

The Role of the Father and Mother In Religious Upbringing within the Family In the Context of Fulfilling Security Needs

Rola ojca i matki w wychowaniu religijnym w rodzinie w kontekście realizacji potrzeby bezpieczeństwa

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Received: 6 Aug 2025

Revised: 28 Oct 2025

Accepted: 19 Nov 2025

Published: 26 Nov 2025

Abstract: This article examines the role of parents in religious education in relation to the need for security. This is a significant pedagogical challenge, and contemporary social and cultural changes further complicate the situation. This reflection is the result of research primarily in family studies, grounded in pedagogical, psychological, sociological, and theological assumptions. The research goal of this study is to demonstrate the relationship between the roles of father and mother in family religious education and the fulfilment of the need for security. This goal was achieved by characterizing the family's sociocultural context, describing the need for security in the child's life, presenting the study's results, and developing practical parenting conclusions. The analysis of research and scientific texts enabled us to formulate recommendations for parents to adopt an appropriate approach to prayer, avoid coercion, respect the child's religious desires, speak positively about God, and care for their own development. The conclusion emphasizes the need for both parents' involvement as a source of security and a model of faith. The key is building faith on a foundation of love and parental authenticity.

Keywords: religious education, parents, safety, faith

Abstrakt: Prezentowany artykuł podejmuje problem dotyczący roli rodziców w wychowaniu religijnym w kontekście realizowania potrzeby bezpieczeństwa. Jest to istotne wyzwanie pedagogiczne, a sytuację dodatkowo utrudniają współcześnie zachodzące przemiany społeczne i kulturowe. Refleksja jest owocem badań głównie z zakresu nauk o rodzinie. Opierają się one na przesłankach pedagogicznych, psychologicznych, socjologicznych i teologicznych. Celem badawczym opracowania jest ukazanie zależności zachodzącej pomiędzy rolą ojca i matki w wychowaniu religijnym w rodzinie a realizacją potrzeby bezpieczeństwa. Cel ten został zrealizowany poprzez: charakterystykę kontekstu społeczno-kulturowego rodziny, opis potrzeby bezpieczeństwa z życia dziecka, prezentację wyników badań własnych oraz opracowanie wniosków przydatnych w procesie wychowania. Analiza badań i tekstów naukowych pozwoliła na sformułowanie postulatów, aby rodzice pamiętały o właściwym podejściu do modlitwy, aby nie stosowali przymusu, aby szanowali pragnienia religijne dziecka, aby pozytywnie mówili o Bogu, aby troszczyli się o własny rozwój. Wniosek końcowy podkreśla potrzebę zaangażowania obojga rodziców jako źródła bezpieczeństwa i wzoru wiary. Kluczowe jest budowanie wiary opartej na miłości, autentyczność rodziców.



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Słowa kluczowe: wychowanie religijne, rodzice, bezpieczeństwo, wiara

INTRODUCTION

The religious upbringing of children is a process that, in the modern socio-cultural context, is influenced by many factors. The apostolic exhortation *Catechesi tradendae*, issued in 1979, states that the role of parents in religious upbringing is “in no way replaceable” (Jan Paweł II 1979a, 68). Despite the passage of time, this statement still seems true but difficult to implement.

Looking back, one can only recall the early centuries of Christianity or the Middle Ages with longing and appreciation, as it was the parents who had the decisive influence on the religious upbringing of their children (cf. Murawski 2011, 371ff). The Enlightenment period, which permanently connected religious education with the school environment, thereby somewhat weakened the role of family catechesis. Currently, religious upbringing in the family seems to be based on creating a stable and predictable environment for the development of faith.

The aim of this article is to demonstrate the relationship that, according to the author, exists between the role of the father and mother in religious upbringing within the family and the fulfilment of the need for security. This objective will be achieved through four main points: a brief characterization of the contemporary socio-cultural context of the family, an exploration of the fundamental elements of the need for security in the process of child upbringing, a presentation of research findings, and an attempt to formulate specific conclusions and recommendations aimed at parents. The presented reflection is the result of research and inquiries primarily in the field of family studies. They are based on pedagogical, psychological, sociological, and theological premises.

1. THE NEW SOCIO-CULTURAL CONTEXT

The last decades, especially in the context of Poland, have brought relatively significant social and cultural changes. This has been reflected in the roles of the father and mother in the religious upbringing of children. From the perspective of the past years of the new century, it is evident that social changes in family functioning have a broad structure. They result from almost evolutionary social transformations while also expressing the effects of tensions and conflicts brought about in Polish reality by the recent years of social, cultural, and economic

transformation. Families have undergone changes caused by both external and internal factors (cf. Janke 2009, 9-21; Mazur 2022, 23-31; Janik-Skowrońska 2023, 411-426; Regulska 2015, 232-239).

As a result of these transformations, parental roles have been redefined. This means that the traditional division of responsibilities—where the father was the head of the family and the mother was the primary caregiver—has undergone changes. The modern concept of fatherhood increasingly involves active participation in child-rearing, which influences the mother's role and the way children perceive religious values. After a period of the “absence of the father,” there has been a “return of the father.” This absence was either physical (due to war or work-related migration) or emotional (the father was physically present but not involved in raising the child), a phenomenon observed in Europe until the 1970s and in Poland until the 1990s. Biological fatherhood is evolving into a more mature, psychological, educational, and moral fatherhood (cf. Lewicka 2020, 201-212). As J. Wróblewska-Skrzek points out, men's awareness is changing, and they are increasingly engaging in their children's lives in an active way (Wróblewska-Skrzek 2017, 33-40). The fatherhood model is shifting towards one that emphasizes interaction both with the child and with the mother in the upbringing process. This means that fathers are not only concerned with providing material security but also want to participate in their children's cultural, social, and religious development (Włodarczyk 2014, 94-138).

