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TWO DIMENSIONS OF SEEING Gabriel Marcel's Philosophy and the Existential and Anthropological Background of Synodality

For Marcel, the necessity of dialogue points to something more than the mere duty of communication; namely, to an ontological need which in the deepest layers of the person manifests itself in the form of some inner mysterious appeal which calls man to transcend himself, to actively open himself to the external reality. The ontological need manifests itself, then, as the necessity of being which for a fully awake individual becomes a desire to be more “at home” and to be for the other: it turns into participation.

If anyone wondered what concepts have been gaining in popularity within recent ecclesiological discourse, synodality would undoubtedly feature prominently among them. This is, *inter alia*, because synodality is precisely one of the issues which have preoccupied Pope Francis in a particular way from the very beginning of his pontificate. Already in 2015, as part of his address on the occasion of the ceremony commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops by Paul VI, Pope Francis emphasized: “It is precisely this path of *synodality* which God expects of the Church of the third millennium.”¹ However, the questions involved here are not only of the theological nature. As it appears in his teaching and—to offer a wider context—in the teaching of the Church after the Second Vatican Council, synodality also implies serious questions of the philosophical nature. Moreover, it is not just a matter of individual ideas, but of a holistic vision of the Church and how it should function in the future. As Grzegorz Strzelczyk rightly observes, “the Church’s polity is not so much hierarchical as synodal. This conclusion may have been reached at some point by Pope Francis. The synodal process initiated by him may constitute part of a movement that will literally recast ecclesiology, Church structures and canon law.”² Indeed one should also expect the synodal process to significantly influence the shape of the existential and anthropologi-

¹ F r a n c i s, “Address of His Holiness Pope Francis at the Ceremony commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops (17 October 2015),” The Holy See, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco_20151017_50-anniversario-sinodo.html.

² Grzegorz S t r z e l c z y k, “Synodalność: musisz iść przez to, czym nie jesteś” [Synodality: You have to go through what you are not], *Więź*, no. 3 (685) (2021): 75. (Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.)

cal reflection undertaken within the Church; thus, it may result in unfolding new perspectives for the very reflection.

BETWEEN THE SYNODAL CHURCH AND THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF SYNODALITY

Fundamentally, synodality is nothing new. Although the concept itself did emerge relatively recently as part of the growing post-Vatican II reflection on the nature of the synod as such, it brings us back to the very essence of synodality as an already existing phenomenon. In the document published in 2018 and titled *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, the International Theological Commission explains as follows:

“Synod” is an ancient and venerable word in the Tradition of the Church, whose meaning draws on the deepest themes of Revelation. Composed of a preposition σύν (with) and the noun ὁδός (path), it indicates the path along which the People of God walk together.... Since the first centuries, the word “synod” has been applied, with a specific meaning, to the ecclesial assemblies convoked on various levels (diocesan, provincial, regional, patriarchal or universal) to discern, by the light of the Word of God and listening to the Holy Spirit, the doctrinal, liturgical, canonical and pastoral questions that arise as time goes by.³

While it is true that in the second millennium of Christianity the synodal model of the functioning of the Church was partly overshadowed by the super-hierarchical model, which reflected the feudal relations that prevailed in the social space to some extent and in the way power was exercised, a change in this respect took place in the second half of the twentieth century. According to Janusz Bujak, an important “discovery of Vatican II and its aftermath in the postconciliar period was synodality. In order to reinvigorate synodal practice at the level of the universal Church, Pope Paul VI established the Synod of Bishops for the universal Church (18 November 1965) directly under the authority of the Pope and its task is to counsel him.”⁴ Moreover, the International Theological Commission stresses that “in the more than fifty years since the last Council ... there have been positive experiences of synodality at diocesan, regional and universal levels.”⁵ Undoubtedly,

³ International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, 2 March 2018, Sections 3–4, The Holy See, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20180302_synodalita_en.html.

⁴ Janusz Bujak, “The Teaching of Pope Francis About Synodality in the Context of Contemporary Theological and Ecumenical Reflection,” *Collectanea Theologica* 91, no. 5 (2021): 149.

⁵ International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, Section 41.

Francis' pontificate lends new impetus in this regard. Tomasz Wielebski points to the fact that, according to some theologians, the Pope "returns to the authentic thought of the Vatican Council Fathers, making a transition from a 'universalist ecclesiology to the ecclesiology of the local Church.'" ⁶ As a result, not only does he frequently address the issue of synodality in his speeches, but he also entrusts the International Theological Commission with preparing a document on synodality in 2014 and promulgates the *Apostolic Constitution "Episcopalis Communio" on the Synod of Bishops* in 2018. Finally, he convenes the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops *For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission* and on 9–10 October 2021 inaugurates an extended two-year synodal process to no longer listen to the bishops only, but "to give voice to the entire People of God" ⁷ in the form of global consultations. What is to be reflected upon and discerned? This time, synodality itself.

