński, the priest associated with the National Democracy and the “Kurier Poznański.” Among the causes of the unrest, he also saw the dissatisfaction of Bishop Antoni Laubitz (interested in the Chełmno diocese) and the anti-Polish views of Rev. Karol Klinke, a cathedral canon of German nationality, who confirmed under oath at the

48 Segreteria di Stato, Sezione per i Rapporti con gli Stati, Archivio Storico, Congregazione per gli Affari Ecclesiastici Straordinari, Polonia, 1923–1933, Pos. 75, fasc. 105, Jun 24, 1926, k. 32: Nuncio Lorenzo Lauri to Cardinal Pietro Gasparri.

49 Segreteria di Stato, Sezione per i Rapporti con gli Stati, Archivio Storico, Congregazione per gli Affari Ecclesiastici Straordinari, Polonia, 1923–1933, Pos. 75, fasc. 105, Jun 24, 1926, k. 32: Nuncio Lorenzo Lauri to Cardinal Pietro Gasparri.

50 Segreteria di Stato, Sezione per i Rapporti con gli Stati, Archivio Storico, Congregazione per gli Affari Ecclesiastici Straordinari, Polonia, 1923–1933, Pos. 75, fasc. 105, Jun 24, 1926, k. 32: Nuncio Lorenzo Lauri to Cardinal Pietro Gasparri.

nunciature the accusations which Okoniewski also denied under oath.⁵¹ However, the attack on Okoniewski impacted the Poznań clergy and was the background for Rolewski's negative decision. According to the nuncio's report, the scenario of similar moral accusations appearing in the press—this time against the pastor from Ostrów Wielkopolski—was real.⁵²

4. Factography (1926–1936)

Rev. Rolewski returned to the parish, and Bishop Hlond became his ordinary. In 1926, Rolewski began studies at the Faculty of Theology of the University of Warsaw, culminating in obtaining the Doctor of Theology academic degree in 1929. The title of his dissertation, written under the supervision of Rev. Prof. Zygmunt Kozubski, was "Social Obstacles to the Freedom of the Human Will."⁵³

On September 26, 1928, Cardinal Hlond appointed Rev. Rolewski as a rector of the Archbishop's Theological Seminary in Poznań.⁵⁴ When he left the Ostrów parish, he was farewelled as a priest who enjoyed "extraordinary love and respect," as a "modes man, without needs," and with a "generous hand for the poor."⁵⁵ The Primate also commissioned

51 Segreteria di Stato, Sezione per i Rapporti con gli Stati, Archivio Storico, Congregazione per gli Affari Ecclesiastici Straordinari, Polonia, 1923–1933, Pos. 75, fasc. 105, Feb 20, 1926, k. 7–18: Nuncio Lorenzo Lauri to Cardinal Pietro Gasparri. In January 1926, the National Democrats' press in Poznań published an article about the alleged pro-German sympathies of the nuncio in Warsaw: *Dokoła naszej nuncjatury. Spostrzeżenia i uwagi*, „Kurier Poznański” 21 (1926) no. 38, p. 2.

52 Segreteria di Stato, Sezione per i Rapporti con gli Stati, Archivio Storico, Congregazione per gli Affari Ecclesiastici Straordinari, Polonia, 1923–1933, Pos. 75, fasc. 105, Jun 24, 1926, k. 32: nuncjusz Lorenzo Lauri do kard. Pietro Gasparriego.

53 Archiwum Archidiecezjalne w Poznaniu, Konsystorz i Kuria Arcybiskupia, 976, Julź2, 1929, s.n.f.: S. T.D. diploma of Jan Kazimierz Rolewski.

54 Archiwum Archidiecezjalne w Poznaniu, Konsystorz i Kuria Arcybiskupia, 976, Sep 26, 1928, s.n.f.: Decree appointing priest Kazimierz Rolewski to the position of rector of the Archbishop's Theological Seminary in Poznań.

55 Pożegnanie ks. proboszcza, „Orędownik Ostrowski. Pismo na miasto i powiaty Ostrowski i Odolanowski oraz miast Ostrowa, Odolanowa, Sulmierzyc i Raszkowa” 77 (1928) no. 95, p. 1.

him to give lectures on moral theology—casuistry.⁵⁶ Entrusting him with the delicate function of a rector, which requires special qualities, proves that the conversation participants at the nunciature were convinced of Rev. Rolewski's integrity, humility, and sincerity.

In October 1928, Cardinal Hlond asked the Holy See to grant the new rector the dignity of a "domestic prelate."⁵⁷ Pope Pius XI awarded him this title in 1930. The President of the Republic of Poland, Ignacy Mościcki, in 1929 awarded the Golden Cross of Merit to Rev. Rolewski, "the parish priest and dean in Ostrów of the Poznań Voivodship, for his achievements in the field of national and social work, physical education and military training."⁵⁸ In the following years, Rector Rolewski was one of the radio preachers during Holy Masses broadcast from the Poznań cathedral on Sundays by Polish Radio.⁵⁹

The post of the rector, Rev. Rolewski, held the position until September 1935. He resigned due to his progressive illness.

By the example of his pious, sacrificial, and apostolic life, lectures based on many years of rich experience, and especially the endearing kindness of his priestly heart, the late priest Rolewski raise a large group of young pastors who will remember him, love, and be grateful beyond the grave,⁶⁰

wrote Rev. Kazimierz Kowalski in his obituary, successor as rector.

56 Archiwum Archidiecezjalne w Poznaniu, Konsystorz i Kuria Arcybiskupia, 976, Dec 21, 1929, s.n.f.: Cardinal August Hlond to Rev. Kazimierz Rolewski.

57 Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, Archivio Nunziatura Varsavia, b. 249, fasc. 692, Oct 18, 1928: Cardinal August Hlond to Nuncio Francesco Marmaggi.

58 „Monitor Polski. Dziennik Urzędowy Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej” 12 (1929) no. 264, p. 1.

59 Archiwum Archidiecezjalne w Poznaniu, Kapituła Metropolitalna, 1631, Dec 31, 1929, s.n.f.: Rev. Stanisław Adamski to Rev. Franciszek Ruciński. An interesting contribution to the history of radio preaching is a letter written by a former emigrant from Częstochowa in 1934 after Holy Mass. with a sermon by Rev. Rolewski broadcast from Poznań: "I was happy because I heard the same voice that I heard probably every Sunday in Meissen, in Dresden, at the meeting of the Association of St. Wojciech, the voice of our beloved chaplain, a good guide and a warm guardian. Today, after over twenty years, I heard the same voice of Rev. Prelate, Regens, and educator. Most Reverend Prelate, for your work and care for us, I offer you, Good Priest and patriotic Pole, God bless you heartily"; quote from: A. Franc et al., *Apostoł wielkiej dobroci*, p. 48.

60 Śp. Ks. Kazimierz Rolewski, p. 207.

There is no indication that the Głuszyna slander was spread. However, the rumor that he had been refused the bishopric accompanied Rev. Rolewski. "I will not wish you worldly goods because you have never cared about them. I will not wish you dignity and honors because you have never tried for them. You even refused the dignity of the Bishop of Silesia,"⁶¹ said one of the inhabitants of Ostrów Wielkopolski during the farewell of Rev. Rolewski in 1928. Rev. Kowalski mentioned the refusal of the episcopal dignity during the funeral sermon in the Poznań cathedral: "He became everything to everyone, maintaining an exemplary humility that did not allow him to accept the Silesian bishopric offered to him by the Pope."⁶² He included a similar thought in the obituary written for "Miesięcznik Kościelny," but this sentence was deleted in the Archbishop's Consistory from the text sent for printing.⁶³ Some publications also included information about his repeated refusal to accept the episcopal dignity.⁶⁴

61 Pożegnanie ks. proboszcza, „Orędownik Ostrowski. Pismo na miasto i powiaty Ostrowski i Odolanowski oraz miast Ostrowa, Odolanowa, Sulmierzyc i Raszkowa” 77 (1928) no. 95, p. 1. The speech was delivered by a member of the parish council, attorney Waclaw Jankowski.

62 Mowa żałobna na pogrzebie śp. x. prałata dr. Kazimierza Rolewskiego, pp. 8–9.

63 In the biography provided by Rev. Kazimierz Kowalski to the Archbishop's Consistory, the opinion: "Finally, on September 11, 1935, Monseigneur Rolewski resigned from the position of rector of the Seminary due to a chronic illness", his ending was deleted: "this illness, which, together with his great humility, did not allow him to accept the offered bishopric of Katowice in Ostrów"; Archiwum Archidiecezjalne w Poznaniu, Konsystorz i Kuria Arcybiskupia, 976, b.d., s.n.f.: życiorys ks. Kazimierza Rolewskiego do „Miesięcznika Kościelnego”; por. „Miesięcznik Kościelny. Organ Archidiecezji Gnieźnieńskiej i Poznańskiej” 51 (1936) no. 6/7, p. 207.

64 Rev. Stanisław Jezierski, author of an extensive biography of Rev. Rolewski prepared for the beatification process, states: "During her pastoral work in Ostrów, she met Rev. Rolewski was offered the episcopal dignity twice: on June 12, 1926, the nuncio from Warsaw summoned him, informing him, as the Holy Father's wish, of the proposal to take up the bishopric in Katowice. After three days of reflection (which he asked for) and seeking his confessor's advice (Rev. Sopuch TJ), he asked the nuncio for the Pope to withdraw his decision. «That day—he admitted later—was one of the hardest days of my life.» He also refused when, in 1927, Primate Hlond offered him the Poznań suffraganate. Then he was to say: «Your Eminence, one has said it once, so one must be consistent again»" (Cf. S. Jezierski, Rolewski, p. 277). Apart from minor inconsistencies with the nuncio's account (e.g., three days of consideration), the alleged proposal of a suffragan in Poznań by Bishop Łukomski could not be related to the refusal to accept the dignity granted—Rolewski was not taken into account by

Kazimierz Rolewski died on March 13, 1936 in Poznań.⁶⁵ Archbishop of Poznań Antoni Baraniak, in 1966, then secretary of the Cardinal Hlond, initiated the beatification process, which is still ongoing.⁶⁶

Conclusion

With the development of the media, gossip understood as a dynamic communication event, began significantly influencing the lives of public figures, including clergy. This article refers to the common opinion about the priest's refusal to accept Kazimierz Rolewski to the episcopal dignity, presenting previously unpublished source documents from the Vatican archives. They show that the slander spread in a small parish environment became the direct cause of the refusal to accept the bishopric in Katowice, offered to him by Pope Pius XI. The candidate clearly declared his innocence. In the opinion of the nunciature, he was credible. Yet, the possibility of publicizing rumors after his episcopal nomination that cast a shadow on his good name resulted in the acceptance of the resignation from the bishopric offered to him.

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- 65 U schyłku życia ks. prał. Rolewskiego. Na podstawie wiadomości zebranych od sióstr, lekarzy w szpitalach w Środziewie, w Poznaniu oraz od ks. prof. Szymańskiego, Poznań 1936, pp. 11–15.
- 66 A. Baraniak, *Przemówienie podczas I Sesji Trybunału do procesu informacyjnego Księdza Kazimierza Rolewskiego 20 XII 1966*, „Miesięcznik Kościelny Archidiecezji Poznańskiej” 18 (1967) no. 3, pp. 60–62; H. Misztal, *Powojenne inicjatywy episkopatu dotyczące polskich spraw beatyfikacyjnych i kanonizacyjnych (20-lecie Postulatorskiego Ośrodka Studiów w Rzymie)*, „Częstochowskie Studia Teologiczne” 12–13 (1985), p. 425.