In this context, it is also important to note that the role of the mother has changed. Women are increasingly engaging in professional work and, just like fathers, taking responsibility for the material support of their children. At the same time, expectations placed on women are evolving. The pressure and demands no longer concern only relationships with their husband or partner, family, or in-laws but now extend to employers, professional competition, and even active presence in the media and social communication. As E. Krause points out, the traditional stereotype of the devoted Polish mother is gradually being replaced by the image of a working mother. The perception of the stay-at-home mother is giving way to that of a multitasking mother (cf. Krause 2020, 31-56). However, the unique bond between mother and child remains exceptional due to its intrinsic nature (cf. Szymaniak 2021, 233-245).

As a result, there is a growing recognition that parenting responsibilities are increasingly being shared between both parents.

A key factor influencing the changing social roles and the experience of fatherhood and motherhood is—broadly speaking—new technologies and social media. They have a noticeable impact on how parental functions are carried out and how religious upbringing is approached. It is hard to ignore the impression that media, operating within the framework of the modern order, shape not only social and cultural life but also influence the upbringing of children. Globalization, based on the compression of time and space, permeates many aspects of reality, including family life. In an era of information overload, discovering the truth about human identity and authentic vocation becomes increasingly difficult. Universal principles of family life are being widely rejected, leading to the sidelining of traditional values and authorities, as well as the rapid transformation of intergenerational relationships. As a result, the family becomes a fragmented educational environment where parents and children seem to live in two separate worlds of digital culture. This often leads to weakened relationships and even conflicts. Moreover, it undermines the traditional role of the family as a unit centred around the “sacred”—the highest value of faith and God. The affirmation of the person has been replaced by the affirmation of new technologies (cf. Łuczyński 2018, 63-73; Kopiczko 2021, 57-74).

The intersection of postmodern culture with the reality of the media world, globalization, and migration creates yet another challenge—religious pluralism. Parents tasked with the religious upbringing of their children face an increasing diversity of religious beliefs within society. In practice, this means that families must confront various religious convictions and practices or even different forms of secularization and atheism. As J. Mariański points out, this requires parents to be fully aware of their own beliefs and practices that they wish to pass on to their children (Mariański 2001, 9-31).

It may seem that in recent decades, as noted by P. Mazurkiewicz, a certain shift has occurred in Polish reality, where the ideology of socialism has been replaced by liberal ideology. This introduces a kind of “noise” in the process of shaping the identity of men and women, as well as in defining the roles of fathers and mothers and their responsibilities in the context of religious upbringing. The reduction of upbringing to the sphere of corporeality makes it more

difficult to ensure proper religious education, which belongs to the spiritual dimension of human life (cf. Mazurkiewicz 2023, 152-168; Mąkosa et al. 2024, 113-138).

As M. Żmudziński observes, this has led to a transformation in which a culture where belief in God was once taken for granted has evolved to the point where, even for deeply religious people, it has become just one of many axiological options. In this context, the family has become “the most essential environment for a mature choice of religious faith” (Żmudziński 2023, 611-624). On a practical level, these cultural changes have increased the social significance of women, opened up the labour market for them, significantly altered the role of the father, and drawn both parents and children into the digital world. As a result, this has also led to postponing marriage decisions, a greater focus on financial stability, increased attention to various forms of entertainment, and a continuously rising number of divorces.

Given statistics indicating a rising number of divorces in Poland (cf. Pawłowska 2024), this phenomenon can be seen as one of the significant factors hindering proper religious upbringing, particularly in the context of the roles of the father and mother, who are meant to provide a sense of security for the child. The family is built on unique bonds based on love, voluntariness, and a shared pursuit of common goals. It is widely acknowledged that the family provides the best conditions for a child’s development, ensuring a sense of security and stability. However, the breakdown of the bond between parents creates a major challenge for the child’s integral religious upbringing. The family structure is disrupted, leaving the child without the close support of both parents.

Children often experience emotional burdens due to their parents’ divorce, which affects their ability to engage in religious life, as this requires openness and trust. A child growing in faith needs support, yet in such circumstances, they are deprived of it (cf. Miernik 2015, 135-151; Lewicka 2021, 93-108). It can therefore be stated that the socio-cultural context largely determines the effectiveness of religious upbringing. Most phenomena occurring on a global or national scale are reflected on a micro level in the way families function. Changes related to globalization, the development of digital technologies, cultural diversity, shifts in the labour

market, and the revolution in concepts of family and gender shape the paradigms of religious upbringing within the family.

2. FULFILLING THE NEED FOR SECURITY

One of the key needs for human development and life is the guarantee of a sense of security. It stems from natural, fundamental needs and is closely linked to the biological existence of a person. This need includes the awareness of being cared for, a sense of stability in one's existential situation, and the feeling of being protected. Fulfilling this need, in turn, translates into self-confidence, the ability to form relationships courageously and freely, and trust-based interactions. As A. Maslow argued, humans naturally seek security, and almost everything else can be considered less important, especially in the process of family upbringing (cf. Maslow 2013, 66).

From the perspective of faith-based upbringing, the sense of security is more than just the absence of threats perceived by an individual. It is rather related to relationships and functioning within the family environment. Ideally, the need for security should be fulfilled without any tensions or conflicts. According to A. Maslow's theory, meeting this need is a prerequisite for fully satisfying the need for belonging and recognition (cf. Maslow 2013, 85).

