

Highly Religious Young Poles in the Process of Transformation

Głęboko religijni młodzi Polacy w procesie transformacji

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Abstract: The article describes highly religious young Poles who are at the stage of entering adulthood (aged 18-19 and attending the final grades of high school). In the empirical analysis, we use the existing data from quantitative research carried out in 1996, 2010, and 2021. The same methodology for the implementation of the survey, including sample selection, as well as a broadly comparable research tool, allowing to capture significant changes, tendencies, and trends that have occurred among young Poles in the last 25 years in terms of religiousness.

The data show that despite a significant decrease in the percentage of people who define themselves as religious, and even more so as regularly practicing religion, the percentage of deeply religious people and regular religious practitioners remains relatively constant (about 5% of the population of young Poles who have reached the age of majority). The question arises whether the socio-demographic structure of this group remains stable over the time and whether and to what extent it differs from the structure of other groups, including less religious and non-religious people. The article attempts to answer this question.

Keywords: youth, faith, religious practices, value system, late adolescence

Abstrakt: Artykuł opisuje wysoko religijnych młodych Polaków, którzy są na etapie wkraczania w dorosłość (mają 18-19 lat i uczęszczają do ostatnich klas szkół średnich). W analizie empirycznej wykorzystano dane zastane z badań ilościowych zrealizowanych w latach 1996, 2010 i 2021. Ta sama metodologia realizacji badań, w tym dobór próby oraz w dużej mierze porównywalne narzędzie badawcze, pozwalają uchwycić istotne zmiany i tendencje, jakie zaszły wśród młodych Polaków w zakresie religijności w ciągu ostatnich 25 lat.

Z danych wynika, że pomimo znacznego spadku odsetka osób określających się jako wierzące, a tym bardziej jako regularnie praktykujące religijnie, odsetek osób głęboko wierzących i regularnie praktykujących pozostaje na względnie stałym poziomie (około 5% populacji młodych Polaków, którzy osiągnęli pełnoletność). Powstaje pytanie, czy struktura społeczno-demograficzna tej grupy pozostaje stabilna w czasie oraz czy i w jakim stopniu różni się od struktury innych grup wyróżnionych ze względu na religijność, w tym osób mniej religijnych i niereligijnych. Artykuł jest próbą odpowiedzi na to pytanie.

Słowa kluczowe: młodzi dorośli, wiara, praktyki religijne, system wartości



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INTRODUCTION

In Poland, the religious and church-related situation – despite the changes that are taking place – is clearly different from that in Western countries. Religion sociologists point to the exceptional persistence of religiousness in Polish society in its most general dimensions, i.e., religious self-declarations and religious self-identifications (Grabowska 2018). Socio-political and economic transformations have not led to a significant decline in religiousness at the level of the so-called national religiosity (“the faith of the nation”), where religiousness functions more as a common value than a personal one. In the post-war period, religiousness, measured by religious self-declarations, maintained a relative continuity, and in some periods, it was subject to particular transformations. Under conditions of compulsory and top-down atheization, overt religious affiliation ceased to be a matter of “inheritance,” “fate,” or “destiny,” and more and more often became a matter of personal decisions and choices, sometimes bordering on risk and heroism. In global dimensions, there have been no significant transformations in religious affiliation, and belonging to religion (mostly Catholic) was, and to a large extent still is, a specific social norm in Poland and, to a certain extent, cultural obviousness. Catholicism represents a more expansive and extensive socio-cultural system than any other alternative socio-cultural system that could compete with it in Poland (Sadłoń 2021). It should be noted, however, that the young generation of Poles is already experiencing fundamentally different conditions for shaping religious personalities from those that formed the older generations. In youth circles, especially after 2005 (the death of Pope John Paul II), the first symptoms of changes in the primary (general) parameters of religious life, such as belonging to a specific denomination or global attitudes towards faith, were particularly noticeable. However, in these circles, the changes were more evolutionary than revolutionary (Boguszewski 2018). Some acceleration has been visible only in recent years, which is undoubtedly consistent with the findings of sociologists that the modernization process, which is connected with an increased financial, social and existential security, results in a decreased need for religious reassurance (Norris and Inglehart 2011; Höllinger and Muckenhuber 2019; Molteni 2020).

Participation in religious practices is systematically decreasing, especially in Sunday and Easter observances (Scovil 2022). Specific religious patterns of behavior, which are a clear sign of the spiritual culture, disappear from everyday life. The rates of formal withdrawals from Christian Churches are increasing, far exceeding the rates of people joining these Churches. Norms in force in the Church, especially in the moral field, are gaining less and less theoretical and practical approval. Many members of the churches believe that they themselves and on their own have the right to determine what is binding for them in religious and ecclesiastical matters (Boguszewski 2022). These decisions are frequently different from those provided for in the Church's programs of life and activity and indicate a trend towards

privatization (Luckmann 1967) or decomposition of religion (Hervieu-Léger 1999), where religious life, as in the economic paradigm, constitutes a specific market for spiritual goods (Stark and Bainbridge 1996). At the same time, outside the ecclesiastical framework of the official Christian Churches, “new religious scenes” and alternative forms of religiosity are developing, ranging from various forms of extra-church and sectarian religiosity, from psychotherapeutic cults to multiple forms of occultism and esotericism (Zaręba 2012), indicating to some extent the desecularization (Berger 1999; Mariański 2013), or the deprivation of religion (Casanova 1994).

The complete diagnosis of the state of religiousness is currently rather doubtful. It is not a documented expert opinion. One thing is certain: in the changed socio-cultural situation, more and more “opaque” reality, many of the current views on religion and the Catholic Church in Polish society, especially in youth circles, require rethinking and formulation. Until recently, the processes of change in the religiousness of Polish youth were described as “creeping” secularization and have been accelerating in the last few years (“accelerated,” possibly “violent” secularization).

The results of sociological research among school children suggest an ongoing change in the global attitudes of the young generation towards religion, i.e., at the level of the so-called national religiosity (Mariański 2018). The shaking of the continuity of faith and unmistakable traces of non-continuation indicate a trend of individual choice of faith at the expense of its “inheritance.” The model of Western European de-Christianization does not have to be realized in Poland, however, as a pluralist society is shaping. The changes related to the broadly understood social modernization do not inevitably entail a “decline” of religiousness. Undoubtedly, they facilitate the process of secularization and the change of forms of religiosity and churchiness.

