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Sacramento-logic of Pope Francis

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Sakramento-logika papieża Franciszka

STRESZCZENIE

W nauczaniu papieża Franciszka trudno doszukać się zwartej i całościowej refleksji na temat sakramentów. Jednak lektura papieskich tekstów nie pozostawia wątpliwości, że myśl sakramentalna jest w nich mocno obecna. Choć jest to często obecność ukryta, można uznać, że myślenie sakramentalne przenika i prowadzi refleksję papieża w bardzo różnych obszarach, będąc jakby zwornikiem podstawowych prawd chrześcijaństwa. Z tego powodu lepiej jest mówić o pewnej logice sakramentalnej, która prowadzi papieskie nauczanie, niż o sakramentologii, która dotyczy bezpośrednio refleksji o sakramentach Kościoła. Niniejszy tekst za cel stawia sobie przedstawienie tej logiki sakramentalnej obecnej w nauczaniu papieża Franciszka oraz ukazanie sposobu, w jaki rozumie on najgłębszą istotę sakramentu, a także jak łączy to rozumienie z całością doktryny.

Słowa kluczowe: Franciszek, sakramenty, sakramentalność, magisterium, Kościół

* * *

In his teaching, Pope Francis always considers the contemporary context, taking the present moment in the life of the Church and the world as a starting point. That is why his texts have a specific architecture: his teaching does not provide a systematic discourse in which he might try to present the whole doctrine related to a given theme in a fully balanced way. Rather, the Pope begins with a diagnosis of the present moment, focusing on what, according to his discernment (cf. EG 50), should be remembered, emphasised or expanded at a given time of the Church (cf. EG 38)¹.

The same interpretation can be applied to Francis's aspectual treatment of the questions related to the sacraments: he only refers to them to a degree

¹ Walter Kasper, *Pope Francis' Revolution* (New York–Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2005), 10-11. The fact that the Pope does not tackle certain doctrinal issues in his text should by no means be interpreted as a sign of their discreditation or rejection, but rather the result of the above mentioned logic of the texts. Moreover, Francis's text often contain traditional teaching expressed in a non-traditional way with no classical theological terminology (cf. EG 41), which is often difficult to grasp at a first reading.

which he considers valid at a given moment. Consequently, his teaching offers no coherent text devoted to the sacraments in general. Even though one can refer to the cycle of catecheses in which the Pope discusses each of the seven sacraments respectively², it does not offer a holistic approach, either.

When the Pope speaks about the sacramental activity of the Church, or the nature of the sacraments, he always does it in the context of other themes, as their continuation/extension. It may produce an impression that the sacraments are, in a way, a secondary thread of Francis's teaching³, yet a thorough analysis of his texts leaves no doubt that the Pope presents a remarkably deep sacramental reflection, which harmoniously combines with the entirety of the Church teaching. What is more, sacramental thinking pervades all his teaching, providing kind of a pillar for his thinking on Christianity.

This paper aims to present the sacramental logic of Pope Francis which underlies his entire teaching, and to show the way in which the Pope combines the sacramental doctrine with the Church teaching as a whole. We also attempt to search his texts for what he perceives as the deepest sense of the sacrament/sacraments. Thus, the text does not intend to focus on the sacramental activity of the Church *sensu stricto*, i.e. the ministry of the seven sacraments, or the nature of each of the sacraments. This paper is in fact not devoted to Francis's sacramentology understood as reflection referring exclusively to the seven sacraments of the Church.

1. "The world as a sacrament" (LS 9) – Sacraments at the Extension of Protology

For the Pope, the whole world is a sacrament. Francis's teaching abounds in references to the all-embracing presence of God and His work in all creation. Those motifs – especially in relation to the natural world – are particularly emphasised in his encyclical *Laudato si'* (further

² Catecheses given during the general audiences between January 8th and April 2nd 2014.

