

## *Between institutional ritualism and individual search. On dimensions of Polish religiosity*

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**Abstract:** In this article, an attempt was made to show the chosen aspects of the Polish religiosity, which in superficial examination seems durable and quite stable, especially regarding the self-declaration of faith, affiliation to the Church and rites of passage, making Poland it a certain phenomenon in the view of secularized Europe. However, this stability of the native religiosity appears to be somewhat illusory, since we can also notice a selective and eclectic attitude of Poles towards the religious sphere. The emerging secularization tendencies force the Polish Catholic Church to take new initiatives, like, for example, meetings of young people in Lednica, which correspond to contemporary pop culture performances consolidating emotions. The question is to what extent such initiatives, referring to pop culture, may revive nowadays the religious commitment of Poles.

**Key Words:** Poland, religiosity, Catholic Church, secularization.

### **Entre ritualismo institucional e busca individual. Sobre as dimensões da religiosidade polonesa**

**Resumo:** Neste artigo, procurou-se mostrar os aspectos escolhidos da religiosidade polonesa, que no olhar superficial parece durável e bastante estável, especialmente no que diz respeito à autodeclaração de fé, à filiação à Igreja e aos ritos de passagem, tornando a Polônia um certo fenômeno na perspectiva da Europa secularizada. No entanto, esta estabilidade da religiosidade nativa parece ser um pouco ilusória, uma vez que também podemos notar uma atitude seletiva e eclética dos poloneses frente a esfera religiosa. As tendências emergentes de secularização obrigam a Igreja Católica polonesa a tomar novas iniciativas, como, por exemplo, encontros de jovens em Lednica, que correspondem a performances contemporâneas da cultura pop que consolidam as emoções. A questão é em que medida tais iniciativas, referentes à cultura pop, podem reviver hoje o compromisso religioso dos poloneses.

**Palavras-Chaves:** Polônia, religiosidade, Igreja Católica, secularização.

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## Entre el ritualismo institucional y la búsqueda individual. Sobre las dimensiones de la religiosidad polaca

**Resumen:** En este artículo se intentó mostrar los aspectos elegidos de la religiosidad polaca, que en un examen superficial parece duradera y bastante estable, especialmente en lo que se refiere a la autodeclaración de fe, la afiliación a la Iglesia y los ritos de paso, haciendo de Polonia un cierto fenómeno en la Europa secularizada. Sin embargo, esta estabilidad de la religiosidad nativa parece algo ilusoria, ya que también podemos notar una actitud selectiva y ecléctica de los polacos hacia la esfera religiosa. Las tendencias emergentes de la secularización obligan a la Iglesia católica polaca a tomar nuevas iniciativas, como, por ejemplo, reuniones de jóvenes en Lednica, que corresponden a actuaciones de la cultura pop contemporánea que consolidan las emociones. La cuestión es hasta qué punto estas iniciativas, referidas a la cultura pop, pueden revivir hoy en día el compromiso religioso de los polacos.

**Palabras clave:** Polonia, religiosidad, Iglesia católica, secularización

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### ***Preliminary remarks***

Since 1990s, the space of religion in Poland has appeared to be a phenomenon in the European context, where secularization influences significantly affected the religious landscape of the old continent with its distancing from the institutional dimension and a decline in religious practice, the feeling of belonging, declaration of faith in personal God, life after death or other doctrinal ingredients related to Christian tradition. These trends indicate to the consolidation of the process of church de-institutionalization and targeting the religiosity of Europeans to an individual model, referring to syncretism, eclecticity and subjective preferences, and also to the emergence of the approaches affirming indifferentism or lack of religious beliefs. Generally, the transfer from the forms of religiousness governed by religious institutions to forms based on individual choice, various searching, subjectively constituted universes of meaning and private expectations is significantly diversified in Europe, yet, these tendencies essentially distinguish Europe from other parts of the world, making it a particular case in the context of the functioning religious revival and dynamism. [Berger, Davie, Foaks 2008: 12-16].

While, Europe with its specific form of Euro secularism is treated as an exception in the world - wide perspective, also Poland seems to be an enclave and a beacon of religion, externally perceived as a country insignificantly affected by laicizing, de-christianizing or more widely secularizing trends, with a determined role of the Catholic Church, whose social and cultural potential seems to preventatively influence

any likely spiritual peregrinations and believers` search for tranquillity in a number of frequently innovative proposals. Nevertheless, does this institutional and at the same time ideologically-axiological supremacy efficiently halt transformations in the field of the sacred and neutralise individuals` preference for individual explorations that allow for a “patchwork” creation of experiences and feelings in relation to the sacred? To what extent, given Polish conditions, is subjectivizing faith present in the field of religion? And further, to what extent do the appearing transformations correspond with currently observed universal tendencies, and to what extent do they convey local peculiarities? These questions will constitute the framework of the analysis presenting the specificity of Polish religiosity along with the manifestations of transformations, which are gradually marking their presence in the mainstream of Polish Catholicism, affected by sentiments for the past and thus its strong bonds to “folk” model [*Ciupak 1973:31-32, 39-41; Pimowarski 1983: 12-15*].