Even if Polish youth is a unique case on the European religious map, the results of national polls and the findings of sociological research indicate a clear decline in the group of young people who define themselves as believers and a simultaneous increase in the declaration of religious indifference and irreligion (unbelief). It stays in line with the global trend (Pew Research Center 2018). In the last two decades, young Poles have become less and less interested in institutionalized forms of religiousness (Żurek 2020), although many people treat religious faith as one of the fundamental values in their lives, define themselves as deep believers, and regularly participate in religious practices. Despite the signaled secularization trends, this group has remained relatively stable over the years in terms of numbers. This group is the subject of our interest in the presented text.

1. METHODS

The article describes highly religious young Poles who are at the stage of entering adulthood (aged 18-19 and attending the final grades of high school). In the empirical analysis, we use the existing data from quantitative research carried out by the Public Opinion Research Center (CBOS) in 1996, 2010, and 2021, while the measurements from 2010-2021 were carried out in cooperation with the National Bureau for Drug Prevention.

All the studies, whose findings are described in the article, were conducted using an auditorium method on nationwide samples of students in the final grades of upper secondary schools, diversified by school type (general high schools, technical schools, vocational schools), size of place of residence, and voivodeship. The sample selection was random and consisted of two stages: 1) random selection of schools; 2) random selection of one class in each selected school. In all the studies, a partially repeatable survey questionnaire was employed (some questions varied depending on the current context and current issues).

1. The 1996 study was conducted from April 13th to April 22nd, 1996, with a sample size of N=1275 students.

2. The 2010 study was conducted from November 2nd to November 19th, 2010, with a sample size of N=1246 students.

3. The 2021 study was conducted from October 1st to November 5th, 2021, with a sample size of N=1531 students.

The same methodology for the implementation of the survey, including sample selection (carried out according to the same pattern; N>1200), as well as a broadly comparable research tool, allowing to capture significant changes, tendencies, and trends that have occurred among young Poles in the last 25 years in terms of religiousness.

The data show that despite a significant decrease in the percentage of people who define themselves as religious, and even more so as regularly practicing religion, the percentage of deeply religious people and regular religious practitioners remains relatively constant (about 5% of the population of young Catholics in Poland who have reached the age of majority). The question arises whether the socio-demographic structure of this group remains stable and whether and to what extent it differs from the structure of other groups, including less religious and non-religious people. We attempt to answer this question in the presented article.

We also analyze, among other things, the system of highly religious values of young Catholics in Poland, their views and ways of spending free time, and we check whether and to what extent they have evolved in the last thirty years and whether and to what extent they deviate from the goals and objectives in life, views and ways of spending free time of young Catholics in Poland who can be described as moderately religious and non-religious based on religious self-identifications in the field of declarations of faith and religious practices.

Religious self-identifications most often include identification with the community of believers, the dynamics of general attitudes towards religion in comparison with the period of childhood or adolescence or in comparison with their parents, and justification of one's own faith or lack of it. Studying the so-called global attitudes towards faith (deeply religious, hesitant, indifferent individuals, non-believers) only greatly approximates and tentatively characterizes religiosity. A declaration of belonging to a religious group or a general statement of attitude to religious and church institutions, a declaration of the type "I am a believer," is an external indicator of religiousness. It allows for a sociological approach to religion and attitudes in the most general dimensions – more institutionalized than non-institutional (Sroczyńska 2020).

The community of believers includes both Catholic believers and young people associated with sects (the so-called converts) as well as believers "in their own way," loosely associated with the Catholic Church or individuals not even feeling religiously connected to it. Positive self-declarations of faith, which create a certain frame of reference of a superior nature, remain in a statistically significant relationship with participation in religious practices and other rituals of a spiritual nature (Sroczyńska 2015). The criterion of global denominations of faith does not inform about faithfulness to religion or a significant bond with the Church. Still, it only shows the will to be included in the community of people who define themselves as Catholics or believers. It does not allow us to grasp extra-ecclesiastical and individualized religiousness.

In the article, due to the available data, we rely on the so-called attitudes towards religion and use declarations of faith and practices as an external indicator of religiosity. It is worth noting that in Poland, about 95% of the population are invariably referred to as Catholics, therefore, in public opinion polls, questions about religion are usually not treated as a differentiating variable, and thus they are rarely used in questionnaires. The question was also not asked in the research we refer to in this article. Therefore, when talking about highly religious young Catholics, we use a certain simplification because we mean all respondents aged 17-19 who described themselves as deeply religious and declared that they participate in masses, services, and other religious ceremonies at least once a week. This simplification is justified because in a recent population study in which the question about religion was used, 94% of people aged 18-24, who described themselves as deeply religious and regularly practicing, declared the Roman Catholic faith.¹

2. RELIGIOUSNESS OF POLISH YOUTH – CHANGES OVER TIME

Cyclical studies monitoring the level of religiousness of Poles in terms of global attitudes towards religion (declarations of faith and frequency of religious

¹ Based on the results of the CBOS research "Current problems and events" (378) carried out in October 2021.

practices) have been suggesting a slow abandonment of faith and a much faster abandonment of religious practices. These phenomena are observed in the entire society and all age cohorts, while in the youngest groups of Poles, they are particularly intense (Grabowska 2021). While in the entire population of adult Poles in the years 1992-2022, the percentage of people who define themselves as religious and deeply religious decreased from 95.3% to 83.8% (a difference of 11.5 percentage points), in the group of people aged 18-24, this decrease amounted to as many as 26.2 percentage points (from 93.1% to 66.9%).

Even greater differences relate to the decline in the implementation of religious practices. In the entire population in 1992-2022, the percentage of adult Poles practicing religion at least once a week decreased from 67.2% to 37.6% (a difference of 29.6 percentage points), while in the group of people aged from 18 to 24, the percentage regular practitioners decreased from 69.1% to 22.3% (a difference of 46.8 percentage points). At the same time, in the entire adult population, the number of not practicing individuals increased from 8.5% to 23.0% (a difference of 14.5 percentage points), and among the youngest adults – from 7.9% to 39.3% (a difference of 31.4 percentage points).²

Cohort analyses derived from aggregated CBOS data from monthly measurements in 1992-2022 suggest that the process of abandoning religious practices is evident in all age cohorts of Poles, while in the two youngest ones (the first including people born between 1980 and 1996 (“Millennials”) and the second one including people born after 1996 (“Generation Z”) – it is utterly dramatic (Grabowska 2021). In the millennial generation, in less than 24 years, the percentage of regular practitioners decreased by 42.8 percentage points. The number of non-practitioners increased by 22.7 percentage points, while in the youngest cohort (Generation Z) in just under 7 years, the percentage of regular practitioners decreased by 32.7 percentage points. The number of non-practitioners increased by 18.4 percentage points (Grabowska 2021).