It can be said that fulfilling the need for security is a key factor in a child's proper emotional and spiritual development. A fundamental sense of existential security directly contributes to emotional stability, which serves as the foundation for developing healthy relationships with others and with God. A stable and secure family environment significantly supports the building of trust and a sense of belonging. The sense of security also involves a consistent reference to clear moral principles, which help in making the right decisions (cf. Chałupniak 2007, 3-13).

Individuals who grow up in an environment of security tend to participate more confidently in the religious life of the Church community. This is also reflected in the quality of their spiritual development. A safe environment in everyday life contributes to a sense of security in the religious sphere as well. This enables children to grow spiritually, build their own identity, and ask bold questions without fear of judgment. It is important for a child to be able to rely on parental support in times of doubt or crisis. This not only protects them from

negative social influences but also strengthens their sense of self-worth (cf. Oleszak and Czajkowski 2019, 193-204).

When reflecting on the role of the father and mother in a child's religious upbringing, it is important to emphasize that this task requires cooperation. Despite certain differences in their roles, their efforts should be complementary. The mother's primary role can be seen as being a "source" of emotional support. She is responsible for ensuring a sense of closeness, both physically and spiritually, which is particularly crucial in the first weeks and months of life. In the upbringing process, the mother often introduces stability and routine into family and child life, significantly strengthening the sense of constancy and security (cf. Szymaniak 2021, 236; Tataj-Puzyna 2015, 158-170). On the other hand, the father's role in fostering a child's sense of security lies in introducing structure and norms. This helps the child understand the surrounding world and reinforces their sense of security within it. The father also plays a crucial role in shaping a child's behaviour. As a role model, he provides an example to follow, demonstrating how to handle difficult challenges and navigate unfamiliar situations. Building a child's sense of security involves the father's active participation in the upbringing process—being present, spending time together, engaging in play, completing tasks together, and having meaningful conversations. Additionally, the father can support the child in discovering the world and embracing new experiences. The courage of an adult man can inspire a child to take on new challenges, which in turn fosters self-confidence and strengthens their sense of security (cf. Żernik 2018, 13-28; Walesa 2001, 291-320).

The complementarity of the father's and mother's roles is reflected in their joint efforts in raising their child. This not only strengthens family bonds but also develops social and emotional skills while fostering trust and a sense of security. The stability of the parents' relationship, their presence, and their cooperation—especially in the context of religious upbringing—reinforce the child's awareness that they are growing up in a safe environment. Together, parents create an atmosphere of support and a willingness to help (Więcławski 2018, 46-55). It is worth noting that a lack of a sense of security in a child's development can lead to consequences such as stress and anxiety, difficulties in relationships, low self-esteem, aggressive behaviour, and trouble making decisions. This, in turn, directly affects challenges in

the development of faith, understood as a personal relationship with God (cf. Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization 2020 124, 226-231).

3. PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH

To verify the initial assumptions, namely the correlation between the educational efforts of fathers and mothers in religious upbringing, empirical research was conducted.¹ Over four hundred people responded to the survey. The vast majority of respondents came from intact families—nearly 90%. Only 16% of participants were from single-parent families. This may provide a relatively solid basis for the assumption that respondents had a relatively high level of security during their upbringing.

One of the key questions in the study was identifying which parent provided a greater sense of security. In response to the question: Who provided a greater sense of security? (Own research. N=406) around 41% of respondents answered that both parents did. Slightly over 37% indicated that their mother was the primary source of security, while only 12% pointed to their father as the one who provided the greatest sense of security. Nearly 10% of respondents stated that neither parent ensured a sense of security. Interestingly, among those who felt that neither parent provided security, the vast majority came from intact families. Additionally, a noticeable