### ***Polish religiosity in view of selected data***

Secularizing and de-confessionalizing tendencies are only beginning to mark their presence in Polish religious sphere, gaining a symptomatic shape, yet, the shape that signals the emergence of changes in this sphere, indirectly indicating to Polish attitudes and approaches to sacralization moving towards trends and transformations stimulated by modernity, pluralism and the market, where a more significant role is played by individual preferences and also to the attractiveness of the spiritual offer rather than a strong attachment to tradition and reproductions of historically shaped patterns of the religion at birth. The present viability of Polish religiosity primarily appears to be an implication of the pontificate of JPII, but also a consequence of the role of the Catholic church during the period of socialism and then in the political system transformation and the processes of democratization in Poland, where this institution was a fundamental structure of the social support, the defender of freedom – related aspirations and freedom postulates of Poles, the emblem of the national identity and the supporter of integration and the transformations, related to negating and rejecting ideological civic freedoms, including the ones related to ideological emancipation.

Historically shaped social and cultural position of the Church and the heritage of JPII pontificate lead to conditions favourable for energising and developing religion in Poland and thus significantly anchored the specificity of Polish religiosity, appearing as an integral and quite an unchangeable element of the culture, the power and potential of which translated into common declarations of faith and belonging, as well as into mass religious practises, manifestations of axiological identification, sacralization of public space and the affirmation of the concept of a “A Pole - Catholic”, underlying the

coherence of the scope of the national identity with the belonging to the Church. Consequently, potentially marginal transformation of the shape of Polish religiosity is primarily based on constituted past events and the stereotype of Polish piety whose external manifestations are based on a uniform religious structure and also relates to Poles' bonds with the rites of passage such as: baptising, wedding and funerals along with their mass practising and self-declaration of faith [Marianański 2011: 19,21].

The data concerning the religious structure of Poland clearly indicate a dominating role of the Catholic Church with - depending on the source - 94,4% to 87% of Poles affiliated. According to the Guide Book on Church and religious communities issued by GUS, 94,4% of Poles were affiliated with the Church in 2014, 94,95% in 2013 and 96,6% in 2005 [*Wyznania religijne 2016:33*]. According to the Institute of Statistics of the Catholic Church (ISKK), the number of the faithful in Poland amounted to 91,5%<sup>2</sup> [*Annuario Statisticum 2015: 6-7*]. Based on the Statistical Yearbook of GUS, the religious structure of Poland of 2014 may be presented as follows: Catholicism – 87,3%, including the Latin rite – 87%; Orthodox Church – 1,3%; Protestantism 0,3%, others – 0,35% and 10,67% of the non-affiliated [*Rocznik statystyczny 2015: 196 – 197*]. To compare, in 2004 this structure included: Catholicism – 90,2%, along with the Latin rite - 89,8%, Orthodox believers – 1,3%; Protestantism – 0,38%, other denominations – 0,35% and 7,7% of those not covered by the statistics<sup>3</sup> [*Maly rocznik statystyczny 2005: 129-130*].

Denominational self-identification of Poles presented in surveys is similar, as pursuant to the data of Public Opinion Research Centre (CBOS) in 2014 a close bond with the Church was declared by 89,3% of respondents; with Christianity – 4,9%; with the Orthodox church – 0,4%; Protestantism – 0,4%; 3,2% of respondents declared themselves as non-believers or atheists; agnostics – 0,2%, non-affiliated – 0,7% [*Lokalna parafia 2014:1*]. In 2008, the percentage of Catholics was higher by 5.4 pp, and the structure of responses concerning religious affiliations was the following: Catholic church – 94.7%; Protestantism and orthodox church – 4% each, non-denominational people, agnostics and atheists – 2,1 %; Christianity – 1,2% [*Wiara i religijność 2009:4*]. This data indicate that though the percentage of Catholics is decreasing, the identification with the Church is becoming a common and essential attribute. Moreover, its position among Poles seems to be dominating and *de facto* independent, and the sphere of religion is monopolised, with an insignificant participation of other denominations, which indicates to functioning of a religious market, yet, of a non-competitive nature. Religious affiliation

<sup>2</sup> Calculation based on the number of inhabitants in Latin parishes and the number of Catholics in such parishes.

