

*Janusz Mariański\**

ORCID: 0000-0002-0620-8000

Lublin, Poland

## **The Religious Condition of Poland's High School Youth in the Years 1988–2017**

### **Kondycja religijna młodzieży szkolnej w Polsce w latach 1988–2017**

**Summary:** Poland's youth are changing in a dynamic way, in short intervals, in various ways and in different social environments. This article presents the selected results of sociological research undertaken four times over the years 1988–2017 on nationwide samples of Poland's youth attending secondary schools. It was conducted using a distributed questionnaire, meaning that we provided questionnaires to students who were present on a given day in classes at school. Youth religiosity was diagnosed according to several basic parameters: confessional and religious self-identification, young people's attitudes towards the dogmas of the faith, and religious practices, both in static and dynamic cross-sections. The current status of the religiosity of secondary school youth and its transformation in 1988–2017 indicates accelerated processes of secularisation in Polish society. The thesis about the accelerated "secularisation creeping in" is becoming increasingly more legitimate.

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\* Ks. prof. dr hab. Janusz Mariański, emeritus professor of The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, Faculty of Social Sciences, Institute of Sociology. Address: The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, Al. Raławickie 14, 20-950 Lublin; email: [januszm@kul.lublin.pl](mailto:januszm@kul.lublin.pl).

**Keywords:** school youth; confessional and religious self-identification; dogmas of the faith; religious practices; secularization.

**Streszczenie:** Młodzież polska zmienia się w dynamiczny sposób i to w krótkich odstępach czasu, w rozmaity sposób, w różnych środowiskach społecznych. W niniejszym artykule zostały przedstawione wybrane wyniki badań socjologicznych zrealizowanych czterokrotnie w latach 1988–2017, na próbach ogólnopolskich młodzieży uczęszczającej do szkół średnich. Zostały one przeprowadzone za pomocą ankiety rozdawanej, czyli przez przekazanie kwestionariuszy uczniom obecnym w danym dniu na lekcjach w szkole. Religijność młodzieży została zdiagnozowana według kilku podstawowych parametrów: autoidentyfikacje wyznaniowe i religijne, postawy młodzieży wobec dogmatów wiary, praktyki religijne, zarówno w przekroju statycznym, jak i dynamicznym. Obecny kształt religijności młodzieży szkolnej i jej przemiany w latach 1988–2017 wskazują na przyspieszone procesy sekularyzacyjne w społeczeństwie polskim. Coraz bardziej staje się uprawniona teza o przyspieszonej „pełzającej sekularyzacji”.

**Słowa kluczowe:** młodzież szkolna; autoidentyfikacje wyznaniowe i religijne; dogmaty wiary; praktyki religijne; sekularyzacja.

Under the conditions of radical social changes, various types of crises arise concerning one's personal identity, both individual and social (group). With regard to the crisis of individual identity, we can refer to an identity deficit that is a result of an inadequate definition of self and the lack of attachment to specific values and goals. An identity deficit is a typical phenomenon characteristic of young people who are entering adulthood. On the one hand, they question their current identity (bidding farewell to childhood), and, on the other hand, they question the existing world of adults that they now face. This is sometimes accompanied by the phenomenon of anomie. A conflict of identity means the coexistence of a multiplicity of definitions of one's "self," which are internally inconsistent and even contradictory.

In the context of this general thesis, it can be assumed that youth in school are more prone to experiencing an identity crisis, including a crisis in their religious and moral identity. Religious and moral values become a matter of choice; youth shows a lack of stability over time and a specific ambivalence. This is the "price" that individuals pay under conditions of radical social changes. Modern, individualised and pluralistic societies are charac-

terised by a variety of life goals, accepted norms, worldviews and lifestyles. There is a lack of consensus regarding shared values and their hierarchy. According to Irena Borowik, the religious orientations of Poland's youth are slowly changing, there is no visible and one-way trend, and some elements of change are arranged into specific tendencies. In this context, she mentions changes in pre-marital customs, a drop in regular participation in the Mass, a shift from one's declared faith to indecision, religious indifference and even unbelief, including a critical attitude towards school catechesis.<sup>1</sup>

The present study will outline the results of sociological research undertaken in 1988/1989, in 1998, in 2005 and in 2017, based on the nationwide samples of Poland's youth attending secondary schools. These studies were conducted in the research consortium of the Department of Sociology of Religion at the Institute of Sociology at Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw along with the Institute for Catholic Church Statistics at the turn of April and May in 2017. The first version of the nation's youth sample was developed in 1988. In 1998, the sample was updated. In 2005, due to the reform of secondary education made in the meantime, the research on secondary schools (i.e. currently in post-junior high schools) from second grades at general high and technical schools to first grades was postponed in order to preserve the uniform age of secondary school students. Sociological research was undertaken using a distributed survey, in other words, by providing questionnaires to students who were present on a given day at classes in school.<sup>2</sup>

The subjects are in a period of their lives when their interests, worldview and hierarchy of values are being formed, and these create the basis for organising their personal and social lives. Making choices according to their own needs is treated as something natural and to some extent is an inalienable right of every individual. The obtained empirical results are a photographic document from the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in reference

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<sup>1</sup> Irena Borowik, "Religijność w Polsce okresu transformacji – na tropach zmian" ["Religiosity in Poland's Transformation Period. Following the Trail of Changes"], in: *Polska początku XXI wieku: przemiany kulturowe i cywilizacyjne* [Poland at the Beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Cultural and Civilization Transformations], eds. Krzysztof Frysztacki, Piotr Sztompka (Warszawa: Komitet Socjologii PAN, 2012), 339–342.

