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The Unity of the Parish and the Celebration of the Eucharist in Small Parish Communities in the Light of Recent Documents of the Magisterium of the Church

Eucharistic celebrations by small communities in a parish, often held outside the main church building, raise concerns, whether the unity of the parish is not disturbed. The reasons for those concerns are more of theological than pastoral nature and mostly relate to the communities of the Neocatechumenal Way. In order to find out if the concerns are justified in the light of the theological criteria, we will analyze selected Church documents of the 20th and the 21st century.

1. The Unity of the Eucharistic Celebration Required by the Vaticanum II Liturgical Reform

The post-conciliar Instruction, published in 1967, concerning the mystery of the Eucharist – *Eucharisticum misterium* 17¹ commands to take care not to have two liturgical celebrations at the same time in the same church. The instruction emphasises that it is above all true of the celebration of the Eucharist, indicating that it distracts the people's attention. From the context

¹ “Acta Apostolicae Sedis” 59 (1967), p. 556–557.

one may conclude that there are, however, theological aspects of this command. Point 16 of the *Instruction* presents the full and active participation of the entire people of God in the same Eucharist, around the one altar where the bishop presides as an outstanding example of common unity and as an ideal of the liturgical life of the Church. The document refers to the Paragraph 41 of the conciliar Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium* and Par. 26 of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*. The Constitution on the Liturgy presents the problem in a way that allows to balance the theological view and the pastoral needs. The idea of the uniqueness of the Eucharist around the presiding bishop is supported in the conciliar document by the views of Ignatius of Antioch (30–107 AD) quoting his Letters to Magnesians 7, Philadelphians 4 and Smyrnaeans 8. However, point 42 of the Constitution explains the pastoral need of dividing the faithful into lesser groups “set up locally under a pastor who takes the place of the bishop,”² adding that “efforts must be made to encourage a sense of community within the parish, above all in the common celebration of the Sunday Mass.” The Constitution *Lumen Gentium* 26, also referring to the role of the bishop as the basis of the unity of local Church, mentions the fact that every Eucharistic community forms a complex reality in which “under the sacred ministry of the bishop, there is exhibited a symbol of that charity and «unity of the mystical Body, without which there can be no salvation».” The document of the Congregation for Divine Worship *Actio Pastoralis Ecclesiae*, issued in May 1969, two years after *Eucharisticum mysterium*, specified the rules of celebration in small parish groupings.³

Harmony and liturgical discipline is one of the most challenging aspects of the contemporary Church in the post-conciliar period, due to the ne-

² The account of the process of division of the Bishop Church into parishes gathered around their rectors as understood in the consciousness of the early Church was given by John D. Zizioulas in his doctoral thesis: *Eucharist, Bishop, Church. The Unity of the Church in the Divine Eucharist. The Bishop During the First Three Centuries*, Brookline, Massachusetts 2001. The author is a professor at the Institute of Theology in Athens, a titular metropolitan of Pergamon and the co-chairman of *The Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue Between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church*.

³ “Acta Apostolicae Sedis” 61 (1969), p. 809–811.

cessity of finding balance between the theological and pastoral issues. The difficulties are caused, for example, by excessive inertia of parish practice over some issues, which can be seen in many European countries today e.g. in the common practice of giving the communion from the tabernacle, despite the strong recommendation of the *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 55 Constitution for the faithful to “receive the Lord’s body from the same sacrifice” after the communion of the priest. The recommendation repeated a few times in the instruction was also placed in the Paragraph 85 of the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*.⁴ The difficulty of acquiring the liturgical discipline in the post-conciliar period can also be caused by the factor opposite to inertia – private invention of the celebrants. According to Austin Flannery OP, the editor of the English edition of 20th century magisterial documents of the Church, more than one hundred documents on liturgical issues were published by the Holy See after 1964.⁵ Among the problems that required indications from the highest authority of the Church were: national languages in liturgy, concelebration and celebration in small communities. The evolution in liturgy concerning the first two issues was quite smooth. The transition from many private, individual masses said in Latin by individual priests at side altars to the widespread custom of celebrating the Eucharist in the way of con-celebration was made. It seems that it was this historically formed habit of private masses that the instruction *Eucharisticum mysterium* 17 was directed against, ordering that two liturgical celebrations cannot be held at the same time in the same church. Other detailed instructions of the Congregation point to the growing acceptance towards celebrations in smaller groupings. This fact proves that, in theological sense, these celebrations are not contradictory to church unity, but serve as important pastoral tools. In the next part of this paper we will try to find a justification of this statement in the documents of the Holy See.

