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Personalistic dimension of ecclesia-forming catechesis

The article addresses the personalistic dimension of the Church's catechesis presented as a process of including children and young people in the mystery of the Church seen in a personal way, as the *Communio Personarum et personarum*. The personal view of the Church and the personalistic dimension of ecclesial education in catechesis is intended as a safeguard against understanding and grasping the Church in rheistic, institutional, hierarchical, juridical, and sociological terms. It is also meant to open up to anthropological, personalistic and communal dimensions. A new personal quality and a higher way of existence for the person being catechized as coexistence with Christ should be the most important fruit of a personalistic introduction to the Church.

Key words: Church, community, catechesis, personalism.

Introduction

In today's world, indeed in the ecclesial community itself, one notices a simplistic way of understanding the Church. Analysis of the way the Church functions, its daily life and presence in the world, reveals many flaws in the understanding of its nature and essence. Analysis of the situation of the Church, which many consider as difficult and in need of renewal, indicates the need for the Church to develop a deeper awareness of its own identity.

Since the Church as a community is the first subject of companionship in faith, it is thus the subject of catechesis, and catechesis is invariably the work of the Church. Therefore, for the Church, catechesis is an instrument of ecclesial communion, ecclesial formation, ecclesial maturity, and ecclesial faith. Therefore, one of the many challenges

for the religious education of children and young people includes ecclesial education as a major task of ecclesial catechesis. Knowing the aspirations of young people to belong to a group and community of persons, it seems that the most appropriate and creative ecclesial formation will be a personalistic one, which introduces the *Communio Personarum et personarum* into the Church.

The situation of understanding the Church within the Church

Ecclesial formation is necessitated not only by the low awareness of being the Church, but also by the fact that many people experience crises and uncertainties in their understanding and belonging to the Church during their school education. In recent years, an additional confluence of numerous external factors has significantly undermined the authority of the Church, which, as M. Chmielewski observes, is the first bitter fruit of the Covid-19 pandemic¹. Faced with these difficulties, many young people have developed excuses to sever ties with the Church because of reservations and doubts about the Church.

In addition, numerous events that have taken place within the Church have led to an evident erosion of trust in it. *The Directory for Catechesis* adds some more causes: “As for ecclesial experience, at this stage of life many young people distance themselves from the Church, treat it with indifference or distrust. Reasons include a lack of witness, credibility, spiritual and moral support from the family, as well as inadequate catechesis and a nondescript religious community” (DC 151)². Therefore, the low understanding of the Church within it necessitates religious education and sets out the urgent task of in-depth ecclesial formation within the framework of religious instruction at school, in order to adequately prepare and educate the catechesis students for life and responsibility for the Church of tomorrow³.

However, questions arise as to whether those who still accept Jesus yet reject His Church realise that they owe Him to the Church. Another issue to be considered is that of what Church people today want to

¹ See M. Chmielewski, *The Catholic Church in Poland, Her Faithful, and the Restrictions on Freedom to Practise Religion during the First Wave of the COVID-19 Pandemic*, in: *Catholic Education*, ed. P. Mąkosa, Basel 2023, pp. 183-207.

² Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization, *Directory for Catechesis*, Vatican 2020, (Hereinafter abbreviated to: DC).

³ Cf. P. Mąkosa, *Formacja eklezjalna w edukacji religijnej młodzieży szkół ponadgimnazjalnych*, in: *Katecheza w Kościele i dla Kościoła*, ed. R. Czekalski, Płock 2026, pp. 79-80.

be in and what Church they wish to accept Christ's message from⁴. It is therefore necessary to consider what kind of Church catechesis should introduce students to, and whether there is still a need for the Church in today's mentality. Questions about the grounds of trust in the Church or issues related to its existence as a real community, living in true brotherhood, rather than as a business or service institution, must also be addressed.

These and other questions, patterns of conduct and attitudes stem from reductionism: "Christ – yes, Church – no". Before attempting to resolve the above issues, it should be noted that very often the doubts referred to are born out of a distorted image of the Church in the media⁵. This is evident, among others, in the detachment of the Church from God, an overly organizational view of its functioning and the position of the faithful next to the Church community without the awareness of being its co-authors. Witnessing such phenomena, many young people identify the Church exclusively with its institutional and hierarchical structure, theological and hermetic teaching or with descriptive abstract theoretical terms. At this point, we must also note a misconception of the term "Church" itself. More often than not, it is a sociological and legal *a priori* understanding that deprives it of the qualities of personality and communion.

