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## **The Ecclesiology of Pope Francis: A Critical Analysis of the Metaphor of the Church as Polyhedron**

### *Ekleziologija papeža Frančiška: Kritična analiza metafore Cerkve kot poliedra*

*Abstract:* Pope Francis focuses on essential topics for the Church and society in his pontificate. To describe the relationships between different social subjects, he often uses the metaphor of the polyhedron to highlight the importance of each individual and each social group for the equitable development of the entire society. Nowhere does it systematically describe this metaphor, but it uses it in different contexts: societal, ecclesial, ecumenical, and theological. The literature also lacks papers that systematically and critically question this metaphor, presenting possible consequences for the Church's life, i.e., pastoral care, liturgical practices, morality, doctrine, etc. This paper aims to describe this metaphor of the Church as a polyhedron. The metaphor of the polyhedron that he uses in his documents will be described first. Then, the key features, advantages, and disadvantages of the metaphor of the Church as a polyhedron will be brought out. According to this metaphor, the Church can be understood through her main characteristics: as synodal Church, unity in diversity, missionary Church, and charity.

*Keywords:* Pope Francis, Church, metaphor of the polyhedron, synodality, charity

*Povzetek:* Papež Frančišek se v svojem pontifikatu osredotoča na teme, ki so bistvene za Cerkev in družbo. Za opis odnosov med različnimi družbenimi subjekti pogosto uporablja prisposodbo poliedra, z namenom poudarjanja pomena vsakega posameznika in vsake družbene skupine za pravičen razvoj celotne družbe. Metafora nikjer ni opisana sistematično, temveč je uporabljena v različnih kontekstih: družbenem, cerkvenem, ekumenskem in teološkem. V literaturi prav tako manjkajo prispevki, ki bi sistematično in kritično preizpraševali to metaforo ter predstavili možne posledice za življenje Cerkve, tj. za pastoralo, liturgične prakse, moralo, doktrino itd. Namen tega prispevka je opisati metaforo Cerkve kot poliedra. Najprej bo opisana metafora poliedra, ki jo papež uporablja v svojih dokumentih. Nato bodo izpostavljene ključne značilnosti, prednosti in pomanjkljivosti metafore Cerkve kot poliedra. V skladu s to prisposodbo lahko Cerkev razumemo skozi njene glavne značilnosti: kot sinodalna Cerkev, edinstvo v različnosti, misijonarska Cerkev in dobrotelost.

*Ključne besede:* papež Frančišek, Cerkev, metafora poliedra, sinodalnost, dobrotelost

## 1. Introduction: The Metaphor of a Polyhedron

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For Pope Francis, the metaphor of the polyhedron is a thought concept that he wants to utilize to explain the various processes that can contribute to equitable development within different social groups or contexts. In using the metaphor, he primarily relies on the works of Romano Guardini, a great twentieth-century theologian (1885–1968). Pope Francis has a doctoral dissertation that he never finished entitled “Polar Opposition as a Structure of Everyday Thought and Christian Proclamation”. The original contribution of his thesis was published in “*Evangeli Gaudium*” (222–237). In it, he outlined the social criteria that can help build peace and expressed them through the opposites. This is a reinterpretation of Guardini’s polarities from his 1925 work *Der Gegensatz*. Guardini writes about life’s eight opposites: act-structure, fullness-form, individuality-totality, and production-disposition (Guardini 2019, 165). But Guardini, like many other authors, such as Yves Congar, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Erich Przywara, and Henri de Lubac is influenced by the Tübingen School of Theology. The authors from this school enabled the transition from a scholastic-apologetic theological position that viewed the Church and religious truths statically. The period of the school begins with the works of Johann Sebastian von Drey (1777–1853) and his students: Johann Adam Möhler (1796–1838), Franz Anton Staudenmaier (1800–1856), and Johann Evangelist Kuhn (1806–1887). All these authors and several theologians that came after were greatly influenced by the philosophy of German idealism, most notably Schelling, Schleiermacher, and Hegel (Thomas O’Meara 1982).