<sup>2</sup> Janusz Mariański, *Kondycja religijna i moralna młodzieży szkół średnich w latach 1988–1998–2005–2017 (raport z ogólnopolskich badań socjologicznych)* [The Religious and Moral Condition of High School Students in the Years 1988, 1998, 2005, and 2017 (a Report from Nationwide Sociological Research)] (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, 2018).

to young people learning in secondary schools from the perspective of their religiosity, morality and recognised values. Undertaking religiosity and morality from a sociological point of view, we only consider their social aspects, and we do not aspire to present a comprehensive approach to this phenomenon. Religiosity and morality examined by a sociologist are not static quantities, but they are constantly changing depending on the socio-cultural context. Besides, sociology, as an empirical science, never guarantees certainty, but only a probability, with the possibility that its claims will be subject to modifications and even falsifications. We record, describe and interpret numerous social facts, but we also attempt to provide a holistic approach to religiosity, morality and recognised values both on the level of consciousness as well as religious and moral behaviour.

In this sociological study, we refer to the alarming warnings that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Poland's youth will massively leave the Church, especially the Catholic Church ("emigration of youth from the Church," "the Church without youth," "young people outside the Church," "youth without the Church," "the Church lost from within by the youth," "the Church loses importance among the youth," "the Church irrevocably loses its youth," "the Church's moral defeat in working with the youth," "the young Church is breaking up," "the youth and the lost Church") claiming that the Catholic Church at an accelerated pace is losing the young generation of Poles. This analysis will allow us to approximate the pace of changes in religiosity and morality. If young people are a special social category in which changes in religiosity and morality seem to be occurring, this will undoubtedly lead to a deepening gap between the younger and the older generation of Poles in terms of religious and moral attitudes and behaviours. This does not mean that religiosity and morality will decrease in the next age cohorts at the same pace and irreversibly.

In these conditions of radical socio-political and socio-cultural changes, Polish youth are standing at a peculiar religious and moral crossroads. The "uniqueness" of Polish religiosity, especially in the context of a secularized Europe, belongs to very interesting topics within the framework of contemporary studies on religiosity. Religiosity and morality in their social dimensions change according to the logic of "long-lasting duration," and fundamental changes take place slowly. It is not only worth diagnosing young people's attitudes and behaviours, but also ask what has changed over the past 30 years and in what direction are changes in religiosity and morality going? Are changes in religiosity, morality and recognized values only quantitative or also qualitative, what is different now, and what element is continuous?

## 1. Confessional and religious self-identification

Confessional and religious affiliation concerns the so-called global attitudes towards religion. They express religious identification and the general attitude towards religion (positive, indifferent, negative), the degree of one's own faith (deeply believing, believer, undecided, indifferent, searching), the dynamics of general attitudes towards religion in comparison with the periods of childhood or youth or in comparing with one's parents, a justification for one's faith or unbelief (e.g. the transmission of religious values in the family, one's own thoughts, reading books, etc.) and the influence of faith on other dimensions of religious life. The declaration of belonging to a faith community, one's declaration of attitudes towards a religious and church institution, or an "I believe" declaration is an external indicator of religiosity. It allows a sociologically measurable approach of one's orientation of attitudes and behaviours towards religion (the most general world-view options).

Polish sociologists of religion point to the exceptional durability of religiosity in our country in its most general dimensions, meaning confessional self-declarations and religious self-identification. Socio-political and economic changes have not led to a decline in religiosity at the level of the so-called national religiosity (the "faith of the nation"), on which religiosity functions more as a common value than a personal one. In youth circles, the first symptoms of changes in the basic (general) parameters of religious life, such as belonging to a particular confession or global attitudes of faith, in these environments will be marked by evolutionary rather than revolutionary types of changes.

In Polish society, pluralism on the level of confessional and religious affiliation is slowly developing, but the indicator of Catholic religious affiliation in Polish society as a whole is still around 90% (with a slight downward trend) and about 85% in youth environments, thus still within the so-called cultural obviousness range. Poles, including Polish youth, are reluctant to admit of being religiously "homeless", even if their ties with a particular faith community or religion are very weak and their Catholicism rather vague and unspecified. National studies covering adults show a slight evolution of the confessional affiliation.

In the years 1988–2017, there was a marked decline in religious affiliation among secondary school students. In 1988, 95.2% of the respondents admitted to belonging to the Roman Catholic Church, but in 2017, it was 84.6% (a decrease of 10.6%). Belonging to other Christian confessions and

to other religions has remained relatively stable and included only a small group of Polish youth, while the category of people who did not admit to belonging to any confession or religion rose significantly (an increase by 8.7%). Empirical data indicate that even in this most basic parameter of religiosity, there was a slow evolution (falling by 1.8% in 1988–2005) which clearly accelerated in 2005–2017. We are slowly approaching the lower limit of the so-called cultural obviousness related to recognised values and norms (80%).<sup>3</sup>

In the entire population of secondary school students in 2017, 7.5% of respondents considered themselves as deeply religious, 46.4% as believers, 23.3% as undecided but attached to religious tradition, 13.2% as religiously neutral and 8.8% as non-believers (0.7% gave no answer). The number of deeply believing and believers formed in the entire surveyed population was 53.9% but decreased in the years 1998–2017 by 28.4%. The difference between formally belonging to a faith community and the declared belief identification was 34.8%. The indicator of religious affiliation (the so-called global confessions of faith) was clearly below the limit of cultural obviousness. This means that a significant proportion of school-aged youth that identified with a particular confession or religion do not define themselves as believers, but as indecisive, indifferent or non-believers.

