

## Biblical Foundations of the Synodality

### Preliminary Considerations

What is Synodality? The term “synodality” is a neologism coined within theological discourse over the recent decades, derived from the word “synod”. For centuries, no precise distinction was made between “synod” and “council,” and the terms were used interchangeably, a practice that persisted even during the Second Vatican Council. Terminological clarity was established only in the 1983 *Code of Canon Law*, which differentiates between particular synods, episcopal synods, diocesan synods, and ecumenical councils<sup>1</sup>. Thus, the term “synod” designates assemblies of local churches, while “council” is reserved for gatherings of the universal Church. This terminological distinction may introduce some confusion, as it suggests that synodality is associated solely with the term “synod” and, consequently, pertains only to local church communities (such as metropolises, dioceses, and parishes).

However, the concept of synodality encompasses both local churches and the universal Church. Historically, the synodal dimension of the Church was primarily expressed through the collegiality of bishops convened in synods or councils, thus pertaining exclusively to the Church’s hierarchical structure. Since the Second

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<sup>1</sup> *Code of Canon Law* (CIC), canon 337, employs the term *Concilio Oecumenico* for ecumenical councils. See *Codex iuris canonici auctoritate Ioannis Pauli Pp. II promulgatus*, Romae 1983.

Vatican Council, a radically new perspective has emerged, applying the concept of synodality to all members of the Church and emphasizing the legitimate and active participation of the laity in the faith pilgrimage of the People of God. This article will explore the biblical foundations of this inclusive understanding of synodality.

Before proceeding to strictly biblical reflections, it is worthwhile to briefly examine the etymology of the word “synod,” which originates from classical Greek<sup>2</sup>. The term *σύνδοδος* (synodos), which can be either masculine or feminine in Greek, is composed of the preposition *σύν* (“with”) and the feminine noun *ὁδός* (“way” or “path”). Thus, it should be translated as “common journey” or “walking together.” In ancient pre-Christian Greek literature, the term *σύνδοδος* was used to denote various types of gatherings or meetings (e.g., in Herodotus). Aristotle and Thucydides employed *σύνδοδος* to refer to national assemblies. Thucydides, in *The Peloponnesian War*, used the term to describe the confrontation of two opposing armies. Additionally, ancient Greeks applied *σύνδοδος* not only to human gatherings but also to describe compatible or fitting entities (as in Herodotus) and the convergence or connection of things, such as paths (as in Plato).

## Old Testament Premises of Synodality

The starting point for exploring the biblical foundations of synodality is the primordial harmony of the world created by God. In this harmonious world, everything was good and beautiful. This is the significance of the Hebrew word טוב (“good” or “beautiful”), repeated seven times in the biblical hymn of creation (Genesis 1–2), which can be translated into Greek as *καλός* (“beautiful”) or *ἀγαθός*

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<sup>2</sup> See H.G. Liddell, R.Scott, H.S. Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon. With a Revised Supplement*, Oxford 1996, 41464.

(“good”)<sup>3</sup>. God places humanity, created in His image and likeness<sup>4</sup>, in the Garden of Eden,<sup>5</sup> where they experience happiness and unity with each other and with all creation. As a result of disobedience towards God (Genesis 3), the first humans permanently lose their paradisiacal identity and are exposed to the forces of evil. The entire narrative of salvation history, recounted in the pages of the Bible, is essentially a process of God’s continual efforts to restore humanity to this lost state of blessedness.

Subsequent chapters of the Book of Genesis illustrate the pervasive spread of evil and its consequence, sin, within human communities. Cain’s murder of his brother Abel, driven by envy and jealousy (Genesis 4),<sup>6</sup> exemplifies this escalation, culminating in God’s decision to eradicate evil from the earth through the cleansing waters of the flood (Genesis 6–8). From Noah, the sole righteous man, and his family, God renews humanity, hoping that the forces of evil will never again prevail (Genesis 9). However, this divine hope is thwarted by further acts of evil committed by post-flood humanity (e.g., the Tower of Babel, Genesis 11)<sup>7</sup>. The broader biblical narrative

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<sup>3</sup> The symbolism of the number seven is explained in J. Lemański, *Księga Rodzaju. Rozdziały 1–11*, Nowy Komentarz Biblijny. Stary Testament, vol. 1, part 1, Częstochowa 2013, pp. 190–193.

<sup>4</sup> See D. Dziadosz, *Teologiczna struktura relacji o ogrodzie Eden (Rdz 2,4b-25)*, in: *Ex Oriente Lux (Festschrift for A. Tronina)*, (ed.) W. Chrostowski, Warszawa 2010, pp. 162–196.

<sup>5</sup> See A. Schüle, *Made in the “Image of God”: The Concept of Divine Images in Gen 1–3*, “Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft” 2005, no. 117, pp. 1–20; M. Basiuk, *Człowiek – obraz Boga. Rdz 1,26–27 w kontekście Starego i Nowego Testamentu*, in *Genesis 1 – 3. Tekst, interpretacja, przemyślenia*, (ed.) Z Pawłowski, “Scripta Theologica Thoruniensia” 4, Toruń 2009, pp. 51–59.

<sup>6</sup> See A.J. Kim Harkins, *Cain and Abel in the Light of Envy: A Study in the History of Interpretation of Genesis 4: 1–16*, “Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha” 2001, no. 12, issue 1, pp. 65–84; W. Chrostowski, *U źródeł przemocy: Kain i Abel (Rdz 4,1–16)*, “Studia Bobolanum” 2005, no. 5, issue 2, pp. 5–19.

