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WALKING TOGETHER TOWARDS RENEWAL: THE ATTEMPT AT SYNODALITY IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA, 1988-1998

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Summary

This paper aims to present, based on the Church's current teaching on synodality, the attempt at synodality of the Catholic Church in Czechoslovakia, which was entitled The Decade of Moral and Spiritual Renewal of the Nation. The paper briefly analyses this little-known event based on contemporary testimonies and their expert processing. It begins by clarifying the concept of synodality to gain a deeper understanding of the theological significance of this task that God asks us to do. Then we present the main actors of the Decade of Moral and Spiritual Renewal of the Nation, its content, and a summary of its effects on walking together of the Church in Czechoslovakia in the still totalitarian atmosphere of the 1980s. At the same time, the paper attempts to compare this event with the current course of the Synod on synodality. The successes and failures of the Decade of the Spiritual Renewal of the Nation, as well as the catechetical work of the so-called underground Church in Slovakia, show that it is necessary to look at man and history not as the addressees of one's agenda, but as those with whom one wishes to have a relationship characterised by mutuality and dialogue.

Keywords: Synodality, Synod, Decade of Spiritual Renewal, Czechoslovakia, History of the Church, Pastoral.

Introduction

The distinctive attitude of the Church after the Second Vatican Council is to be special attention to human reality, which we assess historically. It is our task to

correctly interpret the facts, the events, and the phenomena of our time. In the words of Pope Francis, in some respects, history describes the constant inner turmoil of humanity. This inner turmoil invites us to consider what we can do better, what we must preserve, and what must be changed. In the same way, this history teaches us that if the Church does not move, it cannot be beneficial to her. Therefore, the Church moves forward by reading the world's reality with the eyes of faith and the heart of God.¹ »*Movement is the fruit of docility to the Holy Spirit, who directs this history, in which all have a part to play, in which all are restless, never standing still.*«² The Church needs to rediscover that it is a people journeying together with one another and humanity. These are the reasons for the convocation of this Synod on synodality, as given by Pope Francis. This paper aims to present, based on the Church's current teaching on synodality, the attempt at synodality of the Catholic Church in Czechoslovakia, which was entitled The Decade of Moral and Spiritual Renewal of the Nation. The paper briefly analyses this little-known event based on contemporary testimonies and their expert processing. At the same time, the paper attempts to compare this event with the current course of the Synod on synodality.

The synodal process with the theme »Towards a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission« has been underway since October 2021. In early October 2022, the Vatican updated the synodal process ongoing throughout the Catholic Church, which is moving from the first to the second stage. The second so-called continental stage will produce the documents for the actual celebration of the Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in Rome. The aim of the first stage was to consult the People of God on the various topics set forth, such as formation in synodality; decision-making and discernment; celebration; ecumenism; authority and participation; sharing of responsibility. In his homily at the opening Mass, Pope Francis clarified that a synodal process is an event of encounter in which we are to be inspired by the situation and history of others, by their restlessness and questions, without fear of wasting time. Thus, the effort of all those involved so far has been to show that the way of the Church comes from and draws strength from listening.³

¹ Cf. FRANTIŠEK, *Príhovor k veriacim diecézy Ríma na tému synodality*, 2021, In *Tlačová kancelária Konferencie biskupov Slovenska*. [online] [cited 25 December 2022] Available from: <https://www.tkkbs.sk/view.php?cislocianku=20211007052>

² FRANTIŠEK, *Príhovor k veriacim diecézy Ríma na tému synodality*, 2021, In *Tlačová kancelária Konferencie biskupov Slovenska*. [online] [cited 25 December 2022] Available from: <https://www.tkkbs.sk/view.php?cislocianku=20211007052>

³ Cf. TLACOVÁ KANCELÁRIA KONFERENCIE BISKUPOV SLOVENSKA, *Vo Vatikáne predstavili prechod synody z diecéznej do kontinentálnej fázy*. 2022, [online] [Cit.

If synodality is an expression of the life of the Catholic Church in all her particular churches, we can expect each Church to find the real presence and power of the Holy Spirit reflected in her unique circumstances, history, and traditions. The Synodal Church is also a Church of relationships and a Church of encounter.⁴ In connection with these observations, Metropolitan S. Zvolenský, Archbishop of Bratislava, offered an interesting thought in an interview about the Synod: the Church in Slovakia brings her own historical experience: during communism, the Church lived in small groups, not in formal structures. At that time, large events were forbidden, so the Church had to continue to live small. They prayed a lot and talked about faith.⁵ One of the pastoral initiatives that succeeded in communist Czechoslovakia was the Decade of Moral and Spiritual Renewal of the Nation, known in the Czech Republic as the Decade of Spiritual Renewal. Through this programme, the »silent« Church spoke and, at the same time, began to seek an answer to the question of how to think about the future of the Church in the world. After more than 30 years, the initiators of this event admit that we, as Christians, are again in a similar situation as the Church in Czechoslovakia was at the end of the 1980s. Very dynamic processes are taking place around us, which, unlike the period of the end of unfreedom under communism, do not seem to be full of hope and expectation. It makes it more challenging to consider how the Church should respond to this situation.⁶ The answer can be found in the call to synodality, as the Church seeks to present it in her teaching.

1. Synodality in the mission of the Church

*»The path of synodality is the path which God expects of the Church of the third millennium.«*⁷ The word »synod« is a very old and venerable word in the tradi-

25.10.2022] Available from: <https://www.tkkbs.sk/view.php?cislocianku=20220830016> >

⁴ Cf. Mario GRECH, Synoda: udalosť Ducha Svätého. In *Ecclesia. Cesty spoločnosti a dialógu*. Bratislava, 2023, Vol. 1, no. 1, 6 [online] [cited 10 February 2023] Available from: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1xRv-5G1qGlvFkMiirA0plwDKfLU_epOI/view

⁵ Cf. TLAČOVÁ KANCELÁRIA KONFERENCIE BISKUPOV SLOVENSKA: *Za komunizmu sme sa naučili synodalite, vraví arcibiskup Zvolenský*. [online] [cited 25 October 2022] Available from: <https://www.tkkbs.sk/view.php?cislocianku=20220930012>>

