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Special Issue Reprint

Christian Prayer

Social Sciences Perspective

Edited by
Małgorzata Tatala and Konrad Janowski

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Christian Prayer: Social Sciences Perspective

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Guest Editors

Małgorzata Tatala
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About the Editors

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Małgorzata Tatala is affiliated with the Department of Developmental Psychology at the Institute of Psychology, the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin (KUL), Poland. Her career began as an assistant lecturer, progressed to assistant professor, and she currently serves as a university professor. She also holds a Master's degree in theology. In 1999, she earned a PhD in the field of psychology from the Institute of Psychology, KUL. Her doctoral dissertation "The Development of Religious Feelings in Preschool Children" was honored with the KUL Rector's Award. In 2011, she achieved her post-doctoral degree in psychology, with the focus on developmental psychology.

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Preface

This reprint, titled “Christian Prayer: Social Sciences Perspective”, represents a significant contribution to the study of Christian prayer, transcending traditional theological frameworks. The articles included in this Reprint explore prayer as a multidimensional process that, while inherently religious, is also deeply rooted in psychological, social, and even economic determinants.

This collection demonstrates that prayer serves as a dynamic social mechanism that fosters individual internal integration while also having impact on public and cultural spheres. It is intended for researchers, clergy, educators, and anyone seeking insights into the role of prayer in daily life. More than a theoretical study, it offers a practical account of how prayer can become a “life program”, shaping one’s relationships with oneself, others, and God.

Małgorzata Tatala and Konrad Janowski

Guest Editors

Introduction to the Special Issue “Christian Prayer: Social Sciences Perspective”

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Prayer, as a natural and fundamental essence of Christian life, is realized in the space of a dialog between man and God. While fundamentally a religious act, it is grounded in a complex interplay of psychological, social, and even economic factors (e.g., Contribution 1; Contribution 5; Contribution 6; Contribution 7). In this perspective, prayer ceases to be merely a confessional duty, it becomes a deeply personal attitude, a conversation rooted in faith in the presence of a personal God. Christian prayer permeates deep structures of life, giving it a distinct meaning and activating cognitive, emotional, volitional, and behavioral processes (Kulpaczyński 2000; Walesa 2005). It emerges as a multi-dimensional process supporting well-being and personality development.

Each type of prayer addresses different human needs: from adoration, which expresses joy in God’s greatness, through thanksgiving, the gratitude for gifts received, to petition, that is focused on coping with difficulties and satisfying needs (Walesa 2005; Tatala and Pékala 2024). Regardless of the form, be it spontaneous individual practice or formalized liturgy, prayer fosters the inner coherence of a person and nurtures relationships that extend the realm of the Sacred, directly affecting one’s social environment.

As identified in the subject literature (Krok 2014; Gurba et al. 2015; Froese and Jones 2021; Zalewska-Meler 2025), prayer can fulfill the following purposes:

1. Be a tool for emotional and cognitive self-regulation, thereby fostering internal integration and contributing to axiological redefinition, i.e., the conscious ordering of a hierarchy of values in the face of external chaos.
2. Be a spiritual adaptive strategy which can serve as the foundation for psychological resilience, helping individuals constructively cope with trauma and experienced stressors.
3. Be a process for constructing and stabilizing identity at the individual and social levels. It can provide a sense of subjective continuity of the “Self” by facilitating a dialog with the Transcendent, allowing individuals to build a personal life narrative. Simultaneously, it may help shape group identity by fostering a strong sense of belonging within the community of believers (Stepulak 2003; Walesa 2005; Contribution 14).

It should be emphasized that the contemporary phenomenon of prayer is shaped by dynamic socio-technological transformations, necessitating a redefinition of traditional forms of piety and their place in the social structure. Additionally, a growing secularization of public spaces alters perceptions of sacred monuments, which are no longer viewed solely for their liturgical functions, as noted by Contribution 8.

Alongside developments in cultural and architectural spheres, the practice of prayer is also being challenged by the rapid expansion of modern technologies. This raises questions

about the boundaries between prayer and contemporary digital tools, which are becoming new forms of mediation for religious practices (Contribution 2).

The reprint, comprising 13 chapters, serves as an interdisciplinary platform for showcasing the latest research findings and addresses the central research problem of the social dimension of prayer. By analyzing the unique nature and functions of prayer, the authors examine its impact on quality of life as well as its role within public, cultural, and economic contexts.

The reprint begins with the article by Henryk Jarosiewicz and Jagoda Stompór-Świdorska: “Religiousness in the Light of Kazimierz Twardowski’s Concept of Actions and Products” (2024). The authors review religiosity and prayer through the framework of actions and products developed by Kazimierz Twardowski, a distinguished Polish philosopher, psychologist, and logician. Within this framework, both actions and products are understood as mental phenomena. The article presents a psychological model of the personal subject and depicts a mechanism in which religiosity is a product of a person’s actions. Not only does this approach explain the essence of morality, how a human-being becomes good, it also describes how one becomes a participant in the eternal life. Prayer, portrayed as a relational and communal process, aids in achieving this goal. By utilizing Twardowski’s conceptual apparatus, the authors describe prayer not merely as an internal experience but as a concrete activity directed toward the Sacrum. This action generates lasting products in the spiritual and social spheres, including the shaping of moral identity and moral self-improvement. In this way, prayer becomes a tool for personal formation in relation to the Sacrum and to others.

The subsequent section of the Special Issue shifts its focus to empirical analyses on the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in prayer practices, the validation of the Prayer Importance Scale, the impact of prayer on human development through choral singing, and, finally, the role of prayer in consumption.

A significant complement to modern perspectives on prayer is the study of attitudes toward AI as a means to support prayer practices. In “Artificial Intelligence as a Tool Supporting Prayer Practices”, Contribution 2 examine the attitudes of Poles toward the use of AI in Christian religious practices, focusing specifically on individual prayer. Their research was conducted via a diagnostic survey on a nationwide sample of 1018 adult respondents. Empirical data revealed that a higher frequency of prayer and a strong religious commitment were associated with more skeptical and conservative views on AI tools in the religious context. Conversely, younger generations showed greater openness to technological support in their relationship with God. Furthermore, the place of residence (urban vs. rural) was found to influence perspectives on the digitalization of prayer practices. Findings also revealed a phenomenon of sustained attachment towards the AI tools: most users planned to continue using AI-based religious applications, with forecasts indicating a gradual adoption by new target groups. The authors emphasize that the growing role of technology in spiritual life calls for a profound reflection on the ethical and theological boundaries of applying AI to the human–God relationship.

In the third chapter “Measurement Invariance of Prayer Importance Scale: Religiosity, Gender, Age”, Contribution 13 present the next phase of their work on the validation of the Prayer Importance Scale (PIS; Tatala and Wojtasiński 2021). The authors subjected PIS to a psychometric evaluation of measurement invariance across a sample of 566 respondents. The results demonstrate that the scale measures the subjective importance of prayer in a consistent manner, regardless of gender, age, or level of religiosity, which significantly enhances its value as a robust tool for studying prayer.

The reprint’s research perspective is further expanded by the chapter “Flourishing through Prayer by Singing in a Liturgical Choir” authored by Contribution 9, who as-

sess the impact of prayer performed through choral singing on human development. They conducted 16 in-depth interviews with members of 14 choirs, accounting for the respondents' gender and family status. The analyses of the empirical data lead to the identification of five main categories and four subcategories, confirming the assumptions of the adopted theoretical model. The research results indicated that four engagement mechanisms—embeddedness, immersion, socialization, and reflectiveness—produced two types of benefits: those associated with singing in any choir and those specifically related to singing in the liturgical choir dedicated to glorifying God. It was discovered that choral singing positively influences performers' health and well-being while fostering the development and enhancement of their competencies and skills. These benefits were argued to stem directly from the communal nature of the liturgical choir, which imparts a new value to music by distancing it from the pursuit of personal ambitions. Additionally, a connection between prayer and spiritual well-being was discovered, which is significantly linked to the prayerful role of singing, the harmonious alignment of one's actions with personal values, and the active pursuit of happiness and flourishing (eudaimonia). It was concluded that membership in a choir fosters deeper involvement in Church life and intensifies the relationship with the Sacrum through meditation on biblical texts and a more profound experience of the liturgy. These benefits are directly tied to the liturgical nature of choirs and the fulfillment of the chorister's vocation, namely prayer through song.

The interdisciplinary character of the reprint is enriched by the chapter from Katarzyna Jabłońska-Karczmarczyk: "Towards Socially Responsible Consumption: Assessing the Role of Prayer in Consumption" (2024). The author evaluates prayer from the perspective of economics and business ethics, examining the attitudes of the socially responsible consumer. The study centers on a group of young consumers whose growing purchasing power significantly shapes contemporary market trends. It examines the relationship between prayer practices and consumer choices motivated by a concern for social welfare. Drawing on the results of research conducted via an online survey, the author demonstrates that prayer extends beyond being a purely internal religious act and translates into concrete pro-social behaviors in the area of consumption. The findings also identify specific areas of responsible consumption where prayer plays a significant role in the choices made by young people, promoting attitudes of ethical engagement in the marketplace.

In the chapter concluding the empirical section of the Special Issue, "'Violent Times Call for Violent Prayers': 'Divine Violence' during the COVID-19 Pandemic in the Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries, Nigeria", Contribution 4 explores African religiosity from the perspective of prayer practices during traumatic situations. The author examines the concept of "violent prayer" within the Nigerian Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries (MFMM) movement, investigating its dynamics during the COVID-19 pandemic. This form of prayer is found to transcend the boundaries of individual communication with the Sacrum, becoming a vital communal ritual that unites believers in the face of external threats. The mechanism of "violent prayer" emerges as a specific form of spiritual warfare, aimed at confronting antagonistic metaphysical forces that followers identify as the spiritual source of global crises and human suffering. This form of prayer is deeply rooted in African Pentecostalism, which interprets crises such as the pandemic as spiritual battles against malevolent forces or spirits. A crucial element of this analysis is the concept of "divine violence", understood not as an act of destruction, but as a sovereign and just act of God, essential for restoring disrupted order during a time of existential uncertainty. In-depth interviews and participant observation presented in this article offer a reliable account of motivations and dynamics of those engaged in this expressive form of prayer. The findings stem from ethnographic research on Nigerian Pentecostalism conducted since 2021, situating "violent prayer" within a broader historical and cultural context, linking

it to Africa's colonial past and ongoing socio-political struggles, where both physical and spiritual violence have served as tools for liberation.

The two subsequent chapters highlight the importance of religion and prayer in the literary studies of two areas: pro-social behavior and the 20th-century Russian Orthodox culture.

Contribution 11 review the works of Felix Timmermans to explore a potential connection between prayer and pro-social attitudes. Their analysis presented in "The Prosociality of Prayer in the Literary Fiction of Felix Timmermans" leads to a compelling conclusion that the relationship between prayer and pro-social behavior is complex and does not provide a conclusive answer. While evidence suggests that there is a relationship between prayer and pro-social behaviors of the characters inhabiting Timmermans' fictional worlds, this holds true only in certain (and certainly not all) situations. The positive impact of prayer is confined to certain characters who experience internal transformation through prayer, enabling them to fulfill specific roles within society. This article aims to foster a productive dialog between social sciences and literary studies, both of which may share a common interest in exploring prayer as a universal religious phenomenon.

Contribution 12 investigates literary representations of prayer in the works of two authors from the first wave of the Russian emigration in "Prayer Motifs and National Consciousness in Changing Conditions of Reception: As Exemplified by the Works of Ivan Shmelev and Boris Zaitsev". Russian literary–historical discourse considers these texts classical masterpieces of 20th-century Russian Orthodox culture, as they illustrate the historical spirituality of pre-revolutionary Russia. The analysis of prayer imagery shows the conventions used by both writers as well as the circumstances in which the studied novels were written. In the context of emigration, prayer was treated as a guarantor for preserving national identity, which was under severe threat at that time. Literature that mythologized the concept of "Holy Rus" was aimed at preserving Russian cultural continuity within the émigré community, amid the homeland's total rejection of traditional values. After the fall of the Soviet Union, these works were rediscovered in both Russia and worldwide, along with the broader corpus of the restored émigré literature, revealing a richness of ideas and poetics that sharply contrasted with the thematically stagnant socialist realist literature.

Subsequent chapters explore interactions between prayer and the socio-economic sphere, addressing topics such as the management, financing and multifunctional use of sacred sites and the institutional–economic framework of the Catholic Church's operations in Germany.

Contribution 8 investigate the system of financing sacred monuments in Poland. In "Public Funds as a Source of Financing Revalorization of Sacral Historical Monuments: The Example of Poland", the authors emphasize the dual nature of these sites: on the one hand, they serve as spaces for religious and prayer practices; on the other, they are cultural assets of vital importance that help shape national identity. Further, it is posited that property owners and public authorities share the responsibility to protect and maintain the sacred heritage for future generations, justifying the use of public funds to finance their restoration. Empirical data regarding the scale of support and funding sources for these sites is also discussed, highlighting the specific characteristics of sacred monuments, and detailing their multi-dimensional social, cultural, and religious functions as defined by Polish legislation.

The discussion of the topic is complemented by Janina Beata Kotlińska's paper: "Historical Sacral Objects as Places of Prayer—But Not Only: Towards Multifunctionality" (2024). In this article, Kotlińska examines the challenges posed by the rising maintenance costs of sacred historical buildings amid a progressive decline in the number of faithful and visitors, alongside an increase in social awareness of the untapped potential of these

sites. Two solutions are proposed: broadening and diversifying the use of sacred spaces as well as leveraging the added value these buildings bring to local communities.

This section is concluded by the article of Anna Mizak and Mariusz Sokołec, titled “Stability of the Roman Catholic Church Financing System Based on Germany” (2024), which explores the institutional and economic foundations of the Catholic Church’s operations, using the example of the Catholic Church in Germany. It underscores the critical importance of establishing a stable financial system that enables the Church to fulfill its mission amid demographic and socio-cultural changes. The authors provide a detailed presentation of the primary sources of income and allocation of financial resources, arguing that churches have long served as vital centers of psychological, existential, and social support within communities, fulfilling social and cultural roles beyond their religious functions. The paper makes a significant contribution to the discussion on the State-Church relations that concerns the public funding of religious communities, viewed through the prism of their multifaceted functions.

Further reflections on the existential and systemic significance of prayer presented in this reprint demonstrate how internal coherence and spiritual values translate into theoretical and practical foundations of economics.

Contribution 1 analyzes the influence of scholastic thinkers from the School of Salamanca on the development of free-market economics, which are sometimes treated as synonymous with economic liberalism. Their heuristic narrative presented in “The Entrepreneur’s Prayer and the Scholastic Inspirations of Free-Market Economics” ranges from the biblical protection of the poor, aptly exemplified in the words of Psalm 86, to a prayer for generosity, mistakenly attributed to St. Ignatius of Loyola.

From the perspective of the Anglo-Saxon classical school, which defines a socio-economic order supporting the free-market ideals, there is a recognized need for supplementary assumptions beyond formal legal safeguards to effectively shape a free-market mechanism for exchanging goods and services. These assumptions are identified in three institutionally recognized dimensions: the freedom to choose the parties participating in exchange; the reliance of productive efficiency on the division of labor; and the private ownership of the means of production and goods acquired through exchange. Viewed as the foundations of a just social order, these factors are reflected in the teachings of Spanish scholastics, who were inspired by the Scripture and the Church’s tradition of saints.

This reflection predates Adam Smith’s widely recognized contribution, considered as the beginning of modern economics, by over two hundred years. A rigorous scholastic analysis of the natural law thus initiates doctrinal inquiry, fostering the development of free-market theories and socio-economic doctrines. This framework, presented through a heuristic interplay of historically conditioned contexts and the evolving nature of humanity’s prayerful relationship with God, provides inspiring insights and reinforces Christianity’s intellectual heritage as a foundation for a socio-economic order rooted in socially responsible entrepreneurship.

The discussion on economic ethics is concluded in the chapter by Anna Horodecka and Andrzej J. Żuk titled “The Common Good According to Great Men of Prayer and Economists: Comparisons, Connections, and Inspirations for Economics” (2023) where economic interpretations of the common good are juxtaposed with perspectives from Church authorities, such as St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, Jacques Maritain, Popes John XXIII, John Paul II, and Francis.

The primary aim of this analysis is to explore potential avenues for developing economic theories of the common good through the lens of the Catholic social teaching. It discusses the prevailing one-dimensional and relativistic approaches within the current economic frameworks and highlights the promises of the multi-dimensional, universal

perspectives rooted in Catholic social principles. It also highlights the contributions of “great men of prayer” as inspirations for a deeper understanding of the common good in economics.

The works collated in this Special Issue share a common goal: to understand the dynamics through which religious practices, particularly prayer, shape individual experiences, evolve in response to technological and cultural challenges, and influence socio-economic processes. We hope this publication sparks meaningful dialog on the phenomenon of prayer, inspiring researchers and practitioners alike to explore its deeper significance in today’s contemporary world.

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Article

Religiousness in the Light of Kazimierz Twardowski's Concept of Actions and Products

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Abstract: The aim of the present article is to approach religiousness and prayer with the aid of the conceptual apparatus of K. Twardowski's concept of actions and products. Both actions and their products are psychic phenomena, so the idea is to present the psychological mechanism of the formation of religiousness as a product of a person's actions. This requires a description of the phenomena that are the object of morality, as well as of religion, which is a special aspect of morality. In order to make this description clear, a psychological model of the personal subject will be outlined to explain not only the essence of morality, i.e., how man becomes good, but also how he comes to partake in eternal life.

Keywords: religiousness; prayer; Kazimierz Twardowski's concept of actions and products; model of the personal subject; inner experience; religious actions and products

“Do this and you will live” (Luke 10:28)

1. Introduction

1.1. Religiousness as Signification and as a Signified Process

The term “religiousness” has different meanings in the religious tradition and in the extensive literature on the subject (Walesa 1997). With this context in mind, the present article will focus on what this term *means* in psychological terms, i.e., what psychic phenomena it signifies. We will therefore be dealing with the theoretical psychological conception of this important aspect of man's moral life.

Such a design seems to be justified also by the fact that religion and religiousness are an expression of human nature.¹ However, in order to think matter-of-factly about such subtle phenomena, one needs some notion of that nature, i.e., a model. This will allow the phenomenon of religion and religiousness to be framed in the context of (through the lens of) the *construction* of the human subject.

1.2. Holistic and Developmental Approach

Psychology allows us to look at religiousness in several complementary dimensions. This approach is indicated by the revelation itself, which states that you should love God in four aspects:² with all of your heart, with all of your mind, with all of your soul, and with all of your strength (power). In these words uttered by Our Lord Jesus Christ, the term *holes* (meaning “all”) draws attention, so let us explain how this term can be understood.

At the same time, the text by St. Paul³ features another term: *holoteleis* (“completely”). It is therefore necessary to view the human subject *holistically* with the phenomenological method, not only to take into account the complexity and the distinguished aspects of nature (holism), but also to pay attention to the final aspect (the Greek *teleis*), that is, to the maturation of the subject in each of the distinguished aspects. In particular, when we speak of “all your soul”, we mean not only the soul, which expresses itself through the body it creates, but also the spirit, or the person, who expresses himself through the psychic

life. This, too, requires clarification: what the essence of spiritual life consists of—in the language of psychology—for it is only at this level that we can speak of religiousness as a certain relationship between man and God.

Regardless of the four aspects of human nature, love is an act—an act of the entire person, in whom different dimensions can be distinguished. Referring to the title of this article, we can say that the product of love thus understood is eternal life: “Do this and you will live” (Luke 10:28).

2. The Model of the Personal Subject

2.1. The Subject of Psychology and Its Methods

Psychic facts (also called psychic phenomena) are the subject of psychology. In the Lviv school, founded by Kazimierz Twardowski, psychic facts are conceptualised as psychic actions and their products, as well as dispositions towards the formation and course of psychic facts (Twardowski 1965a, 1965b).

According to Mieczysław Kreutz, a student of Twardowski’s, a psychic phenomenon is “an object that has real existence, is psychic and given directly in experience” (Kreutz 1949, p. 350). Affections are real objects too, in the sense that they are phenomena “that are part of objective reality, independent of the cognising subject” (ibid.) despite taking place in the subject, analogous to how the functions of the human respiratory system are real. Such assumptions give rise to the following question: How does the relationship between man and God become a *psychic object*?

So as to avoid misunderstandings, it is important to emphasise that there is a difference between the things that surround us and “objects”. With the term “object” we denote the *meanings* that the *subject* gives to various aspects of reality: things, relations, and any phenomena, whether accessible to the senses or imagined or conceived of. These meanings are products not only of the action of knowing things, but also of the experience of relations. “Thanks to knowledge, we discover the meaning of particular things and advance in the understanding of these *things* themselves and of the *connections* that take place between them. For to understand is nothing else but to intellectually grasp the meaning of things or the connections between things” (Wojtyła 2021, p. 66). One of the aspects of reality captured is man’s relationship to God as it appears in psychic life, that is, either in cognition or in a lived experience.

Psychic life, too, can be given objectively, the product of which is self-knowledge. In a case like this, it becomes the subject of psychology, understood not only as the science of the soul, but also of its functions (actions) and products, as Twardowski (1965c) puts it.

As regards the adequate method of investigation, psychic objects are given in two ways: in direct inner experience, called introspection, and in reflection, which includes contents called consciousness.

The object of our analyses is religiousness understood as a relationship between two subjects—God and man—given psychologically and therefore objectively. These subjects are given differently. As viewed by Aristotle, God is not a mythical figure, nor is He a thing. God is the First Cause, i.e., the necessary explanation of what is empirically given. In other words, He is a real psychic object.

Contrary to appearances, the existence of a person is given as subtly as the existence of God. That is why the research credo espoused by St. Augustine, the “discoverer” of the method of introspection, was “I desire to know God and the soul. And nothing more? Nothing whatever” (St. Augustine 1910, p. 10). You can only see a person intellectually, that is, objectively. The person is given as an object, i.e., a product of cognition, and not merely as a unique subject that expresses himself in the external facts of culture and language, and in—given internally—a moral experience (Wojtyła 1999).

As a consequence of the above assumptions, we cannot but conclude that human actions are objective.⁴ The human subject is not guided in his actions by the products of his senses, but by created objects (or meanings taken over from others in communication) that form his image of reality. Objectively given, these are things that become his immediate

motives for action, but also goods that become his spiritual goals of action. Approaching God, as well as the relationship between man and God, as an object allows us to see the objective actions that man takes in relation to God.

2.2. Outer Experience, i.e., Observation

As an empirical science, psychology starts from experience, not only outer experience, i.e., observation, but also inner experience. Let us begin with the former, with it being the more tangible element.

The basic fact given in observation is referred to as *action*. This action is a phenomenon of two subjects coming into direct contact with each other and one of them *changing* the other in some way.⁵ These changes can be described, but also explained.

The basic mental action that occurs in observation is concerned with understanding that which is given in observation. It is not only about cognition, i.e., answering the question: “What is this?”, but is also concerned with the origins, functions, and mechanisms of the phenomenon that we refer to as “action”. This cognition is predicated on the content given in observation, i.e., sensory perceptions, and consists of classifying a phenomenon into a particular class and providing a definition; for example: a human being is a subject, i.e., an entity that exists and acts by itself (Tatarkiewicz 1988, p. 9 and ff). Explaining action requires pointing to the causes of that which is observed. It has been accepted that science is causal cognition: “*scientia est cognitio rerum per causa*” (Aristotle).

In order to explain action, the existence of certain phenomena in the subject is posited. In the concept of hylomorphism propounded by the Stagirite, action is a process involving a transition in the subject from potentiality (potency) to actuality (action), while the transition itself is caused by the soul. The soul is defined as a “substantial form” that forms matter into some specific subject with specific dynamisms (forces) and action conditioned by these dynamisms and environmental conditions.⁶ This points to the function of action, i.e., the answer to the question: Why does a given existing subject act? Wojtyła puts it as follows: “Action actualises the essence of a given being: what it is in potency becomes reality in it” (Wojtyła 2017, p. 64).

In this kind of explanation, the *mechanism* of action escapes us. Wojtyła sees this as a task for psychology: “Psychology aims at disclosing by the empirical inductive method the specific mechanism by which the will operates, and identifying the concrete motive forces which make for the realization of a chosen end. Ethical analysis on the other hand aims at fully explaining the sense of rightness by identifying and characterizing the chosen end—its moral value” (Wojtyła 1981, p. 290, n. 6).

The soul as a form is the external cause of life, whereas the efficient and final causes are internal causes (Krapiec 1959, p. 229). Therefore, in classical psychology, posited is the existence of the so-called powers of the soul, being both sensory and spiritual powers, from which the observed action is derived. By means of deduction, certain logical relations are described, e.g., that the will conditions the arbitrary actions we observe. And so the following question arises: How does that happen?

Empirical psychology, which dates from Franz Brentano’s (See Brentano [1874] 1973) *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* (1874), delves into two aspects of experience: alongside outer experience (observation), into inner experience. This experience points to a whole new class of facts that are becoming the broadly defined subject of psychology. It is not only the soul, but also its *functions* that are given in inner experience; not only the intellect, but thinking and its products, such as ideas, judgments, and produced representations of reality.

One characteristic of psychic products is that they may be obvious to the subject, but are very difficult to put into clear definitions. No one doubts the existence of love, yet it is very difficult to think clearly about it. We therefore draw on the conceptual apparatus of Twardowski’s concept of actions and products to not only *describe* psychic life, but also to adumbrate its picture, which includes the products of psychic actions (Twardowski 1999). This will help us identify the designata of terms that are commonly used but differently

understood, e.g., the heart. Thus, we take our analysis of the inner experience further, after presenting a picture of the subject.

2.3. A Psychological Model of the Personal Subject

A model is a mental image, such as that of the solar system or the nucleus of an atom. The essential functions of a model are as follows: an object-oriented representation of reality in terms of structure and function, which enables explanation of observational data. In psychology, the range of facts widens; alongside observed behaviour, there are inner objects, i.e., actions and their products, as well as dispositions, such as sensitivity, and will. The question of explaining the action thus deepens; we refer to an action *caused* from within—and only *conditioned by* an external situation as “behaviour”. This is a psycho-physical product. The meaning of the product, i.e., what we come to know and not just observe, involves psychic actions and their products. Reconstructing these actions will help us answer the fundamental question of psychology: “Why do people behave the way they do?”

In our search for the rationale elucidating human behaviour, we use the a posteriori method, i.e., we infer the cause from the effects.⁷ The explanations obtained in this way form a psychological picture of the subject. The first attempt to build a picture of psychic life was made by M. Kreutz. In *Rudiments of Psychology*, he writes: “I have already introduced the essential descriptive concepts I had in mind. For the sake of clarity, I shall also discuss the logical relations in which these concepts remain among themselves, and the real relations in which their objects remain among themselves; this too will make it possible to present a picture of psychic life as captured by the conceptual apparatus introduced” (Kreutz 1949, p. 389). We are already able to do this.

Referring to the conceptual apparatus of Twardowski’s (1965a) concept of actions and products, in the image of psychic life, we distinguish *actions*—e.g., a lived experience, their sensory *products*—in this case, an affection, actions, and spiritual products—imagination, and the image of the “I”, as well as *dispositions* towards the formation of actions and products. Dispositions are certain material conditions, such as sensory sensitivity, but also the will.⁸ We illustrate this below (Figure 1).

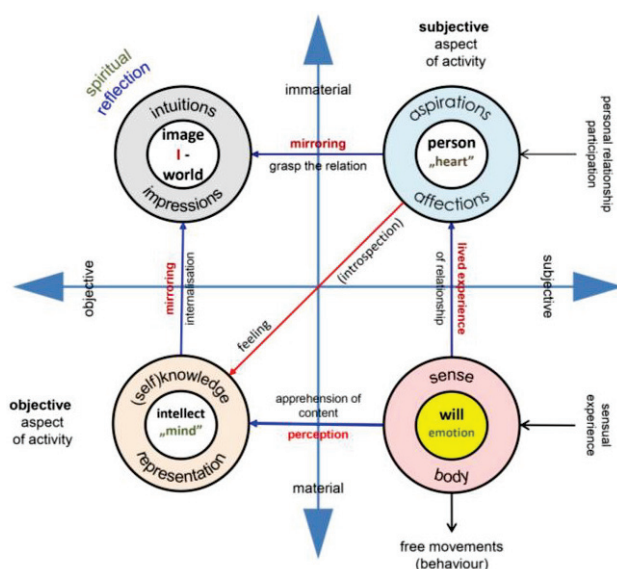


Figure 1. A model of the personal psyche organisation.

2.3.1. Subject Actions and Products: Both Material and Immaterial

The dynamism of the subject comprises the reactive dynamism of the body, the sensory dynamism, which is expressed in emotions and in the actions of sensory cognition, and the dynamism of reason, which is expressed in the actions of the will and the intellect. In

observation (outer experience), we see that vegetative changes in the body and changes in the senses (consisting of receptors, nerve pathways, and the central nervous system) are expressed in bodily reactions (symptoms). These reactions are subject to the influence of the will (integration), which results in free movements (behaviour). In addition to behaviour, which is a non-transient and impermanent product, we distinguish other products; a transitive product is action, i.e., a change in external material, where work can serve as an example. In contrast, a permanent non-transient product of the will is character, understood as capacity (*"habitus operativus"*): "something at our disposal whenever we wish" (*"quo quis agit, cum voluerit"*) (Woroniecki 1986a, p. 332).

At the same time, the subject has an inner experience, in which the products of a lived experience are given. Both bodily changes and sensory changes (emotions) are experienced, as well as—from a certain point onwards—actions of the will. Affections (the so-called bodily and sensory affections) are products of a lived experience of a bodily state and emotions. These are lived experiences of the *"passio"* type. On the other hand, the lived experiences that K. Wojtyła describes as *"action"* are noteworthy. These are lived experiences, the *"matter"* of which is the will's own actions. The will, as a *disposition*, is the innate (human) ability to govern oneself, which we see in free movements such as walking, speaking, etc. These lived experiences should be referred to by a different term than *"affection"*, namely the term *"wanting"*. Analogous with the way in which an affection is a lived experience of pleasure, i.e., opening up to a certain relationship with the world (or shutting oneself off: experiencing unpleasantness), wanting is a lived experience of an object that becomes a final cause of action. The will is given in two ways: the spiritual will as an *aspiration* of who the person who wants to be—by way of illustration, a spouse—and as a disposition in the *effort* to attain the goal.

Through the lived experience, human nature is given to the person himself, as it were, *"from within"*, as an affection (a desire—a lived experience of some lack) or wanting (which expresses an aspiration). We refer to these qualitatively new immaterial phenomena as the *"heart"*. A lived experience reflects a personal subject's state; the overall state of the heart is a state of the *"person"* as an immaterial being. A person enters into personal relationships with other people and can be in love, angry, etc., while his free movements merely express these inner states.

2.3.2. Objective Actions and Products: Both Material and Immaterial

The objective aspect of activity is related to the cognition of things and grasping relations. The act of cognition is a *process* that—at the sensory level—consists of the reception of content given by the change brought about as a result of the sensory organs picking up material energy. These are accidental attributes (colour, size), and at the mental level, it is the form of a thing, or its essence, which is grasped intellectually. These actions are referred to by the term *"objectivisation"*, as the content of cognition is *"taken off"* the thing (object). In this way, things and phenomena exist mentally in the form of objects. Apart from knowledge of the world, the subject also has knowledge of the person. The product of the objectivisation of one's own desires and aspirations is self-knowledge.

Both knowledge and the products of lived experiences are given in the form of an objective image of reality, referred to as consciousness. The origin of consciousness, as illustrated by the model, is twofold, being the products of lived experiences and cognition—both at different levels. Some objects arise spontaneously, e.g., impressions and intuitions (i.e., a reflection of experienced values), while others arise through the so-called substitute actions that create a higher level of psychic life.

Through the internalisation of the content of cognition, a new qualitative group of phenomena emerges, which are referred to as inner life, deeper than psychic life. This life develops from the products of the sensory psyche.⁹ As K. Wojtyła emphasises, *"the person as a subject is distinguished from even the most advanced animals by a specific inner self, an inner life characteristic only of persons [...]. Inner life means spiritual life. It revolves around truth and goodness. And it involves a whole multitude of problems, of which two*

seem central: what is the ultimate cause of everything and—how to be good and possess goodness at its fullest. The first of these central problems of man's interior life engages cognition and the second desire or, rather, aspiration" (Wojtyła 1981, pp. 22–23).

It is only in such a broad view of the personal subject that it is possible to utilise content given as inner experience, the source of which is not only the intellect, but also the human heart.

2.4. Inner Experience

The primary inner experience is the *sensing of one's own body*.¹⁰ Man experiences his body (through internal sensory organs: sensation, balance, etc.) so that he has some intuitive image of his own body. Sensation conditions conscious action, i.e., a deed. In our developed model (Figure 2), the relationship between consciousness, in which the person as the "I" is reflected, and conscious action is of fundamental importance. This relationship is exhaustively presented in K. Wojtyła's *Person and Act*.

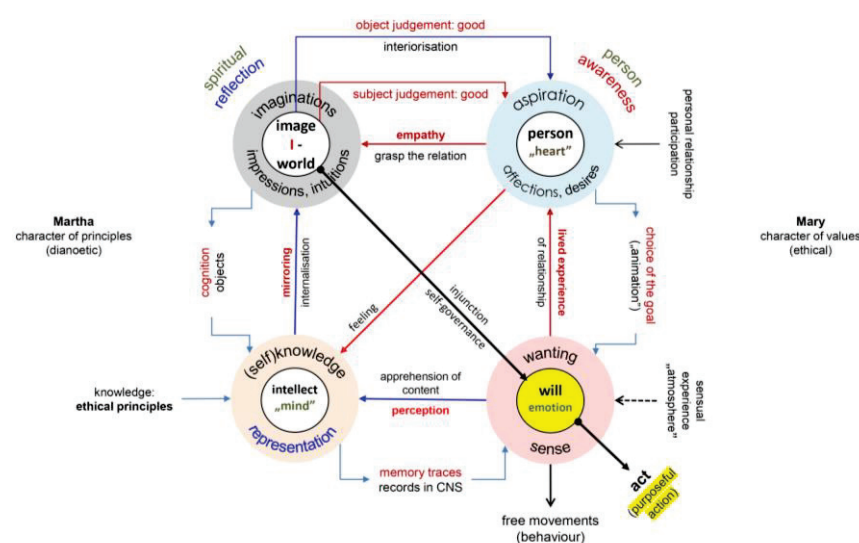


Figure 2. A model of the self-determination mechanism.

The basic empirical fact that is given to us in connection with the human subject is *free movement*. The explanation of this fact points to another fact, given in inner experience, namely freedom. The mechanism of freedom, referred to by Wojtyła as self-determination, is shown in Figure 2. It consists of two elements: self-possession (sensation) and self-governance. To govern oneself means for a man to be able to “dynamise” himself as the first “object” of action. The person “wants to” and can act freely, experiencing his efficacy, which entails responsibility for his own acts. “Man’s nature differs fundamentally from that of the animals. It includes the power of self-determination based on *reflection*, and manifested in the fact that a man acts from choice. This power is called free will” (Wojtyła 1981, pp. 23–24 (emphasis ours)). The will is free, because it is subject to a person’s freedom, which Wojtyła puts very aptly when he writes that “*the will is the power of the freedom of the person*” (Wojtyła 2021, p. 224).

The second aspect of inner experience is the *feelings* through which one has knowledge of what one is experiencing. The objects of these lived experiences are bodily states (e.g., hunger), the value of the relationship with the environment and—discussed above—one’s own action (the lived experience of efficacy).

The third aspect is reflection, which makes way for Descartes’ famous “*cogito ergo sum*”. This is an action of the spiritual soul itself. It is through it that some *sense of self* is formed. In the image of the world, one’s own “I” emerges. Despite the variable content encompassed by this personal pronoun, the “I” itself appears to be unchanging, and thus we speak of the “I” identity (Jarosiewicz and Stompór-Świdorska 2022).

2.5. Processes of Self-Organisation

2.5.1. Thinking and Choices

The subject model introduced allows for a fundamental thesis: God can be known—although not directly, but indirectly, through his creations—and that is real knowledge. You can also address him in your behaviour, in the most real way. How is this psychologically possible?

From earliest childhood, people's actions are free. Still—their object matures. We say that man organises himself to act, and this preparation (exercise)—in each act—stays in the psyche, understood as organisation. In our model, this is illustrated by the three “brackets”, namely cognition, object judgment, and choice (Figure 2). This is done in two different ways. Two typical characters emerge, known and distinguished already by Aristotle: the dianoetic character and the ethical character.

The dianoetic character is formed on the basis of representation. In the ego concept, these are the so-called substitute actions.¹¹ Through these activities, artificial products, called artefacts by Twardowski, are created. An actor's performance on stage or an academic lecture are examples of such a psychosomatic artefact. “Abundant use of them—as Twardowski goes on to exemplify artefacts—is made by an actor adopting a pose in which to express an affection. In fact, however, the actor usually only presents the affection to himself, so that this pose—this psycho-physical product—is not created by the actual affection that is usually expressed in the pose, but by the representation of the affection, i.e., *affection represented*. Thus, just as this merely represented affection is a product substituting for the real affection, so this pose too is an artificial product, since it is not the real expression of affection, but only its feigned, assumed expression” (Twardowski 1965a, p. 238 (emphasis ours)).

Cognition is an action that *goes beyond* the changes that take place in the brain (in the model we refer to it as the “sense”).¹² It is the product of the action of thinking, i.e., the assignment of *object meanings* to the products of perception, which are reflected in the image as impressions (perceptions). The products of cognition, i.e., knowledge (information¹³), form *their own* representation of reality and can be stored in memory and rendered (mirrored) in reflection in the form of imagery. The aim of cognition is to apprehend the *truth* about reality, including axiological truths about the values experienced. On the basis of the representation, rational decisions about the object of the action are made. However, people do not always choose what they consider to be the object of action *adequate* for the situation. As Ovid writes (*Metamorphoses*, 7, 20): “*video meliora proboque, deteriora sequor*” (“even though I know better, I keep doing the wrong thing”). Apart from rational decisions, one observes choices resulting from subject judgements that arise under the influence of relationships with others, such as jealousy (Jarosiewicz 2013; Stompór-Świdorska and Witkowski 2011). These choices are not appropriate to the situation, but are in line with the aspirations of the “heart” (see Figure 2).

And so, we have two levels of phenomena here. Through impressions, the subject merely *orients* himself to reality, which indeed allows him to act efficiently and learn to act, but without understanding.¹⁴ As a result of thinking at the sensory level, ideas are formed, which are the expression of action planning, as well as *notions*, in which the essence of things is captured.¹⁵ The subject decides on his motives for action and “uses” his will to carry out the imagined plans.

This is a style that we can describe as Martha's approach to life (from the parable of Martha and Mary, Luke 10:38–42). On the other hand, there appears a style that Mary can illustrate. Whereas Martha is guided by objective judgement, Mary is guided by empathy and subjective judgement. Empathy is the grasping of relationships in which the subject participates. We distinguish between these two phenomena. The term “choice” encompasses any actions whose object is to change a person's life situation, i.e., his relationship with the world or with God, to a more developmentally advantageous one (in general, development is determined by relationships). The aim, for example, is to start a family. A choice “animates” the will. The term “decision”, on the other hand, covers actions that

reveal one of the available courses of action. The object of choice is the good/value that attracts the will, while the decision is an act of the intellect.