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**John Paul II and Benedict XVI's concern
for the protection of the faithful
against the most serious crimes, with
particular emphasis on the sexual abuse
of minors committed by clergy**

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Abstract

John Paul II and Benedict XVI's concern for the protection of the faithful against the most serious crimes, with particular emphasis on the sexual abuse of minors committed by clergy

The problem of dealing justly and efficiently with the most serious crimes in the Church after the promulgation of the Code of Canon Law in 1983 became the concern of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, later Benedict XVI, and John Paul II. Their cooperation and the decisions of Benedict XVI, as a continuation of the path started, laid the foundations for the creation of a system of canonical criminal law capable of responding properly and effectively to the most serious crimes committed by the faithful in the Church. The introduction of a clear scope of competence for the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the definition of a longer limitation period, the possibility of revoking it, the centralization of procedural steps, entrusting them to qualified personnel, enabling the control of the action of individual superiors are very concrete legal solutions that confirm the teaching of the Church and the definite statements of the two Popes on the protection of the most vulnerable in the Church from the immense harm of sexual abuse that some clerics could commit against them. The article presents and discusses concrete legal solutions and relates them with the teachings and attitudes of the two popes towards protecting minors in the Church. It is an attempt to argue for the defense of their good names and to oppose the unfounded accusations made against these two authorities.

Keywords: Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, crime of sexual abuse, Benedict XVI, John Paul II, criminal law, concern for minors in the Church

Abstrakt

Troska Jana Pawła II i Benedykta XVI o ochronę wiernych przed najcięższymi przestępstwami ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem nadużyć seksualnych wobec nieletnich dokonywanych przez duchownych

Problem sprawiedliwego i sprawnego rozpatrywania najcięższych przestępstw w Kościele po promulgacji Kodeksu prawa kanonicznego w 1983 roku stał się przedmiotem troski kard. Josepha Ratzingera, późniejszego Benedykta XVI, oraz Jana Pawła II. Ich współpraca, a także decyzje Benedykta XVI, jako kontynuacja rozpoczętej drogi, stanowiły fundamenty dla stworzenia systemu kanonicznego prawa karnego, który jest w stanie właściwie i skutecznie reagować na najcięższe przestępstwa popełniane przez wiernych w Kościele. Wprowadzenie klarownego zakresu kompetencji Kongregacji Nauki Wiary, określenie dłuższego okresu przedawnienia, możliwość jego uchylenia, scentralizowanie procedur procesowych, powierzenie ich wykwalifikowane-

mu personelowi, umożliwienie kontroli działania poszczególnych przełożonych, to bardzo konkretne rozwiązania prawne, które potwierdzają nauczanie Kościoła i konkretne wypowiedzi tych dwóch papieży w kwestii ochrony najślabszych w Kościele przed ogromną krzywdą nadużyć seksualnych, których mogliby się dopuścić wobec nich niektórzy duchowni. Artykuł stanowi przedstawienie i omówienie konkretnych rozwiązań prawnych oraz zestawienie ich z nauczaniem i postawami obu papieży wobec ochrony nieletnich w Kościele. Jest to próba argumentacji mająca na celu obronę dobrego imienia oraz sprzeciwienia się bezpodstawnym oskarżeniom kierowanym wobec tych dwóch autorytetów.

Słowa kluczowe: Kongregacja Nauki Wiary, przestępstwo nadużyć seksualnych, Benedykt XVI, Jan Paweł II, prawo karne, troska o nieletnich w Kościele

The issue of protecting the faithful against the most serious crimes is a topic of interest, not only among the faithful of the Catholic Church. It should be mentioned that the torts included in the term “most serious crimes” include not only crimes relating to sins against the sixth commandment of the Decalogue committed by a minor with a minor but also all offenses against faith, morals, or the administration of the sacraments entrusted to the competence of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith. However, due to the special interest of public opinion in the issue of the Church’s care or negligence in matters *de sexto contra minores*, several arguments will be presented that point to the actions of John Paul II and Benedict XVI to protect the faithful from the most serious crimes of which they could become victims. Recalling the introduced legal norms in the field of canonical criminal law and their adaptation to changing circumstances is the most significant argument indicating that the two popes at the beginning of the third millennium did not want to remain silent on this difficult topic but took a very specific initiative to oppose hurtful and scandalous attitudes.

1. Scope of competences in matters of the most serious crimes before the introduction of the 1983 Code of Canon Law

To understand the changes regarding introducing norms relating to the most serious crimes in the Church, one should first consider the

Congregation of the Holy Office competencies. The above institution was the equivalent of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which has now been transformed into the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith.

In the Code of 1917, one can find a provision that the Congregation of St. The Office, headed by the pope, deals with those matters which the law reserves to it not only by way of appeal against the decisions of the Ordinary but also those directly addressed to it (cf. can. 247 §2 CIC 1917), in the field of the doctrine of faith and morals (cf. can. 247 §1 CIC 1917). The competence of this dicastery of the Holy See included crimes relating to apostasy, heresy, and schism (cf. can. 2314 and 2315 CIC 1917), as well as those that aroused the suspicion of heresy, i.e., conscious and voluntary assistance in spreading heresy or taking an active part in “heretical” religious rites (cf. 2316 CIC 1917). Its competencies also included the conclusion of marriage with the provision that all or some of the children would not be brought up in the Catholic spirit (cf. can. 2319 §1, 2° and §2 CIC 1917), the submission of a child by parents or legal guardians for upbringing or education in non-Catholic religion (cf. can. 2319 §1, 4° and §2 CIC 1917), scattering or taking away or keeping consecrated species for an evil purpose (cf. can. 2320 CIC 1917). Moreover, the crime reserved for this dicastery of the Roman Curia was appealing against the laws, decrees, or orders of the Roman Pontiff to an ecumenical council (cf. can. 2332 CIC 1917), stubbornly continuing the penalty of excommunication for a year (cf. can. 2340 §1 CIC 1917), simony administering or receiving sacraments (cf. can. 2371 CIC 1917), as well as direct betrayal of the secret of confession (cf. can. 2369 CIC 1917).

It is, therefore, clear that the scope of criminal competence was very wide. Although the Congregation of Saint Office was entrusted with taking care of matters of faith and customs, it was not clearly indicated that it was also about crimes against the sixth commandment involving a minor. Yes, there are statements that the competencies of this dicastery include the crime of polygamy (*polygamia*), solicitation for confession, and, then, incitement to sin against the sixth commandment. There is no clear entrustment of competencies regarding sexual crimes committed by clergy against minors yet. The Pio-Benedictine Code provides for severe penalties for sins against the sixth commandment of

the Decalogue with minors under 16 years of age, even expulsion from the clerical state, but does not reserve this crime to be dealt with by the Holy See (cf. can. 2359 §2 CIC 1917). It should be noted that the complete indication of the competencies of the Congregation of St. The office is very difficult because the pope himself led it, and only he set its limits of competence. This Congregation could, then, accept for consideration any criminal case that it deemed fit to be judged by the highest tribunal.¹

There can be no doubt that *de sexto contra minores* crimes fall into the category of morality. First of all, due to the very fact that, according to the catechetical tradition, such a crime can be classified as a “sin crying to heaven for vengeance,”² which results directly from the biblical account (cf. Ex 22:21–23), and also in terms of sins *main*.³ The validation may be that such an approach to protecting children and young people has existed in the Church since the first centuries⁴ because church discipline has always guarded customs consistent with the Gospel message.

It can be emphasized that although the issue is certainly within the competence of this Congregation of the Holy Office because it concerns customs, it has not been reserved to it by positive law. There is, therefore, no doubt that the most serious cases could be referred to this Congregation for judgment. It is important because John Paul II served the universal Church throughout his pontificate, respecting the provisions of the old Code of 1917.

2. Promulgation of the 1983 Code and changes in criminal law

A fundamental change occurred after five years of Pope John Paul II's pontificate when the Code of Canon Law promulgated by him came into force on November 27, 1983. Among the significant changes to this Code

¹ Cf. S. Czajka, *Przedawnienie w prawie karnem kanonicznem*, Lublin 1934, pp. 137–139.

² Cf. *Codex Iuris Canonici*, 1867.

³ Cf. *Codex Iuris Canonici*, 1866.

⁴ “Gwałciciele dzieci nawet na koniec nie otrzymują komunii” (*Dokumenty synodów od 50 do 381 roku*, eds. A. Baron, H. Pietras, Kraków 2006, p. 60 (kan. 71). *Synod w Elwirze* (ok. 306 roku), *Kanony*, kan. 71, in: *Dokumenty synodów od 50 do 381 roku*, eds. A. Baron, H. Pietras, Kraków 2006, p. 60).

was revising the criminal law applicable in the Church.⁵ When introducing the new legal system, the postulates of the fathers of the Second Vatican Council were guided, in particular, by the criteria of subsidiarity and “decentralization,” giving a special position to specific law and the initiatives of individual bishops in the exercise of governing power, because they are the ones who, as it were, replace Christ in their dioceses, ruling them through councils, encouragements and examples, but also by the supremacy of their authority and holy power.⁶ For this reason, the Universal Legislature left it to the ordinaries of the dioceses to assess and discern the advisability or groundlessness of imposing criminal sanctions and the manner of proceeding in specific cases.⁷

The 1983 Code of Canon Law clearly states which penalties for committed crimes are reserved to the Holy See. These crimes included abandoning, taking away, or keeping for sacrilegious purposes the Holy Eucharist (cf. can. 1367 CIC 1983), physical coercion against the Roman Pontiff (cf. can. 1370 §1 CIC 1983), absolving an accomplice in a sin against the sixth commandment of the Decalogue (cf. can. 1378 §1 CIC 1983), episcopal consecration without a papal mandate (cf. can. 1382 CIC 1983), direct violation of sacramental secrecy (cf. can. 1388 §1 CIC 1983). These crimes were sanctioned by the penalty of excommunication *latae sententiae*, reserved to the Holy See. At first, the catalog of these crimes did not include sins against the sixth commandment of the Decalogue committed by a priest against minors. They were left to the ordinary of a given clergyman, with the possibility of imposing the penalty of expulsion from the clerical state (cf. can. 1395 §2 CIC 1983).

However, the practice of applying canonical criminal law has exposed that in the cases of clerical crimes against the sixth commandment of the Decalogue with minors, the norms of the new Code of 1983 were very weak. It is not about the severity of the penalty because expulsion from

5 Cf. Wstęp, Zasada 9^o, in: *Codex Iuris Canonici auctoritatis Ioannis Pauli PP. II promulgatus*, Jan 25, 1983, “Acta Apostolicae Sedis” 75 (1983) pars 2, pp. 1–317; tekst polski: *Kodeks prawa kanonicznego promulgowany przez papieża Jana Pawła II w dniu 25 stycznia 1983 roku*, Poznań 2022, pp. 29–31.

6 Cf. Sobór Watykański II, Konstytucja dogmatyczna o Kościele *Lumen gentium*, 27, in: Sobór Watykański II, Konstytucje. Dekrety. Deklaracje, Poznań 2002, p. 132.

7 Cf. J. I. Arietta, *L’influsso del Cardinale Ratzinger nella revisione del sistema penale canonico*, “*Civiltà Cattolica*” 3851 (2010) n. 4, p. 431.

the clerical state is the most severe expiatory penalty administered to a clergyperson.⁸ The weakness of the penal system consisted of the quick limitation of criminal complaints in matters regulated by the can. 1395 §2 of the Code of Criminal Procedure 1983, i.e., crimes against minors under 16 years old. The limitation period for these matters was set at five years. It meant that the victim of such a crime might not have left the minors, and the criminal complaint would have already expired. As a consequence, the ordinary or the tribunal had no possibility of imposing a penalty provided for by law, i.e., a just punishment (cf. can. 1342 §2 CIC 1983), and in a criminal trial, even expulsion from the clerical state if the statute of limitations had expired (cf. can. 1362 CIC 1983, can. 1720, 3°, 1726 CIC). Thus, the only option left was to apply the extent of pastoral concern or punitive measures (cf. can. 1348 CIC 1983), which did not equalize justice or reduce scandal.

At the beginning of 1988, the constitution *Regimini Ecclesiae Universae* of 1967⁹ was still in force, which regulated the competencies of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Then, although everything that—in any way related to faith and customs belonged to her—crimes associated with *de sexto contra minores* were not subject to her tasks. Moreover, when it entered into force (cf. can. 6 CIC), the Code of Canon Law abolished any previous criminal law in force.¹⁰

3. Joseph Ratzinger's intervention in matters of the criminal law in force at that time in the Church

The fact that the competencies of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith do not include crimes relating to the violation of the sixth commandment of the Decalogue by clergy towards minors is confirmed by a letter from the Prefect of this Dicastery, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, to the chairman of the then Pontifical Commission for the Authentic

8 Cf. M. Wronowska, *Przyczyny i procedura wydalenia ze stanu duchownego*, "Studia Ełckie" 16 (2016) no. 4, p. 495.

9 Cf. Paweł VI, *Konstytucja apostolska, Regimini Ecclesiae Universae*, Sep 15, 1967, art. 29, "Acta Apostolicae Sedis" 59 (1967), p. 897.

