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## Religiosity and Secularisation of Polish Youth in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Quantitative Research Analysis\*

In this article, we analyse the religiosity and secularisation processes of secondary school youth on several selected levels: religious affiliation, changes in religiosity, belief in a personal God, compulsory and non-compulsory religious practices, i.e. personal prayer. These analyses are based on the results of a sociological survey as part of the research project 'Religious education of Polish youth – current state, opportunities and challenges', conducted in November and December 2022 and January 2023. The study involved 1,672 male and female students from secondary schools across Poland. The results of the study confirm the increasingly dynamic secularisation processes.

**Key words:** religiosity, secularisation, youth, Poland.

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## Introduction

For many decades, sociology was dominated by the secularisation thesis, according to which an autonomisation of various areas of social life was taking place in modern societies, i.e. individual sectors of society and culture were being freed from the power of religious institutions and symbols. This objective process of transformation gradually affected people's consciousness and transformations in the religious universe. Religion was losing its former credibility and falling into crisis. Traditional religious definitions of reality were being replaced by rational, scientific, technical explanations. In this context, the thesis of the disappearance of religion, the weakening of the social hold of religion and the coming of a religionless society was proclaimed, which eventually developed into the global secularisation thesis. Some versions of the secularisation thesis treat religion as a manifestation of the pre-modern era and an expression of an irrational lifestyle. Modern societies become, as it were, inherently secular societies<sup>1</sup>.

According to this theory, religion in the conditions of modernity loses its ability to legitimise and construct the social and moral order, its social significance is steadily diminishing and it can only remain in the cracks and niches of mainstream social life. Secularisation is not a by-product of certain forms of social life, but a constitutive feature of it. The spread of secularism, finding expression in philosophical doctrines, constitutions and state structures, in its extreme forms denies religion the right and ability to shape public affairs and the destiny of people in the future<sup>2</sup>.

Some sociologists in the 20<sup>th</sup> century proclaimed the triumph of secularisation and secularism, the days of religion seemed numbered. Christian churches were treated as relics of the past, claiming that history was moving towards secularisation or even secularism and religion would eventually be abandoned. Traditional theories of secularisation were to some extent normative, for they assumed the demise of religion as the goal of human history. Moreover, getting rid of God – according to secularist approaches – is supposed to help solve all the world's problems on the assumption that secular humanist values will

<sup>1</sup> U. Baumann, *Jugendliche und Religion*, in: *Neues Handbuch religionspädagogischer Grundbegriffe*, eds. G. Bitter, R. Englert, G. Müller, K.E. Nipkow, München 2002, pp. 199-203; *Jugend 2019: Eine Generation meldet sich zu Wort. 18th Shell Jugendstudie*, eds. M. Albert, K. Hurrelmann, G. Quenzel, Weinheim-Basel 2019, pp. 150-156.

<sup>2</sup> K. Gabriel, *Gesellschaft und Religion*, in: *Neues Handbuch religionspädagogischer Grundbegriffe*, pp. 139-143.

suffice. Scientific and rational progress is supposed to lead eventually to the erasure of the idea of God from human consciousness. Secularisation as a socio-cultural process can be observed in all countries of Western Europe, although it takes different shapes and proceeds with varying intensity. In recent years, secularisation processes have also been gaining momentum in Poland. The present study contains an analysis of the results of the author's sociological research conducted among Polish youth and its comparison with other nationwide studies from the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Thus, the research aim of this study is to provide an answer to the current level of religiosity of Polish youth attending secondary schools and the secularisation processes taking place in this social group.

## Research methodology

The phenomenon of youth secularisation will be analysed on several selected levels of religiosity. These analyses are based on the results from the author's sociological research conducted as part of the research project 'Religious education of Polish youth – current state, opportunities and challenges', carried out in November and December 2022 and January 2023. The survey involved 1,672 male and female students from secondary schools across Poland. In accordance with the adopted assumptions of the auditory survey, at least 100 persons from each voivodeship were included in the study. In the entire population of schoolchildren surveyed, there were 52.7% females and 47.3% males, 52.3% of first grade secondary school pupils and 47.7% of fourth grade (matura) secondary school pupils, 50.4% of general secondary school pupils and 49.6% of technical secondary school pupils, 50.8% living in rural areas and 49.2% in urban areas. The empirical results from these sociological surveys will be compared with two previous nationwide sociological surveys, from 2005 conducted by the Institute of Statistics of the Catholic Church SAC and from 2017 conducted by the Institute of Sociology of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University<sup>3</sup>.

