

Fr. Perozich comments —

When I was a boy it was common to make ethnic jokes mocking people based on their nationality. The Poles were part of this jocular, presenting them as not intelligent.

Archbishop Stanisław Gądecki blows that out of the water with his clear analysis of the synod below.

For those accustomed to internet sound bites, take these 15 pages slowly, chewing a little at a time, meditate, and then come back for more. It is a read that satisfies.

The highlights and bolding are mine.

Will the Synod transmit faith or unbelief? An interview with Archbishop Stanisław Gądecki

Today, says the head of the Polish Episcopal Conference, we “have a meeting of Churches of ‘excess’ and Churches of ‘scarcity.’ ... The threat of squandering the achievements of two millennia of Christianity is staring us, representatives of the West, in the face.”

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Print



Archbishop Stanisław Gądecki of Poznań, Poland, is pictured in a 2015 photo. (CNS photo/Paul Haring)

Archbishop Stanisław Gądecki was appointed **Archbishop of Poznań, Poland**, in March 2002 by Pope John Paul II. In March 2014, he was elected President of the Polish Episcopal Conference for the first term, and in March 2019 he was elected for the second term. He is currently serving a second term as a member of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith.

Archbishop Gądecki took part in the Synod of Bishops in Rome devoted to the proclamation of the Word of God (2008), new evangelization (2012), family (2014 and 2015), and youth (2018), and he was also at the Synodal Assembly in Rome held in October.

He recently spoke with Catholic World Report about the recent Synodal Assembly, the positives and negatives of the Assembly, the ongoing push for blessings of homosexual couples, and the extremism of the German *Synodale Weg*.

CWR: Excellency, this is the fifth Synod in which you've participated. What surprised you during the Synodal Assembly in Rome this past month?

Archbishop Stanisław Gądecki: The consultation process launched by Pope Francis at parish, diocesan, national, and finally continental levels was a new and interesting experience. Everyone was invited to participate, regardless of their attitude to the faith and the Catholic Church. As a result of this approach, **sometimes the “non-Catholic” voice was more audible than the “Catholic” one. However, this is not what seeking God’s will is all about. We saw a wide variety of viewpoints, with the most extreme ones articulated in Germany, where the *Synodale Weg* ran parallel to the synodal process.**

The diversity of opinions and balancing on the verge of orthodoxy was also heard in Rome, which was partly reflected in the final document. In addition, the confidentiality clause for everyone regarding what happened in the Synod Hall was new. In fact, with the exception of James Martin, who broke this rule at a meeting with European Union ambassadors, everyone else followed it.

The synod offered a lot of time for prayer and meditation. We spent a considerable amount of time in small groups, where, however, **there was no opportunity for authentic conversation.** The requirement was to “listen without prejudice” to the interlocutor and not enter into polemics. **It is an interesting experience, but it does not serve dialogue, that is, a rational search for the truth,** even though in my group, everyone was very friendly. In addition, specific issues were assigned to each table in advance, so being assigned to a particular group was equivalent to being excluded from the conversation on other topics. There were also plenary sessions

where one could make their voice heard. Three and then two minutes were allotted for statements. Some participants managed to talk three or four times. I, oddly enough, was not so lucky. **We were encouraged to send positions to the secretariat, but no one seems to have read them so far.**

***CWR:** Did the participation of the laity in the Synod on Synodality give a different style to the work?*

Archbishop Gądecki: The participation of the lay faithful in the consultation process was natural. It is common practice in local Churches.

In the case of the assembly in Rome, however, there was a question about the nature of the assembly. **The Pope convened a synod of bishops, then the word “bishops” was removed from the name and only the term “synod” remained.** Then came the realization that such a reality does not exist in either canon law or the tradition of the Church. Therefore, “bishops” were reinstated in the name of the event. In the discussion, however, **there is a distinction between a synod of bishops and an ecclesial assembly.** The will of Pope Francis, as expressed in his apostolic constitution *Episcopalis Communio*, expanded the group of those participating in the synod to include those who do not share in episcopal authority but nevertheless hold the right to speak and vote.

Pope Francis, therefore, named the synod of bishops as an institution that differs from that known from the tradition of the Church and that described in the Code of Canon Law, which was emphasized primarily by the bishops of the Eastern Churches.

***CWR:** The Synod on Synodality began in 2021 with a diocesan phase. What did the process of synodal consultations look like in Poland? How much interest was there in it among the laity?*

Archbishop Gądecki: Less than 1 percent of Catholics probably participated in the entire consultation process.

At the same time – as usual with such initiatives, also in the secular environment – **these were active people, in acts and in words.** Hence the question about the representativeness of the opinions collected. Nevertheless, the fact that we could get to know them should be considered positive. They were not voices we had not heard before, but now we have allowed them to be heard as if from within the Catholic Church. The situation was similar in Poland.