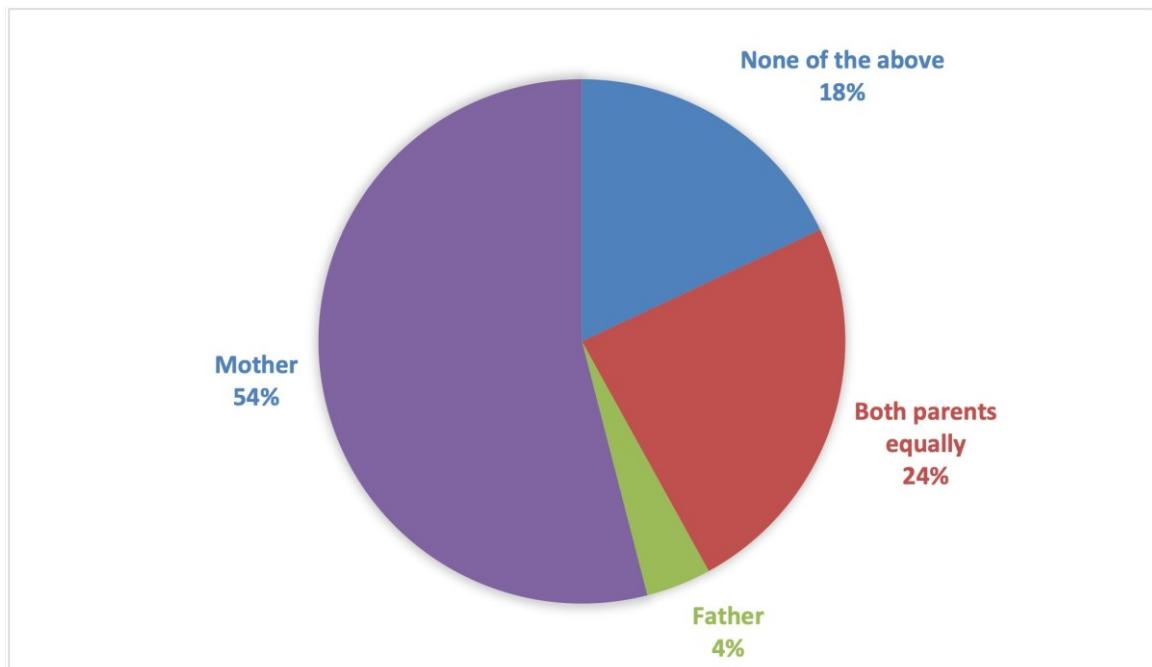
¹ The research was conducted in collaboration with students from the Faculty of Law and Administration at UKSW (Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University): Angelika Miszkurka and Julia Oliszewska. The study utilized the CAWI (Computer-Assisted Web Interview) technique, where respondents were asked to complete an electronic survey available on a website. A part of the quantitative research, a questionnaire was designed containing nine questions, including two open-ended ones. This total enabled the collection of empirical data. The data collection process lasted approximately one month (from October 5, 2024 to November 12, 2024). A total of 411 responses were gathered, with nearly 400 being fully completed. Due to the random sampling method and the limited scope of the study, the results cannot be considered representative of the entire country. The primary objective was to obtain preliminary data that could potentially serve as a foundation for broader empirical research in the future. However, the collected data allow the author of this article to draw conclusions that reflect social trends regarding the role of fathers and mothers in religious upbringing within families. The research sample was selected based on the snowball sampling. The survey contained seven closed questions and two open questions. The results of the research were analyzed, which allowed for their description and presentation.

trend emerged: among those who lacked a sense of security in their family, the majority identified their mother as the primary decision-maker in organizing daily life.

An interesting correlation also emerges between the responses to the questions about who provided a sense of security and who was (or is) the primary decision-maker in the respondent's family home (Own research. N=407). About 44% of respondents indicated that both parents shared decision-making equally, while 41% pointed to the mother and 15% to the father. A clear pattern can be observed: in families where a "partnership" model dominates—meaning parents equally share parenting responsibilities—children tend to feel a similar level of care and security from both their mother and father.

Although this trend persists, it is less pronounced when it comes to the question of who taught prayer and other religious practices.

Teaching of Prayers



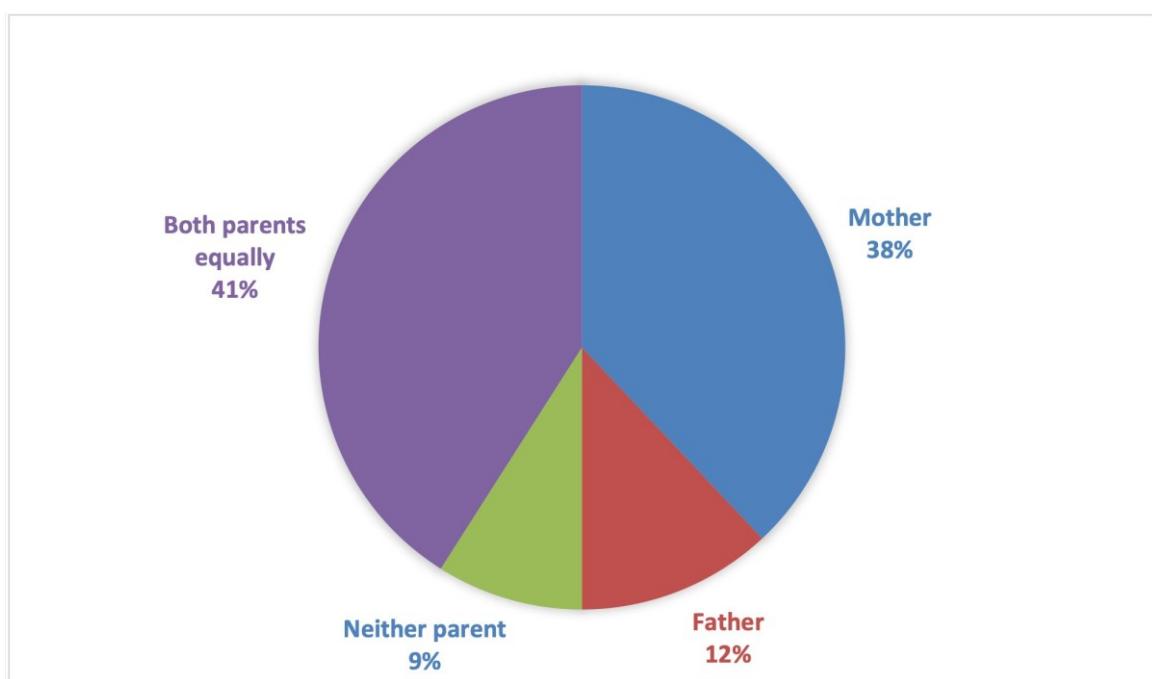
Who taught you prayers and other religious practices?

Source: Own research (N=406).

Nearly one-fourth of respondents indicated that both parents were equally responsible for introducing them to religious practices and teaching them prayers. The majority—54%—pointed to the mother as the primary figure in this role. Only 4% of respondents identified the father, while nearly one in five did not attribute this responsibility to either parent. These findings reflect the traditional approach to religious upbringing in families, where the mother (or women in general) is assigned the role of introducing children to the religious world (CBOS 2025; Osenko-Mizerska 2025, 151-163).