³ The Pope rarely refers to the sacraments in his major documents. The direct references can be listed as follows: 1. *Lumen fidei* para 40-44 on the sacraments in the context of the transmission of faith, para 31 on the sacraments as the extension of Incarnation; 2. *Laudato si'* para 9 on the sacramental nature of the whole creation; 3. *Evangelii gaudium* para 47 on the need for a broad access to the sacraments, para 104 on the impossibility of the ordination of women, para 112 on the Church as a sacrament, para 174 on the relation between the word and the sacrament, para 254 on a quasi-sacramental nature of non-Christian religious rituals; 4. *Amoris letitia* refers exclusively to the sacrament of marriage; 5. *Gaudete et exultate* offers virtually no reflection on the sacraments, which is peculiar as the text is devoted to holiness. One might thus expect that the text will provide a "catalogue" of means which help us reach holiness, with the sacraments on the top of the list (cf. LG 39-42); 6. *Querida Amazonia* para 81 on the natural perception of the sacraments among the peoples of Amazonia, para 87-88 on the nature of the sacrament of ordination, para 89 on the irreplaceability of the Eucharist, para 107 on the Catholic identity manifested i.a. in the sacraments; 7. *Christus vivit*: almost no reflection on the sacraments.

referred to as LS). In para 80, we read the following: „God is intimately present to each being (...) His divine presence, which ensures the subsistence and growth of each being, »continues the work of creation«”. God dwells in the world from its very beginning, from the moment of creation, or more precisely: from the moment of initiating the work of creation which is still being continued. The visible, material creation not only does reveal or manifest God, say something about God, offering a glimpse of His beauty, goodness and greatness; it is not only a “word” about Him, a message addressed to us, or a mirror reflecting God (cf. LS 12, 33, 221). It is not “information” sent by God about Himself. Creation is “a locus of His presence” (LS 88; cf. EG 215). On no account does it mean that the boundary between God and the world is blurred: neither God is the world, nor the world is God. There is no implication of any form of pantheism. God is in the world, but the world is not God; or in other words, the world is in God, but God is not the world (LS 78, 88). Francis stresses that the finite creation is not really divine, yet, there is an intimate connection between all that exists and God (LS 234).

Although God is a spirit, His presence in creation should not be perceived as ethereal, volatile⁴ or spiritual, as opposed to corporeal or material. God’s presence in the world in real, tangible, persistent, or even, one might say, corporeal. The claim that “the world is a sacrament” (LS 9) implies the following: God is present in the matter of this world, though He Himself is not the matter; He gives Himself through what is corporeal, while remaining non-corporeal; and His presence is permanent.

When we mention God’s presence in the world, it does not only refer to the natural world – the section of the world which came from His hand more directly and is less dominated by humans. One must never think that God is present in the unspoiled world of nature, while His presence in the world of human activity (culture) is far less obvious. There is no doubt – and it is repeatedly emphasized in Francis’s texts – that God is present in the realm of activities that are typically human: in the (material) products of culture and religion.

In para 71 of *Evangelii gaudium*, for example, the Pope stresses the presence of God in a city. Francis by no means idealizes the urban reality, where human poverty and sin intertwine with almost unlimited possibilities of personal development. God does not limit His presence to sterile spaces, untouched by sin. That truth finds a powerful expression in para 42 of *Gaudete et exultete* (further referred to as GE): „Nor can we claim to say where

⁴ The Pope believes that such thinking poses a real threat when he writes: “Our culture has lost its sense of God’s tangible presence and activity in our world. We think that **God is to be found in the beyond, on another level of reality**” (LG 17).

God is not, because God is mysteriously present in the life of every person, in a way that he himself chooses, and we cannot exclude this by our presumed certainties. Even when someone's life appears completely wrecked, even when we see it devastated by vices or addictions, God is present there". One may thus claim that that in no human life, in no patch of the world there exists a space that would be totally God-less. Still more, instead of looking away from sin, God works with even greater might in the midst of the darkness (EG 84; see also Rom 5:20).

Francis does not hesitate to acknowledge the work of God in other religions. What is more, he points that God is also present there in a (quasi) sacramental way, i.e. His presence is expressed in a material way, through certain ceremonies and rites in which He is accessible to non-Christians. Referring to non-Christian religions in *Evangelii gaudium* 254, he pronounces words that carry an enormous weight: „But due to **the sacramental dimension of sanctifying grace**, God's working in them tends to produce signs and rites, sacred expressions which in turn bring others to a communitarian experience of journeying towards God. While these lack the meaning and efficacy of the sacraments instituted by Christ, they can be channels which the Holy Spirit raises up in order to liberate non-Christians from atheistic immanentism or from purely individual religious experiences" (cf. QA 79, emphasis added).

The Pope thus states that every work of God manifests itself in the physical or the material, as grace is always *sacramental* by its nature. Various expressions of God's presence are united by the same logic of God's self-giving in a *sacramental*, i.e. *material* way. Such perception of sacramentality can be directly inferred from Francis's texts⁵.

