

# DIALOGICAL NATURE OF THE SYNODAL CHURCH. TOWARD A TRINITARIAN CONSIDERATION OF THE THEOLOGICAL ROOTS OF DIALOGICAL SYNODALITY

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SUMMARY: I. *The Church as the Fruit of Dialogue.* II. *Pneumato-logical Space of Ecclesial, Synodical Dialogue.* III. *The Cross of the Son, Pneuma and Truth: Toward Synodical Epistemology.* IV. *A few Practical Conclusions.*

The current synodal process needs solid theological foundations, both as signposts and correctors. It is my conviction that we can find such foundations in the very concept of Revelation. A detailed analysis of the concept of Christian revelation—which I presented elsewhere<sup>1</sup>—allows us to draw a fundamental conclusion: Christianity is not dialectical, but dialogical. So is the Church in its deepest nature. Revelation as the creative manifestation of uncreated and dialogical difference refers us to the concept and reality of dialogue. Revelation, as a certain kind of dialogue, leads to the formation of dialogical selfhood and dialogical—especially internally—Church.

The dialogue seen from such a perspective is more than mere discussion, the dissection of a problem. If revelation as a dialogical event leads to the formation of a dialogical self, then the dialogue implies an essential openness to the whole of reality. In this sense, dialogue is the opposite of dialectics. As such, from an ontological perspective,<sup>2</sup> it is a fundamental affirmation of reality in the multiplicity of dimensions of its existence.

At the outset, I would like to propose four comments on the topic presented here: *The first* one: the Church was invented in divine Trinitarian dialogue as well as it is destined to foster it in the world. Both possibilities are pre-supposed and their mutual relationship will be the subject of the argument presented here. *The second point* concerns the perspective in which the thought presented here moves.

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<sup>1</sup> R.J. WOŹNIAK, *Różnica i tajemnica. Objawienie jako teologiczne źródło ludzkiej sobości*, W drodze, Poznań 2012.

<sup>2</sup> I am thinking here of the so-called philosophy of dialogue represented by M. Buber, F. Ebner or J. Tischner. The way of thinking inherent in such a dialogical approach, actually an attempt to build a dialogical metaphysics, has left its mark in theology, if only in the numerous writings of J. Ratzinger.

It is eminently theological. This concretely means that—for methodological reasons—both psychological and sociological perspectives are bracketed here. I thus turn openly to what I consider to be the core of the meaning of any truth about dialogue, and which I discover in the very mystery of God. *The third comment* articulates the author's personal conviction that although the idea of dialogue is commonly present in modern culture, we do not always have to do with dialogue where it is claimed to occur. Not everyone who talks about dialogue is really talking about dialogue. In fact, dialogue remains scarce material all the time. I am referring to all sorts of degenerations of dialogue that pretend to be dialogue. It happens wherever truth is conceived only as an effect of dialogue, and not also as its premise and starting point. *The fourth remark* addresses the need for a certain pre-possession of the definition of dialogue. From its Greek root (*logos* = rationality), dialogue means, fundamentally, a word that takes place between two, the word as a bridge, the word/rationality as an aura of encounter.<sup>3</sup>

#### I. THE CHURCH AS THE FRUIT OF DIALOGUE

The starting point is the absence of explicit reflection on the concept of dialogue (Gr. *dia-logos*) in New Testament theology. Does this absence mean that any attempt to derive dialogue from revelation must fail? To answer the question posed in this way, let's analyze a Pauline text from 1 Corinthians 1, 17–18:

- 17 For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with wisdom and eloquence (οὐκ ἐν σοφίᾳ λόγου), lest the Cross of Christ be emptied of its power.
- 18 For the message of the Cross (Ὁ λόγος γὰρ ὁ τοῦ σταυροῦ) is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

The passage of Paul's argument that interests us is the famous reference to the 'word/wisdom of the Cross' (Ὁ λόγος γὰρ ὁ τοῦ σταυροῦ). It is not difficult to guess that Paul is referring to a word addressed to believers (or perhaps even more broadly: to all people), in which the essence of *euangelion* is revealed: between the word of the Cross and the good news there is a far-reaching relationship of identity. The word is always spoken to someone. The expression 'word of the Cross' means that the Cross itself is treated as a word addressed to someone. The Cross is a kind of speech of God, and as such it is the condition for the possibility of any word about God.<sup>4</sup> What kind of word is the Cross?

<sup>3</sup> Cf. P. STUDNICKI, *Dialog jako wartość*, Petrus, Kraków 2016.

<sup>4</sup> E. JÜNGEL, *Gott als Geheimnis der Welt. Zur Begründung der Theologie des Gekruzigten im Streit zwischen Theismus und Atheismus*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen 1977, 391nn.

