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Changes in the Religiosity of Secondary School Youth in Poland. A Sociological Analysis

Przemiany religijności młodzieży maturalnej w Polsce.
Analiza socjologiczna

Abstract

The results of sociological studies on the transformation of religiosity indicate the deeper changes that have been taking place in this sphere in recent years. Therefore, it is worth paying attention to the religious transformations of the youth, as they can be regarded as a kind of barometer foreshadowing future development trends. The article shows the religiosity of secondary school students in Puławy. The empirical material used for the sociological analyses was collected during surveys carried out in 1994, 2009, 2016 and 2021, in the same secondary schools in Puławy, using the same survey questionnaire entitled "Secondary school graduates and moral values." This article attempts to answer the research question of what changes have taken place over nearly 30 years in the religiosity of the surveyed youth, what direction these changes are taking and what is the pace of these changes. The following indicators were chosen to outline the religiosity of secondary school students: religious and religious self-declarations, religious practises, religious commitment.

Keywords: religiosity, faith and religious self-declaration, religious practises, religious commitment, youth

Abstrakt

Wyniki badań socjologicznych dotyczących przemian religijności wskazują na głębsze zmiany, jakie dokonują się w tej sferze w ostatnich latach. Warto więc zwrócić uwagę na przemiany religijne młodzieży, gdyż mogą być one traktowane jako swoistego rodzaju barometr zapowiadający przyszłe trendy rozwojowe. W artykule została ukazana religijność młodzieży maturalnej w Puławach. Mate-

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riał empiryczny wykorzystany do analiz socjologicznych został zebrany podczas badań ankietowych przeprowadzonych w latach 1994, 2009, 2016 oraz 2021, w tych samych puławskich szkołach ponadpodstawowych, za pomocą tego samego kwestionariusza ankiety pt. „Maturzyści a wartości moralne”. Artykuł jest próbą odpowiedzi na pytanie badawcze, jakie zmiany dokonały się na przestrzeni blisko 30 lat w religijności ankietowanej młodzieży, jaki przybierają one kierunek, a także jakie jest tempo tych przemian. Do nakreślenia religijności młodzieży maturalnej zostały wybrane następujące wskaźniki: autodeklaracje wyznaniowe i religijne, praktyki religijne, zaangażowanie religijne.

Słowa kluczowe: religijność, autodeklaracja wyznaniowa i religijna, praktyki religijne, zaangażowanie religijne, młodzież

Contemporary sociology of religion faces many research challenges. One of these is non-religious spirituality, which is characterised by ambivalence, fluidity and volatility.¹ From a theoretical perspective, it will be crucial here to relate the aforementioned spirituality, which opposes institutionalised forms, to religiosity in its traditional format. The new spirituality, an issue increasingly described by sociologists, is related to the satisfaction of spiritual needs by a growing number of people outside the realm of religion or even the *sacrum*. From a research point of view, institutional religiosity also remains intriguing, and is often described by many sociologists (e.g. Irena Borowik, Józef Baniak, Krzysztof Koseła, Mirosława Grabowska, Janusz Mariański, Halina Mielicka-Pawłowska, Maria Sroczyńska, Sławomir H. Zaręba) as well as numerous research centres, e.g. CBOS (Centre of Public Opinion Research) and the Institute for Catholic Church Statistics SAC. Institutional religiosity will be the subject of the following sociological analysis; it is constantly changing, and it seems that in recent years, especially in Poland's conditions, these changes have begun to accelerate.

The processes of secularisation, individualisation and pluralisation play a major role in the transformation of religiosity, all of which are well described from a theoretical point of view. Sociological studies conducted at the end of the first decade of the 21st century showed the transformation of religiosity, which was much slower in Poland than in most countries throughout the world. There were many reasons slowing down the aforementioned processes, and Tadeusz Szawiel wrote about some of them, emphasising the relatively stable ties in local communities, which were not affected by the political transformation; the activity of the Catholic Church, which had a stabilising effect on the religiosity of Poles, especially at the parish level, and religion teaching in school, which maintained religious motivations among Polish youth.² The pontificate of John Paul II, whose significance for Polish society went beyond the *strictly* religious sphere, also played an important role. However, the second decade of the 21st

¹ H. Mielicka-Pawłowska, *Duchowość ponowoczesna. Studium z zakresu socjologii jakościowej*, Zakład Wydawniczy NOMOS, Kraków 2017.

² T. Szawiel, *Religijna Polska, religijna Europa*, „Więź” 2008, no. 9, pp. 30–37.

century is characterised, in light of sociological research, by more dynamic changes in the area of religiosity in Polish society, especially among youth.

Research on youth is always a barometer that foreshadows changes in the future. It is worth noting that the period of adolescence is characterised by a sceptical or even critical attitude towards the existing world, arranged by adults. Contemporary youth also often react to their problems by adopting a rebellious attitude against “their parents’ world,” criticising all authorities as well as various types of institutions that have stabilised the social system for years, including those of a religious nature. However, youthful rebellion does not always mean a complete rejection of the values of previous generations in the future. They are often internalised in different ways and passed on in identical or altered forms to the next generation in a relay of generations.

With varying degrees of probability, the changes taking place in the youth environment predict certain shapes of religiosity in the near future. However, rejecting, following Karl Popper, the notion of historical determinism, showing a high degree of correlation of a linear nature, scenarios of religious change should be constructed with great caution. Among sociologists, the thesis of contemporary religious diversity is being described with increasing frequency. Janusz Mariański writes:

Sociologists reflecting on the future trajectory of religion speak of increasing religious diversity and secularised and desecularised phenomena. Contemporary theoretical discussions on religious pluralism, including those on supply and demand in the religious market, have not led to clear conclusions. However, somewhat different religious transformations can be expected in societies that are homogeneous or heterogeneous in terms of religion (their numbers and strength of influence). The impact of social modernisation on religiosity will be different in societies where religious identifications are intertwined with national identifications than in societies where there is no such connection.³

The transformation of religiosity can take place in different directions and intensities. The task of the sociology of religion is to continually and empirically verify theoretical assumptions and seek their confirmation in social facts. Sociological surveys that are repeated in the same places and with the same research tool are therefore of great research value, as they make it possible to show not only the current diagnosis but also the dynamics of religious change.