⁴ Cf. *Eucharisticum mysterium* 31, 32; *Immensae caritatis*, the Instruction of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments from 29 Jan 1973, no. 2, “Acta Apostolicae Sedis” 65 (1973), p. 267–26. Cf. N. X. O’Donoghue, *Partakers of the Same Sacrifice*, “Antiphon” 16 (2012) no. 2, p. 130–143.

⁵ Cf. *Introduction*, in: *Vatican Council II. The Conciliar and Post-conciliar Documents*, New York 1988, p. xvii.

1.1. Paschal Mystery as the Source of Unity

The document of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith about the Church as the communion *Communio notio* from 28 May 1992,⁶ signed by the then prefect Card. J. Ratzinger, contains statements, which were later incorporated in papal documents and synodal opinions of bishops on the Eucharist. One of the first statements concerns the fact that unity, which is the communion (Gr. *koinonia*) of the parish, derives from the Paschal Mystery communicated through the sacraments: Paragraph 3 “It is essential to the Christian understanding of communion that it be recognised above all as a gift from God, as a fruit of God’s initiative carried out in the paschal mystery. The new relationship between man and God, that has been established in Christ and is communicated through the sacraments, also extends to a new relationship among human beings.”

The document *Communio notio* stresses that, since unity is a gift of God bestowed on people in sacraments, every Eucharist, even if it takes place in a small community, is a Eucharist of the catholic Church: Paragraph 10 “Moreover, one’s belonging to a particular Church never conflicts with the reality that in the Church no-one is a stranger: each member of the faithful, especially in the celebration of the Eucharist, is in his or her Church, in the Church of Christ, regardless of whether or not he or she belongs, according to canon law, to the diocese, parish or other particular community where the celebration takes place.”⁷ In this sense, without impinging on the necessary regulations regarding juridical dependence, whoever belongs to one particular Church belongs to all the Churches; since belonging to the Communion, like belonging to the Church, is never simply particular, but by its very nature is always universal.”⁸

⁶ Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion *Communio notio* (28 May 1992), “Acta Apostolicae Sedis” 85 (1993), p. 838–850.

⁷ Cf. canon 107 of *The Code of Canon Law*.

⁸ John Chrysostom, *Homily on the Gospel of John*, 65, 1 (PG 59, 361): “The dweller in Rome deems the Indians a member of himself”; cf. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic

In the light of these words no Eucharist taking place in a small parish community is separated from other parishioners, since it is the celebration of the Paschal Mystery, the source of the communion. The Encyclical Letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, written by John Paul II 10 years later, specifies in more detail how the paschal unity of the parish should be understood.

1.2. Unity that the Eucharist Implies

At the beginning of the part of *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (2002) which is devoted to *unity*, in Par. 20 John Paul II indicates that taking part in the Eucharist amid division has always been considered unworthy of a Christian community, even in the times when Saint Paul reprimanded the church community in Corinth (cf. 1 Cor 11: 17–22). The Pope also mentioned that through the gesture of “washing of the feet” during the Last Supper Jesus appeared as the teacher of communion and of service. It is worth noticing, that the lack of unity in the church of Corinth, brought up by the Pope, referred to the situation in which divided members of the parish community gathered together in the same room and celebrated one Eucharist (cf. 1 Cor 11: 17–22. 27–34). The source of the lack of communion that showed through not waiting for one another before beginning to eat was not the result of physical division, but the spiritual one. Consequently, in Paragraph 23 of *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* John Paul II states that it is the spiritual unity with Christ that is the source of the unity of the Church: “The argument is compelling: our union with Christ, which is a gift and grace for each of us, makes it possible for us, in him, to share in the unity of his body which is the Church. The Eucharist reinforces the incorporation into Christ which took place in Baptism though the gift of the Spirit (cf. 1 Cor 12: 13, 27).”

In the consecutive paragraphs of the Encyclical Letter the Pope continues analysing this problem, touching on and elaborating on the general thoughts of *Communio in notio*. In Paragraph 35 he points out that the communion stemming from the celebration of the Eucharist should be regarded posterior compared to the ecclesial communion, which derives

from the unity with Christ and has been traditionally described as being “in the state of grace.” According to the Pope, the Eucharist “presupposes that communion already exists.”

John Paul II comments on the distinction between the *visible* and the *invisible* dimension of communion, that *Communio nis notio* discusses.

Invisible communion exists when individual faithful live the life of grace and practice theological virtues. It is the only way to be in communion with the Trinity and the Church. Referring to *Lumen gentium* 14 the Pope emphasises that it is not only the faith that is required, but also perseverance in sanctifying grace and love. We must remain within the Church both “bodily” and “in our heart” (Par. 36). It is clear that this invisible unity comes first and is more basic than the visible communion, which, however, also acquires its achievement through concrete bonds which are proper to its nature.