From the perspective of Johannine theology, which is complementary here with respect to Paul's original intuitions, the word of the Cross is a dialogue, *dia-logos*. It is about Jesus' inner dialogue with the Father, who remains hidden, which does not mean his absence. Although the Father is a hidden God he is present with his Son, who gives himself up from the Cross and entrusts himself to the beloved Father, the beginning and end of his Son's existence, his Son-universe. Although the dialogue seems to go unnoticed, the very essence of the event of the Cross is an event of dialogue and being coram. The words spoken by Jesus 'Father into your hands I entrust my Spirit' signify that closeness which is realized in the distance. The Cross itself is here an expression of the Son's dialogical obedience to the Father. Reading closely the 17th chapter of John's Gospel, one has the irresistible impression that the dialogue between Jesus and the Father contained therein is a direct hermeneutic of the event of the Cross. In it, Jesus reveals his crucifixion as the fruit of dialogic love with the Father. For the Son, going to the Cross is a journey toward the Father, an act of love and obedience arising from the Son's loving, faithful and attentive turn toward the Father, stemming from an absolute trust in the Father's goodness. Balthasar argues that in this act of freedom of the Son, which is the Cross, there appears for the first time in the world the unveiling of the personal difference, the personal, 'subjective' otherness of the Son in relation to the Father.<sup>5</sup> Following Balthasar's intuition, it can be said that in this way the Cross is the unveiling of the true dialogue that has always been going on within God. Let us add that without understanding the Cross as a dialogue between Jesus and the Father, the Cross itself remains an incomprehensible, and indeed, non-Christian event.

To give an idea of what has been said let's use an image. I am referring to the statue of the Crucified Christ, which is located in the Nowa Huta church of Our Lady Queen of Poland (Bieńczyce). This crucifixion is an artistic attempt to capture the idea that modern exegetes attribute to John's theology of crucifixion. The Nowa Huta crucifixion depicts Christ rising from the Cross toward some invisible reality beyond this world. Indeed, it goes to the mystery of the Resurrection, which is the innermost moment of Jesus' death on the Cross. John understood the Cross of Jesus as the full realization of his 'hour' (John 2, 4: ἡ ὥρα μου) for which he came into this world. Linked to humiliation, the essence of this hour is the simultaneous exaltation of the Son of Man.

What is the central point of the theological discourse on the kenosis and exaltation of the Son? What is really at stake in this humiliation and exaltation? John's theological vision is very useful in discovering this point of reference, this

<sup>5</sup> Cf. H.U. VON BALTHASAR, *Mysterium Paschale. The mystery of Easter*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco 1990.

dynamic of Jesus' hour, the basis of the transition from humiliation to exaltation.<sup>6</sup> John's Christology presents Christ leaning toward the Father, dialoguing with the Father. Being an entrusting of himself, turning himself towards the other, a dialogue. It presents Jesus as the Word spoken by the Father, who returns to His beginning. Christ here is all turned to the Father, is that very turning to the Father. The Cross is essential part of Jesus' transition from 'this world' to the Father, and as such is a dialogue. The Cross is the word (*logos*) about the word that in God is always between (*dia*), which is the eternal foundation of the divine *communio*, of finding oneself in the other and the other in oneself.<sup>7</sup> God, Tertullian affirms, is not eternally alone, but—as rational—”has a word in himself.”<sup>8</sup>

The Cross reveals what is deepest in God. Thus, as a historical event, it refers us to transcendence—and indicates that in it there is a dialogue that does not disturb the silence, that takes place in absolute silence. An artistic expression of this idea is the icon of Abraham's hospitality by Rublev. This icon, again set metaphorically in a particular event from the world and its time, takes us into the very heart of God and interprets the event of the Cross. Here we meet God feasting. At first glance, the icon appears to depict three angels who are silent. However, prolonged exposure to the icon tips the intuition that this silence is shrouded by some infinite dynamism of the exchange of the Word, some kind of connaturality, inbreeding, intuitive contact, union. ”God has only one Word, which He utters in absolute and unbroken silence.”<sup>9</sup> The utterance of this Word is the content of Rublev's icon. In addition, by introducing a table-altar at the very center of the icon, the Rublev suggests a reference to the Eucharist and the Cross. It is commonly believed that the chalice located in the center of the altar, at the very center of the life of the Trinity, is a representation of the sacrifice of the Son of God, who became the true sacrificial lamb on the altar of the Cross. The icon is therefore thoroughly Paschal. Only in this way does it express metaphorically, symbolically, not only the depth of the revealed truth of the Trinity, but also its paschal turning to the world and the very deepest source and nature of the Church.

<sup>6</sup> This theme is also present in Paul's theology of kenosis, cf. Phil 2:5–11.

<sup>7</sup> One is reminded here of P. Ricoeur's famous hermeneutic-metaphysical intuition of 'the self as other', whose main intention is to reconstruct the possibility of the relational thinking of the subject. Cf. P. RICOEUR, *Oneself as Another*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1995.

<sup>8</sup> TERTULLIAN, *Adversus Praxean*, V. 7: “quanto ergo plenius hoc agitur in deo cuius tu quoque imago et similitudocenseris, quod habeat in se etiam tacendo rationem et in rationesermonem? possum itaque non temere praestruxisse et tunc deum ante universitatis constitutionem solum non fuisse, habentem in semetipso proinde rationem et in ratione sermonem quem secundum a se faceret agitando intra se”.

<sup>9</sup> JUAN DE LA CRUZ, *Avisos Espirituales*, Puntos de amor, reunidos en Beas, 21: “una palabra habló el Padre, que fue su Hijo, y ésta habla siempre en eterno silencio, y en silencio ha de ser oída del alma”.