³ J. Mariański, *Modernizacja społeczna a religijność - zmienne relacje*, „Przegląd Religioznawczy” 2019, no. 1, pp. 35–36; see: K. Koseła, *Religijność młodych Niemców i Polaków*, in: *Młodzi Polacy i młodzi Niemcy w nowej Europie*, eds. K. Koseła, B. Jonda, Wydawnictwo Instytutu Filozofii i Socjologii PAN, Warszawa 2005, p. 250.

Sociological research methodology

The analyses carried out will present the results of a sociological study on the changes in the youth religiosity of upper-secondary school students in Puławy. The empirical material used for the sociological analyses was collected during four repeated surveys conducted in the years: 1994, 2009, 2016, 2021. The research tool in all four studies was the same study questionnaire entitled. "Secondary school graduates and moral values," developed in 1993 in the Faculty of Sociology of Morals at the Catholic University of Lublin. The first three empirical studies were carried out independently by Janusz Mariański, with the help of students, and the last one was carried out jointly with the author of these analyses, in November 2021. The auditory questionnaire consisted of fifty-eight open-ended and closed-ended questions that addressed the following issues: religiosity, the relationship between religiosity and morality, basic moral orientations, the family as a value, the family as an environment for upbringing, life orientations and value priorities, daily, basic, meaning-making and ultimate values, pro-social and egoistic values, human dignity as a socio-moral value, the meaning of life, attitudes towards death.

Secondary school graduates from the same secondary schools in Puławy participated in the study each time: Prince Adam Czartoryski Secondary School No. 1, Christian Piotr Aigner Social Secondary School, Technical School No. 1 and Technical School No. 2. In 1994, 242 questionnaires qualified for sociological analyses, 252 questionnaires in 2009, 286 in 2016 and 281 in 2021. The analysis of the 2021 empirical results will be differentiated by four independent variables⁴: "gender" (58.7% of females and 41.3% of males), "school type" (secondary school students – 48.4%, technical school students – 51.6%), "religious self-declarations" (firm believers and believers – 44.1%, undecided but attached to religious tradition – 24.6%, indifferent – 14.6%, non-believers – 16.4%) and "participation in religion classes" (regularly attending religion classes – 42.0%, irregularly – 12.5%, not attending – 35.6%).⁵

⁴ The empirical data for the independent variables did not take "no response" into account in the statistical analyses.

⁵ The empirical data obtained were statistically analysed using Pearson's non-parametric χ^2 test and Cramér's V test. The former enables one to test whether there is a statistically significant relationship between two variables (the mentioned relationship exists if the test equals 0.05 or less); at the same time, however, it does not determine the direction or strength of this relationship. Cramér's V indicates the strength of the correlation formed between the variables. A value of this test from 0 to 0.2 indicates a very weak correlation, 0.2 to 0.4 confirms a weak correlation, 0.4 to 0.6 a moderate correlation and 0.6 to 0.8 a strong correlation, while 0.8 to 1.0 a very strong correlation between the variables. In the analyses conducted, only those correlations of dependent and independent variables that indicated a statistically significant relationship will be shown.

The aim of the publication is to show the dynamics of changes in youth religiosity in the dimension of global attitudes towards religion, recorded during repeated studies in Puławy. The broader background for the empirical data presented here will be provided by nationwide CBOS surveys conducted among Polish youth over the past twenty-five years⁶ and data from a representative sociological study conducted in the Archdiocese of Lublin in 2021.⁷ This will make it possible to answer the following research questions: how are the global attitudes towards faith of secondary school graduates from Puławy shaped against the background of the empirical results of youth in Poland as a whole and in the Archdiocese of Lublin? In this context, the following hypotheses of the researcher will be verified: the changes in the religiosity of the youth of Puławy are proceeding in a secularising direction and the secondary school graduates of Puławy receive similar rates in their global attitudes towards religion as the youth in the nationwide sociological research and in the Archdiocese of Lublin.

Religious affiliation

The first issue to be analysed will be religious self-identification, which belongs to global attitudes towards religion. This external criterion depicting the religious and church situation was among the most enduring components of religiosity in Polish conditions. It is worth emphasising that in the first decade of the 21st century, sociological studies confirmed the attachment of Poles to the religious traditions of their fathers and no major shifts between religions or towards a complete loss of identification with Catholicism were perceived. In 2011, Janusz Mariański wrote: “In Poland, formal affiliation to the Catholic Church is a kind of cultural obviousness. People with no religious affiliation, who do not declare any connection to religious organisations, constitute a small collective, with no major upward trend.”⁸ It is worth recalling that it is not possible to deduce the quality of a declared connection to Catholicism on the basis of identification with a religion alone. It can be experienced superficially, formally, festively and culturally, or it can be a deep, personal, internal and daily affiliation.

Empirical research conducted among secondary school graduates in Puławy indicates relatively large changes in religious affiliation over the last twenty-seven

⁶ Empirical data from CBOS studies are included in the report: *Młodzież 2021. Opinie i Diagnozy nr 49*, eds. M. Grabowska, M. Gwiazda, CBOS. Warszawa 2022.

⁷ Empirical data for secondary school graduates from the Archdiocese of Lublin are taken from the book: W. Szymczak, T. Adamczyk, *Młodzież w kontekstach współczesnych. Rodzina. Czas. Szkoła. Kościół i katecheza*, Wydawnictwo KUL, Lublin 2022.

⁸ J. Mariański, *Przemiany moralności polskich maturzystów w latach 1994–2009. Studium socjologiczne*, Wydawnictwo KUL, Lublin 2011, p. 151.