Visible communion – in the Paragraph 38 of the Encyclical Letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* John Paul II elaborates on the definition of incorporation into the community of the Church as presented in the Second Vatican Council’s Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium* 14. The most important conditions to become fully incorporated in the Church are “possessing the Spirit of Christ” as well as accepting the entire structure of the Church and all the means of salvation that she was given. The authority of the Supreme Pontiff and the Bishops needs to be accepted. One has to be united with them and all the other members of the Church through the bonds of “profession of faith, the sacraments, ecclesiastical government and communion”. The Pope emphasises that the Eucharist is the supreme sacramental manifestation of communion in the Church. How does he understand the unifying reality of the Eucharist?

1.3. Unity that Results from the Eucharist

John Paul II recalls the words of Saint Augustine in order to point out that “If you are his body and members of him, then you will find set on the Lord’s table your own mystery”⁹ (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia* 40). In the

⁹ Saint Augustine, *Sermon* 272.

earlier fragment, quoting the words of the instruction of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith *Communiois notio*, he stresses the fact that the celebration of any local Eucharist “is performed in union not only with the proper Bishop, but also with the Pope, with the episcopal order, with all the clergy, and with the entire people. Every valid celebration of the Eucharist expresses this universal communion with Peter and with the whole Church.” The sentence itself was written in order to warn some Christian Church communities against spiritual separation (*Communiois notio* 14). However, it also partly proves that the allegations of separation are unjustified: the community celebrating the Eucharist on her own, (e.g. enclosed nuns in the convent), if it celebrates the holy mysteries in a valid and worthy way, it always remains in the state of the “universal communion” with the whole Church. The fact of participation in the Eucharist, either in bigger groups or separately, in many smaller groups, is not, according to the dogmatic teaching of the Church, the determining factor of the ecclesial communion or its lack.

In the Paragraph 52 of the *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* the Pope indicates that the communion, the unity of the whole community with the universal Church is guaranteed by the priest celebrating the Eucharist. Presiding at the Eucharist, the priest is responsible for doing it *in persona Christi* and must “provide a witness to and a service of communion not only for the community directly taking part in the celebration, but also for the universal Church, which is a part of every Eucharist.” John Paul II reminds about this truth in order to warn against making the celebration of the Eucharist a private event, and especially against introducing unauthorised changes. However, the rule itself can also serve as proof that through the celebration of the Eucharist separately, the community does not become a parallel church.

1.4. Sociological Unity and the Unity of Faith

In the synodal *Instrumentum laboris*¹⁰ on the Eucharist, a working document, which was created in October 2005 and is the result of the Holy See’s

¹⁰ Cf. Synod of Bishops, XI Ordinary General Assembly (2005), *The Eucharist: Source and Summit of the Life and Mission of the Church – Instrumentum laboris*.

consultations with episcopates of the world, there is a comment that in some church communities, primarily in western European countries enjoying a general climate of peace and prosperity, we can observe a decrease in the theological and spiritual understanding of the unity of the Eucharist. Instead, external criteria of the unity are emphasized. Eucharist, as the document implies, should change human lives in a spiritual way, with the power of the Paschal Mystery: "Many mention that the idea of participation is often limited to its exterior aspects. Not everyone understands that its true meaning comes from faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Participation in the Eucharist is rightly seen as the quintessential act in the Church's life. It is communion with Trinitarian life: God the Father, the incarnate and risen Son of God and the Holy Spirit, who works the transformation and the "divinization" of human life" (*Instrumentum laboris* 25).

Among the attitudes which hinder proper understanding of the unity of the Eucharist, the document mentions the incorrect interpretation of the theological significance of liturgy as creating Christ. The truth is, that, in order to become the Body of Christ, the liturgy must accept Him as the source of unity: "It is widely held that Christ's presence is the result of the community and not Christ himself, who is the font and centre of our communion and head of his Body, the Church" (*Instrumentum laboris* 27).

Instrumentum laboris also draws attention to the huge role of the profession of faith, which is an important bond reaffirming the communion with other Church communities: "Before partaking of the Eucharist, the profession of faith is renewed. This fundamental bond manifests the communion of each particular Church with the local Churches throughout the world, and also the primary union with the Church of Rome and its Bishop, the necessary principle of the Church's unity" (*Instrumentum laboris* 32).