The observed trend of a decline in religiousness among young people in Poland is also confirmed by research carried out by CBOS in the 1990s on a sample of young Poles who are at the stage of entering adulthood – aged from 17 to 19 and studying in the last grades of high schools. Hence, it is a sample constituting the basis of this article. Also, in this group of respondents, a decline in the number of people who declare religious faith and participation in religious practices is evidently visible. In the mid-1990s, the number of students who defined themselves as non-believers increased almost fivefold (from 5% to 23%), and the number of believers decreased by a third (from 80% to 54%). Between 2018 and 2021 alone, the number of believers decreased by 9 percentage points (from 63% to 54%), and the number of non-believers increased from 17% to 23%. Compared to the general population of adult Poles, the percentage of non-believers among students

² Based on the aggregated data from monthly CBOS surveys carried out from 1992 to 2022 (last year include surveys carried out from January to June).

in a comparable period turned out to be almost five times higher (23% compared to 5%), and declarations of faith were expressed much less frequently (89% among all Poles compared to 54% among the surveyed students).³

Another dimension of religiosity that shows a downward trend regards participation in religious practices. Moreover, in this dimension, the decrease is even more marked than in the case of self-identification. Since the mid-nineties of the twentieth century, the number of students leaving secondary education has tripled (from 16% to 49%). At the same time, the percentage of people participating in religious services such as masses, services, or religious meetings at least once a week has decreased almost three times (from 62% to 24%). The decline in participation in religious practices noted in recent years is one of the most radical studies in the history of young Poles leaving secondary education. It is dictated by, among other things, the COVID-19 pandemic and the accompanying restrictions, which at various stages, to a greater or lesser extent, hampered access to institutional religious practices. In the period between 2018 and 2021 alone, the percentage of respondents who regularly practice religion decreased by 11 percentage points, while the number of non-practicing individuals increased by 14 percentage points (from 35% to 49%). These trends are consistent with the results of other studies carried out in Poland, which indicate the impact of the pandemic on the decline in religious commitment and suggest the polarization of religiosity (Bożewicz 2022; Bożewicz and Boguszewski 2021; Boguszewski, Makowska and Podkowińska et al. 2022).

3. WHO ARE HIGHLY RELIGIOUS YOUNG PEOPLE IN POLAND, AND HOW IS THEIR STRUCTURE CHANGING?

Although the percentage of declarations of faith and regular religious practices is systematically decreasing among young Poles, what has remained almost unchanged for 25 years is the number of young Poles who define themselves as deeply religious and regularly (at least once a week) practice religion. In 1996, they constituted 5.1% of the population of students attending final grades of high schools, and in 2021 their percentage was 4.7%. In the context of the outlined tendencies of changes in religiousness in Polish society, a question arises about the religious profile of highly religious young Poles, its possible changes over time, and differences concerning the profile of less religious and non-religious people. When analyzed over time, the structure of young Poles who call themselves deeply religious and who see themselves as regular religious practitioners and non-religious individuals shows that both men and women belong to the group. The sex division remains stable over time. In the other discussed categories, however, there is a clear shift from male to female dominance. At present, for example, the groups of non-believers and non-practitioners include more women than men, while in the 1990s, this group included over five times more men than women.

³ Based on the CBOS and KBPN survey "Youth 2021."

In the group of highly religious youth, there is a slight increase in the number of people from large cities, while in the structure of non-believers and non-practitioners, the share of inhabitants of rural areas and small towns is increasing. Nevertheless, the analyzed group of highly religious youth are mainly rural residents.

In the entire population of young Poles, the number of students in vocational schools is decreasing, which is also visible in the structure of each of the compared categories and results from the decline in popularity of these schools in Poland. However, while in the case of believers and practitioners who practice religion irregularly, as well as believers and non-practitioners, at the expense of vocational students, the number of students in technical schools is increasing in two extreme groups (highly religious and non-religious), the share of high school students increases.

Highly religious young Poles invariably live mostly in complete families. Although there are slightly more highly religious people from one-parent families, which is in line with the trend of an increase in the percentage of such people in the entire youth population, in other groups (especially among non-religious individuals), the increase in the share of people growing up with one parent or without parents is much more noticeable.

Highly religious young Poles are more and more often people satisfied with their material status, which is also related to the general trend of increasing the level of wealth in Poland and can be observed in all the compared groups. However, in the highly religious group, this increase is the highest.

In all the compared groups, the structure of parents' education is also changing – the number of less educated people is decreasing, and the number of parents with higher education is increasing. These changes are also most often observed in the highly religious group. This group, similarly to non-religious groups, currently comes from families where parents are relatively best educated. While in the 1990s and 2010, highly religious young Poles more often pointed to the relatively low level of education of their parents (especially fathers). Currently, highly religious people more often come from families where parents (especially mothers) have higher education.

The structure of highly religious and non-religious people, slightly more often than in other groups, constitutes people with an above-average interest in politics. Nevertheless, those with an average interest in politics dominate across all the compared groups. In all the analyzed groups, people with unspecified political views usually predominate. However, they are relatively the least numerous among highly religious and non-religious individuals. In contrast, if they have specific political views, highly religious people often describe them as right-wing and non-religious as left-wing. In this regard, the data remains relatively stable.

In the structure of highly religious people, as compared to other groups, since the 1990s, more people rated their school achievements highly. This tendency is becoming even more evident with time. Currently, students with top marks in the highly religious group account for more than a quarter (27.5%), while among non-religious groups, the percentage is 10.1%.