## Analysis of research results

The remainder of this article will present the results of research conducted among Polish secondary school students. The following

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<sup>3</sup> J. Mariański, *Kondycja religijna i moralna młodzieży szkół średnich w latach 1988-1998-2005-2017 (Raport z ogólnopolskich badań socjologicznych)*, Toruń 2018.

research areas will be analysed: religious affiliation, changes in religiosity, belief in God and religious practices.

## Religious affiliation

Religious self-declarations refer to the so-called holistic creeds and are among the most enduring components of religiosity. In the group of schoolchildren surveyed, 72.8% declared membership in the Roman Catholic Church, 1.1% in the Orthodox Church, 0.7% in the Jehovah's Witnesses, 0.6% in the Greek Catholic Church, 0.6% in the Protestant Church, 0.4% in the Muslim faith, 0.2% in the Mosaic faith, 0.2% in other faiths, 3.6% in none, 12.6% in none, 7.4% hard to say.

For the sake of comparison, let us add that in 2017 – according to a nationwide survey carried out by the Institute of Sociology at UKSW – 84.6% of respondents declared a Catholic denomination, other religious denominations – 4.1%, non-denominational – 10.3% and no answer – 1.0% (in 2005: 93.4%, 3.5%, 2.5%, 0.7%). Thus, between 2005 and 2023, the rate of those declaring Catholicism decreased from 93.4% to 72.8% (a difference of 20.6%), while the rate of the irreligious increased, from 2.5% to 10.3% (a difference of 7.8%). A declaration such as “I am a Catholic” is no longer within the framework of so-called cultural obviousness, which can be spoken of when positive answers are above 80%<sup>4</sup>.

Roman Catholic Church affiliation was reported by 72.9% of female and 74.9% of male respondents ( $p = 0.002$ , Kramer's  $V = 0.125$ ); 72.6% of first-year secondary school students and 74.7% of secondary school students ( $p = 0.109$ , Kramer's  $V = 0.093$ ); 73.0% of students from general secondary schools and 74.1% of students from technical schools ( $p = 0.677$ , Kramer's  $V = 0.064$ ); rural areas – 79.7%, town up to 30,000 inhabitants – 72.8%, town from 30,000 to 100,000 inhabitants – 67.6%, town from 100,000 to 500,000 inhabitants – 69.4%, town with more than 500 thousand inhabitants – 46.7% ( $p = 0.002$ , Kramer's  $V = 0.125$ ); regularly attending religious lessons at school – 86.7%, irregularly – 71.4%, not attending religious lessons at school – 39.7% ( $p = 0.000$ , Kramer's  $V = 0.342$ ); practicing several times a week – 85.7%, every Sunday – 93.2%, almost every Sunday – 94.2%, one or two times a month – 86.8%, only on major holidays – 84.8%, only on the occasion of a wedding, funeral, etc. – 63.2%, not attending at all – 31.7% ( $p = 0.000$ , Kramer's  $V = 0.224$ ). A total of 73.4% of the surveyed schoolchildren belonged to the Roman Catholic and Greek Catholic Church, 2.4% to other Christian

<sup>4</sup> Ibidem, 43.

denominations, 4.2% to other religions, non-respondents – 7.4% and not belonging to any denomination – 12.6%. A small proportion of respondents gave other expressions of their religious affiliation, such as atheism, Buddhism, Seventh Day Christianity, Christianity in general, Catholicism, Satanism, Wiccanism, belief in self, belief in the universe.

The highest number of respondents declaring no religious affiliation at all were those who do not participate in religious practices (43.3%), who do not attend religious lessons at school (35.7%), who live in cities with more than 500,000 inhabitants (26.7%), who participate in religious practices only on the occasion of a wedding, funeral, etc. (22.1%), and who live in cities with more than 100,000 to 500,000 inhabitants (16.9%). (22.1%), living in cities of 100,000 to 500,000 inhabitants (16.9%). Adherence to Catholicism was declared slightly less frequently by women than by men, more frequently by those living in rural areas or small towns than by those living in medium-sized and large towns, less frequently by general secondary school students than by those living in technical secondary schools, less frequently by first graders than by high school graduates, more frequently by those attending religious lessons than by those not attending, and more frequently by those practising regularly than by those not practising. Demographic and social characteristics (with the exception of place of residence) only slightly differentiated the affiliation of the surveyed youth to Catholicism.