The relatively low rate of positive religious self-declarations among young people is perhaps partly caused by the very construction of the question, for which the answer was “undecided but attached to religious traditions.” School youth are in the process of shaping their individual religious or secular worldview, the phase of making sense of their lives and finding their place in the world around them, relatively often referring to their “state of mind” as indecision, even when *de facto* they acknowledged the existence of God and some religious beliefs (showing unwillingness to inform anyone about their religious affiliation). However, this is an ambiguous faith, inconsistent, unclear, confused, with suspicions and doubts, oscillating between faith and disbelief (shaky believers). Quite popular in youth circles are attitudes of doubt and indecision, as well as being in a situation of indeterminacy, fluency and religious ambiguity, where certain facades and superficiality may be a clear sign of weakening religious revival processes in the 1980s

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<sup>3</sup> Ondrej Štefaňak, *Globalny stosunek do wiary młodzieży słowackiej w procesie przemian* [*The Global Attitude of Slovakia's Youth towards Faith during the Process of Transformations*] (Katowice: Studio NOA, 2018).

and blurring the boundaries between faith and unbelief. The fact that about two-fifths of school youth failed to identify themselves as believers is significant. This may testify to the slow secularisation of youth circles in Poland (a scenario of secularisation).<sup>4</sup>

Religious indifference (atheism with indifference) or unbelief is the basis for leaving the Church. Describing themselves as “undecided in matters of faith,” they oscillate between faith and unbelief. They often formulate their attitude towards religion in the following words: “perhaps I believe,” “why not,” “depends on the occasion,” “there is something in it, but I do not know what,” “I believe in God and not in priests,” “I believe in myself,” “maybe, but I’m not sure,” “I have doubts,” “I do not know,” “I believe in something mystical.” Such religiosity is most certainly personal religiosity, but not necessarily a person-based religion. It is not always expressed in faith in a personal God and does not recognize all the basic dogmas of Christianity.

## 2. The youth's attitudes towards the dogmas of the faith

Not only does the doctrinal *Creed* of the Church function in the awareness of many Poles, but there is also a private *creed* among individual believers. There are increasing doubts and negations in relation to certain dogmas of the faith. This process even seems to continuously deepen and encompass more people who declare belonging to Catholicism. The contradictions between the official model of religiosity and effective individual priorities may be on the increase and lead to the fact that the official model of religion is not treated literally, but rather as a form of rhetoric. The fundamental truths of the Christian faith should be accepted by all those who admit belonging to the community of the Church of Christ. In practice, these elements of the Christian *Creed* are also sometimes questioned, subject to doubts or even incomprehensible to the faithful, and thus the attitude of indecision is expressed towards them.

There are various attitudes of people towards the dogmas of the faith, from an in-depth and fortified faith, through a partial faith (selective attitudes towards the faith), up to and including religious indifference and unbelief.

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<sup>4</sup> Wojciech Świątkiewicz, “Młodzież i religia” [“Youth and Religion”], in: *Leksykon pedagogiki religii* [*Lexicon of Religious Pedagogy*], ed. Cyprian Rogowski (Warszawa: VERBINUM Wydawnictwo Książy Werbistów, 2007), 414–418.

They form in the process of socialisation, in the cultural context of a particular society. The Church's faith and the religious beliefs of its members do not always coincide. In a situation in which most of Poland's youth still consider themselves to be believers, it is important how they believe. The theological qualification of particular dogmas of the faith varies, but people who accept the basic contents of faith (e.g. faith in Christ's divinity and humanity) are certainly more religious in the Christian sense than those who doubt these truths or relate to them with indifference. Religious beliefs constitute the subjective system of the meanings of the Church's faith.

In the group of secondary school students in 1988, 80.0% of respondents believed that there is a Higher Power than man who rules the world, 3.3% did not believe in this, 15.7% had no opinion and 0.9% did not answer. Faith development based on a personal God was at a much lower level, with believers at 59.7%, those who do not believe at 10.3%, those for whom it was difficult to say at 27.1% and no answer at 2.9%. Some young Poles approving of the existence of a Higher Power, Spirit or the Absolute do not attribute personal qualities to him (e.g. deism, pantheism), questioning the existence of a personalised Supreme Being. In 1998, the school youth who were surveyed were also asked whether they believed in a personal God. The following answers were obtained: 53.3% stated they believe, 14.5% do not believe, 30.7% it is difficult to say, and 1.5% gave no answer. In 2005, respondents answered the general question of whether they believe in the existence of God. In the entire population of school youth, 86.8% of respondents confirmed faith in the existence of God, 3.7% denied it, 9.3% stated it was hard to say, and 0.3% gave no answer. In 2017, respondents answered, respectively, at 68.8%, 8.5%, 21.1%, and 1.6%.