This paper aims to use this metaphor to explain the ecclesiology of Pope Francis. There is a lack of teaching on the Church in his official writings. The metaphor of polyhedron, which he uses in several contexts, will be explained here in the context of ecclesiology. The main idea is that the metaphor of the polyhedron is addressed to the Church, the center of which is Jesus Christ. The different and multiple layers are the members of the Church who constitute this single object with their history, experience, culture, and tradition. This opens up a question: how do we understand this? The metaphor of the Church as a polyhedron can be understood primarily as unity in diversity. The Holy Spirit unites the differences of individual surfaces into one whole - a polyhedron. The differences and peculiarities of unique surfaces are not anomalies; on the contrary, they are welcome because the peculiarities of individual surfaces are seen as the wealth of the polyhedron itself. However, when Pope Francis mentions the word “polyhedron”, he does not mention it exclusively in the ecclesial context but uses it in four different contexts in official documents. This article uses this metaphor to explain Pope Francis’s ecclesiological approach, even though he didn’t announce some ecclesiological documents and does not directly connect this metaphor to his teachings on the Church. But, as we will see, he uses this metaphor in the context of the Church.

By researching the papal documents, it can be concluded that he mentions the polyhedron metaphor in four different contexts: social, ecumenical, theological and, last but not least, ecclesial.

He claims the metaphor of the polyhedron can help understand the society that will develop the sensibility of its members. For instance, in his third encyclical, “*Fratelli Tutti*”, “polyhedron” is mentioned four times: in FT 144, FT 145 and two times in FT 215. In paragraph 215, he elaborates: “The image of a polyhedron can represent a society where differences coexist, complementing, enriching and reciprocally illuminating one another, even amid disagreements and reservations.” (FT 215) Also, in his address to the European Parliament and the Council of Europe in 2014, he underlined the importance of European multipolarity, which should strive to preserve the “particularity of each of the parts”. Pope Francis explains the significance of such a notion by using the metaphor of the polyhedron (Francis 2014). This approach is sensitive to each community member in which everyone has equal dignity, and all differences participate in building community. In his address to the members of the diplomatic corps in 2019, Pope Francis encouraged international cooperation, which is “experiencing a period of difficulty, with the resurgence of nationalistic tendencies” (2019b). Listing the reasons for obstructions in international dialogue, he speaks about the “spherical” and “polyhedral” notion of globalization (2019b).

It is also important to note that Pope Francis mentions this metaphor in an ecumenical context. In his speech to the evangelical pastor Giovanni Traettino, he remarks that unity in diversity in the Church is possible if unity is understood as a polyhedron that represents a unity that does not suppress differences. Here, he uses the word polyhedron in two instances. He relies on the metaphor of the polyhedron to facilitate the understanding of the relationship between Christian communities (2014a).

Furthermore, he uses the word “polyhedron” in the context of theological research. In the fourth part of “*Veritatis Gaudium*”, he deals with ecclesiastical universities and faculties, contemplating the reform of ecclesiastical studies that would help empower the church’s missionary outreach. Pope Francis identifies four criteria essential for carrying out such a task (VG 2017). The fourth criterion concerns the networking of numerous studies in different countries, which is possible if the polyhedron metaphor is considered. Also, in a meeting on theology organized by the Pontifical Theology Faculty of Southern Italy, he noted that theological faculties are places where dialogue occurs. He said he wished the faculties also would become places where “one experiences the model of the polyhedron of theological knowledge, instead of that of a static and disembodied sphere” (Pope Francis 2019a). Here, Pope Francis used the geometric model of the polyhedron as a metaphor for theological research open to dialogue.

He uses the metaphor of polyhedron in the ecclesial context as well. The following will systematically construct Pope Francis’s ecclesiology based on this metaphor’s use in the ecclesiastical context.

## 2. Main Characteristics of the Metaphor of the Church as a Polyhedron

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Ever since Avery Dulles' famous work *Models of the Church*, models in ecclesiology have been considered particularly useful in better understanding theological ideas. Dulles believes that in theology, images serve "for the purpose of gaining a better understanding of the mysteries of faith, or, in the matter that interests us here, of the Church" (Dulles 2002, 15). Using images in ecclesiology can become a systematic application of a particular model (12). To better understand the ecclesiology of Pope Francis, we present it here using the metaphor of the polyhedron.