The Polish consultations also showed that improving relations between clergy and laity is one of the most urgent tasks. The month we spent together at the Vatican was an opportunity to work on it a little. For the bishop, it is also an opportunity to be nourished by the faith and example of people who have families and, at the same time – without neglecting their duties – find time to spend long moments in the chapel. Sometimes longer than the average clergyman. **However, the group of non-bishops involved was very diverse, and the manner in which they were nominated made it questionable whether their views were representative of a given Church, diocese, or parish.**

The growing sense of co-responsibility on the part of the laity for the Church and evangelization is to be greeted with enthusiasm. It is not wholly new because we would not have figures like St. Catherine of Siena, St. Thomas Moore, or Blessed Carlo Acutis without this sense of co-responsibility. However, the question arises whether there is a specific vocation of the laity and a secular path to holiness or whether the only model is the priestly path, and the laity can fulfill the mission resulting from Holy Baptism to the extent that they become like priests.

In the conversation about the laity, I see the need to defend the secularity of the laity against attempts to “clericalize” them. If the laity were to focus only on liturgical matters in their thinking about vocation, many areas proper to their vocation, such as the family or politics, would be neglected.

CWR: What do the participants expect from the Synod, and what are your expectations?

Archbishop Gądecki: This assembly was unique. The process started as early as 2021; the event is planned to take three years. In this regard, some may associate it with the Council. More important, however, is its social and cultural context. Catholicism is in severe crisis in Western Europe, where the Church is most modernized. In a sense, this is a local phenomenon. However, the universality of this Synod means that we can, and sometimes must, confront Catholics from other parts of the world, who are often surprised by our problems. In my view, the presence of the Eastern Churches and, somewhat more broadly, the martyr Churches, i.e., from regions where persecution of Christians is ongoing or has recently ended, is very important here.

We have the problems of the satiated Churches. the main issues raised by Western Churches, including the German *Synodale Weg*, are those of a consumer civilization in which people have become accustomed to not having to deny themselves anything. Churches from developing countries often lack material resources but do not lack faith and witness to life. Thus, we have a meeting of Churches of “excess” and Churches of “scarcity.” Of course, the latter also have their own problems. The threat of squandering the achievements of two millennia of Christianity is staring us, representatives of the West, in the face. Just as Europe once shared its

faith, today, it may begin to share its lack of faith which is destroying Churches in other parts of the world.

Hence the question: will the synod in its entirety be a place for the transmission of faith or, rather, unbelief? I think that Christians in the West often doubt that they have something so essential to communicate to people that their fate, i.e., salvation or damnation, depends on its acceptance or rejection. So, to avoid being rejected, they try to hide that part of Jesus' teaching which might meet with opposition and expose only that which is shared with the world.

CWR: What postulates were most frequently presented during the Roman session of the Synod?

Archbishop Gądecki: The synod was to be dedicated to the issue of synodality, that is, seeking solutions on how to arrange the relationship between the various states of life within the Church, such as bishops, presbyters, religious women and men, and laity so that it serves the work of evangelization the best possible way. As I mentioned, most of the laypeople in Poland consider this a matter of utmost importance. They have also made it clear that they expect the Church to discover new ways to proclaim the Gospel without compromising doctrine, remaining faithful to Christ and the Gospel.

On the opening day of the synod, however, we all received by e-mail the documents of the German *Synodale Weg*. Almost all of the demands listed there raise serious concerns for me. I believe the Church in Germany is in the greatest crisis since the Reformation. In turn, I read the mailing of the above documents as an attempt to disseminate the German problems across the Church. The documents draw profusely from Protestant theology

and the language of modern politics. From there comes the conviction that the Church should conform to the world by adopting a democratic system and the standards of a liberal bureaucracy. In Germany, we generally have a Church with an expanded bureaucracy. From this comes the desire to limit the power of the bishops and the intention to build a secular power structure parallel to the hierarchical one, as well as to introduce a secular supervision of the bishops.

CWR: It is known from previous declarations that some Bishops' Conferences advocated the introduction of the practice of blessing homosexual couples, the abolition of priestly celibacy or the ordination of women to the diaconate (and even to the priesthood). What is your opinion on these issues?

Archbishop Gądecki: Christ is the Savior of all people, regardless of their origin, race, colour, sexual orientation, nationality, gender, etc. Therefore, the Church, which Pope Francis strongly emphasises, must not close the door, the “gate of mercy”, to anyone who wishes to draw near to Christ. At the same time, the conditions for the truthfulness of this encounter with Christ are the same for everyone, whatever our differences, including gender and sexual orientation; it is always conversion, turning away from sin and adopting a lifestyle in accordance with the Gospel.