Are the neologisms "synodal" and "synodality," which have appeared in the theological, canonical, and pastoral literature of recent decades, really becoming the key to a fuller understanding of the nature and mission of the Church in contemporary ecclesiology? ⁸ First of all, it should be emphasized that they mean a certain way of implementing the synod: a style of gathering its participants, as it was the case at various levels of the early Church, assuming their readiness for dialogue, mutual listening and common discernment of God's will. Consequently, it is not a new idea, but a practical method of proceeding: following a common spiritual path with no intention of fighting opposing views or aggressive rhetoric; the goal is to proceed with openness, in search of consensus. Therefore, according to the International Theological Commission, people speak of synodality as a constitutive dimension of the Church. ⁹

Although synodality is not explicitly found as a term or as a concept in the teaching of Vatican II, it is fair to say that synodality is at the heart of the work of renewal the Council was encouraging. The ecclesiology of the People of God stresses the common dignity and mission of all the baptised, in exercising the variety and ordered

⁶ Tomasz Wielebski, "Droga synodalna wyzwaniem dla Kościoła w Polsce" (The Synodal Path as a Challenge for the Church in Poland), *Ateneum Kapłańskie* 177, no. 3 (676) (2021): 535. See Bujak, "The Teaching of Pope Francis About Synodality in the Context of Contemporary Theological and Ecumenical Reflection": 57.

⁷ Francis, *Apostolic Constitution "Episcopalis Communio" on the Synod of Bishops*, Section 6, The Holy See, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_constitutions/documents/papa-francesco_costituzione-ap_20180915_episcopalis-communio.html.

⁸ See Sławomir Jezior ski, "'Lex orandi' jako inspiracja dla synodalnego 'modus vivendi' Kościoła" [Lex orandi as an inspiration for the synodal modus vivendi of the Church], *Teologia i Człowiek* 52, no. 4 (2020): 74; International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, Section 5.

⁹ See International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, Section 5.

richness of their charisms, their vocations and their ministries.... In this ecclesiological context, synodality is the specific *modus vivendi et operandi* of the Church, the People of God, which reveals and gives substance to her being as communion when all her members journey together, gather in assembly and take an active part in her evangelising mission.¹⁰

Thus, the question arises as to the extent to which synodality refers to contexts other than the obvious theological connotation, especially to the existential and anthropological ones. This question is all the more pertinent in view of the fact that the understanding of synodality, as articulated in official documents and papal pronouncements, strongly reflects a specific way of looking at *conditio humana*, including in particular the emphasis on the motif of the journey and the dialogical character of human nature. In a sense, the concept of synodality merges *conditio humana* with *conditio ecclesiae* to the extent that the two realities meet in the theological picture of the People of God. Indeed, the preparatory document of the Synod on Synodality initiated by the Pope in 2021 reminds us: “Synodality represents the main road for the Church.... The ability to imagine a different future for the Church and her institutions, in keeping with the mission she has received, depends largely on the decision to initiate processes of listening, dialogue, and community discernment, in which each and every person can participate and contribute. At the same time, the decision to ‘journey together’ is a prophetic sign for the human family, which needs a shared project capable of pursuing the good of all.”¹¹

This perspective signals not only an ecclesial and social dimension, but also a deeply existential and *sui generis* human one. Beyond any doubt, reflection on man is an integral part of the synodal theme. The document prepared by the International Theological Commission states that “synodality manifests the ‘pilgrim’ character of the Church ... [that] expresses its social, historical and missionary character, which corresponds to the condition and vocation of each human person as *homo viator*. The path is the image that clarifies our understanding of the mystery of Christ as the Way that leads to the Father.”¹² At the same time, apart from the mystery, it also constitutes the image that invites questions about the one who walks this path—about human beings themselves and about the possible reinterpretation of their existential experience. Synodal categories

¹⁰ Ibidem, Section 6.

¹¹ Holy See Press Office, *Preparatory Document for the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops*, 7.09.2012, Section 9, The Holy See, <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2021/09/07/210907a.html>.

¹² International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, Section 49.

such as the way or the mystery, but also others—especially dialogue, listening, discernment and hope—are in fact part of a kind of anthropology of synodality; they make it possible to grasp the specificity of human nature, destiny and human self-experience not from a narrow, static, essential perspective, but from a dynamic one in the light of the most recent existential experiences faced by humans and the processes to which they are subjected. This, in turn, seems necessary not only because of the ever-present need to understand their nature all the more fully, but also in order to properly discern the spectrum of further transformations of their way of being in the Church and in the world. What is at stake, then, is also a kind of view, a vision whose nature becomes clear when the synodal categories are integrated into a process of reinterpretation of human self-understanding. What is more, it turns out that their counterparts already appeared earlier in Christian reflection on man; admittedly, it happened at a slightly different time and in a different period of history, but also in connection with a specific kind of existential experience. It is enough to mention here the French philosopher Gabriel Marcel (1889–1973), identifying himself with Christianity, who developed the above-mentioned idea of *homo viator* at a difficult moment in the history of post-war Europe while existential and moral transformations were taking place. The approach he adopted was, as Antoni Podsiad observes, “a concrete philosophy, reduced to defining, or rather taking, a stance that is most worthy of a human on a pilgrimage; it is the philosophy of a fully awakened individual who begins to realize his human condition.”¹³ Thus, it may be worthwhile to scrutinize some elements of this philosophy insofar as they shed some clearer light on the particular kind of seeing that would characterize the synodal man.