The decline in faith in God is significant in youth environments, but the growth of clearly atheistic attitudes is noticed to a lesser extent (in 2005–2017, it increased by 4.8%). The current development trend does not yet permit us to accept the hypothesis that atheism will become a matter involving a significant part of Poland's youth. It can be assumed, however, that attitudes of indecisiveness, scepticism or even agnosticism will increase, in which the image of God will be characterized by more general religious representations than typically Christian contents.

Increasingly more young people want to define their relationship with God individually, and their decisions often do not agree with the official programme of faith proposed by the Church. Belief in a personal God is weakening, slowly giving way to a vague belief in a Higher Power or some undefined Force, a Supernatural Power, etc. (a transition from a transcendent



to an imminent understanding of God). It is significant that the indicator of those who declare themselves to be believers is lower than that which refers to faith in the existence of God.

The level of approval for the dogmas of the faith is diversified. In 2017, 53.7% of respondents from secondary schools expressed faith in the existence of God in Three Persons, 15.2% negated this, 27.4% stated it was hard to say and 3.7% gave no answer; 'God is the Creator of the world' was respectively answered at 57.4%, 17.0%, 23.5%, and 2.2%; 'God is the Creator of man' was held at 56.6%, 18.5%, 22.3%, and 2.6%; God became man and died on the cross for all people was stated at 65.0%, 12.5%, 20.2%, and 2.4%; the existence of hell was stated by 54.3%, 20.2%, 23.2%, and 2.4%; belief in reward or punishment after a person's death was at 47.6%, 18.5%, 30.8%, and 3.0%.

In the entire school population in 2017, 23.9% of respondents accepted the thesis that people will resurrect with their soul and body after death, 36.9% stated that only souls will live on after death, 9.6% stated that after death, neither the soul nor the body will live, 7.8% stated that there will be no Final Judgment, 21.4% stated they are undecided in their opinions and 0.4% did not give an answer. If we combined the first two answers, then we could say that 60.8% of the respondents accept the truth of the faith about the immortality of the soul (in 1988 at 77.3%, in 1998 at 68.6%, and in 2005 at 73.4%). In the years 1988–2017, the rate of approving the dogma about the soul and body resurrecting decreased by 6.9% and youth approving the thesis that after death, only human souls will live also decreased by 9.6%. On the other hand, the indicator completely questioning life after death increased (from 4.7% to 17.4%) as well as those who were undecided (from 16.4% to 21.4%).

Among high school youth in 2017, 59.2% of respondents declared that for them, Jesus Christ is primarily God (the Son of God), 13.9% stated God and man, 5.9% stated he was an outstanding historical figure, 8.2% stated he was a legendary figure, a myth, 11.8% stated hard to say, and 1.0% gave no answer. If we consider the first two answers to be appropriate, then 73.1% of the school youth surveyed admit to the Divinity of Jesus Christ (in 1988 it was 86.7%, in 1998 – 85.2%, in 2005 – 90.2%). However, it is significant that Jesus is much more often referred to as the Son of God than as the God-man (a 45.3% difference). 14.1% of the respondents from among the whole group of students do not recognise the Divinity of Christ and every tenth respondent has at least difficulties in recognising Christ as God, which shows a serious swaying of their stance towards the Christian faith.

High school students now question the basic truths of the faith increasingly often, such as the existence of God, the creation of the world and man, the existence of the Holy Trinity, the revealed character of the Bible, the saving mission of Christ, the afterlife, heaven and hell, and the resurrection of the body. The indicators of respondents who did not believe in these dogmas of the faith did not usually exceed 15%, but more often they were not able to give an answer. The choice of the answer “hard to say” was probably dictated by various factors, such as lack of interest in religion, agnosticism, uncertainty as to what one believes in, security or an unreflective acceptance of the faith. The selectivity of attitudes towards the dogmas of the faith was manifested in a particularly explicit way with respect to eschatological issues and was more characteristic of a certain “deficit” of Church religiosity than of autonomous and individualized religiosity. The collected empirical data undoubtedly testify to the weakening of religious faith in youth circles in Poland.

The process of selectivity in the attitudes of high school youth towards the dogmas of the faith actually goes back to the relativization of religion itself. Many Poles, even those who describe themselves as believers, do not admit to the exclusive truthfulness of their own religion, seeking truth in other religions as well, and take the Christian truths into account contextually. God, in whom they believe, sometimes has little to do with the Christian God. He is not a God who we should subordinate our lives and needs to, but He is the one who should justify our human needs and life projects. Some believers “piece together” their religious “jigsaw puzzles” from various scraps and shreds of ideas. The phenomenon of religious relativism is confirmed by the results of opinion polls and sociological research.<sup>5</sup>

Many young people try to shape their faith in their own way, becoming their own directors, but not according to the expectations and precepts of the Church (“Church of bricolers”, “a bricoler mentality,” “a bricoer biography,” and “I am the Pope”). In any case, they do not unquestionably and absolutely accept the heritage of the Church’s faith. Changes in religious (dogmatic) awareness are not really occurring in a spectacular way, but they are happening, and perhaps even irreversibly, at least in the near future. Our sociological research ascertains that there is a slow erosion of traditional religious

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<sup>5</sup> Józef Baniak, *Religia katolicka i Kościół rzymskokatolicki w opiniach młodzieży polskiej. Od akceptacji do kontestacji* [The Catholic Religion and the Roman Catholic Church in the Opinion of Poland’s Youth. From Acceptance to Contestation] (Kraków: Zakład Wydawniczy NOMOS, 2015).

beliefs. The “religious faces” of young people are becoming increasingly diverse, ambivalent, selective, and in the minority they are clearly unorthodox. Sometimes, it is more important that someone believes at all rather than what they believe in.