The subject not only perceives the material aspects of things, but is also capable of grasping values, especially the relationships between people.¹⁶ The value is the relation of something corresponding to someone because of something;¹⁷ water corresponds to the body because of physiology, and this “correspondence” is experienced precisely as the value of the thing (relation). As a result of the apprehension of the value (relation), ideas are also formed. It should be noted at this point that we have two types of ideas: reconstructive ideas and creative ideas. *Reconstructive* ideas arise from sensations as new ways of acting. *Creative* ideas, on the other hand, arise as products of the action of grasping the value of relationships with the world, whereby the person creates ideas of relationships that are more optimal. Thus, for example, an angry person, as a result of being disrespected by people important to him, spontaneously ideates a change in these relationships, which may take the form of revenge. The moment the choice is made, the value ideated becomes the *goal*. Goalless action is inconceivable. In doing so, it is important to distinguish between observational data, which show us that an action always has some *direction*, and inner experience data, which allow us to talk about the goals of the action. A goal is what we call “the result that gives a given process, before it has even been realised, its direction” (Woroniecki 1986a, p. 62). This result can be recorded as an instinct or it can be created. Indeed, the soul is understood by Aristotle in two ways; as “ἐνέργεια” (“energeia”), i.e., action (activity), and as “ἐντελέχεια” (“entelecheia”),¹⁸ as a purpose. In the case of the human being, goals are not ready-made, since the spiritual soul “is a system intrinsically independent of matter, capable of cognition and purposeful aspiration” (Wojtyła 1999, p. 75). The aspirations (intentions) that arise in the “heart” are achieved in *rational* ways, as these *ways* are provided by the mind (thinking). Actions of the will and of the intellect complement each other, as do the goal and the manner of achieving it.

The products of cognition—both the representation of reality and the products of choices—are fixed in the material subject as memory “traces” and movement “patterns”. Every affection and aspiration that is revealed in an act causes the subject—and his actions—to become this or that of the following:¹⁹ in moral terms—good or bad, and in relation to God—religious or not.

2.5.2. An Act, or Free Action

The task of the above-outlined model is to explain the mechanism of the act, or free action, of which morality is a product. The literature distinguishes between three stages of such an act: preparation, resolution, and execution (Woroniecki 1986b).

In the preparation stage of an act, i.e., an action in which the free “I” decides something about himself on the basis of his own judgement, we have distinguished two aspects (see Figure 2). Aspiration can be a product of an objective judgement that is predicated on a representation of the world. On the other hand, there is a predominance of subjective judgements, which pertain to relationships. The way St. Paul sees it, this is the case of “people who are still worldly” (1 Cor 3:1). Self-knowledge is the prerequisite for a balanced inner life. In this way, the sensual man (“*psychikos*”) and the bodily man (“*sarkinos*”) complement each other.

Along with the injunction (resolve), we observe behaviour whose intention is to achieve aspirations and goals. These goals express the “principles” that Martha follows, or the “values” that Mary experiences. This is not about a one-off action, but is about *exercise*, i.e., a series of actions guided by ideas, be they reconstructive ideas (as in a “sensual man”) or creative ideas (as in a “bodily man”).

The function of acts, i.e., intentional actions, is to change: to change a thing (as a result of cognition—such as coal taking on the meaning of fuel and being used as such), to change a subject that has been objectified (e.g., treatment), or to change a relationship between two subjects given as objects. The function of religious acts and religiousness as their product

(which we will describe further on in the paper) is to establish “a personal and positive relationship between man and God”, as Walesa (2005, p. 13) puts it.

3. Religiousness and Prayer in the Concept of Actions and Products

3.1. Religion and Religiousness

As Woroniecki writes, “we use the word «religion» to denote an objective set of beliefs linking mankind to God, rather than a *subjective* preoccupation with them, and we do not link it to the concept of some fixed inner disposition, or virtue. A more fitting word here is «religiousness»; for as a matter of fact we say of *people* that they are religious or non-religious, by which we signify their constant spiritual frame of mind in relation to God” (Woroniecki 1986b, p. 272 (emphasis ours)). If we turn our attention to people, i.e., to how beliefs affect their psychic life, the adopted model of the personal subject allows us to indicate not only how to understand faith, but also how to understand religiousness.

In the model of the subject we are adopting here, religiousness is a subjective phenomenon. It is the product of judgements, which—according to St. Paul—are the product of the spiritual person (1 Cor 2:15). The content that the subject recognises as good in judgement is experienced as aspirations. These aspirations are a state of consciousness. In the “heart” of man, we find lived experiences of various origins, including both sensory and relational affections, as well as those that originate in the mind. By experiencing the content of a reflective image of reality, knowledge of God (religion), which is something objective (given objectively), becomes the person’s personal relationship to God. We are then talking about *religious awareness*.

The distinction between subjective and objective phenomena is significant from yet another point of view. As we have already mentioned, a person’s inner life has two—complementary—poles: cognition and aspiration. The spiritual soul as a substantial form is the external cause of the subject’s existence, while in the living personal subject, we distinguish two internal causes: the efficient and the final cause. The “I” as the *efficient* cause is given—in the lived experience—in relation to the will as the power at the moment of resolution (injunction—“I want”) or consent. Resolutions concern clear motives or modes of action, as they are the products of reflection. In contrast, a person who aspires towards an optimal relationship with the world is working towards a final cause. Although the concept of action includes its purpose—for there is no purposeless action²⁰—the purposes of action are not always clear, i.e., are reflection-based. For when we talk about purposes, it is important to bear in mind their various origins. A purpose can express one’s own objective aspirations, which are clear, such as starting a family, but a purpose can also express the feelings and desires or goals and aspirations *picked up* from others. Choices made under the influence of affections or the will of others are often unclear as to their origin. Participation in the lives of others is one of the most important phenomena in spiritual life, as it is the source from which faith is drawn and customs are adopted (Jarosiewicz 2020). However, the aspirations that are formed in childhood require reflection. As Wojtyła writes: “For me, the fundamental problem was not one of a conversion from unbelief to faith, but rather one of a transition from an inherited, received faith that was more emotional than intellectual to a conscious, fully mature faith given intellectual depth after a personal choice” (Frossard 1984, p. 50).

3.2. The Objective Meaning of Religion and Religiousness

When we speak of the objective meaning of religion and religiousness, we mean the fact that although God is a spirit, He can be a *real* psychic object. He is therefore—in some way—“accessible” to beings capable of cognition, personal lived experience, and reflection.

Furthermore, it should be stated that He can be the object of the action of the heart and of the mind, of the dynamism of the will and of the spiritual soul (of the person), since such aspects of the life of the personal subject have been distinguished in the model presented. In other words, the terms “religion” and “religiousness” can denote *qualitatively different* phenomena in the human subject. However, they are all connected to God.

In terms of the *genesis*, God becomes the content of our psychic life in two complementary ways. He is an entity that is cognised and experienced as a value. Both cognition and the lived experience are special, as God is an immaterial subject. On the other hand, cognising God and experiencing God are possible because in the human subject—as we have demonstrated—we find immaterial phenomena: consciousness based on the lived experience, and reflection as a spiritual action. In the first aspect, i.e., in the lived experience, the origin of aspiration is value, understood as a relationship involving man and God. This relationship is given not only intuitively or affectively, but objectively. In the second aspect, i.e., cognition, man accepts on faith the existence of God, or accepts this existence on the basis of “consistentisation” (Aristotle) as the necessary cause of all that exists. This is because every product presupposes certain actions and their agent.

God can be an object given in the act of cognition or the adoption of the content of cognition on the basis of trust placed in someone who communicates that content and the *belief* that the subject that has been cognised exists objectively. The object of faith is not the essence of the subject, but its existence. For Aristotle, “Faith (πίστις) (pistis) is the act of reason by which *we accept* as true some assertion” (see III, 428 a 20–23). The reflective subject is therefore capable of recognising a judgement as truth, without having to refer to his own data (perceptions) and his own thinking. For it is one thing to know something and another to recognise its existence in an act of judgement. For Woroniecki, faith is a judgement: “It is, as far as the object is concerned, a theoretical action, because the content of beliefs does not comprise our actions, but truths that exist outside of us, over which we have no influence. [...] A judgement of faith is therefore a judgement made by virtue of someone else’s testimony, about the object which one has not come to know oneself” (Woroniecki 1986b, p. 67 ff).

Religiousness is a qualitatively separate phenomenon. It involves that which the person does as a transcendent subject, for a clear distinction must be made between the reflective “I” and that which can be labelled as “mine”. Affections and lived experiences condition morality, but it is only the act that actually is morality.

3.3. Prayer and Act as an Expression of “Service to God”

Following Woroniecki, we have assumed that when we talk about religiousness we pronounce on people, and not on religion. As we analyse religion and religiousness, we point to three aspects: actions, their products, and the disposition behind them. Religion is—in this conceptual apparatus—a product of cognition, i.e., a belief system that can be subjected to analysis. In the analysis of religiousness, on the other hand, this belief system interests us, but as a source of knowledge on the basis of which the subject creates *his own representation* of God and of the relationship between God and man. Furthermore, the intellectual representation of the world is the basis for acts of the will, as the will strives for good the way the intellect presents them to it.

Striving after the good is in fact nothing other than love, as Plato has already emphasised. In the dialogue *Symposium*, he makes Diotima say the following statement: “[...] they love not what is their own, unless perchance there be some one who calls what belongs to him the good, and what belongs to another the evil. For there is nothing which men love but the good” (Plato 1892, p. 576). But love can express itself in a variety of ways. According to J. Woroniecki, “love, and by extension Christian perfection, consists of two factors: actual love, i.e., prayer and habitual love, i.e., the performance of duties, or in other words—a good life” (Woroniecki 1988, p. 5).

3.3.1. Religious Actions and Products

Religiousness as a product is about two types of phenomena: transitive and non-transitive, which in turn are divided into non-permanent and permanent products. Both permanent and impermanent products express the human subject, in each of the four aspects indicated earlier. These are the products of thought—intellectual representations,

of the heart—aspirations, of the spiritual soul—reflection, and the products of the will—intentional actions (cf. Figure 2).

Transient impermanent products are acts that express the free person (spiritual soul) and the will. The significance of the will is fundamental in the moral life. The Lord Jesus states: “Do this and you will live.” An act is the product of an action of the will, which is “at the disposal” of a person at the moment of self-determination. Woroniecki, referring to the thought of St. Thomas, writes: “Piety, as a moral virtue, should first of all improve the will and then only from it penetrate into all the other powers of our soul, which, under its influence, should acquire a permanent disposition towards all the actions by means of which we are to worship God” (Woroniecki 1986b, p. 279).

The person is their efficient cause: at the moment of resolution, he commands the will to act. Noteworthy, whether an action is good or bad, religious or not, is determined by its purpose. The will chooses certain affections, desires, or objective goods as the goal of action. If the object of choice is the good of God, then the product of such acts is *worship*, i.e., reverence for the Creator. Additionally, sensual aspirations and desires also influence *ways of acting*; in morality, we are dealing with what is known as “wanting thinking”, i.e., it is the intentions of the “heart” that trigger the search for ways to realise them.

The essence of worship is “zeal, that is, a constant readiness of the will for everything pertaining to the worship of God, such a deep devotion to its divine affairs and responding readily to God’s every call to do His service” (Woroniecki 1986b, p. 279). In the course of worship, *permanent* transient products are also produced, such as *places of worship*, artistic creations (e.g., songs), or written *accounts* of religious events or experiences.

Next to external products, there also appear *non-transient* products, i.e., changes in the subject himself. These too can be impermanent and permanent. They are more difficult to describe, as they are mainly about sensory experiences and interpersonal relationships.

Impermanent non-transient products are current thoughts and ideas. At the time of the Annunciation, Mary “wondered in her heart what this salutation could mean” (Luke 1:29).

Impermanent subjective products are also lived experiences, both sensory and spiritual ones. A lived experience is a response to value. As Hildebrand writes: “If man is to become a bearer of moral values, he must experience various conscious acts: first, the act of cognition, of understanding morally relevant values; then, of the free response to the goods that are the bearers of morally relevant values, i.e., the response to value” (Hildebrand 1985, p. 171). A value can be given spiritually: “[...] our joy presupposes the knowledge of an object and its importance, and that the process by which the object in its importance engenders the response is itself a conscious one, a process which goes through the spiritual realm of the person.” (Hildebrand 2007, p. 26).

The content of a religious experience is special. It is a *numinous* (from Latin “numen”, meaning “deity”) experience. Following R. Otto (1924), C. S. Lewis assumes that it is a “*mysterium tremendum et fascinans*” (“a fascinating yet horrifying mystery”). In *The Problem of Pain*, he provides a number of examples of such experiences: “In Pagan literature we find Ovid’s picture of the dark grove on the Aventine of which you would say at a glance *numen inest* [Fasti, III, 296]—the place is haunted, or there is a Presence here; [...] Ezekiel tells us of the «rings» in his Theophany that «they were so high that they were dreadful» [Ezekiel 1:18]: and Jacob, rising from sleep, says «How dreadful is this place!» [Genesis 28:17]” (Lewis 2001, pp. 7–8). Such experiences are not treated by Lewis pejoratively, for the reason that they are irrational, but as the legitimate voice of the heart, which in our model we define as participation in the life of someone.

In the development of religiousness, a lived experience, whether sensual or spiritual, is complemented by ethical reflection: “The Numinous is not the same as morally good, and a man overwhelmed with awe is likely, if left to himself, to think the numinous object «beyond good and evil». This brings us to the second strand or element in religion. All the human beings that history has heard of acknowledge some kind of morality; that is, they feel towards certain proposed actions the experiences expressed by the words «I ought» or «I ought not»” (Lewis 2001, p. 10). It is the voice of the natural conscience. Piety is born, as

Lewis argues, “when the Numinous Power to which they feel awe is made the guardian of the morality to which they feel obligation” (Lewis 2001, pp. 11–12).

The third non-transient product is reflection, which makes it possible to grasp the “I”–“You” relationship. To use Edith Stein’s (1988, 1989) idiom, there emerges the act of empathy through which it is possible to grasp the relationship with the other. In the relationship with “You”, an image of the “I” as the efficient cause of action emerges. This is a product of identification. This image is often intuitive and therefore unclear. To the other person, one can *attribute*—in reflection—various qualities, or lived experiences, which may be a *projection* of the subject’s own affections.

The “response” to the relationship with the other person takes the form of one’s own judgement (called “subjective”, as opposed to mature “objective” judgement), the product of which is to seek to participate in the other person’s life or to break off the relationship. K. Wojtyła expresses this conflict in a poetic form: “I have decided to remove the word «mine» from the collection of the words I use. How can I use this word if I know that everything is Yours? (. . .) I fear the word «mine», although at the same time I love what is contained in it. I fear it, however, because the word always puts me before You” (Wojtyła 1984, p. 8).

The fourth subjective product, which is non-transient, is the act, or the act of the will. This is preceded by the choice of a goal. The aforementioned participation consists of a person choosing what is chosen by another important person with whom the subject identifies (Jarosiewicz 2020).

3.3.2. Piety as a Product of Action

The permanent *non-transient* product of the acts expressing a person’s aspirations or religious principles is *piety*, understood as character, i.e., a certain permanent capacity. A man who performs religious acts acquires certain qualities, characteristics, and attributes that these acts produce in him. Henry Newman refers to this as *perfection*: “By perfect”—he writes—“we mean that which has no flaw in it, that which is complete, that which is consistent, that which is sound—we mean the opposite to imperfect” (Newman 1893, p. 382). In line with what we wrote earlier, it can also be assumed that by doing moral good, a person becomes good.

The aforementioned acts can be divided into life actions—preparatory and religious ones, in the proper sense. “If you ask me”—Newman continues—“what you are to do to be perfect, I say, first—Do not lie in bed beyond the due time of rising; give your first thoughts to God; make a good visit to the Blessed Sacrament; say the Angelus devoutly, eat and drink to God’s glory; say the Rosary well; be recollected; keep out bad thoughts; make your evening meditation well; examine yourself daily; go to bed in good time, and you are already perfect” (Newman 1893, pp. 382–83).

3.3.3. Prayer as an Act of the Heart

Expressing one’s love for God includes *individual prayer*, understood as being a conversation with God (Tatala and Wojtasiński 2021), and *religious rites*, in which communal prayer takes place. Prayer has its origin in piety. As Woroniecki writes: “As soon as in the will arises the desire to devote oneself, without hesitation, to the service of God, its first resonance is sure come from the reason, which is most closely associated with it, and which, inspired by this desire, will itself begin first to declare in its interior its worship of God, and then to express it also outwardly, by voice, by posture, by some or other actions, or finally even by the various things which it will offer in service to the worship of God” (Woroniecki 1986b, p. 281). Woroniecki emphasises the complementary link between prayer (actual love) and actions (habitual love). Piety is expressed in prayer, while prayer permeates the acts of the will, i.e., the readiness to serve God. We are dealing with actual love “when man, by conscious acts of reason and will, turns to God and expresses to Him all that he owes Him: honour and praise, thanksgiving, apology, petitions, etc.” (Woroniecki 1988, p. 4).

Here, we find all four aspects of love highlighted in our model (Figure 2). God, who can be grasped by reason, becomes, in the process of internalisation, the object of the

aspiration of the “heart”. The heart animates the will, whereby the person undertakes God’s works and acquires God’s character. The fourth aspect is reflection. The “I” stands in relation to the “You”. On the formal side, prayer is communication between two persons who meet and talk. As St. Francis de Sales writes, preparing for prayer is a process “which consists of placing yourself in the presence of God (*Mettez-vous en la presence de Dieu*), and in imploring his assistance” (St. Francis de Sales 1885, p. 49). The first condition to be met is (1) “a lively and attentive comprehension that He is present in all things and in all places [...] [in a reflection]”; (2) “that God is [...] in your heart, nay, in the very centre of your soul, which He enlivens and animates by his divine presence [...]”; (3) “[in] consider[ing] our Saviour in his humanity [...]”; (4) “in imagining to ourselves [...] Jesus Christ [...] in his sacred humanity” (pp. 49–51). The second condition is perhaps even more important than the other three. The function of prayer is not the exchange of information, but the communion of people. “Prayer is always an act of love, where that love is actual, conscious, uniting us by inner predilection with God, whom we come to know by reason and faith, and who has revealed to us that He wishes to dwell in our souls” (Woroniecki 1988, p. 30).

Prayer as “actual love” is a peculiar “act” of the heart. Not only does the “I” stand in relation to “You” in prayer, but it also participates in the other person’s nature. “By such participation”—writes K. Wojtyła—“in someone’s nature, not only do *we depend* on him, but *we belong* to him in the innermost way. (...) What is more, through such participation, we inwardly become like him, we become, in a way, “another him”, of course—to the extent that the intensity of this participation itself allows us” (Wojtyła 1999, p. 114 (emphasis ours)).

The truth about God’s dwelling in the soul is linked to hope, which—next to faith in his presence and love—plays an essential role in prayer. Hope, writes Woroniecki, “positions itself in relation to God in a twofold manner, i.e., from two viewpoints: firstly as to that supreme infinite and immutable good which we desire one day to possess, and secondly as to him from whom we expect help in obtaining it. Through hope we expect God from God, “*Deuma Deo*” (Woroniecki 1986b, vol. 2, p. 170). He is not only the final cause, as man strives towards Him, but also the efficient cause. This removes the suspicion of idolatry.

4. Conclusions

When we talk about religion, we point to the content related to God and the relationship between man and God. As regards the term “religiousness”, man is its designatum. Using the conceptual apparatus of the concept of actions and products, we have been able to show how the personal subject is “constructed”. The person, who through reflection appears as the transcendent “I”, is the cause of the free act, i.e., the agent of the morality for which he takes responsibility. But he is also a subject experiencing relationships. Through the lived experience, he becomes the final cause of activity, that is, he realises some goods, including God’s goods. With the aid of the psychological model that depicts man as a spirit, soul, and body, we have illustrated the meaning of the Lord Jesus’ call to love God with all of one’s heart, all of one’s mind, all of one’s soul, and all of one’s strength. Love takes the form of piety, or acts of free will, and the form of prayer, in which the person stands in the presence of God and participates in the life of God Himself. The product of such participation is the character of Mary. A religious person can also realise the principles he is obliged to adhere to by faith, and this is Martha’s character. These are the two aspects that make up religious acts. Still, “Mary has chosen the better part, and it will not be taken away from her” (Luke 10:42).

The model of the subject we have developed affords us a new perspective on the crucial problems of man’s inner life, for we distinguish not only between material and immaterial phenomena (Figure 1), but also—alongside conscious phenomena, which are products of experiences—the image of reality as a purely spiritual phenomenon. Not all of a person’s desires and aspirations are reflected in this image. Consequently, not all personal relationships (the “bodily man”—to use St. Paul’s idiom), of which the subject is aware,

are reflected and become the subject of a person's decision (the "spiritual man"). Hence, the analysis of phenomena in the psychoanalytic paradigm: "unconscious (subconscious)–conscious" is complemented and deepened when we take into account the tensions between consciousness and reflection. This finds application in the study of religious development and in the analysis of problems that arise in the "I"–God relationship (e.g., the conflict between the freedom of a person and the duty they feel to realise the will of God).

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Notes

- ¹ K. Wojtyła writes: "Religion, like ethics, is also in a large measure something which blossoms from the human nature. Humankind did not need Revelation in order to be religious in some way, just as it did not need religion in order to determine for itself the framework of natural morality. The rational nature of man itself forms the basis not only of ethics, but also of religion. Reason itself leads man to the conclusion that there exists the First Cause who is the First Being, namely God. Practical and moral consequences of this conclusion belong to ethics. Since God is the First Cause to whom everything, and thus also man, owes existence, so man, as a being capable of knowing this truth, must give it expression in his internal and external life. As he does this he is satisfying an elementary obligation of justice. If, however, he fails to do this, he is falling short of justice. In this way religion, the worship of God, belongs to the program of natural morality. Religion does not primarily imply ethics, but ethics does primarily imply religion as the elementary sign of justice." (Wojtyła 2017, p. 227).
- ² See Matt 22:37, Luke 10:27, Mark 12:30.
- ³ 1 Thess 5:23: "Himself now the God of peace make sanctify you completely (holoteleis) and entirely your spirit (holoklēron) and soul and body blameless at the coming of the Lord of us Jesus Christ may be preserved (holoklēron)" (literal translation, from the Greek-English interlinear New Testament at https://biblehub.com/interlinear/1_thessalonians/5-23.htm (accessed on 1 December 2023)).
- ⁴ As J. Woroniecki points out: "... the morality of each of our deeds depends primarily on its object. We call 'the object of the deed' that which we want to obtain or achieve with it. These will not just be some external things, but equally inner states, thoughts, affections, desires, etc. (...) In a word, anything that impels us to act, that, having come to our mind as an end worthy of desire and attainable, takes us out of the passive state and brings us into the active state, all this we call the object of the act" (Woroniecki 1986a, pp. 260–61).
- ⁵ This is a fundamental assumption behind Aristotle's "dynamic" theory: "According to this theory, it is part of the essence of an act to «give oneself». In this sense, «all being is good». And so Aristotle denotes act and action with the same term ἐνέργεια. Every act is capable of action. In order for it to actually engage in action, certain conditions must be met, in particular the acting agent must: (1) come into contact with the body which is to receive action from it; (2) differ from it in some respect, because «like is unaffected by like»" (Aristotle 1935, p. 91).
- ⁶ "So the soul"—writes Aristotle—"must be substance in the sense of being the form of a natural body, which potentially has life potentially within it. And substance in the sense of form is actuality. The soul, then, is the actuality of the kind of body we have described" (Aristotle 1935, p. 69).
- ⁷ "For the individual manifestations of human life, man's individual lived experiences and acts constitute a set of effects. The soul is the proper and first cause of these effects" (Wojtyła 1999, p. 24).
- ⁸ "Conditions which include sensitivity, memory, imagination, disposition, inclinations, will, character, etc. (...) are covered by the umbrella term of «disposition» (adaptation)" (Twardowski 1965c, p. 244).
- ⁹ The Greek word ψυχικός indicates a connection with that which is "sensual" (Popowski 1995); cf. "sensual man", as seen by St. Paul (1 Cor 2:14).
- ¹⁰ "It demonstrates"—writes Wojtyła—"a relation to the body such as that which a subject has to an object: although this relation is not made conscious in sensation itself, through it the body becomes a certain content that simultaneously permeates

the field of consciousness. Thus, through sensation we rise above what [...] was called the subjectivity of the body itself” (Wojtyła 2021, p. 338).

- 11 Substitute actions have been described in detail by M. Kulczycki (1990). He distinguishes between (1) orientation processes, the product of which is a picture of reality, (2) decision-making processes, which serve to reveal the goals of action, (3) the construction of modes of action, (4) realisation processes, and (5) processes of behaviour control and correction.
- 12 “It is not enough”—writes K. Wojtyła—“merely to introduce this object «onto the territory» of the cognising subject, but the adoption and creation of this object is accomplished in a new way—in the cognitive image or reflection (species). Such a description of the fact of cognition indicates that it arises with the aid of some internal force that performs this adoption and cognitive expression of the object in the act of cognition” (Wojtyła 1999, p. 33 (emphasis ours)).
- 13 The term “information” can be understood as the apprehension of the form that makes a thing what it is; similarly, it is possible to grasp (comprehend) what idea was conceived by the carpenter who made a wooden table rather than a wheel.
- 14 It is noteworthy that animals orient themselves to the world given by the senses, but they do not cognise it objectively. At the sensory level, they have an emotional life, often broader in scope than that of humans, and sensory perceptions, which allows them to store sensory content in memory and learn new behaviours that can be remembered. Learning is about associating affection and sensation. Animals do not possess themselves in the form of consciousness, i.e., an image of themselves and the world, within which they can choose their goals and modes of action. At the level of the sensory psyche, there is a lack of reflective distance through which the personal subject transcends himself and creates his own goals of action.
- 15 Notions are communicated in the form of sentences. In the statement, “A triangle is a geometrical figure in which the sum of the angles. . .”, that which is perceived (three segments) takes on a new meaning thanks to what is conceived: it is a figure.
- 16 Formal relations, apprehended in the process of cognition—the relation of equality, majority, etc.—are a different thing.
- 17 “A value is not the same as the object which represents it; it constitutes a specific object-subject relationship, and expression of a particular correspondence (of some-one to some-one, of something to some-one, or of something to something as it affects some-one)” (Wojtyła 1981, p. 304, n. 52).
- 18 Greek: “something that contains its purpose in itself; a form becoming realised in the building material; a force causing the organism to develop” (Stein 2015, p. 97).
- 19 “All things subject to change and to becoming never remain constant, but continually pass from one state to another, for better or worse [...] Now, human life is always subject to change; it needs to be born ever anew [...] But here birth does not come about by a foreign intervention, as is the case with bodily beings [...]; it is the result of a free choice. Thus we are in a certain way our own parents, creating ourselves as we will, by our decisions” Gregory of Nyssa, *De Vita Moysis*, as cited in: John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, n. 71.
- 20 “There is no pointless action. (. . .) If there is actual action, there is an objective factor determining that action, there is a factor that makes the action the way it is [. . .] We call this very objective factor, which is the sufficient reason for the action, the goal. The goal (. . .) is the rationale behind action as the good towards which the action itself perceptibly proceeds” (Krapiec 1959, p. 228).

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Article

Artificial Intelligence as a Tool Supporting Prayer Practices

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Abstract: This article attempts to describe Poles' attitudes towards AI in the development of Christian prayer as a technology supporting prayer practices. Four research questions were formulated: 1. Do the frequency of prayer and engagement in religious practices influence the attitudes of Poles towards prayer programs/applications based on AI technology? 2. Does believers' age affect Poles' attitudes towards prayer programs/applications based on AI? 3. Does believers' place of residence affect the attitude of Poles towards AI-based prayer programs/applications? 4. Do current users of the prayer-supporting applications plan to continue using it, and are new believers considering using it in the future? Research hypotheses were adopted to verify the research problem, with the first, second, and third being positively verified. H1: The higher the level of prayer frequency and engagement in religious practices of respondents, the more conservative the attitude towards prayer programs/applications based on AI; H2: The age of respondents differentiates the attitudes of Poles towards prayer programs/applications. H3: The respondents' place of residence differentiates Poles' attitudes towards prayer programs/applications. H4: Most AI users plan to continue such usage in the future, while new practitioners will appear.

Keywords: artificial intelligence; Christian prayer; nationwide survey; CAWI

1. Introduction

This empirical research aimed to verify the impact of programs categorized as artificial intelligence (AI) on prayer practices, primarily individual prayer. Interest in the religious sphere of social life influenced by the increasingly popular AI technology is due to the nature of the Polish society, which is recognized by the Roman Catholic Church, despite the ongoing secularization described by Janusz Mariański as “creeping secularization” (Mariański 2018, p. 225). Furthermore, the intense development of information and communication forces researchers to reflect more deeply on AI's ethical and theological aspects. As the significance of technology grows, there is a need for a more detailed focus on research related to the ethical aspects of technological progress, “especially in the context of autonomous recommendation and decision-making systems. After all, what is technologically possible is not always ethically permissible” (Modliński and Przeglasińska-Skierkowska 2023, p. 16), especially in the area of empirical research on prayer practices.

To address this topical issue, the state of research is presented first, followed by an explanation of the term “artificial intelligence.” Subsequently, the article's objective, research questions, and hypotheses are formulated. The “Material and Method” section discusses the applied methodology and research material. In the following sections, we present selected results from nationwide research conducted in 2023 on a sample of 1053 individuals aged 15–65. The obtained results undergo a thorough analysis and interpretation, followed by discussion and comparison with findings available in the relevant literature. Finally, the most significant conclusions and practical implications are formulated.

Right from the outset, it should be emphasized that this article fills an existing gap in the global literature on the subject. Currently, there are no empirical studies directly

addressing peoples' attitudes toward artificial intelligence as a technology supporting prayer practices in the process of developing Christian prayer. Existing publications focus on the influence of religiosity on the general attitude toward AI or decision-making processes (social and moral) determined by faith in God (Mert C. Yilmaz 2023; Karataş and Cutright 2023). They concentrate on aspects such as the following:

- Ethical and theological implications (Aldén et al. 2019; Dietvorst et al. 2015; Castelo et al. 2019; Goltz et al. 2020; Jackson et al. 2015; Chan et al. 2014; Kupor et al. 2015);
- AI and religious practices (Aldén et al. 2019; Dietvorst et al. 2015; Castelo et al. 2019; Thinyane and Sasseti 2020);
- AI and religious texts (Yong Sup Song 2021);
- AI and interfaith dialogue (Yuli Andriansyah 2023);
- AI and theology of creation (Yuli Andriansyah 2023; Lockhart et al. 2020).

Delving into the definitional aspect of AI, many authors emphasize that “currently, there are certain difficulties in determining what is encompassed by the general concept of artificial intelligence” (Feliks Kurp 2023, p. 11). Typically, the literature, following John R. Searle, divides the field of artificial intelligence into two categories: strong and weak. The first—general AI—conceptualizes artificial intelligence as “Hypothetical, artificial intelligent systems of a complex or at least multitasking nature that function autonomously in an environment, demonstrating intelligence” (John R. Searle 1980, p. 417). On the other hand, weak or narrow AI includes “programs performing specific tasks or solving specific problems that, when carried out or solved by humans, are considered to require intelligence” (John R. Searle 1980, p. 417). In this context, technologies based on AI that support prayer practices should be analyzed.

When discussing artificial intelligence, two aspects must be considered: the first is the narrow or engineering aspect, where AI is treated as a branch of computer science that creates intelligent machines capable of performing tasks often requiring human reasoning. Within this aspect, AI encompasses various techniques, including those based on neural networks, such as machine learning, deep learning, reasoning computation, natural language processing, and computer visualization. The second aspect offers an interdisciplinary perspective, where artificial intelligence is perceived as a comprehensive set of elements based on the development of digital technologies, such as self-learning applications and programs. These elements impact every aspect of individual and collective life, leading to the algorithmization of society. In summary, in this article, artificial intelligence can be referred to as “systems designed by humans that, due to a complex purpose, operate in the physical or digital world by perceiving their environment, interpreting collected structured or unstructured data, drawing conclusions from the knowledge obtained from these data, and undertaking the best actions to achieve the set goal (according to previously defined parameters)” (Tomasz Zalewski 2020, p. 7).

This article attempts to describe Poles' attitudes towards AI in developing Christian prayer as a technology supporting prayer practices. The significance of the issue stems from the collision of two social processes. On the one hand, there is the dynamic development of technologies supporting and facilitating prayer practices based on AI. On the other hand, we have the ongoing secularization of Polish society, declaring openness to technological innovations in areas other than prayer practices. Hence, it can be asserted that William Ogburn's “cultural lag” concept is selective (Ogburn 1964).

At the beginning of the research process, the following research questions were formulated:

1. Do the frequency of prayer and engagement in religious practices influence the attitudes of Poles towards AI-based programs/applications that support the prayer practices of respondents?
2. Does believers' age affect Poles' attitudes toward AI-based prayer programs/applications?
3. Does the believers' place of residence affect Poles' attitude towards AI-based prayer programs/applications?

4. Do current users of the prayer-supporting applications plan to continue using it, and are new believers considering using it in the future?

To verify the problem, the following research hypotheses were adopted:

H1: *The higher the frequency and engagement of respondents in religious practices, the more conservative the attitude towards AI-based prayer programs/applications supporting prayer practices.*

H2: *The respondents' ages differentiate Poles' attitudes towards prayer programs/applications. The older the respondents, the more conservative their attitude towards prayer programs/applications.*

H3: *The respondents' place of residence differentiates Poles' attitudes towards prayer programs/applications. The larger the place of residence, the more conservative the attitude towards prayer programs/applications.*

H4: *Most AI users plan to continue such usage in the future, while new practitioners will appear.*

2. Material and Method

This article presents selected results from nationwide research conducted by the Educational Research Institute in Warsaw in September 2023 on a sample of 1053 individuals aged 15–65. The study employed a quantitative method using a survey questionnaire technique. The research tool was developed by a team of researchers specifically for the issues addressed in the article. It consisted of 15 single-choice questions based on a short cafeteria (usually using the Likert scale), 2 multiple-choice questions (6-point cafeteria), and 1 question composed of 26 items rated on a scale of 1–5. A metric containing respondents' demographic and social characteristics was also used. The survey questionnaire was constructed with two thematic blocks. The first block comprised questions related to issues associated with artificial intelligence, while the second block was based on topics concerning religiosity and prayer. The distribution of research tools was carried out using the CAWI (Computer-Assisted Web Interview) panel. The sample selection used a random quota method to increase the likelihood of representing the characteristics of the entire population.

It should be emphasized that the anonymous research was conducted in accordance with the highest ethical standards, respecting the dignity of every individual. All ethical principles applied in social research were considered, following the guidelines outlined in the "International Code on Market, Opinion, and Social Research and Data Analytics" (ICC/ESOMAR 2016).

Additionally, it is important to note the current limitations of the research. These include the sensitivity of the research topic, society's reluctance to disclose religious identity preferences, and the lack of familiarity among the older research group with technologies supporting AI-based prayer practices.

In total, 52.1% of women and 47.9% of men participated in the study, with 2.6% indicating primary/junior high school education, 7.3% vocational education, and 34.3% secondary education. A total of 12.8% had post-secondary non-tertiary education, 10.7% a bachelor's degree, and 32.2% a master's degree or equivalent. Additionally, it should be noted that 17.8% indicated living in a village, 13.6% in a small town (up to 20,000 residents), 15.8% in a medium-sized town (20,000 to 99,000 residents), 43.7% in a major city (100,000 to 500,000 residents), and 9.1% in a large city (over 500,000 residents).

Due to the limited text length, only an outline of basic statistical analyses of variables forming the foundation of this article has been provided. Using programs based on artificial intelligence (Practices with AI), religious practices and daily prayer practices were adopted as independent variables. It is important to emphasize that these variables were also analyzed regarding demographic characteristic variables. It should be noted that in most cases of the statistical analyses, in correlation with dependent variables, asymptotic (two-tailed) significance at the level of 0.01 or 0.05 was observed in tests based on Pearson's χ^2 .

Significant indicators that substantially impact religious practices accompanied by applications based on artificial intelligence belong to the group of social characteristics. In this case, spiritual elements include religious self-identification, religious practices, and daily prayer practices.

The data analysis allows us to draw several significant conclusions. Individuals declaring themselves religious seemed less inclined to use artificial intelligence applications. Over 82% had never used such technologies, indicating conservative attitudes toward accepting modern technological solutions. In turn, the lower the religious involvement, the higher the frequency of using artificial intelligence applications. Those who declared themselves non-believers presented the highest usage rates of this technology (daily—24.0%), suggesting greater openness to modern solutions in this group. The undecided and seekers oscillated in the middle of the scale, showing moderate levels of using artificial intelligence applications. These groups used technology several times a week (26.6% and 10.1%, respectively). In summary, most respondents used artificial intelligence applications with moderate frequency several times a week. It is worth noting, however, that the analyzed data showed some diversity depending on the religious characteristics of the respondents, suggesting that the level of religious involvement may influence the acceptance and use of modern technologies.

When analyzing religious practices and practices related to the use of artificial intelligence programs, it was observed that there was a connection between religious practice and attitudes toward artificial intelligence. Individuals showing no religious activity expressed greater interest in technology. Among those practicing religion several times a week, 3.6% used artificial intelligence once a day, 3.6% several times a week, 5.5% once a week, 9.1% once or twice a month, 34.5% less than once a month, and 43.6% had never used it. For individuals practicing once a week, the percentages of those using artificial intelligence were 12.6%, 13.8%, 5.7%, 8.9%, 13.8%, and 45.1%, respectively. In the group practicing once or twice a month, the rates of those using artificial intelligence were 11.4%, 25%, 9.1%, 10.2%, 21.6%, and 22.7%. Individuals practicing once or a few times a year used artificial intelligence according to the following percentages: 12.1%, 13.7%, 4.8%, 12.9%, 12.1%, and 44.4%. Those practicing less than once a year used artificial intelligence according to the following percentages: 12.6%, 9.2%, 7.6%, 11.8%, 21.8%, and 37%. Among respondents who did not participate in religious practices, the percentages of using artificial intelligence were 18.3%, 12%, 4.7%, 8%, 14.3%, and 42.7%. One possible explanation is that religion and digital technologies may be perceived as competing value systems. Religion often emphasizes the importance of traditional social values such as family, community, morality, and ethics. Digitization, new media, and applications may be perceived as a threat to these values. According to research from the Institute of Educational Research (Gruchola and Zieliński 2023), artificial intelligence, rated on a scale of 1–5, significantly interferes with respondents' lives (2.94), can provide valuable answers to religious and existential questions (2.74), and may become an object of cults similar to religious cult (2.74).

The data showed that individuals practicing prayer constituted a relatively high percentage of those who had never used such technological innovations (40.7%). Notably, a very high rate of individuals who had never used artificial intelligence technology was found in each category concerning the frequency of prayer practices and among individuals declaring a lack of prayer practices (44.8% of respondents). Individuals practicing prayer once a day had a diverse approach to artificial intelligence. The majority of them (44.2%) declared that they had never used this technology. In the case of individuals practicing prayer several times a week, the percentage of those not using artificial intelligence was 27.5% (a similar rate occurred among individuals practicing prayer once or twice a month), which is a relatively low result compared to other groups. Surprisingly, the variation in data is noticeable within groups who used artificial intelligence applications daily, both among individuals declaring daily prayer practices and those who did not practice at all. For instance, the difference between individuals practicing prayer once a day and those not practicing at all was 2 percentage points; for those practicing several times a day, it

was 3.5%. In this case, it can be assumed that these relatively insignificant differences arise because practicing individuals may use AI technology to support their prayer practices.

3. Results

In the analysis of the data presented in Table 1 regarding the practices of using artificial intelligence and prayer-supporting applications, several significant patterns can be observed. Regarding the frequency of using prayer-supporting applications, the largest group of respondents (31.4%) declared that they had never used them. However, those who used these applications most often did so infrequently (38.4%). As for the group of people considering using the applications in the future, it was observed that various levels of interest occurred depending on different frequencies of use. Notably, the most significant share of this group declared that they would use the applications rarely (20.0%) or a few times a week (11.4%). On the other hand, a significant group of individuals (43.9%) stated that they were not interested in this type of prayer support. In summary, although some people used prayer-supporting applications, most respondents seemed to avoid using them regularly. These individuals preferred a traditional approach, such as prayers they remembered from childhood, developed through their own religious experience, or read from various printed sources and prayer books. For those considering future use, preferred usage frequencies ranged from rare to several times a week. It is also worth noting that 43.9% of the respondents were not interested in this type of prayer support. This percentage will likely change over the years. With the rapid pace of digitization and the development of artificial intelligence-based programs, the number of people who never use them will gradually decrease. The second factor contributing to this situation is, in addition to digitization, the ongoing secularization of society, especially among the youth (Mirośława Grabowska 2023, p. 2).

Table 1. Religious characteristics and religious practices supported by AI (Data in %).