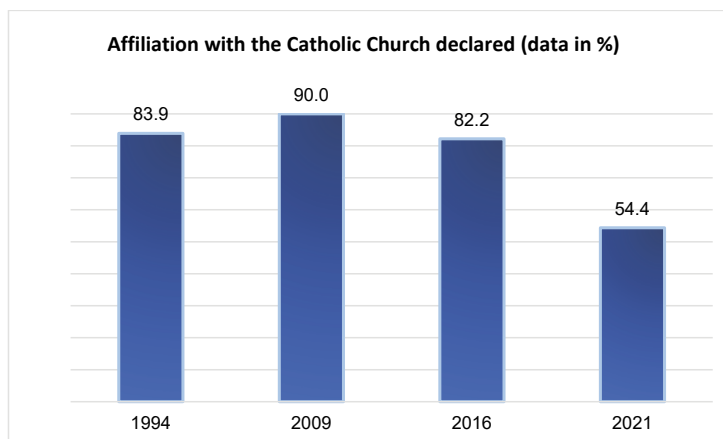
years. However, they were not just one-way. In 1994, 83.9% of respondents considered themselves to be Catholics (undeclared affiliation to Catholicism – 12.8%, no answer – 3.3%), in 2009 – 90.0% (undeclared affiliation to Catholicism – 6.0%, no answer – 4.0%), in 2016 – 82.2% (undeclared affiliation to Catholicism – 15.0%, no answer – 2.8%), while in 2021 – 54.4% (undeclared affiliation to Catholicism – 22.4%, hard to say – 22.1%, no answer – 1.1%). Declared affiliation to the Catholic religion increased in the 2009 survey, which can be explained by a number of factors. It was the time after the death of John Paul II – an event that resonated strongly in Polish society. At the time, sociologists noted a relative stabilisation of religious attitudes in Poland across society as a whole. This was a phenomenon compared to other European countries, where secularisation processes were far more dynamic.

The decline in affiliation to Catholicism in the last two studies, i.e. over five years, is already steep (27.8 percentage points). In seeking a sociological explanation for this phenomenon, two elements are worth noting. The first is indeed the erosion of youth identification with Catholicism in Polish society. This is a relatively broad and multi-vector phenomenon. It will be gradually explained in the following analyses of further empirical data. The second element is – intriguing from a research point of view – the “hard to say” category. It was chosen by one in five respondents (22.1%) and is similar in the percentage received to those who do not explicitly identify with the Catholic religion (22.4%). It is worth noting that respondents without an unambiguous declaration did not describe themselves as either Catholic or non-Catholic. They are characterised by an ambivalent identity situated “in between”. It seems that some of the youth surveyed are experiencing a fluid religiosity, in this case seen in their religious self-declarations, which can range on a scale from Catholic identification to its complete rejection.

In 2021, the rate of those admitting to Catholicism was higher among youth from technical schools than those from general secondary schools (45.2% to 64.3%; $p = 0.002$, Cramér's $V = 0.208$), among firmly believers and believers than undecided, indifferent or non-believers (92.7%, 44.9%, 15.0%, 4.3%; $p = 0.0001$, Cramér's $V = 0.647$) and those attending catechesis at school than those attending religion irregularly or not at all (75.5%, 52.8%, 28.8%; $p = 0.0001$, Cramér's $V = 0.347$). Although the independent variable “gender” did not significantly differentiate the study population in religious self-declaration, it is worth noting that the rate of affiliation to Catholicism was higher among women than men (58.7% against 48.6%). In contrast, the studied collective is significantly differentiated by the religious variables analysed – religious self-declaration and participation in catechesis.

In light of the empirical data presented, it can be concluded that identification with Catholicism will be less and less a cultural certainty. In religiously

Graph 1. Declaration of affiliation to the Catholic Church



Source: Own research.⁹

pluralising societies, non-religious people are a growing collective. Identification with a particular religion (e.g. Catholicism) will increasingly be an expression of personal choice and not just an inherited reality. For half of the youth surveyed in Puławy, identification with Catholicism is no longer the cultural norm. This also demonstrates the increasing diversity in the area of religious identification among youth.

Religious self-declarations

For many years in Polish society, religious self-declarations, like religious beliefs, were an enduring part of the culture. In recent years, however, it can be seen that secularisation and individualisation (privatisation) processes in religiosity are beginning to have an increasingly strong impact on Polish society, especially on youth. According to a study depicting religiosity in 108 countries, presented by the US-based *Pew Research Center*, there are still high rates of religiosity among Poles. It is worth noting, however, that after dividing the surveyed population into two age categories – persons under forty and over – the first category ranks at the European average in terms of religiosity, and Polish youth are currently secularising faster than in other European countries.¹⁰ However,

⁹ Empirical data from sociological studies carried out in: 1994, 2009, 2016 are included in the book: J. Mariański, *Maturzyści puławscy w latach 1994–2016. Szkic do portretu młodych Polaków*, Warszawskie Wydawnictwo Socjologiczne, Warszawa 2019.

¹⁰ *The Age Gap in Religion Around the World*, <https://www.pewforum.org/2018/06/13/the-age-gap-in-religion-around-the-world/> (accessed: 10.04.2023).

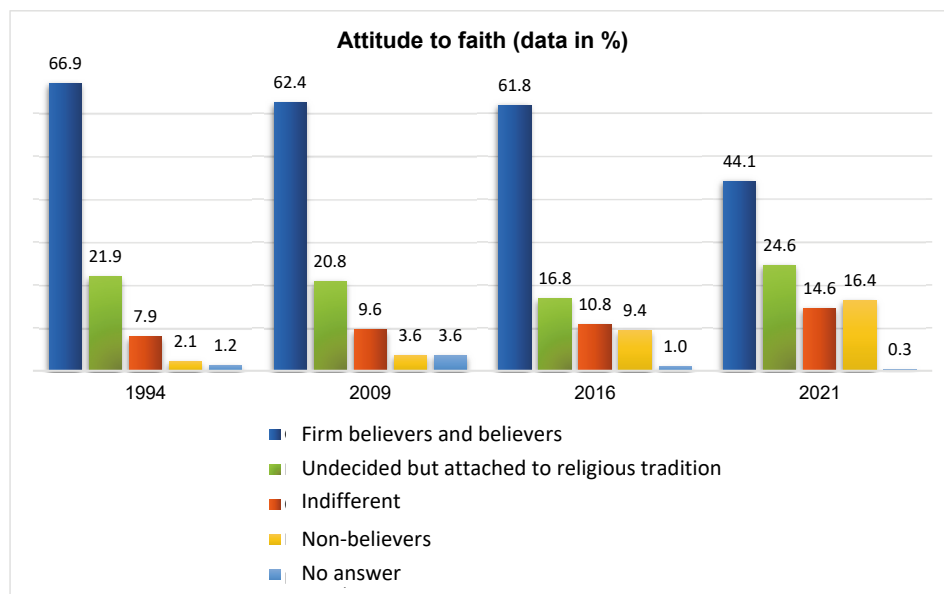
it must be emphasised that this accelerated process of secularisation was taking place in Western European societies in earlier years, and that at that time religiosity in Poland – in light of empirical data – was stable.¹¹