According to patristic theology (Origen, Ambrose, Augustine among others), followed meticulously by texts of The Second Vatican Council,<sup>10</sup> the Church was born from the open side of Jesus, from the Cross of Jesus.<sup>11</sup> Doesn't this mean that it was ultimately born from Jesus' dialogue with the Father, in which our human world is forever and irreversibly included and drawn in? The Church was born out of love, out of the loving dialogue that has always been going on between the Father and the Son, the Son and the Father. The Church is the fruit of this dialogue in which we receive the answer to the fundamental question why the world exists. In the beginning was the Word (John 1,1)—this Word unveiled in the hour of Jesus as love and dialogue, as an all-founding exchange of love and word, as *communio* and the foundation of being and existence. Dialogue is the *communion*, and the community is originally the exemplary form of human being.

At this point, one more small remark should be made: if God is a Trinitarian dialogue from which the Church is born, then the existence of dialogue in God means that God has truth and is truth only in this Trinitarian-dialogical way. The truth of God is a dialogue of love of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

This is how the Cross brings us up to the essence of the totality of Christ's event, which in theology we call the incarnation.<sup>12</sup> What God is in Himself, that is, truth as a loving dialogue, is offered to us in no other way than in the incarnation,

<sup>10</sup> LG 3: "Venit igitur Filius, missus a Patre, qui nos in Eo ante mundi constitutionem elegit ac in adoptionem filiorum praedestinavit, quia in Eo omnia instaurare sibi complacuit (cf. Eph 1,4–5 et 10). Christus ideo, ut voluntatem Patris impleret, regnum caelorum in terris inauguravit nobisque Eius mysterium revelavit, atque oboedientia sua redemptionem effecit. Ecclesia, seu regnum Christi iam praesens in mysterio, ex virtute Dei in mundo visibiliter crescit. *Quod exordium et incrementum significantur sanguine et aqua ex aperto latere Iesu crucifixi exeuntibus* (cf. Io 19,34), ac praenuntiantur verbis Domini de morte sua in cruce: 'Et ego, si exaltatus fuero a terra, omnes traham ad meipsum' (Io 12,32 gr.). Quoties sacrificium crucis, quo 'Pascha nostrum immolatus est Christus' (1Cor 5,7), in altari celebratur, opus nostrae redemptionis exercetur. Simul sacramento panis eucharistici repraesentatur et efficitur unitas fidelium, qui unum corpus in Christo constituunt (cf. 1Cor 10,17). Omnes homines ad hanc vocantur unionem cum Christo, qui est lux mundi, a quo procedimus, per quem vivimus, ad quem tendimus"; SC 5: "Hoc autem humanae Redemptionis et perfectae Dei glorificationis opus, cui divina magnalia in populo Veteris Testamenti praeluserant, adimplevit Christus Dominus, praecipue per suae beatae Passionis, ab inferis Resurrectionis et gloriosae Ascensionis paschale mysterium, quo 'mortem nostram moriendo destruxit, et vitam resurgendo reparavit'. *Nam de latere Christi in cruce dormientis ortum est totius Ecclesiae mirabile sacramentum*".

<sup>11</sup> Cf. CCC 766: "The Church is born primarily of Christ's total self-giving for our salvation, anticipated in the institution of the Eucharist and fulfilled on the Cross".

<sup>12</sup> On the subject of the soteriological unity of Jesus' life, it is worth referring to the fundamental study of J.-P. JOSSUA, *Le Salut: Incarnation ou mystère pascal. Chez les Pères de l'Église de saint Irénée à saint Léon le Grand*, (Cogitatio fidei, 28), Cerf, Paris 1968.

oriented to the Cross and glory, which represent the fullness of incarnation.<sup>13</sup> And incarnation means the unveiling of truth, immeasurable in its simplicity, in human flesh and in human language. The incarnation—that is, the divine-human being of Jesus of Nazareth, who is the Christ—allows God to speak of Himself in human language. Therefore, the incarnation is the possibility of God’s truth appearing in our world in a human way. The humanity of Jesus, taken into union with the person of the eternal Word, becomes the world-visible expression of the dialogue that God is in Himself. He becomes a sign of God’s absolute dialogue not in spite of and on the margins of his natural weakness, but precisely in it. The Incarnation—as the way to the Cross and to glory, as the foundation of the Church—is the effusion of the tri-dialogical truth of God in dialogue with the world. The Church comes from this dialogue and is called to extend it to the all the “people of good will”: “By virtue of her mission to shed on the whole world the radiance of the Gospel message, and to unify under one Spirit all men of whatever nation, race or culture, the Church stands forth as a sign of that brotherhood which allows honest dialogue and gives it vigor”.<sup>14</sup>

## II. PNEUMATO-LOGICAL SPACE OF ECCLESIAL, SYNODICAL DIALOGUE

We mentioned already—following a rich patristic intuition—that the Church as a community of dialogue is born from the Cross. How does this birth take place? The short answer to this question can be expressed as following: the Church was born on the Cross pneumatically, that is, by the work of the Spirit.<sup>15</sup> Whoever gazes at Christ rising from the Cross toward the immeasurable horizon of his own transcendence, which is the Father, experiences in himself the Spirit of Jesus. The Cross and its deepest truth is the coming of the Spirit of Jesus. To be precise: the coming of the Spirit to the world is the fruit of the Cross. As the fruit of the Cross, this coming is the result of Jesus’ dialogue with the Father expressed in the form of the Cross. The full truth of the Cross, then, is this: it is the place of the gentle incursion of the Spirit of Jesus into the world.

The phrase ‘Spirit of Jesus’ itself is again ambiguous: it can originally mean Jesus’ own personality, his personal style of being and acting as well as his inner

<sup>13</sup> On the rich philosophical meaning of the incarnation cf., M. HENRY, *Incarnation. Une philosophie de la chair*, Seuil, Paris 2000.