⁶ Cf. ČESKÁ KŘEŠTANSKÁ AKADEMIE: *30. výročí Desetiletí duchovní obnovy s T. Halíkem, M. Vaňáčem a J. Šebkem*. [online] [cited 25 October 2022] Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MDIKV2OIKTw>>

⁷ FRANTISEK: *Prihovor pri príležitosti slávenia 50. výročia založenia Biskupskej synody, 17. októbra 2015*: In *AAS 107 (2015/11)*, p. 1139 [online] [cited 25 October 2022] Available from: <https://www.vatican.va/archive/aas/documents/2015/acta-novembre2015.pdf>>

tion of the Church. It refers to the path along which the people of God walk together. It also denotes a gathering in the communion of the disciples of Jesus and, in some cases, is a synonym with the ecclesial community. In theology, the neologism »synodality« derived precisely from the word »synod« has taken shape in recent decades. The novelty of the term synodality is evidence of the maturing of something new in the Catholic Church. In an ecclesiological context, synodality denotes journeying together of the people of God, by which the nature of the communion of the faithful is specifically manifested and implemented when all gather in assembly and take an active part in the evangelizing mission of the Church.⁸ Synodality also constitutes the core of the ecumenical efforts of Christians. It means an invitation to walk together to full communion, to be one flock (Jn10:16). In its very nature, God's plan of salvation calls us to the unity of all humanity with God and in God, despite the troubled journey through history. The central figure giving direction to the journeying communion is the Holy Spirit. In our ministry to the Church, each of us is called to listen to his voice and only in this way discern the path forward. We are all co-responsible for synodality, and we are all called to it. In Christ, through the Holy Spirit, we share in the life of the communion of the Holy Trinity, which aims to embrace all humanity (Lumen Gentium 4). This communion is for us both a gift and a commitment. Synodality, which is walking together and living in communion, draws on and has its purpose in this communion. The source of its strength is in the Eucharist and the liturgical celebration where our dignity as redeemed children of God is shown. The synodal path is a journey of the pilgrim children of God. Faith, hope, and love shape this journey, which cannot stop at major or minor obstacles but continues until the end of time.⁹ All these ideas and impulses for pastoral ministry can also be identified in the Decade of Spiritual Renewal programme, which is presented in the following lines. Although the word synodality is nowhere to be found in its content, the goals the programme wanted to achieve and the principles it was built on corresponded perfectly thereof.

⁸ Cf. MEDZINÁRODNÁ TEOLOGICKÁ KOMISIA, Synodalita v živote a v misii Cirkvi. 2-5. [online] [cited 3 May 2022] Available from: <https://www.kbs.sk/pdf/VAT/VAT-Synodalita2021.pdf>>

⁹ Cf. MEDZINÁRODNÁ TEOLOGICKÁ KOMISIA, Synodalita v živote a v misii Cirkvi. 2- 5. [online] [cited 3 May 2022] Available form: <https://www.kbs.sk/pdf/VAT/VATSynodalita2021.pdf>>

2. A Decade of Spiritual Renewal 1988 – 1998

In addition to the National Pilgrimage to Velehrad¹⁰ in the summer of 1985, the second great event in the period of the weakening of communist power in Czechoslovakia was the declaration of *the Decade of Moral and Spiritual Renewal of the Nation* in 1987. The prevailing opinion in most of society at that time was that socialism was immoral.¹¹ The economic collapse of socialism was seen by

¹⁰ National Pilgrimage to Velehrad – The leaders of the so-called underground Church decided to encourage participation in pilgrimages from about 1980 onwards because it was a legal space where people from small communities could meet. The national pilgrimage to Velehrad represents a turning point in the history of religious life in Czechoslovakia. The place of pilgrimage in eastern Moravia with its Basilica Minor was for decades the spiritual centre of the Cyril and Methodius celebrations in Czechoslovakia. In 1985 it was a commemoration of the 1100th anniversary of the death of St. Methodius. The highest party authorities tried to give the pilgrimage a peaceful overtone and emphasize the cultural aspect of the mission of Saints Cyril and Methodius rather than the missionary-Christian one. The state authorities did not want to allow the 1985 pilgrimage to become a large-scale spiritual event. In the end, estimated 200,000 believers, mainly from Slovakia, came to the pilgrimage on 7 July 1985. Speaking of state officials, among prominent district officials, the two ministers of culture also attended the event, who were supposed to weaken the religious diction of the celebration by their presence. Their political speeches on the spot provoked the crowd to show their discontent by boos and chanting slogans supporting the Church. The national pilgrimage to Velehrad on 7 July 1985, with the mass participation of the faithful, became an open expression of disagreement with the official ecclesiastical policy of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and dispelled the illusions of the successful control over the Catholic Church. The pilgrimage also surprised the Church, which seemed to realise her strength only from that moment. Contemporaries of the pilgrimage characterise its impact as a psychological turning point in the inner life of the Church, which brought many the courage to 'be the Church'. Cf. Róbert LETZ, *Prenasledovanie kresťanov na Slovensku v rokoch 1948-1989*. In František MIKLOŠKO, – Gabriela SMOLÍKOVÁ, (ed) *Zločiny komunizmu na Slovensku 1948:1989*, Prešov, 2001, 325. Cf. Katarína RUSSINOVA, *Od Dubčeka po pád komunizmu. Cirkev v čase normalizácie*, Ružomberok, 2020, 123-128.