Table 1. Profile of highly religious young Poles compared to other groups distinguished by their level of religiosity

Socio-demographic characteristics:	Declarations of faith and religious practices											
	deeply religious and regularly practicing			believers and practitioners irregularly			believers and non-practitioners			non-believers and non-practitioners		
	1996	2010	2021	1996	2010	2021	1996	2010	2021	1996	2010	2021
Total percent	5,1%	4,3%	4,7%	15,2%	25,7%	17,4%	8,1%	8,9%	14,2%	3,6%	5,7%	20,5%
Total number	N=64	N=53	N=70	N=185	N=313	N=276	N=92	N=109	N=224	N=45	N=70	N=308
Gender												
Male	51,6	52,8	51,4	69,7	50,0	44,6	70,7	53,7	47,1	84,4	63,8	47,9
Female	48,4	47,2	48,6	30,3	50,0	55,4	29,3	46,3	52,9	15,6	36,2	52,1
Place of residence (population size)												
Village	34,9	62,3	48,6	18,4	51,1	47,4	9,1	33,9	45,3	2,2	21,4	26,3
City of up to 19,999	20,6	11,3	14,3	18,9	15,3	12,0	20,5	20,2	14,3	13,3	12,9	14,3
City 20,000 – 199,999	36,5	11,3	20,0	27,6	16,3	20,1	34,1	21,1	21,1	31,1	27,1	27,3
City 200,000 – 499,999	1,6	7,5	10,0	20,0	11,2	12,0	14,8	13,8	9,9	8,9	15,7	15,6
City of over 500,000	6,3	7,5	7,1	15,1	6,1	8,4	21,6	11,0	9,4	44,4	22,9	16,6
Type of school												
General secondary school	42,2	52,8	62,8	30,3	42,5	42,0	37,4	36,7	36,1	35,6	60,0	57,4
Technical secondary school	10,9	24,5	25,7	29,2	38,3	46,0	22,0	24,8	42,9	31,1	18,6	34,1
Vocational school	46,9	22,6	11,4	40,5	19,2	12,0	40,7	38,5	21,0	33,3	21,4	8,4
Do you live permanently												
With both parents	89,1	86,8	81,2	77,3	82,6	72,8	80,2	63,3	68,8	77,8	75,7	59,1
Only with mother	10,9	9,4	10,1	14,1	10,0	17,0	12,1	25,7	17,4	15,6	14,3	26,9
Only with father	0,0	1,9	1,4	2,2	1,9	2,9	5,5	2,8	3,1	4,4	2,9	4,5
With someone from extended family (grandmother, aunt, etc.)	0,0	1,9	1,4	3,2	1,6	1,8	1,1	2,8	2,7	0,0	0,0	1,6
Different situation	0,0	0,0	5,8	3,2	3,9	5,4	1,1	5,5	8,0	2,2	7,1	7,7

Financial situation													
Very poor	7,9	7,5	0,0	1,1	1,0	1,8	2,2	3,7	1,8	6,7	2,9	2,3	
Poor	19,0	3,8	4,3	15,7	5,5	1,4	14,3	9,2	4,0	8,9	11,4	2,6	
Moderate	41,3	37,7	14,3	49,7	37,6	19,9	47,3	37,6	24,7	42,2	44,3	28,9	
Good	31,7	37,7	35,7	32,4	42,1	49,6	35,2	36,7	34,5	40,0	24,3	41,9	
Very good	0,0	13,2	45,7	1,1	13,8	27,2	1,1	12,8	35,0	2,2	17,1	24,4	
Mother's education													
Primary and lower	22,2	3,8	0,0	13,5	8,2	5,5	16,9	6,4	3,4	2,2	4,4	4,2	
Vocational	27,0	26,9	12,5	34,6	32,7	19,4	27,0	31,2	22,5	22,2	19,1	9,3	
Lower secondary	3,2	5,8	0,0	8,6	4,9	1,6	6,7	4,6	2,0	4,4	4,4	3,1	
General secondary	0,0	15,4	4,7	10,3	11,1	10,7	12,4	15,6	8,8	11,1	8,8	9,0	
Secondary vocational	12,7	23,1	17,2	9,7	16,0	20,2	10,1	18,3	20,1	6,7	19,1	13,5	
Post-secondary	11,1	5,8	10,9	9,7	7,5	9,9	6,7	5,5	11,8	15,6	8,8	8,7	
Incomplete higher	7,9	1,9	9,4	5,4	3,9	5,1	6,7	5,5	4,9	13,3	11,8	8,3	
Higher	15,9	17,3	45,3	8,1	15,7	27,7	13,5	12,8	26,5	24,4	23,5	43,9	
Father's education													
Primary and lower	12,9	17,6	1,6	14,2	6,9	6,4	16,1	6,5	4,4	4,4	3,0	3,3	
Vocational	48,4	35,3	12,9	42,6	39,7	22,7	35,6	42,1	26,6	26,7	34,8	14,6	
Lower secondary	6,5	0,0	0,0	8,7	6,2	1,2	4,6	6,5	4,4	4,4	3,0	1,8	
General secondary	3,2	7,8	1,6	2,7	5,6	4,4	3,4	6,5	6,4	0,0	3,0	5,5	
Secondary vocational	6,5	19,6	38,7	14,2	21,3	33,1	10,3	15,9	26,6	13,3	19,7	23,7	
Post-secondary	9,7	3,9	8,1	4,4	7,9	9,2	9,2	6,5	8,9	13,3	12,1	10,9	
Incomplete higher	1,6	3,9	11,3	4,4	4,3	5,2	5,7	5,6	3,0	11,1	6,1	8,0	
Higher	11,3	11,8	25,8	8,7	8,2	17,9	14,9	10,3	19,7	26,7	18,2	32,1	