This sentence brings to mind an ancient rule, according to which the measure of the unity of a particular church community and its members with the universal Church was the Creed it professed – the faith in which it baptised its new members.¹¹ In the context of the Eucharist, the synodal

¹¹ Cf. B. Neunheuser, *Baptism and confirmation*, trans. by J. J. Hughes, Freiburg 1964, p. 137–139; J. Day, *The Baptismal Liturgy of Jerusalem. Fourth and Fifth-Century Evidence*

working document points out a negative tendency in western countries, where the understanding of the Eucharist and its unifying character is being limited to its social dimension of a meal of fellowship. Instead, in countries experiencing wars and other difficulties, the Eucharistic mystery is understood more fully, as the paschal mystery celebrated in an unbloody manner on the altar.¹²

If we perceive the Eucharist primarily as “a meal of fellowship,” which understands the unity as the physical presence of all parishioners, then regular separate celebrations of the Eucharist in particular groups must be seen as opposing the sense of fellowship understood in this way. However, this criterion is an inappropriate, too “external” one. This viewpoint of *Instrumentum laboris* was confirmed during the Synod itself. Paragraph 64 of the post-synodal exhortation *Sacramentum caritatis* is devoted to the need of acquainting the parishioners with the Paschal Mystery. The Pope indicates that the basic structure of the Christian experience calls for a process of mystagogy which should always respect three elements: the interpretation of the rites in the light of our salvation, presentation of the meaning of signs contained in the rites, and connecting the rites to Christian life. With that in mind, as the Pope emphasised, there is a need for “greater involvement by communities of consecrated life, movements and groups which, by their specific charisms, can give new impetus to Christian formation” (*Sacramentum caritatis* 64).

As we can see, according to the *Magisterium*, expressed in the teaching of the Vatican council, the synod and the documents of CDF, the unity of the parish ought to be understood primarily in the dimension of faith, and not sociology. It means that the unity among the parishioners is built and strengthened when they are helped to live more profoundly the *Paschal mystery* celebrated in sacraments, especially Baptism and the Eucharist. It's the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Christ that are the source of Christian unity. According to the aforementioned documents, establishing smaller parish communities is, paradoxically, beneficial for the growth of the unity among the parishioners and rooting them in the parish. It

from *Palestine Syria and Egypt*, Aldershot 2007, p. 57.

¹² *Instrumentum laboris*, 33

is because of the role small parish communities play in the initiation of the faithful into the mystery of the Passover. The process called by Pope Francis mystical initiation (cf. *Evangelii gaudium* 166).

2. The Word of God and Small Communities

In the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini* (2010), issued after the Synod on the Word of God (2008), Pope Benedict XVI focuses on the problem of introducing the parishioners to regular, personal encounters with “Christ, who gives himself to us in his word” (*Verbum Domini* 73). In the opinion of the Pope, the biblical apostolate ought to have a central position in the pastoral activity of parishes.¹³ The Holy Father pointed out that not only is the parish life the first environment for “the proclamation, hearing and celebration of the word of God,” but also shows the incredible value of the pastoral care “in the Christian communities as the proper setting where a personal and communal journey based on the word of God can occur and truly serve as the basis for our spiritual life” (*Verbum Domini* 72). Because of that, “it is good that pastoral activity also favour the growth of *small communities*, “formed by families or based in parishes or linked to the different ecclesial movements and new communities” (Propositio 21), which can help to promote formation, prayer and knowledge of the Bible in accordance with the Church’s faith” (*Verbum Domini* 73). It seems quite clear that the Pope’s words also relate to the Neocatechumenal Way, which he is familiar with since when he worked

¹³ In *Verbum Domini* we can read that: “Along these lines the Synod called for a particular pastoral commitment to emphasizing the centrality of the word of God in the Church’s life, and recommended a greater “biblical apostolate,” not alongside other forms of pastoral work, but as *a means of letting the Bible inspire all pastoral work*” (Propositio 30; cf. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei verbum*, 24). This does not mean adding a meeting here or there in parishes or dioceses, but rather of examining the ordinary activities of Christian communities, in parishes, associations and movements, to see if they are truly concerned with fostering a personal encounter with Christ, who gives himself to us in his word” (73).

in Tübingen. One of the three basic elements of the Neocatechumenate, constituting the “Christian tripod” (Word of God – Liturgy – Community), is a programme of bringing the parishioners closer to the word of God, in the context of liturgical celebration and community life.