¹¹ The symbolic settlement with the immorality of the totalitarian regime based on the communist ideology was attempted by the federal Act of the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic No. 480/1991 Coll. on the Period of Unfreedom. The content of the act was a statement aimed at preserving historical truth (Section 1): »Between 1948 and 1989, the communist regime violated human rights as well as its own laws. The communist dictatorship disrespected humanity and disparaged the state by its lawlessness and crimes.« Furthermore, the Act of the National Council of the Slovak Republic No. 125/1996 Coll. on Immorality and Illegality of the Communist System declares that the regime based on communist ideology in the period from 25 February 1948 to 17 November 1989 was immoral, unlawful, reprehensible and aimed at the suppression of fundamental rights and freedoms through the purposeful destruction of the values of European civilisation, national and religious rights, judicial crimes carried out in political trials, terror carried out against holders of views other than those corresponding to Marxism-Leninism, the abuse of education, science and culture for political and ideological purposes, as well as the wanton destruction of historical monuments, nature and the environment, etc. Cf. Andrej BELEŠ, *Nemorálnosť a protiprávnosť totalitného režimu založeného na komunistickej ideológii – zákonné vyjadrenie*. In *Come-*

many as a consequence of this immorality of the system. For almost 40 years, the life of every individual at that time had been running under the strong pressure of demoralising conditions: egoism in the sense of taking care only of oneself and not taking part in public affairs, lies and obfuscation of the truth in the sense of conforming to ideology, theft and dishonesty in the work ethic, informing on opponents of the regime, bribery, and so forth. However, it was also the time of the emerging so-called perestroika¹², when it could be sensed that something new was in the air. The establishment of Charter 77 brought about a certain awakening of civil society. To contemporaries, it might have seemed that the Church remained reticent, even passive, in the face of this. It could be mainly seen in the attitude of Czech Primate Cardinal F. Tomášek. Among the signatories of Charter 77 were some of the personalities of the underground Church in Bohemia, who also embodied the moral and intellectual renewal of Catholicism in Czechoslovakia. John Paul II, the new Pope on the See of Peter, prompted the involvement and support of Cardinal Tomášek. It was he who inspired many to take a braver stand. Also, thanks to this, the almost 90-year-old, very cautious Archbishop of Prague eventually became a national symbol of resistance to totalitarianism. The Church in Czechoslovakia was, in fact, the only legal opposition to communism. That is why it attracted young people, disgusted by the lethargy of the previous generation and desiring change. On the other hand, the Decade of Spiritual Renewal authors were aware that the Church herself also needed a constant conscious-

nus. Odborný blog Právnickej fakulty Univerzity Komenského. 2020, [online] [cited 3 May 2022] Available from: https://comeniusblog.flaw.uniba.sk/2020/11/17/nemorálnost-a-protiprávnost-totalitneho-rezimu-zalozeneho-na-komunistickej-ideologii-zakonnev-yjadrenie/#_ftn17> Zákon NR SR o nemorálnosti a protiprávnosti komunistického systému. [online] [cited 3 May 2022] Available from: <https://www.zakonypreludi.sk/zz/1996-125> >

¹² The term, translated as rebuilding, refers to M. S. Gorbachev's reform programme. He originally intended perestroika as an economic reform because the goal was to overcome the deep crisis of the Soviet economy. From 1987, the rebuilding of the entire political system began. These included changes such as the reduction of the planning apparatus' control over the economy, the liberalisation of foreign trade, but also a fundamental break with Stalinism, an increase in the prestige of socialism, changes in the political decision-making system, a change in foreign policy manifested in a more welcoming and open attitude towards the West, transparency in government, a reduction in bureaucracy, freedom of the press, freedom of scientific research as well as the right to strike. However, the total rebuilding failed on the incompatibility of fundamental political and economic reforms and the sabotaging action of the so-called nomenklatura because the authors never worked towards establishing democracy. On the other hand, perestroika contributed to the fall of the eastern communist regimes by bringing the wind of freedom and capitalism to the population. Cf. SOCIOLOGICKÝ ÚSTAV AKADEMIE VĚD ČESKÉ REPUBLIKY, *Sociologická encyklopedie*. [online] [cited 3 May 2022] <https://encyklopedie.soc.cas.cz/w/Perestrojka>>.

ness of her renewal, not self-centred triumphalism. The Church should be part of the people who have the moral health of society at heart. These views created room for deep ecumenical cooperation with both other Christians and non-believers, and at the same time, for a humble attitude on the part of the Church. It was humility that inspired the authors to implement repentance in the Decade. Repentance for all the expulsions of key figures of Czech history and Czech Catholicism from the country.¹³

The Decade not only represented a programme targeted at the near future, but it also represented raising awareness of the post-conciliar sowing that had been growing unnoticed in the Church for several years. Although the Decade's programme did not explicitly follow the programme of the Work of Conciliar Renewal¹⁴ in Czechoslovakia, after nearly twenty years, it was an initiative aimed in a very similar direction. Its goal, which was the moral and spiritual renewal of the Church, was intended to stimulate the renewal of society as stated in the Council's Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*. It evoked a desire for religious freedom in society, led to ecumenism and brought about new forms of pastoral care based on journeying together and dialogue. After the pilgrimage to Velehrad, a group of Prague Catholic activists began draw-

¹³ Cf. ČESKÁ KŘEŠŤANSKÁ AKADEMIE: 30. výročí Desetiletí duchovní obnovy. In *III. Fórum dialogu. Populismus v Evropě a obranyschopná demokracie*. [online] [cited 23 January 2023] Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MDIKV2OIKTw>

¹⁴ A movement of Catholic clergy called the Work of Conciliar Renewal (WCR) was founded in the spring of 1968 as part of the democratisation of society after January 1968 in place of the pro-regime Peace Movement of the Catholic Clergy (PMCC) to activate religious life on the impulses of the Second Vatican Council. At the founding congress at Velehrad in May 1968, the WCR was established as a national religious organisation of Catholic laity and clergy. The Action Committee of Catholic Clergy, headed by Archbishop František Tomášek of Prague, promptly grew on the ruins of the discredited PMCC. The Committee promptly presented its so-called Action Programme. It aimed to support the bishops in their tasks, to serve the needs of the faithful and the everyday needs of our whole society. In August 1968, the Warsaw Pact troops, with their entry into the territory of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, ended the 'democratization process' and began the period of 'normalization'. In November 1968, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia decided definitively not to approve the statutes of the WCR because it was an organisation based on the principle of the hierarchical construction of the Catholic Church, which allegedly contradicted the democratic centralism of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic. The WCR was labelled as an organisation the hostile forces wanted to use to attack socialism. Much of what began to occur in the Church in 1968 continued secretly in the so-called 'underground Church'. Instead of the WCR, various clandestine activities began to emerge, such as the publication of samizdat, residential seminars, lectures and Masses, the establishment of secret monasteries or monastic communities, and so forth. Cf. Jaroslav CUHRA, *Československo – vatikánská jednání 1968 až 1989*. Praha, 2001, 39-40. Cf. Katarína RUSSINOVÁ, *Účasť biskupov Čiech a Slovenska na Druhom vatikánskom koncile a ich osobný prínos pre obnovu liturgie a katechézy, Ružomberok, 2016, 144-162.*