Almost until the end of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Polish young people were reluctant to admit “denominational homelessness”, even if their ties to a particular denomination or religion were very weakened and their Catholicism very vague and undefined. Between 2000 and 2018, sociologists observed slow changes in the religious affiliation of Polish society, also in youth circles. Research from the last few years already indicates a clear erosion of religious affiliation in secondary school youth circles. In the last five years (2017-2023), the processes of youth emigration from the Catholic Church have clearly accelerated: from 84.6% to 73.4% (a difference of 11.2%).

It should also be borne in mind that positive declarations of religious affiliation do not always correspond with religious affiliation. Indeed, participants in a religious group may be individuals who reveal different levels of personal religious faith, who are indifferent in their faith stakes or who are even non-believers. For some young people, being Catholic is more of a cultural fact than a matter of deepened faith and personal conviction. A specific category of respondents are those who apply the terms to themselves: “I believe in God but not in the Church”,

“I am a believing Catholic but disagree with some bishops”. They are in a kind of ambivalence, but they do not take the final decision to part from the Church. Some of them will “populate” in the future the category of Catholics described as “non-believing but practising Catholics”, “cultural non-practising Catholics”. The circles of those who do not identify with any religion and the Christian Church, i.e. those who are ecclesiastically unaffiliated, are growing slightly faster<sup>5</sup>.

## Religious self-identifications

The study of the so-called global attitudes towards faith (firm believer, believer, undecided, searching, doubting, indifferent, non-believer) only characterises religiosity in a very approximate and preliminary way. A declaration of belonging to a religious community or a declaration of attitude towards a religious/church institution, a declaration of the type “I am a believer”, allows for a sociological grasp of orientations and attitudes towards religion in the most general, more institutionalised than non-institutionalised dimensions.

Among the secondary school students we surveyed, 7.7% of the respondents described themselves as firm believers, 38.0% as believers, 21.4% as undecided but attached to a religious tradition, 11.4% as indifferent in matters of faith, 13.3% as non-believers and 8.2% as difficult to say. Combining the first two answers, we get an index of firm believers and believers at 45.7%. Almost one in three respondents placed themselves in the ‘undecided’ and ‘hard to say’ categories (29.6% in total). For the sake of comparison, let us add that in 2017 – according to a nationwide survey carried out by the Institute of Sociology at UKSW – 7.5% of secondary school students surveyed declared themselves to be firm believers, 46.4% as believers, 23.3% as undecided, 13.2% as religiously indifferent, 8.8% as non-believers and 0.7% – no answer (in 2005: 13.8%, 59.6%, 18.4%, 4.5%, 3.3%, 0.3% respectively)<sup>6</sup>. The combined rate of firm believers and believers was 73.4% in 2005, 53.9% in 2017 and 45.7% in 2023 (rate of non-believers: 3.3%, 8.8%, 13.3% respectively). Between 2005 and 2023, the rate of firm believers and believers thus decreased by 27.7%<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> J. Casanova, *Religiosität in Spanien. Eine interpretative Lektüre der Resultate des Religionsmonitors*, in: *Woran glaubt die Welt? Analysen und Kommentare zum Religionsmonitor 2008*, ed. B. Stiftung, Gütersloh 2009, pp. 229-232.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 59.

<sup>7</sup> J. Mariański, *Kondycja religijna i moralna młodzieży szkół średnich w latach 1988-1998-2005-2017*, p. 59.