Consequently, it can be stated that the whole world, the entire material reality of creation is a place where God is present. It makes no difference whether we understand the world as the work of God's hands, the world contaminated by sin, or the world which is creatively transformed by humans. God is accessible through the world and in the world, in its beauty and despite its sin.

2. "The face of God reflected in so many other faces" (GE 61) – Sacraments at Extension of Anthropology.

Francis's texts provide a basis for the statement that a human being is a sacrament of God in a number of different aspects, be it a human commu-

⁵ E.g. "The awakening of faith is linked to the dawning of a new **sacramental** sense in our lives as human beings and as Christians, in which **visible and material realities are seen to point beyond themselves to the mystery of the eternal**" (LF 40; emphasis added).

nity, or a human being encountered individually, as well as a human person “for him or herself”, as they find God within their hearts. Such thinking is based on the Pope’s anthropology, with which we have to begin in order to validate the above statement.

In the teaching concerning the human person, Pope Francis places his emphases in a specific way. Taking account of today’s context, i.e. the ecological crisis resulting from incorrect anthropology (LS 67), Francis emphasizes the connection between the human being and the world, or even more broadly, the interconnection of everything that exists⁶. In the same context, Francis’s texts abound in references to human bodiliness to stress human fragility, dependency, transience, and our interconnection with the matter of this world.

Placing such a strong emphasis on the link between humans and the rest of visible creation, which finds its expression in the materiality of the human being, the Pope does not overlook the key point of Christian anthropology, i.e. the idea of God’s image (GE 61, 98; EG 178, 274; *Amoris laetitia* 9-11, 29, 63, 71, 118 – further referred to as AL). It expresses human connection with God that is as strong as that with the material world. The human person, *imago Dei*, is thus a unique place of access to God, the place where He is present. It is a body transcending itself. As it carries in itself the image of God, it represents God to other created beings, and because of its bodiliness, it does it in a sacramental way. Therefore, by virtue of being created, *human being* becomes a *sacrament of God*.

There are, however, two ways of interpreting the above statement. Firstly, access to God is granted to us because of our very humanity; we can discover God in ourselves. Yet, though he does not seem to negate the tradition related to God’s presence in the human soul, the Pope does not emphasize that aspect, turning our attention in an utterly different direction – it is another human being, a community, a relation with another human that reveals God’s presence to us. Writing about the image of God in the human person, Francis stresses the existence of God’s image in the community of human persons as a reflection of the trinitarian communion. Nonetheless, his texts also contain passages identifying an individual human being as *imago Dei*⁷.

Let us stress, however, that the Pope is far from recognizing the domination of a community over an individual, or the authority of another person over one’s own experience, as if the other was the only revelation

⁶ Like a chorus, LS repeats the claim that everything is interconnected, bound together. See e.g. LS 117, 138, 142, 220, 240.

⁷ The pope invokes the concept of God’s image present in every human being especially when he defends the value of each human person.

of God's presence and will, or as if God always spoke through the other. All passages where Francis emphasises the importance of the individual conscience and the need of individual discernment give a powerful evidence to that claim (e.g. AL 37). An intimate relation with God, though always within community⁸, and a search for answers in one's inner self, though not without respect for external (objective) truths and values (AL 34): this synthesis of God's presence in an individual and in a human community prevails in Francis's texts. Being a sacrament pertains to both a human person "for him or herself", meeting God within their hearts, and another person with whom a community is established.

It has to be acknowledged, however, that Francis places a particularly strong emphasis on the presence of God in another human being: the face of the other becomes the face of God: "In other words, amid the thicket of precepts and prescriptions, Jesus clears a way to seeing two faces, that of the Father and that of our brother. He does not give us two more formulas or two more commands. He gives us two faces, or better yet, one alone: the face of God reflected in so many other faces" (GE 61)⁹.

Moreover, Francis stresses that the presence referred to above is of a corporeal, material, and thus sacramental nature¹⁰ – God is present in the face of the neighbour, in his/her body. There He becomes visible and tangible. The other manifests God's presence and brings a blessing not only through a good word, a "communion of hearts" or understanding: God dwells in his/her body – a physical encounter with the body of the other can be a sacrament of God's presence¹¹.

3. „One Person of the Trinity entered into the created cosmos” (LS 99) – Sacraments at the extension of Christology

Francis's teaching suggests that a human being becomes a sacrament already by virtue of creation, as part of the visible world inhabited by God, while being created in God's image makes it even more distinctive. The human being reveals who God is, mediating His presence in a unique way, different from other visible beings, as the only *imago Dei*. The Pope, however, stresses that it is the Incarnation that gives the above mentioned sacramentality exceptional power and an entirely new quality. In the face of Christ, the two faces meet: that of God and that of man. The human being

⁸ Francis, Homily for April 17th, 2020, Vatican 2020, access 19 April, 2022, http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/cotidie/2020/documents/papa-francesco-cotidie_20200417_lafamiliarita-conil-signore.html.