<sup>7</sup> See U. Berges, *Gen 11,1–9: Babel oder das Ende der Kommunikation*, “Biblische Notizen” 1994, no. 74, pp. 37–56; P. Lorek, *Wygnanie z Edenu a rozporoszenie w Babel (Rdz 1,1–9). Literacki i ideologiczny wymiar motywu wygnania w Księdze Rodzaju*, in *Ge-*

of the Old and New Testaments depicts God's ongoing endeavors to guide humanity towards salvation. Within this theological context, presented in narrative form in Genesis 1–11, the theme of synodality should be considered. Synodality is understood as the response of individuals who accept God's invitation to become His People, embarking on a shared journey under His guidance towards the lost paradise, symbolizing the state of salvation.

A fitting prelude to reflections on synodality in Sacred Scripture is the beginning of humanity's prehistory, namely God's call to Abra(ha)m and his migrations from Haran to Canaan, his continued wanderings within Canaan, and his sojourn in Egypt (Genesis 12–25)<sup>8</sup>. Following the death of Terah, the head of the clan, who decided – without divine inspiration – to migrate from Ur of the Chaldeans with his entire family to the land of Canaan, Yahweh directly addresses Abram in Haran, promising him land and numerous descendants on the condition that he journeys with his clan to Canaan. The vicissitudes of Abra(ha)m and his family, as narrated in Genesis 12–25, can be interpreted as a prelude to synodality. The key element here is the communal journey of the clan under the leadership of its head, with whom God communicates and to whom He offers proposals and promises contingent upon obedience to His voice.

Further premises for the biblical concept of synodality are provided by the subsequent books of the Hebrew Torah: Exodus, Numbers, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy. The point of reference is the fact that God intervenes on behalf of the enslaved people in Egypt, who are later referred to by the author of the Exodus as Hebrews. According to contemporary exegetical scholarship, these enslaved individuals were a diverse group of people from various backgrounds, whose identity was defined by their enslavement and labor for the

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*nesis 1 – 3. Tekst, interpretacja, przemyślenia*, (ed.) Z. Pawłowski, Scripta Theologica Thoruniensia 4, Toruń 2009, pp. 61–64.

<sup>8</sup> See J. Van Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition*, New Haven – London 1975.

Egyptian pharaoh. They did not yet constitute a nation or even a people<sup>9</sup>. Moreover, it appears that they were reconciled to their status as slaves. It was God, Yahweh, Who, by calling Moses (an Egyptian name), resolved to lead them out of slavery. The Book of Exodus illustrates how arduous and painful this process was, as the status of slaves seemingly appeared more attractive and secure to these individuals than the hardships of the journey to the Promised Land.

The prolonged journey through the Sinai desert under the guidance of Yahweh gradually redefines the identity of these enslaved individuals, transforming them into the People of God<sup>10</sup>. The experience of Yahweh's miraculous intervention, overcoming not only the hardened heart of Pharaoh but also the entire pantheon of Egyptian gods through the ten plagues<sup>11</sup>, served as an impetus that enabled them to cast off the shackles of slavery. However, it did not provide the determination needed for the subsequent journey through the desert. In the maturation process of these former slaves during their collective journey towards the land of Canaan, two complementary processes can be observed: a growing trust in the God who leads them through the perils of the desert and the gradual development of a sense of national identity.

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<sup>9</sup> See J. Warzecha, *Historia dawnego Izraela*, Wydawnictwo UKSW, Warszawa 2005, pp. 77–105. However, there are authors who believe that the narrative of the sojourn in Egypt and the Exodus is a historical myth intended to construct the identity of biblical Israel. See B. Halpern, *The Exodus from Egypt: Myth or Reality?*, in *The Rise of Ancient Israel*, (ed.) H. Shanks, Washington 1992, pp. 86–118. In this presentation, we adopt a historiographical-theological perspective. Without delving into questions of historical factuality, we seek to trace the theological pragmatism guiding the authors of the biblical narratives.

<sup>10</sup> The following collective work is worth recommending here E.M. Laperrousaz (red.), *La protohistoire d'Israël. De l'exode à la monarchie*, Paris 1990.

<sup>11</sup> See more on it in: J. Kręciński, *Water Changed into Blood: First Egyptian Plague Ex 7,14–25*, w: *Przemawiaj do nich Moimi słowami. Księga pamiątkowa dedykowana Jego Magnificencji Księdzu Rektorowi Profesorowi Ryszardowi Rumiankowi w 35. rocznicę kapłaństwa i 60. rocznicę urodzin*, (ed.) Z. Godlewski, Warszawa 2007, pp. 322–333.

The first threshold experience of God's power, guiding this community of former slaves towards liberation, was the miraculous passage through the Red Sea (Exodus 14: 15–31). Through such experiences of God's power, care, and providence – such as their deliverance from death by starvation and thirst through the gift of manna and quail (Exodus 16) and water brought forth from the rock (Massah and Meribah; Exodus 17: 1–7) – their faith is constituted. They also come to understand that they can rely on Yahweh as a perfect guide, who indicates the direction of their journey by a cloud during the day and a pillar of fire at night. Their victory over the superior forces of the Amalekites instills in them the conviction that this triumph is not due to Joshua's strategic abilities or the strength of their weapons, but to the power of God, who hears the prayers of Moses interceding on the mountain (Exodus 17: 8–16).