The rate of profound believers and believers was slightly lower among females than males (43.9% vs. 47.7%;  $p = 0.121$ ,  $V$  Kramer = 0.072); adolescents from general secondary schools – 45.3%, adolescents from technical schools – 46.0% ( $p = 0.269$ ,  $V$  Kramer = 0.062); students from first classes of secondary schools – 46.0%, secondary school graduates – 45.3% ( $p = 0.163$ , Kramer's  $V = 0.069$ ); those living in rural areas – 52.1%, those living in towns with up to 30 thousand inhabitants – 41.1%, in towns with 30 thousand to 100 thousand inhabitants – 42.9%, in towns with 100 thousand to 500,000 inhabitants – 38.9%, in cities with more than 500,000 inhabitants – 24.2% ( $p = 0.000$ , Kramer's  $V = 0.104$ ); attending religious lessons at school regularly – 59.0%, attending irregularly – 26.3%, not attending at all – 20.3% ( $p = 0.000$ , Kramer's  $V = 0.327$ ); attending religious practices several times a week – 79.0%, every Sunday – 79.6%, almost every Sunday – 65.0%, about once or twice a month – 59.3%, only on major holidays – 38.5%, only on the occasion of a wedding, funeral, etc. – 17.5%, not practising at all – 8.6% ( $p = 0.000$ , Kramer's  $V = 0.711$ ). Religious self-identifications was declared less frequently by women than by men, general secondary school youth less frequently than by technical secondary school youth, secondary school youth from first grades slightly more frequently than from fourth grades, youth living in the country more frequently than in cities, youth attending religious education classes more frequently than those not attending, and youth practising regularly more frequently than those not practising at all.

For comparison, in a nationwide CBOS poll of 2021, in the entire youth population 6% of respondents described themselves as deeply believers, 48% – as believers, 23% – as undecided, 23% – as non-believers. The combined rate of firm believers and believers was 54% (in 1996 – 80%, in 1998 – 80%, in 2003 – 78%, in 2008 – 81%, in 2010 – 77%, in 2013 – 71%, in 2016 – 69%, in 2018 – 63%). Between 2018 and 2021 alone, this rate has decreased by 9 percentage points<sup>8</sup>.

The results of sociological studies among schoolchildren indicate outlining changes in the global attitudes of the young generation of Poles towards religion, i.e. at the level of the so-called national religiosity. A disruption in the continuity of faith and clear traces of a lack of continuity indicate a trend towards individual choice of faith at the expense of its inheritance.

Among those who are 'undecided but committed to a religious tradition' are some who are in fact believers in their own way and

<sup>8</sup> R. Boguszewski, *Religijność młodzieży*, in: *Młodzież 2021. Opinie i diagnozy*, nr 49, eds. M. Grabowska, M. Gwiazda, Warszawa 2022, p. 135.

according to their own taste, although they do not describe themselves as religious. Some of them believe in God, but not in the kind of God presented to them by the Church. The decrease in the rate of believers among young people is a relatively new trend in the phase of political, economic and socio-cultural changes and undoubtedly a peculiar phenomenon accompanying these changes. The results obtained among school youth allow us to assume that the downward trend will continue. However, secularisation processes are taking place in different ways in various social environments<sup>9</sup>.

It is also worth noting that, among the young people surveyed, 45.2% said they were more religious in the past, 10.2% said they were more religious now, 23.3% said no change and 15.4% said it was difficult to say. Almost half of the male and female students surveyed described themselves as more religious in the past and 6.0% as non-religious. For the sake of comparison, let us add that in 2017 – according to a nationwide survey carried out by the Institute of Sociology at UKSW – 41.0% of schoolchildren surveyed reported that they were more religious in the past, 12.3% – that they are more religious now, 24.6% – no change, 18.1% – hard to say and 4.0% – no answer (in 2005: 39.3%, 17.5%, 27.6%, 14.6%, 0.9% respectively). 39.3% of respondents in 2005, 41.0% in 2017 and 45.2% in 2023 considered themselves to be more religious “formerly”. Self-assessments of one’s religiosity indicate a slow process of secularisation of the religious consciousness of schoolchildren. Between 2005 and 2023, the rate of those who claimed to have been more religious “in the past” increased by 5.9%.

Responses such as “I used to be more religious” were more often given by women, young people attending general secondary schools, living in cities with a population of up to 30 000, not attending religious lessons and rarely or not practising at all. Young people’s awareness of a decrease in their religious commitment is much higher than their awareness of an increase in religiousness. The religiousness of Polish youth is far from stable, but it does not follow a predetermined trajectory; rather, it is subject to constant changes and fluctuations, more often negative than positive. The tendency to deepen faith is less widespread in youth circles than the tendency to depart from religious faith.

<sup>9</sup> R. Boguszewski, M. Bożewicz, *Religijność i moralność polskiej młodzieży – zależność czy autonomia?*, “Zeszyty Naukowe KUL” 2019, Vol. 62(4), pp. 36-46.