⁹ Cf. CV 117, where Francis writes about the presence of the Father in the faces of His witnesses.

¹⁰ Cf. EG 254; Francis, *Homily*...

¹¹ That form of God's presence finds its culmination in the sexual unification of spouses.

becomes the sacrament of Christ. Francis encourages „learning to find Jesus in the faces of others, in their voices, in their pleas” (EG 91), as “our brothers and sisters are **the prolongation of the incarnation** for each of us” (EG 179; emphasis added).

In Francis’s teaching, one also finds threads suggesting that the incarnation of Logos was a ground-breaking moment not only for human beings. For if the human being is connected with the abundance of created beings as part of the material world, then the material world was also transformed when the Son assumed human nature. Francis captures it in the following passage: “From the beginning of the world, but particularly through the incarnation, the mystery of Christ is at work in a hidden manner in the natural world as a whole (LS 99)”. It can thus be stated that since the incarnation of the Son, the world has become “even more” a sacrament of God’s presence.

Although the incarnation of Logos already implies full unity with the human being, and consequently with the whole visible creation, the Pope emphasizes its further transformation as a result of the Resurrection of Christ. The Resurrection is a new phase of the deification of matter. The Pope claims that from that moment on, „the creatures of this world no longer appear to us under merely natural guise because the risen One is mysteriously holding them to himself and directing them towards fullness as their end. The very flowers of the field and the birds which his human eyes contemplated and admired are now imbued with his radiant presence” (LS 100)¹². The Incarnation and the Resurrection are thus crucial moments when the presence of God is strengthened in the whole creation, and particularly in (another) human being.

In Francis’s texts, one can also come across some direct statements which associate the incarnation of Logos and the sacraments of the Church. In *Lumen fidei*, para 31, he presents the subject most briefly: „By his taking flesh and coming among us, Jesus has touched us, and through the sacraments he continues to touch us even today”. Therefore, the sacraments cannot be defined as simply one of the many ways in which God can touch us. They cannot be placed on the same level as the way in which God dwells and acts in the natural world or another human being. The Pope does not renounce the claim that „the Sacraments are a privileged way in which nature is taken up by God” (LS 235). However, Francis’s teaching provide no basis for an explicit classification of various ways in which God inhabits the world.

¹² See also LS 22, QA 74.

4. "Touching Christ's suffering flesh in others" (GE 37) – The Sacraments and the Preferential Option for the Poor

A human being who bears God's image, and, through the incarnation, is fully received by God, becomes a unique channel of His grace. The Pope stresses, however, that Christ's presence is particularly intense in a certain category of human persons – the poor. The motif of Christ's closeness, or even unity with the smallest of this world is strongly present in Francis's teaching. To summarize that teaching, one may state that, according to the Pope's logic, the poor are a sacrament of Christ (God).

Assuming human nature, Logos became a concrete person with a specific identity, living in a specific space and time. Being poor was part of Jesus's identity (EG 186, 197). By virtue of being poor himself, Christ was very close to those who were poor and excluded, to the extent that he fully identified with them (EG 197, see Matt 25:35 ff). The category of the poor must not, however, be associated with purely material poverty, though it was the basic dimension of being poor in the case of Jesus. In *Evangelii gaudium*, para 209, Francis writes: "Jesus (...) **identifies especially with the little ones** (cf. Matt 25:40). This reminds us Christians that we are called to care for the vulnerable of the earth", and in the following paragraph: "It is essential to draw near to **new forms of poverty and vulnerability**, in which we are called to **recognize the suffering Christ**" (emphasis added).

The passages quoted above clearly show that poverty has a broader meaning than material deprivation. It is confirmed in the following paragraphs of *Evangelii gaudium*, where the Pope gives examples of the new forms of poverty. The common denominator for the poor can be defined as belonging to the smallest of this world, being "second quality" people. And it is precisely in them, in their suffering bodies, that we recognize "the face of Christ, whom we love so much, whom we adore in the Holy Eucharist" (CV 299).