Several recent papers have focused on understanding this metaphor in an ecclesial context and different aspects of the life of the Church. Rainero Cantalamessa describes the path from the Church as a Pyramid to the Church as a Circle and to the Church as a Polyhedron (Cantalamessa 2019, 442–454). In his analysis, he describes the development path that the metaphor of the Church as a polyhedron has gone through to indicate the consequences such an ecclesiological metaphor can have in the context of ecumenical dialogue.

Ghislain Lafont critically reviews the ecclesiology of Pope Francis in his book *Piccolo saggio sul tempo di papa Francesco* (2017). In his analysis, he focuses on mercy and synodality. He considers that *spiritus movens* of the Church as a polyhedron is mercy. This approach is not a great novelty for him because it was established earlier in recent history: "Pope Francis did not invert the pyramid, but Second Vatican Council did." (Lafont 2017, 81) Therefore, the ecclesiology of Pope Francis cannot be separated from the ecclesiology outlined in the Second Vatican Council; even more so, as Lafont points out, his ecclesiology is well-founded in this council.

Walter Insero also explored the motif of polyhedron inside the ecclesiology, examining the role of the papacy, theology, bishops, and the Church in the context of the notion of "people" in his book *Il popolo secondo Francesco: Una rilettura ecclesiologicala* (2018). According to Insero, four significant aspects of this ecclesiological approach should be considered: the Church is the people of God, the *sensus fidei*, the role of all faithful, and popular piety in the proclamation of the Gospel. Those aspects represent four different dimensions of the metaphor of polyhedron when it is applied to the Church.

Ormond Rush observes the importance of every member of the Church and the diversity that stems from understanding the Church as a polyhedron. This uniqueness is essential, particularly in understanding the synodality and synodal Church. He starts from the Second Vatican Council, without which this metaphor cannot be understood, insisting on the key terms of the Church as a polyhedron: synodal Church, *sensus fidei*, the people of God and *communio*. (Rush 2017, 299–325)

Sigrid Müller considers that there are four main characteristics of Pope Francis' ecclesiology: the *sensus fidelium* and synodality, orientation towards pastoral ministry, unity in plurality and process method (see-judge-act) (Müller 2021). She excellently detects possible wrong interpretations of this metaphor by describing

the main characteristics of Pope Francis' ecclesiology. She believes that when Pope Francis mentioned inverting the pyramid, he did not mean that now faithful would lead the discussion and decide but that "ministers of the Church should accompany and support the faithful on the typical path in their concrete situations" (221). At the same time, she considers the role of discernment in concrete pastoral cases as an essential kind of practice.

Piero Coda argues that with this metaphor, Pope Francis outlined a new ecclesiology that focuses on the importance of the following dimensions: mercy, synodality, poverty and encounter (Coda 2017, 109). These four terms are essential to Coda's interpretation of Pope Francis' ecclesiology, as he considers them "an examination of conscience and a qualitative leap" (123).

In summary, the mentioned authors point out the following characteristics of the Church as a polyhedron: mercy, synodality, Church as a people of God, the role of faithful and popular piety, *communio*, orientation towards pastoral ministry, unity in plurality, process method (see-judge-act), poverty and encounter.

They empower all faithful for the transformation of the Church according to the metaphor of a polyhedron into a Church in which all are of equal dignity that God has given in the sacrament of baptism. Also, this is the communion in which members have different gifts and ministries in which the communication skills of listening, dialogue and then the skills of joint decision-making in the Spirit prevail. These characteristics can be summarized in four main characteristics that represent the pillars of Pope Francis' ecclesiology: unity in diversity, synodality, charity and missionary mandate. Our interpretation of the main characteristics of the Church as a polyhedron is very close to the previous ones. Still, we believe that the above characteristics better reflect the fundamental dimensions of the Church in what it is (unity in diversity and synodality) and how it expresses its identity in meeting with others (charity and missionary mandate). Furthermore, Pope Francis's approach to understanding the Church seems close to the ecclesiology based upon the notion of "people of God". Richard Gaillardetz points out that Pope Francis's approach is the approach that changes the "*communio*" approach mainly established and defended by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger. Gaillardetz states: "The pontificate of Pope Francis marks the end of a thirty-year hegemony of *communio* as the exclusive theological articulation of council teaching." (2014, 61) Gaillardetz's approach is very helpful for realizing the changes happening, but it mainly focuses on the differences between the two approaches without emphasizing the connections between them. Here is more helpful the analysis of Roberto Repole who showed how the "people of God" approach became central in Pope Francis's teaching but not so much in disharmony with the previous approach, as Gaillardetz states. (Repole 2017, 49–63)