In the context of the emerging simplifications, criticisms, and errors of perception of the Church, a need arises to rediscover this work of God in the world. Above all, we need more faith in the Church today. It is also necessary to believe more in the Church, since it speaks and teaches in the name of God. It constitutes God's home on earth; it is a reality more divine than human; it has its source in God. Its greatness, its value, and its authority have their source in Christ, who is the Head and also the Bride of the Church⁶. Furthermore, we need a mature perception of the Church and a better awareness of it. "We urgently need good catechesis about the Church or rather about the presence of Christ in the Church. It is indispensable for itself and for the faithful. In particular, it is necessary to think in terms of the Gospel"⁷.

⁴ J. Szymik, *Theologia benedicta*, Vol. 2. Katowice 2012, p. 236.

⁵ See M. Chmielewski, *Ewangelizacyjna misja Kościoła a social media*, "Studia Leopoliensia" Vol. 10. 2017, pp. 191-205.

⁶ Cf. A. Czaja, *Wiara w Kościół i jej podstawowe treści*, in: *Wierzę w Kościół Chrystusowy*, ed. R. Chromy, W. Musioł, K. Piechaczek, Katowice 2022, pp. 33-35.

⁷ Polish Bishops' Conference, Letter to Priests for Holy Thursday 2008, *Umowa – przymierze z Najwyższym Kapłanem*, no. 4.

Therefore, analysis of current ecclesial consciousness calls for raising the self-awareness of the Church. Deepening ecclesial awareness first requires a reliable communication of the truth about the Church, an explanation of the meaning and values and basic tenets, especially the nature and salvific mission of the Church. As a significant task of catechesis, ecclesial formation will respond most adequately to the contemporary needs of building a positive image of the Church if it has a personalistic focus. Such catechesis will not only be ecclesial formation and education, but also Ecclesia-forming catechesis.

Catechetical foundations of ecclesial formation

The Church is the real and ultimate subject of the knowledge of Jesus Christ. Christ lives and makes Himself present in the reality of the Church⁸. An encounter with His Person is made possible through catechesis, which aims to uncover the divinity and humanity of Jesus in the catechesis student and to help the latter establish a profound intimacy and communion with Christ (DC 75). The communion of living with Christ and the attendant “experience of a new grace” (GDC 116)⁹ assume union with the subject of catechesis, i.e. the Church. Total adherence to the Person of Christ means at the same time adherence to His Church, and acceptance of the Person of Christ is synonymous with acceptance of the Church of Christ.

The interaction between catechesis and the Church is bilateral. “On the one hand, catechesis finds its source, justification, context, and effectiveness of influence in the Church, and on the other hand, the Church carries out the mission of salvation through catechetical ministry. Catechesis, participating in the Church’s prophetic function, finds itself in the Church, but at the same time its sameness and dynamism promote the vitality of the Church”¹⁰. Catechesis, through its ecclesial dimension, is an activity that guides the Christian community towards both a mature faith and a deeper understanding of the reality of the Church¹¹. Catechesis is, therefore, both ecclesial and Ecclesia-

⁸ Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Chrystus i Jego Kościół*, Transl. W. Szymona, Kraków 2005, p. 95.

⁹ The Congregation for Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis*, 11 August 1997, (Hereinafter abbreviated to: GDC).

¹⁰ T. Panuś, *Zasada wierności Bogu i człowiekowi i jej realizacja w polskiej katechizacji*, Kraków 2001, p. 223.

¹¹ See. M. Zając, *Wymiar eklezjalny katechezy*, in: *Katechetyka materialna*, ed. J. Stala, Tarnów 2002, pp. 195-233.

forming. In his apostolic exhortation *Catechesi tradendae*, John Paul II indicates that ecclesial formation is one of the fundamental tasks of catechesis: “Catechesis is intimately bound up with the whole of the Church’s life. Not only her geographical extension and numerical increase, but even more, her inner growth and correspondence with God’s plan depend essentially on catechesis” (CT 13)¹².