<sup>14</sup> GS 92: “Ecclesia, vi suae missionis universum orbem nuntio evangelico illuminandi et omnes homines cuiusvis nationis, stirpis vel culturae in unum Spiritum coadunandi, signum evadit illius fraternitatis quae sincerum dialogum permittit atque roborat”.

<sup>15</sup> The full historical and ecumenical elaboration of the topic of the Cross from the pneumatological perspective can be found in C.E.L. TAN, *The Spirit at the Cross: Exploring a Cruciform Pneumatology: An Investigation into the Holy Spirit’s Role at the Cross* (Australian College of Theology Monograph), Wipf and Stock, Eugene 2019.

principle of existence. At the same time, the Spirit of Jesus is his personal relationship with the Father, a relationship with the Father that becomes a person. Augustine called the Spirit the knot of love and the union of the Father and the Son,<sup>16</sup> their mutual personal place of being-for-the-other; Bonaventure spoke of it as *donum in quo omnia dona donantur*.<sup>17</sup> The two meanings complement each other: all that we can call Jesus' own spirit, his personality, his character revealed in concrete works, is the Spirit-person that unites him constantly with the Father.<sup>18</sup> After all, it is the Holy Spirit who shapes Jesus' humanity from the very moment of conception (cf. Luke 1, 35), through His public life (Luke 4, 14–30) to the Cross (cf. 1 John 5, 6–7; Hebrews 9, 14) and resurrection (cf. Rom 1, 4).

The Spirit of Jesus and his intra-Trinitarian breath is the creation of the inner place of the exchange of words as an exchange of love. The Spirit is the intra-Trinitarian environment of love and dialogue. The Greek word for the Spirit is *pneuma*. This word, and its related concept, means the breath that accompanies

<sup>16</sup> AUGUSTINE, *De Trin.*, VI, 5, 7 (CCSL 50, 235): “Quapropter etiam Spiritus Sanctus in eadem unitate substantiae et aequalitate consistit. Sive enim sit unitas amborum, sive sanctitas sive caritas, sive ideo unitas quia caritas et ideo caritas, quia sanctitas, manifestum est quod non aliquis duorum est quo uterque coniungitur, quo genitus a gignente diligatur generatoremque suum diligit, sintque non participatione, sed essentia sua, neque dono superioris alicuius sed suo proprio servantes unitatem spiritus in vinculo pacis. Quod imitari per gratiam, et ad Deum et ad nos ipsos iubemur, in quibus duobus praeceptis tota Lex pendet et Prophetiae. Ita sunt illa Tria Deus unus, solus, magnus, sapiens, sanctus, beatus. Nos autem ex ipso, et per ipsum, et in ipso beati quia ipsius munere inter nos unum; cum illo autem unus spiritus, quia agglutinatur anima nostra post eum. Et nobis haerere Deo bonum est, quia perdet omnem qui fornicatur ab eo. Spiritus ergo Sanctus commune aliquid est Patris et Filii, quidquid illud est, aut ipsa communio consubstantialis et coaeterna; quae si amicitia convenienter dici potest, dicatur, sed aptius dicitur caritas; et haec quoque substantia, quia Deus substantia et Deus caritas, sicut scriptum est. Sicut autem simul substantia cum Patre et Filio, ita simul magna et simul bona et simul sancta et quidquid aliud ad se dicitur, quoniam non aliud est Deo esse, et aliud magnum esse vel bonum, et cetera sicut supra ostendimus. Si enim minus magna est ibi caritas quam sapientia, minus quam est diligitur sapientia; aequalis est igitur ut quanta est sapientia tantum diligitur. Est autem sapientia aequalis Patri, sicut supra disputavimus; aequalis est igitur etiam Spiritus Sanctus, et si aequalis in omnibus aequalis, propter summam simplicitatem quae in illa substantia est. Et ideo non amplius quam tria sunt: unus diligens eum qui de illo est, et unus diligens eum de quo est, et ipsa dilectio. Quae si nihil est, quomodo Deus dilectio est? Si non est substantia, quomodo Deus substantia est?”. Cf. L. AYRES, *Augustine and the Trinity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2010, 251–256.

<sup>17</sup> BONAVENTURE, *I Sent.*, a. 2, q. 1.

<sup>18</sup> The arguments for such a hermeneutic of Trinitarian mystery are presented by: Th.G. WEINANDY, *The Father's Spirit of Sonship: Reconceiving the Trinity*, T&T Clark, London-New York 1995; F.-X. DURRWELL, *Jésus fils de Dieu dans l'Esprit Saint*, Desclée, Paris 1999; J.-M. GARRIGUES, *L'esprit qui dit Père! et le problème du filioque*, Pierre Téqui, Paris 1999 and IDEM, *Le Saint-Esprit, sceau de la Trinité*, Cerf, Paris 2011.

the utterance of a word, the air that carries the word between the utterer and the addressee of that word. The Spirit, which comes to the world from the open heart of the Lord, is the space of dialogue, is its carrier, its place, and its duration. It is—in short—that dia-log itself.