## 2.1 The Church is Unity in Diversity

All problems and questions from communities from different parts of the world are an integral part of the life of the Church. In the apostolic exhortation "Amoris

Laetitia”, “polyhedron” is mentioned once. However, unlike other translations, the English equivalent “multifaced gem” is used instead. Polyhedron is a multifaceted gem reflecting many legitimate concerns and true questions (AL 4). In this way, many issues and problems that concern communities worldwide in different local environments are gaining new strength. For example, in the document “Querida Amazonia”, it is stated that specific local Church communities in some areas successfully adapted to the regular pastoral life of the parish community despite the absence of priests for decades (QA 99). In the context of religious life in Central European countries such as Croatia, those critical situations are still unimaginable for the life of the Church. However, the same Church lives in the regions of Amazonia and Croatia. By comparing these differences in the lives of individual faith communities, this first dimension of the Church as a polyhedron can be better understood: unity in diversity.

Speaking to the Catholic Fraternity of Charismatic Covenant Communities and Fellowships members, Pope Francis notes that “uniformity is not Catholic, it is not Christian”, but “unity in diversity” is. Later, he quotes EG 236, mentioning the metaphor of the polyhedron (Pope Francis 2014b). In the metaphor of the Church as a polyhedron, differences should not disappear, nor should they be absorbed by the abstract uniformity of the Church. As integral parts of the Church’s life, differences should be directed towards unity. They will not disappear but will be united, as in an orchestral performance, different instruments are combined in a beautiful symphony (2015). All these various processes and services are united in the Holy Spirit, joining Catholics with their bishops in a firm unity. Just as people with different characters and talents grow in a family where talents are not hidden, and characters are not stifled. Talents, charismas, and different personalities serve the life of the Church and its mission in the communion accomplished by the Holy Spirit.

## **2.2 The Synodality Represents the Fundamental Principle of Understanding the Church’s Unity in Diversity**

This is also confirmed in the apostolic exhortation “Christus vivit”. Namely, the metaphor of the polyhedron is translated as “multifaced reality” in paragraph 207 (CV 207). Pope Francis emphasizes the importance of synodal pastoral work, believing that

“in this way, by learning from one another, we can better reflect that wonderful multifaceted reality that Christ’s Church is meant to be. She will be able to attract young people, for her unity is not monolithic, but rather a network of varied gifts that the Spirit ceaselessly pours out upon her, renewing her and lifting her from her poverty.” (CV 207)

Within the metaphor of the Church as a polyhedron, listening to the other and getting to know diversity, i.e., bringing synodality to life as a fundamental dimension of the Church, is not only allowed and welcomed but is woven into the living

and dynamic organism of the Church. Synodality is precisely what enables the metaphor of the Church as a polyhedron and not just some more or less redundant addition to the life of the Church. Rafael Luciani believes synodality “represents the overcoming of a pyramidal and hierarchical institutional model and a homogenizing way of carrying out evangelization” (Luciani 2022, 26). Synodality is a stumbling block for the pyramidal model of the Church because it insists on listening to all faithful in the spirit of community. Also, it seems that synodality, as a fundamental principle of the Church, is a dimension that enables adequate dealing with various anomalies in the life of the Church precisely because it is the “state of mind” of the Church.

The International Theological Commission document entitled “Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church” from 2018 in no. 52 emphasizes the relationship between synodality and communion:

“The synodal dimension of the Church implies communion in the living faith of the various local Churches with each other and with the Church of Rome, both in a diachronic sense - *antiquitas* - and in a synchronic sense - *universitas*. The handing on and reception of the Symbols of faith and the decisions of local, provincial, and - in a specific and universal sense - ecumenical Synods have expressed and guaranteed in a normative way that communion in faith professed by the Church everywhere, always, and by everyone (*quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum est*).” (International Theological Commission 2018, 52)

In this way, synodality is an instrument that enables the realization of the *communio*. Each facet within the polyhedron finds its proper place in the Church through synodality, which includes journeying together, listening, and making decisions. Local Churches are areas within a polyhedron with their characteristics and by no means strive for abstract uniformity. Still, it is precisely their characteristics that the Holy Spirit unites in the polyhedron (International Theological Commission 2018, 61).