Ecclesial education is addressed also in the *General Directory for Catechesis*, which observes that “Through catechesis [the Church] feeds her children with her own faith and incorporates them as members into the ecclesial family” (GDC 79). While discussing initiation and education to community life in catechesis, the same document sets out its ecclesial community building task by stating that “Catechesis prepares the Christian to live in community and to participate actively in the life and mission of the Church” (GDC 86). Explaining the induction to mission work, the *Directory* urges catechesis to prepare catechetical students to “cooperation to the different ecclesial services, according to their proper vocation” (GDC 86). Thus, the *General Directory for Catechesis* encourages ecclesial formation at all stages of religious education and demands that catechesis show the community aspect of the Christian faith.

The need for catechesis to address the community aspect is likewise indicated in *The Catechetical Directory of the Catholic Church in Poland*. The document explains that education for community in catechesis and through catechesis should first of all consider education to the community of the Church and, apart from the transmission of the tenets of the faith, should show the true image of the Church and foster the sense of membership in an ecclesial community. The Polish *Directory* assigns a special role in this respect to catechesis in the parish, which helps the faithful to experience an ontological (through Baptism) membership in the Church at the existential level (PCD 28)¹³.

Further on, *The Catechetical Directory of the Catholic Church in Poland* highlights that catechesis aims at giving flesh to the Church as a salvific community and at building ecclesial awareness. The latter task must start from an enhanced message of the knowledge of the Church. Furthermore, it is vital that the smallest links of the Church (families, movements, and associations) be connected with the parish. The parish should become their main facilitator, especially for all

¹² John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae*, 16 October 1979, (Hereinafter abbreviated to: CT).

¹³ Cf. The Polish Bishops’ Conference, *The Catechetical Directory of the Catholic Church in Poland*, Kraków 2001, (Hereinafter abbreviated to: PCD).

forms of ministry to young people, and a privileged place which young people can identify with (PCD 52).

In turn, the amended *Directory for Catechesis*, defining the tasks of catechesis, including introduction into community life, confirms the need for ecclesial formation. The document makes it clear that catechesis is to “foster the sense of *membership* in the Church; to teach a *sense of unity* in the Church, which lead to the acceptance of the Magisterium, unity with the pastors of the Church and fraternal dialogue; to form to a sense of *joint responsibility* for the Church, so that its members actively participate in the building of the community and contribute to its growth as disciples-missionaries” (DK 89). The same document points to the ecclesial criterion as the core of the proclamation of the message of the Gospel; referring to Pope Francis’ encyclical *Lumen fidei*, the document recalls that “Faith is necessarily ecclesial; it is professed from within the body of Christ as a concrete communion of believers” (LF 22)¹⁴. Subsequently, the *Directory* points out that “catechesis introduces the faithful to the mysteries of the community, not only in the relation with the Father through Christ in the Spirit, but also in the community of believers, through the agency of the same Spirit. By educating to community, catechesis educates to life in the Church and as the Church” (DC 176).

Analysis of the above documents shows that catechesis in all respects, being an ecclesial act, points to the Church as its unquestionable subject and inherent reference. The content conveyed by catechesis about the Church and its activities facilitates the understanding of its essence. Thus, catechesis contributes to mature thinking about the Church and understanding of its meaning. It nurtures in the students the ability to identify with the community, brings up a sense of belonging to and identification with the Church. Each person is seen as an indispensable part of the Church. As A. Kiciński notes, this truth contributes to building interpersonal ties, fraternity, and respect for each person, including people with disabilities and their families. It is an Ecclesia-forming factor that extends to the entire ecclesial community¹⁵.

The experience of the Church possible through catechesis, is first and foremost the experience of the community in which catechesis takes place. Thus, the catechized gathered to listen to the Good News

¹⁴ Francis, Encyclical Letter *Lumen fidei*, 29 June 2013.

¹⁵ A. Kiciński, *Eklezjocentryzm w katechezie osób z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną*, in: *Kościół – Communio jako podmiot i środowisko współczesnej katechezy*, ed. A. Draguła, Szczecin 2009, pp. 209-221.

not only experience, but already by this very gathering and grouping they build the Church. "Not only is catechesis implemented in the Church and speaks about the Church, but is itself an experience of the Church, positive or negative, depending on its quality. Therefore, it is vital that it makes possible a positive experience of the Church and that it is direct and clearly brings out its educational value, inherent actually in all experience"¹⁶.