Interest in politics													
Very interested	7,8	11,3	8,7	4,9	1,6	3,0	1,1	1,8	5,0	2,2	4,3	6,2	
Interested	21,9	9,4	14,5	13,5	9,0	10,7	8,8	9,2	11,3	17,8	18,6	15,1	
Moderete interested	50,0	41,5	40,6	53,0	44,9	40,7	51,6	27,5	35,6	33,3	28,6	42,6	
Slightly interested	6,3	13,2	11,6	19,5	18,6	24,8	16,5	11,0	16,2	15,6	12,9	16,4	
Not interested	14,1	20,8	21,7	9,2	25,0	17,0	18,7	45,0	26,6	28,9	28,6	15,1	
Other answer	0,0	3,8	2,9	0,0	1,0	3,7	3,3	5,5	5,4	2,2	7,1	4,6	
Political views													
Left-wing	12,7	15,4	12,0	10,3	7,1	17,8	13,0	17,0	18,2	35,6	20,3	47,7	
Centrist	11,1	7,7	10,4	11,9	11,6	10,0	14,1	9,4	10,5	0,0	7,2	11,8	
Right-wing	31,7	26,9	34,3	27,0	11,6	11,9	14,1	11,3	9,1	13,3	13,0	7,5	
No views	44,4	50,0	43,3	50,8	69,7	60,2	58,7	62,3	62,3	51,1	59,4	33,0	
Typical school grades													
E (2)	0,0	7,5	7,2	3,2	10,3	4,8	6,5	16,7	8,1	8,9	20,3	7,8	
D (3)	35,9	39,6	21,7	48,1	50,3	33,8	43,5	50,9	43,4	64,4	33,3	37,3	
C (4)	48,4	35,8	43,5	41,6	34,3	41,5	43,5	27,8	36,2	22,2	34,8	44,5	
B (5)	14,1	11,3	23,2	7,0	4,2	17,6	6,5	2,8	9,0	4,4	7,2	7,5	
A (6)	1,6	5,7	4,3	0,0	1,0	2,2	0,0	1,9	3,2	0,0	4,3	2,6	

Source: Public Opinion Research Center (CBOS) and National Bureau for Drug Prevention (KBPN)

4. VALUES, NORMS, AND BEHAVIORS OF HIGHLY RELIGIOUS YOUNG POLES COMPARED TO OTHER GROUPS

Values, norms, and judgments constitute social life considered from the normative perspective. Norms presuppose values because what they demand is the realization of values. In other words, norms of behavior accompany values, defining acceptable and socially acceptable ways of behaving and acting, which is the implementation of recognized values. Values indicate the right goals to pursue, and norms suggest the right ways to achieve them. Values and norms indicate what is considered right, proper, fair, or justified in human life (axionormative sphere); they are something valuable (for various reasons), something worth taking care of and striving for (Štefaňak 2018).

The ongoing socio-cultural, economic, and political changes are reflected in young people's choices of life values and life strategies. Not always recognized life values form a coherent hierarchy or system of values. There are sometimes conflicts between them, which can be a source of personal tensions and social problems. The observed preferences regarding life values may turn out to be quite persistent in the minds of schoolchildren and determine – also in the future – specific evaluation criteria in many life situations and be a factor of selectivity in determining the life plans of individuals. It is also worth noting that the life values declared by young people may or may not precisely coincide with values that are recognized and realized. Some values and norms are contradictory and mutually exclusive. What individuals choose from different offers is primarily their individual decision. Changes in values are characterized not so much by a sharp fluctuation as by a “continuity fluctuation.”

According to sociological research, the leading everyday values of young Poles include family, love, and friends. Supportive values, as if a kind of background for the former, include work, education, self-realization, and to some extent also religion. Social values that require disinterested openness to the issues and problems of a specific person, especially to broader social structures, such as the homeland, are clearly less popular. The low rank of political values has been maintained for a long time, which is probably related to the lack of trust in the political elite. There are many indications that the surveyed high school graduates are focused on their needs, and the orientation towards one's own self is formed to some extent. Regardless of the quality of life values declared by high school graduates, it should be emphasized that this is not a generation suspended in an axiological vacuum but a generation diversified in terms of recognized values (Mariański 2012).

Strong individualization tendencies are noticed in the selection of life goals and aspirations (everyday values) in youth circles in Poland. The emphasized subjectivity is often focused on seeking personal happiness “here and now,” among values that are “at hand” (possible to achieve). In a spirit of seeking happiness in earthly life, religious values are losing their importance. However, sociological research confirms a significant discrepancy in the approval of values, norms,

and patterns of everyday behavior by various religious and non-religious self-identification categories (Prüfer 2018).

This discrepancy can also be noticed in our data analysis from research conducted since the mid-1990s among adolescents entering adulthood. The data show that the value system of highly religious people changes over time to some extent and, at the same time, differs from that declared by less religious and non-religious people. Even though highly religious young Poles consider being helpful to others as necessary less and less often, they still more often than others treat this value as important in their lives. They value love and friendship more often than others, and it can be seen that the importance of this value (similarly to the other compared groups) is systematically growing.

More often than others, and especially than non-religious ones, highly religious young Poles care about successful family life and children. On the other hand, as a rule, they value a successful sex life, interesting work in line with their interests, peace, and the pursuit of political power less often than representatives of the other analyzed groups.

What distinguishes highly religious people from the rest of the value system is the striving to live in accordance with religious principles. Although the significance of this value slightly decreases, it invariably remains at the forefront. It is mentioned as significant by highly religious people, while it is indicated least often or not at all in the remaining groups. Highly religious students in the final grades of high schools invariably attend religion classes almost universally and, as the only group, the vast majority of them positively evaluate the activities of the Catholic Church, and their behavior is more consistent with its teaching. They get drunk much less often than others and reach for cigarettes and intoxicants less frequently, with a slight upward trend in this group in the case of the last category.

Similarly to other groups, highly religious people mostly have limited trust in others, although they are the only analyzed category in which this trust increases with time. On the other hand, they tend to believe that a person who wants to achieve something in life should look for opportunities to act together with those who have similar problems, rather than act alone and rely solely on themselves.

Community action of highly religious people correlates with their above-average social commitment. More often than non-practitioners, they participate in elections to the school self-government. They also show a relatively higher propensity to economic activity because they usually do not exclude running their own business in the future.

Despite some symptoms of increased trust in other people, highly religious young Poles are characterized by a relatively low tolerance for LGBT+ people. They express reluctance towards them slightly more often than tolerance, while acceptance prevails in the remaining groups, especially among non-religious people. Highly religious people treat climate change as one of the greatest threats to modern civilization slightly less often than others and less than non-religious people.