Social Features Oscillating around Religiosity		Practices of Using AI						Total
		Daily	Several Times per Week	Once a Week	Once or Twice a Month	Less than Once a Month	I Have Never Used	
Religious self-identification	Deeply religious	7.2	14.4	4.5	9.0	27.9	36.9	100.0
	Religious	11.1	12.4	6.5	9.9	14.7	45.4	100.0
	Undecided	13.7	26.6	4.8	7.3	12.1	35.5	100.0
	Seeking	15.2	10.1	8.9	8.9	12.7	44.3	100.0
	Non-religious	24.0	6.6	3.3	13.7	18.6	33.9	100.0
Religious practices	Several times per week	3.6	3.6	5.5	9.1	34.5	43.6	100.0
	Once a week	12.6	13.8	5.7	8.9	13.8	45.1	100.0
	Once or twice a month	11.4	25.0	9.1	10.2	21.6	22.7	100.0
	Once, several times a year	12.1	13.7	4.8	12.9	21.1	44.4	100.0
	Less than once a year	12.6	9.2	7.6	11.8	21.8	37.0	100.0
	I do not participate at all	18.3	12.0	4.7	8.0	14.3	42.7	100.0
Daily prayer practices	Several times a day	12.7	10.2	3.4	9.3	23.7	40.7	100.0
	Once a day	14.2	16.8	7.6	4.1	13.2	44.2	100.0
	Several times per week	12.5	20.8	5.8	10.8	22.5	27.5	100.0
	Once a week	7.5	9.4	22.6	3.8	11.3	45.3	100.0
	Once or twice a month	10.7	16.7	2.4	20.2	22.6	27.4	100.0
	Less than once a month	9.7	9.7	3.9	11.7	14.6	50.5	100.0
	I don't practice prayer	16.2	10.1	4.2	11.4	13.3	44.8	100.0

Source: Authors' compilation.

Table 2 contains data approximating the impact of demographic characteristics on the use of prayer-supporting applications. Initially, it is important to highlight that the correlation significance between the independent variable “place of residence” and the

use of prayer-supporting applications was at the 0.05 level ($\chi^2 = 25.137$, $df = 12$, $p = 0.014$), distinguishing it from the other independent variables, which maintained significance at the 0.01 level. Most women and men declared that they did not use such applications and were not interested in using them in the future (82.1%). A total of 9.9% of the respondents did not currently use them but planned to do so in the future, with only 5.5% of women considering this option. Looking at those (whose percentage was small) declaring regular use of such applications, apparent differences in using prayer applications were observed between women and men. Women were significantly more inclined to regularly use such tools (4.4% compared to 2.2% of men). The results suggest that prayer-supporting applications are more prevalent among women than men. Nevertheless, the overall attitude from both genders toward such tools is moderately cold, indicating the need to better understand the motivations and barriers associated with accepting this type of technology in the context of religious practices.

Table 2. Demographic characteristics and the use of applications supporting prayer practices (data in %).

Demographic Characteristics		Usage of Apps Supporting Prayer Practices				Total
		Yes, Regularly	Yes, but Rarely	No, but I'm Considering Using Them in the Future	No, I Am Not Interested in This Type of Support in Prayer	
Gender	Female	4.4	8.0	5.5	82.1	100.0
	Male	2.2	5.8	9.9	82.1	100.0
Age	15–24 years	1.2	6.0	10.1	82.7	100.0
	25–34 years	3.9	3.4	11.2	81.5	100.0
	35–44 years	7.3	6.7	9.1	77	100.0
	45–54 years	1.2	8.7	5.8	84.4	100.0
	55–65 years	3.2	8.6	3.8	84.4	100.0
Education	Primary or junior high school	10.7	-	10.7	78.6	100.0
	Vocational	-	11.7	11.7	76.6	100.0
	Secondary	2.2	4.1	8.3	85.4	100.0
	Post-secondary non-tertiary	2.2	6.7	3.7	87.3	100.0
	Bachelor's degree	3.5	9.7	11.5	75.2	100.0
Place of residence	Village	2.7	7.5	9.6	80.2	100.0
	Small town (up to 20,000 residents)	9.2	7.0	4.9	78.9	100.0
	Medium-sized city (20,000 to 99,000 residents)	0.6	8.4	7.2	83.8	100.0
	Major city (from 100 to 500 thousand residents)	2.6	6.9	6.9	83.5	100.0
	Large city (over 500,000 residents)	4.1	4.1	10.3	81.4	100.0

Source: Authors' compilation.

In the data analysis, noticeable differences in the acceptance of modern tools in religious practices were evident based among age groups. Younger individuals (15–24 years) appeared to be significantly less interested in using such technology while praying, with 82.7% of respondents from this group declaring a lack of interest. Of course, it is vital to consider the lower percentage of individuals from this age group engaging in religious practices involving regular church attendance. For individuals aged 25–34, although the rate of those who regularly used applications was slightly higher (3.9%), the majority (81.5%) still showed no interest in those digital tools. Compared to other age groups declaring regular usage, the highest percentage of individuals who regularly used prayer-supporting applications during daily prayers was found among those aged 35–44

(7.3%). We can observe an interesting increase in interest in prayer-supporting applications among older individuals, especially in the 55–65 age group, where the percentage of users was higher than that among younger respondents. It suggests the need to tailor the offerings of applications supporting prayer practices to different age groups. Organizations, not only from church environments, involved in developing such tools can focus on providing content and features that attract the attention of younger users while considering the growing interest among older individuals. Simultaneously, it is worth considering educational and evangelical campaigns that can alter the perceptions of the benefits of using prayer-supporting applications, especially among youth communities.

Generally, most respondents from all education groups showed little interest in prayer-supporting applications. The largest group of individuals with primary or junior high school education (78.6%) and vocational education (76.6%) declared that they did not use such applications. However, 10.7% with primary education and 11.7% with vocational education considered using such digital assistance in the future. For respondents with secondary education, although the majority still did not use such applications (85.4%), a noticeable small percentage was considering potential use in the future (8.3%). Individuals with post-secondary, non-tertiary education and bachelor's degrees also mostly did not use prayer-supporting applications (87.3% and 75.2%, respectively). Still, in these groups, a small percentage of individuals were open to the potential use of such technology in the future. Individuals with primary education exhibited the highest percentage of regular use (10.7%) compared to members of the other group. The results suggest that interest in prayer-supporting applications is generally low across all education groups. Nevertheless, there was some openness to the potential use of this type of technology in the future, suggesting an evolution in attitudes toward this kind of prayer support in society.

Based on the data presented in Table 3, it can be observed that in Poland, prayer-supporting applications are most popular among users in small towns (9.2%) and large cities (4.1%). In the case of villages, this indicator is even lower, standing at only 2.7%, but it is not the lowest, as 0.6% of respondents lived in medium-sized cities. Notably, the interest in using prayer applications appears to decrease as the size of the place of residence increases. Individuals residing in villages were the least inclined to use this type of support (4.9%), while residents of large cities showed the highest interest (10.3%). In each locality group, many respondents declared a lack of interest in prayer applications, especially in medium-sized and major cities (83.8% and 83.5%). This phenomenon may result from various reasons, including a traditional approach to prayer, personal preferences, or a lack of access to relevant technologies. It can be presumed that in major and large cities, these applications are more accessible, and there is a greater interest in such solutions in these environments. Here, the percentages are higher compared to small towns and settlements (Michał Feliksiak 2023, p. 4). Furthermore, individuals living in major and large cities are typically more open to new technologies and more inclined to use them in various aspects of life, including the religious sphere.

Table 3. Practices of using AI and applications supporting prayer (Data in %).

Using Apps to Support Prayer Practices	Practices of Using AI						Total
	Daily	Several Times per Week	Once a Week	Once or Twice a Month	Less than Once a Month	I Have Never Used	
Yes, regularly	20.0	11.4	11.4	5.7	20.0	31.4	100.0
Yes, but rarely	8.2	16.4	11.0	11.0	15.1	38.4	100.0
No, but I'm considering using them in the future	16.7	20.5	9.0	17.9	15.4	20.5	100.0
No, I am not interested in this type of support in prayer	13.4	12.3	4.6	9.5	16.3	43.9	100.0

Source: Authors' compilation.

Table 4 presents the relationship between social characteristics related to religiosity and the use of prayer-supporting applications. The research results show a strong correlation between religious self-identification and the frequency of using prayer-supporting applications. Deeply religious individuals constitute 9.0% of the respondents who regularly use prayer-supporting applications. In turn, religious individuals comprise 3.9% of the respondents who use such applications regularly. A total of 5.1% of those who regularly use AI-based programs belong to the so-called seeking group, people looking for their religious path. Focusing on individuals who indicate a lack of interest in AI support in prayer, it is observed that over 91% of respondents identified themselves as non-religious (97.3%), seeking (91.1%), or undecided (93.5%). In contrast, individuals self-identifying as deeply religious and religious firmly declared that they did not use or intend to use AI assistance (62.2% and 71.4%, respectively).

Table 4. Indicators of religiosity and the use of applications supporting prayer practices (Data in %).

		Usage of Apps Supporting Prayer Practices				Total
		Yes, Regularly	Yes, but Rarely	No, but I'm Considering Using Them in the Future	No, I Am Not Interested in This Type of Support in Prayer	
Religious self-identification	Deeply religious	9.0	16.2	12.6	62.2	100.0
	Religious	3.9	9.5	9.1	77.4	100.0
	Undecided	-	-	6.5	93.5	100.0
	Seeking	5.1	2.5	1.3	91.1	100.0
	Non-religious	-	-	2.7	97.3	100.0
Religious practices	Several times per week	25.0	21.4	5.4	48.2	100.0
	Once a week	5.7	16.3	13.1	64.9	100.0
	Once or twice a month	-	11.6	10.5	77.9	100.0
	Once a year, several times a year	2.4	3.2	8.9	85.5	100.0
	Less than once a year	-	2.5	3.4	94.1	100.0
	Do not participate at all	0.7	0.3	3.3	95.7	100.0
Daily prayer practices	Several times a day	20.5	17.9	7.7	53.8	100.0
	Once a day	2.0	10.7	14.2	73.1	100.0
	Several times a week	1.7	11.7	10.8	75.8	100.0
	Once a week	7.5	24.5	13.2	54.7	100.0
	Once or twice a month	1.2	3.6	3.6	91.7	100.0
	Less than once a month	-	-	9.7	90.3	100.0
	Do not practice prayer	-	-	2.6	97.4	100.0

Source: Authors' compilation.

The next category of analysis involves the frequency of religious practices among respondents. Individuals participating in religious practices several times a week (25.0%) often used prayer-supporting applications, while most participating once a week (64.9%) did not use them at all. Increased frequency of participation in religious practices is strongly correlated with a greater interest in prayer applications, as 25.0% of respondents declaring participation in religious practices confirmed that they regularly used AI-based applications.

The last part of Table 4 focuses on individuals' daily prayer practices. Respondents using prayer-supporting applications daily (20.5%) are in the minority compared to those who practiced prayer once a week (54.7%). Over half of the respondents (53.8%) practicing prayer several times a day declared that they had not used and did not intend to use AI support. Based on the data analysis, it can be assumed that the growing interest in prayer-supporting applications is related to the frequency of religious practices. A significant percentage of respondents identifying themselves as "deeply religious" suggests that this

group may constitute a potential target market for new and improved prayer applications. Additionally, it should be emphasized that the pandemic also contributed to reaching for applications, browsing the internet for religious information, or participating in online worship. However, it is essential to note that after the pandemic, religiosity among Poles significantly weakened, where the pandemic “caused not only a general deintensification of religious practices among Poles but also clearly weakened their subjective sense of religiosity” (Katarzyna Czechowicz 2022). In this case, strong correlations can be found, as with the decline in religiosity and society moving away from the Church, a decrease in the use of various artificial intelligence-based programs will be visible. Generational changes should also be taken into account, as young individuals subjected to secularization processes and growing up on AI-based applications and programs reject religion and religious practices because the “website” is capable of replacing traditional religion and its doctrine with their deities created by the virtual world and, perhaps, artificial intelligence.

4. Discussion

The contemporary world, marked by dynamic technological development, globalization, and numerous social changes, poses a unique challenge for traditional institutions, including the Catholic Church. Human actions in the digital era, ongoing processes of secularization, and socio-cultural evolution seem to shape a new reality that engages in dialogue with religious doctrine. As a significant religious, moral, and spiritual institution, the Church must adapt to modern realities to remain relevant and effective in reaching modern society (Monika Przybysz 2023). With technological progress, interpersonal communication has undergone revolutionary changes, influencing how individuals identify with religious values and engage in the life of the Church community. On the one hand, new media and online communities open up new possibilities for evangelization and dialogue. On the other hand, they pose challenges in shaping authentic spiritual experiences in the digital environment. These challenges align with both the substantive and functional understanding of religion. They may lead to attributing divine characteristics to AI-based devices that fulfill many functions assigned to religion (Gruchola and Zieliński 2023). “Cyberspace is another gift from God and at the same time an expression of human wisdom. Like any tool in the hands of humans, it can be used for good or bad purposes” (Arkadiusz Domaszek 2013, p. 77). The Pope Francis (2020) believes that the observed exponential progress in robotics and AI can make the world a better place if it is connected to the common good. He also stated that “artificial intelligence is at the heart of the epochal change we are experiencing. Robotics can make a better world possible if it is joined to the common good. Indeed, if technological progress increases inequalities, it is not true progress” (Franciszek 2020).

The topic that combines artificial intelligence with prayer can be fascinating, as it brings together two spheres—technological and spiritual. However, before developing this concept, it is worth considering whether, in the spiritual sphere, touching the sacred, it is truly necessary. Additionally, one should contemplate whether the profane, undoubtedly represented by artificial intelligence-based applications, will not violate the exosphere of the sacred. In 2020, in the exhibition halls of the Pompidou Center in Paris, artificial intelligence used robotic silicone lips to say mechanical prayers (Anna Zagórna 2020). This is possible due to the development of an algorithm that collects prayers worldwide and creates a universal one. The next stage could be starting a new religion and, consequently, a messiah or even God.

In recent years, there has been a significant increase in publications on AI and religion in scientific journals indexed in the Scopus database (Yuli Andriansyah 2023). Economically advanced countries such as the USA and the United Kingdom are at the forefront of these studies. This is an encouraging sign to conduct similar studies in other countries, particularly those with a strong religious presence (Yuli Andriansyah 2023). There is no doubt that Poland, despite the so-called “creeping secularization,” belongs to countries

with a strong religious character. The country still ranks at the forefront of Europe, with 84% of its population being Catholics (Grabowska 2020).

Our study falls within the research area of AI and religious practices, focusing on how artificial intelligence supports religious practices in the context of rituals, religious ceremonies, and spiritual guidance. Researchers explore the impact of AI on religious experiences, the role of artificial intelligence in religious education, and the potential benefits and challenges associated with artificial intelligence in supporting spiritual practices. However, it should be noted that at this stage of scientific knowledge development, survey research, if conducted, generally focuses on the impact of religiosity on the overall attitude towards AI or decision-making processes (social and moral) conditioned by faith in God (Mert C. Yilmaz 2023; Karataş and Cutright 2023). There are no publications directly addressing this topical research problem.

In this context, our results align with considerations regarding technology and AI's utility and inevitable presence in religious life (Aldén et al. 2019). On the other hand, they serve as an important contribution to the development of scientific knowledge regarding believers' use of prayer applications. Our research indicates that Polish believers, guided by the principles of religious institutions with significant expertise in addressing the concerns of believers (Aldén et al. 2019), tend to approach AI technology in religious practices with caution. And in this field, it confirms the findings of the Global Consumer Survey (Karataş and Cutright 2023) regarding the significant impact of religious affiliation on algorithmic aversion, especially when it comes to institutionalized religiosity. In this field, our results also extend the work on aversion to artificial intelligence (Dietvorst et al. 2015; Castelo et al. 2019). As Song (Yong Sup Song 2021) rightly points out, adopting AI tools by religious institutions is often a cautious and thoughtful process based on theological reflection and societal discussions. This is particularly significant because the technologies discussed can significantly impact worship practices, doctrine interpretations, and the wider community's involvement, raising questions about the authenticity of religious experiences mediated by artificial intelligence (Umbrello 2023). For example, if artificial intelligence offers a religious interpretation or facilitates a religious experience, it does not present an "objective" religious truth. Instead, it provides a mediated understanding influenced by its programming, datasets, and inherent biases (Thinyane and Sassetti 2020). With its extensive data processing and pattern recognition capabilities, AI can offer a new perspective on age-old doctrines and religious practices, reinforcing traditional interpretations, challenging them, or proposing entirely new ways of understanding them (Goltz et al. 2020). In this situation, educating believers and reinforcing the authority of church leaders as guides in the evolving landscape of religious life become crucial. This education should be rooted in the foundational principles of the Creed, which draws from the Old and New Testaments, the Gospels of the New Testament, church doctrines, and canon law (Tatala and Wojtasiński 2021). Notably, while religious identification is positively correlated with conservatism, spiritual identification may not be (Lockhart et al. 2020). Furthermore, research suggests that there is no conclusive evidence that thoughts about God make people more restrained (Jackson et al. 2015). Finally, divine significance often leads to greater risk-taking unless moral issues are at stake (Chan et al. 2014; Kupor et al. 2015). Thoughts about God make people feel smaller, making them more inclined to acknowledge human fallibility. Consequently, they consider relying on humans in decision-making as unreliable and are more likely to accept recommendations based on artificial intelligence (Karataş and Cutright 2023). Of course, it is essential to refer to social innovation theories and consider cultural lag (William Ogburn 1964; Karpińska 2020), or, rather, time lag (Karpińska 2020) differences between countries leading the way in spreading AI knowledge like the US and the UK and Poland.

5. Conclusions

At the beginning of this research process, four research hypotheses were adopted, three of which were positively verified.

The first hypothesis assumed an inverse relationship between the respondents' prayer frequency and engagement in religious practices and their attitude toward AI-based prayer programs/applications. The data obtained indicate that the higher the level of religious practices (frequency and engagement), the more conservative the attitude towards AI programs/applications supporting prayer. The analyzed hypothesis was positively confirmed.

The second and third hypotheses postulated that the respondents' age and place of residence differentiate Poles' attitudes towards prayer-supporting programs/applications. H2: The older the respondents, the more conservative their attitude toward prayer programs/applications. H3: The larger the place of residence, the more conservative the attitude toward prayer programs/applications. These hypotheses were positively verified. The analysis of the collected data showed that the groups that were most favorable to AI-based prayer applications were respondents/Poles aged 35–65, professionally active individuals, residents of large cities with access to AI technology, and those who frequently used it in their professional work. Notably, there was an increasing interest in prayer-supporting applications among older individuals (55–65 years), where the observed level of users was higher than that of younger respondents.

The last hypothesis assumed that most AI users plan to continue such usage in the future, while new practitioners will appear. The obtained data did not allow for the positive verification of the fourth hypothesis. Although a group of people used prayer-supporting applications, most respondents preferred a traditional approach, i.e., prayer that is understood as a personal, individual conversation with God, enriched by reading printed publications. It is worth emphasizing that almost half (43.9%) of the respondents were not interested in this type of support in prayer. At the same time, the conducted research indicated that artificial intelligence, rated on a scale of 1–5, could become an object of cult similar to religious worship (2.74); it could replace religious practices (2.39); respondents believed more in the capabilities of AI than in the abilities of God (2.30); and respondents considered AI as something significant in their lives (2.23). Artificial intelligence provided psychological support to many respondents (5.7%); it positively influenced their well-being (41.0%). According to the respondents, AI can offer valuable answers to religious and existential questions: 2.74. It also exercises social control over people (3.50) and serves an integrative function: building and/or maintaining relationships with the virtual, invisible, and inexperienced world (9.4%). This vision seems realistic according to Homer Barnett's (1953) theory of innovation, expounded in the untranslated and rarely cited work in Poland titled *"Innovation: The Basis of Cultural Change"*, where he explains how the substitution of the old with the new occurs through successive stages: configuration, recombination, identification, and substitution. The conservative attitude of the respondents can be explained by William Ogburn's concept of "cultural lag" (Ogburn 1964), which suggests that cultural changes do not keep pace with technological changes.

For now, religious practices based on artificial intelligence technology may become a "substitute" for the prayer practices of modern humans. But only a substitute.

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Article

Measurement Invariance of Prayer Importance Scale: Religiosity, Gender, Age

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Abstract: The main goal of the research was to increase knowledge on the psychometric properties of the Prayer Importance Scale (PIS). The study analyzed the structure of test items using item response theory (IRT), Mokken scale analysis (MSA), and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to establish factorial structure of the method. Measurement invariance (MI) was calculated in groups differentiated by three criteria: religiosity, gender, and age. MI verifies whether test items measure the construct in the same way across different groups. The Structure and Level of Religiosity Test (SLRT) was used to examine the level of religiosity in participants. In a study conducted with a sample of $n = 566$ adults ($M_{\text{age}} = 49.16$ years; $SD_{\text{age}} = 15.72$), two religious groups were identified based on a median distribution: with low ($n = 275$) and high ($n = 291$) levels of religiosity. Two groups differentiated by gender, men ($n = 284$) and women ($n = 282$), were equivalent per age period: early (age 25–39; $n = 192$), middle (age 40–59; $n = 187$), and late adulthood (age 60+; $n = 187$). Results of the analyses show high homogeneity of items comprising PIS, as well as strict invariance for the three distinguished criteria. Results of the study provide extended knowledge about psychometric properties of PIS and the ability to compare results due to religiosity, gender, and age.

Keywords: prayer importance; Mokken scale analysis; measurement invariance; religiosity; adulthood

1. Introduction

Prayer is defined as a personal, autonomous and authentic ability to enter into a dialogue with God (Zarzycka et al. 2022). Prayer occupies a central place in one's religious life, permeating its structure and path from within (Bänziger et al. 2008). It leads to an increasingly fuller integration and contributes to establishing spiritual bonds with God as well as mutual bonds between people (Kulpaczyński and Tatala 2000; Ladd and McIntosh 2008). Constituting a rich and highly varied field of the human inner experience, it accompanies thoughts and sheds light on relations with other people and the outside world (cf. Walesa and Tatala 2020; Wojciechowska 2017). Among the most common typologies associated with the study of prayer is the analysis of its manifestations. With regard to the content, many types of prayers are distinguished, among which the most common are prayers of praise, thanksgiving, propitiation and petition (Kulpaczyński and Tatala 2000; Szcześniak et al. 2021). In addition, perception of importance of prayer in human life has become a subject of interest lately (Tatala and Wojtasiński 2021). Despite the fact that tangible, positive results of prayer bring positive reinforcement, thereby causing an increase in the subjective importance attributed to it, Tatala and Wojtasiński (2021) noted that the subject of prayer importance has played a minor role in the literature. The topic has often been discussed explicitly (Huber and Huber 2012) or marginally (Rydz et al. 2017), which prompted the authors to develop the Prayer Importance Scale (PIS). Its model and results were subjected to convergent validity analysis (Tatala and Wojtasiński 2021). However, it is still unknown whether results obtained with PIS are comparable due to a differentiation in basic and fundamental variables, such as the overall level of religiosity, gender of the respondents or their age.

Recent polls conducted by the Social Opinion Research Centre in Poland (Social Opinion Research Centre 2022a) showed that there has been a slow decline in the general level of religious beliefs among Poles with a relatively faster decline in religious practices observed at the same time. A series of surveys conducted from March 1992 to June 2022 showed that the percentage of adults who describe themselves as believers dropped from 94% to 84%, while the percentage of those who practice regularly (once a week or more) dropped from nearly 70% to 42%. Simultaneously, the percentage of non-practitioners increased from 9% to 19%. Among the significant reasons for secularization in Poland is the increasingly growing interconnection of the religious and political sphere (Wojtasik 2021). Another survey carried out by the Social Opinion Research Centre (Social Opinion Research Centre 2022b) indicated that 82% of Poles have never attended meetings of any religious community, prayer group, or religious movement; less than 9% said they used to belong to a religious community or prayer group; and 7% stated they currently belong to a religious group. Out of this 7% of respondents, 4% regularly attend meetings, and slightly fewer (3%) do so occasionally. It was noted that the decline in the level of religiosity has been fastest among respondents aged 18–24. It should be noted, however, that in the case of Poland a decline in religiosity is not always associated with a complete departure from the Church (Szymczak et al. 2022). Regardless, the fact that the observed decline appears to be one of the highest in the world is alarming (Pew Research Center 2018). This phenomenon is noted mainly in large cities and among educated people.

Cohort analysis revealed the occurrence of intergenerational changes: from one generation to the next, the level of religious belief and regular practice decreases, and non-practice increases. Moreover, intra-generational changes were observed: as people enter adulthood and with the passage time, the level of religious belief and regular practice decreases and non-practice increases (Social Opinion Research Centre 2022a). The youngest age cohort (18–24-year-olds) differed noticeably from other age groups, such as their parents and grandparents (cf. Borowska 2020; Social Opinion Research Centre 2022a). In addition to the issue of religiosity over the course of life, a number of studies have been undertaken to analyze gender differences (Walesa 2014). Women were found to be more religious and to practice more regularly than men (Walesa and Tatala 2020).

Prayer and its importance, as an expression of religious practice, is conditioned by religiosity, gender and age (Walesa and Tatala 2020). This creates a wide verification field regarding potential differences in the level of prayer importance for different values of the above-mentioned variables (religiosity, gender and age). At the same time, the possibility and methodological validity of such comparisons needs to be verified, as so far, the Prayer Importance Scale has not been subjected to invariance analysis with participants representing different levels of religiosity, gender and age (see Figure 1).

With the purpose of conducting a methodologically valid inspection of PIS, it was necessary to analyze the factor structure of the method. Therefore, dimensionality of the scale and the quality of items were examined. To analyze the factor structure of the method, we used: Mokken scale analysis (MSA), parallel analysis (PA), Very Simple Structures analysis (VSS) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Based on MSA, it was possible to determine scalability, homogeneity and monotonicity of the items. PA and VSS enabled establishing the factorial structure of the tool. CFA made it possible to calculate the goodness-of-fit criteria between the model and the data and to confirm the structure of PIS. Once the above analyses were conducted, invariance analysis allowed us to draw conclusions about comparisons between groups representing different levels of religiosity, gender and age.

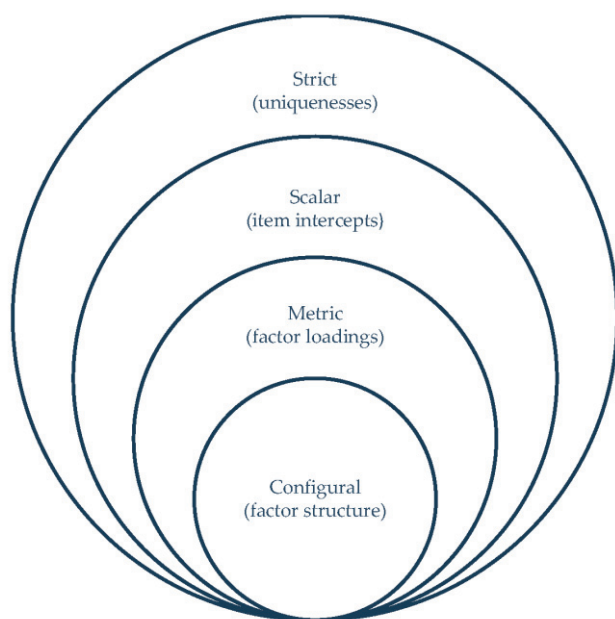


Figure 1. Four models of measurement invariance. The basic configural model concerns verification of uniform factor structure and test items. The metric model is related to factor loadings of individual items and verifies whether they are the same across the tested groups. The scalar invariance model tests if both factor loadings and intercepts are equal across groups. The highest degree of equivalence is represented by the strict invariance model, in which, in addition to the factor loadings and intercepts, there are also residual variances of items.

2. Results

2.1. Method

Two methods were used in the present study:

The Prayer Importance Scale (PIS) by Tatala and Wojtasiński (2021; Appendix A) consists of six items and is used for a speedy diagnosis of religious people. Responses are provided on a five-point scale from 1 = “strongly disagree” to 5 = “strongly agree”. Satisfactory properties of fit indices measurements (CFI, RMSEA, PCLOSE) were obtained in two studies and confirmed the proposed model (English and Polish versions of the scale can be found in the Appendix A). The standardized reliability of the method in the present study was $\alpha = 0.87$, which is considered satisfactory.

The Structure and Level of Religiosity Test (SLRT) by Rydz et al. (2017) was used to measure levels of eight parameters of religiosity by Walesa (2005). Walesa (2005), in his cognitive-developmental theory of the integral development of religiosity defines religiosity as a personal and positive relationship with God that is expressed through religious awareness, religious feelings, religious decisions, bonds with the fellowship of believers, religious practices, religious morality, religious experience and forms of religious beliefs. The SLRT consists of 40 test items, five for each parameter of religiosity (more can be found at Rydz et al. 2017, p. 23). Response options range from 1 = “definitely not applicable” to 5 = “definitely applicable”. Cronbach’s α for the total score was $\alpha = 0.90$ in the present study, which is consistent with previous results ($\alpha = 0.95$) obtained by Rydz et al. (2017).

2.2. Participants

The study was conducted with a group of 566 participants in early (25–39), middle (40–59) and late adulthood (60+). The overall mean age was $M = 49.16$ years, $SD = 15.72$ (in early adulthood $M = 31.32$ years, $SD = 4.33$; in middle adulthood $M = 49.19$ years, $SD = 5.65$; in late adulthood $M = 67.44$; $SD = 5.90$). The youngest person was 25 years old and the oldest was 84. The groups of men ($n = 284$) and women ($n = 282$) were balanced in

age: early ($n_{\text{men}} = 97$; $n_{\text{women}} = 95$), middle ($n_{\text{men}} = 95$; $n_{\text{women}} = 92$) and late adulthood ($n_{\text{men}} = 92$; $n_{\text{women}} = 95$).

In addition to the variables of age and gender, religiosity was also analyzed. Two religious groups were identified based on a median distribution of results in the SLRT with low ($n = 275$; $M = 144.58$; $SD = 10.87$) and high ($n = 291$; $M = 172.53$; $SD = 9.11$) levels of religiosity. Both groups were represented by people belonging to Catholic religious communities and involved in the religious life of their parishes. No clergy, seminary students, or religious brothers/sisters were examined in order to keep the sample homogeneous. However, access to the target groups was possible through the above persons. As such, a control of membership to the specific religious group has allowed to reduce the proportion of uncontrolled variance in the results already at the study design stage.

2.3. Procedure

The study was conducted individually among Roman Catholics who belonged to religious communities in Poland. Respondents were informed of the subject and purpose of the study and were assured of the confidentiality of the collected data and the use of the results for scientific purposes only. There was no time limit so that the participants could thoroughly familiarize themselves with the test items and answer them reliably. Meetings ended with a short conversation, during which the respondents could express their opinions on the completed questionnaires and were thanked for their time and cooperation.

2.4. Analysis

A series of psychometric analyses were conducted to verify the structure of the method: MSA, PA, VSS and CFA. MSA refers to a series of procedures that verify the nature of test items against the scale. As recommended by Sijtsma and Sijtsma and van der Ark (2017), the steps of MSA consist of homogeneity analysis, scalability analysis with the use of automated item selection procedure (AISP) and monotonicity. In the second stage, three sets of invariance analysis were conducted in groups differentiated by religiosity (low or high scores on the SLRT scale), gender (men and women) and age (period of early, middle and late adulthood). In the next step, unidimensionality and multidimensionality of the tool was verified using PA and VSS as recommended by Dima (2018) and van der Linden (2016).

The final step was to conduct a series of CFAs to verify measurement invariance. All analyses were performed in R Program (R Core Team 2022) with RStudio (RStudio Team 2022) using the following packages: corrplot (Wei and Simko 2021), dplyr (Wickham et al. 2022b), EFAtools (Steiner and Grieder 2020), ellipse (Murdoch and Chow 2022), ggExtra (Attali and Baker 2022), ggplot2 (Wickham 2016), ggpubr (Kassambara 2022), GPArotation (Bernaards and Jennrich 2005), haven (Wickham et al. 2022a), here (Kirill and Bryan 2020), Hmisc (Harrell and Dupont 2022), jtools (Long 2022), lavaan (Rosseel 2012), lavaanPlot (Lishinski 2021), magrittr (Bache et al. 2022), mokken (van der Ark 2007, 2012), nFactors (Raiche and Magis 2022), psych (Revelle 2022), RColorBrewer (Neuwirth 2022), semPlot (Epskamp et al. 2022), semTools (Jorgensen et al. 2022), tidySEM (van Lissa 2022) and tidyverse (Wickham and RStudio 2022).

Homogeneity analysis is the first step of MSA. In the present study, it showed that all items exceeded the value of the minimum scalability coefficient, which, according to the literature, is 0.30 (Sijtsma and van der Ark 2017; see Table 1).

In the second step, the ability to assign PIS test items to potential factors with rising levels of homogeneity was checked (see Table 2). This analysis shows how the average homogeneity of the entire scale changes when items explain different coefficients.

As a result of the scalability analysis, it was observed that it is possible to assign all test items to a single scale, regardless of the established homogeneity threshold (0.10–0.80). On the other hand, in no case was the value of zero ("0") obtained, indicating the impossibility of assigning a test item to any scale, nor a value of two ("2"), indicating the possibility of assigning an item to two scales. Therefore, the results presented in Table 2 prove that the one-factor solution dominates within test items and homogeneity thresholds.

In the subsequent step, monotonicity analysis was conducted. It captures the specificity of a function, describing the relationship between rest score groups and item response profiles based on the item step response function (Figure 2).

Table 1. Homogeneity analysis for PIS items.

Item Name	Homogeneity Index	Standard Error
PIS_1	0.575	0.034
PIS_2	0.618	0.028
PIS_3	0.620	0.025
PIS_4	0.577	0.035
PIS_5	0.587	0.027
PIS_6	0.582	0.029

Table 2. Scalability analysis for different homogeneity indices.

Item	Index of Homogeneity							
	0.10	0.20	0.30	0.40	0.50	0.60	0.70	0.80
PIS_1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
PIS_2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
PIS_3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
PIS_4	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
PIS_5	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
PIS_6	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1

Monotonicity analysis includes both a graphical inspection of the above graphs and a formal analysis of significant deviations from the linearity of the monotonicity function (see Table 3). The graphical inspection includes verification of the degree of skewness of the curve illustrating the shape of the function, as well as observation of the presence of zig-zag patterns. Although the greatest skewness was observed for PIS_2 item, additional support in the form of a significant violations test (see Table 3) showed no significant violations in the linearity.

Table 3. Item test for deviations from the linearity.

Item	ac	vi	vi/ac	zsig	crit
PIS_1	112	0	0.00	0	0
PIS_2	72	3	0.04	0	18
PIS_3	46	0	0.00	0	0
PIS_4	81	0	0.00	0	0
PIS_5	83	2	0.02	0	1
PIS_6	58	0	0.00	0	0

Legend: ac = number of accordances; vi = number of violations; vi/ac = ratio of accordances to violations; zsig = significance of violations.

In the next step, PA and VSS were conducted to verify the uni- or multidimensionality of the scale. Both of these analyses suggested a one-factor solution (Figure 3 on the left for parallel analysis). The first parameter of VSS, VSS1, reached a maximum (0.91) for one factor with fit index RMSEA = 0.078, and although VSS2 reached a maximum (0.93) for two factors, it showed a lower fit index (RMSEA = 0.084). The Velicer MAP test reached a minimum of 0.05 for one factor and the BIC reached a minimum of −16.95 also for one factor (Figure 3 on the right for VSS).

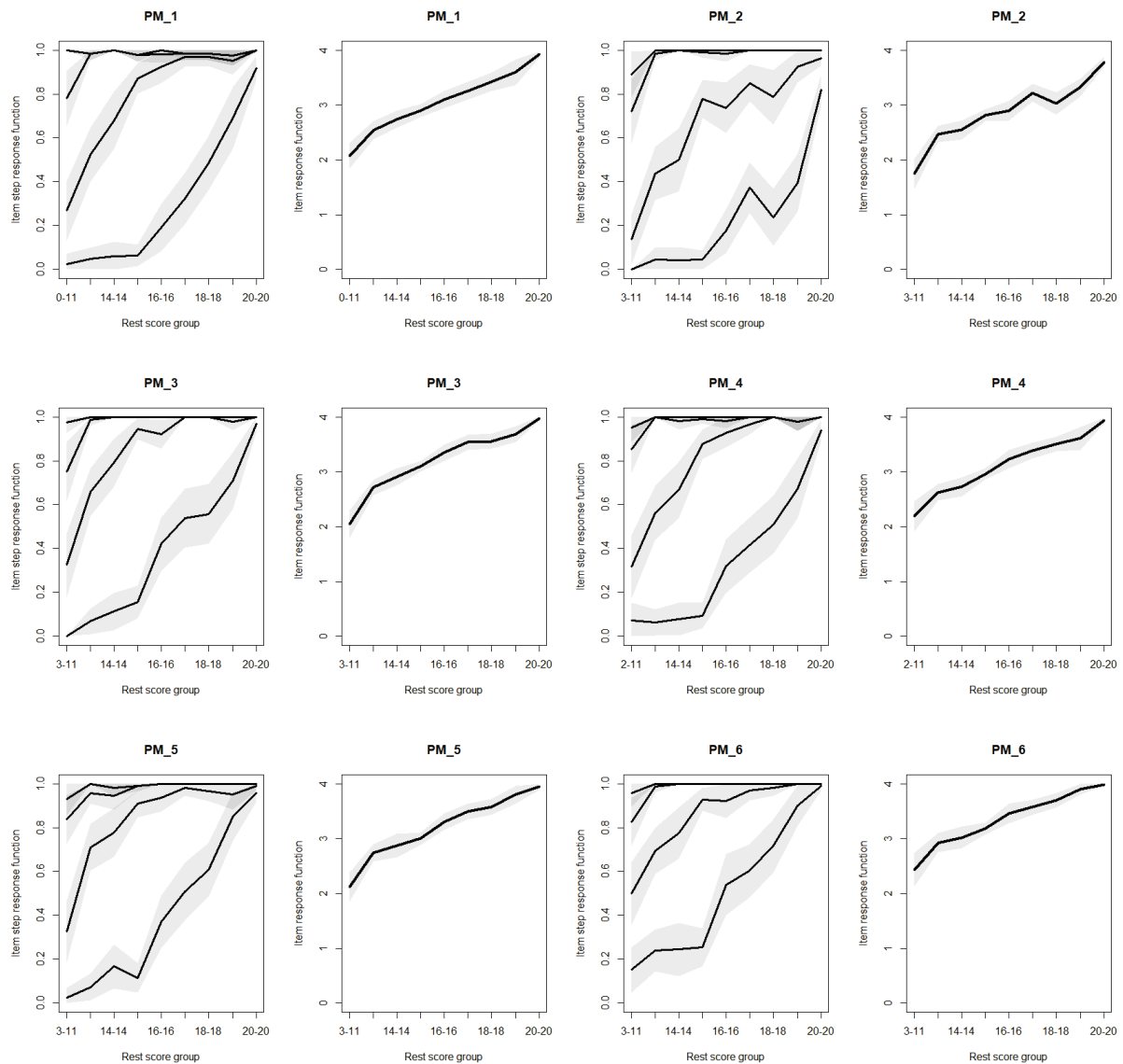


Figure 2. Monotonicity analysis of test items that comprise PIS. Each test item is accompanied by two illustrations—item step response function (on the left) and item response function (on the right).

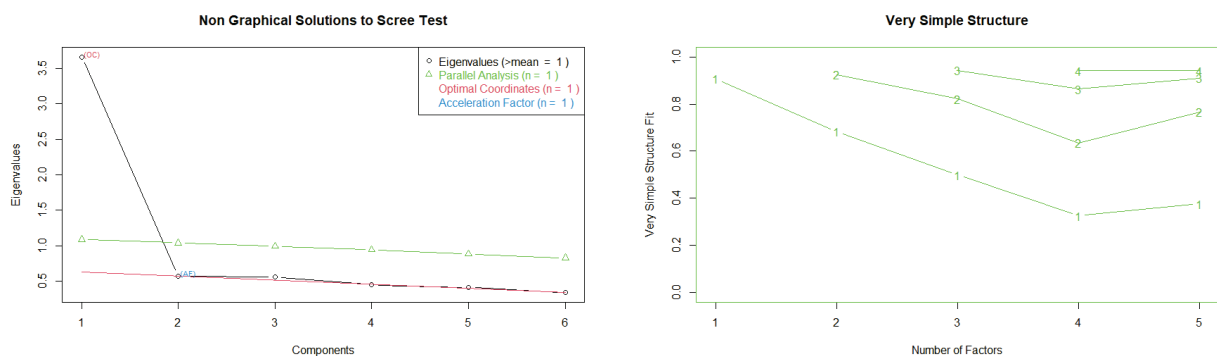


Figure 3. Graphical representation of uni- or multidimensional solutions using PA, OC, AF (on the left) and VSS (on the right).