The Cross, understood pneumatically, is therefore not only a dialogue between God and God, but also a dialogue between God and man. This dialogue, in turn, by creating a suitable environment for it, leads to the emergence of dialogue between people. The Cross as a dialogue between God (the Father) and God (the Son) in God (the Holy Spirit) becomes true ecclesio-genesis. Established in the Paschal Jesus, the Church is a community born of dialogue and destined for dialogue.<sup>19</sup> In the Church, the Trinitarian dialogue that arouses dialogue between people continues, lives and takes place. The Church of the crucified Jesus is, through His Spirit, a place of divine-human dialogue.

The Church is the place of genesis of human dialogue. Thus, Christianity is dialogical in the very pneumatic principle, which is the principle of its emergence and duration. It is in the Spirit that we can experience in ourselves the dialogue of the Father with the Son, which calls us to reflect this dialogue in the world. This is how the dialogical praxis of Christianity is born. This is the nature of the Church and her noble task in the world.

It is worth referring here to Pope Francis' teaching on synodality. This teaching reveals important moments of the Church's genesis in synodal dialogue. The Pope seeks to understand the task and nature of synodality by referring to those places in the Acts of the Apostles where the special relationship between the disciples and the Holy Spirit in making concrete decisions about the life of the Church is revealed. Significant attention is paid to the process of Peter's maturation to courageously include Christians from the Gentiles in the Church.

We can see the Spirit driving Peter to go to the house of Cornelius, the pagan centurion, despite his qualms. Remember: Peter had had a disturbing vision in which he was told to eat things he considered impure. He was troubled, despite the assurance that what God has made clean should no longer be considered impure. While he was trying to grasp the significance of this vision, some men sent by Cornelius arrived. Cornelius too had received a vision and a message. He was a pious Roman official, sympathetic to Judaism, but not enough to be fully Jewish or Christian; he would not have made it past a religious "customs office". Cornelius was a pagan, yet he was told that his prayers were heard by God and that he should send and ask Peter to come to his house. At this point, with Peter and his doubts, and Cornelius uncertain and confused, the

<sup>19</sup> In this regard, it is possible to talk about the conversation in God to which humanity is called. I elaborated on the topic of the Trinitarian conversation about God and in God in my *Szkola patrzenia. Rozmowy w Trójcy Świętej*, Znak, Kraków 2017.



Spirit overcomes Peter's resistance and opens a new chapter of missionary history. That is how the Spirit works.<sup>20</sup>

As it is not difficult to see, hidden in the Pope's words is not only a reflection on synodality, but also a kind of understanding of the essence of the Church as such. In Francis' interpretation of the beginnings of the Church, the key to understanding Peter's vision and his encounter with Cornelius are the apostles' words about the young Church's interaction with the Holy Spirit: "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to place on you any burden beyond these necessary things" (Acts 15:28). The synodal and dialogical nature of the Church is grounded in the presence of the Holy Spirit. There is no doubt that the Pope's interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles reveals an important moment, a dimension of the Church's awakening to life. What the Pope states can be regarded, without doubt, as unveiling the nooks and crannies of the Church's emergence from the Paschal mystery of the Lord Jesus. The young Church does not want to be self-referential. It understands itself by listening to and co-determining with the Holy Spirit, whom it received from within the mystery of the Paschal Jesus. Without referring to the concept of dialogue, the Pope clearly identifies the beginning of the Church, its awakening, with a kind of dialogicity, based on interaction, co-decision, listening. The Church is listening to what the Holy Spirit has to say to her. The necessity and fruitfulness of listening to the Holy Spirit is a theme Pope Francis returns to very often, making it clear that dialogue is inseparable from listening. As Pope Francis shows in his interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles, the Church born on the Cross understands itself primarily through listening to the Holy Spirit. All dialogue in a Church born of dialogue begins with listening, with confronting the speaking God.

### III. THE CROSS OF THE SON, PNEUMA AND TRUTH: TOWARD SYNODICAL EPISTEMOLOGY

Having said all this, one can look retrospectively at the life and work of Jesus as the slow, gradual emergence of the Spirit/spirit of dialogue in the world. All of Jesus' maieutic conversations (the one at night with Nicodemus, with the prostitute, with the unwilling Pharisees, the numerous parables of the reign of God which enter into dialogue with human experience, etc.) and all of Jesus' dialogic gestures are proof and sign of the divine prophecy of dialogue in love.<sup>21</sup> Jesus is the one who talks, who dialogues, and who calls for thinking and discovering the truth through his word. Only on the surface, it would seem that Jesus should not

<sup>20</sup> POPE FRANCIS, *Address to the faithful of the diocese of Rome*, 18.09.2021.

<sup>21</sup> A. JANKOWSKI, *Dwanaście dialogów Jezusa*, Wydawnictwo Tyniec, Kraków 2017.

be interested in dialogue. After all, he himself is the supreme truth: I am—he states—the truth. Why should the truth itself, the personal truth, the truth in the person, need dialogue? Isn't it a resignation of its pretensions to possess the ultimate truth and to be it? This is a question about the deepest dialogical truth of God and about his coming to the world.

The answer to the question posed is hidden in what has already been said about the Cross and its foundation in the incarnation. The Incarnation and the Cross not only say that God is a dialogue, they also say that God wants to dialogue with the world and wants the world to move toward truth through dialogue. They say that truth is not violence, but precisely dialogue. God reveals His own truth to us through an invitation to dialogue. Entering into dialogue can only be done through dialogue. The invitation to dialogue is the Word that became flesh, that is, the flesh that became—in all its weakness—the word about the Word, the new and irrevocable beginning/principle of dialogue. The incarnation shows that God wants to dialogue. For he needs dialogue to bring his dialogical truth into the world. Therefore, the incarnation is directed to the Cross pregnant with glory. And, as we mentioned, on it—in the body of Jesus—the dialogue that God is becomes manifest. The Cross as a place of glory is the radical modality of the corporeality of the incarnate God which is the supreme expression of the divine truth.