God also ensures that, having liberated these people from slavery, they receive a new identity – that of being His People. This identity is shaped through their collective journey toward freedom under the inspiration of the Divine Spirit, and it is sealed by the covenant (תְּרִיטָה in Hebrew, *διαθήκη* in Greek) that Yahweh establishes with them at Mount Sinai (Exodus 24 and 34). The synodal vocation of the People of the First Testament is thus formed through events and actions undertaken under divine inspiration during their desert journey. In this way, the community of the People of God is constituted, referred to by the Hebrew terms *קְהָל* or *עֵדָה* (translated into Greek as *ἐκκλησία*)<sup>12</sup>. In the second year of their desert journey, God orders a universal census of the clans of these wanderers, assigning each tribe a specific place within the structure of the entire community (Numbers 1–2)<sup>13</sup>. This is a crucial premise for the concept of synodality. God does not treat these people as an anonymous

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<sup>12</sup> It is worth noting here that the Hebrew noun *עֵדָה* primarily means “testimony,” which may have significant implications for the theme of synodality.

<sup>13</sup> We are, of course, aware that these divisions reflect the post-exilic social structure in Judah. Our aim here is to grasp the theological perspective conveyed through the narratives contained in the Torah.

mass; rather, every individual within the People of God – including women, children, and foreigners – has a unique and irreplaceable place within it (see also Exodus 24: 7–8; Joshua 8: 33–35). Within this synodal community of the People of God, formed during the desert journey, there are also groups entrusted with special responsibilities. These include judges (see Exodus 18: 25–26), elders (see Numbers 11: 16–17, 24–30), and Levites (Numbers 1: 50–51). Membership in these groups is closely tied to the tasks assigned to them by God within the community.

A unifying factor for the community journeying through the desert is the worship offered to God, Yahweh. The very exodus from Egyptian slavery is initiated by the celebration of Passover – the feast of the Lord’s passing over and liberation (Exodus 12). During the desert journey, a distinctive role is played by the portable sanctuary, the so-called Tent of Meeting, located outside the camp. It is there that Moses meets God face to face to receive guidance for the further journey (Exodus 33). In this sanctuary, the Levites also perform the cult, which will later be continued in the Jerusalem temple (Numbers 3)<sup>14</sup>. A significant place during the desert journey is also occupied by the celebration of the Day of Atonement (יום כַּפּוּר, Yom Kippur) (see Numbers 28–29; Leviticus 16; Leviticus 23)<sup>15</sup>. This, one of the most important later feasts, was expiatory in character, celebrated to eliminate evil in the relationship with God and in interpersonal relationships within the community of Israel.

By divine appointment, Moses plays an exceptional role in this entire process. He is called by Yahweh in the desert to be His instrument in leading these clans of slaves out of Egyptian bondage

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<sup>14</sup> The role of priests and Levites in the worship of Israel, according to various biblical traditions, is competently discussed, for example, in: D. Dziadosz, *Lewici i kapłani w Księdze Powtórzonego Prawa*, “Verbum Vitae” 2010, no. 17, pp. 43–67.

<sup>15</sup> See S. Jędrzejewski, *Jom Kippur – próba znalezienia genezy*, “Seminare. Poszukiwania Naukowe” 2008, no. 25, pp. 95–110.

(see Exodus 3–11)<sup>16</sup>. God also entrusts Moses with the task of serving as a mediator between Him and the People being formed during their desert journey. All of Yahweh's decisions and actions are first communicated to Moses, who faithfully conveys them to the People and undertakes the appropriate actions. Through Moses, God establishes the covenant with His People at Mount Sinai and delivers the Law, including the Decalogue inscribed on two stone tablets, which the newly constituted nation is to follow throughout its subsequent history (Deuteronomy 5).

The subsequent books of the Old Testament canon illuminate elements of this synodal journey of the People of God toward salvation. The successive stages of this journey – settlement in the land of Canaan and the period of the judges, the era of the monarchy and the united kingdom under David, the division into the Southern and Northern Kingdoms, the Babylonian exile, and the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman periods – are painful periods of forging the national and religious identity of this people. These stages are accompanied by God's initiatives to renew the covenant (בְּרִית in Hebrew, *διαθήκη* in Greek) with a people who, despite promises, repeatedly fall into infidelity and stray from the path to salvation<sup>17</sup>. Although new forms of living out faith develop and mature – such as a shift in emphasis from sacrificial worship to experiencing God's presence in sacred texts, the emergence of the synagogue institution, and the development of the wisdom tradition – the People of God seem to continually wander on the path to salvation, as if genetically incapable of fully trusting God and submitting to His guidance.

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<sup>16</sup> See M.N. Puerto, *La vocación de Moisés: Perspectivas metodológicas*, "Estudios Bíblicos" 1994, no. 52, pp. 133–166.

<sup>17</sup> The theology of the covenant in the Old Testament is analyzed, for example, by E.W. Nicholson, *God and His People: Covenant and Theology in the Old Testament*, Oxford 1986.

This problem is recognized and accurately diagnosed by the Old Testament prophets<sup>18</sup>. They assert that a radical qualitative change is needed – a new Exodus. However, before this can occur, human nature itself requires a radical transformation. This is vividly illustrated by the prophet Ezekiel, who cites God’s promise (Ezekiel 11: 19–20): “I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them; I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, so that they may follow my statutes and keep my ordinances and obey them. Then they shall be my people, and I will be their God.” The new spirit and heart of flesh symbolize a new identity, a new human being capable of entering into a new, eternal covenant with God. Through the prophet Jeremiah, God promises that this covenant will no longer be inscribed on stone tablets but in their hearts (Jeremiah 31: 31–34). Through the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 53), God promises that it will be universal in scope and accomplished through the suffering Servant, who will gather all nations, “justify many, and bear their iniquities” (Isaiah 53: 11). According to the prophet Joel, this will be accompanied by the outpouring of the Lord’s Spirit upon all (Joel 3: 1–4)<sup>19</sup>. In the Catholic arrangement of the Old Testament canon, the Book of the Prophet Malachi is placed last, condemning abuses in moral life and sacrificial worship and concluding with significant words of promise regarding the coming of the Messiah, Who will transform their fate and protect them from rejection and curse: “See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me... Behold, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of parents to their children and the

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<sup>18</sup> See R. Watts, *Echoes from the Past: Israel’s Ancient Traditions and the Destiny of the Nations in Isaiah 40–55*, “Journal for the Study of the Old Testament” 2004, no. 28, issue 4, pp. 481–508.