Before measurement invariance, fit between the general model of PIS and the data was verified with CFA. We used the following measures of fit: model chi-squared (χ^2),

comparative fit index (CFI), incremental fit index (IFI), normed fit index (NFI), non-normed fit index (NNFI), parsimony goodness of fit (PGFI), relative fit index (RFI), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), McDonald and Marsh's relative noncentrality index (RNI), standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) and the Tucker–Lewis index (TLI). The model was found to be a very good fit to the data ($\chi^2(9) = 40.27$, CFI = 0.98, IFI = 0.98, NFI = 0.97, NNFI = 0.96, PGFI = 0.33, RFI = 0.95, RMSEA = 0.057 (90% CI [0.04, 0.08]), RNI = 0.98, SRMR = 0.02 and TLI = 0.97).

Reliability analysis of the scale was also conducted using two methods: Cronbach's alpha and Tarkkonen's rho, which provided satisfactory scores ($\alpha = 0.87$; $\rho = 0.77$). In addition, correlations between items were calculated. The plot (Figure 4) shows that PIS items are moderately correlated with each other.

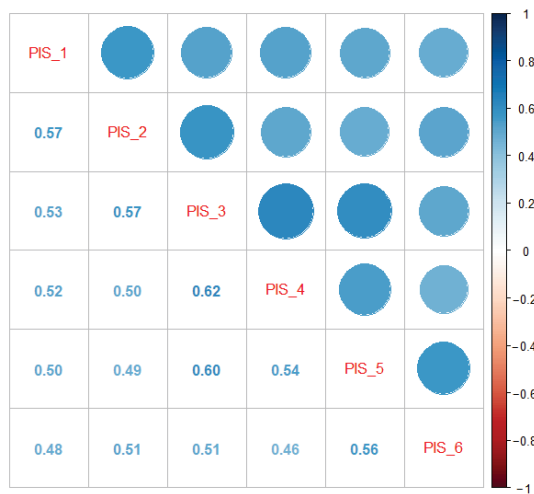


Figure 4. Correlation matrix plot of PIS items.

Invariance analysis was conducted separately for the following variables: religiosity, gender and age.

2.4.1. Religiosity

To verify the measurement invariance, tests comparing fit indices as well as the invariance between factor loadings, intercepts and the unexplained variances for the religiosity variable were conducted (Tables 4 and 5).

Table 4. Measurement invariance steps across religiosity groups.

	chisq.	df	p Value	RMSEA	CFI	TLI	SRMR
Configural model	27.37	18	0.072	0.043	0.985	0.976	0.031
Metric model	39.86	23	0.016	0.051	0.974	0.966	0.046
Scalar model	62.31	28	0.000	0.066	0.947	0.943	0.055
Adjusted scalar model PIS_6 ~ 1	47.86	27	0.008	0.053	0.968	0.964	0.050
Strict model (with free PIS_6 ~ 1)	71.16	33	0.000	0.064	0.941	0.946	0.070
Adjusted strict model PIS_6 ~ PIS_6 (with free PIS_6 ~ 1)	50.18	32	0.021	0.045	0.972	0.974	0.053

Legend: chisq = chi-squared test score; df = degrees of freedom; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; CFI = comparative fit index; TLI = Tucker–Lewis index; SRMR = standardized root mean square residual.

Table 5. Differences between chi-square statistics for religiosity groups.

	chisq. diff.
Configural model—metric model	0.091
Metric model—scalar model	<0.001
Metric model—adjusted scalar model	0.078
Adjusted Scalar model—strict model	<0.001
Adjusted scalar model—adjusted strict model	0.562

Legend: chisq. diff. = significance of difference between two chi-square statistics.

It can be concluded that partial strict invariance across low- and high-level religiosity (with a free intercept and residuals for item 6) was established for PIS.

2.4.2. Gender

To verify the measurement invariance, tests comparing fit indices as well as the invariance between factor loadings, intercepts and the unexplained variances for the gender variable were conducted (Tables 6 and 7).

Table 6. Measurement invariance steps across gender.

	chisq.	df	p Value	RMSEA	CFI	TLI	SRMR
Configural model	31.58	18	0.025	0.052	0.977	0.961	0.029
Metric model	27.53	23	0.234	0.027	0.992	0.990	0.034
Scalar model	38.27	28	0.093	0.036	0.982	0.981	0.039
Strict model	42.29	34	0.156	0.030	0.986	0.987	0.046

Legend: chisq = chi-squared test score; df = degrees of freedom; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; CFI = comparative fit index; TLI = Tucker–Lewis index; SRMR = standardized root mean square residual.

Table 7. Differences between chi-square statistics for gender.

	chisq. diff.
Configural model—metric model	0.588
Metric model—scalar model	0.056
Scalar model—strict model	0.503

Legend: chisq. diff. = significance of difference between two chi-square statistics.

It can be concluded that strict invariance across female and male groups was established for PIS.

2.4.3. Age

To verify the measurement invariance, tests comparing fit indices as well as the invariance between factor loadings, intercepts and the unexplained variances for the age variable were conducted (Tables 8 and 9).

Table 8. Measurement invariance steps across age groups.

	chisq.	df	p Value	RMSEA	CFI	TLI	SRMR
Configural model	40.96	27	0.042	0.053	0.972	0.953	0.031
Metric model	37.01	37	0.468	0.001	1.000	1.000	0.045
Scalar model	51.82	47	0.291	0.024	0.990	0.991	0.053
Strict model	73.77	59	0.093	0.037	0.970	0.977	0.089
Adjusted strict model	64.67	57	0.227	0.027	0.984	0.988	0.072
PIS_6 ~ PIS_6							

Legend: chisq = chi-squared test score; df = degrees of freedom; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; CFI = comparative fit index; TLI = Tucker–Lewis index; SRMR = standardized root mean square residual.

Table 9. Differences between chi-square statistics for age groups.

	chisq. diff.
Configural model—metric model	0.560
Metric model—scalar model	0.137
Scalar model—strict model	0.042
Scalar model—adjusted strict model	0.224

Legend: chisq. diff. = significance of difference between two chi-square statistics.

It can be concluded that partial strict invariance across three age periods: early, middle and late adulthood (with free residual of item 6) was established for PIS.

3. Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to build on the existing validation of the Prayer Importance Scale (PIS), as the already validated model was characterized by satisfactory psychometric indices (Tatala and Wojtasiński 2021). Due to low availability of tools testing the importance of prayer in one's life, the quality of the items underwent Mokken scale analysis (van der Linden 2016). A series of subsequent and independent steps were taken to examine the specifics of the scale items. It was proved that PIS passed homogeneity, scalability and monotonicity analyses for the individual items. In addition, parallel analysis with Very Simple Structures showed that the scale is unidimensional. Finally, measurement invariance was conducted of three variables that seem to generate high variance in results: religiosity, gender and age.

The analyses confirmed at least partial strict invariance for each of the variables. This means that results of values of the variables are methodologically comparable on several levels. First, it is possible to compare the structure of indicator configurations, which is a prerequisite in order to accept the common nature of the construct (configural invariance). Thus, for each of the groups, a one-factor model consisting of six items indicates a good fit to the data. Second, it is valid to conduct further statistical analyses to test hypotheses on differences between individuals representing different religiosity levels, genders and ages (Laakasuo et al. 2022).

This is directly related to fulfillment of the second and third invariance criteria, that is, the equivalence of factor loadings (metric invariance) as well as test items (scalar invariance). Establishing scalar invariance for PIS means that the significance of items is balanced for values of test variables that are the subject of equivalence (scalar invariance). Finally, partial strict invariance associated with correlated residuals (unexplained variance) means that the results for each group are fully comparable (Luong and Flake 2022).

Although the results presented in this article seem to support high psychometric properties of PIS, there are a number of limitations that are worth considering when planning further research. First, the tool provides a starting point, rather than a final one, for an in-depth analysis of the importance of prayer in people's lives. The unidimensional nature of the scale may be attributed to the small but satisfactory number of items. The authors intended PIS to be used for the diagnosis of religious individuals. Importance, however, implies a kind of attitude toward a certain phenomenon, which means that it can represent a cognitive, emotional or a social angle. The second issue is the lack of discriminant validity, which could further establish the value of the method (Sijtsma and van der Ark 2017). For example, correlations with a religious crisis or deconversion could be calculated. Thirdly, there is a risk of generalizing the results obtained with PIS to other religions or faiths without performing separate invariance analyses for different groups. However, the results provide a valuable psychometric basis for making reasonable inferences for Roman Catholics with respect to the three measured variables: religiosity level, gender and age. Finally, the religiosity in participants of the study was assessed based on a multidimensional construct of religiosity by Walesa (2005); nonetheless, other ways of studying the degree of religiosity are proposed in the literature. In addition to

questionnaire methods, such as Huber’s CRS (Huber and Huber 2012), other religious practices (besides prayer) may play a large role here.

The goal of the presented article was to provide extended validation of the Prayer Importance Scale psychometrically. The method was proved to show satisfactory indices at both the item structure and factor structure levels. Additionally, it met invariance requirements for three tested criteria: religiosity, gender and age. The scale can therefore be successfully used without risking the violation of methodological assumptions regarding Mill’s method of difference, among others. As a short, six-item scale, it is suitable for an initial diagnostic of prayer importance which may be the key to understanding the motivational aspects of religiosity fluctuations in future research.

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Appendix A

Prayer Importance Scale (Tatala and Wojtasiński 2021).

The list of test items included:

1. I persist in prayer even when I don’t see the results/Trwam na modlitwie nawet wtedy, gdy nie dostrzegam jej skutków
2. Although other events force priority, I find time to pray/Mimo że inne sprawy wymuszają pierwszeństwo, znajduję czas na modlitwę
3. Even though I experience misfortune, I persist in prayer/Mimo że spotyka mnie nieszczęście, trwam na modlitwie
4. I persist in prayer, even when God seems distant/Trwam na modlitwie nawet wtedy, gdy Bóg wydaje mi się odległy
5. Even though I am aware of the bad things I have done, I do not give up on praying/Mimo świadomości popełnionego przeze mnie zła, nie rezygnuję z modlitwy
6. Daily prayer gives me strength to overcome difficulties/Codzienna modlitwa daje mi siły do przezwyciężania trudności

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Article

Flourishing through Prayer by Singing in a Liturgical Choir

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Abstract: Prayer in human life enables directing attention to God and a transcendent goal beyond Earthly life. Singing has been present in the life of Israel since the oldest times, which is proved on the pages of the Holy Scriptures, in the Books of Exodus and Psalms. In the New Testament, there is a lot of encouragement to sing the glory of God in psalms and songs, as well as praising God Most High in Revelation. The Catholic Church is concerned with the quality of liturgical music through a number of recommendations and requirements defining the pieces that may become a part of the liturgy. Liturgical choir singing is a special form of common prayer. The aim of the present paper is to examine the effect of prayer by choral singing on human flourishing. The aim was achieved by analyzing recommendations of the Church on liturgical music, presenting the assumptions of the theoretical model investigating the effect of art on human flourishing, and then conducting empirical studies. Sixteen in-depth interviews were carried out with members of fourteen choirs. There were four groups of respondents according to their gender and family status. All obtained codes were organized into five main themes with four subcategories. They confirmed the assumptions of the model presented in the theoretical part and made it possible to identify the effect of choral singing on the performers' health and the improvement of their skills. In addition, they showed a direct relation between prayer and spiritual well-being when singing in a choir, a coherence of activities with values as well as the striving for happiness.

Keywords: prayer; choral singing; human flourishing

1. Introduction

Believers' goals go far beyond the Earthly life. They have a need to refer to the highest Absolute, to God, who directs their life and enables them to think about the transcendent goal, which is eternal life. This usually takes place during a prayer, which can take various forms, from short ejaculatory prayers, through devoting one's thoughts and acts to the Creator, to contemplative prayer. The present article attempts to draw attention to singing prayer, which—as the Bible says—has been present in the history of Salvation since the earliest centuries. The choir performing sacred pieces during the liturgy is one of the communities which through prayer directs one's thoughts as well as creative activity towards God. Although a choir is a community of liturgical character, it also performs various roles in the lives of its members as well as the recipients of its songs. A properly run choir is the place of the religious formation of choir members, conductors, music animators and organists. On the other hand, it is a tool to evangelize culture and its recipients (Połacik 2022). The aim of the present paper is to study the effect of prayer by choral singing on human flourishing. To realize this aim, we present the importance of prayer by singing during the liturgy and the concept of human flourishing. After theoretical reflections, the analysis of the results of the qualitative studies conducted among the people involved in singing in liturgical choirs will follow. In-depth interviews constructed according to human flourishing dimensions allow us to examine the particular effects of choral singing

on different aspects of human flourishing. Being aware that attitudes to prayer and singing in different religious rites differ, we decided to examine the Catholic Church practice. That is why the article shows the indications of liturgical prayer and the practice of choral singing within the Catholic Church. Choosing members of liturgical choirs performing in the Catholic Church let us obtain better coherence of the theory with the empirical research.

2. Singing as Prayer to the Glory of God in the Holy Scriptures

The first time we read about singing on the pages of the Holy Scriptures is in the Book of Exodus. The reaction to the miraculous rescue of Israel by Yahweh on the Sea of Reeds is described by the inspired author in the following way: “And when the Israelites saw the mighty hand of the Lord displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the Lord and put their trust in him and in Moses his servant. Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord: I will sing to the Lord, for he is highly exalted. Both horse and driver he has hurled into the sea”. (Exodus 14.1–15.1). The essence of that event is a sequence of successive events: rescue of the Israelites by Yahweh, their act of faith in the Lord, singing the song to the glory of the Redeemer-Savior. Singing is then the response full of faith in the saving Yahweh. It is not hard to imagine that it was a song full of happiness and the overwhelming joy of people who had already believed, and who celebrated their rescue through singing.

Benedict XVI remarks that the very same song of rescue on the Red Sea appears at another important moment in the history of salvation. As we read in the Book of Revelation, “And I saw what looked like a sea of glass glowing with fire and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and its image and over the number of its name. They held harps given them by God and sang the song of God’s servant Moses and of the Lamb. . . (Rev 15.2–3). Benedict XVI emphasizes that “it is not the large and predatory Beasts equipped with powerful media that win but the sacrificed Lamb”. And then the song of Moses, the servant of God, which now becomes “the song of the Lamb sounds again, this time definitely” (Ratzinger 2012c).

This Lamb is Christ, who saved the world in the mystery of the Cross and Resurrection. It is for this reason that the Catholic Church makes this mystery present in each Eucharist while every year during the Paschal Vigil the song of Moses and the Lamb is sung as a response of faith to the final redemption in Christ. However, it should be realistically observed that after crossing the Red Sea, the Israelites still encountered new threats to life. That is why each new danger to their existence and each successive saving intervention of Yahweh called for a new song and this song was a new variant, or even variation, of the song that they had sung together with Moses.

A testimony of the multi-aspect subject of the prayer is the Book of Psalms. Joy, suffering, abandonment, human’s fall, and above all (and finally) God’s miraculous presence constitute the main subject catalog of psalms. We know from biblical sources that the prayer was performed in a vocal and instrumental manner. Reading the psalms we learn what instruments and ways of singing those were; we also know that there were various liturgical and folk melodies (Ravasi 2017).

Christians took over this way of praying from the Synagogue, although already in the new context of the history of salvation since Christ is for the Church this David who “teaches the new song and indicates the tone and manner of the proper adoration of God and union with the Heavenly liturgy” (Ratzinger 2012b). St. Paul understood this perfectly and this is why he wrote in the Letter to Ephesians, “. . . be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another [in] psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and playing to the Lord in your hearts” (Eph 5.18–19). And, therefore, the Church—being conscious that she has already been redeemed in Christ—sings a new song to the Lord.

In each liturgy, the Church celebrates her final salvation in Christ and glorifies Him by singing from the very depths of her soul, thus joining the heavenly choruses which forever and ever sing around the Throne of the Lamb (Rev 4.8–11). Therefore, the reason why Christians sing in the liturgy becomes obvious, and St. Paul expresses it in the following

words: “No one can say, “Jesus is Lord”, but by the Holy Spirit” (Cor 1.12,3). In the perfect relation of love between the Persons of the Holy Trinity, this “charity of God (is) poured forth in our hearts, by the Holy Ghost who is given to us” (Rom 5.5) makes it possible to sing and glorify God for His “wondrous work of our creation and the still greater work of our redemption” (Missale Romanum 1975, p. 312*). So, in the deepest understanding of the essence of glorifying God by singing, the major efficient cause is the Holy Spirit.

The latter breath (*pneuma*) is after all (symbolically) close to the manner of our singing, which takes place through breath, whereas no breath is considered as a lack of life signs. That is why the Church should call *Veni Sancte Spiritus*, especially while celebrating the liturgy in order to give praise to God, and not to herself. Unfortunately, a number of symptoms in the contemporary Church (also on the musical level) point to pastoral projects whose actions do not come from the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, but which are poor pastoral attitudes. In certain local churches, the liturgy may rather resemble mediocre musical shows, often of a secular character, than the proper liturgical music having the character of *musica celestis*. This mainly results from a lack of correct theoretical and musical formation of the clergy, church musicians as well as the faithful (Lisiecki 2018).

Sensitive to this problem, the Apostle to the Nations reminds the Church with all his power: ... “I urge you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship. Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect” (Romans 12.2). What does St. Paul mean by using the phrase *logiké latreia*? While analyzing the consequence of the effect of music in various cultures and religions, Benedict XVI points out that for sacred music *logiké latreia* means that it is not dissolving oneself in uncontrolled intoxication, in sensuality, but a person’s integration with the higher heavenly sphere, and this is the kind of music which refers to Logos—Word—which became human in Christ. “That is why the Word—writes Ratzinger (2012c, p. 123)—gets us out of the isolation of individualism and includes us into the community of saints beyond time and space. All of our singing is always singing and praying together with this great liturgy encompassing all creation”. For Benedict XVI then, the word predominates consistently in liturgical music, and combined with music this word is a higher way of prophesying (Ratzinger 2012c).

Joachim Waloszek, a Polish theologian and musicologist, claims that the word combined with music reevaluates the word and transfers it from the level of pure rationality to the level of emotionality, will and intuition on the pre-rational and supra-rational level (Waloszek 2006). Wherever singing accompanies the word, something more than the correct understanding of words is important. J. Ratzinger explains this issue even more emphatically, “Faith is born out of listening to the word of God. However, where the word of God is translated into human language, a surplus remains of something unspoken and unspeakable which calls for our silence—the silence which finally changes it into song and also calls the powers of cosmos for help so that what was not said can be also heard” (Ratzinger 2012a, p. 524).

3. Liturgical Singing in the Present Teaching of the Catholic Church

The Catholic Church has treated music, and especially singing, with great respect. In her teaching, we can find innumerable documents by popes, councils, synods and bishops referring to so-called church music. Great theological interpretation (teaching) as well as many centuries of alive tradition remain a permanent testimony that treats music, especially in liturgy, with solemnity. Nevertheless, the common secularization touching upon various spheres of the Church also found its way into the music performed in churches. That is why it seems justified to ask a question about the essence and the further fate of sacral music, whose great part is music combined with words—that is singing.

Realizing her mission, the most important goal and the supreme law of which is the salvation of souls (Codex Iuris Canonici 1983, can. 1752), the Church is guided by two fundamental sources, namely the Word of God and Tradition. The liturgy celebrated by the

Church, together with liturgical singing, which is its part, “includes us into the community of saints, as well as trespassing times and places” (Ratzinger 2012c, p. 123). The constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium* of the Second Vatican Council emphasizes that our union with the heavenly Church takes place when in liturgy “with one song of praise (we) magnify the one and triune God” (Second Vatican Council 1963, p. 112). The Catechism of the Catholic Church points to the fact that the Earthly liturgy transgresses the visible dimensions and teaches: “In the earthly liturgy we share in a foretaste of that heavenly liturgy which is celebrated in the Holy City of Jerusalem. . . With all the warriors of the heavenly army we sing a hymn of glory to the Lord” (Catechism of the Catholic Church 1993, art. 1090).

Therefore, a question arises about how the Church perceives the participation of the faithful in liturgy and what role music plays, especially singing. Answers to these questions can be found first of all in *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. There are a number of documents of the universal Church as well as particular churches that extend their commentaries to the concise entries of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. However, for greater clarity and greater attention attached to the most important pillars of the teaching of the Church, the analysis of a number of additional commentaries and instructions is deliberately omitted.

At the beginning of the sixth chapter, the authors of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* emphasize that the musical tradition of the Church is distinguished from other forms of artistic expression in that the church singing combined with words is a necessary and integral part of the liturgy (Second Vatican Council 1963, p. 112). This special character is that the singing of the celebrant, the faithful, the choir and the cantor is not a mere addition or decoration, but it is literally a part of the liturgy. If, as claimed by the authors of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, singing is a necessary part of the liturgy, then the liturgy requires singing, which is a prayer and adoration of the Lord in the company of all angels and heavenly choirs. With them, we make a community during the celebration. D. Sabino specifies this thread: “. . . liturgy without singing certainly is “canonically” valid. . . It is, however, deprived of one of its main anthropological components and hence it is simply deprived of a part of itself and, as a consequence, a part of its meaning” (Sabaino 2013, p. 93).

Church music—including liturgical singing—will be even more elated if it blends with the liturgical action. It needs to be emphasized that the solemnity of the song does not depend on the “greatness” of the composer of a given liturgical song or on the greatness of the esteemed vocal group singing during the Holy Mass, but on whether a given music piece is related to a given liturgical action, thus highlighting its proper sense. A lot of theologians and musicologists question the correctness of the expression *musica sacra* by the Vatican Council. That is why the adjective “sacred” should be understood as referring to music (singing) to the relation with the liturgical action, and above all to the esthetic or musical quality (Piqué i Collado 2017).

The Council also establishes two direct aims of music, which in the context of our biblical analyses seems obvious. These are the praise of God and sanctification of the faithful. These two factors are the essence of the proper liturgy (cult) as well as liturgical music. This is why Piqué remarks that “the ideal of liturgical music should be combined with the proclaimed and prayed Word. In this way thanks to this identification the faithful are led to piety, and—above all—they are prepared for the grace of the sacraments. We can, therefore, speak of sacramentality of music in the liturgy” (Piqué i Collado 2017, p. 100).

Next, the authors of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* point to the fact that the liturgical action takes a more dignified form when divine worship takes place solemnly, accompanied by singing. . . with the active participation of the faithful (Second Vatican Council 1963, p. 113). The essence of each celebration of the Eucharist is celebrating the salvific mystery, which is highlighted by the singing of the community participating in the liturgy. “Active participation” of the faithful does not mean excessive activity or realization of a number of tasks, but rather what we said earlier about *logiké latreia*—active involvement understood as a more conscious service to God, which is prayer.

Further on, the authors of the *Sacrosanctum Concilium* suggest caring about the development of singing groups, especially in cathedral churches (Second Vatican Council 1963, p. 113), while bishops and pastors are given the task of devoted care so that in each celebration of the liturgy where songs are performed all the faithful are able to actively participate in the proper manner (Second Vatican Council 1963, p. 114). Singing groups, choirs and liturgical scholas have existed in the Church for ages. Today it is hard to imagine a world without many valuable compositions written for vocal groups by ordinary and brilliant composers. Now the Church needs smaller groups of the faithful associated with vocal groups considering their personal musical and liturgical formation (education). Vocal groups (choirs, scholas) are also necessary for valuable liturgical works to sound in churches. Hence, the document consistently reminds us of the necessity of music formation in priests' seminaries, novices, Catholic schools, etc. as well as of the permanent liturgical formation of church musicians and members of church choirs (Second Vatican Council 1963, p. 115). Authors of the Constitution on Sacred Liturgy remind that the Gregorian chant is regarded by the Church as its own singing of the Roman liturgy and that is why it should take the first place among other ways of singing. Hence the next postulation is to finalize a model edition of books with this mode of singing.

At the end of this part, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* reminds us of the necessity for new church songs to appear whose texts will be congruent with the Catholic teaching and whose invaluable sources are the Holy Bible and the liturgical sources. This means composers who will serve the Church through their creative work. At this point, we cannot overlook the *Letter of His Holiness Pope John Paul II to Artists*: "The Church also needs musicians. How many sacred works have been composed through the centuries by people deeply imbued with the sense of the mystery! . . . In song, faith is experienced as vibrant joy, love, and confident expectation of the saving intervention of God" (John Paul II 2007, p. 498).

Summing up, it needs to be emphasized that *Sacrosanctum Concilium* contains only ten points; these are, however, the most important indications showing the weight of church singing, its essence and a need for it. In the context of the present studies, a few of the most important indications should be emphasized. Liturgical song is a necessary element of each liturgy celebrated in the Church. Since the salvific mystery of Jesus Christ, His Passion, Death and Resurrection are celebrated, singing is a prayer of adoration of the whole Church, both the Pilgrim Church and the Church already glorified in heaven. The purpose of this prayer is, on the one hand, giving praise to God and, on the other, sanctifying a person, which means entering into communion with God in the hope of reunion in eternity. It also follows from the Council's teaching that the prayer sung during the liturgy cannot be accidental. First of all, it must be related to a given liturgical action and it should possess high aesthetic features. Singing prayer should also be characterized by a reasonably perfect text (the Holy Bible, liturgical texts). A special role is played by vocal groups like scholas and polyphonic choirs. Their members are not treated by the Church as artistic guests during the celebration of the Eucharist but as small believing communities that are continuously improving their liturgical and musical workshop, in this way artistically representing the whole praying community.

4. Human Flourishing and Art

The concept that makes it possible to view the development of the human person holistically is human flourishing. It derives from Aristotle's eudaimonia and is connected with the quest for happiness. Since each person has their own definition of happiness (though the ways to achieve it have some common elements), each person also needs different conditions in which they can use their potential and achieve the desired happiness. In the Parable of the Sower, the grain gives 30-fold or 60-fold yields and only in ideal conditions does it give a 100-fold yield. Likewise, a person can use their potential in thirty, sixty or a hundred percent, depending on the conditions in which they live, work and develop. An element of human flourishing is human well-being, where the hedonistic and eudaimonic aspects can be distinguished (Ruggeri et al. 2020). Hedonistic well-being, according to

the assumptions of hedonism, focuses on achieving satisfaction from life, seeking positive sensations and avoiding negative feelings conducive to a lack of happiness (Ryff et al. 2021). Eudaimonic well-being, on the other hand, is connected with the realization of the human potential (Zheng et al. 2015) and it is directed at higher needs such as autonomy, aspiration for perfection, personal development, positive relations with others, acceptance of oneself and purposefulness in life (Ryff et al. 2021). Another dimension might be added here, namely spiritual well-being understood as “one’s satisfaction with the spiritual domain of life; specifically, satisfaction with one’s relationship with the sacred or divine” (Watkins et al. 2022). The last-mentioned dimension will be the most important determinant of well-being in the context of the paper’s goal.

People combine a number of roles and fields of activity. It is only a coherent development in such areas as family, work and social life as well as combining activity with its proper motifs that lead to flourishing (Mercado 2018). Mutual relations between activities in the family, at work, in religious communities and in education facilitate flourishing. Apart from the aforementioned factors, other spheres of life affect human flourishing (VanderWeele 2017). These are not necessarily so commonly experienced, for example, involvement in art. This thesis is confirmed by numerous studies showing the relation between art, well-being (Daykin et al. 2018; Hallam and Creech 2016; Hendry et al. 2022) and human development in various aspects like building a community (Helitzer et al. 2022), spirituality (Moss 2019), as well as the relation between singing and life (Thompson et al. 2022). In particular, this relation is more thoroughly studied by James O. Pawelski (2022), who defines positive humanities “as the branch of learning concerned with culture in its relation to human flourishing” (Pawelski 2022). American researchers Louis Tay, James O. Pawelski and Melissa G. Keith proposed a conceptual model of the effect of involvement in arts and humanities on human well-being and development (Figure 1). They investigated the influence of involvement through creating, presenting, studying, consuming or criticizing particular works of art, and claimed that various forms of involvement result in other effects in the area of human flourishing. The effects also vary depending on the activities undertaken, for instance, reading, listening or analyzing (passive activities) as well as active activities such as singing, playing musical instruments, painting or dancing (Tay et al. 2018).

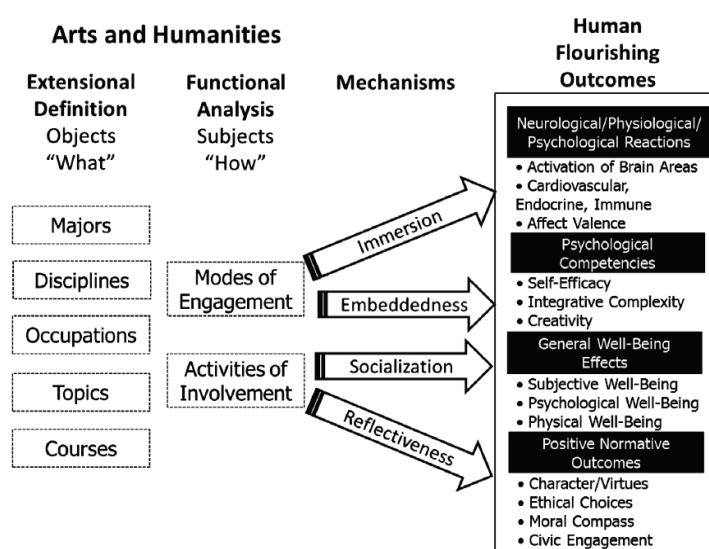


Figure 1. Relations of Arts and Humanities on Human Flourishing—conceptual model. Reproduced with permission from Tay, Louis, James O. Pawelski, and Melissa G. Keith. The role of the arts and humanities in human flourishing: A conceptual model. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*; published by *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 2018.

The authors distinguished four mechanisms, namely immersion, embeddedness, socialization, and reflectiveness, which enable the achievement of positive effects for the development of a person who gets involved in activities connected with art. They emphasize, however, that these mechanisms can also be applied in other areas of life, and they should not be identified only with involvement in art (Tay et al. 2018). In this model, immersion is understood by the authors as complete attention devoted to a given activity to such an extent that a person seems to be absent. This leads to the state of flow, which results in the appearance of pleasant feelings of aesthetic sensations (Tay et al. 2018). This state is possible to achieve in a choir thanks to collective activity where an individual uses their skills and abilities to get totally involved in prayer by singing. As a result, this activity releases joy and excitement in a choir member, thus leading to happiness (Tonneijck et al. 2008).

Embeddedness is connected with socio-cognitive processes enabling the creation of definite behaviors and habits as well as acquiring definite abilities. This can be an experience of mastery, direct encouragement or a positive psychological response. Embeddedness in art can bring fruit in the form of permanent benefits in other spheres of life, e.g., greater persistence in achieving goals or a stronger willingness for improvement (Tay et al. 2018).

Socialization is connected with the variety of roles adopted by an individual in society and in the culture where they function. This variety results in the enrichment of an individual's life through involvement in different activities and through the establishment of a network of new friends and people from whom they may receive support (Tay et al. 2018; Juan-Morera et al. 2023). Moreover, socialization is connected with building a community and sharing experiences through group activities such as playing in the theatre or singing in a choir (Tay and Pawelski 2022).

Reflectiveness is understood here as conscious cognitive and emotional processes leading to the development, strengthening or rejection of certain habits, to work on one's character, values or worldviews. The authors of the model relate reflectiveness to the establishment of a moral compass, involvement in civic behaviors and questioning the current practices leading to social change. This can be a change in the local community as well as on a global scale (Tay et al. 2018).

5. Methods of the Studies

The aim of the present studies is to indicate the way in which singing prayer, which is realized in choirs performing liturgical music, affects the integral development of a human person. To realize the research aim, individual in-depth interviews were conducted with choir members. The plan of the interview was constructed in a way that referred to the areas of human flourishing distinguished in the theoretical part of the model (Tay et al. 2018).

The research sample was chosen deliberately. The criteria of inclusion were: (1) active membership in the choir performing liturgical music and (2) the age above 18 so that the respondents themselves were able to express their willingness to participate in the research. Due to the subject of research—prayer with choral singing—it was important to conduct interviews with people performing liturgical music, which is directed to God. Additional criteria were gender and family status. This follows from different ways of perceiving both prayer (Tatala and Wojtasiński 2023) and leisure activity (Lee 2023) by men and women, as well as different obligations of single people in comparison to those who combine singing in the choir with family duties. As a result, four respondent groups were established, namely single men (group A), men with a family (group B), single women (group C), and women living in a family (group D). To keep the anonymous character, the respondents' answers were assigned codes according to the scheme where F means a woman, M means a man, S means a single person, and F means a person functioning in a family. In this way the following abbreviations were used: 1SM-4SM for group A, 1FM-4FM for group B, 1SF-4SF for group C and 1FF-4FF for group D. All respondents were informed of the aim and the scientific character of the research. All of them consciously agreed to take part in the research and to use their answers in a scientific paper.

Research on the functioning of human communities uses the method of participants' observation since according to the precursors of everyday life sociology, "If somebody is interested in what people think, feel and do, the best, reliable and complete method to acquire this information is sharing their experiences" (Wallerstein 2007, pp. 6–7). This is why the auxiliary method in the present study was participant's observation of the authors who were actively involved in the community of St. John Paul II Choir as the conductor (choirmaster) and a member of the choir.

The analysis of primary data was based on the study of transcriptions of the interviews. In the first step, we were looking for specific expressions that would allow us to confirm mechanisms of engagement and involvement described in analyzed model of relationships between art and human flourishing. Then the respondents' answers were coded line-by-line with the aim of finding the main subjects, important events and situations as well as recurring opinions. A similar method was used in studies on the effect of choir on its members' well-being by (Batt-Rawden and Andersen 2020). Next, the collected and coded research material was arranged in tables and submitted for analysis and interpretation. The interviews were conducted in the period from October to November 2023. Sixteen persons from fourteen different choirs gave the answers.

6. Research Results

In the description of the research results, we decided to organize it in accordance with the analyzed model of relations between art and human flourishing (Tay et al. 2018). For that reason, there is no additional paragraph about the noticed differences between particular groups of respondents, but they are described within particular themes. We distinguished five main themes with four subcategories, which are shown in Table 1. The subject of our research is prayer through singing in a liturgical choir, so we wanted to examine the meaning of prayer in general, and then the specificity of prayer within a choir and motifs that led our respondents to engagement in a liturgical choir.

Table 1. Table of code families.

Prayer	Mechanisms
Mystical experience	<i>Engagement</i>
Devoting all things in life to God	Immersion
Saying words	Embeddedness
Prayer within a choir	<i>Involvement</i>
Words are not enough to praise God	Reflectiveness
Additional window to God	Socialization
Deeper contact with God's word	
Devoting more time to God	Human flourishing outcomes
Deeper experience of a liturgy	<i>Connected to singing in a choir</i>
Helping others in liturgy	Physical well-being
Formation of choir members	Skills
Hardships	Character features
	Creating sth with others
Motifs	Musical taste development
Belonging to the Church	
Enliven the parish	
Interest in liturgical music	<i>Connected to prayer within a choir</i>
Musical traditions in family	Integrative complexity
Religious family	Spiritual well-being

Table 1. Cont.

Prayer	Mechanisms
Conductor's invitation	Subjective well-being
Friend's invitation	
Realization of own vocation	
Willingness to praise God	
Own passion's realization	

Source: own elaboration on the basis of research results.

6.1. Choral Singing as a Prayer

We decided to start with an analysis of a broader category, which is prayer and after that examine the narrower one, which is prayer within a choir. The analysis revealed a different understanding of prayer itself. A mystical experience connected to a deep reflection, intensive emotions or total immersion in the relation with God is rare and hard to achieve (2SM, 3FM). The answer to that hardship is to pray by giving all activities to God and to pray with words, music, or even with body posture (3FM, 1SM, 2SM). In that sense, all actions, from focusing on God, through being open to other people, to deep meditation, can be perceived as a prayer (1SM).

When asked about the reasons for the choice of a liturgical choir, the respondents indicated their previous experience. Some respondents mentioned being brought up in a religious family (1SF, 2SM) or having parents who sing or used to sing in different choirs (3FM, 4SF). They also encountered many years of involvement in the life of the Church, both in scholas and music groups in childhood (3SF, 4SF, 2FF), in academic ministry (2FF, 4FF), in formation communities such as Light-Life Movement (3FM, 1FF, 1SF) or in Father Pio prayer group (2SF). That long-term engagement led two respondents to the willingness to enliven the parish community (1FF, 2SF) and for others was deeper involvement in building the Church community (3FF, 3FM). The motifs for involvement in a choir included personal passion realization (3SF, 4SF) and interest in liturgical music (2SM, 1SF) and the liturgy itself (1SM). An important reason for singing in a liturgical choir was the desire to praise God (3FM, 4SF) or realize one's vocation by using a given talent (1SF, 2SF, 1FM, 3SM) or even paying a debt for the talent (3SF, 2FM). People engaged in more than one project needed a personal invitation from the conductor (1SM, 2SM), for others, a friend's invitation was a trigger to join a choir (2SF, 3SF, 2FF, 3FF). While the mentioned motifs emerged in all four groups of respondents, the interest in liturgical music and in the liturgy itself was present only in groups A and C which involved single people.

Describing prayer through singing in a choir respondents highlighted that for them it is a better form of praying than just saying words (4FF). They often mentioned the quotation attributed to St. Augustine: "who sings, prays twice" (3FF, 2SF, 1SM, 3SM). They also noticed that the spoken word is not enough to express the glory of God or that music is a better way to praise the Lord (1SF, 3SF, 2SM). One of the choristers said: "the music itself also expresses my faith and my love to God, sometimes it's difficult for me to express it in words and then I express it with music. For sure, this spiritual aspect is obviously connected with words, but at times it is sort of easier to sing these words than simply say a prayer" (1SF). Respondents also feel that their involvement in the choir is a way to get closer to God (3SM), it is an additional window to heaven that is available for the choristers (2SM).

Respondents indicated that their prayer is a part of the liturgy. That is why, the choice of particular pieces is vital. It is really important that the songs performed by them have their sources in the Holy Bible (1SF, 2FF) and they are liturgical pieces closely connected with particular parts of the liturgy (1SF, 2SM). According to respondents, conductors of a number of choirs place emphasis on formation during study days, retreats and music workshops (1SF, 3FF, 4SM). One of the female members says, "our choir is very absorbed in prayer, we don't sing just for singing itself since retreats and study days are organized

for us and this is also very important for me” (3FF). During rehearsals, choristers also talk about the lyrics of chosen pieces and try to understand the meaning of God’s words to be able to share them through their singing. Finally, they enter a specific role based on scenes from the Gospel. “It is sometimes not easy to get into such a role and the text which one is singing. For example, the Passion is not only singing for singing itself but transferring the proper emotions. I sing in a choir sentencing Jesus to death and this is horrible from my perspective as a Catholic. Still, I have to get into this role” (4SF), says one of the female members. Another person, also referring to the singing of the Passion, pointed out that he experiences this scene as if Jesus was dying at this very moment, and through this prayer, he empathizes with the Savior’s feelings as if they were happening live (4SM).

By singing in a choir one can also affect the life of others and try to get them closer to God. Personal testimony is important, especially with the speeding secularization and with people turning their backs on God. The respondents emphasized that when they invite their friends to the liturgy prepared by the choir, they create a possibility for those who are not religiously involved to experience the beauty of singing prayer (4SF) and “help them experience something mystical, help them weep” (3FM).