ing up a programme of broad moral and spiritual renewal in preparation for the thousandth anniversary of Saint Adalbert's martyrdom, who was a missionary and the patron saint of Bohemia and Poland. He was an important saint for the whole region of Central Eastern Europe. At a time when the so-called perestroika programme was beginning, which was expected to bring about significant society-wide changes, the initiators of the Decade project wanted to stress that the healing of society could not be expected only from changes in political and economic structures, but from a change in mentality and value orientation within society. It was primarily two personalities who stood behind the idea of the Decade of Renewal: Tomáš Halík and Petr Pířha. This programme of moral and spiritual renewal took a more concrete form in discussions among Catholic laypeople and clerics involved in the life of the hidden, so-called underground Church. During the 1980s, various committees were set up, which were in contact with Cardinal F. Tomášek. The first such group consisted of priests such as O. Mádr, J. Zvěřina, T. Halík, A. Opatrný, and others. The second group consisted mainly of active laypeople, and the third group consisted of religious, among them, for example, the later Cardinal D. Duka, OP.¹⁵

3. Content of the Decade

In a joint pastoral letter of November 1987, the Catholic Ordinaries of Bohemia and Moravia officially declared the programme of the Decade of Renewal and invited the faithful to join in it. Cardinal F. Tomášek, who had initially approached the programme with hesitation, later gained confidence in it and in the people¹⁶ behind it and stood up for it resolutely. He appointed a committee responsible for the preparation of the Decade, which included representatives of all the Czech and Moravian dioceses. Although this committee was illegal before the state power, Bishop K. Otčenášek attended it, and Bishop A. Liška of Prague became the chairman of the committee. The Decade's programme included the themes of spiritual and moral renewal, set for each year of the Decade with the patron assigned to them (see Table 1). The basic idea was di-

¹⁵ Cf. Marta, Edith HOLEČKOVÁ, *Cesty českého katolického samizdatu 80.let*, Praha, 2009, 46.

¹⁶ The group of authors of the *Decade of Moral and Spiritual Renewal* programme included: T. Halík, P. Pířha, V. Malý, V. Benda, M. Holeček, D. Duka, T. Klepek, M. Vlk, J. Graubner, A. Pintíř, F. Lobkowicz, F. Radkovský, V. Vaško, A. Opatrný, and others. Cf.: Jan JANDOUREK, *Tomáš Halík. Ptal jsem se cest*, Praha, 2001, 136.

rected towards the path of healing, reconciliation, repentance, and conversion of the Czech nation and the search for values and moral strength for living in truth.¹⁷ This idea was to be fulfilled by a return and fidelity to the roots of spiritual history. Therefore, each year was dedicated to one Czech saint and, at the same time, aimed at a particular social group. Each year's theme recalled and discussed one of God's Ten Commandments or another Bible command. However, the commandments were interpreted in the form of positive values: the commandment *You shall not steal* clarified the theme of social justice, the commandment *You shall not commit adultery* sought to bring closer God's plan for the family and family life, and the commandment *You shall not bear false witness* explained the theme of truth and justice in interpersonal relationships. Each year of the Decade began according to the liturgical year, that is, on the first Sunday of Advent. The reference to sites associated with the saint of the year revived in people acts of veneration and devotion. Pilgrimages were made to the churches dedicated to these saints, and various adoration, lectures, concerts, and discussions were held.¹⁸ Each year, the programme tried to open up a particular social area and show a new dimension in which things could be improved: health care, culture, marriage, and so forth. The chosen saints were to show the plurality of Christianity and the human face drawn into a particular life story and a specific locality.¹⁹

The birth of the Decade programme did not escape the attention of the ŠtB (State Security), which, however, had neither strength nor motivation for any significant counterattack. The ŠtB only applied an old and proven method, compromising the people opposing the communist regime. The ŠtB analysis from mid-1989 mentioned T. Halík, O. Mádra, D. Duka, V. Malý, V. Benda and J. Čarnogurský. It was the »Klín (Wedge)« operation aiming to bring disunity into the structures of the unofficial Church and destabilise her. The alleged particular political intentions of these exponents of the illegal church struc-

¹⁷ In 1990, the Catholic priest R. Sarka, now an associate professor of practical theology at the Faculty of Education, Catholic University, spoke with the controversial priest Fr. Antonín Dohnál, who claimed he was the one who had proposed the idea of the Decade of the Renewal of Bohemia to Cardinal Tomášek. It is probable according to the original topics to be discussed in the Decade: repentance, reconciliation, etc. Dohnál laconically stated that his idea was later taken up by liberal priests who gave it a completely different content. Later Dohnál entered the Basilian Order and was invalidly and illicitly consecrated as a bishop. As to the activities of A. Dohnál Cf. Róbert SARKA, *Stret spiritualít. II: Reformné projekty katolíckych spiritualít 20. storočia*, Ružomberok, 2016., 43 – 46.

¹⁸ Cf. Jan JANDOUREK. Tomáš Halík. Ptal jsem se cest. Praha, 1997, 133-153.