Table 2. Values, norms, and behaviors of highly religious young Poles compared to other groups distinguished by their level of religiousness

Socio-demographic characteristics:	Declarations of faith and religious practices											
	deeply religious and regularly practicing			believers and practitioners irregularly			believers and non-practitioners			non-believers and non-practitioners		
	1996	2010	2021	1996	2010	2021	1996	2010	2021	1996	2010	2021
Total percent	5,1%	4,3%	4,7%	15,2%	25,7%	17,4%	8,1%	8,9%	14,2%	3,6%	5,7%	20,5%
Total number	N=64	N=53	N=70	N=185	N=313	N=276	N=92	N=109	N=224	N=45	N=70	N=308
People have different goals and aspirations in life. Which of the following goals are most important to you?												
Achieving success in the field of science or art	17,2	3,8	12,3	6,5	6,4	7,3	12,0	5,5	10,3	15,6	14,3	11,7
Achieving a high professional position, making a career	29,7	28,3	30,8	27,6	34,2	41,2	23,9	30,3	38,0	8,9	32,9	28,7
Gaining wealth, achieving a high material position	20,3	26,4	16,9	33,5	31,6	35,4	32,6	26,6	38,5	31,1	27,1	42,0
Being useful to others, „living for others”	20,3	18,9	10,8	8,1	5,1	5,8	12,0	11,9	6,6	4,4	14,3	8,3
A colorful life, full of entertainment, a rich social life	12,5	11,3	7,7	23,2	16,3	17,2	17,4	22,0	18,3	42,2	31,4	27,0
Love, friendship	39,1	49,1	69,2	46,5	55,0	61,3	34,8	53,2	49,3	37,8	41,4	53,7
Successful sex life	1,6	7,5	6,2	15,7	8,9	9,9	9,8	19,3	10,3	31,1	22,9	16,3
Successful family life, children	48,4	39,6	46,2	48,1	53,7	38,7	37,0	44,0	37,1	15,6	24,3	16,7
Gaining political power	0,0	1,9	0,0	1,1	1,6	1,5	3,3	4,6	0,5	4,4	2,9	3,0
The ability to make important decisions in the economic sphere	1,6	0,0	0,0	2,2	1,6	0,0	2,2	1,8	0,9	2,2	0,0	0,3
Living according to religious principles	42,2	37,7	36,9	1,6	1,6	1,1	4,3	0,9	1,4	0,0	0,0	0,0
Independence at work	6,3	3,8	9,2	9,7	3,2	7,3	13,0	11,0	8,9	17,8	12,9	12,0
Interesting work in line with your interests	29,7	34,0	29,2	39,5	37,7	38,3	41,3	32,1	39,4	37,8	37,1	40,0
A peaceful life without hassles, conflict	18,8	22,6	16,9	28,1	31,9	27,0	37,0	23,9	28,2	22,2	20,0	26,7
Other answers	4,7	5,7	0,0	0,0	1,3	1,1	3,3	0,0	0,9	2,2	2,9	2,0
Do you attend religion lessons at school?												
Yes	91,9	92,5	85,7	80,8	97,1	68,4	61,5	86,9	47,8	31,1	54,3	21,1
No	8,1	7,5	14,3	19,2	2,9	31,6	38,5	13,1	52,2	68,9	45,7	78,9

How do you rate the activities of the Roman Catholic Church?												
Very good	-	-	17,4	-	-	2,5	-	-	4,0	-	1,0	
Good	-	-	55,1	-	-	38,2	-	-	24,1	-	1,0	
Bad	-	-	7,2	-	-	26,2	-	-	15,6	-	18,2	
Very bad	-	-	7,2	-	-	10,5	-	-	28,6	-	51,6	
No opinion	-	-	13,0	-	-	22,5	-	-	27,7	-	28,2	
Which of the following statements is closer to your opinion?												
In general, most people can be trusted	4,7	9,6	10,0	5,5	11,3	7,3	13,2	7,6	8,6	8,9	13,0	6,2
You have to be careful in dealing with people	84,4	80,8	78,6	86,8	80,0	85,7	79,1	72,4	79,5	80,0	78,3	87,3
Hard to say	10,9	9,6	11,4	7,7	8,7	7,0	7,7	20,0	11,8	11,1	8,7	6,5
Which of the following statements is closer to your opinion?												
Nowadays, a person who wants to achieve something in life should do his own thing, relying only on himself	-	39,2	41,4	-	44,6	56,1	-	49,5	55,7	-	60,0	55,0
Nowadays, a person who wants to achieve something in life should look for opportunities to act together with those who have similar problems	-	47,1	40,0	-	40,4	27,3	-	27,2	29,0	-	25,7	31,9
Hard to say	-	13,7	18,6	-	15,0	16,6	-	23,3	15,4	-	14,3	13,0
Have you participated in the elections to the school council?												
Whenever it was held	-	28,8	-	-	22,3	-	-	18,5	-	-	18,6	-
Yes, but not every year	-	15,4	-	-	30,3	-	-	18,5	-	-	21,4	-
I have never participated	-	51,9	-	-	44,8	-	-	59,3	-	-	54,3	-
There is no school council in my school	-	1,9	-	-	1,3	-	-	1,9	-	-	1,4	-
Other answer	-	1,9	-	-	1,3	-	-	1,9	-	-	4,3	-
Are you considering starting your own business in the future?												
No	-	9,6	11,4	-	3,2	5,5	-	4,6	7,2	-	11,4	12,4
Yes	-	53,8	64,3	-	51,8	54,5	-	47,7	54,3	-	55,7	51,0
Hard to say	-	36,5	24,3	-	45,0	40,0	-	47,7	38,5	-	32,9	36,6