The last but not least theme that emerged during interviews was hardships during the prayer. One of them is the necessity to focus on too many technical matters (4SM, 4SF), unexpected distractions caused by external factors (2SF) or distractions caused by improper behavior of the choir members (3FM, 1FF). Respondents in groups B and D mentioned that it is hard for them to find time for the rehearsals because they sometimes feel as if they escape from their family (3FF) or have to resign from spending time with their family (1FF), for people from groups A and C it was harder to find any difficulties that distract them from singing in a choir. Some of them had to choose between the choir and meeting friends or taking other hobbies (1SF) or had no idea how to use leisure time otherwise (4SM). One of the respondents from group C said that she organizes everything else in a way that allows her to participate in rehearsals and liturgies with her choir (3SF).

To sum up, analyses of the interviews confirmed that many postulates from *Sacrosanctum Consilium* regarding liturgical music are applied in the practice of the functioning of liturgical choirs. Although respondents perceive prayer differently, their motifs for praying by singing in a liturgical choir are strongly connected with their faith, praising God and serving the community. Even if they have to go through different difficulties, they decide to participate in choir activities for the greater good.

6.2. Mechanisms of Engagement and Involvement

The next step of the analysis was checking if the choirs’ members experienced all four mechanisms included in the model which are immersion, embeddedness, socialization and reflectiveness. Getting engaged in singing choristers immerses in singing by devoting all their attention to it. That activates the brain areas and muscles involved in singing and allows articulating proper sound and concentrating entirely on singing. It also enables one to escape from everyday life and its problems when a given song is performed (1SF, 4FF). The choir members emphasized that they have to take care of the body posture and the proper way of breathing to oxygenate the whole brain (1SM, 1SF, 3SF). It is worth noticing that the concentration on technical issues emerged only in groups A and C which may suggest that single people are even more immersed in singing than those having families.

Analyzing the content of the interviews we can also find such opinions pointing to embeddedness manifested in the establishment of specific habits and skills. The respondents emphasized that they could improve their workshop by learning from the masters whom they consider their conductors to be (1SM, 2SF, 2FF). They also indicated that singing requires the proper training of the muscles, which—when unused—lose their properties (1SM, 1SF, 4SF). Moreover, participation in rehearsals teaches concentration on what is here and now, on the music score, the text and the harmony, and thus also inner discipline (1SF, 4SF). Again, people from groups A and C are more focused on technical issues than people from groups B and D.

Systematic participation in rehearsals and various kinds of celebrations creates responsibility for one's own acts and co-responsibility for the whole choir. In return, they become a part of the community, which satisfies their sense of belonging and enables interactions with the group members. Then the process of socialization occurs, and the appearing bonds facilitate the functioning in everyday life, which is emphasized by the respondents. They remark, however, that although the choir members socialize elsewhere during the rehearsals on various occasions (3FF), they are interested in what is happening in the lives of the other members (1SM, 2FM), and the strength of these bonds varies. When one has sung for many years, one can establish friendly relations (3SF, 4SF, 4FM, 2SM), count on help in prayer (1FM, 2SF, 1SF), as well as help in everyday hardships and problems (4FM), which is a specific sign of love (1SM) and an expression of the functioning as a community (1SF, 4FF).

From the perspective of the research aim, the most important process out of the four mentioned in the analyzed model is reflectiveness. It can be experienced by the choir members while directing their thoughts to God through liturgical songs. For many of them, singing in the choir is closely connected with the sense of life, which is faith in God (1SF, 2SF, 3SF, 4SF, 1FF), eternal happiness (3FM), and love (1SM, 2SM, 4FM) as well as being a good person (3FF), being with others and helping others (1FM, 3FF). People from groups B and D declared that the family is the sense of their lives (3FM, 4FF) while people from groups A and C mentioned living here and now and discovering the goal of the present experiences (4SM) or singing (4SM).

6.3. Human Flourishing Outcomes

6.3.1. Outcomes Connected to Singing in a Choir

By referring the obtained responses to the presented theoretical model, one can identify specific outcomes in the area of human flourishing brought about simply by singing in a choir. Some of them seem to be independent of the character of the choir, for example, the proper technique of singing or health benefits are simply related to group singing, which—according to studies—decreases the secretion of stress hormones, and through the decreased stress level indirectly releases immunological mechanisms responsible for recovery processes in cancer diseases (Szyszkowska 2019). Those findings are confirmed in our research. The first group of benefits is connected to physical well-being. A respondent who works as an organist underlined improvement in voice hygiene and voice physiology as well as muscle tension and stretching (1SF). Others mentioned better brain oxygenation which led to better mood and functioning (1SM) or ability to relax (4SM). Only respondents from groups A and C mentioned benefits influencing physical well-being.

Singing in a choir itself affects one's skills as well as features of character. A person learns to be systematic (4SF) and improves musical techniques (1SM, 1SF, 3FF) as well as develops musical taste (4SM, 4SF). Conductors teach the choristers how to sing properly in a classical mode and how to improve the voice emission to obtain better harmony within the whole choir (1SM, 3FM).

The necessity to adjust the dates of rehearsals and performances makes it possible to acquire the ability to manage time, establish priorities, and organize work and life in such a way that all duties can be fulfilled (3FF, 4FM). Moreover, it contributes to the ability to cooperate, and subordinate to the manager of the group, that is the conductor. Another advantage is overcoming one's shyness or egoism (2SF). A choir member does not focus on their individual happiness, though singing may contribute to the experience of it, but with singing they contribute to the common good.

Responsibility was the feature that respondents mentioned in different contexts. They articulated their responsibility on different levels starting from being on time for rehearsal (1SM), attending all rehearsals (4SM), and being prepared to sing by knowing the score (4SF, 2SM, 4SM) through helping others in learning the melody (4FF) to responsibility for the particular voice group (alto, tenor) or a whole choir and its harmony (3FM, 4FF). Respondents also mentioned that singing in a choir is better than singing solo because they

could create beauty together and the final harmony and beauty of the music sometimes transcend their expectations and give them enormous satisfaction (3SF, 4SF, 2SM, 4SM). Men from groups A and B underlined that they had to come and prepare well because the number of men in their voice was small and all the choir depended on them. Women from groups C and D more often perceived their responsibility for a choir and singing as a whole, as a group.

Some respondents mentioned that their family members' support is one of the benefits of singing in a choir. Their families often take part in liturgies, concerts and events organized by the choir (1FM, 3FM, 4SF). A theme that emerged only in groups B and D is that parents who sing in a choir encourage their children to sing in the same choir (3FF, 3FM), and they treat this time as spending free time and sharing passion with their children.

6.3.2. Outcomes Connected to Prayer within a Choir

Integrative Complexity

It is possible to distinguish the benefits that are strictly connected to the act of common prayer through choral singing, directing one's activities and using one's talents for God. The decision to belong to a choir is an expression of integrative complexity since while being conscious of their values and motifs, a person makes an autonomous choice based on their interests and abilities. It should, however, be emphasized that the decision to join a choir performing songs during liturgical celebrations is also influenced by the willingness to praise God and serve the community, whether it is the parish community, or a broader one, e.g., during the World Youth Days or Taizé Meetings. Making the decision to join a choir a person makes a long-term pledge requiring responsibility for their behavior and, at the same time, for the community which they join. Reflectiveness is expressed in the proper arrangement of priorities, which makes it possible to see the value of involvement in a liturgical choir. "In principle, the superiority of this form (liturgical, and not secular choir) is that I do not realize my own ambitions, and the music performed acquires value due to its purpose. I treat singing as service to the parish community. Naturally, I derive joy from it and I am happy with successes and praises, but they are of secondary importance to me" (3SF).

Integral complexity requires an agreement between values and everyday behavior. Singing during the liturgy demands choristers to behave in a dignified manner during the celebration and concentrate on particular songs. At the same time, it gives one the awareness that they should present a certain model for others (2SF). This is underlined by the choir members pointing to an irreproachable moral attitude. "When you are in a choir, you are a certain model for the environment. Not any choir, but a Catholic one. I brought a few people to the choir but I knew that they were morally all right; I had to know them very well to suggest that they sing in the choir" (2FM). This agreement between the values and behavior led one of the respondents to claim "this is so true and I thought that it also has the dimension of testimony. The fact that maybe my daughter needed to see that involvement in the choir is important for me. She is interested in it and she supports me. It might be the way to win her for Church" (1FF). She understood that her authenticity in praising God during the liturgy and her engagement in the parish choir might be the way of evangelization for her adolescent children. This theme emerged only in group D.

Human flourishing is closely connected with striving for happiness. When asked about the degree to which singing in the choir contributes to their happiness, the respondents noticed a number of aspects. One of them stated that singing in the choir is one of the small parts of happiness since he can cherish a lot of things in the world and all of them build his happiness (4FM). The respondents also emphasized the aspect of belonging to the choir community, acceptance by the other members and common values (2FM, 4SM). Through reference to God and the transcendent goal—eternal happiness—an individual is able to get more involved in singing in spite of any problems they encounter. Despite being tired from professional jobs and duties at home (1FF) and despite the necessity to give up rest

(3FF), meetings with friends (1SF) or any other interesting projects (2SM), members of the choir are able to find time for rehearsals and participation in liturgy together with the choir.

Spiritual Well-Being

Improvement of spiritual well-being seems to be the outcome with the strongest connection to prayer by singing in a liturgical choir. First of all, as stated earlier, being a liturgical choir member leads to a deeper engagement in the Church and devoting more time to God. It influences spiritual development through meditation on the Bible, immersion in sacred text and deeper experience of the liturgy. Some conductors even organize study days and spiritual retreats to integrate their choir members and to have a separate time for training in singing and to deepen their spiritual life. In a community based on Christian values, they can freely manifest their faith and praise the Lord without fear that somebody would criticize their beliefs. All of that leads to a deepening relationship with God and in some cases even to change in life. One of the respondents pledged that she could not accept the conflict of values in her life and she resigned from non-sacramental union with her partner to leave in agreement with the Church's teaching (2SF). The other one indicated that he experienced God's grace in a difficult life situation and now he is paying the debt by helping others with all kinds of problems including those with faith (1FM). Moreover, the common prayer is an integral part of the liturgy, a window to heaven thanks to which the choir members have a sort of a special connection with saints and with God Almighty (2SM).

Taking all code families into consideration, we built a model similar to the model described in the theoretical part but adjusted to our research. Our model is presented in Figure 2.

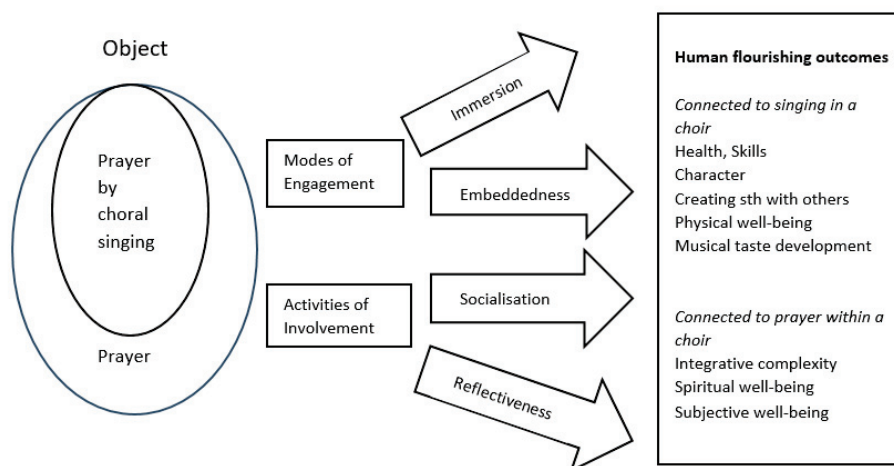


Figure 2. Relations between prayer by singing in a liturgical choir and human flourishing. Source: Own elaboration on the basis of research results and Tay, Louis, James O. Pawelski, and Melissa G. Keith. "The role of the arts and humanities in human flourishing: A conceptual model". *The Journal of Positive Psychology* 13, no. 3 (2018): 215–225.

7. Conclusions and Limitations

The size of the present paper and the definite research aim does not make it possible to present the whole research material. On the basis of the cited opinions expressed by people involved in singing in liturgical choirs, one can definitely state that it has a positive effect on human flourishing. The results of the present studies allow us to state that faith in God is a fundamental motif of involvement in a liturgical choir for the respondents. Performing songs based on the Holy Bible and other liturgical texts enables a deeper relation with the Creator, praising Him and showing gratitude for exceptional musical talent. Thanks to prayer in the community of the choir, the singers realize their Christian vocation, beginning with their spiritual development, through work on their

limitations, to the evangelization of their environment. Involvement in choral singing is an expression of their service for the benefit of the Catholic Church (*logiké latreia*) and a form of building a parish community. According to the results of studies, involvement in liturgical choir singing expresses spiritual maturity resulting from many years of formation, which has often continued since childhood and is still present during study days, retreats and workshops.

Opinions expressed by the studied choir members indicate a high level of realization of recommendations included in the teaching of the Catholic Church on liturgical singing. Summing up the above reflections, it should be emphasized that through choir singing prayer the ways of engagement (immersion and embeddedness), as well as the activities connected with involvement (socialization and reflectiveness), are realized. Choir singing as a group activity requiring specific skills affects health aspects and develops the necessary habits and mastery of the singers. Prayer by singing in a liturgical choir contributes to the increased coherence of motifs with behavior and to spiritual well-being.

The basic limitation of the present studies is the fact that they were conducted on a small sample (16 persons), which does not make it possible to generalize the results to the whole population. Another drawback, which, however, allowed us to maintain the coherence of the research, is the embeddedness of the research in one religious rite, which is the Catholic religion. It would be interesting to see which human flourishing is present in different religious rites and traditions.

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Article

Towards Socially Responsible Consumption: Assessing the Role of Prayer in Consumption

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Abstract: The issue of socially responsible consumer behavior has been of great interest to researchers for years. It seems important to acquire knowledge about consumer behavior, especially among young people, who are a special group of consumers. In recent years, it is not only the purchasing power of young people that has been growing, but also the range of market choices they make. In this context, it is important to identify the determinants of consumer behavior to predict the directions of changes in the behavior of young people as consumers. One of the interesting research areas is determining the role of prayer, or more broadly, human spiritual development, in shaping consumer behavior. Some research suggests that there is a relationship between religion, or more precisely, religious practices and consumption. This work presents the most important definitions of a socially responsible consumer, presenting the most important aspects of this attitude. This work also presents previous research on the relationship between religiosity, prayer and consumer behavior. This research on the SRC attitude among young people was conducted using an online survey. The collected data were tested using the χ^2 test of independence. Owing to the obtained results, it was possible to indicate the aspects of SRC in which the attitude to prayer is important.

Keywords: consumption; prayer; socially responsible consumer

1. Introduction

Consumption is the final stage of the economic process of acquiring or using goods and services to meet all kinds of human needs. Modern civilization is saturated with consumerism, and the effectiveness and speed of meeting needs have become a priority. For many, consumption is a ticket to a better, happier world. The world of consumption is understood as a reality in which every desire must be satisfied immediately. It should be noted that consumerism has a destructive impact on the spiritual sphere of man, because it subordinates the internal and spiritual dimensions of human life to what is material and instinctive in it. John Paul II in the encyclical *Centesimus Annus* wrote that it is one of the possible planes of human alienation, combined with the loss of the authentic meaning of existence, in which “man, not recognizing the value and greatness of the person in himself and in his neighbor, deprives himself of the opportunity to fully experience his own humanity and establishing that relationship of solidarity and community with other people for which he was created by God” (John Paul II 1991, *Centesimus Annus*). Spirituality researchers Zohar and Marshall believe that we live in a culture of spiritual numbness that distorts our motives. Various social and economic pressures make us prone to confuse desires with needs. They also cause us to want more than we need (Marshall and Zohar 2001, p. 285).

Economics is a science that explains and advises how to rationally manage to, e.g., maximize profit, increase sales, reduce costs, etc. It is worth noting that classical economics is dominated by a normative approach to decision-making processes based on the concept of rationality. In economic analyses, it is assumed that the goal of an enterprise is to maximize profit, and the goal of a consumer should be to maximize utility. In real life, a

person never has to maximize their utility or an entrepreneur their profit. An entrepreneur may strive to maximize profit, but they do not have to, and a consumer may strive to maximize satisfaction from consumption, but they do not have to. An entrepreneur is responsible (also morally) for the survival and development of their enterprise (they are responsible for the people they employ). A positive financial result is therefore necessary, but does not have to be maximized. An entrepreneur (or, more broadly, a person managing an enterprise) is a human being and from the point of view of their development, they should not focus solely on making money and developing their company. Also, the consumer should not only strive to maximize satisfaction from consumption—for their own good, they should improve all dimensions of their humanity (Rogowski 2008). The analysis of consumers' or entrepreneurs' decisions goes beyond the subject of economic research and covers, among others, areas such as ethical choices, the impact of decisions made by an individual on the environment and society, and the sense of management.

In 1975, Webster presented the definition of a socially responsible consumer (SRC). He defined a socially conscious consumer as “a consumer who considers the public consequences of private consumption or who attempts to use his purchasing power to effect change” (Webster 1975). This definition was based on the psychological construct of social engagement. This suggests that socially responsible consumers must be aware of and understand the impact of their consumption. Twenty years later, Roberts proposed a different definition. He defines a socially responsible consumer as “one who purchases products and services that he perceives as having a positive (or less negative) impact on or uses his purchasing power to express current social concerns” (Roberts 1995). This definition suggests that SRC encompasses two dimensions: environmental and social concern. Mohr and others proposed a broader definition of SRC compared to Robert's definition. They defined SRC as “a person purchasing, using, and disposing of products with the intention of minimizing or eliminating any harmful effects and maximizing long-term beneficial impacts on society” (Mohr et al. 2001). This definition suggests that SRC refers to the acquisition, use and disposal of products by an individual that is based on their desire not to harm the natural environment and have a long-term beneficial impact on society. Yan and She claimed that “consumers' behavior at every stage of the consumption process is influenced by their concerns about social, moral and environmental issues”. Their definition shows that at each stage of an individual's consumption, the long-term interest of society and the nation must be taken into account (Yan and She 2011). Based on definitions of SRC provided by previous authors, several studies have published dimensions of SRC. Lecompte and Roberts conceptualized SRC from five dimensions. They operationalize SRC based on the following aspects: (1) firm behavior, (2) good cause products, (3) small businesses, (4) geographic origin, and (5) consumption volumes. They expanded the scope of SRC to also include other aspects such as preferences for purchasing local products from small businesses (Lecompte and Roberts 2006). Mohr, Webb, and others based the conceptualization of CRS on the following three dimensions: (1) purchases based on the company's CSR activities, (2) consumer recycling behavior, (3) avoiding and reducing the use of products based on their environmental impact. These dimensions differ from the dimensions of Lecompte and Roberts. Lecompte and Roberts focused on purchasing cause-related products, purchasing from small businesses, and purchasing local products, while Mohr, Webb and others focused on consumer recycling behavior and corporate social responsibility.

The appearance of the term “socially responsible consumer” in the literature postulates that the consumer is able to break away from brand loyalty or strong motivation due to the low price of the product in favor of a more complex selection process in which quality or arguments of a social or ethical nature become the essential criterion. Consumers can therefore behave responsibly if, when deciding to purchase a given product or service based on their initial knowledge, they want to expand it to a state of full awareness, relating not only to the features of the product or service itself, but also to all activities and practices implemented by the entrepreneur and—most importantly—include them in the purchasing

process. Only such action will translate into the consumer's involvement in the product creation process and will give tacit acceptance of the non-economic activities carried out by the company. By choosing products or services of economic entities implementing socially responsible business strategies, consumers are directly involved in the chain of responsibility.

Religiosity shapes an individual's system of values and beliefs, and consequently, consumption behavior. One of the dimensions of religiosity is prayer. The aim of this article is to examine whether attitudes towards prayer can influence consumption. This study's survey was conducted among young people in Poland, which is a country where most people declare themselves to be religious. The dominant religion is Christianity; therefore, this article concerns the relationship between consumerism and Christian prayer. This research enriches the literature on prayer and consumption by showing areas of responsible consumption where attitudes towards prayer may influence consumer behavior. Religion (especially Christianity), as a factor shaping purchasing behavior, is very often overlooked. This is due to the fact that it is treated as a very personal topic, and conducting research requires great sensitivity. Additionally, the decreasing percentage of actively practicing people and the personalization of religion favor treating it as a marginal factor whose role will decrease, which justifies ignoring the impact of this determinant in consumer research. Although there is little research on the relationship between prayer and consumption, the influence of religion on consumer behavior is quite widely studied because religion provides a worldview that permeates an individual's belief and value system and consequently shapes their behavior (Engelland 2014). Some research suggests that religiosity promotes a rejection of materialism (Burroughs and Rindfleisch 2002; Baker et al. 2013) and voluntary simplicity (Chowdhury 2018; Peifer et al. 2020), indicating the existence of a relationship between religion and consumption. In recent years, research has been undertaken on the relationship between the consumption of specific product groups and the attitude towards prayer (Nassè 2022; Abdoljabari et al. 2015), which indicates the existence of a certain relationship.

Some studies on the relationship between consumption and religion show that it is the degree of religiosity that influences consumption behavior (Al-Hyari et al. 2012; Patel 2010). Those authors dealt with Islam and Buddhism. Other studies show that attending Mass, feeling God's presence, and commitment to a particular religion or level of faith influence how much one consumes (Amankwaa et al. 2012). Some recent studies on religious beliefs have shown their influence on consumption behavior (Agarwala et al. 2019; Nassé et al. 2019). Those works highlight the influence of religious practices on consumption behavior in the context of widely varying consumer choices and purchase decision factors such as taste, advertising, price, packaging, and product content.

2. Method

In order to collect appropriate research material, an online survey technique was used. The research tool in the form of a survey questionnaire consisted of 17 questions. Questions about socially responsible consumption included 12 indicators (variables) constituting Likert scale items. There are 3 statements for each aspect of socially responsible consumption. This work adopts the definition of a socially responsible consumer as one who cares about the environment, supports local entrepreneurs, chooses products from companies that act ethically and work for society, and does not buy things that they do not need. When designing a scale allowing for the measurement of socially responsible consumer behavior of young people, in addition to the literature indicated above, a wide range of issues raised by various authors were also taken into account, such as an ethical approach to shopping (Sudbury-Riley and Kohlbacher 2016; Stobiecka 2017). Ultimately, 4 aspects were taken into account in this research: environmental, cultural, local, and social. Detailed statements used to assess the attitude of a socially responsible consumer are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Statements characterizing socially responsible consumer behavior.

Aspect of SRC	Full Statement	Short Name of Variable
environmental	I try to purchase products that do not destroy natural resources	E ₁
	I try to purchase products that can be recycled	E ₂
	I try to purchase products that are safe for the environment	E ₃
cultural	I avoid purchasing unnecessary products, even if they cost little	C ₁
	I don't buy more products than I need	C ₂
	I don't buy products just because others have them	C ₃
local	I try to purchase handcrafted products to preserve heritage and stop the extinction of particular professions.	L ₁
	I buy goods at the local market to support small entrepreneurs	L ₂
	I try to buy products produced in my area	L ₃
social	I try to buy from companies that employ disabled and elderly people	S ₁
	I try to buy from companies that are affiliated with charities	S ₂
	I try to buy from stores or companies that care about good working conditions for their employees	S ₃

The respondents rated individual items on a 5-point scale. The other questions in the questionnaire, which concerned prayer and faith, were also closed. The last part of the survey consisted of questions about the objective characteristics of the surveyed people: gender, place of residence, etc. The collected research material was subjected to statistical analysis. The χ^2 test in connection with the V-Cramer coefficient was used to describe and verify the adopted hypotheses constituting the basis for the interpretation of the research results. The level of significance of differences means a certain degree of requirements at which a decision is made to accept or reject a statistical hypothesis. It was assumed that the χ^2 test allows for a sufficiently precise assessment of the test probability when there are less than 20% of cells with an expected number lower than 5 and when no cells have an expected number lower than 1 (Górniak and Wachnicki 2008, pp. 140–41). In order to estimate the strength of the relationship between the variables, the V-Cramer contingency coefficient was calculated. The level of the V-Cramer contingency coefficient has values between 0 and 1. This provides the basis for determining the strength of the relationship between the studied variables. A value of 0 indicates no relationship, values close to 0 indicate a weak relationship between row and column variables, values close to 1 indicate a strong relationship, and a value of 1 indicates the full strength of the relationship. The partial correlation procedure allows one to calculate partial correlation coefficients that describe a linear relationship between two variables while excluding the influence of one or more additional variables. Based on these statistics, it can be concluded that there is no relationship between the variables or, on the contrary, that such a relationship exists and determine its strength. Based on theoretical considerations regarding aspects of socially responsible consumer behavior, four such aspects were distinguished, including 12 variables. The aim of this work is to examine whether there is a relationship between the attitude towards prayer and consumer behavior, and it was assumed that the attitude towards prayer is related to the regularity of practicing prayer. Some people can pray regularly every day, regardless of circumstances, while others only pray in difficult situations or during special times in their lives. To achieve the above goal of the work, the following hypotheses were adopted for testing:

H1: *Attitude towards prayer influences the purchase of products that do not destroy natural resources.*

- H2:** Attitude towards prayer influences the purchase of recyclable products.
- H3:** Attitude towards prayer influences the purchase of environmentally safe products.
- H4:** Attitude towards prayer influences the avoidance of buying unnecessary products, even if they cost little.
- H5:** Attitude towards prayer influences the avoidance of buying more products than needed.
- H6:** Attitude towards prayer influences avoidance of buying products just because others have them.
- H7:** Attitude towards prayer influences the purchase of handmade products to preserve the heritage and prevent the extinction of particular professions.
- H8:** Attitude towards prayer influences purchasing products at the local market to support small entrepreneurs.
- H9:** Attitude towards prayer influences the purchase of locally produced products.
- H10:** Attitude towards prayer influences purchasing products from companies that employ disabled and elderly people.
- H11:** Attitude towards prayer influences purchasing products from companies that conduct charitable activities.
- H12:** Attitude towards prayer influences purchasing products from stores or companies that care about good working conditions for their employees.

This study was conducted among students of economics and management studying at the Catholic University of Lublin and the Lublin University of Technology using an online survey. The invitation to complete the survey along with a link was sent via e-mail or Teams messenger. Participation in the survey was voluntary and the survey was anonymous. The survey was completed by 117 people, most of whom were women (78.6%). Statistical processing of data was carried out in the Predictive Solutions program (IBM SPSS).

3. Results

Based on frequency tables, we can say that the attitude towards prayer differs from the declaration of faith. Among the respondents, 12.8% of people declare that they are non-believers (Table 2), while there are almost twice as many people who do not practice prayer, i.e., 23.9% (Table 3), which means that the “prayer” variable differentiates the surveyed group more than “attitude to faith”.

Table 2. Answers to the question about faith.

Do You Consider Yourself a Believer?	Frequency	Percentage
definitely a believer	25	21.4
somewhat a believer	66	56.4
religiously indifferent	11	9.4
somewhat a non-believer	8	6.8
definitely a non-believer	7	6.0
	$\Sigma = 117$	$\Sigma = 100.0$

Table 3. Answers to the question about prayer.

Do You Pray? How Often Do You Pray?	Frequency	Percentage
I pray several times a day	5	4.3
I pray once a day	37	31.6
I pray several times a week	9	7.7
I pray from time to time	38	32.5
I don't pray at all	28	23.9
	$\Sigma = 117$	$\Sigma = 100.0$

Next, the cross-tabulations were prepared to check the hypotheses put forward in the work. Unfortunately, the first cross-tabulations could not be interpreted because in all cases, the tables did not meet the abundance condition. Therefore, the variables were recoded by grouping similar responses, e.g., “I pray several times a day” and “I pray once a day” were recoded into “I pray often”. A similar approach was taken in the case of variables regarding the attitude of a socially responsible consumer, and similar answers were combined, such as: “definitely yes” and “somewhat yes” and “definitely no” and “somewhat no”. This meant a change from a 5-point Likert scale to a 3-point one. Owing to this procedure, it was possible to conduct a correlation test in the case of half of the variables. For the other half, abundance was still deficient in some cells; so, the hypotheses could not be tested. Detailed data are included in Table 4.

Table 4. Results of the crossing of “prayer” and consumption behavior.

Variables	Results	Conclusion
E ₁ and “prayer”	$\chi^2 = 5.264$; df = 4; $p = 0.261$; less than 20% of the cells have an expected abundance of less than 5.	Significance is greater than 0.05; so, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected, and there is no correlation.
E ₂ and “prayer”	$\chi^2 = 1.911$; df = 4; $p = 0.752$; less than 20% of the cells have an expected abundance of less than 5.	Significance is greater than 0.05; so, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected, and there is no correlation.
E ₃ and “prayer”	$\chi^2 = 6.066$; df = 4; $p = 0.194$; more than 20% of the cells have an expected abundance of less than 5	Significance is greater than 0.05; so, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected, and there is no correlation.
C ₁ and “prayer”	$\chi^2 = 22.892$; df = 4; $p = 0.001$, more than 20% of the cells have an expected abundance of less than 5	Significance is smaller than 0.05 but more than 20% of the cells have an expected abundance of less than 5; so, it is impossible to test the hypothesis.
C ₂ and “prayer”	$\chi^2 = 16.310$; df = 4; $p = 0.003$; less than 20% of the cells have an expected abundance of less than 5	Significance is smaller than 0.05; so, there is correlation; the V-Cramer coefficient is 0.264; so, this is a weak correlation.
C ₃ and “prayer”	$\chi^2 = 8.206$; df = 4; $p = 0.084$; more than 20% of the cells have an expected abundance of less than 5	Significance is greater than 0.05; so, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected, and there is no correlation.
L ₁ and “prayer”	$\chi^2 = 45.633$; df = 4; $p = 0.001$; less than 20% of the cells have an expected abundance of less than 5	Significance is smaller than 0.05; so, there is a correlation; the V-Cramer coefficient is 0.442; so, this is an average correlation.
L ₂ and “prayer”	$\chi^2 = 26.720$; df = 4; $p = 0.001$; more than 20% of the cells have an expected abundance of less than 5	Significance is smaller than 0.05 but more than 20% of the cells have an expected abundance of less than 5; so, it is impossible to test a hypothesis.
L ₃ and “prayer”	$\chi^2 = 37.050$; df = 4; $p = 0.001$; less than 20% of the cells have an expected abundance of less than 5	Significance is smaller than 0.05; so, there is correlation; the V-Cramer coefficient is 0.398; so, this is an average correlation.
S ₁ and “prayer”	$\chi^2 = 19.643$; df = 4; $p = 0.001$; less than 20% of the cells have an expected abundance of less than 5	Significance is smaller than 0.05; so, there is correlation; the V-Cramer coefficient is 0.290; so, this is a weak correlation.
S ₂ and “prayer”	$\chi^2 = 4.283$; df = 4; $p = 0.369$; more than 20% of the cells have an expected abundance of less than 5	Significance is greater than 0.05; so, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected, and there is no correlation.
S ₃ and “prayer”	$\chi^2 = 37.169$; df = 4; $p = 0.001$; more than 20% of the cells have an expected abundance of less than 5	Significance is smaller than 0.05 but more than 20% of the cells have an expected abundance of less than 5; so, it is impossible to test the hypothesis.

Based on research, we can say that there is a relationship between prayer and the attitude of a socially responsible consumer. However, the relationship does not occur in all

dimensions. The connection between prayer and the approach to consumption is visible in three aspects: cultural, local, and social. When it comes to the environmental aspect, there is no connection between prayer and consumption. Although the majority of respondents declared an ecological consumer attitude, 63.2% declared that they buy products that do not destroy natural resources, 65% choose products that can be recycled, and 56% choose products that are safe for the environment. In the case of the cultural aspect, the correlation between prayer concerns only one variable. The attitude to prayer influences the purchase of products, leading to purchases only in the quantities needed by the respondents. People who prayed more often were more likely to identify with this aspect of socially responsible consumerism. The V-Cramer coefficient is 0.263, which indicates a weak relationship between the variables. Prayer can help an individual reinforce values such as moderation, modesty, and respect for other people and the natural environment. As a result, a person praying may be more aware of their needs and not necessarily be willing to buy products in larger quantities than actually needed. Therefore, prayer can contribute to leading a more sustainable lifestyle and conscious consumption.

The most visible correlation between prayer and the attitude of a socially responsible consumer occurs in the local aspect, and the correlation occurs in the case of two variables: the L_1 (buying handcrafted products to preserve heritage and stop the extinction of particular professions) and L_3 (purchasing products produced locally); and in both cases the V-Cramer coefficient indicates a moderate relationship between the variables. People who pray declare that they support small entrepreneurs who produce and sell locally. Prayer can help individuals see their responsibility for their actions and the impact they have on others. If the person praying realizes that their purchasing choices impact the local economy and small businesses, they may be more willing to make informed choices when choosing local products. Prayer can also lead to a greater sense of community and solidarity with others. In prayer, a person can pray for local entrepreneurs and their success, which can motivate them to support them by purchasing their products. Overall, prayer can lead to greater awareness, an understanding of values, a sense of responsibility, and a greater sense of community, all of which influence attitudes toward purchasing products locally and from small producers.

In the case of the social aspect, the correlation is visible between prayer and the variable that concerns purchasing products from socially responsible companies (employing disabled and elderly people). The V-Cramer coefficient is 0.290; so, this is a weak correlation. Prayer is a common expression of faith and personal beliefs. People who pray regularly often guide their actions and choices in everyday life in line with these values. Socially responsible companies often engage in activities for the benefit of society, sustainable development and ethical business. Prayers who identify with such values often prefer to purchase products from these companies to support their activities.

4. Discussion

The connection between religion, prayer and a socially responsible consumption can be important for many people. Most religions teach love for one's neighbor, compassion for others and responsibility for the world around us. Prayer can help a person to strive hard for these values and integrate them in their everyday life, including in the area of consumption. Owing to this, religion can be an inspiration to make responsible consumer decisions. Prayer is often seen as a time to reflect and focus on the spiritual aspects of life. Those who pray are often seeking peace and connection with something greater than themselves. This mindfulness practice can help us to pay attention to the effects of our choices as consumers and consider their consequences for other people and the natural environment. Prayer can be defined as "a form of communication with the divine, the cosmos or some deity that gives rise to a spiritual relationship" (Vasconcelos 2010, p. 370). Prayer can be defined as a communication process between humans and God. Prayer is also defined as a conversation with God. Prayer is an offering up of humans' desires to God. Prayer can also be defined as petitioning God, making requests or asking God

to meet our human needs. In other words, prayer is fellowshiping with God. When a Muslim or Christian prays, there is an assumption that the direction of prayer is toward God (Tayviah 2018). In prayer, Muslims praise Allah, seek guidance and forgiveness, and develop self-discipline. Muslims believe that through daily worship, a person establishes direct contact with Allah. Daily prayers include special words and actions that symbolize and express a person's faith. In Judaism, prayer understood as a dialogue with God may take on liturgical and private, personal or community forms, similar to those in Christianity. For Christians, the source of prayer is the prayer life of Jesus, which was portrayed as a man of prayer, who sometimes withdrew to pray alone. Therefore, Christians can pray privately or publicly. Research shows that the religious foundation of prayer varies among young Christians. For some, it is the result of deep faith and a habit of piety; for others, it results from a natural desire to help other people and themselves (Walesa and Tatala 2020). John Paul II defined prayer as God's initiative in us, although prayer begins with the thought that it is a human initiative (John Paul II 1979). In the encyclical *Fides et Ratio*, John Paul II pointed out that prayer is a way to unite reason and faith and to become closer to God. Through the experience of meeting God in prayer, a believer strengthens their faith, but also discovers new aspects of truth that lead to a full knowledge of themselves and the visible and invisible world. It is the source of humans' spiritual strength. Prayer is not an escape from everyday duties, but an even greater encouragement to take up and fulfill all of one's responsible tasks (John Paul II 1998). Taking up the problem of the role of prayer in achieving Christian perfection, Woroniecki draws attention to the need to integrate prayer with everyday life, and therefore with all the moral choices made by humans. In his opinion, both areas, life and prayer, are important for a person's spiritual development: a good Christian life goes hand in hand with prayer (Woroniecki 2000, pp. 10–15).

Religions often promote the idea of sustainable development, in which we care for our own needs as well as the good of others and future generations. Concepts such as social justice, equality, fair pay for workers, environmental protection and the fight against poverty can be aimed at responsible behavior as a consumer. Prayer can help develop the ability to make rational consumer decisions. Being able to think about your needs, financial constraints, and the social and environmental impacts of your purchases can help you buy things you really need and whose production does not harm other people or the environment. Prayer can also be a motivation for active involvement in the community and social responsibility. People who pray often feel a sense of moral responsibility for others and those in need. They can express this through specific actions, such as charity work, supporting social justice organizations, or engaging in human rights campaigns.

Religious beliefs, ideas and practices (prayer) may be a driver for the adoption of socially responsible consumption by fostering salient and inner motivations for behavioral change (Emmons and Paloutzian 2003). Other scholars have shown that religion is one of the factors influencing consumer behaviors (Coşgel and Minkler 2004), and more specifically, consumer ethics (Vitell 2010). Some studies have focused on the differences between religious and non-religious people and found that religious people who practice socially responsible consumption are more likely to display this attitude than those who are not or less religious (Graafland 2015).

Based on these research examples and the examples presented in the Introduction, it can be said that there is a relationship between religiosity, or more precisely, religious practices and consumption. In turn, the analysis presented in this article shows that prayer has a positive impact on the attitude of a socially responsible consumer in some aspects. To sum up, it should be emphasized that the contexts of research are different and their results are also different. However, this leads to the reflection that there is a connection between consumer behavior and religious activity, including the attitude to prayer, and this requires further research. In turn, the analysis presented in this article shows that prayer, in some aspects, has a positive impact on the attitude of a socially responsible consumer. It is worth noting, however, that most of them are weak correlations (low values of the V-Cramer coefficient).

The limitation of this work is the impossibility of extending its conclusions to the entire population of young people, as the studied sample is characterized by an overrepresentation of women. Another limitation of this work is that some people may view being a socially responsible consumer as an aspect of their faith and spirituality, while for others, it may simply be a consumer choice that is consistent with their social values. It is worth expanding this study in the future to include additional evaluative variables that, in addition to faith and attitudes towards prayer, would also concern issues of values that are important to young people.

5. Conclusions

Religion is an important part of most people's lives, and most people around the world follow some religion. The issue of consumer behavior has been of great interest to researchers for years. Research aimed at determining the market potential and searching for areas in which companies can offer their products is very popular. On the one hand, such research on the determinants of consumer behavior can be used by commercial enterprises that have the ability to create values and needs and then satisfy them, further deepening the phenomenon of consumerism. On the other hand, it seems important to use knowledge about consumer behavior, especially among young people, to prepare upbringing or educational programs. Young people as consumers are a group of buyers that is particularly important for many entrepreneurs, because, in recent years, it is not only the purchasing power of young people that has been growing, but also the scope of market choices they make and their influence on purchasing decisions made by families. It should be emphasized that today's youth are growing up, and the current preferences and attitudes of young people will soon determine what purchases they will make as mature consumers. One of the interesting research areas is determining the role of religion, or more broadly, human spiritual development, in shaping consumer behavior. The nature of religion and the intensity of an individual's participation in religious life differentiates human behavior in general, and when they play the role of a consumer. Religion is the source of norms and values that guide choices made in the processes of meeting needs. This study enriches the existing research by exploring the role of prayer in shaping the attitude of a socially responsible consumer.

The research presented in the article indicates that there are areas of socially responsible consumer behavior that may be influenced by the attitude towards prayer. First, people who declared that they prayed often indicated that it was important for them to buy only the amount of products they needed. This coincides with previous research on religiosity and consumption, according to which religion promotes voluntary simplicity (Chowdhury 2018; Peifer et al. 2020). Prayer, treated as a form of reflection, can help an individual consolidate values such as moderation. As a result, a person praying may be more aware of their needs and not necessarily willing to buy products in larger quantities than actually needed. Prayer can contribute to a more sustainable lifestyle and conscious consumption.

Secondly, prayer significantly influences the aspect of consumer behavior related to supporting local and small entrepreneurs. Prayer helps you see your responsibility for your actions and influence on others, such as local and small entrepreneurs. People who pray are more likely to make informed choices when choosing local products.