### 3. Religious practices among the youth

An important manifestation of the youth's religiosity is their participation in religious practices. Participating in Sunday mass comprises a part of the strictly required model of religious life and is strongly emphasised in parish pastoral work. The faithful are obliged to participate in the Mass liturgy on Sundays and holy days of obligation. The degree of religiosity among young people and adults can be determined to a certain extent based on their participation in cult practices and the liturgical life of the Church. While at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s, sociologists did not notice major differences in the level of religious practices among youth and the adult generation, at the turn of the century and later on, these differences began to be more clearly marked. Belonging to a specific age cohort is an important factor differentiating religious practices. It can be assumed that differences in religious practices between high school youth and adults will increase.

In the entire school youth population in 2017, 19.0% of respondents reported that they attend Mass every Sunday, 22.1% almost every Sunday, 14.0% about one or two times a month, 19.9% only on big holidays, 12.5% only on the occasion of a wedding, funeral, etc., and 9.2% do not attend Sunday mass at all. In the years 1988–2017, after a slight increase in regular Sunday mass attendance in 2005, there was a clear decrease (a 15.3% difference), as well as going to mass almost every Sunday (a 14.3% difference). There was a significant increase in attending Sunday mass only on special occasions or their complete lack of attendance from 11.8% to 41.6% (a difference of 29.8%). Combining the first two answers, we get an indicator of attendance on every or almost every Sunday: in 1988, it was 70.7%, in 1998 – 53.5%, in 2005 – 61.1% and in 2017 – 41.1% (a difference of 29.6% across the 29 years). Therefore, the drop in attending Sunday mass in youth environments is clear, although not dramatic.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Maria Agnieszka Sroczyńska, *Rytuály w młodzieżowym świecie. Studium socjologiczne [Rituals in the World of Youth. A Sociological Study]* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo FALL, 2013).

The second important religious practice is going to the Sacrament of confession and receiving Holy Communion, especially during the Easter period. Sociologists use the term “paschantes” in describing the practice of going to confession. In the strict sense, the word “paschantes” means the proportion between the number of those who go to confession and receive communion at Easter and the number of those who are obliged to perform this practice in a given Church’s territory (e.g. parish, deanery, diocese) or civil territory (e.g. village, city, the whole country). In the light of current sociological research and public opinion polls, the number of “paschantes” can be estimated at 75%. However, it should be remembered that sociological data, based on the declarations of the surveyed people regarding their behavioural participation in religious practices, are overstated in relation to the real behaviours by 10% to 15%. Perhaps the “paschantes” indicator in Poland does not exceed 60%.

In 2017, 2.2% of respondents reported that they went to confession several times a month, 32.4% went once a month, 0.4% several times a year, 33.8% once a year, 10.2% once every few years, 5.2% not even once in several years, 9.6% did not go at all and 6.3% gave no answer. A close comparison of data from 1988–2017 is made somewhat difficult due to the different multiple-choice selection of answers in individual studies. By combining the first four responses, we get the indicator of *paschantes* in 1988 to be at 76.8%, in 1998 it was 79.8%, in 2005 at 83.8% and in 2017 at 68.8% (a difference of 8.0%).

In 1988–2017, the *paschantes* decreased from 76.8% to 68.8% after a slight increase from 1998–2005. A departure from performing the Easter practices (*paschantes*) is more pronounced than neglecting Sunday practices (*dominicanes*). This decrease in the Sunday and Easter turnout is not a continuous process, there is a decrease only in some social circles, and in others there is an increase, thanks to which the final balance of religious practices does not show dramatic negative changes. In Poland’s society, the growing secularization and individualization, as well as the growing scepticism towards religion, are partially neutralised by the opposite trends in the form of the evangelising forces of the Catholic Church and other religious communities aiming to institutionalise religiosity.

In the entire school youth population, every fifth respondent reported that they pray at home every day (20.0%), 11.6% do it every few days, 1.9% only on Sundays and holidays, 15.3% from time to time, 10.2% pray at home only in more important life situations, 12.3% very rarely, 24.8% do not pray at all and 3.8% gave no answer. In the years 1988–2017, the indicator of people praying on a daily basis decreased systematically (a drop by 31.3%).