10 Cf. J. I. Arietta, *L'influsso del Cardinale Ratzinger nella revisione del sistema penale canonico*, "Civiltà Cattolica" 3851 (2010) no. 4, p. 434.

Interpretation of the Code of Canon Law, Cardinal. José Rosalia Castilla Lary of February 19, 1988, in which the letter's author notes a very problematic situation resulting from the clash of two procedures. At that time, the competence of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith was to grant dispensation to clergy from the obligations assumed with ordination. The dispensation was given as an act of grace on the part of the Church to a given petitioner after careful examination of the circumstances occurring in individual cases. These very circumstances, presented as the motivation for some requests for such an act of grace from the Church, clearly did not deserve a positive response from the Holy See because they were "cases of priests who, in the exercise of their ministry, committed serious and scandalous acts in respect of which the Code of Canon Law, after applying a proper procedure, provides for the imposition of certain penalties, not excluding reduction to secular status."¹¹ Cardinal Ratzinger, on behalf of the Congregation, suggested that in such cases, the penalties provided for in the Code should first be imposed, and only then a possible dispensation from the obligations resulting from the accepted orders should be granted. The motive behind such an opinion is particularly important, namely considering the good of the faithful. Hence, the request for an opinion on other options for dealing with specific cases using a faster and simpler procedure.¹²

In response to the Pontifical Commission for the Authentic Interpretation of the Code of Canon Law, it can be read that it shares the cardinal's approach. Ratzinger's motivation recognized the validity of applying the criterion of priority of the criminal order over granting an act of mercy. However, at the same time, this letter emphasized the need to use the norms of the newly promulgated Code, and, therefore, in the case of crimes that threaten the loss of clerical status (can. 1364 §1, 1367, 1370, 1394, and 1395 CIC 1983), Ordinaries should be encouraged to exercise the power of governance by applying under the provisions of the law sanctions against the guilty. Cardinal Castilla Lary did not agree

11 Cf. J. I. Arietta, *L'influsso del Cardinale Ratzinger nella revisione del sistema penale canonico*, "Civiltà Cattolica" 3851 (2010) no. 4, p. 433. Polish text: "L'Osservatore Romano" (2011) no. 1, p. 54.

12 Cf. J. I. Arietta, *L'influsso del Cardinale Ratzinger nella revisione del sistema penale canonico*, "Civiltà Cattolica" 3851 (2010) no. 4, pp. 434-435.

with the proposal to simplify the judicial procedure, further leading to a penalty of expulsion from the clerical state or to allow penal-administrative procedure contrary to can. 1342 §2 CIC 1983. The Pontifical Commission also aimed to ensure the right of defense in matters relating to a person's condition. The conclusion of the cardinal's letter Castilla Lara of March 10, 1988, is the fact that "appropriate pressure should be exerted on bishops (cf. can. 1389), so that whenever it becomes necessary, instead of forwarding requests for dispensation to the Holy See, they exercise their judicial power and coercive."¹³

Cardinal Ratzinger's reply of May 14, 1988, to the letter of the Pontifical Commission confirms that he has read the arguments. It assures that the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith will consider everything contained in Cardinal Ratzinger's response. Castilla Lara, however, opened the way to changes in competencies and procedures regarding fair judgment and punishment of sexual abuse committed by clergy against minors.¹⁴

4. Significant changes in the criminal law regarding sexual abuse

Already on June 28, 1988, the apostolic constitution *Pastor Bonus* was promulgated, which increased the scope of competencies of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith by giving it the ability to judge not only crimes against the faith but also more serious crimes, both against morality and in the administration of the sacraments.¹⁵ Such formulations of competences in exercising the judicial power of this dicastery opened up the possibility of adjudicating and punishing torts in matters *de sexto contra minores*. As Archbishop J. I. Arietta emphasizes, the competencies defined in this way in the point of judicial power were introduced into the apostolic constitution under the influence of

¹³ Cf. J. I. Arietta, *L'influsso del Cardinale Ratzinger nella revisione del sistema penale canonico*, "Civiltà Cattolica" 3851 (2010) no. 4, pp. 434–436. Polish text: "L'Osservatore Romano" (2011) no. 1, p. 56.

¹⁴ Cf. J. I. Arietta, *L'influsso del Cardinale Ratzinger nella revisione del sistema penale canonico*, "Civiltà Cattolica" 3851 (2010) no. 4, p. 436.

¹⁵ Cf. Jan Paweł II, *Konstytucja apostolska Pastor Bonus*, Jun 28, 1988, art. 52, "Acta Apostolicae Sedis" 80 (1988), p. 874.

the suggestion of the interested Congregation, the prefect of which was Cardinal Ratzinger. One would expect that references to common law and local law would solve the matter due to the Code that has been in force for over five years and the dicastery's own norms. However, the required features of the legal system, and in particular legal certainty, made further interventions necessary to ensure the smooth operation of the justice system. It was required to list specific "most serious crimes" to clearly define the competencies of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in exercising its judicial power.¹⁶

It resulted in the feeling of a lack of sufficient provisions of criminal and procedural law, which in the 1990s still led to the impression that the issue of sexual abuse was not dealt with efficiently enough in the Church. Cardinal Ratzinger continued to desire to deal more harshly with such cases. Legislative work began on standards regarding the so-called *delicta graviora* (more serious crimes) at the end of the second millennium. The result of this work was the publication on April 30, 2001, by Pope John Paul II of the document *Sacramentorum Sanctitatis Tutela*,¹⁷ along with the appropriate norms, which indicated which of the most serious crimes are subject to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, including crimes of clergy abuse against minors who are under 18 years of age.¹⁸ From that moment on, any justified suspicion of committing such a crime had to be reported to the same dicastery of the Roman Curia.¹⁹ This document was, therefore, the first attempt, after promulgating the code in 1983, to determine the scope of competence

16 Cf. J. I. Arietta, *L'influsso del Cardinale Ratzinger nella revisione del sistema penale canonico*, "Civiltà Cattolica" 3851 (2010) n. 4, pp. 437–438.

17 Cf. Jan Paweł II, *Motu proprio Sacramentorum Sanctitatis Tutela*, Apr 30, 2001, "Acta Apostolicae Sedis" 93 (2001), pp. 737–739.

18 Cf. Kongregacja Nauki Wiary, *Epistula a Congregatio pro Doctrina Fidei missa ad totius Catholicae Ecclesiae Episcopos aliosque Ordinarios et Hierarchas quorum interest: de delictis gravioribus eidem Congregationi pro Doctrina Fidei reservatis*, May 18, 2001, "Acta Apostolicae Sedis" 93 (2001), pp. 785–788.

19 Cf. J. Dohnalik, *Prawo kanoniczne wobec nadużyć seksualnych duchownych względem dzieci i młodzieży*, "Dziecko Krzywdzone. Teoria. Badania. Praktyka" 14 (2015) no. 1, pp. 52–53.

of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in the field of the most serious crimes in the Church.²⁰

Over the years, close cooperation between Cardinal Ratzinger and John Paul II resulted in the Pope granting the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith additional competencies and the possibility of granting dispensations, which allowed for action in various cases and consequently also resulted in the definition of new types of crimes in the category of sexual abuse against minors. They were included in the revised Norms on *delicta graviora* published during the pontificate of Benedict XVI on May 21, 2010.²¹ The amended document introduced three new crimes relating to specific categories of minors. They concern a clergy member who buys or stores (also temporarily) or distributes for lewd purposes pornographic materials involving minors under 14 years of age, made in any way and using any device. The *motu proprio* of 2010 also introduced the equation of a person who is permanently incapable of reasoning with a minor.²² The particular gravity of these crimes results from two aspects: they were committed by a clergyman, and they were committed against minors and people deprived of the use of reason.²³

The introduction of regulations in 2001 defining the most serious crimes and the extension in 2010 of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith competencies in judging and punishing clergy for sexual abuse of minors have visible consequences that show the concern of John Paul II and Cardinal. Joseph Ratzinger, later Benedict XVI, to protect the faithful, especially the defenseless, from the most serious crimes.

²⁰ Cf. D. Borek, *Sextum Decalogi praeceptum w kanonicznym prawie karnym aktualnie obowiązującym*, Tarnów 2015, p. 83.

²¹ Cf. Kongregacja Nauki Wiary, *Normae de delictis Congregationi pro Doctrina Fidei reservatis seu Normae de delictis contra fidem necnon de gravioribus delictis*, May 21, 2010, "Acta Apostolicae Sedis" 102 (2010), pp. 419–434.

²² Cf. Kongregacja Nauki Wiary, *Vademecum dotyczące wybranych kwestii proceduralnych w zakresie postępowania w przypadkach nadużyć seksualnych popełnianych przez duchownych wobec małoletnich*, wersja 2.0, Jun 5, 2022, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/ddf/rc_ddf_doc_20220605_vademecum-casi-abuso-2.0_pl.html (May 25, 2023).

²³ Cf. D. Borek, *Przestępstwa zastrzeżone dla Kongregacji Nauki Wiary: normy materialne i proceduralne*, Tarnów 2019, p. 109.

5. Consequences of changes in criminal law — proof of concern of John Paul II and Benedict XVI

The changes that took place in the area of judging and punishing the most serious crimes related to customs at the turn of the second and third millennia display how the gradual transition took place from leaving the case to be judged by the Ordinaries (following the principle of subsidiarity) at the same time using procedures that were often difficult for them to apply, moving away from the tendency to apply pardon, especially in the most serious cases, and understanding that punishment is also a form of opportunity for the criminal by calling for improvement. Consequently, the return to the principle of centralizing the judgment of the most serious crimes can be interpreted as a desire to punish those guilty of scandalous crimes to believers and non-believers alike in all cases.

The legal consequences of the actions of John Paul II and Benedict XVI are very important. First, the clarification in *Sacramentorum Santitatis Tutela* in 2001 of crimes that fall within the competence of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith is worth mentioning. They constituted three groups: (1) against the holiness of the Blessed Sacrament and the Eucharistic Sacrifice; (1a) taking or keeping for sacrilegious purposes or profanation of consecrated species; (1b) attempting to perform the liturgical action of the Eucharistic Sacrifice or imitating it; (1c) concelebrating the forbidden Eucharistic Sacrifice together with the ministers of the community's ecclesiastical institutions that do not have apostolic succession and do not recognize the sacramental dignity of priestly ordinations); (2) crimes against the holiness of the sacrament of penance (2a) absolution of an accomplice in a sin against the sixth commandment of the Decalogue; (2b) solicitation, i.e., inciting people to sin against the sixth commandment of the Decalogue in the act of confession or on the occasion of confession, or under its pretext if the aim is to sin with the confessor; (2c) direct violation of the secret of confession); (3) a crime against morality, i.e., a delict against the sixth commandment of the Decalogue committed by a clergyman with a minor under 18 years of age. The definition and listing of these offenses made it clear that they

were reserved to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.²⁴ It introduced legal certainty as to the criminal competence of the congregation. At the same time, such a legal initiative made it possible to apply the dicastery's law to them, also in procedural matters.²⁵ Although the first wording of the document did not contain any reference to crimes against faith, these competencies in this matter were never abolished. Hence, attempts were made to create a complete catalog of violations reserved to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.²⁶

A specific aspect of applying the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's law in judging crimes reserved to it is the issue of the limitation period for criminal complaints. In the provisions of criminal law in force at that time, in can. 1362 §1, 1° KPK 1983, the Legislator excluded from general limitation provisions, among others: these matters come under the jurisdiction of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. However, due to the lack of legal certainty as to exactly which crimes it was subject to, the Congregation could not apply its own regulations to all cases that came to its office. Hence, in 2001, preparing a catalog of crimes reserved for this congregation was simultaneous with the definition of the provisions regarding the limitation period for criminal complaints against these crimes. The standards attached to *Sacramentorum Sanctitatis Tutela* introduced a limitation period of 10 years. The method of calculating the limitation period was consistent with that used in common law (cf. can. 1362 §2 CIC 1983). However, in the case of crimes of sexual abuse by clergy against minors, the limitation period began to count when the victim of the crime became an adult.²⁷ Pope John Paul II introduced this method of calculating the statute of limitations for the

24 Cf. Kongregacja Nauki Wiary, *Epistula a Congregatio pro Doctrina Fidei missa ad totius Catholicae Ecclesiae Episcopos aliosque Ordinarios et Hierarchas quorum interest: de delictis gravioribus eidem Congregationi pro Doctrina Fidei reservatis*, May 18, 2001, "Acta Apostolicae Sedis" 93 (2001), pp. 786–787.