Another important aspect is the question of religious role models in childhood. About 41% of respondents indicated that both parents equally served as role models in religious upbringing. Similar to previous questions, the mother was the second most frequently mentioned figure, with 38% of respondents selecting her—more than three times the number who identified the father (12%). Nearly 10% stated that neither parent was a religious role model.

A model of religious devotion in the family



Who in your childhood was a model of religious devotion in your family? (Who spoke about God more often and practiced faith-related rituals?)

Source: Own research (N=405).

It can be observed that, despite minimal deviations, a certain trend persists. The percentage distributions of responses to the question of who was the guarantor of security closely align with the responses to the question of who served as a model of religious devotion. Based on this, it seems reasonable to conclude that the sense of security significantly correlates with being a role model in religious upbringing.

	Guarantee of security	Model of religious devotion
Both parents	41%	41%
Mother	37%	38%
Father	12%	12%
Neither parent	10%	9%

Source: Own research.

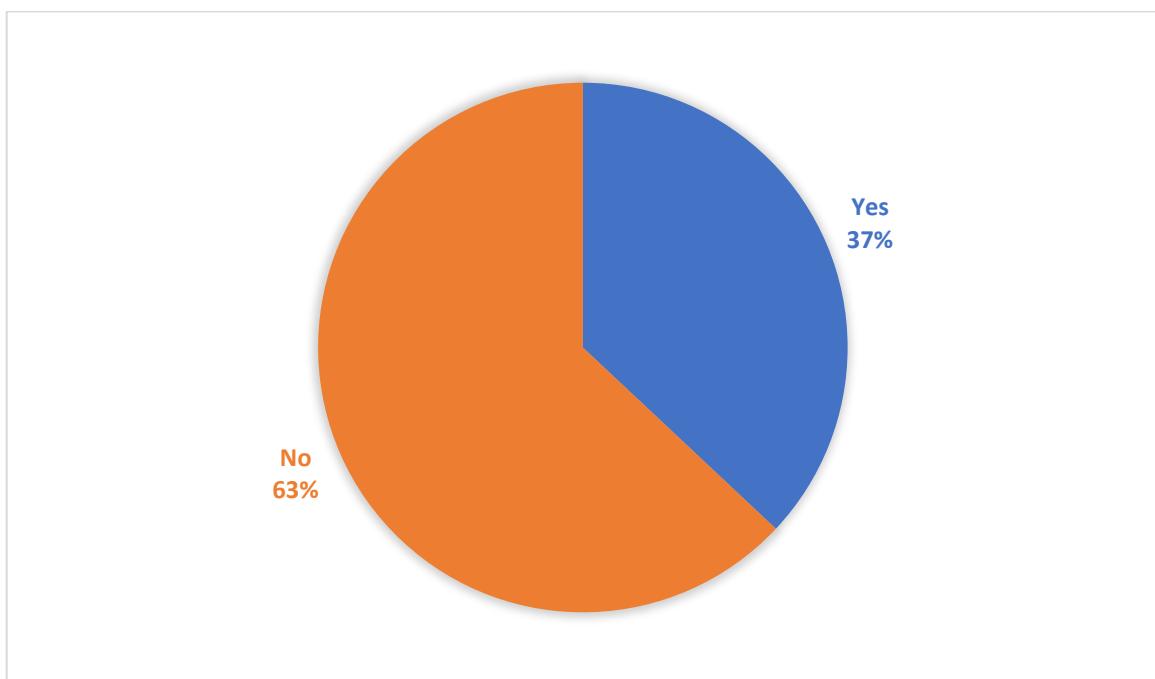
It seems that the above relationship can be interpreted in two ways. On one hand, a sense of security within the family provides a solid foundation for religious upbringing to take place. On the other hand, one could also conclude that a focus on religious upbringing—through a proper model of religious devotion or the introduction of prayer and religious practices—fosters a sense of security for the child within the family. Without a doubt, the most ideal model is one in which both parents—sharing parenting responsibilities equally—provide a sense of security and serve as role models of religious devotion. This creates an environment of educational consistency and emotional stability. It is evident that two engaged parents ensure consistent support in both spiritual and moral dimensions, which directly contributes to a child's sense of security.

The strong role of the mother in ensuring a sense of security and passing on a model of religious devotion may, in turn, be attributed to the deep emotional bond between her and the child. Traditionally, a woman's role has been to accompany the child in growth and development from the very first moments of life. However, the significantly weaker role of the father may be a cause for concern. This could stem from the fact that, in many families, fathers are less involved in child-rearing, including religious upbringing. It is also important to remember that this research focused on adults who were raised in families that operated in previous decades.

In light of the above comparisons, it is also important to consider the situation in which neither parent provides a sense of security nor serves as a model of religious devotion. This may suggest, first, that a lack of security does not foster religious development, and second, that religion itself provides structure, principles, and rituals that contribute to a sense of security.

As a kind of supplement, the study also included questions about the experience of being forced to engage in religious practices. Around 37% of respondents recalled feeling pressured by their parents to participate in religious practices during their childhood and adolescence. Notably, respondents were significantly more likely to identify their mother as the one enforcing these practices—28% pointed to their mother, compared to 8% who indicated their father »Own research. Questions: Have you ever been forced by a parent to engage in religious practices? (N=407); If so, who was the person forcing? (N=398)«.

