



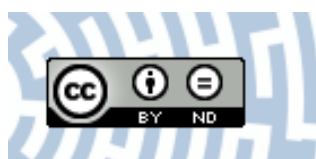
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**Author:** Anna Woźnica, Jan Słomka

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Anna Woźnica\*, University of Silesia in Katowice  
Jan Słomka\*\*, University of Silesia in Katowice

## RADICAL NATURE OF POPE FRANCIS'S ECCLESIOLOGY

As can be easily noticed, Pope Francis's documents provide no systematic ecclesiological discourse, yet undoubtedly, his entire teaching is founded on a very deep understanding of the Church. Thus, the aim of this article is to present its basic theological presumptions. In other words, it seeks to find a hermeneutic key – or keys – which will allow us to better understand the ecclesiological presumptions of the message directed to the Church by Pope Francis.

### INTRODUCTION

As can be easily noticed, Pope Francis's documents provide no systematic ecclesiological discourse, yet undoubtedly, his entire teaching is founded on a very deep understanding of the Church<sup>1</sup>. Thus, the aim of this article is to present its basic theological presumptions. In other words, it seeks to find a hermeneutic key – or keys – which will allow us to better understand the ecclesiological presumptions of the message directed to the Church by Pope Francis in his documents. For that reason, the article raises a number of issues which step beyond traditional ecclesiological discourse, while some classical elements of that discourse are omitted. It can be stated, though, at the very outset, that an analysis of the theological foundations of Pope Francis's theology leads us to the conclusion expressed in the title of this article: Pope Francis's ecclesiology is radical. The authors hope that the analyses of his ecclesiology presented in the article will demonstrate the nature of that radicalism.

\* Anna Woźnica – associate professor at the University of Silesia in Katowice; e-mail: anna.woznica@us.edu.pl; ORCID: 0000-0002-0561-9588.

\*\* Jan Słomka – full professor at the University of Silesia in Katowice; e-mail: jan.slomka@us.edu.pl; ORCID: 0000-0002-1404-5109.

<sup>1</sup> See also: G. Mannion, *Francis's Ecclesiological Revolution. A new Way of Being Church, a New Way of Being Pope*, in: *Pope Francis and the Future of Catholicism: Evangelii Gaudium and the Papal Agenda*, ed. G. Mannion, Cambridge 2017, p. 93.

The whole theology of Pope Francis is founded on the Tradition of the Church, which is demonstrated by his numerous references to the documents of the Magisterium.<sup>2</sup> There is an abundance of references to synodal documents. They lend themselves as a major subject for research, as they help to better understand the ecclesial nature of Francis's theology. However, we do not intend to analyse them in this article.<sup>3</sup> Instead, we will focus on the internal logic of that theology. As *Evangelii Gaudium* is considered to be a programme document<sup>4</sup>, we will base our analyses almost entirely on its text. The essence of Francis's ecclesiology is probably best expressed in the sentence opening para. 24 of *Evangelii Gaudium*: "The Church which «goes forth» is a community of missionary disciples who take the first step, who are involved and supportive, who bear fruit and rejoice."<sup>5</sup> Therefore, this article will occasionally refer to some selected words from the above quoted sentence.

## A LOOK OF FAITH, FROM WITHIN THE CHURCH

The Church is a community of Jesus's disciples, so what binds the Church together is faith in Jesus, and thus faith in the God of Jesus Christ. Therefore, any reflection on the Church will always mean thinking within faith. It is not a look from the outside, but from within the Church. It is a look of faith.<sup>6</sup> The pope's own experience, even though it is not often referred to directly as his personal witness, plays a fundamental role in that ecclesiology.

Francis's ecclesiology is thus a theology in the strictest sense, i.e. a reflection built on the foundation of faith. Faith is subject to critical reflection, however,

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<sup>2</sup> More about contention (or disconnection) between Francis and the earlier teachings of the Church's Magisterium see for example: M. Faggioli, *Evangelii Gaudium as an Act of Reception of Vatican II*, in: *Pope Francis and the Future of Catholicism...*, pp. 38–54; G. Mannion, *Francis's Ecclesiological Revolution...*, pp. 94–99, 106–108.

<sup>3</sup> Such an analysis is not simple. It would definitely be insufficient, or even highly confusing, to draw conclusions only on the basis of the number of quotes. St Thomas Aquinas, for example, is quoted more frequently in EG than St Augustine, yet we claim that Francis's theology is far more Augustinian than Thomistic. It would, however, take another study to uphold or reject such a claim.