Personalistic concept of the Church

The personalistic concept of the Church assumes that the Church is both a material and a spiritual world, external and internal, subjective and objective. From the very beginning of its existence, the Church has been a personal entity. After Christ's death, resurrection and glorification, His salvific activity was not limited to the non-historical realm. He assumed a new Body, which is present in history in a personal way. This body is the Church. The task of this Church is to reveal Christ's divine personal presence in the world. Christ, taking on a new Body, creates with it a personal reality with a Divine-human structure. The Church, therefore, has a personal existence. Christ is the head, and the community of believers makes up the remainder of the organism. This Divine-human reality of the Church forms a personal unity of being. The Church is thus a social and personal manifestation of Christ or, more precisely, is the presence of the Holy Spirit in the period between the Ascension and the Parousia. Christ therefore continues to live, teach, sanctify, and reign in and through the Church. Therefore, it is also a hierarchical and personal community, intrinsically connected to Christ¹⁷. This Church present on earth is meant to be Christ, ever living; for all its imperfections, the Church is truly His body.

Christ is therefore the cornerstone and creator of the Church. The Church is the gift of the Lord to man. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches that "The Church is born primarily of Christ's total self-giving for our salvation" (CCC 766). Therefore, the Church derives directly from the Person and Event of Jesus Christ¹⁸. As a result, the Church is a religious and social Person¹⁹. The Church and Christ,

¹⁶ E. Alberich, *Katecheza dzisiaj. Podręcznik katechetyki fundamentalnej*, Warszawa 2003, p. 172.

¹⁷ Cf. M. Rusecki, *Traktat o wiarygodności chrześcijaństwa. Dlaczego wierzyć Chrystusowi?*, Lublin 2010, p. 348.

¹⁸ Cz. S. Bartnik, *Istota chrześcijaństwa*, Lublin 2004, p. 55.

¹⁹ Cz. S. Bartnik, *Dogmatyka katolicka*, Vol. 2. Lublin 2003² p. 55.

being one, meet within a person, as observed by St. Augustine: “Our redeemer has shown himself to be one person with the holy Church whom he has taken to himself” (CCC 795), while St. Thomas Aquinas adds: “Head and members form as it were one and the same mystical person” (CCC 795). Ultimately, the Church is a Mystical Person²⁰, a religious and social Person.

The personal concept of the Church reveals the fact that the Church has a Trinitarian genesis. It is the work of the entire Trinity, i.e. the Community of Persons. The origin is the Person of God the Father, who is the principle of creation and the “starting point” for the other Divine Persons. God the Father is thus the first and primary cause, the “Parent of the Church”. The Church then becomes the Body of Christ, who as a Person is in a filial relationship with the Father. In turn, the Love between the Father and the Son is embodied in the Person of the Holy Spirit. “The Holy Spirit is the soul of the Church” (EN 75)²¹ which brings All into a single Mystical Person. The Person of the Holy Spirit is likewise the foundation of the love between God and people, between man and people and of the love that people have for one another²².

The Church exists to the fullest where there are many persons. Beginning with the fact that the Church has been subjected to the Triune God, who is a unity of Persons. The Church is a community of Divine Persons and a community of human persons. The Church is a multipersonal entity and is therefore always social. The community understanding of the Church exposes the social element in it, while keeping in mind that the idea of community is more than a simple “collection of people”. This is because it constitutes an inter-personal body with strong personal mutual bonds. This organism is strongly internally unified, thanks to which the community of the Church “blends” into a single *communio personarum*²³. Importantly, the Church of the *communio personarum* is not the sum total of the particular Churches

²⁰ M. Rusecki, *Personalistyczna koncepcja teologii fundamentalnej*, “Personalizm” 12:2007 p. 65.

²¹ Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi*, Vatican, 8 December 1975.

²² Cf. E. Sienkiewicz, *Communio w Bogu a wspólnota Kościoła jako dzieło Ducha Świętego*, in: *Duch Kościoła Kościół Ducha*, ed. A. Proniewski, Białystok 2014, pp. 58-80.