Combining the “very rare” and “not at all” answers, we obtain the practical indicators of those who do not pray at home: in 1988 it was 13.9%, in 1998, it was 21.3%, in 2005, it was 24.4% and in 2017 it was 37.1%. The daily prayer potential among youth environments decreased significantly.<sup>7</sup>

The last issue discussed in the framework of religious practices is religious lessons at school. In the early 1990s, religious education in state schools became a controversial subject, both before the return of religion to schools and after the announcement of introducing religious instruction to schools in mid-September 1990. For some, it was an act of historical justice after the removal of religion from schools in the 1950s, for others it meant an attack on secularism and school independence. Even some of the clergy and lay Catholics expressed concerns about whether catechization in school would bring greater losses to religious education than profits, because teaching religion in the Church building can provide a better religious atmosphere and bonding with the parish. Proponents of religion classes in school were convinced that school is the right place for catechetical work and evangelisation. The activities undertaken by a school and its catechesis are not mutually exclusive, but on the contrary, they are even complementary, because the common goal of schools and the Church is to bring the student to full maturity.

In the nationwide survey from 2017, 76.3% of the high school students surveyed stated that they regularly partake in religion classes, 9.3% do so irregularly, 11.9% do not attend at all, and 2.4% gave no answer. In the entire school population, 47.1% of respondents want religion classes to take place at school, 9.7% want it in the church, 25.5% responded they were indifferent, 5.1% stated it was hard to say, and 12.6% gave no answer. In comparison, it is worth adding that according to Poland's nationwide CBOS survey from 2016, 75% of the secondary school students surveyed attended religion classes (at 85% in cities with less than 20,000 residents, to 49% in cities with more than 500,000 residents). In the entire population, 40% of respondents assessed religion classes as interesting, 38% treated it just like any other classes with nothing special about it, and 22% said they are boring, since nothing important happens there. 50% of the surveyed youth were in favour of an optional form of religious education in schools, 14% wanted option-

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<sup>7</sup> Krzysztof Kosela, “Religijność młodych Niemców i Polaków” [“The Religiosity of Young Germans and Poles”], in: *Katolicyzm polski w warunkach Unii Europejskiej. Szanse i zagrożenia, obawy i nadzieje* [Polish Catholicism in the European Union's Conditions. Opportunities and Threats, Fears and Hopes], ed. Józef Baniak (Poznań: Redakcja Wydawnictwa UAM – Wydział Teologiczny, 2004), 123–153.

al classes in catechetical parish centres, 17% wanted compulsory religious classes in schools, 2% wanted obligatory classes in catechetical centres and 17% stated it was difficult to say.<sup>8</sup>

It is highly probable that in the near or distant future, school catechesis will not boast such massive participation as today. On the one hand, secularisation processes will continue to have an effect on Polish society, and on the other hand, there will be new competitive offers against religious education at school (e.g. ethics, religious studies). Much will also depend on religious and lay catechists who will improve and make their classes in schools attractive. Today, the question is what should be done to make the massively catechised youth show greater interest in religious issues, to make school catechesis more effective and contribute to shaping their moral attitudes based on universal values.

Reports based on sociological surveys and public opinion polls allow us to conclude that the percentage of people who abstain from religious practices is increasing among young people, and the percentage of those expressing doubts about the faith is also increasing, especially in relation to the institutional Church. Perhaps the specific type of traditional religiosity has ceased to be attractive to part of the young generation of Poles who either tend to be religiously indifferent or seek their own ways of expressing their transcendent longings and searches. If this bi-directional trend persists and even deepens, then the polarisation of attitudes and behaviours towards religion in youth environments in the future and in the entire society can be predicted. The thesis about the progressive differentiation or pluralisation of Poland's religiosity, but also on the secularisation of the religious awareness of young Poles, is already being legitimised, at least partially.

The studied secondary school students are characterized by a decreasing level of positive religious self-declarations and self-identification with religious practices. The results of this sociological research seem to suggest the ideas of a schematic change in the global attitudes of the young generation of Poles towards religion, meaning on the level of the so-called national religiosity. The wavering of the faith's continuity and the marked changes of discontinuity point to the trend of the growing role of an individual's choice at the expense of its "inheritance" (habitual faith). Even if the individualisation

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<sup>8</sup> Magdalena Gwiazda, "Religia w szkole – uczestnictwo i ocena" ["Religion in School: Participation and Evaluation"], in: *Młodzież 2016. Raport z badania sfinansowanego przez Krajowe Biuro ds. Przeciwdziałania Narkomanii* [Report Financed by the National Office for Combating Drug Addiction] (Warszawa: CBOS, 2016), 141–148.

of the religiosity of Polish youth is not a universal phenomenon, a Church religiosity prevails in Poland, and these problems are slowly growing. As to young people emigrating from the Catholic Church, we can speak of this as a fact that is occurring as a social phenomenon. This emigration is happening gradually and not necessarily without the return of those who are now emigrating from the Church.

Two general conclusions seem particularly important. The first concerns "nature" and the second concerns the "quality" of the religiosity of Poland's youth. As for "nature", it is not easy to say what the majority of young people understand by religion. It seems that for about half of the respondents, God appears to be a personal being, watching over the world, caring for people, as well as rewarding and punishing us. For a certain number of young people, faith is associated with the vague sense of "Someone" existing outside of this world, a Spirit, Higher Power or some undefined Reality. When we go from the question "are you a believer?" to the question "do you believe in a personal God?" it transpires that more youth describe themselves as believers in the existence of God than believers in a personal God. In reference to about 30% of the surveyed youth, we could say that they are deists rather than theists (they do not believe in a personal God, although they admit to some religious beliefs).