HOMO VIATOR

Towards an Existential Seeing

In “*Vademecum*” for the Synod on Synodality,¹⁴ i.e., one of the two key documents introducing the idea of the synodal process launched by Pope Francis

¹³ Antoni Podsiad, “Gabriel Marcel, czyli próba chrześcijańskiego egzystencjalizmu” [Gabriel Marcel, or an attempt at Christian existentialism], in Gabriel Marcel, *Homo viator: Wstęp do metafizyki nadziei* [Homo viator: Introduction to a metaphysics of hope], trans. Piotr Lubicz (Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy Pax, 1984), 291. Podsiad’s essay is the afterword to the Polish translation of Marcel’s work.

¹⁴ See Secretary General of the Synod of Bishops, “*Vademecum*” for the Synod on Synodality: *Official Handbook for Listening and Discernment in Local Churches; First Phase [October 2021–April 2022] in Dioceses and Bishops’ Conferences Leading up to the Assembly of Bishops in Synod in October 2023*, Synod 2021–2023, <https://www.synod.va/en/documents/vademecum.html>.

in 2021, one can find the following diagnosis of the context in which the Synod was taking place:

A global pandemic, local and international conflicts, growing impact of climate change, migration, various forms of injustice, racism, violence, persecution, and increasing inequalities across humanity, to name a few. In the Church, the context is also marked by the suffering experienced by minors and vulnerable people “due to sexual abuse, the abuse of power, and the abuse of conscience perpetrated by a significant number of clerics and consecrated persons.” With all this being said, we find ourselves at a crucial moment in the life of the Church and the world. The COVID-19 pandemic has made existing inequalities explode. At the same time, this global crisis has revived our sense that we are all in the same boat, and that “one person’s problems are the problems of all.”¹⁵

What does the above diagnosis imply? First of all, a certain type of existential view on the situation of contemporary people seen from the perspective of an experience which in a sense redefines their way of being in the world. This is linked to the above-mentioned “crucial moment,” a significant breakthrough that recurs in the history of humankind and always brings a kind of existential *novum* with it. For experience, when duly recognized the ground-breaking, and therefore perceived as specific and unique, is always inscribed in a certain hermeneutics of rupture and continuity. A rupture, because it introduces a new quality into the context of human existence; a continuity, because, between it and the breakthroughs that preceded it, there exists an analogy exceeding the level of metaphor or attributive play on words. It is rather an analogy of the sensations that constitute the said experience, which—although they arise in a different place, time and socio-cultural reality—are characterised by the similarity of the related experiences and, consequently, by the similarity in the way they are described. Existential seeing, i.e., a multifaceted understanding of human existence in the world, cannot therefore be ahistorical. What is more, when set in a concrete moment in history, it almost demands an analogy, so that the recognition it brings may be more complete and its interpretation more adequate. The situation is no different when it comes to the synodal diagnosis concerning the crucial breakthrough moment for the Church and the world. Is it possible to find a historical reference for both the diagnosis and this breakthrough? Among numerous paths, one appears to be particularly attractive. It is the path indicated by the concept of *homo viator*: a way of interpreting the human condition and vocation that is strongly inscribed in the synodal context. Perhaps not by accident, this very concept was developed by the aforementioned Gabriel Marcel at another turning point in the history

¹⁵ Ibidem, Section 8.

of both the world and the Church. Suffice it to say that the first edition of his book was prepared in France during the years of deep German occupation, a dark and difficult period not only for Europe but also for the whole world; it was published in 1944 under the same title as the aforementioned concept. The second edition, on the other hand, saw the light of day at a time when the Catholic Church was initiating a key event in its further history, i.e., the Second Vatican Council. In the preface to the second edition of *Homo Viator*, Marcel writes that if he were to address the issues he wrote about in the first edition, the essential ideas would remain the same, but the tone would certainly be different. Undoubtedly, he argues, he would have highlighted the causes of the hopelessness that the then situation brought his contemporaries and, paradoxically, the obligation incumbent upon people not so much to reject those causes, but at least to contrast them with the certainty that belonged to another order.¹⁶ Today, humankind—stuck between the crisis in the Church on the one hand, and the dilemmas and tensions of the pandemic reality on the other—may have to confront a comparable imperative.

To what type of existential seeing, then, does Gabriel Marcel invite his contemporaries? What connections does it reveal with the situation of the synodal man? In this respect the opinion on Marcel expressed by Roger Troisfontaines, as cited by Tadeusz Gadacz, is of significance:

To an age that anxiously ponders the meaning of human destiny and the role of freedom, Marcel replies: it is commitment based on free will that constitutes the person and creates being.... In the face of all reality and the presence of God himself, I must choose between rejection and invitation, between confinement to complacency and the communion of true *caritas*.... While atheistic existentialism is based on the choice of an absurd and nauseating world in which monads all add up without ever truly meeting each other, Marcel always calls for a commitment to participation with others.... The greatest value of this message is that it is not limited to observation, to an external statement, it does not remain in the world of abstractions. It reflects this personal commitment, it bears witness to life, it gives testimony.¹⁷

One might say: just like the message on synodality. Indeed, it suffices to mention the fact that it is precisely the value of communion and participation extracted by Troisfontaines from Marcel's conception that constitutes, as it were, the heart of the synod initiated by Pope Francis, while synodality itself,

¹⁶ See Gabriel M a r c e l, "Przedmowa do nowego wydania" [Preface to the new edition], in: Gabriel Marcel, *Homo viator: Wstęp do metafizyki nadziei*, 6.