25 Cf. Jan Paweł II, *Konstytucja apostolska Pastor Bonus*, 52.

26 Cf. M. Stokłosa, *Przedawnienie skargi kryminalnej w prawie kanonicznym*, "Prawo Kanoniczne" 56 (2013) no. 4, pp. 149–150.

27 Cf. Kongregacja Nauki Wiary, *Epistula a Congregatio pro Doctrina Fidei missa ad totius Catholicae Ecclesiae Episcopos aliosque Ordinarios et Hierarchas quorum interest: de delictis gravioribus eidem Congregationi pro Doctrina Fidei reservatis*, May 18, 2001, "Acta Apostolicae Sedis" 93 (2001), p. 787.

United States with a special indult in 1994, and a similar document was introduced for Ireland in 1996.²⁸

Nevertheless, this is not the end of initiatives and changes in punishing the most serious crimes, particularly emphasizing sexual abuse committed by clergy against minors. After 2001, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith applied the introduced regulations and, at the same time, gained more and more experience. As a result, issues were noticed that were not yet covered by the provisions of criminal law in force at that time, which reserved certain competencies exclusively for this Congregation. Therefore, over the next few years, Cardinal Ratzinger, for the dicastery he runs, received some powers and dispensations from Pope John Paul II. As a result of this cooperation, new types of crimes were defined, which were also reserved for judgment by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. All these adjustments were included in the amended norms regarding delicta graviora published in July 2010 by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith during the pontificate of Benedict XVI, which he approved on May 21, 2010.²⁹

In addition to systematizing and specifying the scope of competencies in criminal matters reserved to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, in the case of safeguarding the doctrine of faith (the crimes of heresy, apostasy, and schism were distinctly mentioned, as well as the right to appeal to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in the second instance),³⁰ in defense of the Holy Eucharist, the judgment of crimes was reserved to this dicastery consisting in the case of consecration for sacrilegious purposes of only one species or both during the celebration of the Eucharist or outside it.³¹ The list of crimes against the holiness of the sacrament of penance has also been expanded (the following has been added: 1° attempting to grant sacramental absolution or hearing confession despite the prohibition, as referred to in can. 1378 §2, 2° CIC 1983; 2° simulating the granting of sacramental absolution, as referred to

28 Cf. Kongregacja Nauki Wiary, *Normy motu proprio „Sacramentorum sanctitatis tutela”*. Wprowadzenie historyczne, in: *Odpowiedź Kościoła na dramat wykorzystania seksualnego małoletniego. Aspekt prawny*, Ząbki 2020, p. 19.

29 Cf. Kongregacja Nauki Wiary, *Normae de gravioribus delictis*, May 21, 2010, “Acta Apostolicae Sedis” 102 (2010), pp. 419–430.

30 Cf. Kongregacja Nauki Wiary, *Normae de gravioribus delictis*, art. 2.

31 Cf. Kongregacja Nauki Wiary, *Normae de gravioribus delictis*, art. 3 §2.

in can. 1379 CIC; 3° indirect violation of sacramental secrecy; 4° recording with any technical device or disseminating with malicious intent in the media of social communication what the confessor or penitent said in sacramental confession).³² In the matter of sexual abuse, three categories of crimes have been added, which have already been mentioned, related to pedophilic pornography of minors under 14 years of age (1° acquisition; 2° storage; 3° distribution for lewd purposes). Moreover, the crime of sexual abuse committed by a clergyman against a person permanently incapable of using reason has been equated to such a crime against a minor.³³

The standards introduced another fundamental change, contributing to the possibility of more fair and effective judging and imposing penalties. The point is to increase the limitation period. All offenses reserved to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith expire after 20 years. In the case of crimes involving sexual abuse, this period begins to count from the time they reach the age of majority. In addition, the right of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith to waive the statute of limitations in individual cases has been maintained.³⁴ This modification, introduced at the express request of Cardinal Ratzinger, came into force one year after the *Sacramentorum Sanctitatis Tutela* entered into force. John Paul II granted such a right on November 7, 2002. Thus, from that time on, in special cases, the limitation period could be waived at the request of the Ordinaries. Repealing the limitation period could also have a retroactive effect (cf. canon 9 of the Code of Canon Law). The introduction of this law into the 2010 Norms was intended to avoid each time the popes confirmed it and, therefore, to ensure its continuity.³⁵

Another significant issue in the introduction of norms regarding the reservation of the most serious crimes for the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith is the unification (through centralization) of criminal proceedings in such a way that already at the first stage, i.e., after the completion of the canonical preliminary investigation (cf. can. 1717 CIC),

³² Cf. Kongregacja Nauki Wiary, *Normae de gravioribus delictis*, art. 4 §1–2.

³³ Cf. Kongregacja Nauki Wiary, *Normae de gravioribus delictis*, art. 6 §1, 1°.

³⁴ Cf. Kongregacja Nauki Wiary, *Normae de gravioribus delictis*, art. 7 §1.

³⁵ Cf. D. Cito, *Las nuevas normas sobre los „delicta graviora”, “Ius Canonicum”* 50 (2010) nr 100, pp. 650–651.

ordinaries are obliged to present the collected documents to this assembly. This one either reserves the matter due to the circumstances or instructs the clergy superior to proceed with the case. Any appeal against the judgment of either party is possible only to the Supreme Tribunal of this Congregation.³⁶ After the conclusion of the first instance, the case files should be sent to the Supreme Tribunal of this Congregation. If the Commissioner for Justice finds that an unjust judgment has been issued in a lower instance, they have the right to appeal or recourse.³⁷ In this way, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith also received tools to assess and respond to the actions of ordinaries in matters of *delicta graviora*. Qualified judges with appropriate experience and good standing can supervise and assist the judicial authority in the first instance at the local Church's level to ensure justice and discipline in the Catholic Church.

In addition to very specific reactions in the form of initiatives in the field of criminal law, the cardinal's position was confirmed. Ratzinger and John Paul II regarding sexual abuse against minors may be the formulations regarding pedophilia contained in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, in the creation of which they were both involved. John Paul II was the initiator and the one who announced the final version of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*,³⁸ to which the head of the editorial team, the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger.³⁹ This catechism states that "sexual abuse committed by adults on children or adolescents entrusted to their care is akin to incest. "This sin is at the same time a scandalous attack on the physical and moral integrity of young people, who will bear its mark throughout their lives, and a violation of educational responsibility."⁴⁰ In this context, it is also worth mentioning the teaching on scandal, which "takes on a particular gravity because of the authority of those who cause it or the weakness of those who suffer it. [...] Scandal is particularly serious

36 Cf. Kongregacja Nauki Wiary, *Normae de gravioribus delictis*, art. 16.

37 Cf. Kongregacja Nauki Wiary, *Normae de gravioribus delictis*, art. 26.

38 Cf. Cf. A. Offmański, *Katechizm Kościoła katolickiego ostatnim z dokumentów odnowy soborowej, "Colloquia Theologica Ottoniana"* (2013) no. 1, pp. 47–48.

39 Cf. Jan Paweł II, *Konstytucja apostolska Fidei depositum*, Oct 11, 1992, in: *Katechizm Kościoła katolickiego*, Poznań 1994, p. 7.

40 *Katechizm Kościoła katolickiego*, 2389.

when it is spread by those who, by nature or due to their functions, are obliged to teach and educate others. Jesus accuses the scribes and Pharisees of such scandal, comparing them to wolves disguised as sheep.⁴¹

In addition to presenting the teaching of the Church, it is also worth mentioning the statements of John Paul II and Benedict XVI regarding this issue. John Paul II, for example, during a meeting with young people in Toronto, directly addressed this issue: "The evil done by priests and clergy to young and sensitive people fills us with deep sadness and a sense of shame."⁴² John Paul II defined such behavior as a crime and stated that superiors should not be lenient towards such problems.⁴³

Similarly, Benedict XVI officially took a stance against abuses several times and spoke out on counteracting such abuses and helping victims. He argued that it was necessary to "establish the truth about what happened in order to take the necessary steps to prevent it from happening again, ensure compliance with the law, and, above all, help the victims and everyone affected by this dangerous crime."⁴⁴ Benedict XVI emphasized that "it is a particularly grave sin when someone who is supposed to help people on their way to God, to whom a child is entrusted on this path, molests them and leads away from God. As a result, faith as such becomes unconvincing, and the Church cannot credibly present itself as proclaiming Jesus Christ."⁴⁵

41 *Katechizm Kościoła katolickiego*, 2285.

42 "The harm done by some priests and religious to the young and vulnerable fills us all with a deep sense of sadness and shame" (Jan Paweł II, Toronto. XVII Giornata Mondiale della Gioventù. *La concelebrazione Eucaristica conclusiva nel Downsview Park*, Jul 28, 2002, in: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, 25 (2002) pars 2, n. 5, p. 105). Tekst polski za: Jan Paweł II, *Przemówienie do młodzieży podczas Światowych Dni Młodzieży w Toronto*, "L'Osservatore Romano" 23 (2002) n. 9, p. 53.

43 Cf. Jan Paweł II, *Ai partecipanti alla riunione interdicasteriale con i cardinali degli Stati Uniti D'America*, Apr 23, 2002, in: Jan Paweł II, *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, 25 (2002) pars 1, n. 1, pp. 606–607.

44 Benedykt XVI, *Ai presuli della Conferenza Episcopale di Irlanda in visita "Ad limina"*, Oct 28, 2006, in: *Benedykt XVI, Insegnamenti di Benedetto XVI*, 2 (2006) pars 2, s. 525. Cf. Jan Paweł II i Benedykt XVI *wobec nadużyć seksualnych duchowieństwa*, <https://www.ekai.pl/dokumenty/jan-pawel-ii-i-benedykt-xvi-wobec-naduzyc-seksualnych-duchowieństwa/> (Jun 6, 2023).

45 Benedykt XVI, P. Seewald, *Świątliwość świata: Papież, Kościół i znaki czasu*, transl. P. Napiwodzki, Kraków 2011, p. 37. Also, another fragment points to the need to revise criminal law: "The Archbishop of Dublin told me something very interesting in

These selected statements display the position of the popes and their concern that the issues of clerical sexual abuse of minors are properly resolved.⁴⁶ These were not just declarations that were not backed up by action. Several activities of both popes were indicated, aimed at introducing such tools into canonical criminal law that are aimed at a proper and, above all, fair approach to each case. Hence, it is worth emphasizing that the most important tool available to justice operators against clergy who have committed a crime *de sexto contra minores* is the possibility of waiving the statute of limitations in individual cases. It means that the perpetrator of such a crime can never feel unthreatened by a just punishment, even the penalty of expulsion from the clerical state. Thus, crimes reserved to the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, which are among the most serious crimes, could be considered crimes that are not subject to a statute of limitations.⁴⁷ These crimes also include sexual abuse against minors. There is no statute of limitations in modern legal systems, but it is reserved for other crimes, such as crimes against humanity, peace, etc. Although criminal law penalizes such behavior, it respects the principles of calculating the statute of limitations. In this context, the Church stands out from other communities with its own

this context. He said church criminal law existed until the late 1950^s; it wasn't perfect—there's a lot to criticize—but it was used nonetheless. However, since the mid-1960^s, they have stopped using them. There was a belief that the Church could no longer be a Church of law but a Church of love; therefore, he should not punish. This way, the awareness that punishment can also be an act of love was eliminated. There was also a strange clouding of many good people's thinking. Today, we must learn again that love for the sinner and the victim stand in proper proportion when the sinner is punished in the possible and appropriate form. In the past, such a change of consciousness occurred, and due to this change, there was a misunderstanding of the law and the necessity of punishment—and finally, a narrowing of the concept of love, which is not only being nice and polite but also being in the truth. And it is also true that we must punish those who have sinned against true love" (Benedykt XVI, P. Seewald, *Światłość świata*, pp. 37–38).