<sup>4</sup> See *Pope Francis and the Future of Catholicism...* Especially: G. Mannion, *Pope Francis's Agenda for the Church – Evangelii Gaudium as Papal Manifesto: Introduction*, in: *Pope Francis and the Future of Catholicism...*, pp. 9–12.

<sup>5</sup> Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013, 24 November), 24, [http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html) [20.04.2021; hereafter cited as EG].

<sup>6</sup> EG repeatedly refers to a look of faith, e.g. 50, 68, 71.

the reflection itself is not lead from outside, from a place external to faith, which would presumably be objective and impartial, and, because of its “objectivity”, could be regarded as a privileged point of view or criticism. The above might suggest that Francis’s ecclesiology shuts itself within faith and is thus protected from rational criticism. It is a legitimate allegation, and it needs to be dealt with.

In the first place, one has to reject a simplified perception of faith which apprehends faith from the perspective of knowledge as rational cognition, thus subject to rational criticism. Contrary to such cognition, faith would mean adopting the truths which cannot be reviewed and verified on the basis of rational or empirical criteria. Faith would thus constitute a specific extension of knowledge with a parallel structure. Such perception of faith unavoidably puts it in the position of “inferior knowledge.”

EG adopts a totally different understanding of faith, where a thirst awaken in the human heart is the point of departure. Faith is described as a way of living in a relationship with God, which remains to be the desire of God and which gives rise to a relationship with other people and the will to give oneself.<sup>7</sup> Thus, faith exists in man on a totally different level than knowledge: it is much more deeply rooted in the human heart. There is no direct relationship between faith and knowledge. Rational knowledge serves faith. Also theology, as far as it is knowledge, is meant to serve faith. The contribution of theology, including the theology open to modern sciences, lies in rational criticism which guards faith against the illusion of subjectivism and immanentism (EG 133, 242). However, what Francis continually recalls as the panacea against immanentism, or faith that is shut upon itself and impervious to criticism, is the test of the love of neighbour, or more precisely, the sensitivity to the wrong done to another man, the neighbour. In that context, he closely links faith to tenderness (EG 88). The belief that every person is created and loved by God provides the basis for an attitude of “going out”, or stepping beyond the bounds of the familiar, towards other people. Thus, it becomes the most significant criterion, a critical tool, which precludes closing oneself within the system, leaving others outside: its call to go out, to see man in their unique and irreducible humanity, thwarts any attempt at such closure. The question whether a given theological idea serves the love of neighbour becomes the most significant benchmark for a critical assessment. Such criticism functions

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<sup>7</sup> Francis extensively presented this understanding of faith in his first encyclical, *Lumen Fidei*. Abraham, our father in faith, is a model for this faith (LF 8–11). Abraham recognized the voice of God calling him to leave because he had heard the promise of fatherhood in it. He recognized God’s voice by the desire of the heart and not by the discernment of reason (see Francis, *Lumen Fidei*, 2013, 29 June), 11, [http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20130629\\_enciclica-lumen-fidei.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20130629_enciclica-lumen-fidei.html) [20.04.2021].

in a completely different way than the criticism offered by the “objective” rational mind, but it is no less demanding.

It is worth noting that the way of thinking where objectivism or scientific rationality are not considered to be the highest authority, while what is really important about man and his humanity should be regarded outside their framework, is already well grounded in the twentieth century European philosophy. Husserl came to similar conclusions towards the end of his life, which he described in “The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology.”<sup>8</sup> It is certainly Levinas’s way of thinking about man, also Derrida and other post-modernists may be mentioned in this context. The link of Francis’s theology with (post)modern philosophy will be discussed in more detail in the part devoted to the moment of “going forth.”

## THEOLOGY OF GRACE, DIALOGICAL ECCLESIOLOGY

The perspective of faith described above is closely linked to the question of the primacy of grace. In pope’s writings, everything related to the Church, her life and evangelising mission, is described within the theology of grace. It is a theology of an absolute primacy of grace: grace comes first, it is an act of God towards man, but also towards the world and in the world. Grace works in a mysterious way, it precedes any human effort, including the proclamation of the Word (EG 112). It surpasses human capability to comprehend. One of the few modern theologians quoted in EG is Henri de Lubac (EG 93). Francis is clearly his disciple as far as the question of grace is concerned. It can be stated that, even though he does not do it explicitly, Francis rejects the neo-scholastic approach to the relation between nature and grace, the approach expressed in the phrase “grace builds on nature.” Francis’s theology of grace can be summarised with the words suggesting the opposite: “nature builds on grace.”<sup>9</sup> Thus, any effort of the Church takes place

<sup>8</sup> E. Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*, Evaston 1970.