Jesus's identification with the poor does not (or did not) result from the mere fact that He himself was part of the poor folk. Indeed, Jesus did not experience many various aspects of poverty, yet His solidarity extends to people who suffer from all its different forms. Francis points to the origin of Jesus's identification with the poor that goes much deeper than His personal experience, writing "God's heart has a special place for the poor, so much so that he himself »became poor«" (EG 197). Thus, Logos became a poor man because God in His heart gives preference¹³ to the poor. God loves the

¹³ In other language versions, the above quoted passage of EG 197 refers to the "preferential" place of the poor in God's heart. In Italian: „Nel cuore di Dio c'è un posto preferenziale per i poveri, tanto che Egli stesso »si fece povero« (2 Cor 8,9)". In Spanish: „El corazón de

poor so much that He decided to become one of them. Jesus does not identify with the poor because He belongs to them: He belongs to them because He identifies with them. Parenthetically, it is worth noticing that in the context of Jesus's identification with the poor and their "sacramental nature", His sex is an interesting aspect. Christ was born as a man and he remains as such in His resurrected body. It may give an impression that it is the reason why Jesus may seem closer to the men's rather than the women's world, as if he felt more solidarity with men because of sharing the same sex, which has an enormous impact on the way a person functions. That, unfortunately, is also the key to the interpretation why women cannot be ordained: it implies that men are closer to Jesus – and He is closer to them – than women¹⁴.

It is, indeed, natural resemblance that is the basic theological argument supporting the ordination of men only: to assure the resemblance between the sign (the ordained minister) and the Signified (Christ), Christ the Bridegroom has to be represented by a man¹⁵. It may suggest that men are naturally closer to the divine reality, while women are kept aside because of their sex. Pope Francis also recalls the concept of natural resemblance, upholding the teaching on the ordination of men (EG 104, QA 101), yet, at the same time, his texts radiate a revolutionary message, even though not explicitly stated: paradoxically, Christ is closer to women, and they manifest His presence to a greater extent than men. It is because women rather than men belong to the poor of this world¹⁶.

In many of his texts, Francis stresses the inferior position of women, either today or in the past¹⁷. In *Evangelii gaudium* he gives it a particular emphasis, naming various "categories of the poor" in paras 210-210 and 213:

Dios tiene un sitio preferencial para los pobres, tanto que hasta Él mismo »se hizo pobre« (2 Co 8,9)”. In Polish: „W sercu Boga jest preferencyjne miejsce dla ubogich, do tego stopnia, że On sam bowiem »stał się ubogim« (2 Kor 8, 9)”.

¹⁴ In this context, Mary Daly's famous statement, "If God is male, then male is God" (Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), 19), referring to the presentation of God only in male categories, could be applied to Christ: "If Christ is male, then male is Christ". However, the Pope does not seem to apply that logic, even though he acknowledges the legitimacy of natural resemblance as an argument for ordaining men.

¹⁵ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Inter Insigniores. On the Question of Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood*, access 19 April, 2022, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19761015_inter-insigniores_en.html.

¹⁶ It is, obviously, a simplified statement. There are situations where women – e.g. educated middle-class Europeans – may have a higher social position than men – e.g. immigrants coming from poor African countries, without education or knowledge of the language of the host country. Yet, it seems to be a sad rule that – as we consider individual societies – women almost always have inferior positions to men. Cf. Elizabeth Johnson, *Quest for the Living God. Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God* (New York-London: Continuum, 2008), 91.

¹⁷ E.g. in *Evangelii gaudium* (212), *Amoris laetitia* (54), *Gaudete et exultate* (12), *Querida Amazonia* (14), *Christus vivit* (74), *Fratelli tutti* (23), and catecheses on the family.

the homeless, the addicted, refugees, indigenous peoples, the elderly who are isolated and abandoned, migrants, children used for begging, victims of human trafficking, economic exploitation or prostitution, unborn children... In para 212, where he refers to the situation of women, he acknowledges that they are “doubly poor”, which may mean that they are always in a less favourable position than men in all the above mentioned situations of vulnerability (see *Fratelli tutti* 23; further referred to as FT)¹⁸. Therefore, women as the poor among the poor are especially close to Christ, and He is especially accessible to them.

To conclude this thread, it is worth mentioning yet another category of the poor. In *Laudato si'*, the Pope seems to include – although not explicitly – the devastated and trampled environment among the contemporary poor of this world (LS 2¹⁹). Many passages of the encyclical emphasise the closeness between the poor and the natural environment. The groans of sister earth intertwine with the cries of the abandoned human beings (LS 53, LS concluding prayer). They are bound together by their vulnerability to the powerful and the subordination to their interests, as well as their mutual interdependence: the devastation of the environment contributes to the increasing areas of poverty, while the growing number of poor people contributes to the degradation of nature, or at least the impossibility of its protection by the poor who have to struggle for their own survival (LS 48).