¹⁹ Cf. Radek TICHÝ, *Slabá Církev? Jeden pokus o obnovu katolíckých farností v Čechách*, Praha, 2011., 36-39.

tures, as the ŠtB called them, were to be unmasked and continuously presented at the meetings of the Assembly of Ordinaries of Czechoslovakia in order to withhold support from the illegal church structures, to condemn their actions, to control Cardinal Tomášek's speeches, and to influence the priests in this spirit. The so-called 'agency measures' against the efforts of the illegal church structures to 'misuse' pilgrimages and celebrations to revive religious life in Czechoslovakia were taken and targeted at particular pilgrimages and church celebrations.²⁰

The first two years were the most crucial for the Decade. In this period, it brought much enthusiasm, expectation and spiritual activity, which also brought particular inspiration for personal piety. The great advantage of the programme was the topicality of its themes, its catholicity, and the formality and credibility given to this programme by Cardinal F. Tomášek. The Easter message of the Archbishop of Prague attempted to attract people beyond the borders of the Catholic Church in Czechoslovakia to the Decade programme.²¹ The awareness of responsibility for the world represented a connection of all people of goodwill: »*The Decade of Spiritual Renewal is a challenge inspired by the Gospel. However, this call is not only addressed to the ecclesial community or people of faith. It is a journey open to the collaboration and contribution of all who realise that the hope for the nation's well-being cannot be separated from what tradition calls the care for the soul.*«²²

The first year of the Decade of Spiritual Renewal, 1988, was dedicated to the veneration of Saint Agnes and those who dedicated their lives to the ministry to those who suffer. The theme of the year, *Ministry of Life*, dealt with God's fifth commandment, »*You shall not kill,*« with the subtitle, *Love one another*. As early as March 1988, representatives of the Czech Catholic Dissent, in cooperation with their ordinaries, organised a national pilgrimage to Saint Vitus Cathedral to venerate Blessed Agnes of Bohemia, one of the most important figures of religious life in the Czech Republic. A characteristic feature of her actions was her awareness of responsibility for society and the state.²³

²⁰ Cf. Petr FIALA, – Jiří HANUŠ, *Katolická církev a totalitarismus v českých zemích*, Brno, 2001, 141.

²¹ Cf. Stanislav BALÍK, – Jiří HANUŠ, *Katolická církev v Československu*, Brno, 2007, 100 – 101.

²² František TOMÁŠEK, *Velikonoční poselství duchovním a věřícím všech křesťanských církví a všem lidem dobré vůle v naší zemi*. ARCHIV APOSTOLSKÉ ADMINISTRATURY ARCIBISKUPSTVÍ PRAŽSKÉHO 5/88, Suppl. 4, 2.

²³ Cf. Jaroslav ŠEBEK, *Svatá Anežka nám vyprosila svobodu*. In *Katolický týdeník*. Praha, 2011. No. 25, Vol. 22. [online] [cit.20.11.2022] Available from: <https://www.katyd.cz/prilohy/svata-anezka-nam-vyprosila-svobodu.html>

Although the communist regime officially allowed the pilgrimage, it tried to limit the number of pilgrims in every possible way. It means, among other things, that the crews of cars arriving at Saint Vitus Cathedral were checked, and public transport lines were diverted. According to dissident V. Benda²⁴, only 12 to 15 thousand people came to the celebration instead of the expected 100 thousand participants. Nevertheless, the pilgrimage continued without complications. The leading dissidents were detained for 48 hours before the opening ceremony of the pilgrimage to St. Agnes in 1988. However, events escalated, and the regime could no longer reverse them. In the second year of the Decade of Renewal, there was an unexpected rapid collapse of the communist regime. Among the most significant changes was the nature of the pilgrimage to the canonisation of Blessed Agnes in the Eternal City. Suddenly, the communist regime in Czechoslovakia did not put obstacles in the way of going on the pilgrimage. A few days before the student demonstration and the subsequent events of November 1989, the canonisation of Agnes of Bohemia mentioned above took place in Rome with a high participation of Czech pilgrims. In those days, when the communist regime in Czechoslovakia was deciding whether to capitulate or resort to military force, Cardinal Tomášek uttered the memorable words in the Cathedral of Prague: *»In this important hour of a struggle for truth and justice in this country, the Catholic Church and I are on the side of the nation!«* The following period brought a completely free space for religious freedom to society in Czechoslovakia.²⁵ In 1989, two saints of the 19th century became patrons of the search for *Faith in the Modern World*: St. John Nepomucene Neuman from Prachatice, missionary and later bishop in Philadelphia, USA, whose canonisation took place in 1977, and St. Clement Mary Hofbauer. Both belonged to the Redemptorists and joined faith with philosophy in their lives. The year 1990 was dedicated to St. Nor-

²⁴ Václav Benda (1946-1999) – a Catholic activist, political prisoner of the communist regime, philosopher, and cyberneticist. In 1979-1984 he was a spokesman for Charter 77. For his dissident activities, he was imprisoned four times for subverting the state. After the Velvet Revolution, he was one of the co-founders of the Christian Democratic Party in the Czech Republic (KDS). He was one of the Christian-oriented politicians: *»A state that attacks both God's and its own symbols, denies itself, ceases to be a social force and loses this power. Czechoslovakia's legal system was in fact one of the worst in the world because it was conceived solely for propaganda purposes. By the end of the 1980s, the communist regime was already insecure and desperate, and the 'real social force' was to be seen in the Catholic Church«*. BENDA, Václav. The challenge from Bratislava, in: Patrik BENDA, *Noční kádrový dotazník a jiné boje: Texty z let 1977-1989*. Praha, 2009., 48–51. Cf. Jiří HANUŠ, *Malý slovník osobností českého katolicismu 20. století*, Brno, 2005., 12.

²⁵ Cf. Tomáš HALÍK, *Katolická církev v České republice po roku 1989*, in: *Společnost v přerodu*, Praha, 2000, 143.