## Belief in the existence of God

One of the fundamental truths of the Catholic faith is the existence of a personal God<sup>10</sup>. In this context, the following question was posed to the young people surveyed: ‘Which of the following statements about belief in God is closest to you?’ Respondents were allowed to choose one of the six suggested answers. Among secondary school students, 26.1% of respondents stated that they believe in God and have no doubts about His existence; 25.1% – believe in God, although they sometimes have moments of doubt; 14.0% – sometimes I think I believe in God and sometimes I think I don’t; 10.1% – does not believe in a personal God; 8.5% – does not believe in a personal God, but believes in some kind of Higher Power; 7.8% – that they do not know if God exists and do not believe there is a way to find out; 8.3% – difficult to say.

Combining the first two answers, we get a rate of 51.2% of those who believe in God and have no serious doubts about it: females – 47.9%, males – 55.1% ( $p = 0.003$ ,  $V$  Kramer = 0.108); general secondary schools – 50.5%, technical schools – 52.1% ( $p = 0.109$ , Kramer’s  $V = 0.079$ ); first classes of secondary schools – 54.0%, matriculation classes – 48.3% ( $p = 0.000$ , Kramer’s  $V = 0.139$ ); rural areas – 57.9%, town up to 30 thousand inhabitants – 47.2%, town from 30 thousand to 100 thousand inhabitants – 50.0%, town from 100 thousand to 500,000 inhabitants – 43.4%; city with more than 500,000 inhabitants – 25.3% ( $p = 0.000$ , Kramer’s  $V = 0.106$ ); participating regularly in school religion lessons – 64.7%, irregularly – 34.9%, not participating – 24.0% ( $p = 0.000$ , Kramer’s  $V = 0.312$ ); participating in religious practices several times a week – 82.5%, every Sunday – 83.6%, almost every Sunday – 71.2%, about once or twice a month – 65.5%, only on major holidays – 46.8%, only on the occasion of a wedding, funeral etc. – 27.2%, does not participate at all – 11.0%, difficult to say – 41.7% ( $p = 0.000$ , Kramer’s  $V = 0.263$ ).

Many young people try to shape their religiosity in their own way, according to their own direction, rather than according to the expectations and precepts of the Church. This approach is sometimes referred to as a “do-it-yourself mentality”. Changes in religious (dogmatic) consciousness are taking place in an unspectacular way, nevertheless in a real and – perhaps – irreversible way, at least in the near future. We observe in sociological studies a slow erosion of traditional religious

<sup>10</sup> W.H. Ritter, *Gott – Gottesbilder*, in: *Neues Handbuch religionspädagogischer Grundbegriffe*, pp. 89-93.

beliefs. “Religious faces” of young people are increasingly diverse, ambivalent, selective, in minorities – clearly unorthodox.

In comparison, in the 2021 CBOS survey, 29% of the surveyed school-children declared that they believe in God and have no doubts about His existence; 23% – believe in God, although they sometimes have moments of doubt; 11% – sometimes it seems to me that I believe in God, and sometimes that I do not; 10% – do not believe in a personal God, but believe in some kind of Higher Power; 11% – do not know if God exists and do not believe that there is a way to check it; 16% – do not believe in God (in 2013, respectively: 45%, 26%, 10%, 7%, 6%, 6%; in 2018 – 37%, 23%, 11%, 9%, 10%, 11%). Belief in God was expressed by 71% of the youth surveyed in 2013, 60% in 2018 and 52% in 2021. These data indicate a clear downward trend of unwavering belief in God and a concomitant increase in agnostic and atheistic attitudes<sup>11</sup>. Furthermore, the traditional image of God is eroding and many young people are rejecting notions of an absolutely transcendent God<sup>12</sup>.

## Compulsory religious practices

Religious practices, more broadly religious rituals, play an essential role in all world religions.

Each of the major religions defines important and distinctive practices, including rituals, rites and ceremonies often associated with milestone events such as birth, marriage and death, and the observance of festivals, and within each religion there are many variations of these practices typical of different denominations, denominations and communities. In terms of Christian customs, regular church attendance on Sundays and holidays is important here, as is the role of prayer, charity, the importance of communion, and the rites of baptism, confirmation and marriage<sup>13</sup>.

Practices performed for religious reasons are evidence of intrinsic religiosity (positive criterion for religiosity). The absence of religious practices, on the other hand, indicates some far-reaching changes taking place in religious life (negative criterion of religiosity). In post-modern and pluralistic societies, in which people do not face strict control and pressure from the social environment, the fulfilment of

<sup>11</sup> R. Boguszewski, *Religijność młodzieży*, p. 136.