The charism of Neocatechumenate in the context of parish life was highly spoken about by a Spanish Cardinal, who is the current Prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, Antonio Cañizares Llovera. The cardinal wrote about it in a short article for the Spanish weekly “La Razón:” “The Word of God, the Eucharist, baptism, received or to be received, and the Christian community, are the core of the itinerary of the growth of faith, which is accompanied by not strictly liturgical celebrations on its every stage. The Sunday Eucharist, usually anticipated on a Saturday night in neocatechumenal communities, is «the soul and strength» of the whole Way. The celebration of the Eucharist, performed within the proper itinerary of these communities, celebrated with the highest dignity, with the sense of «mystery and sacrum», in the spirit of the Church and liturgy. The Word of God and the Eucharist indicate God’s priority and form the basis that gives life, strength, capacity and enthusiasm to communities to enable them to give testimony of their faith.”¹⁴

In his interview for the Vatican Radio, as indicated by the Italian daily “La Stampa,” Card. Cañizares emphasised the importance of the Way as the tool for Christian initiation. The Prefect of the Congregation claims that the Neocatechumenate shows how to avoid situations in which catechetical formation takes place only in the intellectual dimension. According to Cañizares the relation between the liturgy and catechesis in the Neocatechumenal Way may serve as a model.¹⁵

¹⁴ See *Un aire fresco por Cardenal Antonio Cañizares*, “La Razón” 21 Jan 2012, author’s translation, the original text available at: http://www.larazon.es/detalle_hemeroteca/noticias/LA_RAZON_428538/historico/2533-un-aire-fresco-por-cardenal-antonio-canizares (18/03/2013).

¹⁵ Cf. *Cardinale Canizares: Neocatecumenali bene rapporto tra catechesi e liturgia*, “La Stampa” 23 Jan 2012, <http://vaticaninsider.lastampa.it/vaticano/dettaglio-articolo/articolo/canizares-neocatecumenali-news-catecumenals-catecumenales-11940/> (18/03/2013).

The charism of the Neocatechumenate was earlier accepted by Pope John Paul II. In his letter about the Way written in August 1990 he pointed out a relation between the ability to put oneself at the service of the renewal of the Church and the participation of those who walk along the Neocatechumenal Way in small communities and the celebration of the Eucharist in groups. The Pope indicated that it is the communal dimension of the Neocatechumenal formation that their readiness to serve the Church derives from.¹⁶

During his audience on 20 January 2012, in his address given to the catechists, the families constituting missionary parishes called *Missio ad gentes*, and communities of the Way which had completed the neocatechumenal itinerary, Pope Benedict XVI confirmed the importance of the celebration of the Eucharist in Neocatechumenal communities. The Pope reminded art. 13 § 2 of the Statute of the Way, which states that it helps to promote the rapprochement to the wealth of the sacramental life by people who have strayed from the Church, or have not received adequate training.¹⁷

Article 22 of the Statutes of the Neocatechumenal Way says that having completed the itinerary of rediscovery of Christian initiation, a particular community continues the weekly celebration of the Word and the Dominical Eucharist. According to the Statutes it is a crucial element of the ongoing formation in the faith directed to the members of the parish. But also because the Eucharist is a source of pastoral productivity of a given community, the activity of which is a part of the parish itself. The fruits of evangelization of these communities come from Christian *love and unity* present among them. Jesus taught that it is love for one another that will show that Christians are His disciples (cf. Jn 13: 34–35; 17: 21). The signs of love and unity are not that visible in general parish celebrations, since the parishioners do not know each other that well and meet in church rarely. Small parish communities make it possible to go

¹⁶ Cf. John Paul II, the Letter *Ognivolta*, 30 Aug 1990; AAS 82 (1990), p. 1513 – 1515, <http://www.camminoneocatecumenale.it/new/papa.asp?id=111&a=23> (18/03/2013).

¹⁷ Cf. *Pope's Address to Neocatechumenal Way*, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2012/january/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20120120_cammino-neocatecumenale_en.html (18/03/2013).

beyond the limits of anonymity and implement fraternal love in particular relationships with particular people on the regular basis. Real human relationships are the test of the Christian love and unity, which becomes a clear witness for those who strayed from the faith. This is also a way of realising the wish of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 42 to “encourage a sense of community within the parish.”

3. What Do the Statistics Say?

In order to present the situation concerning the initiation of the parishioners in the life nourished by the Word of God and the Paschal Mystery in the common pastoral care 40 years after the Council, I would like to refer to the data provided by sociologists, since we assume, in accordance with the teaching of *Magisterium*, that the degree of unity of particular parishioners as well as different parish communities is proportional to their real bond with the most important mysteries of the faith. The research on the level of religiosity among Catholics provides us with information concerning that matter.