A benediction in Latin (*bene-dictio*) means to call someone good. Benedictions, or blessings of homosexual unions would mean that the Church approves of the lifestyle of homosexual partnerships (even if it does not equate them with marriages), which also means sex between same-sex couples. What has always been defined as a sin in the Judeo-

Christian tradition would now become something positive.

The Catholic Church distinguishes between homosexual inclinations and homosexual acts. The former, although disordered, are not considered sinful. The latter are sinful and, in the words of the Catechism, “will in no way be approved by the Church”. The Church calls persons with homosexual inclinations to a life of chastity. **While a person may not personally decide on their inclination, they are not denied the freedom that allows them to live according to their own informed choice.**

The distinction between inclinations and acts stems both from the faith and tradition of the Church and from the observation that people experiencing gender dysphoria, despite the intrinsic diversity of this group, generally follow two distinctly different paths through life, adopting two different lifestyles. Some, often identifying with the designation LGBTQ+, **lead lives that are clearly at odds with the Church’s teaching, yet they often seek to change that teaching.** Others, who do not identify with the above name, live a life of chastity, and expect the Church to reinforce them in this choice through its teaching. People in this second group do not feel rejected by Catholic sexual morality. On the contrary. **Through the Church’s teaching, they have been able to understand themselves better and have experienced a profound encounter with Christ through the sacraments. It is painful for them that in pastoral practice they no longer encounter the Church’s teaching more and more often.** There they often encounter a typification that corresponds to the language of the LGBTQ+ movement but has nothing to do with the reality of their lives and even rejects it. These people, despite trying to live in a state of sanctifying grace and striving for holiness, feel abandoned by the Church, which ignores their need for spiritual guidance and

support. **They see the attack on the Church's teaching that they follow in their lives as a direct assault on their own faith and their life choice of fidelity to Christ. They do not understand why the Church is trying to marginalize them.** Not only do they feel alone, but they are also psychologically destabilized by a pastoral care practice that undermines the meaning of chastity and a person's capacity to live in chastity. For example, representatives of the American Courage group were not invited to the synod. Nor were those whose testimonies are published by Markus Hoffmann in his book *Weil ich es will*. Representatives of other currents were included instead.

CWR: What do you think about the German Synodal Way, the postulates of which have been included in the document Instrumentum laboris?

Archbishop Gądecki: Germany is pushing hard to introduce the diaconate for women. This topic recurs three times in the **synthesis report**. However, they do not cite **theological arguments but the ban on gender discrimination and women's empowerment. This argumentation suggests that what is at issue here is not the diaconate, but rather the position of women in the Church.** Consequently, the introduction of the women's diaconate would not be a solution to the issue but would only inflame the dispute over the ordination of women to the priesthood. **Historically, the diaconate of women differed from the diaconate of men. Women were deaconesses because of women's baptism by immersion. Modesty required that men not assist in this act.** Deaconesses were introduced into the Maronite Church at a synod in 1736. However, the work of deaconesses (*diaconissarum opera*) differed from the ministry of deacons (*diaconi officium*). It involved charitable

activities. Among other things, they were forbidden to approach the altar and administer Holy Communion even in the absence of a deacon. I don't think women requesting ordination to the diaconate today would be satisfied with such a prospect. Without the diaconate, they are allowed much more in the Church than Maronite deaconesses.

Pope Francis has recently expressed this position when he said that a woman "is not entitled to the Petrine principle but to the Marian principle, which is more important. (...) So, the fact that a woman does not have access to ministerial life is not a deprivation because her place is much more important. In our catechesis, we make a mistake in explaining these things and end up returning to an administrative criterion that does not work in the long run."

The second theme is the question of priestly celibacy. The report says that 'different assessments' have been expressed on this subject. Regarding celibacy, **we must be aware that those who speak of the "voluntariness" of celibacy are, in fact, advocating its abolition. Celibacy is one of the most significant signs that one truly believes in the realness and truth of God.** It is the genuine treasure of our Church. Perhaps this is why the ancient Christian writers called celibacy "white martyrdom." Celibacy, like martyrdom, is an emphatic sign of faith in the absolute primacy of God in life. **The life of a celibate is a clear sign that God is the precious pearl—the one, the only one. The only one without whom it is impossible to live. The real and ultimate disability in life is not celibacy but godlessness, life without God, a-theism. God is all we need. The radicalism of giving up the most beautiful form of human love—marriage and family—is the sign that God is an absolute necessity for all of us to fulfill human destiny.** Who is to show this truth if not the pastors of the community? The fact that some priests have been a scandal in

recent years makes it more difficult for some people to understand the greatness and meaning of a celibate life. However, it is not a sufficient reason for the Church to abandon priestly celibacy. Still, young people across the globe are making this commitment generously. Thousands of priests see Christ himself, the high priest who did not start a family, as a model for their service to others.