<sup>3</sup> The basis for calculation based on Poland's population according to GUS, 38,478,602 people in 2014 and 38,173,835 in 2004.

means interpretative marking of Polish religiosity at least in two ways, since on the one hand it emphasises a specific benchmark of culture, in which religiosity – apart from an obvious integrity with the cultural dimension – emerges almost as an expression of citizenship and identification as well as a belief in historic significance of the people of Poland, supported by messianic visions and concepts. On the other hand, it informs about the institutional potential of the Church, and thus its efficiency in petrifying the models of affiliation, which do not seem to be subjected to interiorised choices, after all they are an immanent element of Polish tradition. Consequently, the religious space emanates not only with uniformity but is also characterised by a relative affiliation stability in a longer timeframe with an emerging trace of changes, which could be treated both as an incidental or transitional expression of distancing oneself from a sacred institution and also as an announcement of deeper transformations in the sphere of religion, thus becoming an implication of the trends stimulated by modernity.

An integral element of historically constituted supreme position of the Church translating into specific cultural or rather religious patterns, related, among the others, to one-time religious practises, which in the sacred dimension constitute a breakthrough moment that does not only connect individuals with transcendence, but also with a religious community, and this way they initiate and shape relations with institutional Church [*Baniak 2013:171-172; Baniak 2007; Mariński 1991:57*], at the same time influencing – at least potentially – life and moral beliefs. This aspect of religious activity is highly appreciated in Poland, since for most people the religious component of the rites of passage is truly solemn. Its exemplification is found in CBOS survey of 2015 which proves that baptism is significant for 83% of Poles, 7% of Poles are indifferent to it and for 9% of respondents it is insignificant. Religious wedding ceremony is solemn for 83% of respondents, 7% find it neutral and for 11% religious component of this rite is insignificant. 85% of respondents appreciate the religious ritual of funerals, 5% of respondents are indifferent to it and 9% find it insignificant [*Sfery sacrum i profanum 2015:9*]. To compare, in 2006 the attitudes of Poles to religious dimension of individual ceremonies was the following: baptism was important for 87 % of respondents, 6% treated it neutrally and it was insignificant for another 6%; religious dimension of a wedding ceremony is found as significant by 84% of respondents, 7% of respondents were indifferent to it, and 8% found it insignificant; funeral – 89%, 4% and 6%, respectively [*Znaczenie religii 2006:7*]. These data indicate that religious rituals concerning crucial elements of individuals` life are essential for most Poles, however, at the turn of the decade a decline from 3 to 4 percentage points (pp) is noticeable (baptism – 4pp, wedding pp, funeral pp) as to the assessment of the importance of church setting for significant pp moments in life, which may signal a change of the current, stable links of the

believers with these particular forms of religious practices, which indicates – at least indirectly – to the emergence of de-sacralizing tendencies [*compare Baniak 2013:201*].

Culturally rooted attachment to religious setting of crucial moments of human lifecycle, and thus their obvious massive scale in Polish conditions is also found in church records, mostly the ones related to the sacrament of baptism. 2014 saw 368,400 of baptisms and a decade before in 2004 the number of baptisms amounted to 342,600, which means a 7,5% increase<sup>4</sup> [*Annuario Statisticum Ecclesiae 2006*]. The statistical data are the following for births: in 2014 the number births was 376,500 and 351,300 children were baptised, in 2004 the number of births was 356,100 and the number of baptisms was 328,700, which means that 93.3% of children were baptised in 2014 while ten years earlier 92,3% of children were baptised<sup>5</sup>. The records concerning the sacrament of baptism reveal a clear stability, proving cultural rooting and universality of these practises in Polish community, which is not visible for other sacraments.

The sacrament of the first communion was administered 210,500 times in 2014 while in 2001 it totalled 416, 400 times, so this period saw a drop by almost a half, i.e. 49,9%. For the sacrament of confirmation the data stand at 310,300 and 488,800 respectively – so the decline totalled 36,5%. These changes can be partially explained by demographic transformations in Polish community<sup>6</sup>, nevertheless, these tendencies seem to have a different ground, related to the ongoing transformations in the cultural and religious sphere affected by secularization processes through which the Church is losing its potential to fully regulate and impose the only proper life patterns. This trend is seen in statistics concerning marriages, as in 2014 the sacrament of marriage was administered 132,200 times while the number of all wedding ceremonies amounted to almost 185,500, which means that Catholic weddings constituted 70.1 %. A decade earlier this statistical data were as follows: Catholic weddings – 152,200, total number of weddings – slightly above 191,800 so church weddings represented 79,3%. Not only did this period see a 9.2% drop of church weddings in relation to the total number of contracted marriages, but also the number of church marriages dropped by 13,1%, while at the same time the number of marriages decreased only by 1,7%. Furthermore, the period 2004-2014 was marked by a 16.7% increase in the number of divorces. This records indicate that

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<sup>4</sup> The calculation was performed on the basis of the total number of sacraments of baptism administered in the discussed period.