3.1. Sunday Listening to the Word of God

We will begin with the presentation of the results of research on social and religious attitudes, conducted in the diocese of Płock in 2010 by the Institute of Statistics of the Catholic Church SAC.¹⁸ Almost 93% of respondents declared to be believers. Asked about children's upbringing in faith, 88% of respondents answered that children ought to be taught the religion by their parents. When specifying the best way of achieving this goal only 0.5% marked: read the Bible together. Common prayer with the child received 10.8% of votes, and 6.2% of respondents wanted to talk to their children about religious matters. These results clearly indicate that

¹⁸ Cf. *Postawy religijno-społeczne mieszkańców diecezji płockiej. Raport z badań przeprowadzonych przez Instytut Statystyki Kościoła Katolickiego SAC*, red. L. Adamczuk, W. Zdaniewicz, Płock 2010.

the Holy Bible has no significant place in the domestic religious formation. Very few respondents (1.2%) thought that “encouraging the child to participate in religious youth communities” is a helpful tool. Among the most commonly selected answers were: go to church with the child and participate in a mass – 19.7%; “send the child to church” – 12.3%. So the service in church was chosen by 32% of respondents. A slightly smaller number of people wanted to “send the child to religion classes” – 18.8%; and 16.7% wanted to “set an example of one’s own religiosity on everyday basis.” In order to present this “own religiosity,” let us take a look at the attitudes to sex and marriage: 42.7% of respondents finds sexual intercourse before marriage acceptable, most probably among them we can find the 29.2% accepting open relationships and the 18.5% accepting the so called “free love” – apparently these respondents, the great majority of whom describes themselves as “believers,” do not find sexual intercourse outside marriage to be the sin against the sixth commandment. Almost every second respondent approves of contraceptives – 43.5%, and about 60% of respondents are in favour of the *in vitro* fertilisation procedures.¹⁹ If these results can lead to any conclusions, then they obviously must be connected with the subjective perception of faith. A declared reference point of the religious and moral beliefs is, to a large extent, the presence in church on a Sunday mass. The personal bond with the word of God does not seem to be any reference point for believers (0.5%). As far as the Catholic sexual ethics is concerned, the opinions of Catholics are not formed by the Sunday mass readings or sermons, but rather newspapers, the TV, the cinema and the Internet. And by no means are they the Catholic ones, but the ones being the advocates of what Saint John refers to as “the world”: “Love not the world, nor the things which are in the world. If any man love the world, the charity of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, is the concupiscence of the flesh, and the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life, which is not of the Father, but is of the world (Douay-Rheims)” (1 Jn 2: 15–16).

¹⁹ Cf. J. Kamiński, *Przygotowanie do małżeństwa i życia w rodzinie w Diecezji Płockiej*, „Wrocławski Przegląd Teologiczny” 19 (2011) no. 2, p. 122–124.

There are cases of priests themselves who undervalue the significance of sins concerning sexual ethics. An example of this are the views of Father Andrzej Bohdanowicz SThD, which are in opposition to the teaching of *Magisterium*, and were presented a few years ago in a Warsaw theological magazine "Collectanea Theologica."²⁰ The opinions presented by him contradict the moral judgement of disordered sexual acts specified in the Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics *Persona Humana* 9 of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith from 1975.²¹

This situation of life in faith in the Mazovia region, in one of the oldest dioceses in Poland is most probably representative of the situation in other regions as well. It shows how important it is, that the voice of the Pope and bishops, calling for the initiation of the faithful into the Word of God with the use of the post-conciliar realities, be heard. The author of the article on the preparation to marriage that the statistical data was taken from, refers to the *Directory for the Pastoral Care of the Family* no. 23 of the Polish Episcopal Conference,²² which indicates that more attention needs to be paid to creating small groups, movements, associations

²⁰ See: A. Bohdanowicz, *Postulat teologii, «z którą można żyć» Karla Rahnera a posoborowa refleksja nad miłością małżeńską*, „Collectanea Theologica” 77 (2007) no. 2, p. 57–68.

²¹ In Par. 9 of the Declaration we read: “The traditional Catholic doctrine that masturbation constitutes a grave moral disorder is often called into doubt or expressly denied today. It is said that psychology and sociology show that it is a normal phenomenon of sexual development, especially among the young. It is stated that there is real and serious fault only in the measure that the subject deliberately indulges in solitary pleasure closed in on self (“ipsation”), because in this case the act would indeed be radically opposed to the loving communion between persons of different sex which some hold is what is principally sought in the use of the sexual faculty. This opinion is contradictory to the teaching and pastoral practice of the Catholic Church. Whatever the force of certain arguments of a biological and philosophical nature, which have sometimes been used by theologians, in fact both the *Magisterium* of the Church – in the course of a constant tradition – and the moral sense of the faithful have declared without hesitation that masturbation is an intrinsically and seriously disordered act.”

²² Polish Episcopal Conference, *Directory for the Pastoral Care of the Family*, Warszawa 2003.

and communities for the young, which promote Christian values and the Christian model of life, building the foundation for future marriages and families.²³ The Pope and the bishops point to small communities as tools, perceiving them as a gift of God for our times. Accepting these realities as a gift and a task to be fulfilled depends solely on priests and attitudes adopted by them.