<sup>9</sup> In other words, proclaiming the message of grace (also in the case of the first announcement – the kerygma), the Church does not come across a void, a place “without God”, but wherever she is sent, she discovers the prior work of grace. The pope describes it as follows: “grace supposes culture, and God’s gift becomes flesh in the culture of those who receive it”. We can see that it involves a double movement. On the one hand, a fruitful process takes place when the Gospel takes root in a given place, for “whenever a community receives the message of salvation, the Holy Spirit enriches its culture with the transforming power of the Gospel”. On the other hand, *the Church herself undergoes a process of reception that enriches her with the fruits of what the Spirit has already mysteriously sown in that culture* [emphasis added]. Francis, *Querida Amazonia* (2020, 2 February), 68, [http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20200202\\_querida-amazonia.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20200202_querida-amazonia.html) [20,04.2021; hereafter cited as QA].

within grace, the Church is an instrument of grace, or “the sacrament of salvation”, which does not mean, however, that grace is subordinated to the authority of the Church. Francis repeatedly insists that we should never endeavour to control God’s grace.<sup>10</sup> Such theology of the absolute primacy and freedom of God’s grace, or God’s acting in the world, which always comes first, has a strong impact on the perception of individual ecclesiological questions.

One of the implications of the above described theology of grace is a deep understanding of dialogue as a genuine conversation, exchange, where each of the engaged parties has something to offer, and at the same time each is ready to acknowledge that the other party has something I lack, which can be a gift for me. Francis’s ecclesiology can thus be defined as dialogical. It builds on the recognition of a dialogical structure of the Revelation.<sup>11</sup> The obligation of the Church, therefore, is to enter into a dialogue with people and communities: it is an obligation stemming from her very nature and the understanding of her mission. That motif is often found in EG. Francis emphasises that “Dialogue is much more than the communication of a truth. It arises from the enjoyment of speaking and it enriches those who express their love for one another through the medium of words. This is an enrichment which does not consist in objects but in persons who share themselves in dialogue.” (EG 142). The above results, *inter alia*, in the way evangelization is understood. It means proclaiming the truth, however, dialogue is not a mere addition to the act of proclaiming, but the only genuine way of spreading the message. The proclamation implies dialogue, i.e. a willingness to recognize and receive the inner gift carried by every person we proclaim the Gospel to. The logic of dialogical theology also pertains to the Church within. It

<sup>10</sup> That call appears five times in EG: 47, 94, 112, 124, 280. Most importantly in 112: “The Church is sent by Jesus Christ as the sacrament of the salvation offered by God. Through her evangelizing activity, she cooperates as an instrument of that divine grace which works unceasingly and inscrutably. [...] This principle of the *primacy of grace* [emphasis added] must be a beacon which constantly illuminates our reflections on evangelization.” The English translation seems rather unfortunate as it does not sufficiently reflect the impossibility to control grace. However, in the original text, i.e. Spanish, there is a direct reference to the lack of such possibility („Ella, a través de sus acciones evangelizadoras, colabora como instrumento de la gracia divina que actúa incesantemente más allá de toda posible supervisión”). Other translations, i.a. Polish („Przez swoją działalność ewangelizacyjną współpracuje on jako narzędzie Bożej łaski, działającej nieustannie ponad wszelką możliwą kontrolą”), German („Durch ihr evangelisierendes Tun arbeitet sie mit als Werkzeug der göttlichen Gnade, die unaufhörlich und jenseits jeder möglichen Kontrolle wirkt”) and Italian („Essa, mediante la sua azione evangelizzatrice, collabora come strumento della grazia divina che opera incessantemente al di là di ogni possibile supervisione”) faithfully follow the Spanish text. It refers to all the aforementioned paragraphs of EG (47, 94, 112, 124, 280).

<sup>11</sup> On the dialogical structure of the Revelation, see, i.a., EG 137. Such an approach to the Revelation is similar to that of Paul Tillich. See P. Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, Chicago–London 1973, p. 111.

imposes a necessity to create dialogical structures and relations in the Church. This theme will be discussed later, in the part devoted to the ecclesial structures.