<sup>5</sup> The calculation was performed on the basis of the number of baptisms administered till 1<sup>st</sup>. year of life. Records for 2004 and 2014 – courtesy of Mr Robert Stepisiewicz of the Institute of Statistics of the Catholic Church.

<sup>6</sup> In the discussed period of time (2004-2014) the number of children aged 8 decreased by 10,2 %, and the number of nine - year- olds dropped by 15,9%. Analogous trend emerges in relation to children aged 14 and 15, where the decrease stood at 31,4% and 31,6%, respectively.

although in declaratory dimension Poles almost invariably value the religious character of the rites related to such crucial moments in human life like birth, wedding or death, distancing from religious dimension is becoming increasingly clear. Consequently, one-time practises in church setting are currently perceived as an integral and clear manifestation of sacral involvement of the believers – they are no longer a common rite, cultivated on the ground of tradition and culturally reproduced benchmark, yet, they are subjected to private choices adequately to individual preferences of lifestyles and appreciated values, which may not be fully coherent with the teaching of the Church.

As highlighted, the rites of passage should introduce and place an individual in a social community, shape their bonds with sacredness and also direct them to specific axiology and model of life, corresponding with doctrinal assumptions and messages, where developing and perpetuating proper ideological perspective and orientation as well as axio-normative orientation was supported – apart from families – also by local institutional communities like a parish [*Mariański 2011: 181-188*]. However, this dimension is also affected by clear weakening of bonds. More than half of Poles living in 2014 (66%) felt attached to their local parish while a decade earlier in 2005 – it was 80%. Yet, only 15% of respondents believe they can influence the parish matters and 81% are of an opposite opinion, while only 14% of them would like to have influence on the parish life. In 2005, the percentage of those who did not have, yet, wanted to have influence on the parish matters amounted to 19%, the opposite opinion was expressed by 71 % of respondents. Additionally, in 2015 only 8% of respondents belonged to any parish movements or communities and in 2015 the involvement in these initiatives amounted to 7%<sup>7</sup>. Furthermore, participation in own parish practices was declared by 66% of respondents in 2014, while in 2005 it totalled 77%. Weakening subjective feeling of bonds with own parish and small percentage of people related with church communities indicate a decreasing ability of the Church to consolidate the faithful in institutional structures, where the retarding elements seem to include current trends concerning globalisation, liberalisation and universal values that affirm freedom of choice in accordance with private preferences but also the ones related to sacredness, yet, this trend involves outmigration to urban areas and thus deconstruction of basic bonds and disappearance of the feeling of belonging to local structures along with freeing oneself from the influence of traditional mechanisms of social control, principally mobilising the actions of the believers and governing their social and cultural functioning. Practising in one own parish is characteristic of the inhabitants of towns and rural areas (below 20,000

<sup>7</sup> In the surveys conducted by ISKK in 2012, the level of declarations of belonging to religious communities amounted to 8,5 %. Compared to 8,1% in 2002, 9,8% in 1998 and 7,8% in 1991 [Firlit 2013:144]

inhabitants), as this form of activity was declared by 77% of respondents in 2014. The larger the city is, the lower percentage of declarations indicating participating in rituals in one's own parish with an increasing percentage revealing either a total non-participation or incidental practising due to specific ceremonies like: baptism, wedding or funerals. The structure of responses was as follows: in towns inhabited by 20,000 to 100,000 people, 60% of respondents participate in religious celebrations and 19% of respondents do not do so; in cities from 100,000 to 500,000 inhabitants the figure stands at 56% and 24% respectively, and in agglomerations above 500,000 people the figure amounted to 39% and 41%. At the same time, peregrination from church to church emerges and fits into believers' search for sacred offers and proposals consistent with their interests and needs, which is particularly noticeable in medium and large cities, where participation in practices out of their own parishes and churches amounts to 19%-20% of the respondents; while in small towns and rural areas the declarations concerning this form of activity total 11-12 % [*Lokalna parafia 2014:4:5,16, 19-20*]. Weakening links with one's own parish - not only a basic organisational structure of the Church, but also a significant institutional element with specific social and cultural functions means that the concept of the church of the people, referring to invariable patterns of mass rituals and attitudes is, in Polish conditions, subjected to a slow deconstruction, which, when simplified can be treated dichotomously. On the one hand, this phenomenon relates to general trends of de-institutionalization and privatization of religion that is getting out of full control and any attempts of multidimensional domination of religious institutions and is becoming a relatively universal formula sanctioning the current religious space. On the other hand, it seems to represent helplessness of the Church itself, faced with such tendencies, *eo ipso* inability to efficiently activate and integrate the faithful, which may result from the clergy's commitment to the image of traditional and vibrant Polish religiosity, and thus to the implementation of not entirely effective pastoral initiatives and solutions that have a retardant effect on current, continuously increasing challenges.