On the basis of what has been written above, one can thus claim that the link between God and nature, or the presence of God in the natural world, is based in a threefold foundation. Firstly, God has inhabited His beloved creation since its very beginning, since the moment it was created; secondly, he unites with it even more closely through the Incarnation and Resurrection of His Son, and thirdly, He sympathises with it as with the suffering poor, who carries the burden of sins committed by brothers – human beings.

¹⁸ Unfortunately, the English version of that passage („Doubly poor are those women who endure situations of exclusion, mistreatment and violence”) suggests that only some of the women experience worse situations. The Italian and Polish translations, as well as the Spanish original, have a slightly different sense. In Spanish: “Doblemente pobres son las mujeres que sufren situaciones de exclusión, maltrato y violencia”. In Italian: „Doppiamente povere sono le donne che soffrono situazioni di esclusione, maltrattamento e violenza”. In Polish: „Podwójnie biedne są kobiety narażone na sytuacje wykluczenia, złego traktowania i przemocy”.

¹⁹ “This sister now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her. We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will. The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life. This is why the earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor; she »groans in travail« (Rom 8:22). We have forgotten that we ourselves are dust of the earth (cf. Gen 2:7); our very bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air and we receive life and refreshment from her waters”.

5. “This is not the Church: this is the Church in a difficult situation (...) but the ideal of the Church is always with the people and the sacraments. Always” – Sacraments at the Extension of Ecclesiology

What has been written here so far might imply that in his teaching, the Pope loses the sense of uniqueness of the seven sacraments. For if God is present and accessible practically anywhere, if there are no totally “godless” spaces, and any created reality may be considered as a sacrament, one may ask whether the seven sacraments of the Church still have any meaning.

The sentence quoted in the title of this chapter was spoken by Francis on 17 April 2020, during the first wave of COVID 19, in the situation when local churches celebrated the liturgy without the participation of believers, which prevented their access to the Eucharist and other sacraments. It is an outrageously radical statement, as it equates the Church and its sacraments with the Church and the physical connection between the brothers and sisters in faith, and thus places an enormous emphasis on the visible aspect of the Church. Under no circumstances should it be considered as exaggerated and conditioned by the circumstances, as if the Pope wanted to encourage the believers to participate in the liturgy once the pandemic is over by creating dramatic suspense. It is no superficial encouragement motivated by the desire to keep the believers within the institutional Church, nor is it cheap moralizing.

The above quoted sentence is a keystone of the most profound Christian truths and a summary of the entire history of salvation. In His freedom, God creates the material world out of love and – because it is His beloved creation – He makes it His dwelling place. By the Incarnation and Resurrection of His Son, and by the sending of the Holy Spirit²⁰, He unites with His creation with the strongest possible bond, and He extends His presence in the Church, particularly in the sacraments. Christianity is thus a religion of the body: matter the human body are works of God; in the Incarnation, God assumes an element of the material world; the Eucharist means eating the Body of God. All the above motifs are very clearly articulated in Francis’s texts. Still more, his texts contain passages pointing to evil as something disembodied, separated from the body and matter, and thus illusory, as it does not touch the truth of existence²¹.

²⁰ Perhaps one should also claim that the sending of the Holy Spirit brings a new quality into the relation God-the world. In his texts, however, Francis does not emphasise the connection between the Pentecost and the sacraments, though there are passages where he stresses the relevance of the sending of the Spirit. See e.g. *Christus vivit* (further referred to as CV) 224: the passage refers to the sending of the Holy Spirit in the context of the major liturgical seasons.

²¹ “There are those who think, based on a one-sided spirituality, that prayer should be unalloyed contemplation of God, free of all distraction, as if the names and faces of others were somehow

At the same time, Francis's teaching emphasises that Christianity is a religion of communion: God, loving every created being, desires salvation for everyone as a people, not only individuals. That thought resonates very strongly in *Fratelli tutti*. Para 137 brings this explicit message: "we are either all saved together or no one is saved". Although the Pope writes in the context of the contemporary multidimensional crisis embracing the whole world, the above quoted words perfectly summarize his thinking on final salvation, as Francis considers salvation in an integral way.