¹⁷ Tadeusz G a d a c z, *Historia filozofii XX wieku*, vol. 2, *Neokantyzm, filozofia egzystencji, filozofia dialogu* [A history of the 20th century philosophy, vol. 2: Neo-Kantianism, philosophy of existence, philosophy of dialogue], Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak, 2009, 436. The above translation of the quotation from the Polish language has been introduced by the author of the article due to the lack of access to the original.

as its founding characteristic, demands precisely personal commitment. How does it manifest itself in the existence of Marcel's man in his pilgrim condition? Through a particular kind of view on existence, namely, through a certain existential seeing. One can assume it is connected with a fundamental change of attitude that takes place in one who moves from the level of a distanced observer, who treats existence as an object that one possesses and towards which one faces as if it were a problem, to the level of an involved existence.¹⁸ Michał Węclawski points out that, according to Marcel, "a feature of possession is the autocentricity of the self—even if man concentrates on the object he desires, he does so with exclusive reference to himself."¹⁹ Consequently, according to Marcel, a human being "is at the heart of the city which I form with myself and which, as experience has given tragic proof, retains the power of reducing itself to ashes.... The more we allow ourselves to be the servants of Having, the more we shall let ourselves fall a prey to the gnawing anxiety which Having involves, the more we shall tend to lose not only the aptitude for hope, but ... the very belief, indistinct as it may be, of its possible reality."²⁰ At the level of reflection, this kind of object-oriented approach to existence, which treats it as a problem, characterizes the so-called primary reflection. It constitutes a sort of impersonal speculation, blind to individuality, which absolutizes thinking and separates it from existence, which follows the dictates of an established subject-object dualism and which never transcends it.²¹ Therefore, primary reflection itself does not represent existential seeing. It is so because genuine existential seeing presupposes a transition from the level of dealing with existence as a problem to the level of engaging with it as a mystery.

SYNIDESIS OR THE MIND'S COMPREHENSIVE GAZE

The understanding of mystery as adopted by Gabriel Marcel assumes—according to Michał Węclawski—that "a mystery is built on a problem; in the conceptual dimension, a mystery comes later than a problem and by offering a contradiction to it, the mystery brings the problem to a higher level. Still,

¹⁸ See Gabriel Marcel, *Metaphysical Journal*, trans. Bernard Wall (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1952), viii.

¹⁹ Michał Węclawski, "Gabriel Marcel i etyka heterocentryczna" [Gabriel Marcel and heterocentric ethics], *Roczniki Filozoficzne* 69, no. 2 (2021): 288.

²⁰ Marcel, *Homo Viator: Introduction to a Metaphysic of Hope*, trans. Emma Craufurd, Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1951, 61.

²¹ See G. Marcel, *The Mystery of Being*, vol. 1, *Reflection and Mystery*, trans. George S. Fraser (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1960), 92–93; Gadamer, *Neokantyzm, filozofia egzystencji, filozofia dialogu*, 446.

if the problem can be pondered over at the abstract level, then the mystery can only be fathomed out in the process of personal thinking, immersed in everyday experience.”²² Thus, it is not a speculative way of thinking. Marcel mentions metaphysical thought as a reflection directed at a mystery. He claims that “an essential part of a mystery [is] that it should be acknowledged; metaphysical reflection presupposes this acknowledgment, which is outside its own sphere.... A problem is something which I meet, which I find complete before me, but which I can therefore lay siege to and reduce. But a mystery is something in which I am myself involved, and it can therefore only be thought of as a sphere where the distinction between what is in me and what is before me loses its meaning and its initial validity.”²³ Marcel turns against the spirit of abstraction²⁴ because he believes that only when the subject–object dualism is overcome, the mystery of existence will be revealed: it will be exposed in the metaphysical reflection, which the French philosopher calls “secondary reflection.”²⁵ Unlike primary reflection, it is not an abstract speculation, but a concrete philosophy (the philosophy of thinking thought) which consists in the constant effort to capture the experience as it is, through the toil of successive approximations to the mystery of existence.²⁶ Joanna Wilkońska points out that “generally speaking, primary reflection dismantles an object (which is often required by methods of analysis) and stops there. Only secondary reflection, as an in-depth way of thinking, has the possibility of uniting and reconciling individual elements. It does not happen, however, as in the case of primary reflection, on the basis of collating or reconciling data, but in an effort to regain a disturbed unity.”²⁷ It is therefore a process which is more insightful than speculative, more intuitive than discursive. In this sense, secondary reflection constitutes seeing rather than reasoning, or an understanding vision of a subject who discovers its existence in experiencing their own “I am” (the “situation” in which they find themselves) and feels it as being one with what exists (with the world).²⁸ This experience of one’s own being is defined by Marcel as existence, and the cognitive depiction co-granted with it appears precisely as existential

²² Węclawski, “Gabriel Marcel i etyka heterocentryczna”: 287.