The tendency to separate from the institutional dimension is visible in religious practices and in particular in participation in systematic, weekly churchgoing. Pursuant to CBOS survey of 2014, the structure of responses concerning this form of activity is the following: regular practises – 50% of respondents, irregular practises – 37%, non-participation – 13%. A decade earlier regular practises were declared by 58% of respondents, 33% of respondents practiced irregularly and 9% did not practice at all [*Zmiany w zakresie 2015:4*]. Decreasing involvement of Poles in regular churchgoing is also confirmed in the survey conducted by ISKK, in which the *dominantes* ratio (concerns Sunday churchgoing) amounted to 39,1% in 2014, and the *communicantes* ratio (receiving Holy communion) amounted to 16.3%, the year 2013 saw analogous results. A decade

earlier in 2004, these ratios amounted to 43,25% and 15.6 % respectively, the *dominicanes* ratio of the 1980s stood at 57% - 46,7% and the *communicantes* ratio stood at 11,1% to 7,8%. The above data indicate decreasing involvement of the faithful in systematic religious practices with an increasing percentage of those receiving Holy Communion, additionally the ISKK data reveal a lower level of Sunday churchgoing than the one indicated by Poles` declarations concerning regular attendance. De-institutionalization of religion is becoming an increasingly distinguishing feature of Polish religious space, which means believers` targeting to a selective formula, subjected to modelling according to individual expectations and needs which may not necessary be coherent with the norms and requirements of the Church.

The significant feature of the ritualised religiosity can be completed by the data concerning praying, which may be treated – according to J. Mariański – “as a symptom of private religiosity”, though de facto it is indicative of “the viability or fall of the Christian life” [Mariański 2013: 84-85]. According to CBOS survey, the number of the faithful praying everyday stood at 43.5 % of respondents in 2014, those praying more than once a week – 15%; once a week – 12%; at least once a week- 8%; a few times a year-12%; once a year or more rarely - 3%; never – 7%. Compared to the results from earlier years e.g. from 2005, weakening of this form of activity can be observed, especially of its everyday character as its figure stood at 56%, which means a decrease by 13 pp. The declarations concerning other frequencies of prayers in that year stood at: more than once a week – 11%; once a week – 13%; at least once a week – 7%; a few times a week – 6%; once a year or less frequently – 3%; never – 5% [Zmiany w zakresie 2015:7]. In view of the presented results, praying practice appears to be a decreasingly frequent expression of believers` piety and care about their own religiosity and thus it is becoming a part of individualising where the model of private involvement, as well as building and maintaining bonds with transcendence, are distant from the one preferred and recommended by the Church.

### ***Nearer to or further away from the Church?***

Selective approach to institutional orders seems to be a characteristic element of Polish religiosity, as indicated not only by the above data, but also by subjective self-identification of the faithful in relation to the Church. According to CBOS survey, the number of the believers following the Church orders stood at 39% in 2014 and 66% in 2005, which means a decline by 27pp, at the same time there was a 20% increase in the number of declarations of individual expression of faith, as in 2014 this figure stood at 52% and in 2005 at 32%. Besides, the number of non-believers increased, in 2014 the figure stood at 5% and at 1% in 2005 [Zmiany w zakresie 2015:6; Polacy wobec Kościoła

2007:2]. These declarations indicate a clear re-orientation of the believers towards the formula of privatised religiosity, distancing itself from a complete surrender to the teaching of the church and as well as from specific doctrinal requirements, which cease to be an unquestionable symbolic universe and a sole source of axio-normative patterns. They tend to take a form of a peculiar offer, from which selective elements can be taken in accordance to individual preferences, representations and styles of life, where flexibility and lack of obligations become a basic criterion, thus following ideas proclaimed by the contemporary culture that affirm almost untamed freedom and the cult of “I” and “me”. These inspirations more and more frequently pass to the sphere of the sacred which – in Polish conditions - is gradually subjected to analogous standards related to the hegemony of choice, private preferences and inclinations, affecting the shape of religiosity that deviates from the Church formula.