Therefore, what matters is not only individual relation of a human being to God. Like the best of parents, God also wants their children to relate to each other. God who reveals Himself as the Father and Mother of all, at the same time reveals the brotherhood of all human beings, or even all created beings. Still more, God, creating the world, leaves His fingerprints on His work, the whole creation bears the trace of His divine parenthood, of the trinitarian communion which is its archetype: God who is communion builds a communion – a people (cf. FT 85).

God thus wants to give Himself in a tangible way and in communion. That is the ideal which the Pope refers to: God giving Himself in the sacraments of the Church, i.e. in a tangible way and in communion. Even though Francis does not often place the sacraments of the Church in the centre of his reflection, as has already been mentioned in the introduction, his few texts concerning the sacraments contain extremely firm statements. The sacraments of the Church should not be considered as one among the many forms of God's presence in the world, but – and especially the Eucharist – the most radical God's entry into the world and the source of its dramatic transformation. One of the most touching texts concerning the Eucharist can be found in *Laudato si'*, para 236:

"It is in the Eucharist that all that has been created finds its greatest exaltation. Grace, which tends to manifest itself tangibly, found unsurpassable expression when God himself became man and gave himself as food for his creatures. The Lord, in the culmination of the mystery of the Incarnation, chose to reach our intimate depths through a fragment of matter. He comes not from above, but from within, he comes that we might find him in this world of ours. In the Eucharist, fullness is already achieved; it is the living centre of the universe, the overflowing core of love and of inexhaustible life. Joined to the incarnate Son, present in the Eucharist, the whole cosmos gives thanks to God. (...) The world which came forth from God's hands returns to him in blessed and undivided

an intrusion to be avoided." (GE, 154). See also FT 169 with the criticism of "disembodied" democracy, detached from the bottom-up people's movements.

adoration: in the bread of the Eucharist, »creation is projected towards divinization, towards the holy wedding feast, towards unification with the Creator himself«²².

The unification of the divine and the created accomplished in the sacraments of the Church, cannot be compared to any other unification of the creation with God. The sacraments are obviously designed for humans, who are their main “addressees”, yet, as the human being is connected with the whole material world, the sacraments have a cosmic dimension: „Indeed the Eucharist is itself an act of cosmic love: »Yes, cosmic! Because even when it is celebrated on the humble altar of a country church, the Eucharist is always in some way celebrated on the altar of the world«. The Eucharist joins heaven and earth; it embraces and penetrates all creation (LS 236)”.

The above suggests that the sacraments are never merely individual: each sacrament has social and even cosmic repercussions. It is true that the sacraments are received by individual persons, yet the consequences of it are not limited to the persons concerned, it is not something happening exclusively between them and God. Therefore, one may claim that the sacraments of the Church and the People of God are inextricably connected: there are no sacraments without the people and no people without the sacraments. The very fact that the sacraments belong to the liturgy of the Church points to their communal nature: liturgy is, after all, “an act of the People”.

All those motifs are very significant in Francis’s teaching. The Pope stresses that no-one can administer a sacrament to him or herself²³. He actually expresses the above when referring to baptism, but the rule can be easily extended to cover all the sacraments. We can only receive a sacrament from the hand of the other, the presence of a neighbour is indispensable. A sacrament is not (only) a thing: it is also a transmission of grace through another human being, which takes place in the network of interhuman relations. It can thus be stated that another human being is a constitutive element of each sacrament.

Just as it is impossible to receive a sacrament without the presence of the people, it is impossible for the people to exist without the sacraments. The sacraments build up the People of God²⁴, beginning with baptism which brings the human being into relation with God and another human in a new way. Through baptism, the human being becomes part of the People (relation

²² Cf. QA 82.

²³ LF 41; Francis, *General audience* for January 8th, 2014, access 19 April, 2022, http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/audiences/2014/documents/papa-francesco_20140108_udienza-generale.html.

²⁴ Cf. QA 89 on the role of the Eucharist in building community, and 107, where the Pope lists the elements which build the identity of the Catholic Church – among them, the seven sacraments.

with others) which belongs to God (relation with God). The Pope expresses it as follows: “In effect, as from generation to generation life is transmitted, so too from generation to generation, through rebirth at the baptismal font, grace is transmitted, and by this grace the Christian People journeys through time, like a river that irrigates the land and spreads God’s blessing throughout the world”²⁵.