<sup>12</sup> See J. Mariański, *Religijność młodzieży polskiej w procesie przemian w XXI wieku*, Lublin 2023, pp. 141-142.

<sup>13</sup> P. Norris, R. Inglehart, *Sacrum i profanum. Religia i polityka na świecie*, Kraków 2006, p. 51.

religious duties generally requires personal commitment and is a sign of religious vitality.

In our survey, 3.4% of young people reported that they attend Mass several times a week, 17.9% – every Sunday, 15.6% – almost every Sunday, 10.6% – one or two times a month, 13.0% – only on major holidays, 12.3% – only on the occasion of a wedding, funeral, etc., 12.6% – do not attend at all, 9.7% – hard to say and 4.9% – not applicable. According to the respondents' declarations, 21.3% of them are regular practitioners (several times a week, every Sunday), 26.2% are irregular practitioners (almost every Sunday, once or twice a month), 25.3% are occasional practitioners (several times a year, only on the occasion of a wedding or funeral) and 17.5% are not participating at all (I do not practice at all, not applicable). One in ten respondents could not specify the frequency of their attendance at Sunday Mass.

For the sake of comparison, let us add that in 2017 – according to a nationwide survey carried out by the Institute of Sociology of the UKSW – 19.0% of surveyed male and female secondary school pupils reported that they attended Mass every Sunday, 22.1% – almost every Sunday, 14.0% – about once or twice a month, 19.9% – only on major holidays, 12.5% – only on the occasion of a wedding, funeral, etc, 9.2% – did not participate at all, 3.3% – no answer (in 2005: 26.4%, 34.7%, 16.6%, 11.1%, 3.9%, 4.6%, 0.0%, 2.6% respectively). Thus, between 2005 and 2017, the rate of attending Mass every Sunday or almost every Sunday decreased from 61.3% to 41.1% (20.2% difference) and to 36.9% in 2023<sup>14</sup>.

In 2023, women attended Mass regularly less often than men (18.6% vs. 24.2%;  $p = 0.023$ , Kramer's  $V = 0.104$ ); young people from first classes more often than young people from secondary schools (26.4% vs. 15.6%;  $p = 0.000$ , Kramer's  $V = 0.175$ ); adolescents from general secondary schools more often than adolescents from technical schools (22.3% vs. 20.4%;  $p = 0.482$ , Kramer's  $V = 0.067$ ); adolescents living in rural areas – 24.7%, in cities up to 30,000 residents – 13.4%; city of 30,000 to 100,000 residents – 19.1%, city of 100,000 to 500,000 residents – 22.2%, city of more than 500,000 residents – 9.9% ( $p = 0.000$ , Kramer's  $V = 0.127$ ); adolescents attending religious lessons at school regularly (30.5%) more often than those attending irregularly (5.8%) and not attending at all (5.0%;  $p = 0.000$ , Kramer's  $V = 0.390$ ).

Considering only those who practise regularly (every Sunday), it can be said that in 2005 there were 26.4 per cent, in 2017 19.0 per cent

<sup>14</sup> J. Mariański, *Kondycja religijna i moralna młodzieży szkół średnich w latach 1988-1998-2005-2017*, p. 141.

and in our 2023 survey 21.3 per cent. One in five respondents declared that they attend Mass every Sunday. However, it should be borne in mind that Catholics' declarations about attending Sunday Mass are somewhat inflated. Socially and culturally motivated religious practices tend to disappear in the transition from a traditional to a modern pluralistic society. In the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the religious practices of schoolchildren were in a phase of slow but systematic decline and a clear acceleration at the turn of the second and third decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is possible that this trend will continue in the years to come.

Religious practices show most clearly the social dimension of religious faith intertwined with cultural traditions, or in other words, dressed in a "cultural costume". They are also often part of the culture of family life, which they co-create and within which they are passed on from generation to generation<sup>15</sup>. However, it must be borne in mind that secularisation may first manifest itself in the sphere of outward behaviour and, with some delay, affect religious faith and belief. A decrease in regular participation in religious practices, does not necessarily go hand in hand with a weakening of religious beliefs to the same extent.