To acknowledge the fundamental role of dialogue does not mean to close one's eyes to the difficulties related to the actual dialogue, including the existence of conflicts, some of which are deep and persistent. Conflicts exist within the Church, in the relations of the Church with the world, and in the world itself. The pope writes: "Conflicts cannot be ignored or concealed" (EG 226). Yet, the whole passage entitled "Unity prevails over conflict" (EG 226–230) is devoted to an instruction that we need to solve conflicts in the spirit of dialogue, "build communion amid disagreement" (EG 228). The patience that is necessary to work for a "reconciled diversity" can be found in Christ, who "has made all things one in himself: heaven and earth, God and man, time and eternity, flesh and spirit, person and society" (EG 229). There is no doubt that such deep understanding of the dialogical nature of Revelation, the proclamation of the Word and ecclesiology owes much to the twentieth century philosophy of dialogue.

## THE CHURCH WHICH GOES FORTH. AN EXISTENTIALIST PERSPECTIVE

"Going forth" is a passing moment which is immediately over. In Francis's reflection, however, that moment means much more. It is a starting point from which he develops his thought. It has both spiritual and theological meaning.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, also in his ecclesiology, the pope starts from "here and now", i.e. from our actual experience of the Church where we belong and live our faith. For Francis, "here and now" is the primary *locus theologicus*.<sup>13</sup> It has its inner dynamics of the beginning, of embarking on a journey. It is not a static point, but living time.

A privileged position of "here and now" points to the existential philosophy as a significant intellectual basis, or a kind of "ancilla theologiae." There is, indeed, some ground for such a statement. Francis emphasizes the primacy of realities over ideas (EG 231), and he perceives reality taking our earthly reality as a starting point: seen in the perspective of faith, yet earthly. Our life here on earth needs

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<sup>12</sup> See most importantly EG 2.

<sup>13</sup> The notion of *locus theologicus* was brought to catholic theology by Melchior Cano, who also suggested a classification of *loci theologici*. As the first and most important category of constitutive and fundamental places, he classified the Scriptures, the Tradition, the Catholic Church, Ecumenical Councils and the Church of Rome. We claim that Francis considers "here and now" as equivalent to that category of *loci*. M. Cano, *De locis theologicis*, ed. J. Belda Plans, Madrid 2006.

the Gospel because it needs salvation. The perception of salvation which begins with and covers the earthly life is undoubtedly very strong in Francis's theology.<sup>14</sup>

Thus, the perspective initiated by Heidegger, i.e. the existentialist recognition of mortal man living on earth as the point of departure and the centre of any philosophical reflection, seems to correspond with the viewpoint presented by pope Francis. However, unlike existentialist philosophy which believes in the primacy of individual freedom as the foundation of humanity, regarding any limitation of that freedom as an assault against the humanity of man, Francis gives priority to the love of neighbour over autonomy, he thus perceives freedom as ancillary to love (EG 78, 89). On the other hand, Francis considers the commandment of the love of neighbour as the basis for any comprehension of man, i.e. anthropology, rather than a moral requirement which is secondary to ontology, thus also to anthropology.<sup>15</sup> His repeatedly expressed objection against prioritizing autonomy as the highest value can be quoted as evidence. Francis warns that such exaltation of freedom-autonomy inevitably leads to immanentism, it closes man to God (EG 89).

Such a point of departure for Francis's ecclesiology, but also for his entire theology, its existentialist perspective with the central position of man living on earth, in the world and in time, demonstrates that Francis has abandoned the classical framework of scholastic philosophy and metaphysics related to it. In other words, Francis has employed (post)modern philosophy to serve theology, abandoning Aristotelian metaphysics. The latter no longer defines the theological understanding of man, God, the world, and thus also the Church. That approach, however, does not mean abandoning St. Thomas Aquinas, whose texts Francis often refers to.

The above discussed transition may also be described in the following way: For Francis, it is the approach of *Gaudium et Spes*, showing the Church in the world, vis-à-vis the world, the Church "ad extra", that is of primary importance, while the approach of *Lumen Gentium*, or, to put it in a simplified way, showing the Church "ad intra", provides a commentary.

<sup>14</sup> This approach seems to betray an influence of liberation theology, which emphasises the earthly dimension of salvation. Cf. W. Morris, *No Salvation without the Church*, "Practical Theology" 7 (2014) 4, pp. 300–301, <https://doi.org/10.1179/1756073X14Z.00000000048>. Juan Carlos Scannone and Rafael Luciani recognizes numerous other connections between Francis's teaching and the "theology of the people" ("teología del pueblo"), which is a strand of liberation theology. J.C. Scannone, *Pope Francis and the Theology of the People*, "Theological Studies" 77 (2016) 1, pp. 118–135; R. Luciani, *Pope Francis and the Theology of the People*, trans. P. Berryman, New York 2017. About the Pope's understanding of the church as shaped by the theology of liberation see: G. Mannion, *Francis's Ecclesiological Revolution...*, pp. 109–117.