<sup>19</sup> See International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, Vatican 2018: [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti\\_documents/rc\\_cti\\_20180302\\_sinodalita\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20180302_sinodalita_en.html), point 14 (date of access: 24.05.2015).

hearts of children to their parents, so that I will not come and strike the land with a curse” (Malachi 3: 1, 23–24). These prophetic words herald the work of reconciliation and salvation of all humanity by God through Jesus the Messiah, Who will unite and lead the new People of God to the house of the Father<sup>20</sup>.

## **New Testament Sources of Synodality**

The person of Jesus the Messiah is the foundation of the Church’s synodality. This stems from His divine-human identity, the Father’s will to gather all in Him as one and to save them, the words and deeds of the historical Jesus, and above all, the work of His passion, death, and resurrection.

The new covenant between God and humanity, foretold by the Old Testament prophets, was realized in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, the divine Messiah. The essence of this covenant is to bring humanity into unity with the Triune God. The ultimate source of synodality is the Most Holy Trinity – the mutual relationship of love among the Divine Persons. The Persons of the Son of God, revealed in Jesus the Messiah, and the Holy Spirit undertake the task of gathering God’s scattered children into one and guiding them on the paths of salvation.

Jesus, born as a human through the conception of the Virgin by the Holy Spirit, fulfills the eternal divine plan for humanity’s salvation through His words and deeds<sup>21</sup>. The historical Jesus is portrayed in the Gospels as a charismatic Teacher and Miracle-Worker

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<sup>20</sup> The theology of messianism in the Book of Malachi is analyzed by D. Döngede, *Charakter deuteronomistyczny Księgi Malachiasza. Teologiczne implikacje intertekstualnej analizy biblijnej*, *Lingua Sacra. Monografie 3*, Warszawa 2013, see especially pp. 169–184.

<sup>21</sup> See J.A. Fitzmyer, *The Virginal Conception of Jesus in the New Testament*, in: *To Advance the Gospel. New Testament Studies*, New York 1981, pp. 41–78; J.D. Kingsbury, *The Birth Narrative of Matthew*, in *The Gospel of Matthew in Current Study*, Grand Rapids 2001, pp. 154–163.

Who traverses the roads of Galilee, Samaria, and Judea, drawing crowds of followers<sup>22</sup>. This marks the beginning of the collective journey of the nascent Church under Christ's leadership. The calling of the Twelve Apostles and other disciples, engaging in dialogue with them, and sending them on a mission to proclaim the Kingdom of God was, in essence, the seed of the Church's synodality.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus identifies Himself as the Way (ὁδός): "I am the way, and the truth, and the life (ἐγώ εἰμι ἡ ὁδὸς καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια καὶ ἡ ζωή). No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14: 6). From the perspective of the Church's synodality, this is a clear indication that the current process of synodal discernment in the Church should not focus on seeking the most optimal structural model in Scripture, but rather on the Person of Christ, Who is the Way of synodality.

Based on the allegory of the vine in John 15: 1–11, it can be concluded that the process of synodality is primarily an invitation to a deeper communion of love with God and with others: "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit" (John 15: 1–2); "I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15: 5). Only brief excerpts of this pericope are cited here, but the entire text of John 15: 1–11 is replete with expressions emphasizing the necessity of the branches abiding (being grafted) in love in

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<sup>22</sup> Various perspectives on the figure of the historical Jesus in contemporary research are presented, for example, by B. Witherington III, *The Jesus Quest. The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth. New Expanded Edition*, Downers Grove 1997; M.A. Powell, *Jesus as a Figure in History. How Modern Historians View the Man from Galilee*, Louisville 2013; R. Bartnicki, *Ewangelie synoptyczne. Geneza i interpretacja*, 3 ed., Wydawnictwo UKSW, Warszawa 2003, pp. 419–484. In the latest publication on this topic, the last author already speaks of a fourth stage in the quest for the historical Jesus.

Christ – the vine – as a condition for preserving the identity of being His disciple<sup>23</sup>.

It should also be noted that this pericope forms the central part of the so-called farewell discourses of Jesus (John 13–17)<sup>24</sup>, a kind of testament delivered to His closest disciples on the evening before His arrest in the Garden of Olives, which serves as a prelude to His passion, crucifixion, resurrection, and return to the Father in heaven. The farewell discourses constitute a testament for the Church of all times. The fundamental message of this testament is Jesus' call for the unity of the Church across all ages: "I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (John 17: 20–21). The Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, plays an indispensable role in guiding the Church community in unity towards the fullness of Truth<sup>25</sup>.

Significant insights for the New Testament theology of synodality are also provided by the pericope of Luke 24: 13–35, in which Luke the Evangelist recounts the journey to Emmaus of two disciples frustrated by the crucifixion of Jesus and searching for meaning in their lives<sup>26</sup>. Paradoxically, they are so attached to their false pre-

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<sup>23</sup> See more in J.E. Rosscup, *Abiding in Christ: Studies in John 15*, Grand Rapids 1973. See also J.G. van der Watt, "Metaphorik" in *Joh 15,1–8*, "Biblische Zeitschrift" 1994, no. 38, pp. 67–80. S. Pisarek, *Uczeń Chrystusa według perykopy o winnym krzewie (J 15,1–11: karpon ferein)*, in: *Diligis Me? Pasce*, (ed.) S. Czerwik – M. Mierzwa, Sandomierz 1999, pp. 236–263.