## Personal prayer

Among the so-called optional practices, personal prayer plays an important role. From a sociological point of view, only certain outward manifestations of prayer are usually recorded, without going into the depth of religious experience and experience. Individual prayer in the opinion of many believers is considered a very elementary religious duty. The observance of daily prayer or its omission is a sign of the vitality or decline of the Christian life.

In the entire population of young people we surveyed, 1.0% declared that they pray every morning, 14.1% – every evening only, 5.2% – every morning and evening, 6.7% – every few days, 1.9% – only on Sundays, 12.3% – from time to time, 11.7% – very rarely, 10.0% – only in major life situations, 29.6% – never pray, 7.4% – hard to say. Combining the first three answers, we get a rate of 20.3% praying daily (once or twice a day).

For the sake of comparison, let us add that in 2017 – according to a nationwide survey carried out by the Institute of Sociology of the

<sup>15</sup> W. Świątkiewicz, *Religijne praktyki i zwyczaje w pejzażu kultury polskiej rodziny*, in: *W poszukiwaniu ciągłości i zmiany. Religia w perspektywie socjologicznej*, ed. I. Borowik, Kraków 2012, p. 269.

UKSW – 20.0% of surveyed male and female secondary school students reported that they pray every day, 11.6% – every few days, 1.9% – on Sundays and holidays, 15.3% – from time to time, 10.2% – only in more important situations, 12.3% – very rarely, 24.8% – does not pray at all, 0.0% – hard to say, 3.8% – no answer (in 2005 – 29.9%, 15.5%, 2.3%, 17.4%, 9.7%, 9.9%, 14.5%, 0.0%, 0.7% respectively)<sup>16</sup>. Between 2005 and 2023, the rate of those praying daily decreased from 29.9% to 20.3% (a difference of 9.6%).

In our 2023 survey, women were more likely than men to declare that they pray at home every day (21.3% vs. 19.5%;  $p = 0.353$ ,  $V$  Kramer = 0.077); first graders slightly more likely than fourth graders (21.5% vs. 19.0%;  $p = 0.042$ ,  $V$  Kramer = 0.102); high school students more likely than technical school students (23.4% vs. 17.2%;  $p = 0.012$ ,  $V$  Kramer = 0.113); regularly attending religious lessons at school (27.8%) more often than irregularly attending (8.2%;  $p = 0.000$ , Kramer's  $V = 0.294$ ) and not attending at all (6.8%); practicing several times a week (54.5%) and practicing every Sunday (45.8%) more often than practicing almost every Sunday (26.5%), about once or twice a month (16.6%), only on major holidays (15.8%), only on the occasion of a wedding, funeral, etc. (6.3%), not practising at all (3.8%;  $p = 0.000$ , Kramer's  $V = 0.252$ ).

On the basis of the research results presented, it can be concluded that the potential for daily prayer has clearly decreased among young people. It is significantly lower than among the adult population (about 40%). According to the European Social Survey, the rate of respondents aged 15-24 declaring daily prayer decreased in Poland between 2002 and 2018 from 36.6% to 22.5%, while the rate of those declaring not to pray increased from 9.7% to 19.1%<sup>17</sup>.

The complete abandonment of personal daily prayer, which is indicative of a significant “cooling down” of religious needs, is already something worrying in Polish families from an ecclesiastical point of view. Prayer practices that are a kind of ritual constituting first and foremost the fulfilment of a Catholic's duty are losing in importance, perhaps those that are an expression of the spiritual needs of the individual are gaining, even if they are not performed daily.

<sup>16</sup> Ibidem, 162.

<sup>17</sup> E. Stachowska, *Religijność młodzieży w Europie – perspektywa socjologiczna. Kontynuacje*, “Przegląd Religioznawczy” 2019, Vol. 3, pp. 87-88.

## Conclusion

The religious situation in Polish society began to change markedly from the middle of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and symptoms of secularisation – especially in youth circles – became increasingly visible<sup>18</sup>. In the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Poland entered the orbit of more intense influences coming from Western Europe. Consequently, secularisation processes typical of that continent may be affecting Polish society in a more pronounced manner.