<sup>15</sup> We claim that Francis does not sympathise with the scholastic principle *bonum sequitur esse*, he acknowledges, on the other hand, that love and good form the foundation of being. Such radical prioritisation of love over ontology is close to the fundamental assumption in the philosophy of E. Levinas's.



## COMMUNITY OF MISSIONARY DISCIPLES. TWO POINTS OF REFERENCE

Thus, the Church is always considered by Francis against two points of reference: its relation to God and its relation to the world.<sup>16</sup> In EG, not only a reflection on the Church as such is absent: there is also virtually no reflection on the mystery of the Church in relation to God alone. As a matter of fact, the mystery of the Church is totally incomprehensible without the context of her evangelizing mission. One can thus claim that EG does not focus on just one aspect of the work of the Church, namely her evangelizing mission, but it presents the deepest identity of the Church, which is being a witness and bearer of Good News to the world. Such an approach towards the Church, however, is no novelty in ecclesial teaching, though it has to be admitted that the emphasis placed by Francis is, indeed, very strong. In a way similar to EG, the Church is presented not only in *Gaudium et Spes*, but also in *Lumen Gentium*. Although, as has already been mentioned, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of the Second Vatican Council seems to focus on the description of the Church herself (*ad intra*), its inner logic to a certain extent approaches that of EG, which is most clearly pronounced in the opening part of the Constitution. Para 1 of the document reads: “the Church is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race.” Here also the Church is presented in her twofold relation – to God (in Christ) and to the whole human family – and defined as an instrument for building communion with God and between people. *Lumen gentium* regards the Church as the Church in the making, an unfinished process which consists in a constant outreach towards all people in order to bring them into the communion with God and others, that is to salvation. That is the goal which defines, and, according to Francis, constantly modifies the identity of the Church.<sup>17</sup>

The relation of the Church to God in EG is at least as fundamental as its relation to the world: the Church is a community of Jesus’s disciples, and being His disciple implies faith in the God of Jesus Christ. At the same time, we as the Church are a missionary community – we are sent into the world. We are also inhabitants of this world: we live as people among other people, we are part of

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<sup>16</sup> The Church’s relation to the world in EG is also thoroughly commented by Judith Gruber in her article: J. Gruber, „*The Lord, your God, is in your Midst* (EG 4): *Evangelii Gaudium*” – *Francis’s Call for a Kenotic Theology*, in: *Pope Francis and the Future of Catholicism...*, pp. 55–74.

<sup>17</sup> “As she perseveres in the preaching of the kerygma, the Church also needs to grow in the Amazon region. In doing so, she constantly *reshapes her identity* through listening and dialogue with the people, the realities and the history of the lands in which she finds herself” [emphasis added]. QA, 66.

the community which encompasses all human beings inhabiting the world, we also belong to numerous social groups, larger or smaller. It is then vital to show the theological foundations on which Francis builds his perception of the relation between the Church and the world.

The relation of the Church to the world consists in community in humanity and the mission to proclaim the Word. The mission to proclaim the Word is founded on the community in humanity, while faith expressed in the Creed provides the most valid grounds for the recognition and understanding of that community. This is the spirit in which the pope interprets the profession of faith in God: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.<sup>18</sup> Faith in God means believing in God who loves every human being, and out of that love He is at work in the world, penetrating every human situation. The work of God goes beyond any limits of our capacity to understand. The perception of the world, of individual human communities and all forms of social life, of every human being, is a perception of faith. All other perspectives, be it sociological, psychological or cultural, are of secondary importance, and they are never considered as the highest critical authority to which the perspective of faith should be subordinated.

Similarly, our community in humanity, i.e. participation in social groups and human actions, is strengthened rather than broken by faith. Our affiliation to the Church does not take us out of human community and the multiple relationships and affiliations of which that community is made. The chosenness of the Church means a call on a mission, it is not chosenness that would remove her members from human community and allow the rejection of others.<sup>19</sup>

Such understanding of the world and the place of the Church in the world provides theological foundations for the call to become involved. Francis calls upon the Church, her members and Church communities to get involved (i.a. EG 24, 235).