²³ Personalism interprets the Church in social terms as a “social person”, “collective person”, “community person”.

or their federation²⁴, but first and foremost a “new personal quality”²⁵ and a bond between people as individuals and communities with the Community of Persons of the Holy Trinity. Only this kind of personal union of man within a group of human persons with the Divine Persons (vertical aspect) and the community of man with other people and their interpersonal relations (horizontal aspect) results in a *Communio Personarum et personarum*.

It is clear from the above reflections that the Church is subjectified both in the human person and in the community of persons. Neither one of these dimensions should be diminished or downplayed. The most perfect image of the Church is the combination of the Church-person and the Church-community; the Church forms the phenomenon of “person,” and as a community it has its subjectivity. Although the Church-community has primacy over the Church-person, it does not depreciate it. The highest values of the Church always exist in social and personal terms. For this reason, the Church serves not only the individual person, but first and foremost the human community. The socio-personal lens is a safeguard against a realist and institutional treatment of the Church.

Catechesis about the Church

A personalistic understanding of the Church helps notice the existing bond between the Church and catechesis via the lens of a person. Catechesis also has its personalistic dimension because the Person of Jesus Christ is at its very core. The goal of this catechesis is to bring the human person to an encounter with Jesus, and then to union and even deep intimacy with Him (CT 5, DC 75). At the same time, it should be clearly emphasized that the personalistic dimension of catechesis also concerns its foundations, for it refers to the Person of God the Father, the Person of Jesus Christ and the Person of the Holy Spirit, as well as to the Mystical Person of the Church. It should

²⁴ “The universal Church is not the sum of the particular Churches, or a federation of the latter, or even the result of their communion as such, since, in the expression of the early Fathers and the liturgy, in her essential mystery the Church precedes creation itself. In the light of this teaching, we can add that the relationship of mutual interiority existing between the universal Church and each particular Church, whereby the particular Churches are formed in the likeness of the universal Church, and in and from the particular Churches there comes into being the one and only Catholic Church”. John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Gregis*, Vatican, 16 October 2003 no. 8.

²⁵ Cz. S. Bartnik, “Kościół”. “Byt osobowy”, in: *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, IX k. 1007.

also be added that catechesis takes place in the world of persons and involves many people in the process of initiation to, and growth and maturation in faith.

In a personalistic spirit, catechesis should also involve the process of Church formation. It should start with explaining the **meaning** of the Church, which is not an aim in itself but is rather a gift of the Triune God so that the inner life of the Persons may be shared with the humanity. The sense of the Church is, therefore, the Triune God and man as a person. As John Paul II observes in the encyclical *Redemptor hominis*, “man is the primary route that the Church must travel (...), he is the primary and fundamental way for the Church, the way traced out by Christ himself” (RH 14)²⁶. “Since the Church is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race” (LG 1)²⁷, the Church is inherently interested in the life of man in Christ (LG 32). “Established by Christ (...), it is also used by Him as an instrument for the redemption of all and is sent forth into the whole world” (LG 9). In personalistic terms, the Church is a personal being conducive to man, turned to man and offering itself to man. It is predominantly a sign and tool of this proximity of God which took place already in Incarnation, cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is God’s gift to man and to the world, expressive of mercy for human sin and confusion.

It is also necessary in ecclesial formation to emphasize the Trinitarian genesis of the Church. The community of the Church takes its origin in the community of the Persons of the Trinity and moves toward the community in which it finds its existence. The source of the Church’s communion is the unity of the Trinity taking place between the Persons of God, and which, through Christ, has been revealed to man. The Church as the People of God is a community of a particular group of people. The Church manifests itself in the form of community as coexistence, patterned on the unity that takes place in God. The Trinity is the highest model of the Church: just as in God the Three Persons constitute a real distinctiveness and yet absolute unity, so do Christians form the Church’s real plurality of persons²⁸.

Under the ecclesiology of *communio*, the Church should be shown as a communal reality, or a “communal person”. Community, especially

²⁶ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis*, 4 March 1979.

²⁷ The Second Vatican Council, *Lumen gentium*, 21 November 1964, (Hereinafter abbreviated to: LG).