### 2.3 Mercy

Mercy is the main principle according to which the Church fulfills its mission. Žalec correctly warns of a strong link between fidelity to the Church’s mission and concern for the most vulnerable groups. In this context, mercy is one of the crucial dimensions of the Church by which she realizes her mission while contributing to the strengthening of resilience. (Žalec 2020). At the center of Jesus’ work is mercy. Jesus announces the merciful Father and is the very expression of God’s mercy. The understanding of mercy in the Gospel can be fully read in the parable of the Good Samaritan. This parable is central to the Second Vatican Council’s spirituality. At the last general assembly of the Second Vatican Council, Pope Paul VI specifically apostrophized the parable of the Good Samaritan: “The old story of the Samaritan has been the model of the spirituality of the council. A feeling of

boundless sympathy has permeated the whole of it. The attention of our council has been absorbed by the discovery of human needs (and these needs grow in proportion to the greatness which the son of the earth claims for himself).” (Pope Paul VI 1965) The council fathers at the Second Vatican Council and the post-conciliar popes paid particular attention to mercy. Also, this parable, and mercy are at the center of Pope Francis’s encyclical letter “Fratelli tutti: On brotherhood and social friendship” (2020).

Lafont starts from the hypothesis that we are in a time of changes from the image of God as eternal and almighty to the image of God as good and merciful (Lafont 2017, 20). He concludes that this topic does not represent something new in theology and the life of the Church and can be traced through the history of theology (54). Mercy continuously reminds us that understanding the Church as a polyhedron is not about finding the best pastoral strategies and solutions but about the response to the call of God, whose fundamental characteristic is the mercy revealed in Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit. In this way, all faithful need to proclaim the God of mercy, thus avoiding all the dangers that arise from understanding the Church oriented primarily on the formalism of pastoral plans and strategies.

#### **2.4. The Church Is Also a Missionary Community**

In the context of the metaphor of polyhedron, the Church constantly strives to find new ways of spreading God’s mercy among people, continuously anticipating emerging pastoral strategies and methods. The metaphor of the Church as a polyhedron enables universal pastoral strategy and methods to be adapted, modified, and supplemented with new pastoral approaches in the local context. In the apostolic exhortation “*Evangelii Gaudium*”, Pope Francis points out that the missionary dimension of the Church presupposes taking the first step and leaving established patterns of behavior to show God’s mercy (EG 24). The act of outreach is made possible by pastoral strategies that are constantly evolving and that depend on the specific conditions in the community where evangelization takes place. Each surface within the polyhedron is specific, with a different shape and many sides. These differences precondition every act departing from established pastoral-catechetical patterns to be original and realized in concrete circumstances. The incarnation of Christ was not abstract. Jesus Christ became incarnate in the factual history of the Jewish people. Analogously, the Word of Christ is embodied in the specificities of specific cultures and peoples. Pope Francis emphasizes the importance of the specificity of the local Church in the following way: “It is the Church incarnate in a particular place, equipped with all the means of salvation bestowed by Christ, but with local features. Its joy in communicating Jesus Christ is expressed both by a concern to preach him to areas in greater need and in constantly going forth to the outskirts of its territory or towards new sociocultural settings.” (EG 30)

It is an original act, as Rafael Luciani calls “ecclesiogenesis”, in which the Church is always born in a new way in specific circumstances. Luciani thinks it is “the new-



ness of the current ecclesial epoch that the Church is in transition, one in which reform I understood as a permanent process so that ecclesiology becomes *ecclesiogenesis*" (Luciani 2022, 4). Luciani does not discuss ecclesiogenesis and basic ecclesial communities in Latin America. It doesn't even mention Boff's interpretation of ecclesiogenesis (Boff 1986). But by all accounts, Luciano's position seeks to balance tensions between the particular and universal dimensions of the Church. For him, ecclesiogenesis is a method according to which the Church should be understood as a Church in the making within the specific, local, and concrete life circumstances of the community of faithful. These circumstances influence the formation of the identity of the local Church. Therefore, ecclesiogenesis saves the particularities and specificities of the Church by avoiding the affinity towards some abstract, uniform ecclesiology (Luciani 2022, 113).