It is in this spirit that one can understand the words “I do not want a Church concerned with being at the centre” (EG 49). In the light of these words, getting

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<sup>18</sup> EG 178: “To believe in a Father who loves all men and women with an infinite love means realizing that “he thereby confers upon them an infinite dignity”. To believe that the Son of God assumed our human flesh means that each human person has been taken up into the very heart of God. To believe that Jesus shed his blood for us removes any doubt about the boundless love which ennoble each human being. Our redemption has a social dimension because “God, in Christ, redeems not only the individual person, but also the social relations existing between men”. To believe that the Holy Spirit is at work in everyone means realizing that he seeks to penetrate every human situation and all social bonds: “The Holy Spirit can be said to possess an infinite creativity, proper to the divine mind, which knows how to loosen the knots of human affairs, even the most complex and inscrutable.”

<sup>19</sup> See EG 278. It is worth noting, however, that Francis almost never uses the word “chosenness.” He prefers to speak about a vocation.

involved in initiatives emerging outside the Church does not mean deviating from her mission. It is not a compromise vis-à-vis the world.

Such an outlook on the world also impacts the perception of cultures and religions. Francis recognizes the work of God in them, and on that basis he builds a comprehensive reflection on the relation of the Church to cultures and religions. Its analysis, however, goes beyond the scope of this article.

## PROCLAMATION OF THE WORD

Only after having discussed the way Francis perceives the community in humanity, may we endeavour to present the foundations of his theology of the proclamation of the Word. Proclaiming the Word, evangelizing, is not a mere addition to the life of the Church, therefore it does not fall under the scope of pastoral theology understood as secondary to ecclesiology: it is an ecclesiological theme par excellence. Proclamation of the Word is the *raison d'être* of the Church, her vital identity. It is through proclaiming the Word that the Church recognises who she is. The proclamation always means listening to the Word at the same time. It is in the proclamation that a twofold relation takes place: we are the disciples who are called to conversion and, proclaiming the Word, we listen to God, who reveals Himself in the faces of people to whom we proclaim it. Revealing Himself, God summons us to conversion. Thus, the proclamation of the Word is at the same time a dialogue with those we proclaim the Word to and with God, who speaks to us through them. Francis strongly emphasises that there can be no proclamation of the Word without listening and conversion (EG 25–26).

Francis points to the kerygma as the essence of the proclamation of the Word. The kerygma, or the first announcement of Good News, may be regarded as an initial stage followed by further deepened formation of catechesis, Francis, however, strongly objects to such perception. He devotes the whole para 164 of *Evangelii Gaudium* to the presentation of his teaching on the subject. The kerygma is supposed to be „the centre of all evangelizing activity and all efforts at Church renewal” (EG 164). Francis stresses the completeness and wholeness of the kerygma, stating that the kerygma is trinitarian. Although the proclamation of the Word, catechesis, formation have their consecutive stages, they should never depart from the inner dynamics present in the first announcement, i.e. the kerygma. Francis writes: „On the lips of the catechist the first proclamation must ring out over and over: «Jesus Christ loves you; he gave his life to save you; and now he is living at your side every day to enlighten, strengthen and free you»” (EG 164). Such a privileged position of the kerygma has to be linked to the theology of the “begin-

ning”. The first proclamation of the Gospel encompasses everything: “This first proclamation is called «first» not because it exists at the beginning and can then be forgotten or replaced by other more important things. It is first in a qualitative sense because it is the principal proclamation” (EG 164).<sup>20</sup>

Let us once again emphasize the ecclesiological dimension of the theology of kerygma presented above: it is closely linked to the idea of the beginning, i.e. the Church which goes forth. The proclamation of the kerygma also involves the renewal of the Church herself, it is her life, her “Exodus”. It is the moment when the Church discovers her identity. Therefore, even though Francis does not explicitly refer to it, we may assume that it is also a significant hermeneutic key for the reading of the texts of the Magisterium.

## ECCLESIAL STRUCTURES. TAKING THE FIRST STEP

We tackle the issue of ecclesial structures in the final part of the article, as the way Francis perceives them is related to all the above discussed themes. As has already been mentioned, the call to conversion and the readiness to convert which accompany every act of proclamation of the Word have not only an individual, but also an ecclesial dimension. Therefore, they also pertain to the Church structures. That's probably what Francis means by his phrase “pastoral conversion” (EG 25, 27, 32).<sup>21</sup> The call to conversion involves a call to look at ecclesial structures in a new way. Francis himself looks at them in this way, and he devotes a large section to the Church structures in *Evangelii Gaudium*. He definitely does not perceive them as a value per se, as a vehicle of the Church's identity. On the contrary, he warns against the spiritual danger of excessive reliance on the structures and of the expectation that they will guarantee the “soundness of doctrine or discipline” (EG 94). He refers to such an attitude of seeking security in the structures as spiritual worldliness, and he condemns it as a most significant threat. He presents a comprehensive analysis of the subject in *Gaudete et Exultate*, pointing to the Pelagian mentality as one of the two greatest spiritual dangers.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> See also, Francis, *Christus Vivit* (2019, 25 March), 213–214, [http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20190325\\_christus-vivit.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20190325_christus-vivit.html) [20.04.2021].