bert, founder of the Premonstratensians, and Blessed J. Sarkander, martyr of the seal of confession. The meditations on the third commandment of the Decalogue: *Remember to keep holy the Lord's day* were meant to encourage to *Sanctification of Life*, and the target social status of this year was priests. Blessed Zdislava was chosen as the patroness of the year 1991. It was focused on *Family Life*, Christian married couples as the target group, and reflection on the sixth commandment of the Decalogue: *You shall not commit adultery. What God has joined together, let not man separate*. Both Blessed Zdislava and Blessed Agnes were canonised during the Decade of Renewal. *Upbringing, education and tradition* became the central spiritual theme of 1992, dedicated not only to teachers and educators. St. Ludmila, the grandmother of St. Wenceslaus and the patroness of teachers, was introduced as the patroness of this year. During the year, attention was paid to the fourth commandment of the Decalogue: *Honour your father and your mother*. The theme of 1993 was *Truth and Justice* according to the eighth commandment of God: *You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour*. The year's patron saint, St. J. Nepomucene, was given prominence as a representative of a social group of those persecuted for their faith and beliefs. The main patron saint of Bohemia, St. Wenceslaus, became the patron saint of the year 1994 with an emphasis on landowners. The message of that year was: *Bear fruit! Work and social responsibility*, in the spirit of the commandment *You shall not steal!* The year 1995 was dedicated to the veneration of St. Procopius, the first abbot of the Benedictine monastery in Sázava, which was the centre of Slavic liturgy in Bohemia in the 11th and 12th centuries. *The spiritual and physical culture of personality* was the theme of that year, to which they added meditations on the creation of man by God in his image. The authors wanted to dedicate the seventh year of the Decade of Renewal to the religious. They dedicated the eighth year of the Decade, 1996, to the veneration of Saints Cyril and Methodius and all the proclaimers of the Gospel. With the theme of *Evangelisation and Prayer*, they wanted to remind Jesus' command to *Go and make disciples for me!* (Mt 28:19). Finally, the millennium anniversary of the death of St. Adalbert was the main theme of 1997. Christ's message *I am with you always* (Mt 18:20) wanted to point the Czech nation to Christ – *the Lord of history and the Father of the age to come*.²⁶

²⁶ Cf. ARCHIV APOSTOLSKÉ ADMINISTRATURY ARCIBISKUPSTVÍ PRAŽSKÉHO, Společní pastýřský list k roku blahoslavené Anežky Přemyslovny. 1987, no. 11/87, Suppl. 1.

4. Evaluation of the progress and results of the Decade programme

According to the authors of this programme, the Decade of Renewal brought perhaps the greatest chance for renewal that the Catholic Church in Bohemia has had in several decades. The Decade programme was meant to be a kind of laboratory for the Christian lifestyle in the new millennium. It emphasised belonging to Europe, its Christian roots, and the key traditions of Czech history. This chance, however, was fulfilled to a minimum level. Many of the tragic fruits of the communist persecution of the Church became apparent only after 1989. The Church was considerably exhausted. The isolation of the Catholic Church in Bohemia from the global one, the isolation from the development of theological science abroad, and the isolation from the post-Conciliar transformations also had their consequences.²⁷

In hindsight, the vision of transforming the Czech nation through the Decade of Renewal seems naive. The fruits of the first years of the Decade, such as the initiative of Christians in social work and charity, and the working team of priests and laity behind the programme, were undoubtedly a good contribution to a new phase in the life of the Church. However, the essential goal, which was to offer this programme as a basic concept of pastoral work which would not only look inwards to the community of the faithful (conversion of the converted) but become a light, a moral inspiration for the broader strata of society, was not achieved.²⁸ Some of its authors speak of a failure to address society clearly enough. The Decade carried the atmosphere of the 1980s when the desire for change was prevalent. However, Czech society did not grow up to the radicalism and dynamism of the changes that followed 1989. Several leaders of the Decade of Renewal programme faced administrative and technical problems in pastoral care. T. Halík became the secretary of the Czech Bishops' Conference, P. Piřha became the Minister of Health, D. Duka, F. Lobkovicz, and others became bishops. They had to face many practical tasks in the renewal of dioceses. This was one of the reasons why the goal of the Decade was lost sight of. After the fall of the regime, when some Christian movements hastily composed a free spiritual programme, the Catholic Church in Bohemia had already had such a programme. However, suddenly no one would invest all their energy into this work. Therefore, the last years

²⁷ Cf. Tomáš HALÍK, *Katolická církev v České republice po roku 1989*, in: *Společnost v přerodu*. Praha, 2000, 144.

²⁸ Cf. Tomáš HALÍK, *Katolická církev v České republice po roku 1989*, in: *Společnost v přerodu*. Sborník referátů z cyklické konference Demokracie 2000, Praha, 2000, 145.

of the Decade boiled down to posting the annual theme on the parish bulletin boards. Another reason for the little success of the Decade of Renewal appears to be the refusal to publicise the programme in the media. At a time when so many different targets and enticements opened up in the mass media, the authors of the Decade did not want their programme to be one of the many political and other ideas on the market offered by the free media. According to O. Mádr, the fact that more demanding mass actions did not attract the Czech mentality was a certain reason why the Decade was left incomplete.²⁹ The authors of the programme saw another reason for its failure in its broad target group. The programme wanted to belong to everybody and appealed to everybody. However, in the final result, nobody adopted it. After years of isolation from the social world, the priests had little understanding of the social dimension of the Decade of Renewal. It was enough for many of them to print prayer cards of the Decade's saints. To this day, the non-church part of Czech society is almost completely unaware of the Decade of Renewal. Ecumenical outreach has hardly taken place at all. The Church in Slovakia had its own path, which consisted of spiritual formation within the life of small communities, which members of the Fatima Community led.³⁰ Behind the programme of

²⁹ Cf. Patrik BENDA, *Noční kádrový dotazník a jiné boje. Texty z let 1977-1989*, Praha, 2009, 52.

³⁰ The lay apostolate movement on the territory of Slovakia began to work actively already in the mid-1940s through true Catholic Action. It was motivated by the lay movement in the Roman Catholic Church, which was born in the 1920s and 1930s at the instigation of Pope Pius XI. The aim of the Catholic Action was to defend and spread Christian values in society through the application of Christian principles in all areas of human life by involving the laity in various activities (e.g. in catechesis) under the guidance of priests and bishops (the lay apostolate). Catholic Action aimed to assist the Church in her pastoral efforts and to defend Christian values in changing social conditions. During the period of the Prague Spring, the already existing groups of the lay movement in Slovakia gained new members, especially from university youth. One of the most important during this period was the group around Salesian J. Beňo. S. Krčméry and V. Jukl initially joined him, but after four years of cooperation, they separated due to differences of opinions. J. Beňo continued his pastoral work with an increasing number of laypeople and priests. A special part was the student groups that began to emerge among university students in about 1969. These were small communities of 5 to 10 students. Before going to university, young people who wanted to live a more active spiritual life were usually given the contact to the priests active among the university students by their local priest. They contacted them with the leaders of these groups. Gradually, the groups specialized according to their activities into 1. prayer groups, 2. study groups – focused on philosophy and theology, and 3. practical groups – apostolate. After graduation, the graduates returned home, where they continued these activities and established new communities to pass on to others what they had received. From 1975 onwards, a network of circles in about 150 towns and villages in Slovakia was established. For better coordination, so-called regional centres were set up, code-named »zábava« (entertainment), held four times a year as far as possible. In 1989, their number reached 17 all over Slovakia. The meeting of the coordinators of the communities from the universities in