46 It is also worth reading other statements. Cf. A. Dobrzyński, *Papież nie milczał*, <https://jp2doc.pl/papiez-nie-milczal/> (Jun 6, 2023); Jan Paweł II i Benedykt XVI wobec nadużyć seksualnych duchowieństwa, <https://www.ekai.pl/dokumenty/jan-pawel-ii-i-benedykt-xvi-wobec-naduzyc-seksualnych-duchowienstwa/> (Jun 6, 2023).

47 Cf. D. G. Astigueta, *Delitti imperscrittibili nella Chiesa?*, "Periodica" 101 (2012), pp. 149–153.

legal systems, and it owes this to the actions of John Paul II and Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, later Pope Benedict XVI.

It is worth remembering these statements and specific actions, especially when there are accusations of inaction, silence, or even more harmful activities, such as hiding or covering up cases of abuse to these two authorities. Such attempts appeared only when Pope Benedict XVI was sick and elderly.⁴⁸ Even more shocking is that attempts are being made to deprive John Paul II of his authority after his death and the announcement of him as a saint after the canonization process carried out under the law. It is also worth remembering that the proclamation of sainthood by the Pope has the nature of a definitive teaching (cf. can. 750 §2 of the Code of Canon Law), and questioning such a papal proclamation by the faithful is equivalent to the error referred to in can. 1365 of the Code of Civil Procedure, when one does it so stubbornly.⁴⁹ Therefore, in case of attempts to destroy the authority of St. John Paul II, it is worth considering the entire life and attitudes presented by this pope because they were all analyzed when assessing his holiness.

Conclusions

It should be noted that John Paul II and Cardinal Ratzinger had the same approach to the most serious crimes, among which they treated with particular attention the crimes of sexual abuse of clergy against minors. The result of their cooperation during the pontificate of John Paul II, and then further actions of Benedict XVI, was concern for effectively counteracting this type of delicts. This article presents very specific actions in the Church in criminal law. This type of intervention is one way to reduce crime. As a result of these legislative initiatives, not only were changes introduced regarding the penalization of these crimes (expanding the scope or introducing new types of crimes) but also enabling effective and fair prosecution of the perpetrator (by abolishing the statute of limitations and centralizing the conduct of trials).

48 Cf. <https://deon.pl/kosciol/watykan-oskarzenia-wobec-benedykta-xvi-calkowicie-falszywe,1794524> (Jun 6, 2023).

49 Cf. G. Ghirlanda, *Implicazione dell'infallibilità nelle canonizzazioni dei santi*, "Periodica de re Canonica" 103 (2014) n. 3, p. 414-415.

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The apocalyptic thought in the early Church as a response to the fears in the 21st century

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Abstract

The apocalyptic thought in the early Church as a response to the fears in the 21st century

This article concerns the Christian understanding of the concept of “apocalypse.” It presents an original way of renewing eschatological thought in the modern world. Current events, social movements and ideologies are often seen as apocalyptic phenomena, because they instill fear, hopelessness, and a false understanding of God. The focus is on the issue of the apocalyptic thought of the early Church, its essence being faith in the resurrection and second coming of Jesus Christ. Based on the theological analyses of the apocalyptic doctrine of the early Church and the Revelation (Apocalypse) of John, the author proposes a method to overcome the fears people are experiencing in the 21st century. The cure for all fears is hope, which is a constitutive element of the Christian apocalyptic thought.

Keywords: Jesus Christ, apocalyptic thought, the Book of Revelation, fear, hope

Abstrakt

Apokaliptyka pierwotnego Kościoła jako odpowiedź na lęki w XXI wieku

Tekst dotyczy chrześcijańskiego rozumienia pojęcia “apokalipsy”. Autor prezentuje oryginalny sposób odnowy eschatologicznego myślenia w świecie współczesnym. Aktualne wydarzenia, ruchy społeczne i ideologie postrzegane są często jako fenomeny o charakterze apokaliptycznym, ponieważ powodują lęk, beznadzieję i fałszywe rozumienie Boga. W artykule jest podejmowana kwestia myślenia apokaliptycznego w pierwotnym Kościele, którego istotą jest wiara w zmartwychwstanie i powtórne przyjście Jezusa Chrystusa. Na podstawie teologicznej analizy apokaliptycznej doktryny pierwotnego Kościoła i Apokalipsy św. Jana, autor proponuje metodę przeciwdziałania lękom ludzi XXI wieku. Lekiem na wszystkie lęki jest nadzieja, która stanowi element konstytutywny chrześcijańskiego myślenia apokaliptycznego.

Słowa kluczowe: Jezus Chrystus, apokaliptyka, Apokalipsa św. Jana, lęk, nadzieja

On September 16, 2022, during the scientific conference of the Polish Dogmatic Society in Legnica, Michał Łuczewski,¹ a sociologist from the University of Warsaw, delivered a lecture entitled *O potrzebie myślenia eschatologicznego* [On the need to think eschatologically].² He put forward the argument that “the contemporary world is much more apocalyptic than Christian theology,”³ explaining that “today, every teenager in Warsaw is more apocalyptic and, therefore, more eschatological than the Polish Church has been in recent decades. He [the teenager] is no longer waiting for some vague apocalypse, because it has already been here.”⁴ The sociologist also proposed a path the Church could take in this situation of anxiety and fear: “We can rebuild this dramatic, eschatological vision of Christianity, which is the response to that anxiety and fear.”⁵

According to Łuczewski, what has marked the history of recent years, i.e., social movements (e.g., the American Black Lives Matter, the National Strike of Polish Women) as well as various events (the war in Ukraine) and ideologies (transhumanism, LGBT+, climateism, antinatalism), has an apocalyptic nature.⁶ These trends, ideas and events are pessimistic, predicting an imminent end of the world due to climate change, COVID-19 pandemic, or financial crises. Contemporary apocalypticists point to the presence of evil and suffering, which we are not able to eliminate, even though we are mindful of the food we eat, the way we travel, of the clothes we wear, as well as of our words and thoughts.

1 Asst. Prof. Michał Łuczewski (b. 1979), a sociologist, Department of Methodology and Sociological Theory of the University of Warsaw, <https://ws.uw.edu.pl/zespol/luczewski-michal-2/> (Feb 22, 2023).

2 M. Łuczewski, *O potrzebie myślenia eschatologicznego*, “Teologia w Polsce” 16 (2022) n. 2, pp. 207–214.

3 M. Łuczewski, *O potrzebie myślenia eschatologicznego*, p. 207.

4 M. Łuczewski, *O potrzebie myślenia eschatologicznego*, p. 212. On the topic of understanding the apocalyptic in modern Western culture, cf. A. Laddach, *Apokalipsa św. Jana w kontekście apokaliptyki tradycji judaistycznej*, “Maska” 25 (2017), pp. 183–184.

5 M. Łuczewski, *O potrzebie myślenia eschatologicznego*, p. 214; cf. R. Tichy, *Czas na apokalipsę. Historia oczekiwań mesjańskich*, in: R. Tichy, *Ukryte Oblicze. O mistyce i mesjanizmie*, Poznań 2013, pp. 181–232; A. Laddach, *Apokalipsa św. Jana w kontekście apokaliptyki tradycji judaistycznej*, p. 185.

6 Cf. M. Łuczewski, *O potrzebie myślenia eschatologicznego*, pp. 207, 212–213.

The paradox is that by making sacrifices for themselves and their unborn children—the young generation does not regain peace [...]. They carry suffering on their shoulders, but cannot, in any way, reverse the end of the world. It is an unbearable burden. As I believe, Christ carries this heavy burden because I am not able to take it on.⁷

Everything inevitably leads to a disastrous post-apocalyptic world, and this fills us with fear. It is a completely different apocalypse from the Christian parousia, which emphasizes “both the coming of the Kingdom of God and the triumphant Christ. At the same time, young people wait for no savior.”⁸ Living according to the post-Christian world vision, young people adapt their choices to this new paradigm. They proclaim that

there is no longer a merciful God. Still, each of us becomes a god who must show mercy to everyone. Everyone, except ourselves. If you take on this role, torment yourself, suffer, self-harm, and sacrifice of not having children, then in a certain post-Christian way, you identify yourself with Christ. It is a messianism for the masses.⁹

The present text is an attempt to respond to Łuczewski’s proposal from the perspective of Catholic theology. Since in his diagnosis of the situation of modern man, the sociologist refers to three concepts closely related to the Judeo-Christian tradition, namely: apocalypticism, the Apocalypse of John and eschatology, I intend to explain their meanings in the light of Catholic theology. Finally, I will present conclusions that can help explicate why the apocalyptic thought in the early Church may be a response to the fears of those living in the 21st century.

7 M. Łuczewski, *Uwięzieni w spirali przemocy*, “Rzeczpospolita”, Feb 11, 2022, <https://www.rp.pl/plus-minus/art35674011-michal-luczewski-uwiezieni-w-spirali-przemocy> (Feb 22, 2023).

8 M. Łuczewski, *O potrzebie myślenia eschatologicznego*, pp. 212–213.

9 M. Łuczewski, *Uwięzieni w spirali przemocy*, “Rzeczpospolita”, Feb 11, 2022, <https://www.rp.pl/plus-minus/art35674011-michal-luczewski-uwiezieni-w-spirali-przemocy> (Feb 22, 2023).

1. Apocalypticism of the early Church

The German term *Apokalyptik* is a neologism, which was introduced in 1832 by Friedrich Lücke in his research on the elements connecting the Book of Revelation with its contemporary texts.¹⁰ Since then it has become a technical term, referring to: (1) a literary genre in late Judaism and early Christianity; (2) a religious movement; (3) a set of views and theological ideas; (4) a special atmosphere, mood (German: *Stimmung*)¹¹, which the Jews “breathed” for approximately four centuries, i.e., from the Maccabees’ fight for the purity of Israel’s faith against Antiochus IV Epiphanus (175–163 BC) to the destruction of the Jerusalem temple by the Romans (66–70) and the Bar-Kokhba revolt (132–135).¹² Modern scholarship use “apocalypse as a literary genre, apocalypticism as a social ideology, and apocalyptic eschatology as a set of ideas and motifs.”¹³

Jewish apocalyptic thought was expressed in some Old Testament books (Joel 3–4; Isa 24–27; Isa 34–35; Isa 63:1–6; Ezek 38–39; Zech 9–14; Dan 2–7, 8–12) as well as in apocryphal literature and the Qumran writings.¹⁴ The following characteristic features of Jewish apocalypticism can be indicated: pessimism, disappointment and discouragement, caused by the belief in the failure of Israel resulting from his unfaithfulness to the covenant with God¹⁵; waiting for God’s imminent judgment, which will end the current history of Israel and the world and

¹⁰ Cf. F. Lücke, *Commentar über die Schriften des Evangelist Johannes*, Bonn 1832.

¹¹ Cf. J. Weiss, *Die Predigt Jesu von Reich Gottes*, Göttingen 1892, p. 67.

¹² Cf. L. Stachowiak, *Apokaliptyka*, in: *Encyklopedia katolicka*, vol. 1, eds. F. Gryglewicz, R. Łukaszyk, Z. Sułkowski, Lublin 1973, col. 753–755; D. S. Russell, *L’apocalittica giudaica* (200 a.C. – 100 d.C.), Brescia 1991, pp. 33–39; A. Annese, *Gesù e l’apocalittica. Le tendenze della ricerca e due casi di studio* (Lc 10, 18; logion Freer), „*Filosofia e Teologia*” 35 (2021) no. 1, pp. 88–90; G. Ancona, *Escatologia cristiana*, Brescia 2003, pp. 54–56, 60, 120–135 (Nuovo Corso di Teologia Sistemática, 13); A. Nitrola, *Il giudizio finale*, in: S. Mantenua, A. Nitrola, F. Ferrario, *La vita del mondo che verrà. Escatologia in prospettiva interconfessionale*, Milano, Cinisello Balsamo 2022, pp. 68–74.