<sup>21</sup> More about pastoral conversation: S. Mazzolini, “An ecclesial renewal which cannot be deferred (EG 27–33),” in: *Pope Francis and the Future of Catholicism...*, pp. 80–83; W. Kasper, *Pope Francis' Revolution of Tenderness and Love*, trans. W. Madges, New York–Mahwah 2005, pp. 37–38.

<sup>22</sup> Francis, *Gaudete et Exultate* (2018, 19 March), [http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20180319\\_gaudete-et-exultate.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20180319_gaudete-et-exultate.html) [20.04.2021], 49–59.

Francis sees little value in tradition, especially in relation to the traditional structure of the Church, that gives rise to a demand to keep what has lasted for a long time just because it has lasted for a long time.<sup>23</sup> The protection of traditional structures granted on the basis of such a demand implies that the very fact of their persistence proves their significance for the Church. Francis writes, on the other hand: “good structures are only helpful when there is a life constantly driving, sustaining and assessing them. Without new life and an authentic evangelical spirit, without the Church’s «fidelity to her own calling», any new structure will soon prove ineffective” (EG 26). Thus, every structure, even if firmly rooted in the theological and sacramental nature of the Church, is subject to assessment in terms of its usefulness for evangelization<sup>24</sup>, and that also refers to „the papacy and the central structures of the universal Church” (EG 32).

Such an outlook on ecclesial structures undoubtedly stems from the theology of grace. Grace is first and foremost at work in human hearts rather than the structures. It can work in the structures insofar as the people the structures are made of follow its inspiration. If they refuse to follow grace and start to rely on the structures as a safety net, an autonomous vehicle of grace, then the structures immediately begin to hinder the work of grace and the proclamation of the Word. Such a reliance on the structures is a specific form of Pelagianism, which Francis exhaustively describes in *Gaudete et Exultate*.

The hierarchical character of the Church is also perceived by Francis as totally subordinated to the purpose of serving the Body of Christ (EG 104) and the logic of evangelization. He writes: „The Church, as the agent of evangelization,

<sup>23</sup> It is worth noticing that the argument of the persistence of tradition is commonly raised in ecclesial discourse. It is also employed in magisterial documents. As the most notable example, one can quote the teaching on the possibility to ordain exclusively men to the priesthood. Both *Inter Insigniores* and *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* refer almost solely to the unbroken tradition of ordaining only men, and they seem not to provide arguments of theological, or more precisely, anthropological nature. (Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Inter Insigniores* (1976, 15 October), chapter 1: “The Church’s Constant Tradition”, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_19761015\\_inter-insigniores\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19761015_inter-insigniores_en.html); John Paul II, *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* (1994, 22 May), [http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_letters/1994/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_apl\\_19940522\\_ordinatio-sacerdotalis.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1994/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_19940522_ordinatio-sacerdotalis.html) [20.04.2021]). Thus, the reason for maintaining this tradition is not apparent. It certainly does not mean that such a tradition should be immediately abandoned, even though it has no sufficient support in theological argumentation since, as we read in *Donum Veritatis*: „Magisterial teaching, by virtue of divine assistance, has a validity beyond its argumentation” (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Donum Veritatis* (1990, 24 May), 34, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_19900524\\_theologian-vocation\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19900524_theologian-vocation_en.html) [20.04.2021]).

<sup>24</sup> See also: G. Mannion, *Francis’s Ecclesiological Revolution...*, p. 99.

is more than an organic and hierarchical institution” (EG 111). One may add that the Church as the subject of evangelization is a community which is held together by a multitude of interpersonal bonds. Francis sees interpersonal relationships as a privileged place where grace is at work (EG 67, 178). Ecclesial community should all the more be a community founded on deep interpersonal bonds (EG 229). Structures must not attempt to replace them.

At the same time, despite his critical view of the significance of structures per se, Francis does not advocate their dismantling. He knows perfectly well that doing away with structures only causes harm and leads to the emergence of new structures which are even worse. A reform of the structures will only bring fruit if it is itself the fruit of “pastoral conversion”. Still, in *Evangelii Gaudium*, Francis calls for readiness to reform the structures when they begin to hamper the missionary dynamism of the Church (EG 26). That readiness involves vigilance and constant examination of the Church structures against the previously quoted criterion of their relevance for the mission of the Church.

