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SYNOD – THE ‘COMMON WAY’
REMARKS
ON THE ROMAN CATHOLIC-ANGLICAN DIALOGUE

From ancient times of the Church her representatives used to gather to discuss the key issues for their communities: doctrinal topics and questions of discipline. Such gatherings were called from the Greek σύν-οδος – the common way¹ Synodality (and its variety – conciliarity) as such belongs to the wider context of exercising authority within the Church and is inseparably linked to the ministerial authority of bishops as well as to the authority of the Church community, which (in some cases) takes part in the decision making and gives its reception to the synodal decisions by its *common sense* or *sensus fidelium*.

Successfully developing from the nineteen sixties the Roman Catholic-Anglican dialogue² came to some important conclusions in the matter of the authority in the Church. One of the most promising and fruitful fields of dialogue seems to be the question on the synodal life within the Church.

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¹ The Greek noun σύννοδος (σύν-όδος) means a gathering, meeting, consultation, conjunction, union, connection. This noun therefore cannot be found in the New Testament. In Acts 9:7 occurs (the only time in the NT) a verb συνοδεύω – to make journey together, to have somebody as a companion, to be in conjunction. From the meaning of this verb is derived the meaning of the noun *synodality* and of the verb *synodal*, to express the sense of a “common journey of the faithful with Christ” Cf. *Concordance to the Novum Testamentum Graecae. Konkordanz zum Novum Testamentum Graecae*. Berlin–New York 1987³ col. 1753.

² In 1966 Pope Paul VI and the Archbishop of Canterbury, Michael Ramsey established the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC). During almost 40 years of dialogue the ARCIC issued many important statements, some of them directly relating to the question of the authority in the Church, including the question of synodality.

I. SYNODALITY IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

Forms of synodal authority are known in the Church from the apostolic times when the first Council of Jerusalem took place (Acts 15). Ecumenical councils of the universal Church were more often convoked in the first millennium, usually to deal with the dogmatic problems of the time. Therefore these gatherings embracing by its authority the whole Church were relatively rare. Much more often the synods of the local Churches were summoned. Some of them issued decisions later accepted by the universal Church and incorporated for good in its legislation³

For the Catholic Church the second millennium was marked by increasing importance of the universal primacy of the bishop of Rome. As the result of that the centre of gravity in the authority of the governing in the Church moved from its conciliar to the primatial form. This tendency was not stopped before the Second Vatican Council, which launched the process of reinforcement of the synodal forms of governing in the Church. Synodality then takes more and more the shape of collegiality, i.e. of the exercising of the authority by the College of Bishops in the unity with its head – the pope – and under his presidency⁴ Vatican II teaches that the authority of governing is given to the pope as the successor of Apostle Peter and to the bishops as the successors of the Apostles⁵ The Council points to the collegial character of the authority of governing given to the bishops:

“Indeed, the very ancient discipline whereby the bishops installed throughout the whole world lived in communion with one another and with the Roman Pontiff in a bond of unity, charity and peace; likewise the holding of councils in order to settle conjointly, in a decision rendered balanced and equitable by the advice of many, all questions of major importance; all this points clearly to the collegiate character and structure of the episcopal order, and the holding of ecumenical councils in the course of the centuries bears this out unmistakably”⁶

³ The development of the synodality, including the collegial and the conciliar synodality, in the first centuries of the Church presents M. L o d s. *Le ministère d'unité*. Le Point Théologique 19. Paris 1976 pp. 45-50. Cf. also H. C h a d w i c k. *Tradition, Fathers and Councils*. In: *The Study of Anglicanism*. Ed. S. Sykes, J. Booty. London 1988 pp. 98-102.

⁴ Cf. *Lumen gentium* 22.

⁵ Cf. *Lumen gentium* 22.

⁶ *Lumen gentium* 22. K. Rahner therefore considers as insufficient the Vatican II statement on the relation between the pope and the College of Bishops for its lack of clarity in the question how precisely such a relation should look like. When the pope as well as the College of

The most significant issue in this Council’s statement is the recognition of the collegiate character of the episcopacy. The emphasis put on the collegial function of the bishops in their exercising of authority in the Church was undoubtedly one of the most important achievements of Vatican II⁷ Indeed, according to the Council the pope together with all the bishops united with him – and not the pope alone – is the very source of the authority in the Church⁸ In this way the Roman Pontiff’s authority is placed in the context of the collegial authority of all the bishops, which does not deny in any part the pope’s primatial authority. Similarly, the recognition by the bishops of the acts of primatial jurisdiction exercised by the pope – the head of the College of Bishops, does not diminish their own authority, even if any such act of the pope is not of the collegial character in itself⁹