Although **“inclusion” was often repeated** in the Synod Hall, few people are wondering what it means. Meanwhile, **before it reached the synod hall, the term was clearly defined in the language of secular politics. We should not associate it only with “all-inclusive” holidays but also with the International Planned Parenthood Federation and the UN Women’s agenda. The documents of these institutions are unequivocal in their undermining the binary division of sex and recognizing all forms of gender expression as equivalent.** They are also about abolishing or loosening the existing criteria for accession to various groups, including the Church. When the Lutheran Church was a state Church in Sweden, an atheist demanded admission to the Church community without baptism. He won the court case, which ruled that requiring baptism was discrimination.

The question arises: **Was the Lord Jesus’ teaching inclusive or exclusionary? Jesus left a clear message to the disciples: “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them...” (Mt 28:19).** He did good and died on the cross for everyone, including the greatest sinners, **but was crucified, among other things, because he made things clear, he told the truth, also the uncomfortable one for the listeners. “You belong to your father the devil” (Jn 8:44) – these were not random words. Radical inclusion was not his highest priority,** as seen when many disciples left after his speech about the Bread of Life (Jn 6:66). Believers in Christ do not send anyone to hell. They pray for

everyone's salvation, which does not mean they downplay human attitudes, choices, and actions. That is why St. Paul commands the Christians in Corinth to exclude the incestuous person from the community by stating: "You are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord" (1 Cor 5:5). Then he adds that they ought "not even to eat with such a person" (1 Cor 5:11). Certainly, the Gospel of Jesus was offered to everyone, men and women, Jews and pagans. However, the invitation of the Lord Jesus did not mean that everyone is welcome on their own terms. It comprised a call to conversion and penance.

The word "inclusivity" definitely does not fit into Christian theology. It comes to us from the social sciences. It is where the problem arises. The Church professes the dogma of the infallibility of the pope. At the same time, one can get the impression that some theologians and bishops believe in the infallibility of social sciences, and not even the sciences, but some mainstream sociologists and theories, which in a few decades will only be mentioned in history textbooks.

It seems to me that sentences such as **"the anthropological categories we have developed are not sufficient to grasp the complexity of the elements arising from experience or scientific knowledge"** stem either from an unconscious inferiority complex or from a superstitious approach to science. **This sentence contradicts the conviction expressed, for example, in *Redemptor hominis* (no 10):**

"The man who wishes to understand himself thoroughly-and not just in accordance with immediate, partial, often superficial, and even illusory standards and measures of his being-he must with his unrest, uncertainty and even his weakness and sinfulness, with his life and death, draw near to Christ. He must, so to speak,

enter into him with all his own self, he must ‘appropriate’ and assimilate the whole of the reality of the Incarnation and Redemption in order to find himself. If this profound process takes place within him, he then bears fruit not only of adoration of God but also of deep wonder at himself”.

It seems that *dubia* were primarily a reaction to the postulates of the *Synodale Weg*, which had been criticized by the Vatican several times previously. I think their fundamental meaning boils down to doubts about how changes in Church teaching are introduced. On the one hand, we have declarations that nothing changes, so the importance of the teachings of previous popes is not questioned. On the other hand, **we have some understatements on the part of Pope Francis, which are sometimes interpreted differently by different theologians and bishops. Thus, it is said that the Pope wants something, although nowhere is it articulated clearly or – which is very important for the official teaching of the Church – justified in the light of Tradition.** In turn, this leads to a situation you mentioned that same-sex unions are blessed in Belgium, although the Pope never officially allowed it. **The faithful need clarity in matters of faith and morality. The point is for the Pope to express his position clearly, not by “winking” to those on the left or right.**

Why is it worth dealing with the *Synodale Weg* documents? In one of his statements Bishop Georg Bätzing said that he managed to include all German postulates in the draft final document of the Synod. **So, there is a risk that the Synod Fathers, by voting on the final document next year, will in fact approve the demands of *the Synodale Weg*, albeit with a slightly different wording.**

It becomes justified to ask about the relationship between the Catholic Church and the synodal Church thus understood: is

there continuity or breakup involved in this reform proposal? **The Synod at this stage has not adopted any document summarizing the deliberations, but this will happen next year, after a longer and deeper reflection, in a fully informed manner.** The task of the Synod was to rekindle the charism of evangelization among both the laity and the clergy. The appreciation of the laity in the Church is critical, but **it cannot lead to the destruction of the hierarchical and apostolic structure of the Church.**

St. John Henry Newman, who was grateful that despite many turbulent events the light of faith reached his generation untainted, states that **sometimes in history, the torch of orthodox faith was carried by only one man, as everyone else had gone astray, including the bishops. In this image, I think he effectively portrays our trust in the Holy Spirit, who will not allow the light kindled by Christ to be extinguished or replaced by some other light.**

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