Coercion in religious practices



Have you ever been forced by a parent to engage in religious practices?

Source: Own research (N=407).

Forcing children to engage in religious practices can negatively impact their sense of security and significantly influence their religious beliefs in the future. As a result, children may

feel a lack of control over their own lives and decisions. A sense of autonomy is crucial for a child's emotional development and overall sense of security.

The classic pedagogical approach to religious development assumes three phases: awakening, development, and fulfilment. At none of these stages is fear or anxiety considered appropriate. Moreover, sensitive and caring parental support can serve as a foundation for a healthy religious attitude in the future. A parallel educational effort by parents can contribute to a sense of security while strengthening both self-identification and identification with a religious group (cf. Walesa 1997, 109-132; Oleśkiewicz 2012, 99-106).

In the final part of this paragraph, it is also worth addressing the role of the father in religious upbringing. Although statistically less emphasized, an analysis of responses to open-ended questions suggests that participants remembered their father's actions more vividly. The dominant responses indicate that the father had little or no influence. The mother's role was overwhelmingly rated positively. However, it is important to note that positive statements about the father often carried a relatively strong emotional charge, which was less apparent in positive statements about mothers. Therefore, it is worth citing a few examples of participants' statements regarding the father's role, where they highlight specific life situations:

- “I believe he had a significant influence, but I only realized it as an older person when I understood that my father didn't say much, but he always set an example of an honest and righteous life.” (Person's statement no. 15)
- “My father and I rarely talked about religion, but observing how he regularly went to church and prayed in solitude subconsciously reinforced my belief that faith is important.” (Person's statement no. 38)
- “My father also had a great influence on the development of my religiosity. He didn't teach me the words of prayers—that was my mother and grandmother—but I saw how, after each long day of hard work, he would kneel and say a short prayer.” (Person's statement no. 62)
- “Significant. I will always have the image of my father kneeling by the bed in the evening before my eyes. It was Dad who took us to church every Sunday. He spoke openly about God, and even now, at over 80 years old, he reminds my sister and me that

life is easier with God. He tells us to pray for our deceased family members and for good health. He can openly thank God and ask for His help on our behalf. Today, I see how much I owe him. Mom always went to church with us and stood by Dad's side, but it was he who never left us a choice—in the best sense of the word" (Person's statement no. 135).

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In the survey, two open-ended questions were asked: "What influence do you think your mother had on the development of your religiosity?" (N=358) and "What influence do you think your father had on the development of your religiosity?" (N=353). The collected and analysed responses led to the formulation of five recommendations, which serve both as a summary and as a basis for further research.

4.1. Prayer is not a Recitation Exercise

The primary aspect of religious upbringing can be the way a child is introduced to the world of prayer. At this point, it is worth quoting a few statements from the respondents:

- "My dad taught me prayers and prayed with me. He always spoke well of God and the role of the Church in the world. That was a solid foundation for the later development of my faith." (Person's statement no. 300)
- "My mother taught me the basics of religiosity: prayers, and in the evenings, she read me the children's Bible." (Person's statement no. 380)
- "A very strong, absolute one. Our mom instilled religiosity in us from a young age; she was the one who taught us prayers and other rituals. We went to Holy Mass, visited graves, and did other religious practices with her." (Person's statement no. 14)
- "Dad demonstrated the practice of personal prayer (I often saw him with the Bible), took care of family prayer, and emphasized the priority of the Eucharist." (Person's statement no. 42).

Nearly 50 years ago, Janusz Tarnowski wrote about the danger of parents becoming either "caretakers" or "taskmasters" (cf. Tarnowski 1977, 127-135). Therefore, it is important

to ensure that teaching prayer is connected to fostering a personal relationship with God. The process of learning to pray should not be reduced to mere memorization but should instead lead to the development of a prayerful attitude. Another crucial aspect is making prayer a shared experience between parents and children. Praying together, reading the Bible as a family, and participating in Holy Mass together can significantly strengthen family bonds and create a sense of security. However, it is essential that these practices are carried out regularly rather than just occasionally. Consistency and parental closeness play a major role in encouraging a child to seek a relationship with God with confidence, drawing from their experience of family relationships. This connection can be nurtured in the realm of prayer and spiritual life.

The respondents' answers also highlight a fairly common phenomenon: parents often have differing attitudes toward prayer and religious upbringing. One example is a statement from a participant who expressed radically different opinions about each parent: "Not much, because she forced me to pray" (mother); "A lot. He was and still is a model of perseverance in prayer for me. I always saw him kneeling with a rosary in his hand" (father) (Person's statement no. 162). Such responses reinforce the idea that leading by example is a far more effective educational method than coercion.

4.2. Upbringing Without Coercion – A Stress-Free Atmosphere

Another important aspect that parents should consider when aiming to foster religious upbringing in an atmosphere of security is the absence of coercion and tension. As respondents' statements indicate, coercion may be effective in the short term, but in the long run, it tends to have the opposite effect. Here are some examples of responses assessing the influence of the mother or father on the respondents' religious upbringing:

- "My mom was more involved in making sure I prayed, received the sacraments, etc. During childhood, at the beginning of my faith journey, her involvement was somewhat important. However, over time, despite her good intentions, it sometimes felt too intrusive and discouraging." (Person's statement no. 38)
- "Good, although the beginning wasn't easy because it happened in an atmosphere of mild coercion." (Person's statement no. 396)

- “Bad, because she portrayed God as neither merciful nor understanding. She forced us to go to church, saying that God would be angry.” (Person’s statement no. 237)
- “She made sure that I attended Holy Mass and services. She was more like a guard.” (Person’s statement no. 252)
- “Being forced to practice had the opposite effect. For example, I don’t pray the rosary or other ‘seasonal’ prayers. To this day, I don’t go to confession because I was forced into it.” (Person’s statement no. 253).