In the *motu proprio* of 15th September 1965 pope Paul VI approved the permanent character of the Synod of Bishops, as a representation of all the catholic Episcopal Conferences¹⁰ By this way after the Second Vatican Council a permanent synodal form of exercising the authority came back to the Catholic Church. However, the Synod of Bishops is set as an advisory body towards the pope and not a decisive one. For this reason the Synod of Bishops cannot be compared to an ecumenical (general) council, the last having the real authority of governing in the Church. The role of a general council can be described as the role of defining the matters of faith and Christian life, what goes far beyond the advisory role of the Synod of Bishops. The common point of these two bodies was found by J.-M. Tillard in reciprocal reading of the Tradition transmitted by the Fathers of the Church and serving for the building of the Church from apostolic times up to nowadays¹¹ Nevertheless, whatever form the exercising of the authority in the

Bishops holds the supreme authority in the Church, their mutual relationship needs to be precise. Nevertheless, in this matter no progress has been made since Vatican I. K. R a h n e r. *On the Relationship between the Pope and the College of Bishops*. Theological Investigations 10. London 1973 pp. 50-55.

⁷ B. Kloppenburg notices that the Council’s fathers attempted to harmonise the relations which exist, can and should exist between the primatial authority of the pope and the ministerial authority of bishops. B. K l o p p e n b u r g. *The Ecclesiology of Vatican II*. Chicago 1974 p. 171.

⁸ Cf. *Lumen gentium* 18, 27.

⁹ Cf. R a h n e r. *On the Relationship Between the Pope and the College of Bishops* pp. 50-70.

¹⁰ Cf. *Litterae Apostolicae Motu Proprio Datae, Synodus Episcoporum pro universa Ecclesia constituitur, Paulus VI*. AAS 57:1965 n. 780.

¹¹ Cf. J.-M. Tillard. *The Bishop of Rome*. London 1983 p. 163.

Church could take, it is ever to be a collegial act calling for collaboration of the College of Bishops and its head – the pope.

II. SYNODALITY IN THE ANGLICAN COMMUNION

The structures of synodality developed in the Anglican Communion on each level of the Church organisation begin with the Provincial Synod, by Diocesan Synod to the Parish Synod (or Council)¹² Also the Lambeth Conferences of all the Anglican bishops, which are held in Lambeth Palace in London every 10 years, should be counted between the forms of synodality. These conferences therefore have no jurisdictional power over the whole Anglican Communion and their resolutions have postulate rather than binding character for each of the Anglican provinces¹³

The basic form of Church structural organization is a diocese (the local Church) with its bishop as its head. The bishop serves as a kind of link between his own and the others dioceses. Through the unity of the episcopate each local Anglican Church stays in communion with the other Churches of the province and the whole Anglican Communion. The Archbishop of Canterbury is considered to be the focus of unity for the whole Anglican Communion¹⁴

As the result of historical development, the structure of the synods in the Anglican Church was based on the organisation of the parliament and shaped similarly. Now, a provincial synod is composed of the House of Bishops, the House of Clergy and the House of Laity. A diocesan synod, presided by the diocesan bishop, contains the House of Clergy and the House of Laity. The synods – each on its level – have the authority of governing in the Anglican Church. A significant number of lay people in the structure of each synod result in large involvement of laity in the Church life and decision making.

¹² On the ecclesial structures in the Anglican Communion cf. J. Rosenthal, *The Essential Guide to the Anglican Communion*. London 1998 pp. 5-39.

¹³ Cf. F.H. Shriver, *Councils, Conferences and Synods*. In: *The Study of Anglicanism*. Ed. S. Sykes, J. Booty. London 1988 pp. 194-197. Also see: Rosenthal, *The Essential Guide to the Anglican Communion* pp. 45-59; G. Ellison, *The Anglican Communion: Past and Future*. Greenwich 1960 p. 82.

¹⁴ Cf. H. Mc A d o o. *Being an Anglican*. Dublin-London 1977 p. 28.