### **3. Advantages and Disadvantages of the Metaphor of the Church as a Polyhedron**

The metaphor of the Church as a polyhedron is not directly expressed in Holy Scripture. Still, in different kinds of scriptural notion of the Church, e.g. "people of God" or "communion", we can find the same content: unity in diversity. In the New Testament, a handful of texts describe various debates in the first Christian communities. The discussions about the circumcision of converted pagans in the so-called "Council in Jerusalem" are a good example. There, they listened to what the other side had to say, held a dialogue, resolved, and made decisions (Acts 15). This New Testament passage begins with a boiling debate in Antioch between the supporters of the circumcision of Gentile converts on the one hand and Paul and Barnabas on the other. The binding regulation, the apostolic letter (Acts 15:24-29), was sent to Antioch after the same discussion continued in Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas went there to consult with the apostles. The decision was made after discussions and consultations in which different parties were heard. After the long debate (Acts 15:7), Peter, Paul, Barnabas, and finally, James spoke. Only after all these processes did the "apostles and elders with the whole Church" (Acts 15:22) send the apostolic letter through Judas and Silas to Antioch. All these characteristics of the discussion that took place are a manifestation of the Church, which is synodal and unity in diversity. This is the first advantage of this metaphor. The main subjects of the current synod on synodality can be easily recognized in the discussion: communion, participation, and mission. Everyone considered the problem that arose so that the Word of God could be proclaimed.

In addition, the metaphor of the Church as a polyhedron finds its foothold in the documents of the Second Vatican Council and the post-conciliar documents of the Magisterium of the Church.

The second advantage of the metaphor of the Church as a polyhedron is the clear emphasis on the Church's primary purpose. The Church is first and foremost missionary; it proclaims the merciful God who has revealed himself through the Holy Spirit in Jesus Christ. The fundamental role of the faithful gathered in the

Church is to proclaim God's Word, which is mercy itself. Focusing on the mission that the Church received from Jesus Christ enables God's love and mercy to come to the fore in specific pastoral situations and the diversity of individual faith communities, and all approaches that prevent or weaken the Church's true mission disappear. In this way, all the anomalies of religious life can be easily detected and rejected, such as clericalism, the formalism of church activity, "selfishness and spiritual sloth", "sterile pessimism", and "spiritual worldliness" (EG 81–101).

The third advantage of this metaphor is that it recognizes the importance of each face within the polyhedron. Each community has the same level of importance in the Body of the Church. Therefore, a kind of decentralization or de-Romanization of the Church continues, which can easily be seen in the documents of Pope Francis, which often cite documents from different regions of the Church. For example, in the encyclical "Fratelli tutti", among other things, the documents of the following Church institutions are cited: Catholic Bishops of Mexico and the United States (FT 127), Social Commission of the Bishops of France (FT 176), Australian Catholic Bishop Conference (FT 205), Episcopal Conference of the Congo (FT 226), Bishop's Conference of Colombia (FT 232), Croatian Bishop's Conference (FT 235), etc. The specificities of individual local communities require a balance between doctrinal principles and pastoral circumstances. Each community simultaneously lives as a surface within the polyhedron with its differences and specificities and as a part of the entire polyhedron, the Body of the Church. This metaphor is, therefore, more sensitive to the concrete circumstances in which the faithful lives, grows, and fulfils its mission. The tension between the local community (one surface) and the universal Church (polyhedron) presupposes skill in maintaining a balance between the demands of universality and particularity. Therefore, to deal with particular difficulties within a community, it is necessary to consider the doctrine of the Church (orthodoxy) and what is happening in concrete practice (orthopraxy). At the very beginning of the encyclical "Amoris Laetitia", Pope Francis talks about this difficulty, suggesting how "that not all discussions of doctrinal, moral or pastoral issues need to be settled by interventions of the magisterium" and continues: "Each country or region, moreover, can seek solutions better suited to its culture and sensitive to its traditions and local needs." (AL 3)