CBOS nationwide and representative surveys conducted between 1996 and 2021 indicate the phenomenon of a decrease in religiousness declared by youth and an increase in declared faithlessness. In 1996, there were 80.0% firm believers and believers, 14.0% undecided, 5.0% – non-believers; in 2008, respectively: 81.0%, 13.0%, 5.0%; in 2016 – 69.0%, 18.0%, 13.0%; and in 2021 – 54.0%, 23.0%, 23.0%. The difference between the percentage of firm believers and believers in 2021 compared to 1996 was 26 percentage points. By juxtaposing youth with adults, significant differences in percentage points can also be seen, where the vast majority of adults consider themselves to be believers (adults: firm believers – 8.0%, believers – 81.0%, youth: – 6.0% and 48.0%), one in sixteen are undecided (adults – 6.0%, youth – 23.0%) and one in twenty are non-believers (adults – 5.0%, youth – 23.0%). In 2021, among secondary school graduates in the entire Archdiocese of Lublin, there were 5.5% firm believers, 44.6% believers, 20.8% undecided but attached to a religious tradition, 16.4% indifferent and 12.0% non-believers (0.7% did not answer). On the basis of the empirical data presented, but also of many other sociological studies on religiosity, one sees an accelerated process of secularisation among youth and a much slower one among adults.

Similar trends in religious self-declarations are noted among secondary school graduates in Puławy, both in relation to the CBOS survey and the indicators obtained among secondary school graduates in the Archdiocese of Lublin. Between 1994 and 2016, in the three sociological surveys presented, the rate of firm believers and believers remained fairly constant and relatively high. During this period, the biggest changes were in the category of non-believers, where the difference between 1996 and 2016 was 7.3 percentage points. Much greater changes in religious self-declaration have been reported in recent surveys. Between 2016 and 2021, the category of firm believers and believers decreased significantly (a difference of 17.7 percentage points), while the rates of the other categories increased, where the point differences were: undecided but attached to religious tradition – 7.8%, indifferent – 3.8% and non-believers – 7.0%. It is also worth showing the changes in the category of firm believers. Here the rate in individual years was: 1994 – 6.6%, 2009 – 11.6%, 2016 – 5.9%, 2021 – 3.9%. The empirical data presented here indicate a phenomenon of erosion in the religious self-declarations of the youth surveyed.

¹¹ W. Szymczak, P. Mąkosa, T. Adamczyk, *Attitudes of Polish Young Adults towards the Roman Catholic Church: A Sociological and Pastoral Analysis of Empirical Research among Young Adults and Teachers*, "Religions" 2022, no. 13, vol. 612, p. 2. DOI:10.3390/rel13070612 (accessed: 23.05.2022); T. Adamczyk, *Autentyczność i duchowość – księży w opinii polskiej młodzieży. Analiza socjologiczna*, Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL, Lublin 2020, pp. 63–65.

Graph 2. Self-declaration of faith



Source: Own research.¹²

Two variables – “gender” and “attendance at religion classes” – proved to be significant in the 2021 surveyed collective in relation to self-declaration of faith. Women were more likely than men to consider themselves to be firm believers or believers than undecided but committed to a religious tradition, indifferent or non-believers (respectively: women – 51.7%, 19.6%, 11.9%, 17.3%, men – 33.0%, 32.1%, 18.9%, 16.0%; $p = 0.014$, Cramér’s $V = 0.214$). Similarly, students who regularly attended catechesis at school (65.8%, 20.8%, 6.7%, 6.7%) considered themselves to be more religious than those who attended irregularly (41.7%, 30.6%, 13.9%, 13.9%) or did not attend (21.4%, 22.4%, 24.5%, 31.6%; $p = 0.0001$, Cramér’s $V = 0.341$). The “school type” variable did not statistically significantly differentiate the study population. It is worth noting that among secondary school graduates declaring themselves to be non-believers, one in fifteen attends religion classes systematically and one in seven irregularly.

The empirical data presented indicates increasingly rapid changes regarding the religious self-declaration of the youth in Puławy. The percentage of people declaring themselves as non-believers is increasing at an accelerated rate. Therefore,

¹² Empirical data from sociological studies carried out in 1994, 2009, 2016 are included in the book: J. Mariański, *Maturzyści puławscy w latach 1994–2016. Szkic do portretu młodych Polaków*, Warszawskie Wydawnictwo Socjologiczne, Warszawa 2019.

identifying oneself as a religious person is no longer a cultural certainty. It can even be stated that the thesis of Władysław Piwowarski, a classic figure in Polish sociology of religion, stating that “atheism does not fit within the national culture of Poles,”¹³ is increasingly being falsified in sociological research conducted among the youth. This does not mean the rejection of religious values by Polish youth but merely indicates that alongside religious individuals, increasingly more people who are religiously indifferent or non-believers will be encountered.

Religious practises

Another important indicator of religiosity is religious practises. As recently as the beginning of the 21st century, sociologists wrote about the socio-cultural character of Polish Catholicism, thus drawing attention to the correlation between being a Catholic and religious practises, which were a cultural norm in Polish society.¹⁴ Wojciech Świątkiewicz emphasized their significance, stating:

For the majority of Poles, religion and religious practises, as demonstrated by sociological research, are culturally understood obligations, an element of family bonds, a solemn and ceremonial way of life, and even an important segment of daily rhythms. They constitute the basis for identifying a religious group within the social structure of the world. They are a source of social integration for the parish community, the local and universal Church, the local and regional community, the national, professional, and class-based communities. Embedded in the cultural traditions of society, they are also one of the strongest factors stabilising the intergenerational transmission of religious patterns.¹⁵

Relatively high rates of religious practise, especially compared to other European countries, were an important – though not the only – characteristic of Polish religiosity. However, in analyses of empirical data, a slight decline in participation in Sunday Mass can be discerned as early as the 1990s, although participation in religious practises was relatively high in Polish society during this period, including among youth.¹⁶

¹³ W. Piwowarski, *Postawy wobec wiary*, in: *Postawy społeczno-religijne mieszkańców archidiecezji katowickiej*, eds. W. Zdaniewicz, T. Zembrzuski, Katowice 1999, pp. 14–15.