III. SYNODALITY IN THE ANGLICAN-ROMAN CATHOLIC DIALOGUE

In the documents of the Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogue the synodality is put in a wider context of realization of the communion (κοινωνία) of Christians and Churches between themselves¹⁵ From the apostolic times this κοινωνία was expressed in the gatherings of bishops and of bishops together with priests and laity, held to discuss and decide important matters of faith and Church life¹⁶ Their decisions were binding for the Churches they represented. The decisions made by an ecumenical council were binding for the whole Church¹⁷

Here the difficulty comes back in establishing the list of ecumenical councils, common for both Anglicans and Catholics. H. Montefiore points that the Anglicans – following Richard Hooker and Lancelot Andrews – recognize as ecumenical only four of first councils¹⁸ How to classify then the next councils, i.e. the Trident, Vatican I and Vatican II, which in Catholic terminology are named ‘ecumenical’? Can the Catholic Church require the Anglicans to recognize the decisions of these councils and are the Anglicans ready to do this? The documents of ARCIC do not answer these questions and the issue stays open. A possible way of solving this problem was pointed out by the Pope Paul VI, who characterised the councils of the second millennium as “the General Synods of the Western Church”¹⁹

¹⁵ Cf. *The Gift of Authority. Authority in the Church III. An Agreed Statement by the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission*. London 1999 [later: *The Gift of Authority*] 34.

¹⁶ Cf. *Authority in the Church I. A Statement on the Question of Authority, its Nature, Exercise and Implications Agreed by the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission*. London 1976 [later: *Venice Statement*] 16.

¹⁷ *Venice Statement* 9. Cf. A. Harker. *Commentary on an Agreed Statement on Authority in the Church 1976*. London 1977 p. 27. P. Fransen points to the difference in the meaning of the adjective ‘ecumenical’ now and in the past. In the past and canonical sense ‘ecumenical’ referred to a council which meant ‘staying in the unity of faith and sacraments.’ In present days using the adjective ‘ecumenical’ can give an impression that it is rather going about a common synod or council of different Christian Churches and Ecclesial Communities. P. Fransen. *The Authority of the Councils*. In: *Problems of Authority*. Ed. J.M. Todd. London 1962 p. 59.

¹⁸ P. Fransen. *Authority in the Church*. “Theology” 80:1977 p. 166. Some of Anglican theologians therefore are ready to accept the authority of first six ecumenical councils. Cf. Shriver. *Councils, Conferences and Synods* pp. 189-190.192.

¹⁹ Speaking on the occasion of the 700th anniversary of the Council of Lyon 1274 Pope Paul VI did not use the term ‘ecumenical council’ but ‘general council’ (*concilium generale*) and classified the Lyon’s council as “the sixth general synod held in the West” AAS 66:1974

The decisions of an ecumenical council, which relates to the whole Church, may sometimes tackle some controversial matters in the doctrine and discipline of the Church. For this reason the ARCIC's *Venice Statement* postulates the establishing of clear criteria of recognition and reception of the council's dogmatic definitions and disciplinary decisions²⁰ The same statement, recognizing the role of the *sensus fidelium* in the process of reception, points to the centuries old tradition of approving the synodal and conciliar decisions by the bishop of relevant see: a local bishop in case of a local synod and the bishop of Rome in a case of decisions concerning the universal Church. By these acts of approbation of conciliar decisions the pope fulfils his task to maintain the whole Church in the truth of the Gospel²¹

The latest ARCIC document, *The Gift of Authority*, evokes a very important aspect of manifesting the synodality in the local Church. This basic realization of the 'common way' is the Eucharist. The whole congregation in the prayerful dialogue with its president is praising God and joins the Lord's great 'Amen' to the will of the Father. The fullness of a local Church is so realized in a synodal way of celebration of the Eucharist²²

None of the local Churches can be self-sufficient but needs to stay in unity with other Churches. For this reason some forms of synodality should be established, capable to manifest the unity of a local Church with the universal One. Such a manifestation of unity is gathering of bishops in collegial bodies²³ The synodal authority in the Church is expressed by the com-

p. 622. W Hryniewicz expresses the opinion that the terminology used by Pope Paul VI enables the reconsidering of the so-called 'hierarchy of councils' Not being of the same value they do not ever merit the name of truly ecumenical. W H r y n i e w i c z. *Kościół siostrzane. Dialog katolicko-prawosławny 1980-1991*. Warszawa 1993 p. 22.

²⁰ Cf. *Venice Statement* 16. F. H. Shriver points on the idea well-rooted in Anglicanism that a council can be recognised as ecumenical only after the definitive acceptance of its decrees by the universal Church. S h r i v e r. *Councils, Conferences and Synods* pp. 191-192. K. Ware, an Orthodox bishop and theologian is of the same view: "I doubt whether any exterior or formal criteria can be established to test or predetermine the process of reception. [...] the Church can only know *ex post facto* whether a conciliar definition is ecumenical and binding" K. W a r e. *The ARCIC Agreed Statement. An Orthodox Comment*. "One in Christ" 14:1978 p. 202.

²¹ Cf. *Venice Statement* 17; H. Chadwick, E.J. Yarnold. *Truth and Authority. A commentary on the Agreed Statement of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission: Authority in the Church. Venice 1976*. London 1977 p. 17.