The dimension confirming a specific spiritual viability of Poles is the faith, 92 % of respondents declared to be believers, including 8% of profound believers, the number of non-believers stood at 8% of respondents in 2014. In 2013 this figure stood at: believers – 93% (9%) and non-believers (7%) and in 2005 these self-declarations totalled as follows: believers – 96% (12% of profound believers) and non-believers - 4% [*Zmiany w zakresie 2015:3*]. The level of Poles` faith is characterised by a certain stability, yet, a decline in the number of profound believers can be observed, as within a decade this figure dropped by 4 pp, alongside with analogous increase in the number of non-believers. Self – declarations concerning faith accentuate, above all, the cultural pattern binding in Polish society [*Mariański 2011:35*], according to which faith might not be an obligation or a necessity, but rather a commonly and freely manifested obviousness. Yet, its ingredients depart from a potential model suggested by the “affiliation structure”. According to CBOS survey conducted in 2015, more than half of Poles unquestionably believe in God (56%) and 27% of respondents express doubts about this belief; for another 5% of respondents the belief in God is not permanent, as it occurs at times. An analogous percentage believes in the Supreme Being, others either do not know whether God exists (4%) or simple do not believe in God (3%). Comparing declarations concerning this dimension, the 2009 survey results indicate that the percentage of unquestionable believers in God decreased by 4% (60%). Faith in God with some elements of hesitation is manifested by 26% of the respondents and alternate faith with some elements of hesitation is manifested by 5% of respondents. Besides, 6% believe in the Supreme Being, 4 % did not have doubt about the existence of God and 1% defined themselves as non-believers [*Kanon wiary 2015:2*]. This context allows to see the presence of Christian concepts and visions referring to the question of the Absolute and transcendence, suggesting coherence of the teaching with the beliefs of the faithful.

Nonetheless, the declarations concerning particular elements of faith indicate its subjective treatment, and thereby confirm a rather selective approach to doctrinal issues and constituting eclectic ideological and symbolic ideas. The faith of Polish people, as indicated by 2015 survey, covers both the elements of the doctrine and also extra - religious elements, since apart from the belief in the last judgement (70%), heaven (70%), immortality of the soul (69%), afterlife (66%), resurrection of the dead (62%), original sin (59%), hell (56%), there appears a belief in: fate (66%), animal soul (36%), reincarnation (30%). Comparing these aspects to the declarations of 2009 indicates a slight decrease in the beliefs in the last judgement (73%), immortality of human soul (73%), life after death (69%), resurrection of the dead (66%), the stigma of original sin (68%), hell (59%) and also animal soul (42%) and reincarnation (33%) [*Kanon wiary 2015:10*]. The beliefs constituting sacred outlook on life of the believers do not only include the content and ideas that are solely of Christian background, but also the ones related to the doctrine are characterized by a diversified level of interiorization. This dimension reveals that self-declaration of faith has a common and stable character in Polish conditions, yet, its ingredients accentuate both the eclectic character of the beliefs and representations, and also a selective approach to the elements of doctrine. This multi - ideology may be treated as an expression of the currently binding pluralism, and thus as a consent to constituting imaginary and symbolic collages, acceptance of diversity that in religious context translates into autonomous creation of “religious” outlooks on life and references. This predilection dominates, as the percentage of the believers in all doctrinal elements stood at 35% in 2014, yet, upon elimination of the respondents with extra - Christian beliefs the ideological coherence will characterise only 5% of the respondents [*Kanon wiary 2015:10*].

The outlined dimensions of Poles` religiosity present its significant diversity, ranging from a conservative and orthodox attitude, through a cultural “model” or pattern replicated on the ground of tradition, to an increasingly clear emergence of the trend of de-institutionalization and privatisation of religion. The entirety clearly indicates internal pluralism of the denomination prevailing in Poland with its “summer - time” and superficial searching and distancing forms as well as traditionalistic and devotional forms, which may be treated a consequence of contemporary transformations in social and cultural sphere that trigger changes in the scope of attitudes, beliefs and axiological orientations [*Borowik, Doktor 2001*]. This differentiation along with numerous individual preferences would be used by numerous religious entities, yet, in Poland this abundance of forms is functioning under the emblem of Catholicism [*Wójtowicz 2010*].

### ***Innovations of the Lednica meetings***

The Church is trying to respond to these tendencies by engaging in various forms of evangelization, the setting of which could be less or more modernised and directing them to various consumer segments. The exemplification of these undertakings could be found in all Poland's meeting of the youth in Lednica, organized periodically since 1997 and whose meaning is of dialectic character. On the one hand, this place emanates with a peculiar symbolism as it is located near Gniezno, the town identified with the baptism of Poland. On the other hand, the initiative was implemented with support of John Paul II, who put a special trust in the youth, especially in the context of current transformations involving secularization - related changes.