¹³ Cf. J. J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination. An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, Michigan, Grand Rapids 1998, p. 2.

¹⁴ Cf. S. Gądecki, *Wstęp do pism Janowych*, Gniezno 1991, pp. 130–137; P. Briks, *Apokaliptyka jako próba „ucieczki do przodu”*, „*Ruch Biblijny i Liturgiczny*” 4 (2003), pp. 280–281. On the topic of apocalypse as a literary genre, see. S. Jędrzejewski, *Apokaliptyka jako rodzaj literacki*, „*Ruch Biblijny i Liturgiczny*” 51 (1998) no. 1, pp. 29–35.

¹⁵ Cf. J. Maier, *Il giudaismo del secondo tempio. Storia e religione*, Brescia 1991, p. 320.

begin a completely new era; the erratic anticipation of signs of this breakthrough, such as social and natural disasters causing suffering on a cosmic scale; and the appearance of some figure fighting with God.¹⁶

However, we must not forget that apocalyptic thought, being, on the one hand, literature, a way of thinking and the atmosphere of a crisis, on the other hand, and ultimately in its essence, is a consoling message of hope. It is the response of faith that Israel had to give in the face of facts that contradicted any hope.¹⁷ In this way, it remains in harmony with the message of the Old Testament, which in its entirety “is a book of hope.”¹⁸

Thus, the source of apocalyptic hope was the belief in God’s absolute dominion over history and His irrevocable fidelity to the promise of salvation, “faithfulness despite it all.”¹⁹ As a result of this belief, Jewish apocalypticists believed in the “scheme of two eons,” i.e., the idea that God would intervene to create the world anew and definitively (*new eon*), different from the previous history, full of evil and infidelity (*old eon*). Therefore, the end of the old would begin a new eon.²⁰ The apocalypticists considered the signs of the coming turn of the eons to be, among others, the general resurrection of the dead²¹ and the appearance of mysterious messengers of God, such as the Messiah, the Prophet, and the Son of Man.²² Consequently, the apocalyptic writings are eschatological,

16 Cf. A. Nitrola, *Trattato di escatologia*, vol. 1: *Spunti per un pensare escatologico*, Milano, Cinisello Balsamo 2001, pp. 360–362; G. Ancona, *Escatologia cristiana*, pp. 57–66.

17 Cf. D. S. Russell, *L’apocalittica giudaica (200 a.C.–100 d.C.)*, p. 36; G. Ancona, *Escatologia cristiana*, p. 65.

18 Benedetto XVI, *Che cos’è il cristianesimo. Quasi un testamento spirituale*, a cura di E. Guerrieri, G. Gänswein, Milano 2023, p. 60.

19 Cf. A. Nitrola, *Trattato di escatologia*, vol. 1: *Spunti per un pensare escatologico*, pp. 362–364. On the topic of God’s irrevocable faithfulness despite Israel’s infidelity, see Benedetto XVI, *Che cos’è il cristianesimo*, pp. 69–73.

20 Cf. G. Lohfink, *Gegen die Verharmlosung Jesu. Reden über Jesus und die Kirche*, Freiburg–Basel–Wien 2013, pp. 56–57. “La logica del ‘tanto peggio tanto meglio’ soggiace al genere letterario dell’apocalittica perché è nel ‘peggio’ che il messia viene. È dalla crisi che prende avvio il processo della redenzione” (M. Ivaldo, *L’apocalisse. Crisi della rivelazione de della storia*, “Filosofia e Teologia” 25 (2021) no. 1, p. 3).

21 Cf. G. Ancona, *Escatologia cristiana*, pp. 57–60, 63–76; A. Annese, *Gesù e l’apocalittica*, p. 88.

22 Cf. A. Nitrola, *Trattato di escatologia*, vol. 1: *Spunti per un pensare escatologico*, pp. 384–385.

as their authors wanted to motivate the members of the chosen nation to wait for the coming of a new and timeless world—a new eon.²³

The heir of apocalypticism and Jewish sensitivity was the early Church, i.e., its first form, at its birth, composed of Christians originating from Judaism, led by the Apostles.²⁴ This is testified by the NT texts of an apocalyptic nature, first of all the Book of Revelation. The last book of the Bible is a typical example of early Christian theology, which is centered around the expected parousia of the resurrected Christ.²⁵ The other apocalyptic texts of the New Testament include Jesus' eschatological speech, so-called "synoptic apocalypse" (Mark 13:5–37; Luke 21:8–36; Matt 24:4–44) as well as Peter's texts (2 Pet 3:10, 12) and Paul's texts (1 Thess 4:14–17; 2 Thess 1:7–10; 1 Cor 15:21–26, 51–52).²⁶ There are also apocryphal apocalypses of the New Testament, e.g. the Apocalypse of Peter, the Apocalypse of Paul or the Apocalypse of Thomas.²⁷

In the early Church, however, the intervention of God, awaited by Jewish apocalypticism, "embodies" Jesus Christ, in whom the expected turn of the eons occurs.²⁸ Christ, unlike John the Baptist, is not a prophet of the apocalypse; He does not preach the judgment of God, but the kingdom of God, a new beginning, which is already present in Him as

²³ Cf. S. Jędrzejewski, *Apokaliptyka jako rodzaj literacki*, pp. 32–35; P. Briks, *Apokaliptyka jako próba „ucieczki do przodu”*, p. 281; R. Krawczyk, *Apokalipsy – orędzia nadziei w Biblii*, "Teologiczne Studia Siedleckie" 5 (2009), p. 114; "The very difficult (political, social, religious and cultural) situation and the lack of a real prospect of improvement in the foreseeable future in a way forced hagiographers to spur on, to transfer their hope for a better fate to some distant, but wonderful future, like never before" (P. Briks, *Apokaliptyka jako próba „ucieczki do przodu”*, p. 284).

²⁴ Cf. A. Nitrola, *Trattato di escatologia*, vol. 1: *Spunti per un pensare escatologico*, p. 420; D. S. Russell, *L'apocalittica giudaica (200 a.C. – 100 d.C.)*, pp. 55–58; A. Jankowski, *Eschatologia Nowego Testamentu*, Kraków 2007, pp. 41–84 (*Myśl Teologiczna*, 54).

²⁵ Cf. M. Wojciechowski, *Apokalipsa świętego Jana. Objawienie, a nie tajemnica. Wstęp – przekład z oryginału – komentarz*, Częstochowa 2012, p. 47 (*Nowy Komentarz Biblijny*, 20).

²⁶ Cf. A. Jankowski, *Eschatologia Nowego Testamentu*, p. 41.

²⁷ Cf. S. Gądecki, *Wstęp do pism Janowych*, pp. 137–138.

²⁸ Cf. A. Nitrola, *Trattato di escatologia*, vol. 1: *Spunti per un pensare escatologico*, p. 440. "The theological idea that God, the creator of the universe and man, showed in Jesus Christ the greatest love for creatures is the basis of apocalyptic eschatology" (P. Paciorek, *Czas kresu czasów w literaturze apokaliptycznej*, "Vox Patrum" 34 (2014) vol. 62, p. 413).

an “incarnate promise” among us (see Luke 17:21) and requires only our acceptance. The requirement ultimately consists of a request to accept the promise of a close God and strong faith in His promise.²⁹

The proclamation of the kingdom by Jesus [...] although on the one hand, is situated within the apocalyptic sensitivity [...] on the other [...] is, above all, the proclamation of an unprecedented newness, the faithfulness of God, which – in order to be so – is always creative even to the point of overturning a hopeless situation, like the one in which Israel found itself.³⁰

Jesus “leaves Israel’s past behind and offers it hope. That God is like this for Israel does not, of course, result from pure juridical fidelity to the covenant condition but from the fact that He loves people as they are, with their limitations, and also with their sins: the kingdom, therefore, is nothing other than God’s being with and for people, at their side despite everything, listening to their cries.”³¹

However, the early Church responded to the non-apocalyptic message of Jesus by its apocalyptic mentality, i.e., it translated the message about God’s closeness into the expectation of His imminent intervention.³²

For this reason, Judeo-Christians saw the fact of Christ’s resurrection through the eyes of Jewish apocalypticism and interpreted it no other than apocalyptic, that is, as the beginning of the universal

²⁹ Cf. E. Käsemann, *Sul tema dell’apocalittica cristiana primitiva*, in: E. Käsemann, *Saggi esegetici*, Casale Monferrato 1985, p. 118; “Jesus hat dieses ‘Heute’ der Gottesherrschaft und damit die Gegenwart Gottes zur Mitte seiner Verkündigung gemacht” (G. Lohfink, *Gegen die Verharmlosung Jesu. Reden über Jesus und die Kirche*, p. 60).

³⁰ A. Nitrola, *Trattato di escatologia*, vol. 1: *Spunti per un pensare escatologico*, p. 389. Benedict XVI describes God’s action in a similar way: “Gesù considera la distruzione del tempio come conseguenza dell’atteggiamento sbagliato della gerarchia sacerdotale dominante. Dio però – come in ogni punto di svolta della storia della salvezza – utilizza l’atteggiamento sbagliato degli uomini come *modus* del suo amore più grande” (Benedetto XVI, *Che cos’è il cristianesimo*, p. 104).

³¹ A. Nitrola, *Trattato di escatologia*, vol. 1: *Spunti per un pensare escatologico*, p. 395.

³² Thus, apocalypticism became the mother of theology, cf. E. Käsemann, *Gli inizi della teologia cristiana*, in: E. Käsemann, *Saggi esegetici*, Casale Monferarato 1985, pp. 100–101. Concerning the synthesis of contemporary views on the character and nature of Jesus’ message, cf. A. Annese, *Gesù e l’apocalittica*, pp. 90–91.

resurrection.³³ It is evidenced by the term the early Church used to describe the experience of the crucified Jesus' "return to life" – "resurrection."³⁴ This term is taken from the language of apocalypticism and has its consequences.³⁵

If the early Church believed in the resurrection of Jesus, it means that death is not the last word, and appearances are deceiving. God works where it seemed He did not exist, where everything – in a human way – failed. Thus, the resurrection of Christ is an event that marks, gives direction or meaning to history and its future, and allows us to hopefully look forward to what will happen next. Talking about the resurrection of Jesus is using the language of hope because it is an anticipation of the end, announcing its concrete shape.³⁶

For Christian apocalypticism, the crisis takes on the face of the crucified and risen Jesus, in whom the dialectic between the old and the new eon must be deciphered so that the expectation is directed towards His parousia.³⁷

Thus, the original *kerygma* took the form of a profession of faith in the resurrection of Christ and waiting for His second coming, i.e., the parousia. This "and" is essential, because resurrection opens to the expectation of parousia, and parousia is the coming of none other than the Risen Jesus Christ, who is already present.³⁸ Hence, it is the essence of the good news that the early Church lived, formulated in the spirit and language of apocalypticism. In other words, the apocalypticism of the early Church is faith in the resurrection of Christ and waiting for His second coming, which will be life for everyone – the living and the

33 Cf. A. Jankowski, *Eschatologia Nowego Testamentu*, pp. 85–115.

34 Cf. A. Nitrola, *Trattato di escatologia*, vol. 1: *Spunti per un pensare escatologico*, p. 423; A. Oepke, *Totenaufstehung im AT und Judentum*, in: *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, Bd. 1, Hrsg. G. Kittel, Stuttgart 1957, pp. 370–371; D. S. Russell, *L'apocalittica giudaica (200 a.C. – 100 d.C.)*, pp. 445–460.

35 Cf. R. Krawczyk, *Apokalipsy – oredzia nadziei w Biblii*, pp. 116–117.

36 Cf. A. Nitrola, *Trattato di escatologia*, vol. 1: *Spunti per un pensare escatologico*, pp. 410–416.

37 A. Nitrola, *L'apocalittica: una dimensione essenziale della teologia cristiana*, "Filosofia e teologia" 35 (2021) no. 1, p. 80.