²² "In the local church the Eucharist is the fundamental expression of the walking together (synodality) of the people of God. In prayerful dialogue, the president leads the people to make their 'Amen' to the eucharistic prayer. In unity of faith with their local bishop, their 'Amen' is a living memorial of the Lord's great 'Amen' to the will of the Father" *The Gift of Authority* 36.

²³ Cf. *The Gift of Authority* 38.

mitment of the bishops in the synods and councils, from a local form of such, by a provincial to a world-level one²⁴ The postulate of *The Gift of Authority* here seems to be of great importance to establish on every level of the Church organisation a synodal body capable of making the decisions for the appropriate community²⁵

In the historical development of the Church of England the synodality was realized not only in ecclesiastical synods, but also on the parliamentary forum²⁶ In both cases however the bishops together with the clergy and laity were engaged in the decision making in the matters of Church doctrine, liturgy and discipline²⁷ The Anglican Churches developing outside the immediate dependence of the British Crown were not affected with the parliamentary form of the synodal authority. Although the Anglican synods were constituted according to the parliamentary pattern – emphasizes *The Gift of Authority* – their nature stayed eucharistic²⁸ This is revealed by the similarity of the function of a bishop presiding at a synodal and an eucharistic congregation.

In the Anglican Church there exist some over-diocesan forms of the synodal life. They are the provincial and general synods including the Houses of Bishops²⁹ For the whole Anglican Communion the synodal life is realized in the Primates’ Meetings, The Anglican Consultative Council, the conferences of Anglican bishops in the Lambeth Palace (so called *Lambeth Conferences*) and the primatial office of the Archbishop of Canterbury³⁰

²⁴ Cf. *The Gift of Authority* 37. See also Shriver. *Councils, Conferences and Synods* p. 197.

²⁵ Cf. *The Gift of Authority* 37.

²⁶ H. Montefiore points on the disadvantageous side of this situation when many aspects of the Church life cannot be decided by the General Synod itself, as the last has to seek the approval of its resolutions by the Parliament. Such a situation appeared for example in 1927 when the Parliament rejected twice the amendment of the *Book of Common Prayer* as proposed by the General Synod. H. Montefiore. *So Near and Yet So Far Rome, Canterbury and ARCIC*. London 1986 p. 32-33.

²⁷ Cf. *The Gift of Authority* 39. See also Shriver. *Councils, Conferences and Synods* pp. 193-194.

²⁸ Cf. *The Gift of Authority* 39.

²⁹ For S. Sykes in such a providential development of the synodal life in the Church there must be the assistance of the Holy Spirit: “A Church which has survived the Borgia Popes, so our Roman Catholic brothers and sisters tell us, must have received the assistance of the Holy Spirit. *A fortiori*, a Church governed by General Synod” S. Sykes. *Authority in the Church of England*. In: *By what authority? The Open Synod Group report on authority in the Church of England*. Ed. J. Jeffrey London 1987 p. 23.

³⁰ Cf. *The Gift of Authority* 39; G. White. *Collegiality and Conciliarity in the Anglican Communion*. W: *Authority in the Anglican Communion. Essays Presented to Bishop John*

The Gift of Authority points to the forms of synodality preserved in the Catholic Church. From the time of Reformation there were three councils and a large number of local synods. Nineteenth and twentieth centuries brought the development of the episcopal conferences, which undoubtedly are a form of the collegial synodality on the regional level³¹ On the universal level this collegiality took the form of the permanent Synod of Bishops³² The most important task and vocation of the bishops is preserving the Church in the truth of the Gospel. For this the bishops are given the authority which has its source in their binding in apostolic succession. For an individual bishop the authenticity of his teaching is guaranteed by his unity with the whole College of Bishops³³

The visits of the bishops of any country or region in Rome, *ad limina apostolorum* can be encountered among the forms of exercising of the collegial authority by the bishops. In the past few years the completion of this forms of synodality are the visits of the bishop of Rome to the local gatherings of bishops during his apostolic pilgrimages to the Churches all over the world. The growing engagement of the laity in the synodal life of the local Churches can neither be neglected³⁴

Interesting may be a proposal made by *The Gift of Authority* to associate the Anglican bishops to the Roman Catholic ones in their *ad limina* visits to Rome³⁵ However one should consider if such a thing may be used as a vehicle for unity or shouldn't occur rather as a result of such.