The last aspect of SRC in which a correlation with prayer appeared is the social or other ethical aspect. People who prayed were more likely to indicate that it was important for them to buy from companies that were socially responsible. Prayer is a common expression of faith and personal beliefs. People who pray regularly often guide their actions and choices in everyday life in line with these values. Socially responsible companies often engage in activities for the benefit of society, sustainable development and ethical business. Prayers who identify with such values often prefer to purchase products from these companies to support their activities.

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Article

“Violent Times Call for Violent Prayers”: “Divine Violence” during the COVID-19 Pandemic in the Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries, Nigeria

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Abstract: Interest in studying prayer has significantly increased because of the belief that it helps humanity to cope, particularly in times of crisis. Prayer is not just a communication with God, it is also an instrument of bond and embodied ritual among prayer litigants or people who belong to the same religious community. This article argues that divine violence, a sovereign act of God, was crucially needed by the litigants in order to guarantee human flourishing in the face of existential threat. The article studied how violent prayer—a genre of prayer that is targeted at the spirits underlying physical manifestation of suffering, pain, or crisis—was utilised by the Mountain of Fire and Miracle Ministries (MFMM) in Nigeria to cope with the fear and uncertainties occasioned by the COVID-19 pandemic. This article is part of an ongoing ethnographic research on “The Politics and Poetics of Violent Prayer in the Nigerian Pentecostal Churches”, which began in 2021. I utilised ethnographic engagement, particularly interviews and participant observation, to attempt to understand what these prayer litigants are doing when they pray violently.

Keywords: violent prayers; spiritual warfare; Nigerian Pentecostals; poetics; machine gun prayers; spiritual technology

1. Introduction

Several studies have shown a resurgence of prayer at the turn of the outbreak of coronavirus in December 2019 (Bentzen 2021; Nyamnjoh et al. 2022; White 2022; Tatala and Wojtasiński 2021; Szałachowski and Tuszyńska-Bogucka 2021; Mwale and Chita 2022). These studies focus on how people across the world deployed prayer as an instrument to contest, resist, succour, or overcome the threats of the COVID-19 pandemic. The emphasis on resurgence is imbued with the belief that prayers were waning in the period preceding COVID-19 or that prayer’s intensity had reduced prior to the pandemic. The resurgence of prayer also challenges the facile notion of prayer that had become suffused as a result of nontheological or secular appraisal of prayer (Fitzgerald 2012). As my fieldwork has also confirmed, even though people gathered in great numbers to pray prior to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the intensity with which they prayed during the pandemic could not be compared with their fervency before the pandemic. Although they did not gather in large numbers during the pandemic, Nigerian Pentecostals intensely prayed and trusted God to heal the world of the virus, thus introducing what they refer to as divine violence to counter the violent intrusion of the pandemic, hence violent prayers.

The broad aim of this article is to examine how the members of the Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries (MFMM) understood and deployed the concept of divine violence in their violent prayer mode during the pandemic. Generally construed, divine violence means that God is a sovereign being whose authority cannot be questioned. As such, when he (God) deplores violence to counter human or other spiritual violent intrusion into his creation, the victims of divine violence are neither regarded as saints nor is their death

perceived as a sacrifice (Zizek 2008). In the context of this article, the MFMM conceives of divine violence as supernatural intrusion and intervention in human existential crisis, which aims to destroy the spiritual forces perceived to be responsible for the outbreak and spread of the COVID-19 pandemic.

To be sure, violent prayer is a special genre of prayer that scholars have described as spiritual warfare prayer, machine gun prayer (Marshall 2016; McAlister 2016; Richman 2020), deliverance prayer, spiritual technology against spiritual forces (Adogame 2012), dangerous prayer, apocalyptic device, a prelude to the final Armageddon (Adelakun 2023), and so forth. This form of prayer was once an exclusive preserve of the Mountain of Fire and Miracle Ministries, Nigeria, from where other Pentecostal churches across Africa and beyond began to borrow (Adelakun 2022b). This genre of prayer is theologically located in the event of the Pentecost at Jerusalem, when “suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house. . . where they [the apostles and others numbering 120] were sitting” (Acts 2: 1–2) (Oden 2011, p. 107). In addition, these Pentecostal Christians claim that Matthew 11:12 grounds them theologically to embark on violent prayer. For them, since the kingdom of God is taken by force, violent prayer becomes the instrument to achieve it. In reality, however, as a combative, aggressive, and confrontational prayer, violent prayer is targeted at spirits that are believed to fight against human existential progress or success. Dislodging or overcoming these spirits through violent prayers is believed by the litigants to be the way to personal freedom and a guarantee to enjoy material success (Butticci 2013). Violent prayer, as an apocalyptic device or machine gun, is also aimed at disestablishing powers and authorities both political and spiritual in order to establish an orderly, righteous reign. In this sense, violent prayer is subversive: this is its core (Adelakun 2023).

However, the suddenness of COVID-19 and its quick spread across the world violated the relative peace that was being “managed” by different countries worldwide at national and international levels. For the Christian world, the pandemic violated the tranquil or convivial nature of their communal worship and fellowship, a bond that makes the Christian (Pentecostal) community an embodied community. Pentecostal worship is stoutly expressive; it is embodied. Prophetically, at least, in Nigeria, the pandemic violated the discursive Pentecostal leaders’ prophetic or spiritual antennae because they rarely saw it coming. This is profound because every New Year’s Eve was usually characterised by volumes of prophecies of what supposedly lay ahead. Even though the prophecies have raised some credible concerns, and some scholars are already interrogating them (Ugwu 2009), the COVID-19 pandemic violated the (dis)order of prophetic rendition in Nigeria.

The COVID-19 pandemic also violated the bond between wealth and health teaching: isolating wealth and emphasising health although momentarily, the Pentecostal leaders quickly realised the existential urgency that violent times have placed on surviving the pandemic first of all (Igboin 2022a, 2022b). The theology of hope in crisis, faith in uncertain times, courage in depressing moments, love in obscure circumstances, and so forth became resonant in the e-congregation and small fellowship centres that characterised the times of the lockdown (White 2022). This is not to suggest that there were no attempts at demonstrating the usual boisterous flouting of wealth by a small number of Pentecostal leaders, but the majority of them certainly and soberly comported themselves with reserved demeanour (Igboin 2022a). The COVID-19 pandemic also practically violated the secular space and trudged both the spiritual and secular spaces with anxiety (Ukah 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic violated the space in terms of its suddenness and interruption of normalcy enjoyed before its outbreak, introducing the concept of the “new normal”. The new normal forced Nigerians and the rest of the world to appreciate the bond they had taken for granted for so long that they were compelled to resurrect, rest they so desired, which the pursuit of material success had taken away from them (Zizek 2020); deep human and spiritual reflection on who they are and the purpose of their existence, which modernity, and biomedicine with their disenchantment had almost completely robbed them of (Reimer-Kirkham et al. 2020); the near collapse of class, identity and status (equality of

humanity at least during the lockdown), which they had often advocated but rarely lived; the need for survival and longevity, which advancement in medical science and practice had assured them was guaranteed (Igboin 2022c); unmitigated ecological violence, which they had caused with unease pleasure from industrialisation and technologisation; the soul of humanity, which they had taken to a robotic realm suddenly reincarnated, at least, for a moment (Knibbe 2020); desertion of the grandiloquent and aesthetic cathedrals where they once believed that God usually dwelt in and bonded with them in human form (Adelakun 2022a); and so forth.

The uncertainty and the imminent fear that the COVID-19 pandemic generated globally caused a different mode and mood of tension for and in Africa, and Nigeria in particular, because of the despicable nature of medical infrastructure. Inveterate corruption and leadership failure have negatively affected almost all aspects of the Nigerian government structure, and confidence in the system is almost completely lost. The predictions that the streets of Africa would be littered with human bodies added to the intensity of fear and need for prayer (Adelakun 2022a). Perhaps building on the experience of the Spanish flu of 1918–20 that tremendously affected Africa (Heaton and Falola 2014), Melinda Gates, for instance, predicted: “I am worried. . . I see dead bodies in the streets of Africa” (Omanga and Ondigo 2020), while the International Director of SOS Children’s Villages in Eastern and Southern Africa, Senait Bayessa, also predicted that “Africa will be the hardest hit by the impact of the outbreak”. In addition, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) predicted that there would be about 3.3 million deaths and 1.2 billion infections throughout Africa (Adebowale and Onyeji 2021). These predictions from developed countries where medical facilities effectively work were a source of great concern for Africa, generally, and Nigeria in particular. Despite the uncertainty and fear that pervaded society during the pandemic, many Nigerian Pentecostals found hope to live through the violent times by recourse to “violent prayers”.

In this article, I examine violent prayers as a response to the “violence” occasioned by the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria with particular reference to the Mountain of Fire and Miracle Ministries (MFMM), Nigeria. In nuancing violent prayer, I will ground it on the concept of divine violence, which intrudes, intervenes, interrupts, and disrupts human processes and acts in ways that violent prayer litigants understand as miracles. I will elaborate on the existential, theological order and the poetics that ground these prayers, which became evident during the pandemic. I ask, what were Pentecostal litigants really doing when they prayed violent prayers during the pandemic? What are the theological potentials contained in violent prayers that can be fashioned to drive towards African Pentecostal theology of prayers in a crisis situation? To be sure, Christians who practise this genre of prayers use certain kinetic aesthetics through which they curate the thought that goes into this radical form of engagement, and they spontaneously perform them in their prayers and everyday actions. I employed ethnographic resources (interview and participant observation) to interrogate this form of prayers in times of crisis in order to understand what the prayer litigants did when they prayed violently during the pandemic, and how their action or performance (of violent prayers) generated the spiritual (faith) resources to cope and/or overcome the pandemic. Data collection for this study involved field observations and semi-structured interviews with nine members of the Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries in Lagos, Akure, and Akungba-Akoko, all in Nigeria, between August 2021 and September 2022. The data are part of the research project titled “The politics and poetics of violent prayer in Nigerian Pentecostal churches” sponsored by a grant awarded by the NAGEL Institute, USA. The research seeks to interrogate what the litigants do when they engage in violent prayers. The names of the respondents have been changed in order to preserve their anonymity.

2. Conceptualising Violent Prayers in Times of Crisis

There is a growing interest in the academic study of prayer in its theological, nontheological, and practical dimensions. In its theological and practical resonations, interest in

prayer has shown, among other things, how prayer is a resource not only to relate with otherworldly beings and seek their help or intervention but also to navigate and mediate existential challenges that confront prayer litigants daily. Human attitude towards God in times of crisis is different from times of ease or peace. Religion obviously plays a critical role in times of vulnerability (Stańdo et al. 2022). Bentzen (2019) points out that the intensity of prayer can be driven by personal, collective, or natural crises. Turning to prayer and other (spi)ritual activities in crisis stoke both emotional and spiritual feelings. Bentzen (2021) has further explored how COVID-19 aroused interest in prayer around the world. Bentzen unravels how people prayed for comfort, an end to COVID-19, and so forth. Exploring the spiritual turn in Southwestern Nigeria, Olonade et al. (2021) show the intensity of prayer to “ward off” the COVID-19 pandemic in the world. Yendell et al. (2021, p. 13) note that the rise and intensity of faith in prayer during the initial stage of the pandemic could have made “secular people” wonder if the act of praying was not “an expression of latent helplessness”. But, as it turned out to be eventually, prayer played a prominent role in how people coped with the pandemic.

The question thus is, what is prayer? In their article, “*Yes, in Crisis We Pray*”: The Role of Prayer in Coping with Pandemic Fears”, Szałachowski and Tuszyńska-Bogucka (2021, p. 1) ask “What is prayer in the Bible? It is how those who believe in God talk to him. That is how they reveal their eulogies and requests”. The emphasis on “how” is at first intriguing because, primarily, prayer is conceived as a “what” (communion) between Christians and their God; it is, therefore, an act, a performance, rather than a method, means, or manner. But, on a deeper thought, it could also be correct to think of prayer as a method, means, or manner of reaching God. As a result, one can understand Szałachowski and Tuszyńska-Bogucka’s definition of prayer as both a performance (act) and a method, means, or manner of demonstrating how prayer is offered or performed. In a rhetorical sense, Fitzgerald (2012, p. 2) states the following:

Prayer as a discursive art in which capacities central to our human experience with language come together with respect to supersensory, superordinate, supernatural reality, typically imagined in the form of culturally significant other-worldly audiences—divine beings with whom human beings enjoy rich, complex relationships.

Fitzgerald does not only conceive prayer as a discursive art but he also nuances it as a performative, pragmatic art culturally conditioned but often tailored towards recognised and accepted divine beings, in whom humans repose and trust. Fitzgerald largely focuses on prayer as a rhetorical discourse, which does not align much with the theological understanding of violent prayer but on the analysis of its language and structure. He believes that the rhetoric of prayers will help us to appreciate the ontological and epistemological meanings imbued in prayer through the study of its language and structure. According to him, prayer can be conceived as “a techne for generating or maintaining presence” (Fitzgerald 2012, p. 58) of the divine being with whom the prayer litigants seek help. It must, however, be noted that the theological production of prayers is a veritable resource for the analytical turn that the rhetoric of prayer assumes and emphasises.

Theological production of prayer refers to the raw, embodied prayers, “vocal prayer, discursive prayer, the prayer of quiet, the prayer of full union, of ecstatic union, spiritual bouquets, spiritual marriage” (Casalddliga and Vigil 1994, p. 121), which litigants offer or engage in consciously or otherwise. This instantiates the fact that situation or context determines the kind, poetic, and performance of prayer litigants pray or are involved in. As Fitzgerald (2012, p. 15) himself acknowledges in *Spiritual Modalities: Prayer as Rhetoric and Performance*, “A critical moment calls for decisive judgment. . . . Experience of need opens one to prayer, and prayer becomes an experience of *blessing*” (emphasis on the original). As the criticality of one’s situation and need for prayer unfurls, the push for a particular mode of prayer intensifies. Fitzgerald (2012, p. 29) adds that “there are far more situations for prayers than there are prayers for situations”. Thus, the prayer we are examining here

is borne out of a (dis)pressed moment when the threat of existential survival was real and the need for immediate divine intervention was intense.

Of course, prayer's upward look for divine intervention suggests that the need being prayed for cannot be met immediately by human efforts or facilities. This is not to suggest that prayer is not a human effort. This accounts for why Reimer-Kirkham et al. (2020) conceptualise prayer as an experience that contradicts the rudiments of technologies, temporalities, and biomedicine. They argue that prayer is a transgressive art that challenges and transcends social rules, interrupts clinical machinery, ruptures established order, intersects and simultaneously penetrates secular and religious spaces, and interpenetrates the otherworldly realm. They posit that prayer is not authorised from the abstract realm, it is "shaped by the social and cultural contexts in which it occurs" (Reimer-Kirkham et al. 2020, p. 21). In other words, both individual and corporate prayers are initiated by the prevailing social and cultural exigencies, which require some form of divine intervention. Prayer thus becomes a channel or means to an end.

During my fieldwork in the Mountain of Fire and Miracles, I also observed that context and the prevailing situation play critical roles in authorising prayers and that prayers are a means to an end. In an interview, Dr. Daniel Olukoya (2013), the founder and presiding pastor of the Mountain of Fire and Miracles, told us that personal, social, cultural, and spiritual context or experience determines prayers and the particular kind of prayer. For him, the presence or abundance of social amenities does not count when one experiences a spiritual need for violent prayers. Acolatse (2018) reminds us that the Western theological context for prayer differs from that of Africa: rather than ascribe spiritual causation to mundane challenges as most Africans do, the West will direct their energy towards the socio-political causation of situation and actively work towards rectifying it. In other words, the same dysfunctional situation in the West and Africa is most likely to be interpreted and addressed differently: in the West, politically, while in Africa, spiritually.

Akadiri, a pastor at Mountain of Fire and Miracles, conceptualises prayer as a human-divine communion, which, more often than not, results in intervention in human situations and human favours. According to Akadiri, a particular situation births the kind of prayer that litigants pray. Since the situation determines the kind, mode, and mood of prayers, Akadiri argues that the prayers prayed during the outbreak of COVID-19 were first and foremost instigated by and targeted at the pandemic. In his words,

The prayer we prayed during the pandemic was focused, and pointed at the termination of the pandemic because it was the pandemic that prompted it in the first place. It was also specific and timely. And we equally believed that since the moment was a violent one that threatened people's lives, the response should be violent because we wanted people to be delivered. . . . We prayed violently in order to put an end to COVID-19. . . . There was divine violence that cancelled the violence of the pandemic.¹

Akadiri also reveals that prayer generates unusual power, and it can be violent (hence violent prayers) when faced with a labyrinth of life or an existential threat, such as the one posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. More importantly, he raises issues of violent prayers and "divine violence" in times of crisis, which will be explored below. Adelakun (2022a) also observes that in Nigerian Pentecostalism, power plays a prominent role in mediating between existential and ultimate space, and this power can be obtained through fervent prayers. According to her, "Prayers are spiritual means of accessing power; the sheer physicality makes the body a channel to draw and exercise power" (Adelakun 2022a, p. 75), where "power is the ability to transcend the limit of one's human ability, and it is essential to relationship between humans and God" (Adelakun 2022a, p. 13). Performing power as an embodied act, according to Adelakun, is the hallmark of Nigerian Pentecostalism because, without power, Nigerian Pentecostalism would be dull, staid, and stale.

The performance of power is contextually authorised just as violent prayers are initiated by the prevailing situation in individual or community life. In my fieldwork, I observed that praying violently is grounded not only in an African spiritual worldview be-

lieved to be characterised by spiritual forces capable of adversely affecting human progress but also in the colonial experience of exacerbated violence that prompted violent struggles for independence. In addition, the military regimes most African countries experienced after independence added and extended the impetus of violence that colonialists deployed in Africa. The ingrained psychological fear of those periods has to be tackled and exorcised, according to the Pentecostals, through violent prayers. Thus, I conceive violent prayers not only in terms of exorcising spiritual forces but also as a means of self-decolonisation. This notion was explicitly explained by one of my respondents.

You researchers always don't link violent prayer with colonial experience of violence. You need to study history. Africa was conquered by violence by the colonial masters. Apartheid in South Africa was a product of violence. It was also sustained by violence. I hope you know that as well? A violent situation naturally will make you violent. What you do is to do anything that you feel can make you escape violence. That is why there were several violent reactions to colonial violence... While many Africans resorted to offer sacrifices to the ancestors against the colonial masters, Christians, particularly the African churches [African Independent/Initiated Churches] violently prayed to God against the colonial masters. That is the genesis of violent prayers in Nigerian churches today. You people [the researchers] need to know this (Interview with Ayeni 2021).²

Although it is difficult to ascertain how the African Independent Churches violently prayed against colonialism, it is trite to argue that these churches were the first to pragmatically take steps to free themselves from colonial churches (Igboin 2006). In reality, the Nigerian historical and political trajectories have, many Pentecostals suggest, not been free from crisis. The Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970) became a precursor for spiritual revival, just as the effects of the Structural Adjustment Programme of the 1980s to early 1990s helped Pentecostalism to maintain a steady presence in public life in Nigeria. The failure of the Nigerian state, inveterate corruption, deplorable economic hardship, and widespread poverty drove people into the Pentecostal churches where violent prayers against the spirit of poverty were literally dealt with (Obadare 2018; Igboin 2022a). In other words, the intensity and regularity of prayer is birthed and sustained by the continuous social, political, and economic crises that have stubbornly refused to be exorcised from the body politic.

However, in this present work, I concentrate on the spiritual intervention in human affairs that violent prayers are believed to initiate, particularly during the initial stage of the COVID-19 pandemic. But, a brief conceptualisation of violence is in order.

3. Conceptualising (Divine) Violence in Violent Prayers

Conceptualising violence in its entirety is a difficult task. This is because of the vast literature and temperaments that are involved in the art of violence itself. A generally accepted cliché is violence begets violence. While Raine (2013) grounds violence in biology, explicating how evolutionary accretions have engineered violence in humans, Grebrewold (2009) locates violence in social institutions, politics, culture, and so forth. Anyone who reads Frantz Fanon's ([1961] 2004) *The Wretched of the Earth* will appreciate the value, politics, and limitations of violence and its deployment in confronting an enemy in a difficult terrain of existential and political deliverance. According to Fanon ([1961] 2004, p. 51), violence is not an impotent weapon; it is, on the contrary, "a cleansing force", that helps the oppressed to pale "their inferiority complex", "restores their self-confidence", and "hoists the people up to the level of the leader". In addition, he states that "Violence can thus be understood to be the perfect mediation. The colonized man liberates himself in and through violence. The praxis enlightens the militant because it shows him the means and the end" (Fanon [1961] 2004, p. 44). For Fanon, by authorising and performing violence, the people unleash a totalising force that helps break the shackles of colonisation. Violence thus becomes a self- and collective decolonising tool that reaches the core of the oppressed and sutures the structures that hold the people bound.

The justification of violence as an art and instrument to confront and dislodge the colonists from further brutal subjugation of the colonised, and the virulent violence that it birthed in return has raised the question of whether violence can actually resolve human conflict. Hannah Arendt's (1970) reflections in her *On Violence* provoke analytical interrogation of violence. National and international violations and violence that characterised the twentieth century, she reasons, defy the political and economic categories that justified violence because at the end of it, what is gained cannot comparatively stand in balance with what is lost.

Beyond state or individual violence, the concept of "divine violence" adds a robust discursive impetus to how people understand violence as a meaning-making phenomenon. Divine violence, Benjamin (in Žižek 2008) wants us to believe, lies in the paradox that exists between what God wants and what, in actuality, happens in God's name. Divine violence is an antithesis of divine predicates; it is a transgressive understanding of the boundaries and borderless conception of violence in its divine-human relations. Accordingly, Benjamin argues that "Mythical violence is bloody power over mere life for its own sake, divine violence is pure power over all life for the sake of the living. The first demands sacrifice; the second accepts it" (cited in Žižek 2008, p. 198). Here, the command to commit violence and the prevention of violence consecutively take place. The turn and gap between commandment and prevention are what humans might wrestle with in their solitary confinement or ignore altogether. Žižek (2008, p. 198) elaborately drives home the concept of divine violence.

It is this domain of pure divine violence which is the domain of sovereignty, the domain within which killing is neither an expression of personal pathology (idiosyncratic, destructive drive), nor a crime (or its punishment), nor a sacred sacrifice. It is neither aesthetic, nor ethical, nor religious (a sacrifice to dark gods). So, paradoxically, divine violence does partially overlap with the bio-political disposal of *Homini sacer*: in both cases, killing is neither a crime nor a sacrifice. Those annihilated by divine violence are fully and completely guilty: they are not sacrificed, since they are not worthy of being sacrificed to and accepted by God—they are annihilated without being made a sacrifice.

One might ask: what does this hold for violent prayers? Violent prayer, as we will shortly describe, puts the litigant in the gap between the paradox of "killing", in this instance, not physical killing, and yet not feeling guilt for the act of killing. The killed (victim) is fully and completely guilty of the "sin" of oppositionality, and his death is thus justified on the basis that the litigants experience both existential and perhaps material deliverance. When violent prayers, as we found out, are targeted at "the spirit of COVID-19" for instance, the death of that spirit (assuming the spirit dies) is justified because it is "a being that works against the purpose of God for humanity" and, therefore, "guilty of causing the COVID-19 pandemic" (Interview with Emmanuel 2021).³ Žižek (2008, p. 199) again helps us to understand this interpretation more clearly when he posits in this context that "one can also kill without committing a crime and without sacrifice". Put literally, to kill without committing a crime as an act of divine violence means that the victim's death is justified on the basis of established guilt, and God cannot be questioned nor regarded as committing the crime of killing the victim; second, the death of the victim, as a consequence of sin committed and death that resulted from it, cannot be understood as a sacrifice to God. In Pentecostal circles where violent prayers are common, for instance, assuming such prayers are believed to have resulted in the death of an enemy, the prayer litigant cannot be accused by the state of committing murder, and the victim cannot be accepted by God as a saint.

In the Pentecostal context, divine violence can be appropriated and contextualised within its poetic and performance of violent prayers. The performance of divine violence is situated within a political or existential time and space of how humans interpret their actions as divine intervention to either call human attention to divine purpose or God executing divine judgment on humanity via human or natural instrument. This theological

gleaning resonates in most of the disasters that humans have experienced, for example, the Spanish flu, HIV and AIDS, 9/11, Ebola, and now COVID-19, where a divine violence theory has been put in place to explain that the moral despicability of the world has reached a “heavenly” crescendo, which deserves a form of divine intervention. Conspiracy theory explained as eschatology and the formula of divine response to human deeds tends to justify the outbreak of COVID-19, which Goshen-Gottstein (2020) refuted as rationally untenable. Historical analysis by Adam Mohr (2020) illustrates how a global pandemic instigates religious fervour among people of faith who choose to look outside the official channels of medical aid (or scientific authority) for survival.

In any case, divine violence becomes justifiable to either refute or justify the disaster. But in Pentecostal context of violent prayer wherein the Pentecostals want a divine violence to occur, it has a redemptive or liberational purpose, at least, for existential reasons; and in particular reference to Africa, this form of prayer is tailored against “spirits whose violent hungers are sated by humans” (Whitehead 2002, p. 1). These preying spirits are wicked, malignant and unappeasable in their determination to feed on humans. In Nigerian Pentecostalism, any spirit other than the Holy Spirit is regarded as an evil spirit in urgent need of exorcism. These spirits do not only inhabit inanimate objects, they are also capable of possessing humans and using them to perform nefarious activities against other humans. It is for this belief that deliverance ministries more often than not ensure that their converts are made to go through deliverance session. As Kalu (2008) explains, even people who have had contact with African Indigenous Churches before coming to some of the Pentecostal churches would be requested to undergo deliverance session let alone the adherents of African Indigenous Religion who become Christians converts.

The Pentecostal belief that all spirits are not of God strongly influences their ascription of spirit to things they believe are opposed to God’s purpose for their human flourishing. It is from this perspective that one can broadly comprehend the theological conception of COVID-19 as a spirit whose mission is to satiate itself with human lives. Divine violence thus becomes known in the Pentecostal circle as supernatural intervention with the evidence of

destroying powers and principalities the devil use (sic) to fight his [God’s] children. God cause (sic) great violent (sic) to the enemies so that he can deliver his people. The case of Pharaoh who perished in the Red Sea is an example of divine violent (sic). Moses and the children of Israel cried to God for deliverance. It was a great cry because they were before (sic) the Red Sea and the army of Pharaoh. . . . Pharaoh died a violent death in the Red Sea. That is why the children of Israel were able to escape. That is also the battle cry against COVID. By the grace of God, we have overcome it (Interview with Olusola 2022).⁴

In violent prayers, there is the spirit of urgency for deliverance at play; it is a prayer that encapsulates one’s whole being in its tri-form—body, spirit, and soul—which is expressed in poetic resonance. In my fieldwork, I have come to realise that the performative or poetic is a totalising part of the aggressive expression or what we might call the poetic current of violent prayer. What is meant here is that violent prayer calls for the immediacy of divine violence or divine intervention to cause, change, transform, rectify, or blow off an oppositional force in operation in a litigant’s real or imagined situation. In this sense, one respondent defines violent prayer the following way:

Violent prayers are prayers. . . number one, you don’t pray them silently. You are not permitted to pray violent prayer silently. Violent prayers are prayers you pray with the spirit of desperation. Violent prayers are prayers you pray with aggression. Violent prayers are prayers you pray with the intention of getting what you want at all cost (Interview with Ayeni 2022).⁵

The divine being intervening in the natural and overruling the law of nature is the goal of the violent prayer litigants: they expect divine violence to occur as often as they pray their importunate prayers. The performative and the expectative conjoin to describe

the intensity or tonality of violent prayers. In addition, there is also the intentionality that directs the mindset of the litigant towards a target; this target is first and foremost imagined and brought into a “tangibly reachable” realm “in the eye of the mind where you can target it without fail”. This aptly describes the belief that underwrites the “Die, die, die in the name of Jesus!”, which forcefully resonates in the prayer format of the Mountain of Fires and Miracles Ministries. The command to the spirit to die in the name of Jesus is best understood by the violent prayer litigants as a poetic performative engagement: this imagined target of violent prayer is beyond the biological, sociological, material, and ecological, even though the militant language often resonates with their register.

This conceptualisation of violent prayer as a poetic performative engagement with the invisible-made-visible forces profoundly represents the theology of prayer that embodies the Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries’ (MFMM’s) imprecatory prayers during the COVID-19 pandemic. The next section examines this theology.

4. Violent Prayers at the MFMM during COVID-19

The Mountain of Fires and Miracles Ministries (MFMM) started as a prayer meeting in 1989 in the house of Dr. Daniel O. Olukoya, the founder. The meeting, summoned by Olukoya, a molecular geneticist from the University of Reading in the United Kingdom, later metamorphosed into the Mountain of Fires and Miracles Ministries in 1994 when the first Sunday service was held in Lagos, Nigeria. The MFMM self-identifies as a prayer ministry devoted to “aggressive” and “violent” prayer. On its website, the MFMM hones the epithet “do-it-yourself gospel ministry where your hands are trained to wage war and your fingers to fight”, implying that members are trained in violent prayers and should be able to apply the principles and methods to themselves and others. This makes every member a militant, violent litigant who prays kinetically or performatively against spirits that are contesting their destinies.

In the numerous publications by Olukoya (up to 600 books and booklets, especially his *Prayer Rain* (Olukoya 2013)), the theme of spiritual warfare, which I prefer to refer to as violent prayers, runs through them. In an interview with Olukoya, he describes violent prayer as what the elite would refer to as a crude, uncivilised, primitive, war-mongering, destructive, ballistic form of prayer, targeted at the devil and his cohorts. Ironically, he believes that such a form of prayer may not make sense to those who claim to be enlightened until they are faced with spiritual challenges beyond their immediate knowledge, skill, or medical science. Olukoya claims that the church engaged in violent prayers against the COVID-19 pandemic, and the result can be verified in the number of cases of infection or death in the country in comparison with developed countries that relied almost exclusively on their scientific or medical knowledge. He argued that although the claim of divine intervention might not make sense to outsiders, that is, people who do not believe in the power of violent prayers, those who believe know the mysterious powers that worked in favour of the country and African continent at large. Put in Wariboko’s (2020, p. ix) words, “It does not make sense, but it makes spirit,” that is, if Olukoya’s explanation does not make logical, conventional sense in a secular world, it does make sense to those who share the same spiritual faith as him.

In the absence and even now the availability of the vaccine, the COVID-19 pandemic, for the MFMM, is first and foremost a “spirit” and, therefore, requires a spiritual battle. According to ethnographers Oyelade and Akintunde (2022, pp. 106–7), “It is certain that the COVID-19 pandemic is a global challenge, Pentecostals in Southwest Nigeria, have never done without warfare prayer against the ‘spirit’ or demon of coronavirus, in spite of the lockdown, even though there have been responses to the global challenge of COVID-19 in various ways”. This belief in the “spirit” of COVID-19 is borne out of African cosmology that holds that sickness, affliction, disease, and so forth are mostly caused by some supernatural forces. As Adiele (2007, p. 146) observes, “This involves the belief that demons are responsible for every manner of sickness that attacks a child of God. Therefore for total solution, the demon of malaria, demon of cancer, demon of small pox, and so

on could be ‘cast out in the mighty Name of Jesus’. Given Olukoya’s background as a self-acclaimed victim of spiritual oppression as a young man, his church, the Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries, believes and teaches that almost everything has a spirit, and the malignant spirits must be dislodged by the name of Jesus. Matthews Ojo (2010), an African church historian, argues that the MFMM stupendously appropriates and magnifies African indigenous spirits, and Christians are advised to identify the spirits responsible for their problems. More recently, Richman (2020) also confirms the overarching belief that spiritual forces are responsible for human problems. Although Richman views this belief as exaggerated, he, however, argues that it forms a critical basis for the flourishing of African Pentecostalism, especially as it relates to deliverance churches, such as the Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries.

Although there are various controversies concerning the origin of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as conspiracy theories (see Aluko 2022), its spiritual etiology resonates with the theology of prayer in the MFMM. According to Akadiri,⁶ “whether or not medical science recognises the spiritual dimension of COVID-19 pandemic, the point that is clear is that sustained violent prayers have saved Africa from its consequences.” Akadiri, a pastor in the MFMM, reveals that the church was engaged in combative, relentless prayer to deal with the root and spirit of the pandemic. “What prayer cannot do hardly exists, and COVID-19 had to yield in the face of intensive and ferocious and ballistic prayers rained with brimstones against the spirit of COVID-19”.

Even those who want to explain away the divine violence dimension of COVID-19, according to Dare⁷, would have to contend with the contradictions inherent in their predictions. Dare thus argues that it makes little or no sense to hold the scientific belief that Africa survived the pandemic despite the minimal preparations, abject poverty, and near-absence of medical facilities, which should have been the very reasons for the fulfilment of the predictions against Africa. He further makes the argument that the same poverty and then climate became the defaults that saved Africa from the pandemic. “Yet, if we tell them that prayers work, they won’t believe because they do not believe in God that answers prayers.” Molade presses it home more deeply when she volunteered the following:

“Look at when this Corona, COVID-19 came, it was tamed. I want to believe that there is a hand of God in that. Coronavirus could not spread the way it killed other people in different places. Some say it is our weather, who gave us that weather? Some say it is because of the prayer. Yes, who gave us that instrument that were (sic) able to curtail the evil of COVID-19? So, our prayers, our intercession is still the one keeping this country.”⁸

The unexpectedness and uncertainty that the pandemic occasioned also stirred a more combative spirit of violent prayers. “You know, when something happens suddenly and it takes you unaware, you are shaken. Then as a prayer warrior, you step back and take position, and then launch an offensive into the spiritual realm where that force is coming from”⁹ Positionality and oppositionality are crucial in deploying violent prayers as a spiritual weapon: “you don’t have to be at the defensive. That is why the church took uncompromising, offensive stand in the battle against COVID-19. COVID-19 is a spiritual attack, and we have to deal with it spiritually”¹⁰ (Interview with Molade 2022).

In an interview with Esther,¹¹ although the church fervently prayed against the COVID-19 pandemic, members were always “instructed and reminded to observe COVID-19 prevention protocols”. Two years after the lockdown, Dr. Olukoya still instructed members of his church to wear their face masks to every Power Must Change Hand programme. In fact, the seats were still arranged with enough space apart to observe social distancing in September 2022 when I visited the church. Esther also believes that the pandemic was a spirit, but that humans were responsible for its outbreak and spread around the world. For her, even though Christians could be protected against the pandemic by reason of their prayers, it was unreasonable to ignore safety protocols.

But the question of the Pentecostal embodiment is raised, that is, how the members of the church organised themselves in corporate worship during the period of the lockdown. To be sure, Pentecostal embodiment expresses the social and (spi)ritual roles in corporate

social life (Wilkinson 2020; Richman 2020). The bodies are not just a biological or physical aspect or site of our being; they are intensely social and cultural and interact differently in different contexts. During the lockdown, megachurches such as the MFMM reactivated their online capacities and facilities through which they organised their worship. Family churches became vibrant and the embodied Pentecostal practice of worship in the house boomed by attracting not only the Pentecostals but also the mainline church members who blurred their denominational idiosyncrasies and warmly worshipped together, thus creating and exhibiting a strong spirit of bond and fellowship. For the MFMM, the ritual of violent prayer intensified at the family level, where emotions of worship burst in a rather concentrated manner. The emotional experience of worship at the family level served to animate an intense desire for bonding and healing a world plagued by the virus. This family unit was given a theological grounding by recourse to “where two or three people are gathered, God is present”. This interpretation ignited a new spirit of hope and intensity of violent prayer, even though the yearning for the return of the large congregation did not altogether wane. As I observed, the conviviality embodied in the return of the church speaks of the power of group solidarity and the boost of faith for divine violence to violate the violation of normalcy caused by the pandemic. However, as Oyelade and Akintunde (2022) observed, such embodiment cannot be compared to the pre-COVID and post-COVID experiences.

5. Conclusions

I have argued that prayer becomes more urgent and intense during times of crisis. First, there is evidence that faith in divine intervention in human affairs rises when everything else seems not to work. During the pandemic, the astronomical rise in prayer globally justifies the belief that prayers can help to cope in times of crisis. Second, a particular existential confrontation results in the kind of prayer that is used to counter it. We have seen that there is a genre of prayer deployed by the MFMM—violent prayers—that believes that violent times, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, demanded divine violence to counter the violence of the pandemic. Third, the belief in divine violence as a form of power capable of destroying existential threats became intense. The theology of violent prayers at the MFMM, which the prayer litigants and our interlocutors grounded on divine intervention, has helped them to cope with the effects of the pandemic. Fourth, violent prayer in large or small units is embodied; the expressive mode of praying, the swinging of the bodies, and the stomping of the ground with audacious vocal rhythm make the body more than a site of understanding but also of constructing a Pentecostal theology of embodied violent prayer. The poetic performative participation gave them hope in the midst of the uncertainties during the pandemic. Since violent times require violent prayers, the MFMM, known for its violent eruption of the spiritual realm and causation, furiously engaged in violent prayers for their existential liberation from the imminent global catastrophe that COVID-19 threatened. However, there is a need to further interrogate how the divine violence concept of violent prayer as embodied by the MFMM becomes a perpetual practice rather than a once-for-all confrontation.

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Notes

- ¹ Interview with Pastor Adedeji Akadiri was conducted on 18 June 2022 at Akure.
- ² Interview with Sunday Ayeni, a member of MFMM in Lagos, 17 August 2021.
- ³ Interview with Bosede Emmanuel was conducted in Lagos on the 17 August 2021.
- ⁴ Interview with Pastor Stephen Olusola was conducted on 4 July 2022 at Akure.
- ⁵ See note 1 above.
- ⁶ See note 1 above.
- ⁷ Sunday Dare is a Senior Lecturer and member of MFMM. The interview was conducted on 23 June 2023 at Akure.
- ⁸ Interview with Emman Molade, a pastor with MMFM at Akure, 16 June 2022.
- ⁹ Interview with Solomon Segun, a member of MFMM at Akure, 16 June 2022.
- ¹⁰ See note 9 above.
- ¹¹ Esther Tope is a youth leader in MFMM. This interview was conducted on 17 April 2022 at Akungba-Akoko, Nigeria.

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Article

The Prosociality of Prayer in the Literary Fiction of Felix Timmermans

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Abstract: This paper examines the ways in which Christian prayer in the literary fiction of Felix Timmermans is represented as a spiritual practice that produces behaviour that is prosocial, or in other words, beneficial to others. The authors combine readings of two texts (the short story *Triptych of the Three Kings* and the novel *A Peasant Farmer's Psalm*) with insights stemming from recent sociological debates on prayer and prosociality to show how Felix Timmermans' prose can prove helpful for understanding how praying transforms individuals by allowing them to behave in a more altruistic way.

Keywords: prayer; prosociality; sociology of religion; Flemish literature; Felix Timmermans

1. Introduction

The idea that “faith without works is dead” (Jas 2:26) has set a norm among Christians for relating religious belief to actions that result from the commandment to love one's neighbour. While Protestantism has typically laid a stronger emphasis on the saving grace of faith alone, Roman Catholicism has retained and developed the idea that one of the criteria of the authenticity of one's faith is how it manifests itself through good deeds in everyday life. One of the fundamental expressions of religious faith is prayer. But can one say, paraphrasing Jas 2:26, that “prayer without works is dead”? A major part of recent sociological research on religiosity has been dedicated to answering the perplexing question of whether praying leads individuals to commit themselves more strongly to actions that are altruistic, generous, and charitable toward others, or in other words, prosocial. The problem of the prosociality of prayer can be approached from a variety of disciplinary perspectives. In this article, we argue that literary studies, geared towards the investigation of social representations, have the potential to provide useful insights for understanding in what ways prayer stimulates altruistic behaviour.