Though Francis strongly emphasizes the communal nature of the sacraments, he does not overlook their personal significance for each individual. After all, the people is made of concrete individual persons who experience total transformation through the power of individual sacraments. The radiation of grace reaching the farthest corners of the created world begins with the personal transfiguration of individual people. In the context of the transforming power of baptism, the Pope pronounces the following significant words: „It is an act that touches the depths of our existence. A baptized child and an unbaptized child are not the same. A person who is baptized and a person who is not baptized are not the same”²⁶.

To sum up, it is legitimate to say that, to Pope Francis, the sacraments of the Church, as well as the Church itself, are not realities that can be easily replaced, but rather an ideal desired by God. Thus, it is not a “spiritual Church” or “spiritual sacrament”, an individual mystical experience or pure bodiless contemplation that should be considered as ideal, but rather the sacramental unification with God which takes place within the community of the Church.

6. Conclusion

As presented in this article, Francis’s teaching suggests that the category of sacrament can be applied to virtually any material reality. The Pope, indeed, emphasises that there is no area exempted from God’s presence and action. On the basis of Francis’s texts, sacramentology, i.e. the teaching on the seven sacraments of the Church, could be located not only at the extension of ecclesiology or Christology, as done traditionally, or proctology, as done by modern theology, but also anthropology or even social doctrine.

In Francis’s texts, however, there seems to exist a certain tension which should not be mitigated, and, even less, resolved to the benefit of only one side. The tension can be summarized in two brief statements: (1) God is present everywhere, His presence permeates everything (or, in other words,

²⁵ Francis, *General audience* for January 15th, 2014, access 19 April, 2022, http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2014/documents/papa-francesco_20140115_udienza-generale.html.

²⁶ Francis, *General audience* for January 8th, 2014.

the whole world is immersed in God), and (2) the sacraments of the Church are a privileged “meeting place” with God. As shown in this article, Francis emphasises both the above statements, making no attempt to find a superficial and easy synthesis. Reading Francis’s texts, one may conclude that God’s presence in the world takes a variety of forms, which are often incomparable and cannot be sorted “from the least to the most significant ones”, it has to be stressed, however, that the sacraments of the Church are radically distinctive from all the others. One may also state, though in an inexcusably imprecise way, that God’s presence in the world manifests itself with various intensity rather than follows the zero-one rule, i.e. “there is” or “there is not”. On the other hand, the above statement is of a highly metaphoric nature, since looking at the issue from yet another perspective, it is hard to explicitly declare if God gives Himself to a greater or lesser degree, wholly or partially. For God always gives Himself totally, to a maximum.

In the light of the above, it is legitimate to ask why the Pope says so little about the sacraments. Perhaps – according to Francis – receiving sacraments, and especially participating in the Eucharist, is an experience that is prior to the word of teaching. It is, in a sense, uninhabited by a language, it is wordless. Such experience of the sacraments would be close to a mystical experience, which remains inexpressible. It would also reflect the ancient restraint in writing about the Eucharist²⁷. EG 174, „The preaching of the word, living and effective, prepares for the reception of the sacrament, and in the sacrament that word attains its maximum efficacy”, can be interpreted according to that key. The word leads the way to the sacrament, yet the sacramental experience is impossible to be rendered in words.

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²⁷ St Ambrose wrote the catechumens: “The season now warns us to speak of the Mysteries, and to set forth the purport of the sacraments, which if we had thought it well to teach before baptism to those who were not yet initiated, we should be considered rather to have betrayed than to have portrayed the Mysteries. *And then, too, another reason is that the light itself of the Mysteries will shed itself with more effect upon those who are expecting they know not what, than if any discourse had come beforehand*” [emphasis added]. The passage in italics may be considered as a general principle applied by the Fathers to the teaching on the Eucharist. Ambrose, *On the Mysteries*, 1,2, access 19 April, 2022, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3405.htm>.

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Sacramento-logic of Pope Francis

SUMMARY

The teaching of Pope Francis does not seem to provide a coherent and comprehensive discourse on the sacraments. Yet, a study of his texts leaves the reader with no doubt that the sacramental reflection is strongly present throughout his work. Though it is a presence that is often implicit, it seems to pervade and lead the Pope's reflection in a number of various areas, becoming a keystone of the fundamental Christian truths. For that reason, we find it more appropriate to refer to a certain logic that underlies the Pope's teaching rather than to sacramentology, which directly refers to the reflection on the sacraments of the Church. This paper aims to present the sacramental logic that is present in Pope Francis's teaching and show the way in which he grasps the most profound nature of the sacraments and combines that understanding with the doctrine in its entirety.

Keywords: Francis, sacraments, sacramentality, magisterium, Church