¹⁴ J. Mariański, *Praktyki religijne w Polsce, w procesie przemian. Studium socjologiczne*, Sandomierz 2014, pp. 46–55; T. Adamczyk, *Praktyki religijne, aspekt społeczny*, in: *Encyklopedia katolicka*, ed. E. Gigilewicz, vol. XVI, Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL, Lublin 2012, col. 248–250.

¹⁵ W. Świątkiewicz, *Między sekularyzacją i deprywatyzacją. Socjologiczne refleksje wokół polskiej religijności w kontekście europejskim*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, Katowice 2010, p. 127.

¹⁶ S.H. Zaręba, *Praktyki religijne jako jeden z głównych wymiarów polskiej religijności*, „Uniwersyteckie Czasopismo Socjologiczne” 2008, no. 2, p. 10.

In the 1996 CBOS survey, the largest category was made up of youth who practise every Sunday, while in 2021, it is made up of youth who do not participate in religious practises at all. Undoubtedly, this relatively high rate of non-attending categories was influenced by the situation related to the COVID-19 pandemic, but considering the 2018 survey and many other empirical studies, one sees a systematic decline in religious practises among youth. The pandemic situation was not its source, at most it may have further accelerated the process.

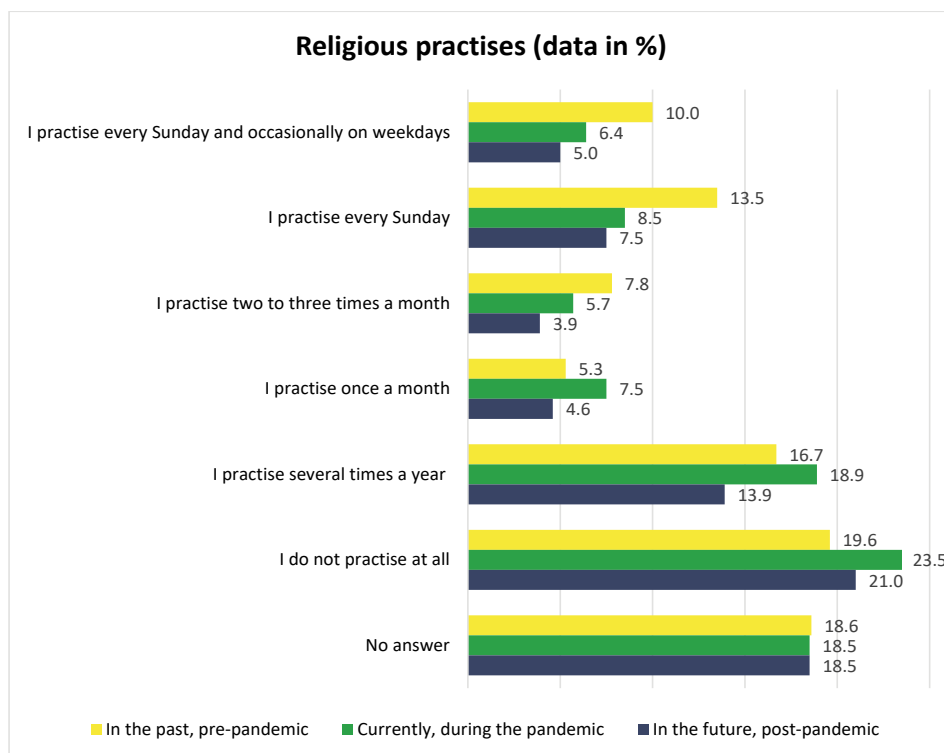
Individual indicators of Sunday practises in CBOS surveys are as follows: 1996: several times a week – 7.0%, once a week – 55.0%, on average one to two times a month – 0.0%, several times a year – 21.0%, do not attend at all – 16.0%; in 2008 respectively: 7.0%, 42.0%, 15.0%, 20.0%, 16.0%; in 2016: 8.0%, 32.0%, 9.0%, 21.0%, 29.0%; in 2021: 6.0%, 19.0%, 8.0%, 19.0%, 49.0%. In a representative sociological study of secondary school students in 2021 in the Archdiocese of Lublin, 16.8% of the youth surveyed attended Mass every Sunday, almost every Sunday – 12.5%, more often than just every Sunday, several times a week – 1.8%, on major holidays – 18.0%, only on the occasion of a wedding, funeral – 9.8%. Those who had previously declared themselves as religiously indifferent or non-believers did not answer this question (this was a total of 28.5% of respondents, no answer – 1.1%).

The question about participation in religious practises was posed to secondary school students in Puławy at a time when Poland was experiencing a coronavirus pandemic. The authors of the study decided to enrich the question “What is your attitude towards religious practises” with three additional response categories: “in the past, before the pandemic”, “currently, during the pandemic” and “in the future, after the pandemic”. The design of the question made it possible to show the frequency of attendance at Mass before the start of the pandemic period, during the pandemic period and to provide declarations of religious practise in the future.

Across the surveyed population of youth in Puławy – based on the empirical data in each of the responses showing frequency of Mass attendance – the rates of those practising more than once a month are falling. During the pandemic, on the other hand, the percentage of practitioners practising once a month increased (by 2.2 percentage points), and according to the declaration, this will decrease after the pandemic (by 2.9 percentage points), similarly practitioners practising several times a year, where the rate during the pandemic is higher (by 2.2 percentage points) and will decrease in the future (by 5 percentage points), also the percentage of never-practitioners increased during the pandemic period (by 3.9 percentage points) but will decrease after the pandemic (by 2.5 percentage points). No answer from one in five respondents is symptomatic, as no question had such a high indication of this response in the survey questionnaire. It is also worth noting that one in four respondents asked about

the frequency of religious practises chose the answer “hard to say”. In light of the empirical material presented in the post-pandemic period, a few percent of respondents are expected to return to religious practise, although it is not possible to say whether this will be systematic attendance at weekly Sunday Mass or only occasional attendance. One in four secondary school graduates surveyed did not give a clear answer, which makes it impossible to determine either the frequency of religious practises or their total abandonment.