This research, which should be treated as a case study, takes as its object of investigation two works of fiction by Felix Timmermans (1886–1947), a Belgian writer and graphic artist whose extensive literary legacy consists mainly of novels and short stories depicting nature, rural life, and Catholic religious traditions in Flanders (for biographies, see Van Remoortere 1972; Durnez 2000). Goedegebuure (2009, p. 532) locates Timmermans' prose at the intersection of regional fiction and vitalism, both characteristic of European modernism. In his fiction, Timmermans celebrated exuberant, sensual, and down-to-earth protagonists, most of whom have a profound, if somewhat idiosyncratic, spiritual life. This category includes his most famous characters: the peasant Pallieter (whose name has become synonymous in Flanders with a bon vivant) and Root, the hero of *A Peasant Farmer's Psalm*. Literary historians have judged Timmermans' prose to be marked by a “mythologizing or idealizing” tendency in its depiction of agrarian life (Goedegebuure 2009, p. 492). The

narrative fiction of Felix Timmermans has traditionally been diagnosed as strongly imbued with references to Catholic Christianity (Vanclooster 2006). The emphasis on religious experience within social contexts is what makes Timmermans' fiction particularly well-adapted for exploring the literary representation of Christian prayer.

Despite the passage of time, Timmermans' novels are still relevant today. The Flemish author's fiction has been widely translated, resonating far beyond the Dutch-speaking world (Absillis and Mus 2023). Recently, *A Peasant Farmer's Psalm* was translated into English by Paul Vincent (Timmermans 2023). Despite the profound social transformation of Flanders in the period from the mid-20th century until the present, Timmermans' prose has remained an important part of the literary heritage of that part of Europe (Van Deinsen et al. 2022). Timmermans' works have a small but vibrant following and have attracted contemporary Flemish artists to create innovative film adaptations (Van den Berghe 2010) or performances (Coffrée 2018).

2. Approaching Prayer and Prosociality in the Fiction of Felix Timmermans

The preoccupation of modernist literature in the West with prayer correlates with the social, political, and economic debates over the status of religion at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries (Lewis 2006, p. 21). Although Timmermans was not a typical modernist in the sense that he did not belong to the avant-garde, but rather a Heimat writer who tended towards vitalism (Goedegebuure 2009, p. 532), he shared the concern of the literature of his time with the challenges of modern society and responded to them by celebrating a return to rurality, tradition, and religious faith. What Lewis identifies as a "conflictual" relationship of modern literature with prayer (Lewis 2006, p. 23) is also true for Felix Timmermans' work as a novelist. The importance of prayer in the life of an imperfect individual is one of the central themes of Timmermans' most successful novel *Pallieter* (1916, translated by Charlotte Beatrice Bodde, 1924). It is the story of an innocent, epicurean, but also intensely spiritual peasant whose life takes on Franciscan overtones (Absillis and de Bont 2020). Timmermans combined the life-transforming message of the Nativity with the mundane realities of occupied Belgium during the First World War in *The Christ Child in Flanders* (1917, translated by Elinor C. Briefs, 1960). The Flemish author's *Very Lovely Hours in the Life of the Beguine Symforosa* (1918, translated by Nell V.L. Boni, 1922) tells the story of how the daily routine of a young Flemish beguine is interrupted by her falling in love with a young gardener who eventually joins a monastic order. The young woman experiences one of the most satisfying moments of her life when, through prayer, she realises that giving up passion can lead to spiritual peace. The "hours" of the title refer, ambiguously, to the experience of illicit love and to a communal monastic prayer. Religious considerations strongly influence the decisions of the protagonists of Timmermans' *Triptych of the Three Kings* (1923, translated by H.L. Rippenberger, 1936). Its dramatic adaptation, *En waar de ster bleef stille staan* (And where the star stood still), co-authored by Timmermans and Elias Eduard Vettermans, was notably transformed by Gust van den Berghe into a film with actors with intellectual disabilities, *Little Baby Jesus of Flandr* (Van den Berghe 2010), demonstrating how its themes of loss, hope, and salvation have the power to transcend social boundaries. *A Peasant Farmer's Psalm* (1935) (Timmermans 2023) is a first-person narrative by a sturdy Flemish farmer, Root, whose religious experiences, especially an intense Christocentric spirituality, are projected onto the comings and goings of his household and the seasonal rhythms of nature. Other novels by Timmermans that explore the topic of a complicated relationship between imperfect individuals and God include *De Pastoor uit den bloeyenden wijngaerd* (The priest from the blossoming vineyard, 1923) and *The Perfect Joy of St Francis* (1931, translated by Raphael Brown, 1955) (Timmermans 1955). The latter novel was a

product of a wider Western interest in the figure of Francis of Assisi (Absillis and de Bont 2020, pp. 49–59; cf. Zajączkowski 2024).

The Flemish author, not unlike the modernist poets referred to by Lewis (2006, p. 23), often used the terminology of prayer (including the associated literary genres) as a stylistic and rhetorical device in his prose fiction. Prayer can be recognised as a key instrument for structuring the narrative and outlining the characters in Timmermans' novels. As we will see in the subsequent analyses, the Flemish writer pursued a strategy of balancing the seriousness of prayer as an activity with a high symbolic value and profound religious significance against the narrative tension and sense of irony created by the transgressions of his protagonists, thus creating an effect of distance between the reader and the literary image of religious activities.

That a fascination with individual and collective religiosity underlies much of Timmermans' fiction was noted early on by Flemish scholars (Claessens 1935). Mertens (1986) emphasised that Timmermans was neither a folklorist nor a Catholic apologist. His artistic merit, according to that researcher, was essentially to depict forms of religious experience. Timmermans' religious faith oscillated between childlike naivety and searching critique but avoided the twin extremes of rationalism and dogmatism. Mertens further argued that Timmermans eschewed a ritualistic religiosity, concluding that the essence of the writer's religious experience was charitable love, manifested in fiction as the protagonists' self-renunciation combined with an attitude of disinterested gratitude to God (Mertens 1986). In more recent studies, the focus has tended to shift from an emphasis on the uniqueness of Timmermans' religious vision to an understanding that his outlook was influenced by external, sociological, or socio-literary factors, and from an emphasis on his Catholicity to approaches from a variety of Christian perspectives. Dom (1986), for example, explored Timmermans' spirituality through the lens of Hjalmar Sundén's role theory. In recent decades, scholars have found Timmermans' fiction to reflect various aspects of Christian spirituality. Timmermans was receptive to Rhineland mysticism (Braekers 2015), an author whose life was a search for God (Van de Perre 2018). Verstraeten (2010), who placed Timmermans' prose in the context of Flemish writers' attitudes towards mystical experience, noted a search for balance between an ecstatic mysticism and a more practical, down-to-earth spirituality that did not exclude morally imperfect individuals. Absillis and de Bont (2020) have also pointed to the existence of previously unexamined mystical tropes in his work. Absillis and Mus (2023), on the other hand, have shown how the international reception of Timmermans' novels resulted from the use of an image of a sensuous and pious Flanders that flourished in other European literatures.

Below, we focus on two samples of Timmermans' fiction as illustrative of their author's representation of prayer in the lives of ordinary individuals, either living on the margins of society or belonging to the peasant population. While the function of prayer in the medieval or early modern West has been explored in a variety of publications (see, for example, Gibson et al. 2017 for the period 1600–1800), a comprehensive approach to this phenomenon in the modern period seems more challenging, but not impossible (McLeod 1981). Specific studies on the relationship between prayer and theology (Prevot 2015), prayer and science (Ostrander 2000), and prayer and literature (Lewis 2006; Domestico 2016) abound for this period, foregrounding phenomena and products of a high cultural significance. On the other hand, the prayer experience of ordinary people, especially for the period before systematic sociological surveys were conducted, still seems to be under-researched, although studies dealing with the post-war period, such as Billiet and Dobbelaere (1976) or, more recently, Gevers (2014), have succeeded in shedding light on the transformation of the Catholic community in Flanders. The evidence in these studies

points to Christian prayer as prevalent throughout all ranks of society in Flanders and in the Western world as such by the mid-20th century.

Literary studies have the potential to fill even more of the gap in our knowledge of the religious experience of ordinary people. Evidently, the depiction of any social phenomenon in literary fiction should not be misunderstood as a transparent, objective representation of society and its processes. Nevertheless, the sociology of literary works (*“sociologie des oeuvres”*) (Sapiro 2023, pp. 75–112), a sub-discipline of literary studies, demonstrates that it is scientifically valid to explore how literature (while by no means a mirror-like image) reflects the social world. While literature, including fiction, is autonomous through its artistic language, it has the potential to capture what is “lost in translation” between the arts and sociology (Váňa 2020).

The modern period marks the beginning of scientific interest in prayer from a sociological point of view. Since then, many definitions of prayer have been proposed and basic research problems have been identified (Tatala and Wojtasiński 2021). From an anthropological perspective, following the insights of Marcel Mauss (2003), prayer is a social act that involves an exchange of gifts. Recent research has established that prayer has a “social life”: besides the contact between a person and the divine, prayers are “a form of action in and on the world” (Bandak 2017, pp. 12–13; 2019). Taking note of various strands of current research on prayer as social action, Bandak identifies, among other things, the search for consolation in times of crisis, building a religious self-identity and achieving a balance between work and prayer (or between action and inaction), affective investment, and dilemmas about the right (or wrong) way to pray as crucial aspects of this phenomenon (Bandak 2017). Regardless of the type of religion, prayer forms a “triangular” (Sun 2016, p. 122) engagement between the believer, the deity, and society. The vertical dimension of this relationship is also social. Sun advocates an “understanding of prayer based on action rather than belief” that is transformative and a socially performative action, even if the motive in question may vary or even be deficient according to certain norms (Sun 2016, pp. 123, 127–28).

While significant methodological input has come from the sociology of literature, particularly in the area of “literature and social representation(s)” (Sapiro 2023), the subject matter of this study also situates it within the growing field of religion and literature, which seeks to map the interrelations between theology, literary works, and literary theory (Knight 2016, p. 2). Studies in religion and literature offer practices of textual enquiry that are relevant to the study of prayer as a literary trope. In studies of religion and literature, prayer belongs to the broader field of devotion, which has recently been increasingly studied by scholars as a “transformative practice” (Craig et al. 2021, p. 3). The key to this new approach, then, is to read a text in order to detect a transformation of behaviour or affect. Seen in this light, prayer has a clear-cut social dimension: the enactment of devotion means that the believer takes specific actions in his or her social environment. This line of thought aligns itself closely with the sociological perspective outlined above. The next step that can be taken in literary studies, then, is to apply the concept of prayer as a socially transformative action to literary fiction, making the characters and their behaviours part of the picture. It seems particularly useful to focus on how the protagonists’ prayer actions touch on the areas explored by Bandak (2017), which can easily provide a common ground for sociological and literary enquiry, while distancing oneself from an assessment of the motives of the fictional characters (cf. Sun 2016), focusing instead on how prayer, as represented in literary fiction, can be understood as a social performance.

This research adopts the concept of prosociality from sociological studies of religion. Synonyms for prosociality (Oviedo 2016, p. 70) include terms such as altruism, cooperative behaviour, volunteering, generosity, or kindness. Recent research offers a mixed assessment

of whether religiosity, in general, or prayer, in particular, contributes significantly to prosocial behaviour. Van Cappellen et al. (2016) have shown that mass attendance promotes prosociality, although self-focused emotion emerges as a mitigating factor. Oviedo (2016, p. 182) questions this link, suggesting that religion thrives in a variety of complex ethical and social relationships without necessarily producing altruistic actions. A decline in religiosity does not necessarily indicate a decline in prosocial behaviour; that the opposite may be true is illustrated by a study by Prouteau and Sardinha (2015). Indeed, as Oviedo notes, scholars of the impact of religious behaviour on prosociality reach opposite conclusions even when referring to the same evidence (Oviedo 2016, p. 170). However, a study by Meijer-van Abbema and Koole (2017) shows that positive beliefs in God may help to promote generosity, increasing trust and decreasing hostility among members of a religious community, thus building a platform for altruistic activities. Given that the existence of a straightforward correlation between religion and prosocial behaviour is a matter of debate, in this paper we use the method of literary studies to inquire into the existence of such a relationship within the world of fictional representations.

The question addressed below, therefore, is: how does prayer transform the protagonists in Timmermans' fiction, and in what ways that transformation is essential in helping them to become more generous towards others? In doing so, we will assess how the sociological perspective described above relates to the findings of a literary analysis of fictional representations of prayer.

3. Representations of Prayer and Prosocial Behaviour in Literature: A Case Study. Two Fictional Texts by Felix Timmermans

The fiction of Felix Timmermans is a rich source of material that can be used to study prayer from different angles, including the one chosen here. Of course, the choice of one or more texts is always an exercise that runs the risk of being subjective. Admittedly, a novel like *Pallieter*, *The Perfect Joy of St Francis*, or a novella like *The Very Lovely Hours in the Life of the Beguine Symforosa*, would have suited our purpose well. A juxtaposition of *Pallieter* and *A Peasant Farmer's Psalm* in particular would have produced rich insights into the representation of prayer. While both protagonists are farmers, in comparison to Root, the hero of *A Peasant Farmer's Psalm*, *Pallieter* is a more exuberant, freewheeling figure whose spiritual experience evolves with little direct contact with the institutional Church. *Pallieter*, like Root, is a character who prays very often, and whose prayers, in many cases, are an expression of gratitude. A difference, however, seems to be present in the more escapist nature of *Pallieter*, whose engagement in social life appears to be less strong than Root's.

In selecting *A Peasant's Psalm* (Timmermans 2023) and *The Triptych of the Three Kings* (Timmermans 1936), we have been guided by two considerations. Firstly, we have chosen texts in which the protagonists belong to two different social groups—a peasant and representatives of the village poor. Secondly, we have chosen to focus on the laity, rather than on a group identified as specifically religious (e.g., a priest or a beguine), in order to provide a more neutral perspective in relation to prayer as an activity. We sought to examine both an early work, in which (like in *Pallieter*) Timmermans resorted to an extradiegetic narrator, with one that represents his later period, where he abandoned external description in favour of an internalised, homodiegetic narrative (Goedegebuure 2009, p. 532). Finally, we wanted to include a well-studied and critically acclaimed text alongside one that occupies a marginal position in Timmermans' work. The result is a compromise that attempts to do justice to the diversity of Timmermans' oeuvre, while not losing sight of the sociological approach to literature.

3.1. *The Triptych of the Three Kings*

Timmermans' *Triptych of the Three Kings*, a novella on the theme of the Nativity, has not fared well at the hands of critics, who have generally considered it a qualitatively lesser work than the rest of his oeuvre (Verstraeten 2010). Notwithstanding this, despite its superficial simplicity, it has the potential to reveal profound religious problems (Verstraeten 2010, p. 1270). One of these, apart from that of the mystical experience already examined by Verstraeten, is how prayer transforms the characters, producing altruistic behaviour.

The novella, whose title and structure alludes to an altarpiece, has as its heroes three ne'er-do-wells: Pitjevogel, an eel-fisher, Suskewiet, a shepherd, and Schrobberbeeck, a beggar. In the social structure of their Flemish village, they represent those who are marginalised, unlike the well-off farmers or artisans. The three men have a tradition of walking together from door to door on Christmas Eve dressed as the Three Kings. Singing songs, they collect food and small change as a reward. However, one Christmas Eve turns out to be different and will transform their lives.

The events of the first chapter of the novella, "The Centrepiece", begin with a scene of "a creaky little kermis wagon" passing through the town. It is little more than a cart, drawn not by a horse but by an old man and a dog. Inside, the narrator tells us, is "a young, slender woman" with "large and troubled" eyes. The reader is invited to focus on this brief scene from the perspective of a bystander. The villagers, however, soon forget what they have seen (Timmermans 1936, p. 5).

During the evening, Pitjevogel, Suskewiet, and Schrobberbeeck experience a strange 'feeling of oppression' which, as the extradiegetic narrator explains, is different from anything they had seen or felt before. Talking to each other, they alleviate this anxiety by referring to the sense of comfort that Christmas Eve brings them. Their idea of Christmas is shaped by folklore. Christmas, for example, is a time when bees are said to awaken. At this time, Suskewiet believes, "God will be born anew". Schrobberbeeck questions this belief, "thinking of his sins", but Suskewiet insists that it is true, even if "He only comes for one night" (Timmermans 1936, pp. 7–8).

To dispel the fear they all feel, the three men spontaneously begin to pray. Prayer, as they understand it, offers protection against evil:

'Let us pray,' begged Suskewiet, the shepherd, 'then no evil can happen to us.'

The beggar and the shepherd mumbled a Hail Mary. Potjevogel began to mutter, for since his First Communion he had forgotten how to pray. (Timmermans 1936, p. 9)

As they walk, they see "a friendly light in the distance". No longer afraid, they spot the kermis wagon. On the way there, they recognise all the signs of Christmas that they know from popular belief. Inside the wagon, they found a young woman with a newborn baby. Spontaneously, the three men kneel and feel, as the narrator tells us, "a heavenly happiness greater than any joy" (Timmermans 1936, pp. 9–10).

The extreme poverty of the people in the caravan soon becomes obvious to Pitjevogel, Suskewiet, and Schrobberbeeck, even though they too are hardly well off. Instead of ending up at the village inn as planned, unexpectedly the three men offer their earnings to the inhabitants of the kermis wagon:

[...] Filled with confusion and compassion, the Kings looked at the old man and the young woman, at the child and the bony dog. Then they looked at each other. Their thoughts were as one, and lo, the stocking with its money was emptied into the lap of the woman, and the sack of food was turned inside out and all that was in it was laid on the shaky little table. (Timmermans 1936, pp. 10–11)

The act of praying precedes the encounter and is present during the scene itself. In the kermis wagon, the "Three Kings" perform the ritual gestures associated with praying.

There, they experience something that may be called a mystical state of consciousness and seem to be engaged in contemplation. The heterodiegetic narrator does not in any way suggest an interpretation of this encounter, which only occurs afterwards to one of the characters.

Although the three men's motives are not altruistic initially, as they set out to earn money and collect food, the new situation coupled with the experience of prayer transforms them. As their previous attitude gives way to generosity, now it is they who are penniless. In hindsight, the "Three Kings" try to come to terms with what they had done. Neither of the three, except for Suskewiet, can come up with a valid reason. The latter not only seems to recognise a resemblance between the situation they had witnessed and the Nativity but even asks, "Couldn't the child have been God?". The others, however, are not satisfied with this attempt at an explanation. "'But why did we give everything away then?' 'I'm breaking my head about that, too', said the beggar, whose stomach began to rumble" (Timmermans 1936, pp. 11–12). That their generosity was religiously inspired seems, after all, to offer them an inadequate explanation. The narrative leaves it up to the reader to decide what caused this change of behaviour.

The following year (as narrated in the "Left wing" of the triptych), the lives of the three beggars take a different turn. Suskewiet, who is now ill, had undergone an inward transformation. He started praying frequently and in public, saying "childish" prayers. We do not learn why these prayers are so-called by the heterodiegetic narrator, or why the reader is invited to understand them as deficient. Elsewhere, however, the narrator mentions explicitly that he said the rosary, did penance, and started talking to people about religious topics. His experience of meeting the three figures in the caravan, whom he has taken to be Christ, Mary, and Joseph, changed the way he behaved, but this transformation only earned him the undeserved ridicule of the villagers. Even the village pastor did not appreciate Suskewiet's way of talking about that event (Timmermans 1936, pp. 15–18).

Suskewiet's relationship with his comrades Pitjevogel and Schrobberbeeck has changed too. Shortly before Christmas, the former suggests that the three should again give all their earnings away:

'Are you mad?' cried Pitjevogel, the eel-fisher.

'Are we not poor enough?' asked Schrobberbeeck, the beggar with the bleary eyes.

'No', said Suskewiet, 'all that you have you must give to God. And whether we give it to God or give it to the poor is all the same'.

'Then we will stay home', said Schrobberbeeck. 'Do you think that I am going to sing myself hoarse for others? One does that once and not again'. (Timmermans 1936, pp. 18–19)

Verstraeten has interpreted the three characters as exemplifying three modes of religious experience. Suskewiet, who is the most radically transformed by the meeting with the three inhabitants of the caravan, can be understood as representing a mystical type of faith. Although, out of the three, Suskewiet seems closest to God, Verstraeten argued that his mysticism was downplayed by Timmermans (Verstraeten 2010, p. 1272). After all, the shepherd is called mad and his story is spurned even by the pastor. However, Suskewiet is not rejected entirely, and he does receive the Last Rites after he falls ill (Timmermans 1936, p. 19). It appears to us that Timmermans did not criticise Suskewiet's religiosity but left a window open to other interpretations. The ones who called Suskewiet mad, for example, were Pitjevogel and Schrobberbeeck, that is to say, precisely the ones who at that stage were not yet open to a more radical religious transformation in their lives (as we will see, this changes in the course of the plot). Other passages seemingly implying Suskewiet's rejection are a rendering of how the village population focalises him. Not proceeding directly from

the extra- and heterodiegetic narrator, such items of information are less authoritative for the reader.

We would like to argue, then, that the three men represent three different but essentially equivalent paths to religious transformation, in the course of which it is Suskewiet who most strongly builds a religious self (cf. Bandak 2017) by engaging in a variety of religious practices. Suskewiet's transformation is so radical that it shocks the villagers. As compared to Pitjevogel and Schrobberbeeck, Suskewiet is the one whose religiosity, a part of which is his life of prayer, expresses itself in an urge to behave in an altruistic way, being open to sharing even the small possessions he and his group may acquire. However, this comes at a price. After pressuring his friends to adopt the same radical model of generosity (which we may understand in the light of Christian *caritas*), Suskewiet becomes an outsider even within the circle of marginalised people to which he belongs (Timmermans 1936, p. 19). Abandoned by his two companions, Suskewiet dies, but before that happens, he sees in his fever a child inviting him to a wonderful palace, which the reader can identify as a vision of Christ and heaven (Timmermans 1936, pp. 20–25). Suskewiet's transformation is signalled by the narrator, who states that the shepherd's soul has been "transfigured" (Timmermans 1936, p. 25).

The two other characters, Pitjevogel and Schrobberbeeck, lead far from model lives, yet they too (in the "Right Wing" of the triptych) are eventually inwardly transformed by their religious beliefs. Three years have passed. Pitjevogel, meanwhile, has met an unfrocked priest who was a Satanist, and come under his influence, and Schrobberbeeck has grown afraid of God. Attracted to the sacred but afraid of it, Schrobberbeeck could be an illustration of someone for whom God is an authoritarian enforcer (cf. Oviedo 2016, pp. 173–74). Although he prays, for example "mumbling an Our Father", it is only while begging that he does so, which points to the deficiency of his motives. Schrobberbeeck also reverences local religious statues of the Virgin Mary. The perspective of Christmas Eve fills him with dread that "something holy might happen to him" (Timmermans 1936, pp. 32–33). Yet, neither praying nor a fear of God seem to prevent him from stealing (Timmermans 1936, p. 31).

Schrobberbeeck, however, eventually undergoes a religious experience, which forms the climax of the narrative, and which due to its length and level of storytelling detail should be seen as equally important as Suskewiet's one. On Christmas Eve, Schrobberbeeck starts off for the midnight Mass. Walking alone he is astonished by how the figures of the Virgin Mary, one by one, come to life, leave their chapels, and walk to the Cross of Christ some distance away. This strange fact is not rationalised or challenged on the level of the hetero- and extradiegetic narration. Schrobberbeeck even has a conversation with a figure of Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows and helps to carry her, answering her plea. From the statue, which came to life, Schrobberbeeck learns that Pitjevogel, now contrite, will be saved through Mary's intercession (Timmermans 1936, pp. 33–37).

That night, Schrobberbeeck experiences a mystical moment, witnessing the wound in Christ's heart, which the beggar calls "heaven" (Timmermans 1936, pp. 38–39). Schrobberbeeck's life is transformed by this vision and that of the figures of Mary coming together to meet with Him under the cross, yet it is an ambiguous transformation, which does not produce altruistic behaviour. On the contrary, although later he "longed for more of such solemn moments [...] and in church, too, he looked out for them", it turns out that "not even the strongest emotion of his soul could get that [i.e., begging and stealing] out of him" (Timmermans 1936, pp. 38–39). The evolution of Schrobberbeeck as a character disproves, on the one hand, the idea that religiosity, or a life of prayer in particular, contributes to more altruistic behaviour (cf. Oviedo 2016). On the other hand, it tends to support the

assumption that belief in God leads to a more empathetic relationship with others in the same community (cf. Meijer-van Abbema and Koole 2017).

3.2. *A Peasant Farmer's Psalm*

A Peasant Farmer's Psalm can be called a prayer in its own right, born out of Timmermans' fascination with the religiosity of Flemish rural dwellers. Lia, the writer's daughter, recalled in her biographical book *Mijn vader* (My Father): "Very often, when we wandered in the fields and saw a peasant, working on his knees in the field, our Dad would say: 'Is there a more beautiful prayer than that which is the fulfilment of simple daily tasks? If one is a believer, of course'" (translation by the author) (Timmermans 1951, p. 78). Indeed, the main character of *A Peasant Farmer's Psalm*, Root, keeps referring to God, thanking him not only for happy days and hours but also for the harsh experiences, the sufferings that God sends upon him (e.g., Amelieken's illness, the death of wives, sons). He develops (with the help of the pastor) an understanding of physical work as a religious activity that offers an alternative to traditional forms of prayer without replacing them entirely. *A Peasant Farmer's Psalm* illustrates this literary theology of prayer through work in two ways: by Root's daily labour on the farm, and more symbolically, by his carving of a figure of the crucified Christ in wood:

'You don't have to pray all God's day', he says, 'all you must do is dedicate your work to God at the start of the day, and in that way your work will be praying' [...] If that's true my life is one great prayer. (Timmermans 2023, p. 41)

A Peasant Farmer's Psalm has invited readings through the lens of theology and spirituality. Herman-Emiel Mertens, for example, has argued that the novel is a "narrative theology of creation" (*narratieve scheppingstheologie*) (Mertens 1986). According to Urbain van de Voorde *A Peasant Farmer's Psalm* is not only a novel of rural life, but also, or even primarily, one about faith in God and trust in his providence. Van de Voorde also assessed Root's faith as blind but profound (Van de Voorde 1989, pp. 23–29). The farmer is reconciled to God's will; his philosophy of life is based on accepting even the greatest suffering and not losing fortitude in the process. This is not surprising, given how the novel employs prayer as a narrative device. One of the first sentences of the novel is a prayer of thanksgiving: "God, I thank you for making me a farmer" (Timmermans 2023, p. 9). Root gives thanks to the Almighty for the field, for the harvest, for the flowers, the leaves, for his first and second wife, and for his children. His gratitude refers not only to the favours he has received, but also to experiences and moments that are extremely difficult and require sacrifice and suffering: "Life is no laughing matter, and yet who would want to die, O Lord! For you gave me children, one of them is even blind from birth, and you gave me the field. Two gifts that are hard to bear" (Timmermans 2023, p. 24). This higher level of gratitude manifests itself in how Root gives thanks for everything, and in spite of everything, in prayer-like inner monologues. Because Root, the novel's sole character-bound narrator, is also the focalizer (Bal and van Boheemen 2009, p. 27), the choice of prayer as a narrative instrument has the effect of offering the reader an inside, "here and now" perspective on his developing spiritual identity.

Timmermans' fiction has an episodic character, and his plots do not tend to progress at a fast pace. The prayers in *A Peasant Farmer's Psalm* are an interruption in the stream of events, a pause delaying the plot. They present a form of auto-focalisation on the part of Root. The farmer repents in prayer-like words for his sins and asks for the Lord's forgiveness (in this case, betraying his wife with farmer Twister's maid): "God never again, never again. I'd rather cut my throat, so help me, Your poor Root!" (Timmermans 2023, p. 32). After such a situation, he praises God with a prayer of thanksgiving, vowing renewed obedience to Him:

Thank God! Everything comes from You and through You. I suddenly felt and saw that then deep in my heart. Now I know now You count and arrange the seeds that we throw in whole handfuls into the furrows. So many for the birds, so many for the farmer. I know that the good and bad weather depends on our actions. I shall listen to You. No one but You and me! (Timmermans 2023, pp. 33–34)

As the story unfolds the reader is likely to experience this type of prayer as more sincere than the conventional ones that Root offers on other occasions, especially when his religious actions are not particularly disinterested (Timmermans 2023, p. 10).

When Root carves the figure of Christ on the cross, this action adds another layer to his prayer experience. The protagonist identifies to some extent with the suffering Christ, investing his feelings of sorrow and disappointment into his work. In the act of carving, he experiences God's help in resolving personal problems. He plunges into thought: "But I've already said: I don't feel grief, I've just withdrawn into my odd thoughts and strange fancies about sin and eternity" (Timmermans 2023, p. 106). Root's moral self-awareness increases greatly during this action:

Our dear Lord, I am carving You in wood. In the winter it's become almost a daily prayer, like our Fien praying the rosary by the hearth every day. Under my hands You are just a piece of wood, but gradually You are coming more and more to life. [...] With You I seek consolation for my misery, and immediately I feel my misery more acutely than at other times. Because I think more of mine than Yours. Forgive me. (Timmermans 2023, p. 72)

This statement is followed by an extended monologue, again in the form of a prayer. In it, Root renounces the idea of asking God for any favour. This prayer of self-renunciation may be called Root's kenosis, paralleling that of Christ on Calvary.

Carving, a very physical, tactile interaction with a religious image, serves as a metonymy of physical labour. At the same time, for the protagonist, it becomes an alternative form of prayer that brings consolation after a crisis. After Fien's death, Root intended to place a carved Jesus on her grave (Timmermans 2023, p. 103). However, after marrying his second wife, Frisine, and the crisis having abated, he abandoned this idea. He did not carve for some time, devoting his time to his spouse. When he returned to work, he found it difficult to reproduce the eyes of Christ, which ended up not being carved correctly (Timmermans 2023, p. 114). One could argue that Root subconsciously did not want to carve the eyes of Christ, disturbed by the fear that God would see his transgressions more clearly: „Jesus did not want to have eyes. I can understand. He no longer wants to see me. He's right" (114). Frisine died too, and the heartbroken protagonist, who was partly to blame for this happening, wanted to have the sculpture of Jesus on his own grave: "Christ on the Cross stands waiting against the wall to be planted on my grave. I'll plant it, or better have him planted, because I need him most" (Timmermans 2023, p. 163). The final effect of this work, however, the finished sculpture, was not as important as the process of carving, which can be read as one protracted prayer.

The novel has a frame-like structure. It begins with the aforementioned phrase "God, I thank you for making me a peasant", and ends with "Thanks in advance!" (Timmermans 2023, p. 171)—and this is also a phrase addressed to God, which like an Amen completes this novel in the form of a prayer. Coincidentally, the Danish translation of the novel's title, *Paa vorhaand tak*, reads like this last sentence (Timmermans 1937). The expression "in advance" shows the total trust that Root places in God while praying. It is a theme that resounds in a mystical prayer, in which the main character renounces the very idea of asking God for anything, expressing an experience of almost total kenosis (Timmermans

2023, p. 72). Root believes in God and knows that even when difficulties arise, the Almighty will never abandon him.

Root mentions that just after the so-called Three Gardeners (St. Pancras, St. Servatius, and St. Boniface), a procession with the relics of the Holy Cross can be seen among the fields in mid-May. The farmer then carries an image of St Anthony together with his neighbour Oxhead. It should be noted that the author of the novel himself took part in the procession with the relics of Saint Gummar (664–ca. 714), to this day a popular saint in the Lier region, who founded a monastery and later, according to legend, built the town of Lier. Timmermans' daughter recalled that her father was very fond of the field processions, and enjoyed taking part in them, both in the sunshine and in the pouring rain (Timmermans 1951, p. 118). On Palm Sunday, Root would place part of a holy palm in the four corners of the field to ensure an abundant harvest. Then, at harvest time, he concludes: "The palms that we planted at the four corners at Easter have given their blessings. They say that an angel stands on watch by each corn stalk. You watched well, angels!" (Timmermans 2023, p. 45).

Prayer of this kind is transformative both for the individual, Root, and for the community, whose members experience a shared sense of satisfaction that their prayers and religious rituals have produced the expected effects. When the world is transformed by seasonal agricultural tasks, the protagonist of the novel finds himself changed (and in a sense, renewed) by a fresh appreciation of the efficacy of prayer. Prayer, therefore, resolves an inherent tension in the community between the emotions evoked by the risks and expectations associated with the beginning of the agricultural process and the fulfilment of those expectations at harvest time. For the villagers, it is like a mental template marking the beginning and end of a logical sequence of actions in the world.

The end of the harvest coincides in the village with an indulgence feast, which is an important holiday for all the inhabitants of the parish. It is the end of the cycle. The farmer rests on this day, and the rest is well deserved after the hard months of work on the land (Timmermans 2023, p. 47). Religion in the novel is a social event no less than a private one. Root makes pilgrimages to the shrines in Brabant—Scherpenheuvel and Kruiskensberg, first as a bachelor and later as a father asking for a miracle of healing for his sick son Polleken and his blind daughter. The protagonist continually commends his affairs and problems to God. He invokes the help of the Blessed Virgin Mary with the Child during the flood of the River Nete. He kneels in the water and prays (Timmermans 2023, p. 19). When he gets out of prison, where he is serving a sentence for poaching, his first steps are towards the church and he starts praying the rosary (Timmermans 2023, p. 78). Prayer, once again, gives comfort in times of crisis. It reconnects Root as a wayward individual with the community and with God, restoring social relations to a state of equilibrium.

In the life of the protagonist and his family, a local priest is constantly present, acting as a spiritual director. Root talks to him very often, often resolving his spiritual dilemmas during such meetings: "But our priest knows very well how fragile human beings are; he relieves us of the worries of faith" (Timmermans 2023, p. 41). Root and the priest share a deep friendship. For the peasant, the vicar is a confidant, a psychologist, a comforter, a teacher, a philosopher, a sage, and, finally and most importantly, a friend. He also resolves Root's doubts about the proper way of praying (cf. Bandak 2017). Reducing his anxiety about saying conventional prayers, the priest teaches Root to see his daily routine as an alternative, non-verbal prayer.

At times, the grief-stricken protagonist asks the clergyman about the meaning of the suffering inflicted by God and bares his soul to him in the most difficult moments, when he experiences the pain of existence. The priest always has a good word for his parishioners. His statements have not only a theological but also a philosophical dimension, and what is most important, the ordinary farmer can comprehend them (Timmermans 2023, p. 87). The

priest is an invaluable adviser to Root in difficult and complicated matters. When Root's son Fons goes missing, he is found dead in Antwerp a few months later. Root identifies the body and, at the priest's insistence, does not tell his wife about this fact lest her heart should break that her son had committed suicide. The priest's spiritual life is paralleled by his wisdom and psychological acumen.

Root is no learned man; he is not thoroughly familiar with the doctrines of the Catholic faith. However, he firmly believes in all the truths of the faith and does not torment himself with what he sees as pointless theological questions. His faith is nearly boundless; moreover, through daily contact with nature, Root is quite unconsciously close to the mystery of existence, discovering the truth that it is a Higher Power that rules the world. And Root knows that this is God.

In reflecting on Root's faith, however, it is important to emphasise the 'bipolarity' of his attitude. As we know, on the one hand, he is a believer and tries to live according to his conscience and religion, but nevertheless believes in certain superstitions. Thus, for example, he adheres to them in fieldwork (Timmermans 2023, p. 42). Root claims that Amelieke's blindness is the result of a lunar eclipse that had taken place during Fien's pregnancy. The parents also see the cause of Polleken's death in the "evil hand" (Timmermans 2023, p. 21). This is because their son died a few hours after a woman selling matches visited their farm. She touched the child's head and from then on the sudden deterioration in the boy's health began. Vercammen reports that in recalling this event, Timmermans referred to the authentic fact of the analogous death of a child, Nolleke Wellens from Kessel, in 1906. The population of the Lier region was very shocked by this event and the story was told for many years (Vercammen 1971, p. 152).

The novel is narrated in the first person singular by Root, who focalises the events of the story. He gives an intensely personal account of the past events of his life, but at times changes the manner of narrating and addresses the Creator with great respect, glorifying his creation. Mertens states that this way of structuring the novel makes the work similar to St Augustine's *Confessions*, where the proper addressee of the narrative is God himself (Mertens 1986, p. 44).

4. Discussion

4.1. Prayer in Felix Timmermans' Fiction: More than an Inducement to Altruism

Our research into how prayer produces altruistic (prosocial) actions has confronted us with the fundamental question of what prayer is and how it should be defined in relation to faith and action. The vertical dimension (communication between the human being and the divine) is understandably emphasised in the vast majority of definitions of Christian prayer. Prayer is thus defined as a form of religious communication that can take different forms (a request, an expression of gratitude, but also, for example, an outcry in suffering). Prayers have a temporal and spatial dimension through the form and function of a given ritual, and prayer is "an essential element of religious praxis" (Oberlies 2006, pp. 1486–88). Because of its many forms, prayer is considered "difficult to define"; it is not only communication, a link between the human and the divine, but also has the potential to bring about communion or even union with God (Louth 1998, p. 1124). Prayer has been described in terms of act, text, and dimension of religion (Gill 1987, p. 489). During Felix Timmermans' lifetime, prayer in a Catholic context was defined, as it is today, in the words of St John Damascene, as "the raising of the mind and heart to God or the asking of good things from God" (Cornelissen and Brandsma 1935; CCC 2019, art. 2559). These definitions show that the ability to encourage altruistic (prosocial) behaviour is only one aspect, and certainly not the most prominent one, of the working of prayer.

Generosity and sharing, on the other hand, is a horizontal dimension of religiosity. A specific focus on this aspect, although important in itself, should not lead to the conclusion that other ways in which prayer manifests itself, either in actual experience or in its fictional representations, are less relevant or less significant to a discussion of this complex religious phenomenon. Although more emphasis is placed on this ‘horizontal’ dimension in this study, both should be considered. In the discussion of literary analysis that follows, we examine the overall function of prayer in the narrative and then consider how prayer is represented as corresponding to altruistic behaviour on the part of the protagonists.

Prayer, in the case of the protagonists of Timmermans’ fiction, certainly cannot be reduced to an activity that merely promotes community building or solidarity. For Timmermans, prayer is first and foremost an individual’s ascent to God; it is communication leading to communion. Although, in some cases, prayer may ultimately lead to action for the benefit of others, this aspect is certainly not the most important. A good point of departure for examining the vertical dimension of prayer in Timmermans’ fiction is Pallieter, although a separate study would be required for a complete examination of this topic. As Absillis and de Bont (2020) note, Pallieter has a vibrant prayer life characterised by a radically non-egoistic praise of God and thanksgiving for His gifts (p. 53). Such disinterested prayer was highly valued in Catholic theology (Cornelissen and Brandsma 1935). However, Pallieter went a step further by refusing to pray for personal salvation or for any personal need (Absillis and de Bont 2020, p. 53). This was certainly not an orthodox position in the light of standard contemporary theological definitions of prayer (Cornelissen and Brandsma 1935). Pallieter ridicules a maid, Charlot, when she asks God for material things. His prayer often takes the form of ejaculations, but there are also other highly idiosyncratic expressions of faith that might have been regarded as disrespectful by Catholic readers of the time: “Pallieter swallowed the last of his food, waved his arms, and called out, while Charlot let her eyelids fall and murmured a paternoster: ‘O Lord, my belly jumps with joy like a grasshopper. It is as if Thou hadst placed a concertina within me’” (Timmermans 1924, p. 7; see also Absillis and de Bont 2020 on the controversy around Pallieter). The character Pallieter enjoys more organised forms of devotion, such as processions and litanies, preferring those that take place in the open air (Timmermans 1924, pp. 229–30). He seems to find God more easily in nature than in the church, and it is in nature that he has what Absillis and de Bont (2020, pp. 53–56) identified as his mystical experiences. Prayer in the novel is not ultimately limited to verbal communication or wordless contemplation. An artistic activity such as playing music can be prayer. The village priest prays through his music (Timmermans 1924, pp. 233–34), anticipating Root, who prays by carving. Pallieter’s personality and carefree lifestyle preclude greater social involvement. However, he is portrayed as a generous and helpful individual to those around him.

The connection between contemplative prayer and action is the theme of one of Timmermans’ later novels, *The Perfect Joy of St Francis*. Once again, the focus is on contemplative prayer as a means to union with God. However, Timmermans does not treat the mystical experience of St Francis of Assisi as an isolated phenomenon, but narrates the biography of the *Poverello*, creating scenes that capture the moment when communication through prayer leads to action for the good of the religious community of the Church. One such key moment is when Francis, praying before a crucifix, experiences a vision of Christ and, as a result, takes it upon himself to rebuild the Church (Timmermans 1955, pp. 38–41). Here, Timmermans showed how Francis’ transformation, which dramatically changed his life, was the direct effect of mystical communion with God. This transformation, which was not restricted to Francis’s interior life, enabled him to act selflessly, transcending personal limitations.