IV. CONCLUSION

Undoubtedly one of the most important achievements of ARCIC is the emphasis placed on the synodality and its implications in the life of the

Howe. Ed. S.W Sykes. Toronto 1987 p. 202. See also Shriver. *Councils, Conferences and Synods* p. 189; *Episcopal Ministry. The Report of the Archbishops' Group on the Episcopate*. London 1990 pp. 124-127; A.P. Bennett. *The Jurisdiction of the Archbishop of Canterbury*. Romae 1958.

³¹ The first Episcopal Conferences came into being in the first half of the nineteenth century, but their development and increase of importance can be noticed in the twentieth century. Cf. J.-M. Tillard. *La primauté romaine*. « ... jamais pour éroder les structures des Églises locales ». "Irénikon" 50:1977 especially: *Les conférences épiscopales* pp. 304-320.

³² Cf. *The Gift of Authority* 40.

³³ Cf. *The Gift of Authority* 44.

³⁴ Cf. *The Gift of Authority* 40.

³⁵ Cf. *The Gift of Authority* 59.

whole People of God and in the local Church communities³⁶ Of no less value is also the exposure of the primacy of the bishop of Rome as placed in the context of synodality and being as such an integral part of the ministry of *episcopē* exercised for the sake of the universal Church³⁷ The self-understanding of the primacy as being exercised within the College of Bishops in union of the ministry of pastoral care and “keeping watch” on the communities would guarantee the right balance between the primatial and synodal forms of the authority in the Church³⁸

The reinforcement of collegial and synodal structures could also prepare the Catholic Church to meet more decentralized system of the Church authority as known in the Anglican Communion³⁹ Such a development, especially on the universal level, echoes a deep desire of local Churches and seems to be a growing need of our times.

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³⁶ Cf. *The Gift of Authority* 34-40.

³⁷ Cf. *The Gift of Authority* 46-48.

³⁸ “This service of unity, rooted in the action of divine mercy, is entrusted within the College of Bishops to one among those who have received from the Spirit the task, not of exercising power over the people [...], but of leading them towards peaceful pastures. [...] The mission of the Bishop of Rome within the College of all the Pastors consists precisely in ‘keeping watch’ (*episkopein*), like a sentinel, so that, through the efforts of the Pastors, the true voice of Christ the Shepherd may be heard in all the particular Churches” *Ut unum sint. Encyclical Letter of Pope John Paul II promulgated on May 25, 1995*. Vatican 1995 no 94.

³⁹ Cf. *The Gift of Authority* 56-57.

- [The] Gift of Authority. Authority in the Church III. An Agreed Statement by the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission. London 1999.
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SYNOD – „WSPÓLNA DROGA” ANGLIKANIE I KATOLICY W DIALOGU NA TEMAT SYNODALNOŚCI

Streszczenie

Przez dwa tysiąclecia synodalność była nieodłącznym elementem życia Kościoła, choć dokonywała się z różną intensywnością na przestrzeni wieków. Rozwijające się osobno od 1535 r. wspólnoty anglikańska i rzymskokatolicka w ostatnich wiekach utrwaliły nieco odmienny model synodalności (oraz jej odmian: koncyliarności i kolegialności). W łonie Wspólnoty Anglikańskiej synody zostały zinstytucjonalizowane jako trwałe elementy struktury kościelnej. Kościół rzymskokatolicki nie zaprzestał odbywania synodów, choć akcent w postudze pasterzowania przesunął się coraz bardziej w stronę prymacjalności papieskiej. Sobór Watykański II otworzył szerzej drzwi dla kolegialności biskupiej i dla promocji życia synodalnego na wszystkich szczeblach organizacji kościelnej.

Życie synodalne Kościoła stało się jednym z tematów toczzonego od wielu lat dialogu katolicko-anglikańskiego i przedmiotem obrad Międzynarodowej Komisji anglikańsko-rzymskokatolickiej (ARCIC). W dokumentach ARCIC synodalność odnajduje swój głęboki sens i jest

pojmowana jako „odbywanie wspólnej drogi wierzących z Chrystusem” Wśród teologicznych osiągnięć dialogu należy wymienić umieszczenie prymatu w kontekście synodalności, co jest szczególnie istotne na szczeblu uniwersalnym i dotyczy relacji między papieżem a Kolegium Biskupów. Warty podkreślenia jest również postulat rozwijania w danej wspólnocie słabiej wykształconej formy autorytetu w Kościele: synodalności w Kościele rzymskokatolickim i prymacjalności we Wspólnocie Anglikańskiej.

Streścił ks. Przemysław Kantyka

Słowa kluczowe: synod, synodalność, koncylialność, dialog, ARCIC, anglikanizm, eklezjologia, jedność, ekumenizm.

Key words: synod, synodality, conciliarity, dialogue, ARCIC, Anglicanism, ecclesiology, unity, ecumenism.