This metaphor also shows at least three shortcomings that are related to each other. The first shortcoming is the lack of clarity on the structure of the Church itself. In the model of the Church as a polyhedron, it seems we count more with the irregular than with the regular polyhedron. Let's consider that such an irregular polyhedron is not finished but is in constant creation and change. It may seem that there is no clear structure of the Church, nor can its identity be easily discerned. One can get the impression that there is no longer a clear orthodoxy to adhere to nor a clear institutional form of the Church itself. In developing the metaphor of the Church as a polyhedron, it is necessary to emphasize that the institutional character of the Church by no means disappears. The Church is a visible and invisible reality. The Church as an institution represents a visible form of an invisible reality and, as such, is necessary. In this metaphor, the institutional

character of the Church has not disappeared, and it is essential to skilfully balance between the institutional dimension of the Church, which naturally tends towards a clear orthodoxy, and the charismatic dimension of the Church. Cantalamessa also emphasizes that new ecclesiological models do not mean simultaneously rejecting previous models (Cantalamessa 2019, 445).

Furthermore, there is a danger of losing sight of the center of the polyhedron, which is not easily visible. Christ is at the center of the polyhedron, and the Holy Spirit unites all opposites into a dynamic unity. The traditional static understanding of the center as a stronghold for a clear understanding of orthopraxy and orthodoxy is transformed in this ecclesiological metaphor into a dynamic acceptance of the center of the polyhedron, which is Jesus Christ himself, who in various circumstances and occasions, ensures unity through the Holy Spirit in the services performed by bishop's role that is of great importance for understanding the polyhedron as a decentralizing force that enables each surface within the polyhedron to preserve unity and be sensitive to its specificities simultaneously.

The third shortcoming is the lack of awareness of the universality of the Church. Focusing on individual areas and their differences weakened the importance of the universal dimension of the Church. There is a danger that the pastoral circumstances of certain communities are taken as relevant and normative models for the universal Church. Therefore, it is necessary to constantly pay attention to the particularity of communities and the universality of the Church. On the one hand, it is essential to promote the importance of communities in specific life circumstances. On the other hand, to guard against the danger that ecclesial contexts, pastoral solutions, and practices are taken as an eminent expression of the life of the entire Church. It means there is the danger that specific ecclesial contexts become normative for the whole Church and the tendency for individual pastoral solutions in particular issues of individual faith communities to evolve solutions for the universal Church. Faithfuls live and work within circumstances that can be almost unimaginably different. Therefore, the real challenge within this ecclesiological approach is to find an appropriate balance between the requirements arising from the particular and universal dimensions of the Church.

### **3. Conclusion**

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Current subjects in the life of the Catholic Church, such as mercy, synodality, reform of the Roman Curia, care for the common home, and many others, point to the fact that ecclesiology is in the final phase of reception of the essential ideas of the Second Vatican Council. The dialogue is continuously transformed from a subject of great importance to the council fathers into the way of life of the faithful. The synod on synodality currently underway in the Catholic Church at all ecclesiastical levels openly encourages dialogue and listening to others. The tendency above is based on the fact that the council fathers also tried to shine a new light on the role of all faithful in the life of the Church, that is, in its mission.

Neither disciple of Christ has the task of participating in the Church's missionary task. These and many other motives derived from the documents of the Second Vatican Council are the keys to understanding the ecclesiology of Pope Francis.

Although Pope Francis does not present a systematic teaching about the Church anywhere, based on the analysis of his published documents, it can be determined that the metaphor of the Church as a polyhedron is the metaphor key to understanding his ecclesiological approach. Analyzing the metaphor of polyhedron in the ecclesial context, it can be concluded that it has four dimensions: unity in diversity, synodality, charity and missionary dimension. Like any other metaphor, this metaphor has its advantages and disadvantages, which are briefly listed here. By all accounts, in the coming period, through the future research of the various conclusions of the synod on synodality and the events surrounding it, theological research will generate new theological findings and understandings of ecclesial practice. However, it should be remembered that the doctrine of the Church was never monolithic and averse to change. Each period in the history of the Church contributed on its own to the development of teachings on the Church.

## Abbreviations

- AL** – Francis 2016 [Amoris laetitia].  
**CV** – Francis 2019c [Christus vivit].  
**EG** – Francis 2013 [Evangelii gaudium].  
**FT** – Francis 2020a [Fratelli tutti].  
**QA** – Francis 2020b [Querida amazonia].  
**VG** – Francis 2017 [Veritatis gaudium].

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