Graph 3. Participation in religious practises



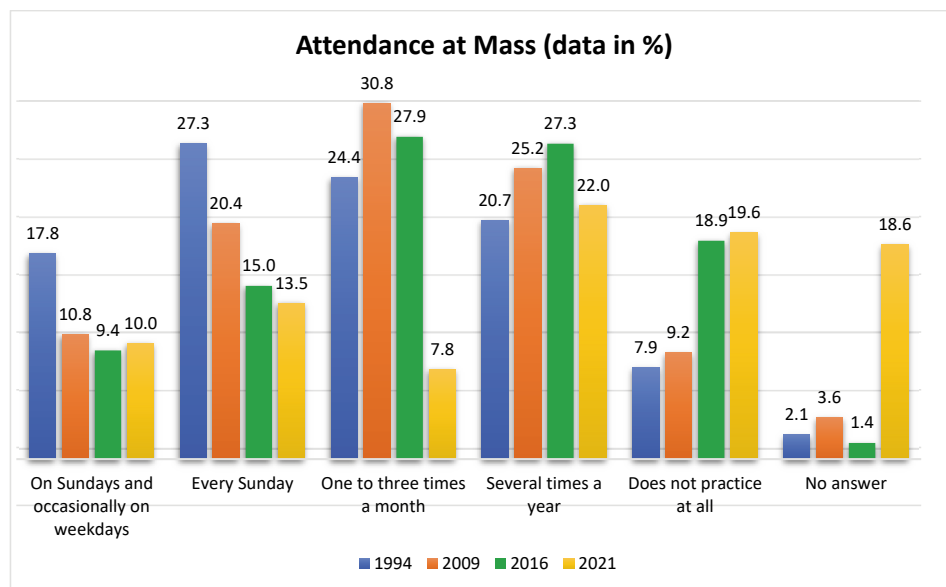
Source: Own research.

Women are more likely than men to currently practise every Sunday (13.9% to 4.5%; $p = 0.022$, Cramér's $V = 0.150$), and secondary school students are more likely than technical school students to not practise at all (30.2% to 13.6%; $p = 0.002$, Cramér's $V = 0.199$). These are the only two cases in the independent variables of “gender” and “school type” where there was a significant static relationship. The variables directly related to religiosity were significantly more likely to be statistically different. Firm believers and believers practise more frequently than undecided but attached to a religious tradition, indifferent

believers and non-believers on every Sunday and occasionally on weekdays (16.7%, 3.1%, 0.0%, 0.0%; $p = 0.0001$, Cramér's $V = 0.266$), as well as every Sunday (16.7%, 10.9%, 3.0%, 0.0%; $p = 0.011$, Cramér's $V = 0.218$), and much less frequently those who do not practise at all (10.4%, 9.4%, 51.5%, 76.7%; $p = 0.0001$, Cramér's $V = 0.672$). Regular participants in religion practise more frequently than irregular and general non-participants on every Sunday and sometimes on weekdays (14.4%, 6.9%, 1.1%; $p = 0.003$, Cramér's $V = 0.190$), and significantly less frequently chose the answer "I do not practise at all" (16.5%, 24.1%, 43.3%; $p = 0.0001$, Cramér's $V = 0.279$).

In order to show the dynamics of changes in religious practises among youth in Puławy, declarations of attendance at Mass before the pandemic were compared with previous studies.¹⁷ This gave the closest research context of all four sociological measurements. The empirical data obtained show a systematically declining proportion of respondents practising regularly (the rate of those practising at least on Sundays and sometimes on weekdays and practising

Graph 4. Mass attendance in 1994, 2009, 2016 and 2021



* In the 2021 survey, the "hard to say" category was introduced, which was selected by 8.5% of respondents.

Source: Own research.¹⁸

¹⁷ On March 14, 2020, an epidemic emergency came into effect.

¹⁸ Empirical data from sociological studies carried out in: 1994, 2009, 2016 are included in the book: J. Mariański, *Maturzyści puławscy w latach 1994–2016. Szkic do portretu młodych Polaków*, Warszawskie Wydawnictwo Socjologiczne, Warszawa 2019.

every Sunday in individual years was: 1994 – 45.1%, 2009 – 31.2%, 2016 – 24.4%, 2021 – 23.5%). In the sociology of religion, people who practise at least once a month are included in the broad category of practitioners. The percentage in this category in individual years was as follows: 1994 – 69.5%, 2009 – 62.0%, 2016 – 52.3%, 2020 – 31.3%. The difference between the 1994 and 2021 surveys was 38.2 percentage points, meaning that the percentages of respondents practising a few times a year and not practising at all have increased.

Firm believers and believers practised more frequently than undecided but attached to religious tradition, indifferent and non-believers before the pandemic on every Sunday and occasionally on weekdays (24.0%, 7.8%, 0.0%, 0.0%; $p = 0.0001$, Cramér's $V = 0.266$), every Sunday (24.0%, 17.2%, 3.0%, 7.0%; $p = 0.010$, Cramér's $V = 0.218$), once a month (4.2%, 14.1%, 3.0%, 2.3%; $p = 0.030$, Cramér's $V = 0.195$), and much less frequently not practising at all (3.1%, 10.9%, 39.4%, 74.4%; $p = 0.0001$, Cramér's $V = 0.634$). Those who regularly participate in religion classes practised more frequently than those who participate irregularly or not at all, both on Sundays and occasionally on weekdays (17.5%, 13.8%, 5.6%; $p = 0.040$, Cramér's $V = 0.172$), every Sunday (22.7%, 10.3%, 10.0%; $p = 0.041$, Cramér's $V = 0.172$), and at least once a month (14.4%, 10.3%, 3.3%; $p = 0.032$, Cramér's $V = 0.179$). They much less frequently chose the answer "I do not practise at all" (8.2%, 24.1%, 40.0%; $p = 0.0001$, Cramér's $V = 0.348$).

Analysing changes in religious practises in CBOS surveys, Antoni Głowacki noted:

The decline in the level of participation in religious practises has occurred among youth faster than the change in self-identification – we have been observing it since the beginning of the measurement of students' religiosity, i.e. since the second half of the 1990s. With the exception of a stabilisation in 2003-2008, the percentage of youth who report attending religious practises at least once a week has been steadily declining.¹⁹

The CBOS polls are confirmed by empirical research conducted among secondary school graduates in Puławy. The decline in Mass attendance is thus a characteristic phenomenon across the country, and the process of disengagement from religious practise is faster among youth than among adults.