²³ Gabriel Marcel, *Being and Having*, trans. K. Farrer (Westminster: Dacre Press, 1948), 100–17.

²⁴ See Gabriel Marcel, *The Existential Background of Human Dignity* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA, 1963), 123.

²⁵ Marcel, *Being and Having*, 121, 125, 140.

²⁶ See Gadacz, *Neokantyzm, filozofia egzystencji, filozofia dialogu*, 446–7.

²⁷ Joanna Wilkońska, “W kierunku nieuwarunkowanego: egzystencja w filozofii Gabriela Marcela” [Towards the unconditional: Existence in the philosophy of Gabriel Marcel], *Kultura i Edukacja*, no. 4 (2004): 31.

²⁸ See Gadacz, *Neokantyzm, filozofia egzystencji, filozofia dialogu*, 447–8; Marcel, *Reflection and Mystery*, 93.

seeing. In fact, it is, in its nature, a view that unites the four aspects that fall under the experience of existence which Marcel describes as follows: "Person—engagement—community—reality: there we have a sort of chain of notions which, to be exact, do not readily follow from each other by deduction ... but of which the union can be grasped by an act of the mind. It would be better not to call this act by the much abused term of intuition, but by one which on the contrary is too little used—that of synopsis [orig. *synidèse*, translated as *synidesis* elsewhere], the act by which a group is held together under the mind's comprehensive gaze."²⁹ However, it is not an act separated from this whole, because in the experience of the mystery—and this is what the experience of one's own existence essentially is—the subject—object relation (separation of thinking from existence) disappears. "The opposition of subject and object," writes Marcel using the example of the relation of consciousness to existence in the body, "is found to be transcended from the start. Inversely, if I start from the opposition, treating it as fundamental, I shall find no trick of logical sleight of hand which lets me get back to the original experience, which will inevitably be either eluded or (which comes to the same thing) refused."³⁰ Understood as existential seeing, *synidesis* (or *synopsis*) does not lead to conceptual diversification, intellectual problematisation and speculation, but in the opposite direction: towards participation.

Marcel's conviction is that being reveals itself in an individual existence that feels and experiences it, and therefore not in an impersonal way, but through an intimate bond with it, making the association between the experience of existence and its direct cognition (*synidesis* or *synopsis*) and participation.³¹ As a consequence, according to Joanna Wilkońska, "participation will consist in the attitude of unprejudiced openness on the one hand and in cooperation with the surrounding world on the other; however, this world should not be treated as an object, but as 'you' with whom I am to enter into dialogue."³² For Marcel, though, this necessity of dialogue points to something more than the mere duty of communication; namely, to an ontological need which in the deepest layers of the person manifests itself in the form of some inner mysterious appeal which calls man to transcend himself, to actively open himself to the external reality.³³ The ontological need manifests itself, then, as the necessity of being which for a fully awake individual (an existence seeking the meaning of its being) becomes a desire to be more "at home" and to be for the other: it turns

²⁹ Marcel, *Homo Viator*, 22.

³⁰ Marcel, *Being and Having*, 12.

³¹ See G a d a c z, *Neokantyzm, filozofia egzystencji, filozofia dialogu*, 447–8.

³² W i l k o Ń s k a, "W kierunku nieuwarunkowanego: egzystencja w filozofii Gabriela Marcela": 34.

³³ See Ignacy D e c, "Homo viator jako kategoria antropologiczna" [Homo viator as an anthropological category], *Collectanea Theologica* 55, no. 2 (1985): 8.

into participation. “The ontological need,” emphasizes Marcel, “in the effort to explain itself, is found not to be comparable with the search after a solution.... The metaproblematic is a participation on which my reality as subject is built (WE DO NOT BELONG TO OURSELVES).”³⁴ Elsewhere, the French philosopher writes about it as follows: “The best part of my personality does not belong to me. I am in no sense the owner, only the trustee.... Indeed, if we come to think of it, there is nothing in me which cannot or should not be regarded as a gift.”³⁵ Thus, participation appears as a satisfaction to the ontological need of the human “I” realised through the person’s inner opening to a person.³⁶ Moreover, thanks to participation, existence becomes coexistence, and synid-esis (synopsis)—a vision embracing also the existential situation of the other in its drama and specificity. According to Karol Tarnowski, “Marcel comes to an increasing realisation that this participation par excellence is ontological in nature: closeness to the human and divine ‘you’ is ‘co-esse,’ i.e., co-existence, in the bosom of the deepest dimension of participation.... The path to discover this dimension runs through the ‘requirement of the Transcendent,’ which unconsciously penetrates us from the beginning, through all life experiences.”³⁷ Tadeusz Gadacz writes in this context: “At the same time, existence, or the feeling of our own being, reveals to us the feeling that we do not truly exist yet.... The ontological need also assumes the requirement of Transcendence. For Marcel, transcending does not mean crossing all limits (for example cognitive ones) in order to possess (have) something, but to be fuller... Being is given in a participation that cannot be objectivised, in communion of a person with themselves, with others, with God.”³⁸ Thus, communion becomes the fullest manifestation of participation, a kind of “where to” of the human existence, and at the same time it constitutes the kind of encounter in which synopsis has a chance to be transformed into a spiritual vision. However, while the former is primarily related to existential experience, the latter dimension of seeing—built on the former—becomes reality, among others, in a synodal experience.