<sup>24</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John. A Commentary*, vol. 2, Peabody 2003, pp. 895 proposes a concentric structure for Jesus' farewell discourses in John 13–17, with John 15: 26–27 (the testimony of the Spirit Paraclete to the world) at its center.

<sup>25</sup> A detailed analysis of the five promises of Jesus regarding the Spirit Paraclete can be found, for example, in J. Kręciđło, *The Spirit Paraclete and Jesus in the Gospel of John*, Kraków 2008.

<sup>26</sup> A meticulous discussion of this pericope is offered by F. Mickiewicz, *Ewangelia według świętego Łukasza (rozdziały 12–24)*, Nowy Komentarz Biblijny. Nowy Testament, vol. 3, part 2, Częstochowa 2011, pp. 583–603.

conceptions regarding Jesus' identity and the nature of His mission that, despite His explicit predictions that He would rise from the dead, they did not believe the women who testified that they had encountered angels at His empty tomb affirming that He was alive (Luke 24: 23). Moreover, they are unable to recognize Jesus in the stranger who joins them on the road to Emmaus, even when He explains that, according to the Scriptures, the Messiah had to suffer to enter His glory (Luke 24: 26). They recognize Him only when, upon arriving in Emmaus, He sits with them at the table, "took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them" (Luke 24: 30)<sup>27</sup>. Once they recognize His identity, the Risen Lord vanishes from their sight, and they begin to reflect on their thoughts and emotions experienced during the journey to Emmaus: "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the Scriptures to us?" (Luke 24: 32). The recognition of the Risen Lord gives them the strength and motivation to immediately return to Jerusalem to testify to the Eleven and other disciples that He is alive (Luke 24: 33–35)<sup>28</sup>.

From this text, several practical conclusions can be drawn regarding the synodality of the Church: 1) The Risen Christ is the fundamental point of reference for the Church's life on its journey towards salvation. Without this awareness, the Church cannot comprehend the reality in which it exists nor correctly interpret even the most evident prophecies and other signs of the times. 2) The recognition of the Risen Christ occurs only at the breaking of the bread, that is, in the Eucharist. Only this perspective opens eyes to

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<sup>27</sup> See C. Combet-Galland – F. Smyth-Florentin, *Le pain que fait lever les écritures, Emmaüs, Luc 24,13–35*, "Études théologiques et religieuses" 1993, no. 68, pp. 323–332; P. Trudinger, *Two Lukan Gospel Stories Key to the Significance of the Dominical Sacraments in the Life of the Early Church*, "Downside Review" 2000, no. 118, pp. 17–26.

<sup>28</sup> The motif of recognizing the "stranger" applied in the accounts of the Risen Christ's appearances was known in Greek literature. See the first chapter of the monograph K. Bro Larsen, *Recognizing the Stranger. Recognition scenes in the Gospel of John*, Leiden 2012, pp. 25–71.

a proper assessment of past events and enables the discovery of the Risen One's presence within them. 3) The recognition of the Risen Christ demands an immediate response in the form of bearing witness to others that He is alive. Bearing witness is the final command of Christ to His disciples before His ascension: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28: 19–20).

The Old Testament category of the People of God as a premise for the Church's synodality is complemented in the New Testament by Paul's image of the Church as the Body of Christ and by the model of the functioning of early Christian communities found in the Acts of the Apostles and in New Testament epistolary literature.

The concept of the Church as the Body of Christ is developed in four letters of the *Corpus Paulinum*. It was introduced in the Letter to the Romans and the First Letter to the Corinthians, which can be attributed to the personal authorship of Paul the Apostle (without excluding the use of professional secretaries)<sup>29</sup>. Its further development is found in the later letters – to the Ephesians and to the Colossians – the authorship of which is attributed to the Pauline school. The metaphor of the Church as the Body of Christ<sup>30</sup>, employed by Paul in Romans 12: 3–8<sup>31</sup> and 1 Corinthians 12: 12–31, aims to make the recipients of the letters aware of their mutual unity (among themselves and with other communities) and the unity of

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<sup>29</sup> Regarding the role of secretaries, see E. Randolph Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing. Secretaries, Composition and Collection*, InterVarsity Press 2004.

<sup>30</sup> See A. Lindemann, *Die Kirche als Lieb. Beobachtungen zur „demokratischen“ Ekklesiologie bei Paulus*, "Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche" 1995, no. 92, issue 2, pp. 140–165.

<sup>31</sup> See a detailed exegesis of this passage in S. Stasiak, *List do Rzymian. Wstęp, przekład z oryginału, komentarz*, Nowy Komentarz Biblijny. Nowy Testament, vol. 6, Częstochowa 2020, pp. 547–554.

all with Christ<sup>32</sup>. In Romans 12: 3–8, the Apostle expresses this as follows: “For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.” Following these detailed instructions, Paul directs an exhortation to the recipients, urging that everything be permeated with mutual love. In 1 Corinthians 12: 12–31<sup>33</sup>, the Apostle elaborates even more specifically on the various ministries and tasks within the Church communities and further emphasizes the role of the Holy Spirit: “For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and we were all made to drink of one Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12: 13). In 1 Corinthians 10: 16–17, Paul employs the metaphor of the Body of Christ<sup>34</sup> to sensitize the Corinthian community to the necessity of preserving unity during the celebration of the Lord’s Supper: “The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.”