Among secondary school graduates in Puławy, there are relatively few practitioners, with only one in three respondents going to Mass at least once a month. This indicates that the ecclesial obligation to attend Sunday Eucharist does not hold an obligatory character for more than half of the respondents surveyed. In contrast, the category of those practising only a few times a year

¹⁹ A. Głowacki, *Religijność młodzieży i uczestnictwo w lekcjach religii w szkołach*, in: *Młodzież 2018*, eds. M. Grabowska, M. Gwiazda, CBOS, Warszawa 2019, p. 148.

or not practising at all is growing relatively quickly. It is worth noting that religious practises among youth in Puławy were rarely statistically significantly differentiated by the independent variables of “gender” and “school type”. In contrast, religious variables such as the level of declared faith and regular attendance at religion classes are important elements that differentiate religious practise issues towards higher frequency.

The CBOS report on youth religiosity contains similar statements:

The youth religiosity expressed in declarations of faith and practises is differentiated due to certain socio-demographic characteristics, although – and this is important – not all previous differentiations remain valid. For example, until now, girls have tended to be characterised by higher declared religiosity than boys, whereas in the current measurement, gender does not in principle differentiate between declarations of faith and practises. Place of residence remains the most significant variable in this respect. The larger the city, the higher the percentage of people describing themselves as non-believers and non-practising.²⁰

Dynamics of religious commitment

The period of the coronavirus pandemic forced isolation and social distance. The limited “outdoors” involvement of whole societies made it necessary to stay among the closest household members. Especially at the beginning of the spread of the Covid-19 virus, many people lost their sense of security and feared for the future. Restrictions to counter the spread of the virus extended to various mass events, people limits were also introduced in churches and worshippers were able to attend services thanks to media coverage. In the analysis of the results of a sociological study on family and religion conducted in 2020 among academic youth, we read:

It is sometimes stressed that the pandemic is, or at least can be, a time of religious conversion and the discovery of family-oriented values and intra-family relationships. The epidemic has certainly weakened social ties in the parish, but, perhaps, strengthened interactions within families, reduced the range of interactions and collective religious practises in parishes, but provided an opportunity to activate individual and collective religious practises within the family. According to some forecasts, a prolonged pandem-

²⁰ R. Boguszewski, *Religijność młodzieży*, in: *Młodzież 2021, Opinie i Diagnozy nr 49*, eds. M. Grabowska, M. Gwiazda, CBOS, Warszawa 2022, p. 142.

ic situation will result in a reversal of the secularisation trend in Polish society, while according to others, this trend will only slow down.²¹

The last question to be analysed helps to show the direction of change of religious commitment in the self-assessment of the respondents. Respondents were asked: “Is your religious commitment now the same as it was before the coronavirus epidemic?” The question did not specify the nature of the commitment mentioned and could be expressed in prayer, meditation or other religious practises.

The empirical research was carried out while the coronavirus pandemic was still ongoing, hence for various reasons, including a dispensation of several months from attending mass, the youth may not have attended services held in churches. Nearly one in three secondary school graduates chose the answer “I do not participate in religious practises at all” (31.7%), one in four “I currently devote less time to prayer, meditation and other religious practises” (24.9%), nearly one in five “I devote the same amount of time to prayer, meditation and other religious practises” (18.5%), and one in twenty-five chose the direction of positive change in religiosity “I currently devote more time to prayer, meditation and other religious practises” (3.9%). It is noteworthy that almost one in five secondary school graduates chose the answer “hard to say” without specifying the direction of their current religious commitment (18.1%). In the light of the empirical material obtained, the youth surveyed assess their religious commitment significantly more often negatively than positively, which indicates a likely weakening of religious practise in the near future.

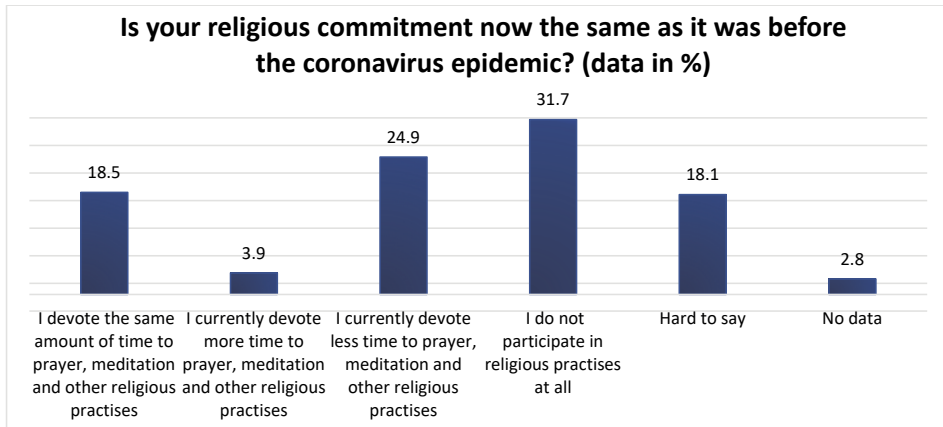
The independent variable “gender” did not statistically significantly differentiate the religious commitment of the youth surveyed, in contrast to the variable “school type”. Secondary school students are more likely than technical school students to not participate in religious practises at all (40.9% versus 24.8%), and to spend more time on prayer, meditation and other religious practises (5.3% versus 2.8%). Technical school students, on the other hand, spend less time on prayer, meditation and other religious practises than secondary school students (29.1% versus 22.9%) and are more likely to spend the same amount of time on religious practises (19.1% versus 18.9%). They were also more likely to choose the answer “hard to say” (24.1% versus 12.9%; $p = 0.015$, Cramér’s $V = 0.213$).

Firm believers and believers were more likely than undecided but committed to a religious tradition, indifferent or non-believers to receive higher rates of greater religious commitment (respectively: 7.4%, 3.0%, 0.0%, 0.0%), the same (30.3%, 16.7%, 7.3%, 2.3%), and less (37.7%, 33.3%, 4.9%, 0.0%), while they were

²¹ S.H. Zaręba, J. Mariański, *Religia jako wartość w czasie pandemii. Analizy socjologiczne*, “Journal of Modern Science” 2021, vol. 1, p. 17.

less likely to choose the answer “I never practise” (4.9%, 25.8%, 68.3%, 86.4%), and the percentage distribution of “hard to say” responses was lowest among non-believers (19.7%, 21.2%, 19.5%, 11.4%; $p = 0.0001$, Cramér’s $V = 0.410$).