Francis's view of the structures is closely linked to his call to take the first step. At first glance, the call seems to be in total contradiction to the traditional call for obedience to the Church. However, if such a call is directed to the Church by the pope, it has to be interpreted with an assumption that it is by no means an encouragement to break the ecclesial obedience and act as if there were no tradition and everything started with us. The most relevant text interpreting that call is provided in the subchapter entitled “The whole is greater than the part” (EG 234-237). It is thus a call to boldly take the initiative, to be courageous, but also an instruction that such an initiative must be subject to discernment. The aforementioned subchapter provides the main criteria for such discernment.

## SUMMA

In the title and the introduction we present an opinion that pope Francis's ecclesiology is radical. We hope that the analysis provided above enables a more precise understanding of that claim.

Pope Francis's ecclesiology is radical in the primary sense of the word. The Latin word *radix* means the root, “radical”, therefore, means “going back to the roots”. However, Francis is not interested in turning back the time and returning to the early Church as if the twenty centuries of her history in all its dimensions, including the doctrine, has never happened. The history of the Church is also, or perhaps above all, the Tradition, i.e. the experience of the twenty centuries of listening to the Word and working of the Spirit collected in the documents of

the Magisterium. The pope refers to it as follows: “the authentic Tradition of the Church, which is not a static deposit or a museum piece, but the root of a constantly growing tree. This millennial Tradition bears witness to God’s work in the midst of his people and “is called to keep the flame alive rather than to guard its ashes.”<sup>25</sup>

The radicalism of pope Francis’s ecclesiology consists in going to the depth, to the very sources of the Gospel rather than going back in time and trying and reconstruct the beginnings<sup>26</sup>. It implies a fresh reading of the Gospel and of what the Spirit says to the churches today. That reading indispensably needs the presence of history, Tradition and Magisterium. They are regarded as enrichment and help rather than intermediaries between us and the Word. They are subordinated to the Word and our reading of the Word. Today we hear His voice, God’s Spirit is at work today. That is probably the essence of the radicalism of Francis’s ecclesiology. Every element of history and the Tradition, including every ecclesial structure, which emerged in history and was interpreted as part of the Tradition, is here relativized, subjected to the test of love and the question to what extent it serves the evangelizing mission of the Church.

For that reason, we can consider Francis’s theology as radical, but by no means revolutionary. A revolution means rejecting the old order for the sake of something new, and the vision of a new order gives the revolution its inner dynamism and power, since the old order has to be demolished in order for the new one to emerge. Francis’s ecclesiology is rooted in the Tradition and traditions. It does not draw a vision of an ideal Church which should now be implemented. It is a call to go forth, and the road leads to the unknown. The actual presence of the Church, including ecclesial structures, provides a point of departure, which is, however, regarded within the logic of transformation, of the Gospel parable of the leaven, rather than the revolutionary logic of demolition.

It is also an ecclesiology that has eventually been freed from the perspective of *christianitas*, which considers those outside the Church as an “object” of evangelization. It is an ecclesiology which is thoroughly dialogical, i.e. recognizes that the world and every man are loved by God and bestowed with grace, so God also speaks to the Church by every man. The Church is a servant, not a dispenser of the grace of God. She is a proclaimer and, at the same time, a listener of the Word. Such a change of perspective means, indeed, a new perception of the place of the Church in the world and the relation of the Church to the whole humanity, including a new openness to the multicultural and multireligious reality of humankind.

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<sup>25</sup> QA 66.

<sup>26</sup> See W. Kasper, *Pope Francis’ Revolution...*, p. 23, 27–28.

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**Keywords:** Ecclesiology, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Magisterium, Pope Francis

## RADYKALIZM EKLEZJOLOGII PAPIEŻA FRANCISZKA

### Streszczenie

Jak można łatwo zauważyć, dokumenty papieża Franciszka nie dostarczają żadnej systematycznej myśli eklezjologicznej, niewątpliwie jednak jego całe nauczanie jest ufundowane na bardzo głębokiej refleksji dotyczącej Kościoła. Celem niniejszego artykułu jest przedstawienie jej podstawowych założeń teologicznych. Inaczej mówiąc, chodzi w nim o znalezienie klucza lub kluczy hermeneutycznych, które pozwolą lepiej rozumieć eklezjologiczne założenia przesłania, jakie Franciszek kieruje do Kościoła w swoich dokumentach.

**Słowa kluczowe:** eklezjologia, *Evangelii gaudium*, magisterium, papież Franciszek