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<sup>32</sup> These contents should perhaps be read against the backdrop of (and in contrast to) the ubiquitous Stoic teaching of that time, which used the metaphor of the human body to illustrate the concept of struggle.

<sup>33</sup> See a detailed explanation of this pericope in R.F. Collins, *First Corinthians*, Sacra Pagina 7, Collegeville 1999, pp. 457–471.

<sup>34</sup> See J.H. Neyrey, *Body Language in 1 Corinthians: The Use of Anthropological Models for Understanding Paul and His Opponents*, “Semeia” 1986, no. 35, pp. 129–170.

In Colossians 1: 15–20, 24–27<sup>35</sup> and Ephesians 4: 4–16<sup>36</sup>, the metaphor of the Church as the Body of Christ is further theologically deepened. These texts present Christ as the Head of the Church, thereby emphasizing His preeminence, distinctiveness, and simultaneous inseparability from the Body: “He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church” (Colossians 1: 17–18a); “But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body’s growth in building itself up in love” (Ephesians 4: 15–16).

The presentation of the various ministries performed by members of the Body of Christ within the Church community in 1 Corinthians 12: 12–31 is directly preceded by Paul’s teaching on the multiplicity of charisms in the Church<sup>37</sup>, from which these ministries derive: “Now there are varieties of gifts (*Διαίρέσεις δὲ χαρισμάτων εἰσὶν*), but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God Who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the

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<sup>35</sup> See J. Kręcidło, *The Reconciliation of the World through the Blood of Christ’s Cross as the Completion of the Work of Creation (Col 1: 15–20)*, “*Verbum Vitae*” 2021, no. issue 39/4, pp. 1133–1157.

<sup>36</sup> See W.A. Meeks, *In One Body: The Unity of Humankind in Colossians and Ephesians*, in *God’s Christ and His People: Studies in Honour of Nils Alstrup Dahl*, (ed.) W.A. Meeks, J. Jervell, Oslo 1977, pp. 209–221; M.Y. MacDonald, *Colossians and Ephesians*, Sacra Pagina 17, Collegeville 2000, pp. 285–300.

<sup>37</sup> See more Ch.H. Talbert, *Paul’s Understanding of the Holy Spirit: The Evidence of 1 Corinthians 12–14*, in *Perspectives on the New Testament: Essays in Honor of Frank Stagg*, Macon 1985, pp. 95–108.

same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit...” (1 Corinthians 12: 4–11).

These spiritual gifts (*χαρίσματα*, also referred to as *πνευματικά*), bestowed by the Holy Spirit, are granted for the building up of the one Body of Christ<sup>38</sup>. The various functions performed within the Church are, in a sense, their derivatives. A reading of the canonical Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, and the letters contained in the New Testament leads to the conclusion that the Church – the Body of Christ – was not established as a democratic community but as a hierarchical one. It is, of course, acknowledged that this was the dominant model of social life at the time. However, God, in His free will, could have established a different model of mutual relationships among the members of the Church community without diminishing the theological status of Christ as its Head. The New Testament clearly places the Apostles at the forefront of the Church community. They are not a collegial body; rather, a leading role is assigned to Peter. This is defined by the event near Caesarea Philippi and Jesus’ significant words: “You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” (Matthew 16: 18–19). It can also be inferred that the other eleven Apostles (and other disciples) had assigned functions within the community of Jesus’ followers, reflecting their status in relation to Him. Evidence for such conclusions may be found, for example, in Judas’ role as treasurer or the arrangement at the triclinium during the Last Supper (John 13–17)<sup>39</sup>. In the farewell discourses, Jesus emphasizes that in their

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<sup>38</sup> See International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, point 18. See also S. Siegfried, *A Pauline Theology of Charismata*, Peabody 1987.

<sup>39</sup> Regarding the possible arrangement of the disciples in relation to Jesus during the Last Supper, see J. Kręciđło, *Tożsamość Umikowanego Ucznia w czwartej Ewangelii*, “Collectanea Theologica” 2008, no. 3, pp. 45–58.

mutual service within the Church community, His disciples should be guided by love, with Himself as the example and motivation.

The most substantial data for the biblical model and theology of the Church's synodality are provided by the Acts of the Apostles<sup>40</sup>. It is rightly called the book of the Holy Spirit, as it clearly demonstrates that the entire journey of the Church from the moment of Christ's ascension (Acts 1) is marked by the activity of the Holy Spirit as its *Spiritus Movens*. The awareness of the members of the early Church in this regard is expressed in the phrase "the Holy Spirit and we" (e.g., Acts 15: 28), which concludes the discernment process before making significant decisions. It is the Holy Spirit who makes the Risen Christ present within the Church community.

Following Jesus' ascension, the Eleven remained in Jerusalem in prayer, together with Mary, His Mother, and other members of His physical family, referred to in the text as "His brothers" (see Acts 1: 12–14)<sup>41</sup>. In addition to prayer, their first task, even before the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, was to complete the number of the Twelve by selecting Matthias (in place of Judas) through the casting of lots. This act underscores the unique status of the Twelve within the Church community and their functional distinctiveness in relation to the rest (even Jesus' physical relatives).

A pivotal moment in the formation of the early Church's self-awareness was the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the emerging community<sup>42</sup>: "When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. (...) All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit

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<sup>40</sup> See L.T. Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Sacra Pagina 5, Collegeville 1992, p. 14.

<sup>41</sup> See B. Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles. A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, Grand Rapids 1998, pp. 113–114.