These statements indicate that forcing a child to engage in religious practices can lead to a negative attitude toward religion and faith. When coercion is used, the child may experience emotions and feelings that, over time, turn into rebellion in adulthood. As emphasized by pedagogy and psychology, coercion can also lead to the breakdown or weakening of family bonds. Children may feel misunderstood and rejected (cf. Kubanek 2015, 107-121).

Stress and pressure can significantly limit a child’s or young person’s engagement in nurturing their relationship with God or the Church community. Parents’ efforts in religious upbringing should focus on creating an atmosphere of respect. While setting expectations is necessary, it should not come from a place of coercion but rather from guidance, support, and a response to the need for growth and security. It is also important to provide space for conversations that build motivation for taking specific actions. This idea is confirmed by positive statements highlighting parents who, instead of using force, acted with care and led by example: “My father taught me respect for Tradition and shared his reverence for clergy and rituals (traditional Catholicism). I wrote that ‘no one forced me to practice’—we all practiced together, and my father set a good example and ‘inspired’ the rest of us.” (Person’s statement no. 226)

4.3. Respecting a Child’s Religious Desires

Another important principle emerging from the research is respecting a child’s desires, both in the realm of religious life and in everyday relationships. This is a key element in building mutual trust within the family and in the child’s relationship with God. This principle is reflected in statements like the following:

- “He sets an example for me, doesn’t force me into anything—which I respect—and creates space for me to express my own thoughts and feelings about religion.” (Person’s statement no. 48)
- “For him, actions matter more than words. He allows me to follow my own path, although I feel that he would prefer me to stay in the faith that has been passed down in our family for generations.” (Person’s statement no. 48)
- “None, because luckily she didn’t encourage me to do anything.” (Person’s statement no. 17)
- “A significant one—she was very opposed to the fact that I found faith as a teenager. My relationship with God was so important to me that, despite previously being very obedient to my mother’s demands, I started defending my faith against her.” (Person’s statement no. 34)
- “Just like Dad—I went to church with them, and whenever I didn’t want to go, I immediately felt their rejection and resentment towards me.” (Person’s statement no. 216)
- “He discouraged me by not accepting any objections. He didn’t let me find my own path to the church but instead tried to impose his own as the only right one.” (Person’s statement no. 201).

Commenting on the above statements, one can refer to the words of John Paul II spoken in Wrocław in 1983: “A family is truly itself if it is built on such relationships, on mutual trust, on mutual commitment. Only on such a foundation can the process of upbringing be built, which is the fundamental goal of the family and its primary task. In fulfilling this task, parents cannot be replaced by anyone—nor should anyone take this primary responsibility away from them” (Jan Paweł II 1983). John Paul II expresses a view derived from the Church’s teachings as well as pedagogical principles, which state that mutual respect for each other and one’s needs increases the sense of mutual trust. This is particularly significant in the context of the formation of conscience and the sense of personal dignity (cf. Jan Paweł II 1981, 12; Czajowski 1983, 81).

As J. Zimny notes, the family atmosphere should be built on an attitude of dialogue, trust, decisiveness, and respect for emerging freedom. Parents should show respect not only for the child's needs but also for their secrets and individuality (cf. Zimny 2020, 13-33). As the analysis of the statements shows, a lack of respect for the child and their views not only harms their sensitivity but also creates a sense of rejection and isolation. It can also lead to discouragement from making efforts related to faith and religious practice. This is far from guiding a child toward a personal experience of faith in a sense of security.

4.4. Speaking Positively About God

Another important element is building a positive image of God. A child who grows up with a positive vision of God more easily develops a loving relationship with Him. This, in turn, strengthens their personal bond with God and removes fear. Among the statements of the study participants who spoke about the influence of their parents on their religious upbringing, the following are worth highlighting:

- “Negative – she conveyed a toxic vision of a ‘punishing God.’” (Person’s statement no. 166)
- “My mom answered most of my questions and doubts about religion and the Church. She made me see religiosity for a long time as an obligation to participate in practices I didn’t understand.” (Person’s statement no. 201)
- “My mother’s relationship with me as a child shaped my image of God as punitive and strict, someone I had to earn everything from—yet never fully satisfy. For many years, my relationship with God was accompanied by fear and a constant feeling that He was always disappointed in me.” (Person’s statement no. 122)

Among the statements, it is also worth mentioning those that reflect positive experiences of parents’ educational efforts:

- “My mom familiarized me with religion and helped me understand the deeper meaning of parables.” (Person’s statement no. 4)
- “Positive – during my crises of faith as a teenager, he showed me that faith could be combined with rational understanding, which undoubtedly influenced the fact that I am a believer today.” (Person’s statement no. 11)

- “Very significant (...) In later years, when I started taking care of my own spiritual growth and joined a youth community, my mom’s role in my development changed. From that moment on, we shared our experiences, and she became a companion in my spiritual journey.” (Person’s statement no. 40).

The statements above suggest that speaking about God in a positive way and explaining the truths of faith to children contribute to strengthening spiritual bonds in one’s personal relationship with God and the Church community. It also fosters a positive outlook on life. A child who knows that God is good does not fear relationships or reactions to their potential mistakes. On the other hand, fear of a punitive God may lead a person to close themselves off from moral growth.