3.2. Sunday Parish Mass

Polish statistics concerning people who go to church and receive communion on Sundays show that Catholics in Poland act accordingly to their beliefs. Out of the 41% of people attending Sunday mass, merely 16.4% receive communion. In the Tarnów diocese, where Sunday mass attendance is the highest – 70.5%, the number of people who receive communion will be up to 23.1% and it is the highest number of people who receive communion among Sunday church-goers in Poland. The smallest percentage of people who receive communion on the Sunday was found in the Szczecin diocese – 10.6%.²⁴ If, at best, every fourth church-goer receives communion, it is difficult to assume that, by going to Sunday mass only, the parishioners are truly united around the Paschal Mystery (cf. John Paul II, *Dies Domini* 40).

The initiation, both in the Eucharist and the Word of God seems to be a necessity, due to the non-Christian influence on the sexual ethics of Catholics. Without it, it will not take long for the parishes to shrink, as was the case in many western European countries. Lower mass attendance of young Catholics in Italy was subject to research by Italian demographers. The conclusions from their detailed analysis of the problem indicate that the experience of sexual initiation outside marriage among young Italians, which is referred to as “adultery” in the language of moral theology, consequently draws them away from attending Sunday mass. The authors concluded that in this respect the Italians are different from

²³ Cf. J. Kamiński, *Przygotowanie do małżeństwa i życia w rodzinie w Diecezji Płockiej*.

²⁴ Data from the website of the Institute of Statistics of the Catholic Church SAC in Poland: <http://iskk.pl/kosciolnaswiecie.html> (29/01/2012).

the Americans. They consider the clear moral message that the Italian society, being homogeneously Catholic, receives, and their proximity to the Pope and accessibility of his teaching, to be the reason for this situation.²⁵ However, according to Andrew Greeley, a well-read Catholic priest, a professor of sociology from Chicago and a supporter of birth control, as far as American Catholics are concerned, the results of the research are similar to the Italian ones in terms of mass attendance.²⁶ The difference between the two societies is that, in the case of the American Catholics, the fact of not going to church on Sunday is not caused by the sense of shame and sin. Quite the opposite – its reason is the indifference to the sin itself. The questionnaire conducted by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) in 1963 and 1974 (the so called Catholic School Studies) showed that practising Catholics stopped perceiving contraception as a sin. For example, in 1974 about 80% of women in their mid-thirties, going to communion often, found nothing wrong in birth control i.e. the contraception of various kind. Even more American Catholic women at that age, more than 80%, thought that sexual intercourse only for the sake of pleasure, therefore, excluding the element of procreation, was acceptable.²⁷ The same author comments on the problem of lower mass attendance on Sundays in America (the decrease from 72% to 50%). The parish priests see the situation in a way that the churches, once full, have now become half empty. According to research of the Gallup Institute, the decrease occurred mostly after the publication of the *Humanae vitae* encyclical in 1968 by Pope Paul VI. Greeney explains that together with the decision to reject the official sexual ethics proclaimed by the Church,

²⁵ M. Caltabiano, G. Dalla Zuanna, A. Rosina, *Interdependence between sexual debut and church attendance in Italy*, "Demographic Research" 14 (2006), p. 471. The article (no. 19) can be downloaded from the website of the magazine published by the Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research, Rostock, Germany: <http://www.demographic-research.org/volumes/vol14/19/14-19.pdf> (18/01/2013).

²⁶ According to publishers' data from 1994, Greeley published 120 books, 20 of which were fiction, with the total circulation of 20 million.

²⁷ Cf. A. Greeley, *Sex. The Catholic Experience*, Allen, Texas 1994, p. 47–48 and tables 5 and 7 on p. 55–57.

also missing out the Sunday Eucharist stopped being perceived by the faithful as a grave sin.”²⁸

Faced with the aforementioned data we must clearly state that the mentality of the majority of church-goers needs to be re-evangelised. The quoted author seems to take no notice of this challenge. He is rather supporting the idea that it is better not to “trouble the consciences of the laity.”²⁹ The confessors’ attitude of not troubling the consciences, which meant not enquiring about the ethical aspects of their intercourse, was, according to Greeney, very common at the beginning of the 20th century and resulted from the indications of Alphonsus Maria de Liguori and John Vianney. In the understanding of the American theologian that meant, in practice, a go ahead for joy and spontaneity, enjoyment of life and each other’s company in marital intercourse. It would be a wise attitude, except that, in this case, enjoyment does not take objective moral norms into consideration. All the joys of this world become curses, when they draw us away from God, prayer and righteousness. Jesus himself said: “Woe to you who laugh now, for you will grieve and weep” (Lk 6:25). And saint John added: “Do not love the world or the things of the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 Jn 2:15).