<sup>42</sup> See I.H. Marshall, *The Significance of Pentecost*, "Scottish Journal of Theology" 1977, no. 30, pp. 347–369.

gave them ability” (Acts 2: 1–4). The descent of the Holy Spirit marked the beginning of the dynamic development of the Church on two levels: the building of mutual relationships within the Jerusalem community and the undertaking of missionary activity. The first of these processes is reflected in the words of Acts 4: 32–37, which present a paradigmatic ideal for the functioning of the Church in all times (and should also illuminate the synodal path): “Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all” (vv. 32–33). Parallel to the building of internal bonds of love within the community, the Church undertakes evangelizing activity, consisting of proclaiming the truth of Christ’s resurrection. The entire narrative of the Acts of the Apostles is, in essence, the Church’s response to the obligation imposed upon it by Christ just before His ascension: “It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1: 7–8)<sup>43</sup>.

Even at the level of reading the four canonical Gospels, it is evident that the communities preserving particular traditions expressed their faith in slightly different ways (compare, for example, the Gospel of John with the Gospel of Mark). From the narrative of the Acts of the Apostles and the letters included in the New Testament canon, it is clear that synodality, understood as a mode of organizing Church communities, should be regarded as a dynamic reality. The Church listens to the voice of the Holy Spirit and discerns the path it is to follow (see, e.g., Acts 5: 19–21; 8: 26, 29, 39; 12: 6–17; 13: 1–3; 16: 6–10; 20: 22). This dynamism of discernment under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, combined with the reform of struc-

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<sup>43</sup> See L.T. Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 26.

tures and openness to transcending previous ways of thinking, is evident, for instance, in the appointment of seven deacons to serve at tables, allowing the Apostles to devote themselves more fully to evangelization (Acts 6: 1–6). Another example is the transformation of Peter’s thinking regarding the Church’s openness to Gentiles, as recounted by Luke in Acts 10. A further step in this dynamic openness to Gentiles is the so-called Jerusalem Council. The Pastoral Epistles (1–2 Timothy and Titus) and the Catholic Epistles (1–2–3 John, Jude, James) illustrate the direction of this ecclesial dynamism: while preserving the deposit of faith and their own specific traditions, Church communities read the signs of the times and adapt their way of living the faith to the realities of a given place and time.

If one was to seek a single event in the Bible that provides paradigmatic foundations for Church synods and councils throughout the centuries, it would undoubtedly be the so-called Apostolic Council in Jerusalem, described by Paul in Galatians 2: 1–10<sup>44</sup> and more extensively by Luke in Acts 15<sup>45</sup>. The immediate impetus for convening this assembly in Jerusalem was an internal conflict within the Church community in Antioch concerning the conditions for admitting converted Gentiles into the Church. This issue had been growing in the young Church community for some time (see Acts 10)<sup>46</sup> and, sooner or later,

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<sup>44</sup> There are also exegetes who claim that these are two different events. See on this in S.A. Panimolle, *Il Discorso di Pietro all’assemblea apostolica*, vol. 1, Bologna 1976, pp. 279–294.

<sup>45</sup> See J. Meier, *The Jerusalem Council. Gal 2: 1–10; Acts 15: 1–29, “Mid-Stream”* 1996, no. 35, pp. 465–475; W. Rakocy, “Będziecie moimi świadkami...” (*Dz 1,8*) (*Dzieje Apostolskie*), in: *Dzieje Apostolskie. Listy św. Pawła*, ed. J. Frankowski, S. Mędała, Wprowadzenie w myśl i wezwanie ksiąg biblijnych, vol. 9, Wydawnictwo UKSW, Warszawa 1997, pp. 37–41.

<sup>46</sup> See M. Plunkett, *Ethnocentricity and Salvation History in the Cornelius Episode*, in *1985 Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers*, (ed.) K.H. Richards, Atlanta 1985, pp. 465–479.

had to be addressed<sup>47</sup>. Luke reports that “certain individuals who had come from Judea were teaching the brothers, ‘Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved’” (Acts 15: 1)<sup>48</sup>. These words encapsulate the dilemma. Circumcision was regarded as a sign of God’s covenant with His chosen people and, consequently, an indispensable element of the ethnocentric identity of the Old Testament faith<sup>49</sup>. Believers of Jewish origin argued that one could not become a full-fledged follower of Jesus Christ without first undergoing this rite of initiation, with all the implications that accepting this ritual entailed. The issue thus concerned the essence of Christian identity: Is salvation the result of faith alone in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, or is it necessary for a converted Gentile to “pass through Judaism”? (see Acts 15: 11).

The situation escalated to the point that it became necessary to send delegates from the Antiochene community to the Mother Church in Jerusalem to request a definitive interpretation<sup>50</sup>. The leaders of the Antiochene Church’s delegation to Jerusalem were Paul and Barnabas, who represented the position of admitting converted Gentiles into the Church community without the requirement of circumcision. The inquiry was addressed to the entire Jerusalem Church (Acts 15: 12), and the whole community was engaged in formulating the decision (Acts 15: 22), although the final interpretation was articulated by the Apostles and elders (Acts

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<sup>47</sup> See S.G. Wilson, *The Gentiles and the Gentiles Mission in Luke-Acts*, Cambridge 1973, pp. 171–195.

<sup>48</sup> See L.T. Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 258–259; B. Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles. A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, pp. 450–451.

<sup>49</sup> See *Obrzezanie*, in A. Grabner-Haider (ed.), *Praktyczny słownik biblijny*, Warszawa 1999, p. 862.

<sup>50</sup> It is worth recommending here the article that presents the examined pericope in a broader narrative context: A. Cheung, *A Narrative Analysis of Acts 14: 27–15: 35: Literary Shaping in Luke’s Account of the Jerusalem Council*, “Westminster Theological Journal” 1993, no. 55, pp. 137–154.