How many times (if any) have you been drunk with an alcoholic drink, such as beer, wine or vodka, in the last 30 days?												
I have not got drunk even once in the last 30 days	-	65,4	64,7	-	49,8	58,9	-	47,2	53,0	-	50,7	56,1
1-2 times	-	26,9	27,9	-	35,1	28,0	-	31,5	32,0	-	31,9	29,8
3-5 times	-	1,9	1,5	-	9,9	9,5	-	15,7	10,5	-	11,6	7,9
6 times or more	-	5,8	5,9	-	5,1	3,6	-	5,6	4,6	-	5,8	6,2
Do you smoke?												
Yes, regularly	9,4	13,5	13,0	37,0	25,6	15,9	39,1	43,0	24,1	57,8	33,3	29,3
Yes, but only in exceptional circumstances	15,6	11,5	13,0	13,6	21,2	22,8	10,9	10,3	16,8	2,2	17,4	21,5
No	75,0	75,0	73,9	49,5	53,2	61,2	50,0	46,7	59,1	40,0	49,3	49,2
Have you used any drugs in the last year?												
Yes	4,7	5,8	10,0	10,8	17,3	10,2	13,0	23,1	10,8	50,0	20,0	23,5
No	95,3	94,2	90,0	89,2	82,7	89,8	87,0	76,9	89,2	50,0	80,0	76,5
How would you describe your attitude towards gays, lesbians and other LGBT + people?												
Aversion	-	-	41,8	-	-	18,6	-	-	23,3	-	-	13,0
Neither aversion nor acceptance	-	-	20,9	-	-	25,9	-	-	17,8	-	-	12,1
Acceptance	-	-	37,3	-	-	55,5	-	-	58,9	-	-	74,9
What is your personal opinion on climate change?												
Climate change is currently one of the greatest threats to modern civilization	-	-	22,9	-	-	25,1	-	-	27,3	-	-	42,7
Climate change is a threat, but it is one of many dangerous issues	-	-	42,9	-	-	40,4	-	-	33,6	-	-	34,9
Climate change is not a particularly significant threat	-	-	4,3	-	-	7,3	-	-	5,5	-	-	2,9
Climate change is not a dangerous issue at all	-	-	1,4	-	-	1,1	-	-	0,5	-	-	1,0
There is no such issue as climate change	-	-	0,0	-	-	0,4	-	-	1,4	-	-	0,7
No opinion	-	-	28,6	-	-	25,8	-	-	31,8	-	-	17,9

Source: Public Opinion Research Center (CBOS) and National Bureau for Drug Prevention (KBPN)

5. FORMS OF SPENDING FREE TIME BY HIGHLY RELIGIOUS YOUNG POLES COMPARED TO OTHER GROUPS

“Free time, like play, can be defined in two ways: as a kind of cultural and moral institution, or in psychological terms – as an area of activities subject to human motivations. When discussing free time as a cultural institution, we mention behaviors recognized in a given community as being outside the sphere of duty. Leisure activities as an institution are quantifiable and defined in each community. If, on the other hand, free time is included in terms of subjective motivations, then the possibility of easy statistical comparisons disappears. For everyone, free time can mean something different; everyone needs to be asked individually about their sense of freedom and pleasure in the course of various activities. A sociologist and culturologist, as well as statisticians, prefer to use the institutional formula of free time, while a psychologist can investigate individual feelings of a free time activity” (Sułkowski 1998).

In our sociological analyses, we pay attention to patterns and preferred ways of spending time outside work, i.e., free-time behavior and activities. We present forms of spending free time by religious people (deeply religious and regularly practicing individuals) and check whether and to what extent they differ from the ways of spending time by religious and irregularly practicing people, believers, and non-practitioners as well as non-believers and non-practitioners.

It turns out that young Poles who are highly religious are clearly more likely to play sports and engage in artistic activity than representatives of the other analyzed groups. On the other hand, they are much less lazy, play computer games less frequently, and spend much less time online. More often than non-religious people, they spend their free time “in the real world.”

Generally speaking, highly religious young Poles clearly differ from non-religious ones regarding forms of spending free time. Both groups have in common the relatively high number of friendships they make. Young people characterized by above-average religiosity declare a rather large number of close acquaintances in the class, although the average, in this case, is slightly lower than in the case of non-religious people and higher than the average among moderately religious people.

Table 3. Forms of spending free time by highly religious young Poles compared to other groups distinguished by their level of religiosity

Socio-demographic characteristics:	Declarations of faith and religious practices			
	deeply religious and regularly practicing	believers and practitioners irregularly	believers and non-practitioners	non-believers and non-practitioners
	2021			
Total percent	4,7%	17,4%	14,2%	20,5%
Total number	N=70	N=276	N=224	N=308
How many students in your class would you include as your friends?				
Mean:	4,83	3,26	3,84	2,84
What is your favorite way to spend your free time? Indicate your three favorite ways of spending free time				
Meetings with colleagues, friends, girlfriend/boyfriend, peers	81,4	89,0	83,3	76,5
Watching tv	15,7	16,5	20,7	9,1
Reading books	18,6	14,3	11,7	23,1
Playing computer games	20,0	26,8	27,5	40,7
Sharing on social networks (e.g. Facebook, etc.)	7,1	8,8	7,2	7,2
Surfing the internet	17,1	28,7	23,9	28,3
Playing sport	41,4	27,2	28,4	20,2
Artistic activity: playing an instrument, creating artwork / computer graphics, etc.	27,1	8,5	9,5	17,9
Going to concerts	4,3	8,1	7,2	6,5
Going to clubs	24,3	22,8	19,8	12,7
Doing nothing, e.g. resting, lying down, sleeping, etc.	17,1	32,0	34,7	40,4
Other answer	18,6	5,5	9,0	7,5

How often do you play sports or engage in physical activity - apart from physical education lessons?				
Every day	21,4	11,0	13,1	11,0
A few times a week	21,4	26,0	27,5	24,4
1-2 times a week	28,6	26,0	20,7	22,7
2-3 times a week	15,7	13,2	10,8	11,7
Once a month or less	7,1	15,4	14,4	14,6
I do not play sports at all, I do not take up physical activity	5,7	8,4	13,5	15,6
How many hours a day (average) do you spend on the Internet?				
Mean:	4,16	4,73	5,10	5,74
Do you spend more of your free time with friends in real life or on the Internet?				
I spend much more free time with my friends in real life than on the Internet	49,3	51,3	54,8	39,5
I spend a bit more of my free time with my friends in real life than on the Internet	14,5	19,8	15,8	15,4
I spend about the same amount of free time with my friends in real life as on the Internet	13,0	15,4	14,9	20,9
I spend a bit more of my free time with my friends on the Internet than in real life	14,5	9,5	7,7	13,1
I spend much more free time with my friends on the Internet than in real life	8,7	4,0	6,8	11,1

Source: Public Opinion Research Center (CBOS) and National Bureau for Drug Prevention (KBPN)

CONCLUSIONS

In the period of intense socio-cultural changes, there are discrepancies between the institutional requirements of the Church and the actual religious attitudes of Christians. The number of orthodox attitudes that correspond to the standards of the official interpretation of faith by the Church is decreasing, and there are more and more attitudes inconsistent with this interpretation, which, depending on the degree of inconsistency and deviation from the established dogmas and hierarchy of religious values, are described as ambivalent, selective and heterodox (Adamczyk 2020; Klimski 2018). In many modern societies, orthodox faith is already a matter for a minority of believers, and the Church is becoming less and less needed as an intermediary with the supernatural world. Some believers define themselves as religious but, at the same time, more or less radically reject many elements of institutionalized religion (according to the principle “my religiousness is my private matter”). They believe that the way to God is found not through ecclesiastically recognized forms of religion but personal faith.