It follows from this that Christians cannot reject dialogue since they possess the deposit of truth. For the very kernel of this deposit is the dialogue of love unveiled in the tormented and glorified carnality of Jesus. The principle is obvious: the more truth the more dialogue. The exclusion of truth and dialogue—just as dialogue without truth and outside of it—is a machination of a diseased imagination! The history of the Church should be viewed from the perspective of the history of divine-human dialogue. In Church's life everything leads to dialogue. The entire ecclesial, doctrinal-hierarchical-liturgical-sacramental structure sustains the dialogue begun in the incarnation and culminating in the Passover. This dialogue has as its basis and its ultimate fulfillment participation in the dialogue of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Dialogue is the basic form of being a Christian, being the Church. This is best seen in prayer, especially liturgical prayer, in concern for the world, for the other, in hospitality, in openness to otherness, in theology and ecumenism.

It is my fundamental argument here, that the Cross of Christ becomes the place where the divine, Trinitarian dialogue enters the world with new power opening the new possibility of seeing truth. The Cross is the event of truth. Viewed as an unveiling of the dialogical relationship between the Son and the Father, the Cross is at the same time an event of the Holy Spirit, who continually connects the Father to the Son and the Son to the Father. Moreover, the unifying activity of the Holy Spirit here also extends to the inclusion of people and the world in the

Trinitarian dialogue, whose privileged place of unveiling in the world is precisely the Cross of Jesus. The Holy Spirit is the true communicator of the riches of filial being and experience in the world. Such an inclusion and such a participation are the conditions of knowing truth.

How to understand this statement? The answer is given to the Church in the words of Jesus himself, who reveals the identity of the action of the third divine person: He, the Holy Spirit “will lead the disciples into all truth” (*ὁδηγήσει ὑμᾶς ἐν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ πάσῃ*), He, the Paraclete is the “Spirit of Truth (*τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας*)” (John 16, 12–15). The event of the Cross thus becomes the revelation of divine truth in the world through the action of the Holy Spirit. The cross of Jesus and the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church presuppose and complement each other. Just as the cross is the condition for the coming of the Holy Spirit (John 16, 7), so the Spirit “taking from Jesus” (John 16, 15) forms the Church from His open side as an “alethic” community.

The Pneumatic dimension of the Cross of Jesus is linked to the truth of things.<sup>22</sup> The sequence of theological reasoning here is as follows: if the word of the Cross can be grasped as a Trinitarian dialogue that has always taken place between the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit, and which enters the world in the incarnation culminating in the mystery of the Cross, then this dialogue is always about truth. Truth is the essence of dialogue. Dialogue is not an end in itself. The goal of dialogue is to know the truth that the Holy Spirit brings about the Father and the Son, the truth in which the truth of the world is visible as it never was before.

This is why Pope Francis insists that the synodal way is not a form of democratic decision-making about the fate of the Church. For Pope Bergoglio, the synod is to become a truthful event of the Holy Spirit. In his speech at the opening of the synod of 2021, the pope stressed the following:

The Synod is not a parliament or an opinion poll; the Synod is an ecclesial event and its protagonist is the Holy Spirit. If the Spirit is not present, there will be no Synod. [...] May this Synod be a true season of the Spirit! For we need the Spirit, the ever new breath of God, who sets us free from every form of self-absorption, revives what is moribund, loosens shackles and spreads joy. The Holy Spirit guides us where God

<sup>22</sup> It is noteworthy that in the scene of Peter’s encounter with Cornelius, cited earlier, a scene orchestrated by the Holy Spirit, the Pope emphasizes the dimension of discovery and witnessing to the truth—Peter does not allow Cornelius to kneel by himself. Their meeting, thanks to the Holy Spirit, becomes for Peter a confirmation of his own humanity: “I am a man”. Pope Francis says: “In the meeting between those two men, we hear one of the most beautiful phrases of Christianity. Cornelius meets Peter and falls at his feet, but Peter, picking him up, tells him: “Get up. I too am a man” (Acts 10:26). All of us can say the same thing: “I am a man, I am a woman; we are all human”. This is something we should all say, bishops too, all of us: “Get up. I too am a man”.

wants us to be, not to where our own ideas and personal tastes would lead us. Father Congar, of blessed memory, once said: “There is no need to create another Church, but to create a different Church” (True and False Reform in the Church). That is the challenge. For a “different Church”, a Church open to the newness that God wants to suggest, let us with greater fervour and frequency invoke the Holy Spirit and humbly listen to him, journeying together as he, the source of communion and mission, desires: with docility and courage.<sup>23</sup>

For Pope Francis, the Holy Spirit is the protagonist of the Church’s life. Francis understands the synodal journey as a special kind of encounter with the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus gave to the Church.

All of this has concrete and far-reaching significance for the Church, her nature, her mission, her task, the way she conducts her pastoral ministry. If the Church is a synodal, pilgrim Church, moving toward the fully realized kingdom of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, then the greatest ambition of its dialogical synodality must be truth itself. And this does not mean truth understood as democratic, liberal consensus, but conformity to what is the nature of reality seen in its deepest level in the light of the revelation of the Cross.