the Decade, there was a particular philosophy of the history of the Czech nation, which is best described by St. Adalbert – the philosophy of entering into one's inner self and the truth. There were a few parishes that managed to get this and honestly went through the renewal programme. Each year, smaller or larger groups of the faithful led by a priest sought answers to the challenges of particular themes and saints in joint meetings at different times. They responded to the idea of mutual aid during the year of St. Agnes with an annual camp for the children of Chornobyl. Diocesan and parish social committees were formed. They gave rise to Catholic Charity after the upheaval. The trigger for the social aid committees was also the aid and support to the victims of the earthquake in Soviet Armenia. The initiators of the Decade, however, tried to focus their attention mainly on helping the underprivileged citizens at home. It contributed to some weakening of the state monopoly on social assistance. The Church claimed her responsibility in the field of social assistance, the symbol of which was Agnes of Bohemia.³¹ The authors of the programme still consider these tiny seeds to be an important confirmation that their work was not in vain. Although the Decade of Moral and Spiritual Renewal did not

Bratislava had the code name »centráľko« (central). V. Jukl was responsible for the coordination of the activities of the lay apostolate in Slovakia. From 1973 onwards, there were even national coordination meetings. After it was discovered that they had been monitored by the ŠtB (State Security), they stopped the activity in 1975. In the meantime, the secular Institute Fatima was created in 1974. Its members travelled annually to the USSR to bring religious literature and, if possible, to evangelise. One of the main goals of the institute was the establishment, formation, dissemination and coordination of small Catholic communities. Their specific content consisted of prayer, contemplation, singing and philosophical-and-theological discussions to »educate intelligent Christians in a socialist society«. The communities became islands of freedom in a totalitarian society. R. Fiby, E. Valovič, J. Gunčaga, F. Novajovský and P. Murdza, who were secret priests without state permission, cooperated with the groups of active laypeople around S. Krčméry and V. Jukl. The head of the Institute was Bishop J. Ch. Korec, officially employed as a workman at that time. He secretly ordained seminarians who secretly studied theology, mainly with the Jesuits. By the end of this period, he had ordained about 100 adepts. They then began to work secretly in pastoral ministry. They organised trips with Holy Masses, gave spiritual retreats and spiritual mentoring, etc. The members of the Fatima Movement took vows of poverty, chastity and obedience and devoted themselves intensively to the apostolate at home and in the Soviet Union, where they often planned missionary journeys. Cf. Ján ŠIMULČÍK, *Svetlo z podzemia. Z kroniky katolíckeho samizdatu 1969-1989.*, Prešov, 1997, 15-16. Cf. *Encyclopaedia Beliana*. Bratislava, 2018. [online] [cited 11 March 2020] Available from: <<https://beliana.sav.sk/heslo/katolicka-akcia>>. Cf. SPOLOČENSTVO FATIMA. SEKULÁRNÝ INŠTITÚT. *Spiritualita spoločenstva Fatima*. [online] [cited 23 January 2023] Available from: <https://fatima-si.sk/spiritualita-spolocenstva-fatima/>.

³¹ Cf. ČESKÁ KŘEŠŤANSKÁ AKADEMIE: 30. výročí Desetiletí duchovní obnovy. In *III. Fórum dialogu. Populismus v Evropě a obranyschopná demokracie*. [Online] [23.1.2023] Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MDIKV2OIKTw>

leave specifically visible traces, at least in its first years, it articulated the optimistic expectations, hopes and activities of a Church yearning for freedom.³² The period of unfreedom of the Church symbolically ended with celebrations, namely with a solemn Holy Mass for the canonisation of Agnes of Bohemia on 25 November 1989 in the Saint Vitus Cathedral in Prague. This Mass was also the first live transmission of a church service broadcast by Czechoslovak state television on the territory of Czechoslovakia. Fortunately, the breath of freedom continued in the following days of life in Czechoslovakia. For the Czech nation, it confirms the hope it had carried for centuries: that the canonisation of Agnes would open the door to freedom. The question is how we, as God's people on the way, use this freedom to move forward together and to sanctify the world.³³

The Decade programme's authors later focused on preparing for the Holy Father's visit to Czechoslovakia in April 1990. Pope John Paul II often mentioned the Decade in his speeches, expressing his support for the programme. Although the nation rejoiced at this, there was no interest in the deeper content of the Decade. The end of the Decade was overshadowed by the preparation for the Great Jubilee in 2000 and the three-year plan of preparations to celebrate the 1150th anniversary of the arrival of Saints Cyril and Methodius to Great Moravia in 2010. The end of the Decade also feels confusing when looking at the many other offers suddenly offered to faithful Catholics. Each diocese produced its pastoral plans and renewal programmes ultimately leading to overload. Too many spiritual impulses and renewal concepts for one Church produced a situation where the faithful remained uninterested. The perceived tension between Moravian and Czech (Prague) Catholicism was also not conducive to cooperation.³⁴

5. Comparison of the Decade programme with the current call to the synodality of the Church

In conclusion, we can say that the common features of the programme of the Decade and the mission of synodality are, first of all, the desire for the internal renewal of the Church but also for the renewal of her relationship with

³² Cf. Tomáš HALÍK, – Petr PÍTHA, a kol. Anketa: Desetiletí duchovní obnovy, in: *Souvislosti. Revue pro křesťanství, literaturu a kulturu* 7 (1997) 1, 257-273.

³³ Cf. Stanislav BALÍK, – Jiří HANUŠ, *Katolická církev v Československu*, Brno, 2007, 67.