Meetings of the youth in the fields of Lednica are meant to implement this concept, as they consolidate the young generation around faith. Besides, they fit into the inculturation project, since they emanate with abundance of religious symbols, giving them an innovative arrangement, corresponding with the codes of contemporary culture. These meetings can boast about professional choreography, marketing, logistics and obviously a pastoral care. Each meeting carries a message that becomes the main theme for the performance which is also aimed at promoting and deepening Christian concepts in young people. The first meeting highlighted the meaning of the Holy Trinity, being in line with the preparations for the great year 2000 jubilee when the meeting in Lednica was originally meant to be a single event only. The constitutive elements of the setting included a metal gate, shaped like a fish and designed by A. Boryska, which was to become – as described by J. Góra the initiator of the event – “a mega symbol” of the meeting already held annually [Góra 2001:18,22]. Walking through the gate, the participants manifest their acceptance for specific values and unity in the Christian community. Additionally, the staffage was mainly composed of wicker – an allegory of the past [Góra 2001:22]. A significant part of both the first and other meetings was celebration of the relics of St. Adalbert [Góra 2001: 18,22, 29] now considered the holy patron of the young arriving in Lednica, who are supposed - as emphasised by J. Góra – “to defend faith faced with increasing paganism of Europe” [Góra 2001:22]

The second meeting held in 1998 highlighted the meaning of crucial Christian symbols like: salt, light and oil [Góra 2001:32] whose sacred meaning was translated into a contemporary model of narration and language. The evangelical contents were presented in a modern and meaningful form because the salt was brought from Klodawa and distributed in specially designed bags to emphasize its multi-functionality, as salt gives taste and also preserves, so in the religious context salt gives the meaning/sense/ and protects “faith from spoilage” [Góra 2001:33]; the oil was “enriched” with fragrances so that spreading aroma could symbolise holiness and faith, as the man of faith smells nice

contrary to a sinner; the fire brought from Rome was the meaning of light and its power and potential were supposed to indicate inexhaustibility of Christian values [Góra 2001:33-35]. Baptising adult people was meant to be a component of next meeting in 2000, yet, this idea was abandoned upon Archbishop H. Muszyński's request "not to pack so many symbols together, as you will clog up everything" [quotations from: Góra 2001:40]

So the meetings in Lednica emanate with symbolism that is put in the references and codes of the contemporary culture and subjected to spectacular associations that are meant to integrate faith and culture and translate its meaning into the language of modernity. Its exemplification could be found in preparation and distribution of the Decalogue cards that resembled credit cards. Jan Góra justified that concept by a particular coincidence of meanings, so just like plastic money lets you live on credit also living in accordance with Christian principles will lead to salvation, yet, the entire issue is based on a "credit like" conviction of the rightness of this standpoint [Góra 2001:54]. The inspirations making the annual performances more attractive take a variety of forms, referring to more or less conventional or even controversial borrowings or associations. In 1999 a replica was made of a part of Rembrandt's painting "Return of the prodigal son", yet, the face of God was replaced by the face of John Paul II, which was to become a peculiar form of allegory of the God of Mercy - as suggested by J. Góra [Góra 2001: 43-46].

While preparing the meetings, the organizers seek various forms of expression and meaning, which will not only be understood and clear for the young generation but will also take a form coherent with the experiences and feelings offered by the contemporary entertainment industry, becoming a counter offer for pop products and quasi icons. Consequently, the settings of these meetings increasingly refer to feasty and simulative character of the contemporary culture and at the same time affirm the sacred, stimulate spirituality and feelings in the community. However, these stagings (shows) may be treated dichotomously.

On the one hand, such performances seem a solution compliant with the requirements of the mass culture, as they promote innovations, dynamism and attractiveness, thus being a completion or an alternative to conventional forms of celebration. The meaningfulness of such initiatives is confirmed by the participants' comments posted on the official web side. For example, "Above all, Lednica offered me a magnificent unity with Jesus and all the other people by my side. I felt I was not alone in my faith, I felt I was with thousands of other people! Never before have I felt it so distinctly! (Ola); "Lednica is for me a place enhancing my emotional stability, the place where I feel God's presence. Lednica helped me change for the better. Since the meeting I have been trying to live more for the others, I want to help!" (Sylwia). The responses of

the participants approve of this innovative setting, as one of the participants claims: “The meeting at Lednica gave me a lot: meeting new people, fabulous atmosphere and a proof that God can be worshipped joyfully, through dancing and singing! Lednica is changing people, and has changed me.. that is why we need it! I want to come back!” (Marta). The symbolic element of the passage through the gates seems to be truly meaningful in view of the participants` experiences as one of them points out: ”Participation in the meeting helped me choose Jesus Christ to be my life Guide. I found the moment of passing through the Fish Gate most amazing!”(Dominik). Others emphasise the role of community feelings, mutual prayer and the sacrament of confession. For example: “I did like the confession I went to in the fields of Lednica. It was a sincere, face to face talk with a priest as a mediator of Jesus. I will always remember it! I will never forget the dances, singing, joint prayers and my spiritual transformation. It was during the meeting that I understood that Jesus and faith in Him constitute a true value in life! I will remember the Meeting for long! “(Sylwia)<sup>8</sup>.