38 Cf. A. Nitrola, *Trattato di escatologia*, vol. 1: *Spunti per un pensare escatologico*, p. 419.

dead (see 1 Thess 4:16–17)—as well as its fulfillment (see 1 Cor 15:28) and Final Judgment (see 2 Thess 1:6–10).³⁹ This message of the faith of the early Church is to be preached to all people on earth until the end of the world, since it proclaims God's victory over death in Christ, and at the same time, the irrevocable defeat of all evil.⁴⁰

2. The Book of Revelation — Apocalypse of Saint John

A special sign of the presence of the apocalyptic tradition in the Christian message and an example of the apocalypticism of the early Church is the Book of Revelation — Apocalypse of Saint John.⁴¹ This text has been regarded as one of the most difficult NT books⁴² and the most mysterious one.⁴³ The study of its text, carried out by Friedrich Lücke, led theologians to coin the category of “apocalyptic literature.”⁴⁴

The term *apokalipsis*, in the strict sense, means an unveiling, a revelation given by God and became part of the title of the last NT book. It is not my intent to present a detailed review of the Apocalypse of Saint John, which can be found in the very extensive literature on this book.⁴⁵

39 Cf. A. Nitrola, *Trattato di escatologia*, vol. 2: *Pensare la venuta del Signore*, Milano, Cinisello Balsamo 2010, pp. 62–66.

40 Cf. A. Annese, *Gesù e l'apocalittica*, pp. 92–96.

41 Cf. M. Wojciechowski, *Apokalipsa świętego Jana*, pp. 37–38, 47.

42 Cf. *Apokalipsa świętego Jana. Wstęp—przekład z oryginału—komentarz*, ed. by A. Jankowski, Poznań 1959, p. 7 (*Pismo Święte Nowego Testamentu*, 12).

43 Cf. R. Krawczyk, *Apokalipsy—orzędzia nadziei w Biblii*, p. 117.

44 Cf. F. Lücke, *Commentar über die Schriften des Evangelist Johannes*, “The Revelation of John is the first ancient composition defined as *apokalipsis*. [...] Today most scholars believe that John's Apocalypse belongs to apocalyptic literature, a term defining a series of Jewish and early Christian writings, which are similar to some extent to the Book of Revelation. Thus, this term refers to a literary genre and in this sense, it means a special kind of writing, i.e. apocalypse” (D. Kotecki, *Kryteria interpretacji Apokalipsy*, „*Biblica et Patristica Thoruniensia*” 5 (2012), p. 23). For a detailed presentation of this literary genre, see D. Kotecki, *Kryteria interpretacji Apokalipsy*, pp. 22–30; *Apokalipsa świętego Jana*, ed. by A. Jankowski, p. 71.

45 Cf. e.g., *Apokalipsa świętego Jana*, ed. by A. Jankowski, pp. 37–132; S. Gądecki, *Wstęp do pism Janowych*, pp. 105–185; U. Vanni, *L'Apocalisse. Ermeneutica, esegesi, teologia*, Bologna 1991; V. Meldau, *Die Wende aller Zeiten. Eine Auslegung der Offenbarung des Johannes aus katholisch-apostolischer Sicht*, Marburg 1998; G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation. A Commentary on the Greek Text*, Milano, Grand Rapids 1999 (*The New International Greek Testament Commentary*, 21); M. Wojciechowski, *Apokalipsa świętego*

Nevertheless, it is worth noting two issues: the context of its creation and its message.

The circumstances of the origin of John's Revelation should be associated with the last years of the reign of Emperor Domitian, who persecuted Christians, i.e. around 95 AD.⁴⁶ According to Dariusz Kotecki,

The Church of the Apocalypse lives in a world that the author describes as a system that excludes God from all areas of life. [...] This earthly order is contrasted with the order of Christ, which in the Apocalypse is reflected by the image of the Woman-Bride. Neither the state that wants to receive divine honor nor the consumerist and secularized system can be God. Christ's order stands in opposition not only to the entire economic and religious pagan world, but also to all those Christians who compromised (i.e. adopted the attitude of the Great Whore) and thus became part of this system.⁴⁷

This *Sitz im Leben* allows us to understand the message of this Apocalypse. Its author wants to support Christians so that they can overcome the feeling of fear and resignation, trusting in God's intervention that will eliminate all suffering. Thanks to this attitude, members of the young Church will be able to stand, but not by their own strength. Their strength is the bond with the crucified and risen Christ, presented in the Book of Revelation as the victor, in whom God showed his full power over history (cf. Rev 7:14; 12:11). Thus, the last book of the New Testament was written not only to encourage the fearful, but also it invited them to become martyrs, since it contains a call to Christian heroism in a world that was hostile to it.⁴⁸

Jana, pp. 37–90; D. Kotecki, *Zrozumieć Apokalipsę? Szkice egzegetyczno-teologiczne*, Rzeszów 2021, pp. 9–24, 25–64 (Biblioteka Szkoły DABAR, 1).

46 Cf. D. Kotecki, *Kryteria interpretacji Apokalipsy*, p. 31.

47 D. Kotecki, *Duch Święty w zgromadzeniu liturgicznym w świetle Apokalipsy św. Jana*, Warszawa 2006, p. 119 (Rozprawy i Studia Biblijne, 26); cf. M. Wojciechowski, *Apokalipsa świętego Jana*, pp. 52–57.

48 Cf. D. Kotecki, *Kryteria interpretacji Apokalipsy*, pp. 31–33; T. Siemieniec, *Bóg jako Pan historii świata i ludzi w świetle Apokalipsy Janowej*, "Studia Koszalińsko-Kołobrzeszkie" 19 (2012) no. 2, pp. 129–155; J. Nowińska, *Apokalipsa św. Jana – księga o sensie zmagania*, "Lumen Bibliae" 4 (2014) no. 4, p. 135.

However, the message of John's Revelation is not limited to its historical situation, because the Roman Empire, described in this book, is a symbol of every power that opposes God and persecutes the Church.⁴⁹ Its message is therefore timeless. Stanisław Gądecki reminds us that

it is not only about the Johannine Christians, but also about every member of the entire universal Church throughout history. People from all nations and times are also naturally drawn into God's salvation history, including those who are only witnesses of the events taking place and who are affected by the apocalyptic events. Consequently, we can say that, in the broadest sense of the word, the object of interest of the Book of Revelation is every human person.⁵⁰

Based on the circumstances of the creation of the Apocalypse of Saint John and the essence of its message, theologians unanimously conclude that this text was not intended to cause fear in its addressees. On the contrary, the mission of the last NT book is consolation,⁵¹ filling them with steadfast trust,⁵² giving courage and uplifting their spirits,⁵³ motivating them to action and effort, showing the meaning of life of every individual, the community of the Church and the whole world,⁵⁴ persuading them to change the way of life and to abandon their sinful behavior.⁵⁵ In short, the Apocalypse of John is a message of hope expressed through

49 Cf. D. Kotecki, *Duch Święty w zgromadzeniu liturgicznym w świetle Apokalipsy św. Jana*, p. 81.

50 S. Gądecki, *Wstęp do pism Janowych*, p. 150; cf. S. Gądecki, *Wstęp do pism Janowych*, pp. 122–123; R. Krawczyk, *Apokalipsy – orędzia nadziei w Biblii*, p. 118; T. Siemieniec, *Rola „Zasiadającego na tronie” w dziejach świata i ludzi. Studium z teologii Apokalipsy św. Jana*, Kielce 2012, p. 104. The universality of the message of the Book of Revelation is also confirmed by research on biblical geography and the role of the cities of the seven churches from John's vision, see S. Szymik, *Ziemia przymierza. Geografia i archeologia biblijna w zarysie*, Lublin 2022, pp. 162–169.

51 Cf. R. Krawczyk, *Apokalipsy – orędzia nadziei w Biblii*, p. 118.

52 Cf. R. Krawczyk, *Apokalipsy – orędzia nadziei w Biblii*, p. 119.

53 Cf. S. Gądecki, *Wstęp do pism Janowych*, p. 184.

54 Cf. J. Nowińska, *Apokalipsa św. Jana – księga o sensie zmagania*, pp. 136–139; T. Nawracała, *Wieczna trwałość ludzkich czynów. Studium biblijno-teologiczne na podstawie Ap 14, 13*, Poznań 2017 (*Studia i Materiały*, 187).

55 Cf. P. Briks, *Apokaliptyka jako próba „ucieczki do przodu”*, pp. 279–280.

the symbols and images,⁵⁶ which it uses, a message that is summarized in the words of the Son of Man addressed to John who saw him:

Do not be afraid. I am the first and the last, the one who lives. Once I was dead, but now I am alive forever and ever. I hold the keys to death and the netherworld” (Rev 1:17–18).⁵⁷ God is a fair Judge, who hears the cries of his faithful servants and guarantees them a just reward. “The judgment also brings hope—an announcement of the deliverance of the faithful.”⁵⁸

Therefore, their hope for final retribution is not vain (see Rev 16: 5–7; 19: 2).⁵⁹

The words of John Paul II from the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Europa* can be considered a summary of our analysis of the message of Revelation:

In proclaiming to Europe the Gospel of hope, I will take as a guide the Book of Revelation, a ‘prophetic revelation’ which discloses to the community of believers the deep and hidden meaning of what is taking place (cf. Rev 1:1). The Book of Revelation sets before us a word addressed to Christian communities, enabling them to interpret and experience their place in history, with all its questions and its tribulations, in the light of the definitive victory of the Lamb who was slain and who rose from the dead. At the same time, it sets before us a word which calls

56 “The wealth of symbols adopted by John reflect the Church’s deep mystery as a human and transcendent reality. The wealth of symbols also serves to transmit John’s message of hope that God has saved all humanity in Christ and invites all to enter into his life” (A. Spatafora, *Symbolic language and the Apocalypse*, Ottawa 2008, p. 135). On the topic of the symbols and images used in Revelation as signs of hope, see A. Spatafora, *Symbolic language and the Apocalypse*, pp. 101–135; cf. D. Kotecki, *Kryteria interpretacji Apokalipsy*, p. 29.

57 Cf. *Apokalipsa świętego Jana*, ed. by A. Jankowski, p. 68; R. Krawczyk, *Apokalipsy – oredzia nadziei w Biblii*, pp. 119–120; P. Briks, *Apokaliptyka jako próba „ucieczki do przodu”*, p. 279; T. Siemieniec, *Bóg jako Pan historii świata i ludzi w świetle Apokalipsy Janowej*, p. 131.

58 T. Siemieniec, *Rola „Zasiadającego na tronie” w dziejach świata i ludzi. Studium z teologii Apokalipsy św. Jana*, pp. 104, 309–321; cf. H. U. von Balthasar, *I giudizi divini nell’Apocalisse, „Communio”* (edizione italiana) 79 (1985), pp. 14–21.

59 Cf. T. Siemieniec, *Bóg jako Pan historii świata i ludzi w świetle Apokalipsy Janowej*, pp. 141, 151–153.

on us to live in a way which rejects the recurring temptation to construct the city of man apart from God or even in opposition to him. For should this ever happen, human society itself would sooner or later meet with irreversible failure. The Book of Revelation contains a word of encouragement addressed to believers: beyond all appearances, and even if its effects are not yet seen, the victory of Christ has already taken place and is final. This in turn causes us to approach human situations and events with an attitude of fundamental trust, born of faith in the Risen One, present and at work in history.⁶⁰

3. Dramatic-eschatological vision of Christianity

As mentioned in the introduction, the sociologist Michał Łuczewski proposes “to rebuild the dramatic, eschatological vision of Christianity, which is the response to this anxiety [of modern man] – to this fear.”⁶¹ This vision can be found in the Apocalypse of John, and this is clearly shown by the Polish biblical scholar Augustyn Jankowski in his commentary. Summarizing the theology of this book, he writes:

The Revelation of Saint John is a worthy conclusion to the entire biblical revelation, a finale, if not in a chronological sense, then certainly in a logical one. It complements it, and making a gigantic synthesis, it shows the totality of the present and future events and all the factors of the great drama of God, the beginning of which was given in the Book of Genesis.⁶²

Jankowski continues to describe the dramatis personae (transcendent God, Christ—the Lamb, the Holy Spirit, angels, evil spirits, the faithful—the Church, the camp fighting against the Church),⁶³ the space-time framework of the drama (the entire visible and invisible world,

60 John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Europa*, Jun 28, 2003, no. 5, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_20030628_ecclesia-in-europa.html (Dec 9, 2023).