According to a sociologist Gianpiero Dalla Zuanna from the Univesity of Padua, northern Italy, the initial approach of not troubling the consciences resulted in the inability of reaching the consciences at all when encyclical *Casti Connubii* was issued in 1930 and attempts to improve ethical formation of married couples were made. Long standing pastoral activity of the Italian bishops and priests from the region of Veneto (around Venice), described by Gianpiero Dalla Zuanna, shows the ineffectiveness of the pastoral activity through the confessional. The priests did not manage to persuade their parisioners to change their life attitudes.

²⁸ *Children of the Council*, “America. The Catholic Weekly” 190 (2004) no. 19.

²⁹ A. Greeney criticises the approach of Pope Pius XI to priests who decided not to “trouble the consciences of the laity” with Church views on contraception, claiming that the demographic changes at the beginning of the 20th century have influenced many countries to the extent in which contraception has become extremely common; cf. *Sex. The Catholic Experience*, op. cit., p. 39.

The failure of their ethical impact was also seen clearly through the decline of the total fertility rate. The number of children in the families of this region dropped from the average of five to below the reproducibility of generations.³⁰ The process was accompanied by strong secularisation of the society and the decline in Sunday mass attendance.

In the face of this situation, re-evangelisation of the parishioners through the Christian initiation in small communities, as papal documents indicate, instead of posing danger to the unity of the parish, seems to be its providential chance. Thanks to small communities, the parish can gain back its mission of sanctifying and unifying around the Paschal Mystery – as regards both, practising Catholics and the lost sheep.

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Summary

The Unity of the Parish and the Celebration of the Eucharist in Small Parish Communities in the Light of Recent Documents of the Magisterium of the Church

The author analyses the problem of parish unity faced with separate Eucharistic celebrations organised by small communities existing in a parish. He tries to formulate theological principles of that unity in the light of the Magisterial documents of 20th and 21st century. The unity of a parish is most importantly connected with the spiritual, invisible dimension, which is also expressed in the external, visible way by bonds of profession of faith, sacraments, Church hierarchy, and communion. Unity between parishioners is built by initiating them into the Paschal Mystery and into daily meditation of the Word of God. Instead of seeing in them a threat to unity, both John Paul II and Benedict XVI indicate that small communities participate in the process of strengthening the unity of the parish by leading people along the mystagogical way towards the initiation into the

³⁰ Cf. *Bassa fecondità e nuova mentalità. Controllo delle nascite e religione nel Veneto nel Novecento*, Padova University Press 2010; cf. Sandro Magister, “*Ego te absolvo.*” *The Catholic Route to Birth Control*, <http://chiesa.espresso.repubblica.it/articolo/1344650?eng=y> (18/03/2013).

Paschal Mystery. The author also refers to sociological data about religiosity in contemporary Polish parishes indicating that there is a serious crisis in the life of faith and a dire need for the communities as a means of Christian initiation.

Keywords

Liturgical reform, Second Vatican Council, Neocatechumenal Way, Eucharist, unity of the parish, Magisterium, Christian initiation

Streszczenie

Jedność parafii a celebracja Eucharystii w małych wspólnotach w parafii w świetle najnowszych dokumentów Kościoła

Autor analizuje zauważane przez niektórych duszpasterzy napięcie pomiędzy celebrowaniem Eucharystii w małych wspólnotach istniejących w parafiach a jednością parafii jako całości oraz teologiczne zasady tej jedności w świetle wybranych wypowiedzi Magisterium Kościoła XX i XXI wieku. Analiza tekstów Magisterium wskazała, że jedność parafii ma wymiar najpierw duchowy, niewidzialny, a następnie także zewnętrzny, widzialny. Konstytuują ją przede wszystkim więzy wyznania wiary, sakramentów, kościelnej hierarchii oraz komunii. Jedność między parafianami buduje się poprzez wtajemniczanie ich w Misterium paschalne oraz w codzienne obcowanie ze Słowem Bożym. W myśl nauczania papieży Jana Pawła II i Benedykta XVI małe wspólnoty zamiast zagrażać jedności parafii, mogą przyczynić się do umocnienia jej jedności poprzez prowadzenie parafian do zjednoczenia z Misterium paschalnym. Wnioski teologiczne autor uzupełnił wynikami badań socjologicznych stanu religijności osób świeckich w parafiach, które sygnalizują poważny kryzys życia wiary i moralności oraz potrzebę sięgania po małe wspólnoty jako środowisko formacyjne i narzędzie wtajemniczenia chrześcijańskiego dorosłych.

Słowa kluczowe

Reforma liturgiczna, Sobór Watykański II, Droga Neokatechumenalna, Eucharystia, jedność parafii, Magisterium Kościoła, wtajemniczenie chrześcijańskie