On the other hand, by corresponding with contemporary eventful life and spectacularity, Lednica appears to be a religious happening, which offers both instant faith and experience and moderately targets spiritual needs. Furthermore, it signals some instrumentalization of the symbolic arsenal, which similarly to the sphere of commerce juggles with connotations and exploits various resources, yet, solely for stimulating the demand. It seems that a trend for a fashion brand is different, as the latter requires at least some potential depth, reflexion and conscious affirmation of *the sacred*, but not a collective joy stimulated by the animators of the “pop” version of experiences and the Absolute. Yet, the intention of Jan Góra was “translating faith into culture” [Góra 2001:32], not only solely through the setting and model of narration as the narration itself multiplies the events like Lednica of the Youth, Lednica of Seniors, Lednica of Children and also extends it with the offer of commemorative gadgets, but his aim was to give the narration a Christian flavour and taste throughout the whole event. Contemporary culture has promoted and is still promoting ephemerality and collecting various experiences and observations. This trend appears to be invariable, nevertheless, it has also penetrated into the sphere of the sacred, as the set of the attributes of consumers still includes the stole, the fish, the breviary and the cross <sup>9</sup>, resembling the whereabouts of our previous spiritual quest.

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<sup>8</sup> [www.lednica2000.pl](http://www.lednica2000.pl)

<sup>9</sup> Among the others, these are the symbols of Lednica available in e- shop [www.lednicki.pl](http://www.lednicki.pl) [25 IX 2016]

### *Instead of a summary*

Briefly presented data concerning some dimensions of Polish religiosity reveal its specificity, which is principally based on the formula of belonging that does not imply explicit permanent and coherent data with predominating expression of religious attitudes. These attitudes seem to be selective and targeted at a culturally reproduced scheme rather than a complete manifestation of shaping relations and experiences with metaphysics. Ritualization becomes the emanation of Polish religiosity, yet, it is mainly the festive ritualization that allows to manifest membership in the community. Yet, it seems that while such moments are occasional, the essence of religiosity, including the beliefs, is losing its depth and reflectiveness, becoming a poor substitute or hologram of sacredness, yet, on a larger scale, it does not mean phasing out or deficit of spiritual needs and desire to experience the sacred, as they are clearly seen in declarations and though they only partially refer to doctrinal matters, they still do not seem to be fully consolidated and developed by the Church. The issue still remains open whether it is a consequence of an uncompetitive character of the religious sphere where the monopolist allows for a superficial character of involvement, or perhaps, it is an inevitable effect of a “tyranny of monopoly” where the prevailing subject may, due to its position, pay decreasing attention to the quality of its offer or product, as the shape of market relations for customers still means the only choice – a choice deprived of any alternatives? Or perhaps it is the outcome of specific changes in the needs of believers, who, in accordance with contemporary tendencies, tend to seek less or more peculiar experiences and feelings, as it is where the contemporary ephemeral and eventful culture permanently stimulates their needs, the phenomenon that the Church may not be fully prepared for. Though the Church undertakes numerous attempts and actions to stop the tendencies emerging along with the modernity, the culture of experience, ephemeral shows, abundance of simulations, yet, these attempts take a provisional and *ad hoc* form. Since these initiatives are aimed at presenting religion in an innovative, marketing and eventful setting, which is likely to impress, lead to collective enthusiasm, stimulate emotions, present other form of collective experiencing, nonetheless, does it leave a permanent trace in the lives of the participants so that they could bring that implemented hope, joy and values into the world of postmodernity, filled with emblems and imitations of other versions of satisfaction and self-fulfilment? The contemporary level and character of religiosity do not exemplify a particular efficiency of such initiatives, yet, this does not deny the rationale for undertaking them, as they seem to be indispensable nowadays [Einstein 2010]. Nonetheless, they appear to accentuate the scope of challenges for the Church, while all religious happenings and sacral performances tempt with their

attractiveness and manifest the modernization of the sacrum, still they do not seem to lead to equally spectacular massive religious conversions.

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