SENSUS FIDEI AS SPIRITUAL SEEING

Synidesis (or, in other translations to English, synopsis) as the first, existential dimension of seeing, revealed in the reflection on the condition of

³⁴ Marcel, *Being and Having*, 111.

³⁵ Marcel, *Homo Viator*, 19.

³⁶ See Dec, “Homo viator jako kategoria antropologiczna”: 8.

³⁷ Karol Tarnowski, “Gabriela Marcela filozofia wiary” [Gabriel Marcel’s philosophy of faith], *Analecta Cracoviensia*, nos. 21–22 (1989–1990): 104.

³⁸ Gadacz, *Neokantyzm, filozofia egzystencji, filozofia dialogu*, 448–9.

contemporary man, does not limit itself to his individual situation. On the contrary, the requirement of transcendence both orientates participation towards a communion of people and opens the human self to a kind of cognition which reveals itself in a synodal context as a second dimension of seeing, i.e., a specific spiritual epiphenomenon of the believer's existential journey. Thus, a seamless transition occurs between Gabriel Marcel's concrete philosophy and the synodal theology of *homo viator*. As Tadeusz Gadacz reminds us, it was Marcel who

expressed the situation of existence that yearns for being and strives for it in the metaphor of the road (*via*). Man is *homo viator*. The requirement of transcendence also constitutes another name for hope, which serves as a hidden drive of the journeying man.... We cannot experience others as their-selves by merely thinking about them, but rather by meeting them.... A real encounter is only possible when "he" ceases to be "him" and becomes "you." To refer to someone as "you" implies being with him and for him.... The encounter between "I" and "you" is possible thanks to the communion of "we." What constitutes the expression of communion is a gift and fidelity.³⁹

It is precisely in this perspective that the synodal concept of communion of persons fits. The International Theological Commission writes about it as follows: "Exercising synodality makes real the human person's call to live communion, which comes about through sincere self-giving, union with God and unity with our brothers and sisters in Christ."⁴⁰ Significantly, this experience of communion and gift, when set in the reality of a living faith, results in a new dimension of spiritual seeing. One could say that it elevates synidesis to a new level. According to Antoni Podsiad, Marcel himself was aware of this to the extent that he believed that concrete philosophy,

by bringing the mysteries of existence, as it were, to the fore, faces the mysteries of faith. By opening the way for the existentialist thinker—through the mysteries in the full philosophical sense of the word—to the mysteries of faith, it enables him to accept them.... Thus the two orders, namely of philosophical mysteries and of the revealed mysteries, are connected in the depths of the soul, which is created for God and seeks him, often without knowing it. Man, in so seeking, finds in his existential experience the One who is more than he is and who embraces and surpasses him.⁴¹

Podsiad emphasizes that "in such a way, then, the metaphysics of mystery leads to the philosophy of faith. Faith here would consist in a living commun-

³⁹ Ibidem.

⁴⁰ International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, Section 43.

⁴¹ Podsiad, "Gabriel Marcel, czyli próba chrześcijańskiego egzystencjalizmu": 312.

ion with the mystery and would thus presuppose an active, dynamic attitude.”⁴² What follows from this for the spiritual seeing itself and for the concept of synodality? When this attitude is realized in the ecclesial community through the communion of the baptized and their coexistence in an essential union with the doctrine of the Church or with particular elements of Christian religious life, it manifests itself in a particular kind of spiritual vision, which is called *sensus fidei*.

As part of His mysterious love for humanity, God furnishes the totality of the faithful with an instinct of faith—*sensus fidei*—which helps them to discern what is truly of God. The presence of the Spirit gives Christians a certain connaturality with divine realities, and a wisdom which enables them to grasp those realities intuitively. This connaturality shows itself in a *sentire cum Ecclesia*: to feel, sense and perceive in harmony with the Church. This is required not just of theologians, but of all the faithful; it unites all the members of the People of God as they make their pilgrim journey. It is the key to their “walking together”⁴³

—and, at the same time, the essence of synodality.

Then, what is *sensus fidei*? Basically, in theology, it is defined—in literal translation—as the “sense of faith”, i.e., a kind of specific, spiritual cognition taking the form of the individual consciousness of each believer, but correlated with the communal consciousness of the Church as a whole.⁴⁴ It would then be, as Marek Pyc writes, “the ability of every believer for an intuitive, experiential and pre-conceptual cognition of love in revealed truth, abiding in it and understanding what he believes.”⁴⁵ However, this ability, as a kind of direct, supernatural perception of the content of faith and morality in a manner most consistent with God’s plan, would enable their adequate recognition only in unity with the entire community of the faithful, therefore, it is considered a kind of specific spiritual insight: the charism of consistency in faith received by all members of the Church.⁴⁶ This is extremely important since “the sense of faith of an individual (*sensus fidei*) converges with the sense of faith of all

⁴² Ibidem, 300.