³⁴ Cf. Radek TICHÝ, *Slabá Církev? Jeden pokus o obnovu katolických farností v Čechách*, Praha, 2011., 36-39.

the world – reading the reality of the world through the eyes of faith. It is also a search for new ways of engaging the members of the People of God in the Church and the world and new ways of evangelizing and strengthening ecumenical dialogue. Above all, however, we want to stress the similarity between the Decade programme and synodality, which consists of the effort to strengthen the consciousness of being a member of the Church, to strengthen the consciousness of co-responsibility for the Church in each of her members. Like the course of the Synod on Synodality, the Decade programme was a programme of meetings centred on listening and spiritual discernment so that the participants could understand what the Holy Spirit wanted to say and where he wanted to take them in the light of God's Word. In this analysis of the attempt at synodality, the following emerge as essential: mutual unity among the various dioceses and unity between the national churches and the Apostolic See. The main goals of the Decade, like the synodality itself, were to be manifested in the authentic life of the local Church and in the orientation towards living together in the body of Christ. As in the past, so also today, the renewal of the Church directed towards the future and not only to the preservation of ancient traditions must also be kept in mind. The Church is to be a place of living faith of today's people. However, the synodal way must not be manifested in greater submission to the world. Behind every spiritual programme must be a sincere and profound conversion to Christ. For the Synod is not so much a programme to be planned and implemented, but above all a style to be put into practice.³⁵

Conclusion

The Catholic Church has embarked on a synodal process. This may not mean anything new and unprecedented for the Church in the Czech and Slovak republics. On the contrary, we can embark on this journey of walking together in direct continuity with the Decade of Spiritual Renewal programme or with the life of the small communities that were active during communism. T. Halík, one of the founders of the Decade of Renewal, sees the inculturation of faith as a strategy for the further action of the Church. That is taking root of the values of the Gospel in the lifestyle and thinking of contemporary people. It should not be a cheap adaptation to this world but a deep dialogue

³⁵ Cf. ČESKÁ KŘESŤANSKÁ AKADEMIE: 30. výročí Desetiletí duchovní obnovy. In *III. Fórum dialogu. Populismus v Evropě a obranyschopná demokracie*. [online] [cited 23 January 2023] Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MDIKV2OIKTw>

with culture. In the current national and global happening, this is what can be, and actually must be, the way of the synodality of every local and the universal Church. Today, Christianity is neither the only nor the most listened-to thing that constitutes culture. On the contrary, the faith is denied, ridiculed and marginalised, especially in Europe. We need a transition to real pastoral care that approaches the individual with love, sensitivity and respect. The successes and failures of the Decade of the Spiritual Renewal of the Nation, as well as the catechetical work of the so-called underground Church in Slovakia, show that it is necessary to look at people and history not as the recipients of one's own agenda, but as those with whom we want to have a relationship characterised by mutuality and dialogue.³⁶ The Synodality thus means a new encouragement in this evangelising mission of the Church in the world, justice towards our neighbours and a heart turned towards God, meeting together, sharing and seeking new ways of transforming the world.³⁷ Looking back on the Decade of Renewal, it is essential to realise that this chapter is not meant to collect dust. The Church's experience of the past can be updated for the present. Nearly a year and a half after the Synod on Synodality began, there is concern about its practical impact on the daily life of the Church. The flow of tasks the leaders of the local churches address is swift and strong. Long-term global projects are often put on the back burner in favour of new and pressing demands at the level of countries or individual dioceses. Even in the case of the Synod on Synodality, the scattered attention of the leadership of dioceses and national churches can result in the familiar situation of repeated beginnings and unfinished ends. The risk of many synods and spiritual programmes is to look inward, the results of which would be just another book on the shelf in the library. We are invited to walk together. *»However, there cannot be a tension of contradiction between local churches and the universal Church: one can only be understood and lived in relation to the other; each has a responsibility for the other one which is expressed in an honest, practical concern born of a love that goes beyond time, place and nationality.«*³⁸

³⁶ Cf. PÁPEŽSKÁ RADA PRE PODOPRU NOVEJ EVANJELIZÁCIE. Direktórium pre katechézu. Article 197, Trnava, 2022.

³⁷ Cf. MEDZINÁRODNÁ TEOLOGICKÁ KOMISIA: *Synodalita v živote a v misii Cirkvi*, 2018, 4-7. [online] [cit.20.11.2022] Available from: <https://www.kbs.sk/pdf/VAT/VATSynodalita2021.pdf>

³⁸ Mario GRECH, Synoda: udalosť Ducha Svätého. In *Ecclesia. Cesty spoločenstva a dialógu*, Bratislava, 1 (2023) 1., 6 [online] [cited 10 February 2023] Available from: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1xRv-5G1qG1vFkMiirA0plwDKfLU_epOI/view

Sažetak

**ZAJEDNO HODATI PREMA OBNOVI: POKUŠAJ SINODALNOSTI
U KATOLIČKOJ CRKVI U ČEHOSLOVAČKOJ, 1988.-1998**

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Ovaj rad ima za cilj prikazati, na temelju aktualnog nauka Crkve o sinodalnosti, pokušaj sinodalnosti Katoličke Crkve u Čehoslovačkoj pod nazivom Desetljeće moralne i duhovne obnove naroda. U radu se ukratko analizira ovaj malo poznati događaj na temelju suvremenih svjedočanstava i njihove stručne obrade. Započinje pojašnjavanjem pojma sinodalnosti kako bi se steklo dublje razumijevanje teološkog značaja ove zadaće koju Bog od nas traži. Potom predstavljamo glavne aktere Desetljeća moralne i duhovne obnove naroda, njegov sadržaj i sažetak njegovih učinaka na zajednički hod Crkve u Čehoslovačkoj u još uvijek totalitarnom ozračju 1980-ih. Ujedno se ovaj događaj nastoji usporediti s dosadašnjim tijekom Sinode o sinodalnosti. Uspjesi i neuspjesi Desetljeća duhovne obnove nacije, kao i katehetski rad takozvane podzemne Crkve u Slovačkoj, pokazuju da je potrebno na čovjeka i povijest gledati ne kao na primatelje nečije agende, nego kao oni s kojima se želi uspostaviti odnos karakteriziran uzajamnošću i dijalogom.

Ključne riječi: sinodalnost, sinoda, desetljeće duhovne obnove, Čehoslovačka, povijest Crkve, pastoral.

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