Moral action is then based solely on avoiding sin out of fear of punishment. In this context, it is worth emphasizing the unique role of the father in shaping a proper image of God. A crucial condition is that the father in the family recognizes the authority of God the Father above himself (cf. Bukalski i Cyrny 2009, 57-78). Through his behaviour, he should embody an attitude of mercy rather than that of a lawgiver. Otherwise, this may significantly limit a child’s sense of security in their relationship with God and hinder the development of the virtues of love and trust (cf. Król 2002, 74-75; Szewczyk 2000, 76ff).

4.5. Parents’ work on themselves

The final postulate, though no less important and essentially summarizing the previous four, is the concern that parents continuously work on developing their faith and relationship with God. This ensures that parents themselves experience a personal relationship with God, which they seek to nurture in their children. Here are some selected statements from the survey respondents:

- “She initiated it but did not help it develop, and during adolescence, it became one of the causes of a faith crisis.” (Person’s statement no. 22)
- “My mother is a believer, but she never had a significant influence on the development of my religiousness. She is not a practicing believer, so she had no opportunity to directly shape my growth in this area.” (Person’s statement no. 84)

- “I think my issue with anxiety-based religiosity may stem from my father imposing and expecting specific religious practices from me while I did not see those behaviours in him.” (Person’s statement no. 274).

It is also important to highlight statements that appreciate the care shown by parents:

- “My father was always a believer, but he did not practice his faith, so his influence was minor. However, he instilled patriotism in us and strengthened our understanding of history and the idea of faith. In later years, after his conversion, he became an active participant in our family’s religious practices.” (Person’s statement no. 41)
- “She instilled the desire to deepen my faith and set a good example of how a truly faithful person should behave.” (Person’s statement no. 46)
- “Positive! Although it was mainly my grandmother who taught me prayers and a relationship with God, my mother had a huge influence on the development of my religiosity. She took me to church, introduced me to the church community, and I always met many people there. I saw how strong her faith was in everyday life, and that inspired me a lot.” (Person’s statement no. 46)
- “I believe that my father had a significant influence on the development of my religious faith because he was always a true Catholic. I saw many examples of how he lived by Catholic values in his daily life, not just talked about them. I think this strengthened my faith, as I learned from his example.” (Person’s statement no. 66).

The statements above can be summarized by saying that the key to effective religious upbringing is the authenticity of parents in practicing their relationship with God. This authenticity is understood as faithfulness, originality, and sincerity—ensuring that the expectations set for the child align with the parents’ own actions. When this is lacking, the child perceives a kind of inconsistency: on one hand, there are rules and expectations, but on the other, there is no visible effort from the parents in developing their own faith. In this way, parents unintentionally convey that a relationship with God, faith, morality, and religious practices are not truly important. Authenticity in this context is closely tied to responsibility, honesty, and self-expression.

A child who observes the authenticity of their parents, expressed through their care for their own faith, recognizes that matters of faith are important or even the most important. When considering authenticity in parenting within the context of a child's need for security, it becomes clear that when parents are authentic and set expectations for themselves as well, the child does not feel deceived or forced into actions that the parents themselves do not follow. Instead of focusing solely on their own "self," the child learns to prioritize relationships with others, which ultimately leads to a deeper connection with God (cf. Rola and Rola 2024, 231-248; Taylor 1996).

CONCLUSION

In summary, while Church documents and pedagogical guidelines emphasize the undeniable role of both mother and father in religious upbringing, this task remains quite demanding. The key to success may lie in fostering an atmosphere of security. A family where a sense of safety and mutual trust create a nurturing environment is far more likely to support the proper development of faith experienced in a personal and meaningful way. The research findings clearly indicate that the presence of both parents is perceived as an important source of a sense of security. However, it should be added that from a pastoral and theological perspective, what is decisive is not solely the structure of the family but above all the quality of the relationships within it. Harmonious, trustworthy, and stable relationships can create a secure environment even in families that are incomplete or marked by difficulties. In the spirit of the exhortation *Amoris laetitia*, it can therefore be said that every family has the potential to become a place of transmitting faith and experiencing security, provided it is rooted in love, respect, and authentic witness. Such an expanded perspective allows the conclusions of the study to more fully reflect the diversity of today's family situations and enhances both its scholarly and pastoral relevance (cf. Francis 2016, 221)

However, it is important to recognize the factors that hinder or disrupt the proper religious development of families and children. The most significant among them include economic changes in the job market, the transfer of educational responsibilities to institutions, the excessive promotion of individual autonomy and self-fulfilment, the negative influence of

the media, and a general societal crisis of religiosity. In conclusion, the religious role of the family today largely depends on the level of religious awareness among parents and the specific environmental conditions in which they live.

Nevertheless, research shows that with the proper involvement of both mother and father, raising a child in faith is possible. Studies also indicate a strong correlation between the parents' role in religious upbringing and their efforts to ensure a sense of security. However, a crucial condition for this is the close cooperation of both parents in pursuing this goal, as well as an educational approach that respects both themselves and their children as individuals. Other key elements include: fostering good family relationships based on dialogue and trust rather than coercion, nurturing a genuine personal relationship with God instead of merely reciting prayers as a task or obligation, and respecting the child's needs and desires. Additionally, speaking positively about God and bearing witness to faith play an essential role. At the core of all these principles is the parents' commitment to their own personal growth in faith. When faith becomes the driving force of upbringing, it radiates outward and serves as a testimony rooted in love rather than fear.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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