As far as the "quality" of religiosity among young Poles is concerned, we can first of all state that it is to a great extent religiosity of a selective nature, to some extent inconsistent and incomplete, and with strong individualistic tendencies. High school youth increasingly often question the basic truths of the faith (God's existence, the creation of the world, the existence of the Holy Trinity, the revealed character of the Bible, and Christ's salvific mission). The ratio of respondents who did not believe in the dogmas of the faith did not usually exceed 15%, but most often they were not able to give an unambiguous answer. The selectivity of attitudes towards the dogmas of the faith was manifested in a particularly explicit way with respect to eschatological issues and was more about the nature of the "deficit" of Church religiosity than about an autonomous and individualised religiosity.

#### **4. Transformation dynamics in the religiosity of high school youth**

Despite the undoubted changes in the religiosity and morality of young Poles after 1989 and the emergence of new religious movements, even

non-Christian, as well as strong atheist and indifferent trends, the thesis of “saying goodbye to a Catholic country” is at least premature, just as treating Poland as an enclave or reserve in post-Christian Europe. Nevertheless, we should consider the slow diversification of traditional religiosity and Churchliness both towards its negative modelling (it is not accepted in its entirety, but only partially, a selective Catholicism) and also positive (the consolidation of traditional contents in a fundamentalist or non-fundamentalist perspective), syncretic (religious concepts are taken out of their original context and filled with new contents), and even “weak” atheism (the lack of interest in matters of religion, or in the perspective of agnosticism or religious indifference). In any case, the weakening of Church ties in Poland will be faster than the loss of religious “substance”. The religious identity of high school students is becoming more variable, flexible, to some extent processual, and far from any final personal identity project.

In the synthesising summary, we acknowledge selected indicators of religiosity in order to show its state and the dynamics of changes in the years 1988–2017. In 2017, 88.7% of the school youth surveyed declared belonging to the Roman Catholic Church, to other Christian confessions and other religions (a decrease of 9.3% as compared to 1988); deeply believing and believers included 53.9% (a decrease of 28.4%); youth’s religiosity being the same as their fathers at 32.3% (a decrease of 4.3%); youth’s religiosity the same as their mothers at 30.4% (an increase of 2.9%); personal unchanged religiosity at 24.6% (a decrease of 9.1%); faith as a source of meaning in life at 32.5% (a decrease of 33.8%); religious faith affects one’s everyday life at 58.1% (a decrease of 20.2%); experiencing God’s closeness at 23.2% (a decrease of 4.9%); faith in the existence of God (in 2005–2017) at 68.8% (a decrease of 18.0%); faith in the existence of the Holy Trinity at 53.7% (a decrease of 22.0%); faith in God as the Creator of the world at 57.4% (a decrease of 22.2%); faith in God as the Creator of man at 56.6% (a decrease of 15.9%); faith in Divine Providence at 65.0% (a decrease of 16.1%); faith in the Divinity of Christ at 73.1% (a decrease of 13.6%); belief in the fact that God became a man and died on the cross for all people at 65.0% (a decrease of 22.1%); faith in the resurrection of the soul and body at 23.9% (a decrease of 6.9%); faith in reward or punishment after death at 47.6% (a decrease of 23.2%); faith in the existence of hell at 54.3% (stable, unchanged); there is one true religion at 26.7% (a decrease of 11.0%); religious faith can provide man with support and a sense of security (in the years 1998–2017) at 60.0% (a decrease of 16.0%); practicing systematically at 25.3% (a decrease of 22.7%); participating in the Mass every Sunday at 19.0% (a decrease of



15.3%); confession at least once a year at 68.8% (a decrease of 8.0%); daily prayer at 20.0% (a decrease of 31.3%).

The average indicator referring to selected manifestations of religiosity in 2017 was 47.0%, and the drop in the approval of selected religious elements was at the level of 15.7%. These data prove that the processes of the secularising religious awareness of school youth in Poland, especially after 2005, have accelerated significantly. It is worth emphasising, however, that in the years 1998–2005, secularisation processes were somewhat slowing down, which even meant there was an increase in the approval of certain elements of religiosity within a few percentage points. After 2005, secularisation processes began to gain momentum again, and perhaps they will progress, embracing a growing circle of Polish youth. According to the aggregate indicator, in 2017, the state of their religious condition (47.0%) was higher by 15.3% than the state of their moral condition (31.7%), but in the years 1988–2017, changes in the religious condition were at a faster pace (a decrease of 15.7%) than in the moral condition (a decrease of 10.4%). These data have only an approximate and simplified character and point to certain tendencies and directions of changes in the religiosity and morality of Poland's youth.

### **Concluding remarks**

If we were to distinguish three scenarios relating to the future of religion and the Church, they would include a scenario of a decline in sense (regress, progressing secularisation), a growth scenario (a religious revival, the “spring” of Christianity) and a stabilization scenario (maintaining the *status quo*), in the light of Poles' predictions and data from public opinion polls and sociological research. The most likely scenario would be the first scenario, then the third and the least probable scenario would be the second one. Despite this pessimistic declaration according to the Church's perspective, the results of sociological research and public opinion polls show that it is impossible to rule out different directions of these transformation processes. Social processes, especially those of a religious nature, are hardly predictable, and what seems unlikely at the present moment, in other changing circumstances becomes probable. In addition to the growing secularisation trend, models of in-depth religiosity can be shaped through religious movements and communities as well as Catholic associations.