61 M. Łuczewski, *O potrzebie myślenia eschatologicznego*, p. 214; cf. R. Tichy, *Czas na apokalipsę. Historia oczekiwań mesjańskich*, pp. 181–232; A. Laddach, *Apokalipsa św. Jana w kontekście apokaliptyki tradycji judaistycznej*, p. 185.

62 *Apokalipsa świętego Jana*, ed. by A. Jankowski, p. 112.

63 Cf. *Apokalipsa świętego Jana*, ed. by A. Jankowski, pp. 113–121.

from the first to the final reception of Christ),⁶⁴ the sense of the drama of history (the Lamb's final victory over Satan who fights with Christ's disciples),⁶⁵ and instruction for the human participants of this drama.⁶⁶

This dramatic character of human history was presented and theologically analyzed by Hans Urs von Balthasar in his monumental work entitled *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*. This Swiss theologian shows salvation history as a drama constantly raging between two freedoms: the infinite freedom of God and the finite freedom of man.⁶⁷ The relationship between the freedom of the Creator and the freedom of the creation is a feature of apocalyptic eschatology.⁶⁸ Therefore, in the last part of *Theo-Drama*, entitled *The Last Act*, being his compendium of eschatology, he presents apocalypticism and the Revelation of John as illustrations of this drama.⁶⁹ The outcome of these dramatic struggles in the universal dimension is determined by the defeat of evil by God, who is love.⁷⁰ God is completely on man's side, expecting man to choose Him. However, in the individual dimension, the dramatic tension continues, because each person is personally called to respond freely to God's love. Thus, man's final fate depends only on his decision "for" or "against" his adherence to Jesus.⁷¹ This choice determines whether an individual life will be a drama with a happy end or it will ultimately turn into a tragedy. This is the essence of the *Theo-drama*: that God's certain, final "victory as such does not contain the certainty of an individual's salvation."⁷²

64 Cf. *Apokalipsa świętego Jana*, ed. by A. Jankowski, pp. 121-122.

65 Cf. *Apokalipsa świętego Jana*, ed. by A. Jankowski, pp. 123-124.

66 Cf. *Apokalipsa świętego Jana*, ed. by A. Jankowski, pp. 125-127.

67 "Se deve esserci un dramma, ci devono essere delle libertà le une di fronte alle altre. Se deve esserci un teodramma, la sua premessa prima è che, «accanto» o «dentro» l'assoluta libertà divina, esista un'altra non-divina, creata libertà, che in un senso vero abbia parte all'autonomia della libertà divina, sia nella decisione per Dio che in quella contro Dio" (H. U. von Balthasar, *Teodrammatica*, vol. 2: *Le persone del dramma. L'uomo in Dio*, Milano 1982, p. 66).

68 Cf. S. Jędrzejewski, *Apokaliptyka jako rodzaj literacki*, p. 32.

69 Cf. H. U. von Balthasar, *Teodrammatica*, vol. 5: *L'ultimo atto*, Milano 1986, pp. 17-46.

70 "The biblical vision of eschatological events positively shows the final victory of good over evil, over Satan, and the triumph of the Church, which is God's institution" (P. Paciorek, *Czas kresu czasów w literaturze apokaliptycznej*, p. 422).

71 Cf. H. U. von Balthasar, *Teodrammatica*, vol. 5: *L'ultimo atto*, pp. 18-19, 25.

72 H. U. von Balthasar, *Teodrammatica*, vol. 4: *L'azione*, Milano 1986, p. 51.

Jesus Christ is the victorious Lamb (Rev 5:5–14) and central character of John's Revelation, which receives the title "the Book of the Lamb."⁷³ In his commentary on this book of the New Testament, Hans Urs von Balthasar states that the Word once for all became flesh, and the Lamb that was slain is eternally alive. His victory is universal. The endurance, which the entire Book of Revelation demands from Christians, is a grace granted by God. Christians must accept it and live it. If they do so, this grace will also lift them above all fears and will free them from their uncertainty of resisting the pressure of evil. The Apocalypse of John does not say about those who follow the Lamb that they are gripped by fear amid the catastrophes of this world. Those who decide to stand on His side, even if they experience fear, their fear will be "the fruitful fear of a woman giving birth, which turns into joy" when she sees her baby, "crying in birth pangs."⁷⁴ Christians trust deeply that thanks to their faithfulness to God, they share the final triumph of the Lamb in all battles.⁷⁵ Therefore, they can ultimately view their future in an optimistic way.⁷⁶ Only the enemies of the Lamb condemn themselves to paralyzing fear. They want to run away and hide themselves from God's judgment.

The kings of the earth, the nobles, the military officers, the rich, the powerful, and every slave and free person hid themselves in caves and among mountain crags. They cried out to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of the one who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb, because the great day of their wrath has come and who can withstand it?" (Rev 6:15–17).⁷⁷

Their desire to avoid meeting the Judge results from their blindness caused by their sins, which makes them unable to recognize the Love that saves them in the Coming One.

73 H. U. von Balthasar, *Das Buch des Lammes. Zur Offenbarung des Johannes*, Freiburg 2010, p. 45. For the topic of the Christ-centered reinterpretation of the Old Testament in the Book of Revelation, see D. Kotecki, *Kryteria interpretacji Apokalipsy*, pp. 20–22.

74 Cf. H. U. von Balthasar, *Das Buch des Lammes*, pp. 118–124; M. Wojciechowski, *Apokalipsa świętego Jana*, p. 37.

75 Cf. *Apokalipsa świętego Jana*, ed. by A. Jankowski, p. 127.

76 Cf. M. Wojciechowski, *Apokalipsa świętego Jana*, p. 90.

77 Cf. H. U. von Balthasar, *Das Buch des Lammes*, pp. 80–83; M. Wojciechowski, *Apokalipsa świętego Jana*, pp. 205–207.

Conclusion

Summarizing our theological analysis of the three concepts: apocalypticism, the Apocalypse of John, and the dramatic-eschatological vision of Christianity, the following conclusions can be drawn.

The apocalypticism of the early Church is a message of hope, as it is focused on the person of Jesus Christ, in whom God fully realizes all the expectations of the Old Testament apocalyptic thought. As the resurrected one, Jesus is the absolute conqueror of death and all evil. Moreover, being expected as the One who will give his victory a universal and final dimension during his second coming (parousia), he confirms that neither the present, full of suffering, nor the future, unknown to people, has to be a source of paralyzing fear and hopelessness. Thus, the apocalypticism of the early Church is a cure for the 21st century man, because “it forms a vision of man being together with the world on the way towards the final coming of Jesus, which is the fulfillment of salvation: this is the apocalyptic element proper to theology as such.”⁷⁸ Therefore, it is necessary to correct the false understanding of apocalypse, which today has become a synonym for an inevitably approaching catastrophe that deprives us of all hope.⁷⁹

Also, the Apocalypse of John has nothing to do with the contemporary mood of general discouragement, described by Łuczewski. On the contrary, it shows a positive and optimistic vision of reality due to the expected better future, guaranteed by the power of the victorious Lamb. His presence and the perspective of a final encounter with Him gives sense to activities, events and enduring all kinds of suffering (see Rev 3:11).⁸⁰ In his message to the church in Philadelphia, John writes hopefully: “Because you have kept my message of endurance, I will keep

78 A. Nitrola, *L'apocalittica: una dimensione essenziale della teologia cristiana*, p. 77.

79 “The apocalypse is happening here and now, before our eyes. We are no longer saved, but we are all condemned, marked by original sin. But there is no God, heaven, or Kingdom of God where we can hope. We are alone. Like the optimistic vision of progress, the idea of decline is not dramatic but tragic. It is a vision of sliding down a slippery slope faster and faster” (M. Łuczewski, *O potrzebie myślenia eschatologicznego*, p. 212).

80 Cf. J. Nowińska, *Apokalipsa św. Jana – księga o sensie zmagania*, pp. 139–140; J. Nowińska, *Bóg przychodzący w ujęciu Apokalipsy św. Jana*, in: *Misterium słowa. Modlitwa*, ed. by D. Czaicki, Kraków 2014, pp. 249–266.

you safe in the time of trial that is going to come to the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth” (see Rev 3:10). In the light of such a promise, no conflicts, hurts and gloomy forecasts can erase the truth that the history and lives of all people, without exception, are ultimately governed by Divine Providence only.⁸¹

For many modern people, the word “apocalypse” brings to mind gloomy associations, because the Johannine text is related more to a “timetable” for the end of the world than to a “book of hope.” This is due to their lack of knowledge about the last book of the New Testament. Only when it is read correctly, i.e., in accordance with the intention of its author, do we understand it as “the book of consolation,” announcing victory over evil and our final rescue. Therefore, it is necessary to constantly and patiently explain the Book of Revelation within the Tradition of the Church.⁸² Von Balthasar was convinced that the Apocalypse of Saint John could only be read and explained in the light of the entire Good News. The Spirit who inspired the New and Eternal Testament cannot remove from this last NT book what he previously revealed: that God is Love. This book was added at the end of the New Testament so that we would not think that we already know enough about what love is, and so that we would not measure the fire of God’s love with our miserable earthly flame.⁸³

Finally, our analysis of the apocalypticism of the early Church and the message of the Apocalypse of Saint John as a special example shows that there is no true Christianity that would not be a dramatic and, at the same time, eschatological vision of human history, both in its individual and universal dimension. The very act of granting the gift of true freedom to people by the Creator-Love points to the need to make choices for or against this Love. This creates a dramatic tension whose sense can only be understood properly in the light of the ultimate destiny of humanity and the world, revealed by God. Therefore, only in view of eschatology can one understand the drama in which every human

81 Cf. R. Krawczyk, *Apokalipsy – orędzia nadziei w Biblii*, p. 120.

82 Cf. A. Tronina, *Apokalipsa. Orędzie nadziei*, Częstochowa 1996, p. 9; E. Ehrlich, *Apokalipsa. Księga pocieszenia*, Poznań 1996, p. 5; M. Wojciechowski, *Apokalipsa świętego Jana*, pp. 31–32, 64.

83 Cf. H. U. von Balthasar, *Das Buch des Lammes*, pp. 119–123.

being, without exception, participates. Since eschatology is a rational discourse concerning what God has revealed as the ultimate and definitive future of man and the world. This revelation is summarized in the Person of the Resurrected Jesus Christ, who promised to come in glory (parousia), and the general resurrection. For this reason, the dramatic-eschatological vision of Christianity cannot be anything other than a message of hope.⁸⁴

The drama between God and man continues. This belief is revealed especially in borderline situations, i.e., great crises caused by, for example, the political or social situations or natural disasters, which somehow invite/force us to make radical existential decisions.⁸⁵ So, apocalypticism includes an invitation to have hope for those living today.⁸⁶ Consequently, a concrete effort is necessary, because hope is an active openness, full of cooperation with God, to the future He is offering.⁸⁷ Moreover, it is looking forward to the One who has already come once and is mysteriously but really present. The end of every individual's history and the end of the world have the same name—Jesus, the Son of Man, awaited by apocalypticists (see Matt 16:13–20),⁸⁸ and for Christians, “the central figure of hope.”⁸⁹ Therefore, Christian apocalyptic thought can remove all fear.

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84 Cf. A. Nitrola, *Trattato di escatologia*, vol. 1: *Spunti per un pensare escatologico*, pp. 19–28.

85 Cf. A. Nitrola, *Trattato di escatologia*, vol. 1: *Spunti per un pensare escatologico*, pp. 364–365.

86 Cf. M. Delcor, *Studi sull'apocalittica*, Brescia 1987, p. 31; A. Nitrola, *Il giudizio finale*, pp. 96–108.

87 Cf. A. Nitrola, *Trattato di escatologia*, vol. 1: *Spunti per un pensare escatologico*, pp. 326, 340, 341. Jewish apocalypticism was not a proposal of an “escape mechanism” because, for apocalypticists, moral values resulting from faithfulness to God, often even to the point of becoming martyrs, were extremely important, cf. D. S. Russell, *L'apocalittica giudaica (200 a.C. – 100 d.C.)*, pp. 136–137.

88 Cf. J. Dupont, *Le tre apocalissi sinottiche. Marco 13 Matteo 24–25 Luca 21*, Bologna 1987, p. 47.

89 Benedetto XVI, *Che cos'è il cristianesimo*, p. 75.

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