²⁸ Cz. S. Bartnik, *Personalizacja Kościoła według Karola Wojtyły*, “Personalizm” 6:2004, p. 73-74.

for a young person, has a unique credibility and power of attraction. The communal character of the Church is necessary in ecclesial formation through catechesis because many young people are interested in small communities, often without discerning their sectarian character. The Trinitarian dimension will help show that the Church is different from any community of people, and that the Church is God's rather than a human work. The Church is "a community composed of men. United in Christ, they are led by the Holy Spirit in their journey to the Kingdom of their Father and they have welcomed the news of salvation which is meant for every man" (GS 1)²⁹.

In explaining to the catechesis student the specifics of the Church as community, it is crucial to realize the personal bond of man with Christ and with other people. Communion in the Church means a community that shares in the Divine life. It cannot be compared only with a human community or organization, association, or congregation. The origin of ecclesial communion is not a contract, agreement, or settlement, but personal communion with Jesus Christ, and its source and goal is the unity of the Son with the Father in the Holy Spirit (ChL 18)³⁰. This is not a unity of a moral but an existential nature, as God's "plan was to raise men to a participation of the divine life" (LG 2). The essence of the union and community is a personal link, the gift of belonging (*participatio*) in the life of the Triune God (LG 2).

In the context of the communal nature of the Church, it is necessary to renew the understanding of ecclesial community outlined by John Paul II. The pope indicated that we must "make the Church *the home and the school of communion*" (NMI 43)³¹. It is a call to foster a spirituality of communion, consisting of openness to God and His mercy. It involves an attitude of turning and trusting God, and adoration and worship of Emmanuel, who is God with us. In turn, the contribution of the catechized person consists in accepting God and His self-giving to man. This should be an adherence of the entire person to God, not just intellectual assimilation of the content of faith.

Furthermore, it is necessary to explain during catechesis that the Church cannot be relegated to the role of philanthropy and charity. While it is true that there are many tasks for the Church in this area, what can the ecclesial community offer the world unless it is first filled with Christ. The Christian community develops by receiving gifts from

²⁹ The Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, 7 December 1965, (Hereinafter abbreviated to: GS).

³⁰ John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*, 30 December 1988.

³¹ John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 6 January 2001, no. 43.

God and only then comes the sharing with others of what has been received. First, one must receive Christ. A person's Christian identity and mission are formed in the act of openness to Christ, in feeding on the word of God, and in the use of the holy sacraments. One must show the catechized the richness of participation in the Eucharist, and then to share Christ and His Gospel³².

In line with the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, the nature of the Church must be seen as complex, Divine-human (teandric), transcendent and historical (LG 9-17; CCC 770-776). It is composed of two elements: Divine and human; the former is supernatural and superior, hence the "ontological" element of the Church. Its identity was offered in the Divine genesis of the Church and at the same time assigned to its incarnation in reality. Thus, its "substance" is not built by man (naturalism) by severing ties from their supernatural source; this would be activism which treats the Church as a reality created solely by man.

It is crucial to show the Mother of God in catechesis and explain that she is the Mother of the Church as the Advocate of the faithful. It is clearly necessary to indicate to the catechesis student to look to Mary as a paragon of union with Christ, walking in His path and professing faith. As the Icon of the Church, Mary is a paragon of holiness for the entire ecclesial community. She is also the core of personalisation of the Church as the bride. The Blessed Virgin Mary is a model for us, "a preeminent and . . . wholly unique member of the Church" (CCC 967). The Blessed Virgin Mary, at the head of the Church's pilgrimage, shows by her person the greatness of the one who can say yes (*fiat*) to God.

Looking up to Mary, one must see the creative power of shaping the existence of the believer in the Holy Spirit. Christian identity is a gift of the Holy Spirit, who He grafts each baptized person into Christ. It is necessary to emphasize in catechesis the role and action of the Holy Spirit in the Church. As a Person, He is its Vivifier. Thanks to him, Christians abide in Christ (inexistence)³³.

There is also a need to show to the catechesis student the meaning and value of office in the Church and the entire institutional aspect of the Church: "For the nurturing and constant growth of the People of God, Christ the Lord instituted in His Church a variety of ministries"

³² Cf. A. Czaja, *Aktualne samorozumienie Kościoła wyzwaniem dla katechezy*, in: *Katecheza w Kościele i dla Kościoła*, ed. R. Czekalski, Płock 2026, pp. 30-31.