Graph 5. Degree of religious commitment compared to pre-pandemic



Source: Own research.

Those attending religion classes regularly were more likely to declare higher religious commitment than those attending irregularly or not attending (respectively: 5.1%, 2.9%, 3.1%), the same (31.4%, 14.7%, 8.3%) and less (33.1%, 28.5%, 56.3%) and answer “hard to say” (20.3%, 17.6%, 17.7%, 19.0%), while they were less likely to declare no participation in any religious practise at all (10.2%, 38.2%, 56.3%; $p = 0.0001$, Cramér’s $V = 0.343$).

The above empirical data indicate that the coronavirus pandemic has resulted in a reduction in religious commitment among secondary school graduates in Puławy. Although one might think that the “uncertainty of fate” dictated by the pandemic could have encouraged a turn towards spiritual values. However, the sociological surveys carried out do not show an increased religious commitment during this period. The pandemic has not reversed the secularisation process or slowed it down but, as numerous sociological studies indicate, has only accelerated it.

Conclusions

In 2008, Irena Borowik, writing about the diversity of Catholics in Poland, outlined the directions of changes in youth religiosity on the basis of sociological analyses:

It can be assumed that in Poland the time for individuals and for the shape of their “individual religiosity” is yet to come. And the fact that the younger generation encounters religion differently from their parents’ generation, in London, Paris, Dublin or Bremen, i.e. in societies that are more individualised than Poland’s, will probably somehow weigh on religion, just as it already weighs on the sphere of moral values.²²

Empirical research carried out in Puławy between 1994 and 2016 confirmed the thesis of large changes in the awareness of youth in the sphere of moral values, but slower changes in religious attitudes. This has been meticulously described in many publications by Janusz Mariański.²³ The sociological analysis of the 2021 survey also positively verified another presumption of Irena Borowik – significant changes are also noticeable in global attitudes towards religion. They are the result of a process of Westernization, i.e. an increasingly rapid convergence of lifestyles, social and religious culture with Western European countries. It is also grounded in the process of individualisation that is characteristic for modern society, where, in contrast to traditional society, the individual is more important than the community.

The empirical results support the thesis of accelerated (rapid) secularisation in the dimension of global attitudes towards religion. In this way, the research hypothesis that changes in the religiosity of youth in Puławy are moving in a secularising direction was positively verified. Perhaps this reflects the changes that were already taking place in society, but at the time, traditional religiosity even dictated that one should identify oneself as a believer. Secularisation and relativisation in many areas of life can allow youth to redefine this faith and redefine themselves. The second hypothesis was to obtain similar indicators in attitudes towards religion and religious practises for youth in Puławy, the Archdiocese of Lublin and Poland as a whole. In this case, however, it should be noted that the process of secularisation is somewhat more accelerated in Puławy. In both the nationwide sociological survey and in the Archdiocese of Lublin, the percentages presented in global attitudes towards religion are slightly higher. Thus, four consecutive sociological studies note significant changes in youth religiosity, a fact confirmed by numerous empirical studies.

²² I. Borowik, *O zróżnicowaniu katolików w Polsce*, „Chrześcijaństwo–Świat–Polityka” 2008, no. 2, p. 26.

²³ J. Mariański, *Przemiany moralności polskich maturzystów w latach 1994–2009. Studium socjologiczne*, Wydawnictwo KUL, Lublin 2011; idem, *Wartości moralne w świadomości maturzystów puławskich. Raport z badań socjologicznych zrealizowanych w latach 1994–2021*, Wyższa Szkoła Nauk Społecznych z siedzibą w Lublinie, Lublin 2022; idem, *Kondycja religijna i moralna młodzieży szkół średnich w latach 1988–1998–2005–2017 (raport z ogólnopolskich badań socjologicznych)*, Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2018.

The level of faith and religious practise is changing, but considering the independent variables analysed, it must be emphasised that the category of those who are firm believers and believers as well as regularly attend catechism differs significantly from those who are undecided but attached to a religious tradition, indifferent and non-religious or those who do not regularly attend religious lessons and those who do not attend. However, it is important to recognise that the dynamics of change show a reduction in the numbers of firm believers and believers, which may be a foreshadowing of even greater changes in the future. On one hand, some people are distancing themselves from religion, but on the other hand, those who remain within it, as one can presume, increasingly do so as an individual choice rather than solely due to attachment to ancestral traditions. The independent variables of “gender” or “school type” rarely differentiated the study population, and in the few cases women had slightly higher rates of declared religiosity and religious practises than men, as did technical school students in comparison to secondary school students. It is noteworthy that the religious self-declaration variable in some correlations reached a strong Cramér’s *V* correlation (above 0.6 to 0.8), indicating how significant of a differentiating element it is among the surveyed respondents.

Analysing the reasons for the decline in faith and religious practise among the youth, Mirosława Grabowska points out that the secularisation of the youngest is accelerating with each generation and is being carried into adulthood.

The youngest age cohort seems to have “flown away” from the “rest” of society, from their parents and grandparents, from religious education at school, from the Church. While millennials, upon entering adulthood, were still similar to older generations in terms of religious faith and even practised more fervently than their elders, the youngest age cohort was already less religious at the starting point and was subject to rapid intra-generational change.²⁴

Children and youth brought up in a particular family will of course partly negate what has been passed on to them as part of their religious socialisation. On the other hand, however, often even subconsciously, they may replicate previously internalised certain patterns of religious attitudes.

German sociologist Karl Gabriel stated that “religions remain, but change their nature.”²⁵ The history of the sociology of religion teaches restraint in predicting the future. It is safer to write about trends, especially when they are documented in repeated empirical studies. In Polish conditions, the youth religiosity

²⁴ M. Grabowska, *Religijność młodych na tle ogółu społeczeństwa*, „Komunikat z badań CBOS” 2021, no. 144, p. 16.

²⁵ K. Gabriel, *Jenseits von Säkularisierung und Wiederkehr der Götter*, „Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte” 2008, no. 52, p. 15.

is changing, but one cannot conclude from this that religion is disappearing. There is no indication that these trends will radically change in the near future. Perhaps the accelerated secularisation within youth environments will slow down once it reaches a level characteristic of Western European countries. It is possible that other factors may emerge to influence the religious trends taking place in modern societies. These issues will be the subject of further sociological research, including in Puławy, which will seek answers to the question of the fate of religion in modern times.

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