On the basis of the research conducted and comparative studies, it can be concluded that a heterogeneity of attitudes to religion is becoming more pronounced among young people, new forms of religiousness and spirituality and irreligiousness are emerging<sup>19</sup>. To some extent, young people's declarations about changes in religiosity demonstrate that religion is now a less important part of their lives than it used to be, both in public and private life. In the last five years, changes in the religiosity of Polish youth have taken place in a rapid, almost "leaping" manner. Admittedly, according to Józef Baniak, as long as the older and middle-aged generation is alive and connected to religious rituals and beliefs, the churches in Poland will not become empty, but "when today's youth comes to power, this may come to an end. They do not want to be in a Church of commands and prohibitions, speaking an incomprehensible language. There are even believers, but non-religious. Two phenomena must also not be underestimated: global migration and the Internet, which also affect people's religious lives. It is not only in secular life that we model ourselves on Western societies, and there desacralisation took place long ago. However, in these desacralised, secularised societies, a longing for the sacred and an attempt to return to religious roots is already slowly beginning to emerge"<sup>20</sup>.

As noted above, the socio-cultural transformations in Poland are to some extent imitative in relation to Western societies, but it is not

<sup>18</sup> J. Borowiec, *Świadomość religijna i moralna młodzieży gimnazjalnej. Burza hormonów (religijnych)*, "Tygodnik Powszechny" 2006, Vol. 31, p. 26; I. Borowik, *Od sekularyzacji do powrotu religii na scenę publiczną: trendy rozwojowe światowej socjologii religii z uwzględnieniem dorobku lubelskiej szkoły socjologii religii w Polsce*, "Roczniki Nauk Społecznych" 2019, Vol. 11(4), pp. 93-110.

<sup>19</sup> H. Mielicka-Pawłowska, *Education for spirituality as a problem of post-modern society*, "Studia Paedagogica Ignatiana" 2021, Vol. 24(1), pp. 21-44.

<sup>20</sup> *Święta nasze nieświęte [Our unholy Christmas]*. Interview with Professor Józef Baniak, sociologist of religion, about what people still need Christmas family celebrations for and about the increasingly shallow faith of Poles, interviewed by Joanna Podgórska, "Polityka" 2011, No. 52/53, p. 26.

excluded that the impacts of modernisation processes on religiosity in Polish society will follow a different path of development. Modernisation impulses in the economy, politics and culture may have different effects in the religious sphere; there is no strictly defined scenario with deterministic features. It is also worth noting that transformations in religiosity are not unidirectional. There are several developmental trends related to both secularisation and pluralisation and individualisation and evangelisation. All these phenomena need to be studied not so much as a stable reality, but rather as rapidly changing processes. The sociological research conducted by the authors has shown the extent of the changes taking place in the religiosity of schoolchildren. These changes are confirmed by the results of other national surveys and other sociological studies<sup>21</sup>.

The research results quoted above illustrate the attitudes of youth towards religion, and on their basis one can speak of a slowly emerging generational “gap” or “divergence” of generations in terms of their global approach to religion. A decrease in the rate of believers among youth is a new trend in the phase of political transformation and undoubtedly a peculiar phenomenon accompanying this change. It is difficult to predict whether the currently declared distance towards religion marked by some youth will be maintained in the future or rather deepened. The results obtained among school youth suggest that the downward trend will continue. Secularisation processes, however, proceed in different ways in various social environments. Probably, however, secularisation will not slow down in the third decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and the next generations of young Poles will probably be less religious. Studying what role religion will play in the lives of young Poles and in their perception of the world in the next decades will be an important task for sociologists of religion and sociologists of morality. Socio-cultural and political transformations in modern or post-modern societies, sometimes referred to as social modernisation, are not without influence on the religious and moral life of contemporary people. The transformations in the religiosity of the young generation of Poles described in this article will probably

<sup>21</sup> T. Adamczyk, *Wiara i praktyki religijne*, in: *Młodzież w kontekstach współczesnych. Rodzina. Czas. Szkoła. Kościół i katecheza*, eds. W. Szymczak, T. Adamczyk, Lublin 2022, pp. 49-83; M. Grabowska, *Religijność młodych Polaków*, in: *Młodzi Polacy w badaniach CBOS 1989-2021. Opinie i diagnozy*, nr 48, ed. M. Grabowska, Warszawa 2021, pp. 91-110; M. Zemło, *Religijność uczniów szkół białostockich a stosunek do wybranych wartości, norm i wzorów zachowań*, “Zeszyty Naukowe KUL” 2021, Vol. 64(1-2), pp. 185-211.

shape the future landscape of religiosity and ties to the Church in Polish society. From an ecclesial point of view, this will pose an increasing challenge.

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