After almost three decades of socio-political and cultural transformations, religiosity in Poland's society remains at a relatively high but changing level. Changes in social structures are much faster than in the axiological sphere. If we discuss new differences in the religiosity of Polish society, they are not so much something radically new and unknown so far, but rather the intensification of certain processes that have an earlier origin, both in the processes of social modernization and in the context of the globalising world. In the future, processes of "de-churching" (weakening bonds with the Church) are more likely to occur than secularisation understood as parting with Transcendence.

All of these phenomena must be studied not so much as certain "states of affairs," but rather rapidly changing "processes" in quite a sleepy massive Polish Catholicism. Religiosity is not a kind of enclave in which no changes are being made, despite significant transformations in other areas of social life. The mass migration of young Poles to the West in the last dozen or so years and its intensification, perhaps in the future, will change religious diversities significantly and contribute to the secularization of religious awareness of young people in Poland and abroad. The religious consequences of the mass geographical and social mobility of young Poles have not yet been thoroughly examined; they are only *in statu fieri*. The nationwide sociological research carried out in the years 1988–2017 shows the extent of the transformations in the religiosity of young people.

We are in the midst of great processes of change; hence, it is not easy to form a final opinion on the future manifestations of a crisis or a religious revival. It seems that the variant of adapting to the European "norm" is more likely to happen than the variant of the mission of Poles towards secularized Western Europe. Secularisation in youth environments is a growing process perceived by young people themselves. When it comes to the religiosity of Polish youth, much has changed between 2005 and 2017. The tension between tradition and post-modernity is continuing, and so the direction of changes in religiosity is difficult to predict. One thing is certain: it is no longer possible to win all of Poland's young people for the Church or the Christian religion.

The above descriptions and sociological analyses covered only selected issues related to the confessional and religious affiliation of young people. It is impossible to draw conclusions about everyone's religious life in conditions of radical socio-cult changes in our country. Nevertheless, sociological studies are of great importance for understanding the strength and character of Polish religiosity, even if they do not give definitive answers to all emerg-

ing questions and doubts. There were forecasts in the early 1990s regarding the impermanence of religiosity in its pre-1989 forms on the decline of the importance of folk, manifested, patriotic and "processional" religiosity, entailing an increase in religious indifference, even including atheism and practical nihilism. These ideas were not fully verified, and significant shifts appeared in the years 2005–2017, even in the most basic components of religiosity.

In the future, there will perhaps be an increase in the number of individuals adopting attitudes towards religion within the limits set by the individualist or even postmodern way of thinking. These individuals will understand their faith in their own way, not entirely fitting within Catholic orthodoxy. This phenomenon will increase regardless of whether there is a rapid process of secularisation in Poland (unlikely), or whether we will observe such processes creeping in but accelerating secularisation (the most likely scenario of the development of religiosity). We can assume that Poland will remain a "special case" in secularized Europe, with a significant role played by religion and the Church in social life. The thesis of "saying goodbye to a Catholic country" in relation to Poland is at least premature, also with reference to youth circles. Poland is included among the countries with a high religiosity and Church culture.

The results of sociological research can become good indicators for the Church's further pastoral work. Sociologists of religion, like sociologists in general, are not free from the temptation to improve society, in this case to improve the Church as an institution and the Church as a community of believers. Balancing between the temptation of excessive optimism resulting from the massive character of Polish religiosity, and pessimism suggesting the little to do "Christian" nature of this religiosity, it is necessary to undertake an intense evangelization. It is obvious that the present youth will decide about the religious face of Polish society in the 21<sup>st</sup> century ("young people are the future of the Church," "young people are tomorrow's Church"). Nothing has yet been exaggerated; there are various scenarios for changing the religiosity of young people in the future.<sup>9</sup>

In the context of sociological considerations, the question arises as to the future of religiosity (also of the Catholic Church) in our society: will it

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<sup>9</sup> Sławomir H. Zaręba, *Religijność młodzieży w środowisku zurbanizowanym. Socjologiczne studium teoretyczno-empiryczne* [*The Religiosity of Youth in an Urbanized Environment. A Theoretical-Empirical Sociological Study*] (Warszawa–Rzeszów: Wydawca POBITNO OFICYNA, 2012).

resist various secularist tendencies that will prevail in the future religiosity? Will the generational differences in religiosity diminish when the youth reach a fully mature age and establish their own families, or will they also represent in the future a level of religiosity lower than their parents? Will the expansion of liberal secularism not entail a reduction in the importance and role of the Church in society? How will it function under the conditions of social pluralism and pragmatic democracy? Will the Christian hue of our culture be maintained?

It is not easy to answer these questions. However, one should consider the diversity of the types and variants of religious life present in various dimensions. In conditions of emerging new interests and pluralistic needs, the operation of the “ideological market” will expand, where the *religious deal* will be one among many. Various group interests, including those of an anti-Church and anti-religious nature, will be more and more clearly articulated. The current shape of the religiosity of high school youth and its transformation in the years 1988–2017 indicate the accelerating processes of secularisation in our country.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Janusz Mariański, “Religijność maturzystów puławskich w procesie przemian” [“The Religiosity of High School Graduates in Puławy in the Process of Transformation”], *Zeszyty Naukowe KUL* 2 (2017): 225–251.

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