On the one hand, truth is always in the shape of a Cross, a gift of self, a refusal to be only for oneself. For the Cross testifies to the existence of truth, this truth expresses and protects it. At the same time, the Cross means giving absolute priority in the search for truth to God and His saving revelation. The search for truth on the way of the Cross is also a refusal to succumb to the temptation to absolutely decide or manipulate it. The Cross also contains a persistent and irrevocable, unceasing call to reason to never cease in its receptivity to truth. The Church is precisely the guardian of the Cross and the truth contained in it. Its synodal way cannot claim to establish truth. Its deepest ethos, and at the same time its most creative element, lies in its fidelity to the Cross as the guardian and revelation of vivifying, saving truth. The Church embarks on the path of synodal dialogue not because she claims to administer truth, but because she believes that it exists and gifts itself in the world in many different ways, of which divine revelation is, in the present economy, the fullest and most perfect one.

The theological epistemology of the synodal path is thus based on the strong conviction that truth emerges in dialogue with the Triune God and humanity. Its communal search in dialogue means entering the way of the Cross. This, in turn, is only possible thanks to the Holy Spirit, who is the engine of every human journey towards God, who does in the Church what he did in its founder—shapes the cruciform ability to listen, to receive, creates openness. Ultimately, it is the

<sup>23</sup> POPE FRANCIS, *Address for the opening of the Synod*, 9.10.2021.

same Spirit, as the Pentecost event tells us, who also teaches the Church to speak in different languages to all the peoples of the earth (Acts 2, 4).

It is appropriate to make one more remark here, to illuminate a final consequence of our proposal to set synodality in light of the Cross understood from a pneumatic and Trinitarian perspective. On the synodal path, the Holy Spirit is both the one who makes it possible, opens it up and fuels it, and the one who sets its limits by being the Spirit of truth. Just as the life of Jesus, culminating in his Cross, is inconceivable without the creative power of the Holy Spirit, so the entire synodal path is impossible without Jesus' Spirit, who intrinsically shapes Jesus' humanity and his Church into 'worshippers in truth'. This aspect needs special emphasis when, as today, the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church is at risk of being identified with the rejection of institutions, order and tradition, with an attempt to build a new Church that is anarchic in its essence.

Moreover, synodal dialogue—if it is to correspond to the pneumatic nature of the Church born on the Cross—must be based on the logic of sacrifice, self-giving, self-denial and genuine discipleship. Its rationality is determined by the wisdom of sincere self-giving. As one can read in *Gaudium et spes*, 24: "Indeed, the Lord Jesus, when He prayed to the Father, 'that all may be one. . . as we are one' (John 17:21–22) opened up vistas closed to human reason, for He implied a certain likeness between the union of the divine Persons, and the unity of God's sons in truth and charity. This likeness reveals that man, who is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself, cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself".<sup>24</sup>

#### IV. A FEW PRACTICAL CONCLUSIONS

If the Church is born out of dialogue and—precisely because of this—gives birth to dialogue itself, then through its careful analysis we can find valuable clues for our daily dialogue. To synthesize the multifaceted nature of the above arguments and draw conclusions, I make the following points:

1) Before it is words, dialogue is a certain form of being. Dialogue can only be done by one who is first for the other, or more accurately: so is for oneself that one is for the other. This, in turn, implies the need to ideologically ground eccle-

<sup>24</sup> GS 24: "Immo Dominus Iesus, quando Patrem orat ut "omnes unum sint..., sicut et nos unum sumus" (Io 17,21–22), prospectus praebens humanae rationi impervios, aliquam similitudinem innuit inter unionem personarum divinarum et unionem filiorum Dei in veritate et caritate. Haec similitudo manifestat hominem, qui in terris sola creatura est quam Deus propter seipsam voluerit, plene seipsum invenire non posse nisi per sincerum sui ipsius donum".

siastical synodality in the Trinitarian logic of life.<sup>25</sup> It should be noted here that a Christological or Pneumatological approach to synodality alone will not suffice. Lossky's approach is well known, as he believed that Western Christomonism—to use Congar's category—is not only insufficient, but even inappropriate. In his view, such Christomonism is burdened with the error of excessive institutionalism,<sup>26</sup> today we would add that it is also clericalism. Lossky advocated the adoption and implementation of a pneumatological approach. In this article, I tried to show that only an integral Trinitarian perspective, grounded in fidelity to the economy of divine revelation, is capable of generating such a concept of dialogue and synodality that corresponds to the nature of the Triune God, man and the divine-human community that is the Church. It follows that one of the most important tasks of any synodal path is to continually return to the revealed truth about God and to form a Trinitarian spirituality based on it.<sup>27</sup>

2) This means that there can be no dialogue without true exposure of otherness, without its manifestation, acceptance, and affirmation as such. For dialogue to be authentic there must be an encounter of otherness, which, however, as the Passover event described above shows, need not be interpreted as the beginning of dialectics. The otherness affirmed in dialogue is outside the dialectic.<sup>28</sup>

3) The goal of dialogue need not be—and probably even more, cannot be—homogeneous unification, but deep and true unity analogically modeled on the Trinitarian one. *Communio* is today one of the basic categories with which one

<sup>25</sup> The link between the Church and the Trinity (understood as *communio*) is presented and elaborated in G. GRESHAKE, *Der Dreieine Gott. Eine trinitarische Theologie*, Herder, Freiburg-Basel-Wien 1997, 377–438. Ecclesiology in Trinitarian perspective can be found as well in: H. MÜHLEN, *Una mystica persona. Die Kirche als das Mysterium der Identität des Heiligen Geistes in Christus und den Christen: Eine Person in vielen Personen*, Schöningh, Paderborn 1964; B. FORTE, *La chiesa della Trinità. Saggio sul mistero della Chiesa, comunione e missione*, San Paolo, Milano 1995; G. CALABRESE, *Per un'ecceologia trinitaria. Il mistero di Dio e il mistero della Chiesa per la salvezza dell'uomo*, Dehoniane, Bologna 2000.