³³ See A. Czaja, *Credo in Spiritum Vivificantem. Pneumatologiczna interpretacja Kościoła jako komunii w posoborowej teologii niemieckiej*, Lublin 2003.

(LG 18). When explaining the importance of offices in the Church, it is necessary to raise awareness of responsibility and integrate the catechised students into the Church community, especially that of the parish. Emphasis should be placed on creating a parish community through gathering at the Eucharist and standing by its pastors. Of great value in building parish community, which should be recommended to the catechesis student, is the witness of exemplary Christian life, sensitivity to the poor, a childlike attitude, fraternal admonition, common intercessory prayer, and readiness for reconciliation and forgiveness.

Keeping in mind the focus on the aggiornamento of the Church, the catechesis on the Church must not lack the interpretation of the new signs of the times. In the context of the Church's aggiornamento, it is essential to show in what sense the unification of Europe is compatible with the salvific mission of the Church. Since the Church is by divine appointment called to be "a sacrament of salvific unity" (LG 9) and to carry out "the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Cor 5:19) among the dispersed people of God, the unification of Europe matches its mission and is a gift and a task for the Church³⁴.

Conclusion

The proposal presented above regarding the personalistic dimension of ecclesial catechesis has been shown as the inclusion of the catechesis student in the mystery of the Church that is understood personally as a *Communio Personarum et personarum*. The basic condition for the personalization of ecclesial education in catechesis is to understand the Church as a community of a personal nature, that is, that the Church is not an object, thing, or some extra-personal substance, but the ultimate personal event of God and man. Next, the Church is not an individual person. The Church is where there are many persons. It is invariably a multipersonal entity and thus it is social, communal, human, and fraternal, although it never disregards the individual person. The Church is a community of persons and at the same time one person in many persons. Furthermore, the the Person of Jesus Christ is the keystone of the Church in individual and collective terms. The person of Christ is the core of the religious community, oriented toward God the Father in the Holy Spirit. Through Christ, the ecclesial community has a special kind of personal bond with the Triune God (vertical aspect) and between human persons (horizontal aspect).

³⁴ Cf. A. Czaja, *Aktualne samorozumienie Kościoła wyzwaniem dla katechezy*, p. 34-36.

This bond develops into a close communion, into a full communion of persons, while the communion creates a special subjectification of the Saviour in man. Finally, the essential meaning and content of the Church is the salvation of the entire human race, that is, every human person. The Church is where participation in salvation takes place, and unification is where salvation is and where Christ is, i.e. the Church.

The personal view of the Church and the personalistic dimension of ecclesial education in catechesis is vitally important as it protects the Church from being understood and embraced in rheistic, institutional, hierarchical, juridical, and sociological terms, opening it instead to anthropological, personalistic and communal categories. It is not easy to identify with an institution or organization. One can only co-create, be involved with and responsible for, and love a person. Therefore, only the Church – the Mystical Person – can be chosen, accepted, loved, and worshipped. Such ecclesial consciousness should be born not so much from the truth grasped intellectually, but from love for Christ and for the persons contributing to His Mystical Body. Total adherence to the Person of Christ, which is the goal of catechesis, is also adherence to His Church. By enabling an encounter with the event of the Person of Christ, catechesis becomes an Ecclesia-forming experience as a community of persons gives birth to the Church provided these persons are united with Christ. In terms of catechesis, this personal relationship takes place when the catechesis students are *christianoï*, which means they are like Christ; they are “a new creation in Christ” (Gal 6:15). Man is within the Church and is the Church inasmuch as they are “in Christ” (Rom 8:9-10). This means that catechesis, while introducing people into the community of the Church, must bring them into a new existence with Christ and in Christ. Being in Christ is the cornerstone of being in the Church, whereas being in the Church means to be in Christ (*esse in Christo*). This perception leads to a deeper sense of belonging to and identity with the Church and responsibility for the actions taken up and carried out by the Church. The most important fruit of the personalistic introduction to the life of the Church should be a new personal quality, a superior way of existence of the catechesis student as coexistence with Christ. This will ultimately contribute to a mature commitment to apostolate, ecumenism, interreligious dialogue, and missionary dynamism, i.e. to the Church of tomorrow.

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