In the conditions of progressive social modernization, entailing pluralization and individualization, also in Polish society, especially in younger generations, there are more and more people who shape religiosity in their own way, selectively (“like a Pole,” “religiousness without consequences,” “liquid-like,” “hazy,” “diluted,” “no dogmas,” “partially organized,” “diffused,” “deregulated”). The changing social forms of religiousness and the ways of its manifestation, which mean greater freedom and abandonment of orthodoxy, not always lead to the decline of faith, but most often to specific deregulation, disintegration, or privatization (Luckmann 1967; Hervieu-Léger 1999). It is true that the religious faith of many Poles, including young people, is still often embedded in the Christian tradition. Nonetheless, it is becoming less deepened and externalized to a lesser extent (many young people are ashamed to show their faith in public). One could even argue that it is gradually blurring and weakening, becoming less and less visible and “asymptomatic,” what is consistent with the global trends (Pew Research Center 2018).

The processes of deinstitutionalization and privatization mean the weakening of ties with the Church and the “unchurching” of religiosity itself. At the same time, the position and role of the Catholic Church in Polish society are changing. In recent years, Polish society has become less favorable to the presence of religion and the Church in public space (Grabowska 2022), and the activities of this institution meet with less and less social recognition (Feliński 2021). A declaration of the “I am a believer” type does not always mean acceptance of the basic truths of the Christian faith (it often coincides with professing views contrary to the dogmatic teachings of Christian Churches) and certainly does not oblige regular participation in religious practices. Such attitudes are particularly often observed in the young generation of Poles. In a study of students in the final grades of high schools carried out in 2021, only slightly more than a half (54%) described themselves as believers, and in this

group, only every second respondent (51%) admitted that there is no doubt about the existence of God. Only 47% of young believers positively assessed the activities of the Roman Catholic Church, and only 38% admitted that they regularly (at least once a week) participate in religious practices.

In the religious beliefs and attitudes of young people, we deal with changeable and incoherent systems of content and behavior more and more often, which are symptoms of the privatization of the religious sphere and the process of erosion of religious consciousness and traditional religious beliefs, as well as the creativity of individuals. Religious identities are created – identities that can be seen as peculiar “unfinished projects” with varied and variable external expressions (Dyczewski 2020; Zemło 2021). Unorthodox forms of religiosity and spirituality are becoming more and more visible in Polish society (Mandes 2021; Szauer 2021). It is sometimes more vital that you believe than what you believe in and how coherent and consistent the belief is. Young selective Catholics often do not treat their attitudes as apostasy or heresy but as an autonomous and free choice of their faith. This also applies to people who define themselves as deeply religious and regularly practicing religion, although this group, despite the fact that it changes internally over time (like the whole society), invariably stands out from the other groups distinguished by us due to the presented attitude towards religion.

While in the entire population of young Poles (18-19 years of age) in the 2021 survey, only 28% of respondents admitted that they believed in God and there was no doubt about His existence. In the highly religious group, this percentage was 81%. Highly religious young Poles in the vast majority (72%) value the Catholic Church as an institution, while in the entire population of young people, this support is only 28%. Every second highly religious young Pole (50%) practices religion more than once a week, whereas this percentage is only 5% of the entire population.

Highly religious young Poles invariably mention their religious faith and family life at the forefront of their life values, and in their behavior, they use psychoactive substances less often than others. They devote themselves to laziness much less frequently in their free time than their peers. They prefer active forms of spending time and limit their presence on the Internet. They are characterized by above-average social commitment and appreciate collective action, which they see as more effective than acting alone. It is consistent with the results of population research (Boguszewski 2016) and Robert Putnam's concept which says that faith-based communities remain important reservoirs of social capital (Putnam 2000). On the other hand, these people do not stand out from society with the level of social trust, which is very low among them. Additionally, they are characterized by much lower tolerance towards people presenting different attitudes and behaviors (including, for example, non-heteronormative individuals). To some extent it confirms the findings based on the results of the World Value Survey according to which “the process of secularization, especially in countries, where the Roman Church once was a very powerful institution, often implied that the remaining ‘hard core’ of practicing Roman

Catholics is less tolerant than the society surrounding the faithful. By contrast, the Roman Catholic faithful are often at the vanguard of tolerance in countries, where Roman Catholics are in a minority position” (Tausch 2017).

The matters that currently absorb young people worldwide, such as ecology and counteracting climate change, clearly become less critical in the case of highly religious young Poles. It is consistent with US research which suggests that highly religious people are no more likely than other Americans to recycle their household waste and when making decisions about what goods and services to buy, they are no more inclined to consider the manufacturers’ environmental records or whether companies pay employees a fair wage (Pew Research Center 2016).

Suppose the socio-cultural changes in Poland are, to some extent, imitative in relation to Western societies. In that case, it should be expected that the processes of “de-churchization,” pluralization, and individualization of religiousness will be more and more visible in Polish society. Even if we can talk about the peculiar sociological uniqueness of Polish religiosity, it does not mean that Poland will always remain a country of such high religiousness as it is today or that there will be no further changes in Polish religiosity. As we can already see, the religious capital in Poland is not something inviolable and permanent. Yet, for some, including the younger part of Polish society, it is essential and at the same time conditions specific attitudes and behaviors that are close to the teaching of the Catholic Church. Therefore, it is difficult to fully accept the thesis that the religious faith of young Poles in the future will only have the dimension of a personal decision or that it will not exist at all. It can be expected that also in the coming years, the social and cultural conditions of religious faith will not be suspended for at least some young people and that the faith strengthened and experienced personally, supported intellectually, and characterized by commitment will always be a significant matter for a minority of young Poles. However, one should also expect further changes in this minority group – both in the demographic dimension and the attitudes and presented behaviors.

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