15: 2). Within the Jerusalem Church community, there was a significant group of converted Pharisees who maintained that Gentiles accepting faith in Christ should not only be circumcised but also be obliged to observe the Mosaic Law (Acts 15: 5). The matter was thus of utmost importance, and its resolution would significantly shape the future of the Church (including the Church today). Had the arguments of those representing the converted Pharisees been accepted, the Church would have remained merely another faction within Judaism.

Interestingly, the decisive voice in discerning this issue did not belong to the converted Pharisees, who were well-versed in the Scriptures, but to the Apostles and elders (Acts 15: 6). The first stage of this discernment was a lively exchange of views between representatives of the opposing positions (Acts 15: 7). The next phase was Peter's speech, which underscores his indispensable authority within the entire Church. The Apostle refers to his Divine commission to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 15: 8) and firmly advocates against imposing the "yoke of circumcision" on Gentiles who accept faith in Christ (Acts 15: 10). His key argument is that both Jews and Gentiles have equally received the Holy Spirit (Acts 15: 9). He further asserts that imposing the burden of circumcision on converted Gentiles would be tantamount to testing God (Acts 15: 10).

The next step in this synodal discernment was the hearing of Barnabas and Paul by the Apostles and elders (Acts 15: 12)<sup>51</sup>. Notably, they do not engage in theological debates, despite both – Barnabas, from the tribe of Levi, and Paul, a highly educated former Pharisee – being capable of effectively countering the arguments of the believers of Pharisaic origin. The crux of their argumentation lies in bearing witness to the great wonders and signs that God performed among the Gentiles through their ministry.

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<sup>51</sup> See B. Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles. A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, p. 456.

The final speaker is James<sup>52</sup>, the leader of the Jerusalem Church community, who affirms Peter's argumentation and then substantiates it scripturally (Acts 15: 13–21), citing especially the teachings of Old Testament prophets (Amos 9: 11ff.; Jeremiah 12: 15; Isaiah 45: 21) and demonstrating that the salvation of all nations is God's eternal plan<sup>53</sup>. James does not remain solely at the level of theoretical theological reflections. He proposes that Gentiles joining the Church community should be obliged to observe a few precepts of Old Testament Law: they are to abstain from food offered to idols, from sexual immorality, from what is strangled, and from blood (Acts 15: 20)<sup>54</sup>. He also suggests that this decision should not be conveyed only orally but also in writing. James' resolution – as the head of the Jerusalem Church – is accepted without debate by the Apostles and elders. They decide to communicate their decision to the Church in Antioch in two ways – orally and in writing. Interestingly, the oral transmission was to be delivered not only by Paul and Barnabas but also by three respected representatives of the Jerusalem Church: Judas, Barsabbas, and Silas. The written decree, which the messengers were to carry, is collectively drafted by the assembled Apostles and elders. It is not a dry, purely legal resolution but takes the form of a friendly circular letter addressed not only to the believers in Antioch but also to Gentiles converted to faith in Christ in Syria and Cilicia. The citation of the legal resolution (Acts 15: 29) is preceded by the formula: "For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us" (Acts 15: 28).

The final step in this synodal discernment was the arrival of the messengers from Jerusalem to the Antiochene community (Acts 15: 30), which gathered to receive the letter containing the reso-

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<sup>52</sup> This figure is comprehensively discussed for example by J. Painter, *Just James*, Columbia 1997; R. Bauckham, *James: Wisdom of James, Disciple of Jesus the Sage*, London 1999.

<sup>53</sup> See Dupont J., *Un peuple d'entre les nations (Actes 15: 14)*, "New Testament Studies" 1985, no. 31, pp. 321–335.

<sup>54</sup> See L.T. Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 266–267.

lution to the posed inquiry (Acts 15: 31). However, the messengers from Jerusalem – Judas and Silas – did not limit themselves to a formal-administrative role. They prophesied, spoke to the people, encouraged perseverance in faith, and remained with the community for some time (Acts 15: 32–33). The Antiochene believers received the content of the decree as “encouraging” (Acts 15: 31), and Paul and Barnabas continued to devote themselves to preaching the word in Antioch (Acts 15: 35)<sup>55</sup>.

The procedure described here appears to have a model character when it comes to resolving difficulties and addressing the challenges and signs of the times in the Church of all ages.

The Book of Revelation makes it clear that the goal of the synodal journey of the People of God of the New Covenant is not limited to earthly reality but has an eschatological (eternal) dimension. The destination of the journey of Christ’s followers is the heavenly New Jerusalem, understood as the dwelling place of God with humanity (Revelation 21–22)<sup>56</sup>. Christ – the Lamb who was slain – redeemed with His blood people from every tribe, language, people, and nation (Revelation 5), and all are invited to the eternally ongoing liturgical assembly in heaven. This is the eternal plan of God, realized in Christ within the Church and the world.

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<sup>55</sup> W. Rakocy, “Będziecie moimi świadkami...” (Dz 1, 8) (*Dzieje Apostolskie*), p. 41, rightly emphasizes that “the decree with four conditions is an example of an agreement reached between Christians of Jewish and Gentile origin, under which the latter undertook to observe four clauses, while the former could, in turn, participate with them in the fellowship of the table without qualms of conscience.”

<sup>56</sup> These chapters are commented in detail by G.K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation. A Commentary on the Greek Text*, Grand Rapids 1999, pp. 1039–1157; M. Wojciechowski, *Apokalipsa świętego Jana*, Nowy Komentarz Biblijny. Nowy Testament, vol. 20, Częstochowa 2012, pp. 371–404; P.J. Leithart, *Revelation 12–22*, International Theological Commentary, London – Oxford 2018, pp. 357–448.

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