⁴³ International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, Section 56. See also International Theological Commission, “*Sensus fidei*” in *the Life of the Church*, Section 90, The Holy See, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20140610_sensus-fidei_en.html; Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, Section 119, The Holy See, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html.

⁴⁴ See Leon Siwicki, “*Sensus fidei* jako dar Ducha Świętego dla Kościoła” (*Sensus fidei* as a gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church), *Studia Theologica Varsaviensia* 43, no. 1 (2005): 80–81.

⁴⁵ Marek Pyc, “Pobożność ludowa a *sensus fidei*” (Popular piety versus *sensus fidei*), *Studia Gnesnensia* 27 (2013): 50.

⁴⁶ See ibidem, 50–51.

believers (*sensus fidelium*), i.e., there is conformity amongst them in matters of faith. The charism in question is therefore both individual and collective, the sense of faith of the faithful being the sense of the whole people of God. This means that the sense of faith is a supernatural capacity given to the entire community of the Church, both to the clergy and to the lay, allowing for a deeper understanding of the revealed reality and an accurate distinction between truth and error in faith.⁴⁷ On the one hand, *sensus fidei* illuminates the life path chosen by the believer and gives it the direction: by prompting the faithful to follow the dictates of faith and morality, it leads them to a deeper, life-changing understanding of faith. On the other hand, however, *sensus fidei* cannot be separated from *sensus fidei fidelium*, or *sensus Ecclesiae*, because the beliefs shared by individual believers are not of a purely private nature, but are always a matter of the community of the Church in the sense that they are related to all the faithful, the teachings of the theologians and the decisions of the Magisterium of the Church.⁴⁸ This is also how they verify themselves. What does this mean in practice? That the sense of faith, properly accepted and recognized in the bosom of the ecclesial community, becomes an invaluable tool for examining the signs of the times and perspectives facing the Church of the future. That is why *sensus fidei* is such an important aspect of synodality. The International Theological Commission stresses that “it is possible to go deeper into the theology of synodality on the basis of the doctrine of *sensus fidei* of the People of God and the sacramental collegiality of the episcopate in hierarchical communion with the Bishop of Rome.... The dynamic of synodality thus joins the communitarian aspect which includes the whole People of God, the collegial dimension that is part of the exercise of episcopal ministry, and the primatial ministry of the Bishop of Rome,”⁴⁹ which is in practice expressed by the fact that “the renewal of the Church’s synodal life demands that we initiate processes for consulting the entire People of God.”⁵⁰ The point is not, however, futile speculation, but meeting, listening together and discerning, and therefore initiating a kind of circulation between the *sensus fidei* of all the faithful. It is about dialogue taking place on various levels of the synodal path and the authority of the Magisterium of the Church examining whether the effect of this spiritual vision remains consistent with the Tradition taken from the apostles.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Ibidem, 51.

⁴⁸ See International Theological Commission, “*Sensus fidei*” in *the Life of the Church*, Sections 59, 65–66.

⁴⁹ International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, Section 64.

⁵⁰ Ibidem, Section 65.

⁵¹ See *Preparatory Document of the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops...*, Sections 14, 30; International Theological Commission, “*Sensus fidei*” in *the Life of the Church*, Section 77.

But there is more to it. There is a risk that, even if a favourable space for engagement is created in the synodal Church, a certain constructive style of participation through dialogue will develop, as well as listening and mutual openness of the Church hierarchy and the faithful, up to the experience of the real communion of persons: an instinctive, natural and direct reaction that comes from the sense of faith will prove to be spiritually accurate and valuable, but existentially fruitless. Admittedly, spiritual vision can reveal the actual difference between what is consistent with the truth of faith and what is contrary to it, but at the same time it can reveal the impotence in the skilful and creative translation of this recognition into the reality of contemporary human existence. As a result, it may—and in fact it more and more often does—emerge that correct doctrinal convictions are not followed in the Church by appropriate pastoral solutions that can boldly face the life turmoil and the dilemmas and tragedies of a specific individual. Why is this happening? Perhaps because the truths of faith and morals seem to be increasingly detached from the realities of human existence today and, as such, are unable to enter into a dialogue with the current conditions of the human predicament, as well as with the changing perception of man himself? Antoni Nadbrzeźny observes: “The search for reliable answers to the question about the essence, functions and manifestations of the ecclesiastical ‘sense of faith’ cannot be carried out disregarding the cultural, social and religious context of contemporary man.”⁵² Therefore, it seems that the future of the Church requires not only a penetrating spiritual vision and a courageous theology, but also a deepened existential vision and a renewed anthropology. The point is not changing the way of understanding human nature, but adopting a perspective that will allow us to recognize and interpret the complex determinants of the human condition in recent times more adequately. Perhaps, then, the theology of synodality, if it is really to give an adequate answer to the challenges of the future facing the Church, must re-connect the two dimensions of vision (synidesis, or synopsis, and *sensus fidei*) and the two perspectives (the pastoral and theological one along with the existential and philosophical one) in one deepened anthropological reflection. Perhaps the time is coming when the ecclesial reflection on the nature of man and his present condition in the Church and in the world should be more constructively enriched with the rethought intuitions of Christian existentialism, in particular those that can help us better understand human fate today? These questions seem all the more important as the synodal process has the potential to deal with the most pressing, current challenges that arise at the