<sup>26</sup> V. LOSSKY, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood 1976, 64–65, 242–243.

<sup>27</sup> In this regard, the synodal process should draw more from the Eastern tradition. Cf. V. LOSSKY, *Théologie dogmatique*, Cerf, Paris 2012, 171: “Les catholiques romains reprochent volontiers aux orthodoxes de ne pas étudier l'Église comme telle, dans son aspect terrestre et ses implications humaines, comme l'écrit par exemple le père Congar, mais en étroit rapport avec le Christ ou l'Esprit. À l'extrême, ce reproche témoignerait seulement d'une ignorance: celle des trésors de la tradition canonique orthodoxe qui s'efforce d'organiser l'administration même de l'Église à l'image de la Trinité. Mais, pour l'essentiel, il nous inquiète comme le témoignage d'une pensée qui dissocie et «chosifie». À notre tour, nous pourrions demander aux catholiques romains s'ils n'isolent pas un peu trop l'Église de ses implications spirituelles au profit d'une sociologie”.

<sup>28</sup> D. TRACEY, *Dialogue with the Other. The Inter-religious Dialogue*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids 1991.

tries to capture the Trinitarian mystery of the life and essence of the Church and of its synodality. The unity towards which the dialogue aims should not be understood as the creation of a monolithic, monadic whole, but rather as a community of differences.

4) Dialogue is not a totalizing rationality but grows out of the rationality of freedom. One cannot dialogue in truth where one does not want to dialogue. Dialogue cannot be violence. All parties to the synodal process must be heard, all must be given space and time to express their understanding of what "the Spirit is saying to the Church" today. However, the freedom that dialogue presupposes is not a freedom determined by nothing, but a freedom directed toward the community and its good. Freedom is the truth of dialogue, while dialogue is the truth of freedom. In other words—the ultimate truth of freedom and dialogue is found in love. The painting by E. Delacorix, *La Liberté guidant le peuple* (1830), depicts freedom as the ability to trample others on the way to one's own goal. Such freedom is the freedom of the revolutionary, not the freedom of the dialogist. Such freedom leads to the death of dialogue.

5) Dia-logos—the human in-between-word, the word-as-exchanged-in-between, as the word-in-between—needs both mediation and its own proper environment. The human *dia-logos* is mediated by and in the (*dia*) *dia-logos* of God addressed in Jesus to the world. The divine dialogue is the mediation, the possibility and the environment (*dia*) of the human logos. Without this environment, human *logos* cannot become *dia-logos*.<sup>29</sup> Hence, the truth of dialogue is participation in the truth of the Triune God. It is precisely this truth which shapes freedom and dialogue in the Church and by no means the other way round! Synodical way has to be—christologically and pneumatologically—subordinated to the Trinitarian revelation of divine wisdom in *logou tou staurou*.

6) Such human-generating Trinitarian dialogue of God is not a threat to human subjectivity, freedom and autonomy. On the contrary, it is its best advocate and the engine of all these values.

If the proposal presented here to understand the Church as a dialogue from within the Passover of Jesus is true, it means that the dialogue we are talking about is the space of Church's crisis. Dialogue comes at a cost; attempting to dialogue can always lead to the Cross. Do we need to take such a risk? There seems to be no other way. Above everything, however, there is always the hope that at the end of the road awaits us a community of love and word, a divine, Trinitarian dialogue of love, unity in difference.

<sup>29</sup> On the subject of truth as participation in the truth of God, see the valuable comments of J. MILBANK and C. PICKSTOCK in *Truth in Aquinas*, Radical Orthodoxy Series, Routledge, New York-London 2001, 3.

## ABSTRACT

This contribution attempts to point out the Trinitarian basis of the Church's synodality. The modern magisterium links it primarily to the third person of the divine Trinity. However, it seems that the roots of the synodal nature of the Church should be sought in the Trinitarian mystery. Following this line, the article starts with an analysis of the cross in the perspective of the Trinitarian dialogue. The choice of such a path is not accidental: the Paschal events, according to the spirit of the great Tradition, especially the cross of the Lord is the meaningful, real center of the revelation of the truth about the inner life of God. At the same time, synodality is about the constantly undertaken divine-human dialogue, the paradoxical expression of which is precisely the Lord's cross. Thus, the Paschal event of the cross combines both Trinitarian and dialogical moments. The cross reveals the inner life of God as a dialogue, and precisely for this reason it determines any understanding of conversation and dialogue in the Church. The Church is a dialogical community only under the sign of the cross. It is this that marks the epistemological contours of synodality and its underlying ethos, which is the search for the truth of God and man and their divine-human communion.