⁵² Antoni Nadbrzeźny, “Zmysł wiary jako zjawisko eklezjalne. Kontekst teologiczno-historyczny” [The sense of faith as an ecclesial phenomenon: The theological and historical contexts], *Theological Research: A Journal of Systematic Theology* 5 (2017): 56.

intersection of reflection on human nature and the living condition of modern man. An example is the 2018 Synod on Marriage and the Family, which, without changing the traditional teaching of the Church, recognized that in special cases it is possible for people living in non-sacramental relationships to receive Holy Communion. This was undoubtedly the result of a synodal discernment reflected in the Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*.⁵³ This shows that future synods can be called not only to be aware of current problems, but also to look for answers on how to respond to them. In the future, a synod envisaged as a process may be called, for instance, to reflect on how the Church should respond to changing sexual attitudes. It is not only about repeating an already established position, but also about finding new ways of understanding the problem—at least in some areas. Moreover, synodality presupposes an active involvement of the laity in this process. For even if the most essential matters are ultimately decided by the Pope (the Church believes that his decision reflects the most adequate understanding of the situation), the voice of the laity ceases to be a second-class opinion and acquires an advisory character, on a par with the opinions of the clergy. After all, synodality is not about the division into states in life, but about the person. Synodal thinking is fully in line with the words that John Paul II made the leitmotif of his Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis*: “Man is the primary route that the Church must travel in fulfilling her mission.”⁵⁴ It seems that in the ecclesial realities of the present day, the deepest meaning of these words is still to be discovered.

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⁵³ See Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, The Holy See, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319-amoris-laetitia.html.

⁵⁴ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis*, Section 14. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_04031979_redemptor-hominis.html.

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ABSTRACT / ABSTRAKT

Aleksander BAŃKA, Two Dimensions of Seeing: Gabriel Marcel's Philosophy and the Existential and Anthropological Background of Synodality

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The concept of "synodality" has become very popular in recent theological debates. Not only does it bring many new highlights to the already classic discourse on the nature of the Church, but it also makes it possible to raise important questions about her future. Moreover, as a mode of dialogue and discernment in the Church—a style of "journeying together" of the People of God—synodality also invites reflection on the subject of that journey, i.e., on contemporary man and his place in the ecclesial community. Not without reason, what constitutes an important aspect of synodality is also anthropological reflection, at the centre of which stands the idea of *homo viator* (the journeying man, the pilgrim): the idea which also lies at the centre of the philosophical creed developed by the great Christian existentialist Gabriel Marcel. The relationship between these two perspectives—the existential and anthropological contexts of synodality and Marcel's metaphysics of hope—is not accidental. This article aims to show that the two perspectives in question entail two essential types of insight, existential and spiritual seeing, which can and should complement each other. What is

more, it seems that their fruitful meeting could result not only in a renewal of the Christian thinking about man, which is needed today, but also in a better recognition of the directions which the Church of the future should follow while seeking space for the difficult dialogue with the modern world.

Keywords: synodality, Christianity, existence, seeing, faith, cognition, experience

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Aleksander BAŃKA – Dwa wymiary widzenia. Filozofia Gabriela Marcela wobec egzystencjalno-antropologicznego kontekstu synodalności

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Pojęcie synodalności często powraca w najnowszej debacie teologicznej. Nie tylko wnosi ono wiele nowych akcentów do klasycznego już dyskursu nad naturą Kościoła, ale pozwala także postawić ważne pytania dotyczące jego przyszłości. Ponadto synodalność jako pewien sposób prowadzenia dialogu i rozeznawania w Kościele – styl „wspólnego wędrowania” ludu Bożego – skłania również do refleksji nad podmiotem owej wędrówki, a więc nad współczesnym człowiekiem i jego miejscem w eklezjalnej wspólnotie. Nie bez powodu jednym z ważnych aspektów synodalności jest namysł antropologiczny, w którego centrum staje idea *homo viator* (człowieka drogi, pielgrzyma), leżąca zarazem w sercu filozofii wielkiego chrześcijańskiego egzystencjalisty Gabriela Marcela. Zbieżność tych perspektyw – egzystencjalno-antropologicznego kontekstu synodalności i Marcelowskiej metafizyki nadziei – nie jest przypadkowa. Celem niniejszego artykułu jest pokazanie, że niosą one z sobą dwa istotne typy oglądu, egzystencjalnego oraz duchowego widzenia, które mogą i powinny się uzupełniać. Co więcej, wydaje się, że ich umiejętne spotkanie mogłoby zaowocować nie tylko potrzebną dziś odnową chrześcijańskiego myślenia o człowieku, ale także lepszym rozpoznaniem kierunków, w jakich powinien podążać Kościół przyszłości, szukając przestrzeni niełatwego dialogu ze światem współczesnym.

Słowa kluczowe: synodalność, chrześcijaństwo, egzystencja, widzenie, wiara, poznanie, doświadczenie

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