4.2. Prayer and Altruism in Two Fictional Texts by Felix Timmermans

The literary representations of prayer in the fiction of Felix Timmermans can be attributed several narrative functions. When the protagonists are confronted with a moral or spiritual dilemma, prayer provides a context in which the protagonists' internal struggles and motives can be subjected to scrutiny. Furthermore, it impedes the narrative progression, prompting the reader to engage in intellectual reflection. Praying often leads the protagonists to consider new courses of action, influencing the trajectory of the narrative towards new, occasionally unanticipated scenarios. In this way prayer, though devoid of action, builds dramatic tension and contributes to the progression of the narrative. The characters created by Timmermans create prayer situations in their lives in reaction to various obstacles. Providing the reader with insight into the protagonists' intellectual and emotional activity, prayer is an effective technique for creating complex, well-rounded characters. The quality of the prayer or the motives are of lesser importance, however. The inability to pray in a manner that is perceived as 'proper' or the recital of prayers that are deemed to be naive from a theological standpoint—both of which are present in *Triptych of the Three Kings* and *A Peasant Farmer's Psalm*—may be regarded as deficient. *Pallierter*, an earlier novel, can be read as a debate on the merits of various types of prayer. However, from a literary perspective, such techniques are effective in portraying protagonists as more vulnerable and relatable, thereby fostering a deeper connection with the readers.

4.2.1. Triptych of the Three Kings

On initial observation, Timmermans' *Triptych of the Three Kings* appears to present a somewhat ambiguous view of the effects of prayer. The encounter with the migrant family in the caravan is a mystical moment that leads to an expression of solidarity on the part of the three beggars. This situation begins with prayer and is accompanied by typical religious gestures. This creates an interpretative framework in which an everyday interpretation of this event is replaced by a religious one. The extraordinary nature of the event, accompanied by prayer and interpreted in a religious way, is what drives the characters to act charitably. In his case, we can observe the prosocial effect of prayer, though it only lasts for one of the three, Suskewiet. Schrobberbeeck's life is eventually also transformed by his religious experience, but the process takes much longer. Superficially, prayer does not produce any observable behaviour for the good of others. On the contrary, or so it would seem, despite his commitment to religious activity (and prayer), his actions transgress social norms. If an inner transformation takes place in his life, it is inconsistent. No observable prosocial effects can be found in the life of Pitjevogel, who only prays out of contrition at the very end of his life. On an individual level, this prayer has psychological significance, allowing him to die in peace, reconciled with God. However, it cannot have an effect on society at large, except possibly through its impact on Schrobberbeeck. Schrobberbeeck's solidarity with the dying man can be seen as the third example of charitable behaviour induced by prayer in the story.

The *Triptych of the Three Kings* allows us to identify three prosocial effects of prayer, without, however, any of those being dominant. On the contrary, the narrative seems to suggest that individuals tend to respond to religious experience (or prayer) in different, very personal ways. Some, arguably a minority, go to great lengths to act charitably, while for others the change brought about by prayer is limited to a psychological transformation that may or may not have a tangible impact on the protagonist's relationships with others in their community. Sometimes, the effect of prayer is limited to the individual concerned, helping him or her to resolve a difficult, traumatic situation or find a solution to an existential crisis, which may (or may not) inspire others.

4.2.2. A Peasant Farmer's Psalm

We see a similar pattern in *A Peasant Farmer's Psalm*. The novel realistically depicts Catholic religious traditions in early twentieth-century Flanders, such as the observance of fasting, festivals and processions, and other local traditions. Giving a gift of eggs to the Sisters of Mercy as a means of stopping the rain (Timmermans 2023, p. 45) is one form of religiously motivated gift-giving that is mentioned, though it too may be found deficient in theological terms. However, such explicit examples of a link between devotion and generosity are rare in the novel. One might argue that the prosocial effect of prayer is present elsewhere. It is manifested in the positive effect that prayer has on the resolution of the not infrequent crises in Root's life. An imperfect individual, prone to violent, irrational, or hedonistic behaviour, and thus a polar opposite of Pallieter, Root's personality is held in check by prayer.

It is this restraining function, preventing antisocial acts from being committed (or being committed more often) that seems to be one of the main social effects of prayer. Root's charitable behaviour towards others, as has been noted, is not frequent, and his character, at first glance, tends to support the view of Oviedo (2016) rather than of the proponents of a strong correlation between prayer and prosociality. However, this would ignore the fact that Timmermans builds his protagonist as someone whose perseverance as a farmer is a direct effect of having a religious life. In this respect, there is a positive correlation between Root's prayer and his ability to contribute to society. Prayer offers Root a solution to the intractable problems posed by illness and death. It could be argued even further that going on a pilgrimage to ask God to find a remedy to a serious, untreatable illness, as Root does when confronted with his daughter's blindness, is an expression of solidarity. On the other hand, the idea of God favoured by Root tends to restrict altruistic actions. Root believes that it is God who should act in response to prayer, whereas the individual is seen as powerless. It would seem, then, that the nature of the mental representation of God has to be factored into the picture (cf. Meijer-van Abbema and Koole 2017). A prayer of complete self-abandonment is less effective in producing prosocial behaviour than one that emphasises the need for the individual to take action to perform acts of generosity.

This does not mean, of course, that prayer in *A Peasant's Psalm* is limited to this one 'horizontal' function. God might be for Root, in his struggle as a farmer, "the Boss upstairs", which implies distance, but prayer, as religious praxis, bridges that gap, becoming a conversation with a God who, in the words of the village priest, "is within us" (Timmermans 2023, pp. 11 and 39). It is a prayer which, like Pallieter's, is not concerned with one's own needs but with praise and thanksgiving. Root's prayer life springs from a response to immediate events. It is a transformative act, even in the most literal sense of carving a figure of Christ in wood. Like Pallieter, Root's experience of prayer lifts him up to God and creates a sense of community that restores meaning to his life. Such prayer has a motive for the good of others, but it turns out to have another, more powerful effect, allowing the farmer to see himself in union with God, even though in his own perception he is far from the standards of holiness or morality. The unconventional form of prayer, and the Passion meditation that accompanies it, transforms Root, giving him greater insight and self-knowledge. The social impact of this prayer is indirect, as it increases social cohesion within the community by restoring harmony to one of its members.

5. Conclusions

This reading of Felix Timmermans' *Triptych of the Three Kings* and *A Peasant Farmer's Psalm* has shown that no prayer is without "works". One reason for this is that prayer, as represented in fiction, is an action that challenges and transforms the one who prays. Prayer, for this reason, is important not only in its horizontal, social dimension but also

in its vertical dimension, in which this transformation takes place in an experience of communion with the divine. The study of what prayer is, then, is essential to a proper understanding of its social impact, whether in reality or in literary fiction. The works by Felix Timmermans discussed here offer manifold examples of praying as a crucial trope that shapes the plot through its capacity to transform the lives of the protagonists. Among the fictional situations examined here, we have found several that suggest that religious experience, and prayer as part of it, is correlated with greater altruism. Prayer is shown to inspire the protagonists to act generously towards others, illustrating a positive relationship between prayer and prosocial attitudes. Prayer, in general, has a positive impact on the protagonists' ability to function in society (or allows them to regain this ability) while also helping to prevent antisocial behaviour. Prayer helps the protagonists of Timmermans' novels to regain their psychological well-being in times of crisis. In this way, his protagonists ultimately contribute to society through their work or by showing solidarity with others.

Looking at the relationship between prayer and altruism in the literary fiction of Felix Timmermans analysed here, we discover a subtle understanding of religiosity. Both texts show how prayer not only serves to achieve personal communion with the divine but also helps to bring about a transformation in the protagonists that fosters self-awareness and a deeper connection to one's community. The characters of the three beggars in *The Triptych of the Three Kings* and of Root in *A Peasant Farmer's Psalm* allow us to witness how prayer can inspire generosity and solidarity, even when the motives for such actions are complex and ambiguous.

Prayer in Timmermans's narrative fiction does not merely function as a catalyst for prosocial acts. Instead, it reflects a fundamental tension between individual spiritual quests and communal dynamics. The transformation of the trio in *The Triptych of the Three Kings* illustrates the power of prayer to evoke compassion, while Root's confrontation with God and suffering shows how spiritual practices can shape ethical attitudes. However, finding explicit links to lasting social outcomes within the fictional world of the novel can be challenging.

This research highlights the need to reflect on the wider implications of prayer as a practice of devotion. Further research is necessary in order to have a deeper understanding of prayer and its functions in Felix Timmermans' oeuvre, with a focus on a more comprehensive selection of his texts than the one that can be achieved within the scope of this article. Both the role of prayer as a communal bond that sustains social relationships and helps to cultivate altruistic behaviour and its significance as a personal consolation or potentially mystical experience need to be explored. This complexity brings us closer to understanding the interplay between religious belief and action and suggests that prayer, both in reality and through its fictional representations, remains a crucial element of human experience.

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Article

Prayer Motifs and National Consciousness in Changing Conditions of Reception: As Exemplified by the Works of Ivan Shmelev and Boris Zaitsev

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Abstract: This article presents the role of selected motifs of prayer depicted in the works of first-wave Russian emigrants in the creation of a certain type of national mythology. The starting point of the considerations is a reflection on the status of emigrant literature at the time of its creation, during the period of political changes in the Soviet bloc, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and today. From the beginning, émigré literature has served as a certain treasury of images and symbols, which are treated as necessary elements for maintaining the national identity of emigrants. The article presents selected motifs from the works of Ivan Shmelev's *The Year of the Lord* and *Pilgrimage*, and Boris Zaitsev's *Saint Sergius of Radonezh*, showing prayer as an element of ritual, as a collective request, and as an act of deep contact with God. The analysis of the selected examples shows that regardless of the literary form, narrative perspective, or the way the subject was presented, the writers showed prayer motifs in a patriotic context, while mythologizing pre-revolutionary Russia and bringing the idea of "Holy Rus" to life. In the years following the collapse of the Soviet Union, there has been an increased interest in emigrant literature, and the ideas contained therein have proven to be very important for the formation of the new national consciousness of Russians. Today, due to another political change in Russia and its political isolation, émigré literature is of renewed importance in Russian circles. The writers whose works are discussed in this study are regarded as the main Orthodox writers of the twentieth century, and the image of praying Russia is again the basis for building a new national identity. The study concludes with the observation that the value of emigrant literature should be studied in the context of the time of its creation.

Keywords: prayer; Holy Rus; Russian émigré literature; national identity

1. Introduction

The first decades of the last century were a time of beginning for many important currents in the history of Russian thought and culture, and a time of many key events for the further functioning of the state. This was the time of such varied phenomena as decadence, symbolism, futurism, new religious philosophy, Bolshevism, revolution, civil war, and emigration. That is to say, this time also reflected on Russian identity and mentality, which, although being quite resilient to change, became the object of strong influences, and, today, viewing that process in a hundred-year perspective, we can say that it shaped the cultural, political, and social distinctiveness of modern Russia.

The fiction and philosophical works of that period are still a living source of reference and frequently cited in Russian scholarly discourse as evidence of two opposing features of Russian culture: on the one hand, individuality and continuity of its tradition and, on the other, its openness to new European influences.

Émigré literature became an invaluable source of texts of patriotic and religious significance for Russia at the dawn of the formation of a new national consciousness and national ideology after the collapse of the Soviet Union. This was a reaction to the great worldview crisis caused by the discrediting of communist theories contrasted with the

reality of the building and functioning of a socialist country. In some sense, it was a repetition of the situation of the 1920s, when the works of Russian émigrés, who left the country voluntarily or forcibly, were a source of complementary, alternative consciousness for their compatriots and a proof that not all Russian culture had succumbed to the new ideology—understood as a communist madness. This feature of émigré literature became even more pronounced at the end of the twentieth century, when the works representing it finally reached readers in their motherland. In this article, I intend to focus specifically on certain historical aspects of émigré creativity, its relevance to contemporaries, and the subsequent implications of its texts among readers. This line of research is quite rare, despite the fact that the literature of Russian émigrés itself has been studied extensively, and one can even say that today it is accepted as part of the Russian classics. The question of classics of emigrant literature deserves separate research and will be mentioned here only briefly, to the extent that is necessary for the present considerations. It is worth noting, however, that certain features of émigré literature were not only relevant at the time of its creation but also corresponded to social demand much later, after being re-read in the homeland and integrated into the common current of Russian literature.

Starting from the characteristics of émigré literature as a whole, I intend to present here, on the example of the motif of prayer, how émigré literature was directed at shaping individual and collective national consciousness. The motifs of prayer will not mean referring to a specific genre of religious works or specific texts of Orthodox literature but various ways of contact with God. I will present some selected examples of these motifs from the works of first-wave emigrant writers well known in Russia today: Ivan Shmelev and Boris Zaitsev. They are widely recognized as Orthodox authors, and I will try to show different meanings for prayer motifs. Guided by the results of research from the current of cognitive poetics and reader-response theories (Stockwell 2006, pp. 3–8; Kędra-Kardela and Kowalczyk 2021, pp. 334–36), in my analysis I will try to evaluate them in terms of their value in the formation of national consciousness at different historical times; namely, at the time of the creation of the works, at the time they reached readers and researchers in the eastern part of Europe, and at the present time at the beginning of the second decade of the 20th century, during this period of Russia's radical end to dialogue with Europe and political isolation.

2. Literature and the Process of Discovering Russian Identity in Exile

It can be said that each of the three emigration waves identified in Russian literary studies for the period from the October Revolution to the collapse of the Soviet Union had its own peculiarities. The third wave emphasized anti-totalitarian, citizenly discourse and freedom; the second operated primarily with the poetic word to express the contrast between human fate and world history; and the first was clearly oriented toward forming a certain mythology of the homeland, creating a sentimental image of Russia driven by emotions associated with forced separation from native traditions and monarchist rituals. Religious motifs illustrating the spirituality of medieval Russia and the richness of Orthodox traditions, as well as the closeness of religious worship and patriotic ideas, became extremely popular in this work.

This literature focused on the construction of a specific émigré identity, in which the real homeland is replaced by a religious–political idea. Identity is one of the most popular concepts in 20th century humanities and in contemporary reflection on society and politics (Franklin and Widdis 2004). Researchers note the rather recent appearance of this concept in scientific discourse. However, the term introduced into the field of humanities by Erik H. Erikson (Erikson 1980, p. 109) has a much longer history, but with other names. Identity in the current study is understood in a special way as self-knowledge about one's roots and cultural affiliation, “as the permanent properties characteristic of an object, person or group, making it possible to recognize their identification, comparison and distinction (Jeżowski 2013, p. 946).” Identity is related to belonging to a certain group and being able to define oneself in relation to other groups. It should be added that identity can

have a religious dimension, when it is not only about the individual's membership in a religious group but also that religiosity determines the individual's relationship to many other groups.

Researchers rightly emphasize that considerations of identity are among the problems that have manifested themselves very strongly in situations of social unrest, revolution, and war, as they become very relevant when the continuity of a group's existence is threatened. Undoubtedly, such a situation was true for some sectors of Russian society in the early 20th century, who faced revolution and civil war and felt that their existence was threatened.

It must be admitted that among the emigrants there were many representatives of the intelligentsia who, even before leaving Russia, were interested in questions of religiosity and new paths of spiritual development in Russia. And while these considerations had previously been close to modernist considerations, the experience of the first serious social movements had already brought thinkers and writers increasingly closer to Orthodox thought and to Orthodox tradition. After all, even before emigration (in 1917), a volume entitled *Out of the depth* (Askoldov and Berdyaev 1990) by Sergei Askoldov, Nikolai Berdyaev, Sergei Bulgakov, and Petr Struve, among others, was prepared. Its authors believed in the spiritual dimension of the Bolshevik upheaval and emphasized the idea of the purifying role of suffering and the religious rebirth of Russia.

Religious interpretations of the ultimate consequences of the October coup were even more popular in the time of emigration, to recall, for example, those formulated in publications of the Eurasianism genre or the individual reflections of Georgy Fedotov, who in an article entitled "Why are we here" (Fedotov 1935) stressed that emigration must not be treated by Russians as a sad accident but as an opportunity to fight for the truth.

This was also the general attitude of literature written in exile. It aimed to maintain a strong bond with the country of birth and develop a distinct Russian national consciousness. Thus, as in the case of any literature in exile, Russian literature produces an idealized image of the homeland, which becomes the basis for collective memory and which is created partly consciously as a literary depository, a narrative treasury of the most important values, among which a very important place is assigned to religion, treated as a deep faith (i.e., spirituality), as a set of beliefs guiding daily life (doctrine), and as an external cult and a community. Three further examples mentioned on the motif of prayer in literature correspond to these first three ways of manifesting religion, assuming that they are all communal activities.

3. Russian Prayer—Prayer as an Element of Ritual

The largest number of images that refer to prayer conceived in a wide variety of ways can be found in Ivan Shmelev's novels *Pilgrimage* (1931) and *The Year of the Lord* (1934). These works, distinguished by a specific child protagonist and being a kind of children's memoir replete with longing for the abandoned homeland, brought the author fame in exile. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Shmelev began to be regarded as the leading Russian Orthodox writer of the 20th century. In fact, the two novels mentioned above are filled with almost reporter-like descriptions of folk religious rituals and services, showing the richness of Orthodox traditions. The events take place in the merchant district of Moscow and in the space between Moscow and The Trinity Lavra of St. Sergius during a pilgrimage to the shrine of St. Sergius of Radonezh. The way the events are presented makes the duology an example of children's literature (Andruszko and Horczak 2019, p. 131), while at the same time the seriousness of the initial situation and the events outside the plot, which are easily recognizable by an adult audience in exile, also make them a set of novels for adults expressively depicting nostalgia, grief, and longing for lost Russia.

When depicting religious rituals of the Orthodox Church, Shmelev always meticulously notes the decor of the temple, the order of the priest's actions, and cites entire verses of Orthodox chants and texts of prayers. The precision of the message is emphasized by the graphic notation of the mentioned passages, in which the melody of the chants is included:

Душе мо-я. . . ду-ше-е мо-я-аа,
Возстани, что спи-иши,
Ко-нец при-бли-жа. . . а-ется. . .¹

In *The Year of the Lord*, the entire order of life not only of the hero's immediate family and the merchant district of Moscow but also of the rest of Russia is dictated by the liturgical year, the Orthodox holidays, and the folk and Orthodox traditions associated with them. According to the concept of Orthodoxy as an agrarian religion, Church holidays are closely linked to the calendar of household and farm work. Of course, works showing the connection between the cycle of agricultural life and the liturgical cycle also exist in other works and in other literature, but what distinguishes the way this situation is presented in Shmelev's work is the primacy of religious optics (Lyubomudrov 2003, p. 228). However, it should be emphasized that this does not mean a deep experience of faith but merely a perspective of view. Among the assessments of Shmelev's work, there are many opinions that the rituals he describes are superficial in nature and that the religious worship portrayed in this way is not a manifestation of faith but of a traditional way of life, defined by Fedor Stepun as "bytovoye ispovednichestvo" (religion of everyday life) (Stepun 1968, p. 128). For readers, this was meant to be a critical assessment, lowering the value of the work in terms of its religious message. However, the prayers depicted, even if they are part of a ritual devoid of deep spiritual content, are the most essential element of the world depicted and reflect the basis of the characters' worldview, the basis for the judgments of reality they express, and the basic criterion for their choices of behavior. The superficial approach is also justified, of course, by the child in the position of narrator and protagonist. The descriptions of prayers themselves, according to the conventions of childish perception, are indeed characterized by superficiality and lack of references to deep symbolism (Sidor 2009, pp. 39, 45). Children's narration of Rus religiosity is often directed at arousing laughter in the viewer, caused by the difference between the religious meaning of events, which is well known to adult characters or adult readers, and how these events are interpreted by the child protagonist. Such a situation occurs, for example, when the adults discuss the picture of a prostitute lying and praying at the entrance to the temple. The writer introduces a certain comic effect when the emotions of the child protagonist are contrasted with the way the adults camouflage information about the nature of the woman's sins (Shmelev 1998, p. 504).

Nevertheless, this effect does not blur the essence of the events depicted in the work, as Shmelev's Russia is full of images and signs that, even when not fully understood at a certain point in life, reveal their meaning later. In this way, a child narrator can convey an even greater range of meanings than an adult narrator would. The choice of a child protagonist, as already stated, opens the viewer to another realm of meanings: those hidden beyond the plot. A child's naive memories can be taken as an invitation to individual recollection and reflection, and Ivan Ilyin's critical sketches on Shmelev's books, or Balmont's poems inspired by them, show that this is how this children's duology was read in exile² (Zakharova 2015, p. 94). The Russia left behind by the emigrants even became the embodiment of "Holy Rus" (Sidor 2015b, pp. 38, 44). The concept that was the basis of Russian imperialism, as seen in the light of Shmelev's duology, is the reality of pre-revolutionary life. Thus, through a nostalgia for the lost homeland that is quite natural for emigrants, the historical, real, pre-revolutionary Russia is mythologized and even sacralized. What is more, by evoking the theory that provided the argumentation for the idea of the All-Russia Empire, the idea of its power was also revived and was presented to readers in an unambiguously positive way.

4. Collective Petitions and the Daily Life of the People

The current of collective prayers expressing requests to God through the mediation of saints or the Virgin Mary appears in many emigrant works (Sidor 2009, pp. 82–83, 100). The communal nature of such prayers not only means that they are addressed by many people at the same time but also that they concern matters of importance to the community. Thus, Orthodoxy permeates every moment of the life of the Russian people of the late 20th century not only as a set of rituals, as mentioned earlier, but also as a way of understanding everyday life, building social and religious bonds, and helping to understand the world. Such cases are encountered, for example, in *The Year of the Lord*, where prayers are even cosmic, as in the description of the procession with icons of the Virgin Mary and St. Nicholas, during which the people sing common prayers:

...Пресвятая Богородице...спаси нас... .

[...] и вот уже Она восходит по ступеням, и лик Ее обращен к народу, и вся Она блистает; розово озаренная ранним весенним солнцем.

...Спаси от бед... рабы твоя, Богородице...³

In Shmelev's narrative, the descriptions are dominated by an external perspective, which is due to the peculiarities of the child's perception, whose experience is based on complicity and the literal treatment of spiritual reality. However, this perspective paradoxically perfectly expresses the richness and depth of the traditions presented. For the emigrants, these descriptions have become a nostalgic memory of religious practices performed in the homeland and the deep faith of the Russian people. In this way, the children's recollections of the externals of worship and documenting the process of integration into the practice of adult faith are meant to evoke personal memories of the readers and appeal to their sense of identity.

It can be said that the way the narrative is conducted builds a special vision of Orthodox Russia, where every smallest element of life is subordinated to faith and lived in the spirit of faith. The book, written in simple language in the narrative and presenting uncomplicated images, creates a universal image of Russia that is recognizable to every Russian. This image is, of course, highly idealized and mythologized, but it corresponds to the social demand of emigrants, sublimating their memories and longings.

In fact, in order to create a sense of nostalgic togetherness and evoke associative images of collective prayers, Shmelev sometimes does not present the texts of the prayers at all or even focus on the element of prayerful concentration. There is an interesting example of the celebration of the Feast of the Protection of the Mother of God, known as Pokrov, described in *The Year of the Lord*. The entire long narrative–dialogue passus expresses, in essence, a cosmic image of the Mother of God, who cares for people. This is an expansion of the iconographic image, the Mother of God who wraps the Earth with her mantle, taking care of the welfare of all creatures and their successful survival of winter. This chapter is like an explication of this imagery and the characters' belief that all are constantly under the tender care of the Mother of God. In turn, the only prayers that appear in this passage are uttered quietly by Gorkin in the presence of servants who are preparing pickles. The entire description of the holiday, however, is filled with a sense of communal prayerful concentration, in which the national consciousness and the conviction that such is the spiritual, religious, prayerful essence of real Russia is strongly emphasized⁴.

Thus, one can already see that whether the descriptions of Orthodox traditions are limited to the external transmission of ritual only or take into account the deeper, doctrinal meaning of the rites, they can be read in the same key. They create a specific vision of Russia as a country in which prayer resounds at all times. Russia, as imagined by the expatriates, becomes a country where communal prayer is a regular part of life. As one can easily guess, the bond with such a country motivates Russians, not simply to pray but to pray specifically for their homeland. Russia is thus an environment of prayer and an object of prayer, and its success becomes a constant concern of believers. Religious identification thus implies acceptance of a particular idea of Russia, in which the freedom to pray is

almost the most important thing. This vision does not take into account many aspects of the existence of the real state, but these aspects are not seen as relevant from the perspective of emigrants who see in the lost homeland an almost mythical paradise.

5. The Depth of Orthodoxy and Russian National Mythology

Prayer motifs are of a slightly different nature in hagiographical texts, created quite often by writers of the Russian emigration. Among the saints readily mentioned in the emigration, for example, is Sergius of Radonezh, the founder and patron saint of the famous Lavra, which was, and still is, regarded as the heart of Russian Orthodoxy. Sergius is also exceptionally revered as the figure through whose intercession a very important Russian military victory took place, namely the Battle of Kulikovo. He appears in at least a few works in exile, but perhaps most prominently his character is depicted in Boris Zaitsev's short story *Saint Sergius of Radonezh* (1924). Saint Sergius is the same saint whose shrine was the destination of the pilgrimage depicted in *The Year of the Lord*. Here, however, the significance of the prayer plot is determined not by the characteristics of the narrator but of the protagonist. Indeed, Saint Sergius is meant to be a model of a man devoted to prayer. Zaitsev focuses on the life of St. Sergius showing the close connection of the type of holiness represented by Sergius with Russian religiosity in general. The Saint of Radonezh thus becomes a symbol of Russian religiosity. It is worth quoting here the author's commentary, included as an authorial introduction to his new biography of St. Sergius:

Как святой, Сергей одинаково велик для всякого. Подвиг его всечеловечен. Но для русского в нем есть как раз и нас волнующее: глубокое созвучие народу, великая типичность—сочетание в одном рассеянных черт русских⁵.

Zaitsev clearly emphasizes the relevance of the figure of the saint for Russians of the time because of the specific feeling that Sergius had for Russia. Zaitsev calls this consonance, and in this term he evokes the impression of a sonic harmony that is associated with a prayer spoken aloud by several people. While generally focusing on the saint's spiritual life, Zaitsev stresses that Russia has always played a major role in Sergius's activity. From the way the character is portrayed in the work, it is clear that Sergius, whom Zaitsev refers to with the word "молитвенник", i.e., a man who pursues his vocation in constant prayer, is very aware of the importance of country and statehood. The basis for this claim is, of course, the fact that Saint Sergius gave his blessing to Dmitry Donskoy before the battle with the Tatars. Zaitsev emphasizes that Sergius not only met with Dmitry but also, during the entire battle, he prayed together with his confreres and prophesied, and, when the battle was over, he said, identifying himself with the Russian troops, "We have won" (Zaitsev 2000, p. 60).

Taking into account the aforementioned fact that Sergius is depicted by Zaitsev as a "typical Russian saint", it can be said that he is also a model from which the characteristics of an ideal Russian Christian can be determined. Thus, prayer for the homeland, carried out in community with other believers, can be considered a manifestation of Russian holiness.

It is worth noting that the period in which Saint Sergius lived was an important time for Russian history for many reasons. First of all, because at that time the territories of the Russian principalities were under Tartar captivity, so the Christian religion was in a subordinate position to another faith. Moreover, it was a time of slow formation of a new state, which can be considered the beginnings of Tsarist Russia.

Reflecting the general trend in the development of Russian religious culture, as well as the tradition-based and religiously correlated policy direction of Tsarist Russia, Zaitsev links Sergius's action aimed at saving the Orthodox faith with issues of national identity. In doing so, he does not mention more contemporary and controversial issues, and does not refer to the idea popular among the people in Russian history that the Tsar had power equal to God (Sidor 2015a, pp. 65–66), but instead touches on those elements of the old, pre-revolutionary state idea that are deeply rooted in the people's practice of piety. The Trinity Lavra of St. Sergius, according to Pavel Florensky, who wrote about it in 1918, is also

“the realization and revelation of the Russian idea”, which he describes as Aristotelian entelechy.

Prayer through the mediation of St. Sergius thus means invoking the question of national belonging at all times. The writer suggests that it is practically impossible to address Saint Sergius to the exclusion of the question of homeland.

This interpretation of the meaning of prayer addressed through the mediation of St. Sergius is confirmed by the conclusion of Zaitsev’s piece, where the writer states:

Он, разумеется, заступник наш. Через пятьсот лет, всматриваясь в его образ, чувствуешь: да, велика Россия. Да, святая сила ей дана. Да, рядом с силой, истиной мы можем жить.⁶

6. Religiosity, Identity, and Mission

Although both authors took up some religious themes in their early works, before the revolution, they represented a rather non-religious worldview. It was not until influenced by revolutionary events that they experienced a conversion to Orthodoxy, and their works featured motifs, images, or themes that depicted religion in a positive light. Influenced by tragic life events, Ivan Shmelev became closer to Orthodoxy even before he left the country, and Boris Zaitsev saw the importance of religion in human life, as he himself admitted, precisely thanks to emigration (Sidor 2009, p. 55).

All in all, the view was often expressed in exile that the Orthodox faith had always been the basis of all Russian literature. Ivan Shmelev’s statement seems significant:

Русская литература—а с нею Гоголевская Шинель, вышла из духовной сущности русского народа [...]. Русская культура—„запечатленная” печатью тысячелетий: крещением в православие.⁷

Religiosity is thus, according to this view, inscribed in Russian literature and culture, and even constitutes its very core. Undoubtedly, verbalized in this quote is the most natural and well-proven statement that the origins of Russian writing are connected to the adoption of Christianity. But the emphasis with which Shmelev expressed this conviction, characteristic, moreover, of this writer’s style, shows that he treats Orthodoxy not only as historic but also above all as mystical and emotional. The modification of the saying attributed to Dostoevsky implies a strict, traditionalist treatment of Orthodoxy and is a rejection of an involved view of Russian culture. For Shmelev, who was a proponent of nationalist ideology in his early works, this is a radical change of opinion. But, indeed, it is a statement that rejects all options but the religious one, nullifies the artistic merits of the Narodniks and Occidentalists, and emphasizes only the Orthodox perspective in the study of Russian culture.

Such a direction of analyzing literature was practiced in exile by many very subtle literary critics, professional and amateur. Among the latter, we can mention very well-known philosophers who published essays in the émigré press on the works they had read. Such reflections in a religious key can quite often be found, for example, in the texts of Sergei A. Levitsky, Ivan Ilyin, Semen Frank, Konstantin Mochulski, or Fedor Stepun. Representative of these works is Ivan Ilyin’s statement that that art in Russia was born as an act of prayer, and the most important thing in art is “its spiritual object”, which is the result of the writer’s unique sensitivity to the affairs of the world, to people, and above all to God (Il’in 1959, p. 19).

Ilyin himself wrote a number of works combining the scope of philosophy, religion, and literary studies, among which, particularly important for our consideration, is his collection of sketches *On Darkness and Enlightenment* (1945), which presents the works of Ivan Bunin, Alexei Remizov, and Ivan Shmelev. In this work he states:

То, к чему русские привыкают в России, как к своему воздуху [...]—становится здесь живым и осязательным потоком образов, зарисованных сразу эпически и лирически. Это Россия. Это сама Россия. Это вековечный ритм ее молитвы и труда⁸.

This analysis of Shmelev's works leads Ilyin to personify Russia, which here means territory, spirituality, everyday life, and the people of the country. According to this approach, prayer is a characteristic of the homeland, and this means that the motifs of prayer portrayed by the emigrants are not considered incidental or peripheral but form the essence of the spiritual climate. Thus, critics highly valued works that portrayed religious practices as crucial to building identity and national pride. Additionally, such work was partly due to the task that the émigrés set for themselves not only with regard to their readers but also with regard to their homeland. Hence, the notion of the mission of Russian emigration emerged in the reflections of emigrants, which over time became one of the sensitive issues in the diaspora community. Consideration of this issue turned into a lively discussion that involved almost the entire émigré community and resulted in many public speeches. Participants in these polemics invoked a variety of arguments, often in a solemn tone, recalling the connection between love of the homeland and love of God and arguing that preserving the memory of Russia is the duty of every Orthodox Russian. For example, the guests of a special evening dedicated to the mission of Russian emigration on 16 February 1924, held in Paris, spoke in this spirit. Among the speakers at that time were I. Bunin, Dmitri Merzhkovsky, Anton Kartashev, I. Shmelev, and Nikolai Kulman, who advocated the mystical significance of Russian emigration. Perhaps of the greatest resonance was the speech of I. Bunin, in which the writer compared the fate of Russia to events related to the death of Christ, often referring to biblical symbolism and metaphors.

Bunin also stressed that, for himself, a sense of national identity is closely linked to faith, and he emphatically stated that under no circumstances can he renounce what he believes in (Bunin 1982, p. 215). Although these words were received very skeptically by some cultural figures, including, for example, the editor of the newspaper *Poslednie Novosti*, Pavel Milyukov, the new Russian messianism still had a great many adherents, who on various occasions were reminded of the unique vocation incumbent on Russian emigrants.

It is in this context that prayer is treated here not only as personal contact with God but also as a sign and method of manifesting a collective identity. It also becomes a feature of Russia itself, the spiritual climate of a mythologized country that enables its people to have constant contact with God in rituals and festivals and through its representatives among the saints. It is also a convenient transmitter of state and even political ideas.

7. The Praying Emigrant Russia in the Modern Era

The study of this religiously oriented literature became a completely new and interesting direction of Slavic literary studies in Russia and the countries of the former Soviet bloc after the collapse of the Soviet Union. At that time, researchers of Russian literature were in a crisis situation, as the analysis of Soviet literature, until then supported by the state, suddenly became unwelcome and even compromised after the change in the political situation of the satellite countries of the former Soviet Union. The attractiveness of researching émigré literature was due, on the one hand, to the fact that it formed a whole corpus of texts completely unexplored and unknown in official literary discourse until then, and, on the other hand, to the fact that it represented the kind of values that had previously been ignored by the communists and which, in the years of transition, were regaining their position in the new post-socialist world. The works of émigrés with expressly religious themes, alien to communist ideology, thematizing the spiritual search, met social demand and became an excellent object of analysis.

Today, however, after some 30 years of studying this literature, many of its works are still unexplored, with their expressive messages no longer drawing researchers outside Russia. The research momentum has thus clearly diminished. At the same time, in Russia itself, it seems that this very message is once again gaining importance, due to the political situation and the tightening of relations between state ideology and Orthodox teaching. Images of Russia's prayers are therefore very important in the construction of the current Russian identity.

Ivan Shmelev has thus been recognized as an Orthodox writer, not least because of the novel *The Year of the Lord*, and, from time to time, proposals to include the reading of his works in the school curriculum resurface. These proposals, of course, do not take into account a deeper study of Shmelev's work, the writer's process in arriving at the Orthodox theme, or his specific personality, which are recognized by some scholars (Lyubomudrov 2010, p. 26). In addition to religious reflections, the writer's life was also filled with other fascinations, including an affection for Nazi soldiers, which he expressed in letters to his close friend Olga Bredius-Subbotina. Relevant passages selected from Shmelev's works have been recognized as shaping today's Russian Orthodox identity, while locating the writer among the classics. In 2023, in connection with the "year of Shmelev", a number of popularization and scientific initiatives were carried out to introduce today's Russians to the works of the author of *The Year of the Lord* (Fedchenkova 2007, pp. 96–102; Ordynskaya 2023). Specifically, the religious–national theme, which Ilyin called "the prayer of Russia", was emphasized. A rather interesting sociological tendency is emerging to make modern Russians realize that the metaphor of "Holy Rus", always existing as a theoretical idea, and an idea with a clear political tinge, refers to the actual historical pre-revolutionary Russia and should be resurrected. It is also not insignificant that Ivan Ilyin himself has become an oft-cited philosopher of the current national consciousness, for which the name Ruscism is sometimes used (Snyder 2022).

The works of Boris Zaitsev, who indeed described himself as primarily Orthodox, can also be considered an example of work that is important for identity building and sensitive to contemporary readings. Zaitsev's prose was permanently tied to a political message, even though after his conversion the writer was much closer to a spiritual–cultural understanding of Russia than a spiritual–political one. This is because the author of *Saint Sergius of Radonezh* recognized the spiritual potential of beauty and saw the possibility of contact with God through the mediation of different cultures. Undoubtedly, Russian culture and the Russian version of spirituality were personally closest to him, but he believed that they were not the only environment in which a Russian could develop spiritually. These thoughts resonate emphatically in such works as *The Tree of Life* (1953), *The Pilgrim* (1926), and *The Vendée Epilogue* (1951), where the writer accentuates the theme of the fate of the emigrant Christian who agrees to distance himself from his earthly homeland and constantly strives for eternal happiness in the eternal homeland.

8. Conclusions

In Russian émigré circles, under the influence of the practice of reading works of émigré writers depicting various aspects of the life of pre-revolutionary Russia in a spirit of nostalgia for the lost homeland, the idea of a perfect, religious Russia was formed, for which here we have used the metaphor of "the prayer of Russia" by I. Ilyin. First of all, the impetus for the creation of this idea was the homesickness of emigrants and their conviction that they should preserve the essence of the lost homeland for future generations. This essence, for them, was a religiosity that caused pre-revolutionary Russia to be identified with "Holy Rus". The mythical "Holy Rus", guaranteeing people uninterrupted contact with God, where prayers were sounded at all times, was thus reborn into extremely diverse material, in which literary motifs of prayer are sometimes not presented literally at all and are, in fact, only a starting point for reader interpretation.

In this way, literary images of Russia's prayers have proven to be sensitive to political changes and are now less and less explored in Slavic literary studies of countries from the former socialist bloc, which today must redefine their policies toward Russia after 2022. Undisputedly, emigrant works were not closed to other cultures and to readers representing other cultures. They also deserve to be studied because of their artistic value and unique language. However, Orthodoxy is inextricably linked to nationalism in the works in question and collective prayer is incorporated into the specific image of Russia, a link not only between the faithful and God but also a medium for conveying the idea of

nationalism, and should be understood in light of the circumstances in which the works in question appeared as emigrant works.

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Notes

- ¹ My soul, my soul,
Rise up that you sleep,
The end is coming. ... (Shmelev 1998, p. 28).
- ² Ilyin wrote directly that this was the essence of Russia (Il'in 1959, p. 186).
- ³ ...Most Holy Mother of God. ... save us. ...
[...] and already She is ascending the steps, and Her countenance is turned toward the people, and all of Her is radiant; pinkly illuminated by the early spring sun.
...Save Thy servants. ... Thy servants, Holy Mother. ... (Shmelev 1998, p. 77).
- ⁴ [...] и слышу и вижу быль, такую покойную, родную, омоленную душою русской, хранимую святым Покровом. [...] and I hear and see the story, so restful, native, prayed by the Russian soul, kept by the holy Pokrov (Shmelev 1998, p. 180).
- ⁵ As a saint, Sergius is equally great for everyone. His feat is universal. But for the Russian, there is something in him that excites us: a deep consonance with the people, a great typicality—a combination in one of the scattered features of the Russians (Zaytsev 2000, p. 24).
- ⁶ He is, of course, our intercessor. Five hundred years later, looking at his image, you feel: yes, Russia is great. Yes, it has been given holy power. Yes, next to the power, the truth, we can live (Zaytsev 2000, p. 69).
- ⁷ Russian literature— and with it Gogol's *Overcoat*, came out of the spiritual essence of the Russian people [...]. Russian culture—“sealed” by the seal of millennia: baptism into Orthodoxy (Shmelev 1999, p. 543).
- ⁸ What Russians get used to in Russia as their air [...]—becomes here a living and palpable stream of images, sketched at once epically and lyrically. This is Russia. This is Russia itself. This is the age-old rhythm of her prayer and labor (Il'in 1959, p. 174).

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Article

Public Funds as a Source of Financing Revalorization of Sacral Historical Monuments: The Example of Poland

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Abstract: Sacral historical monuments are primarily places of prayer, but also objects performing numerous other functions. These are public goods, including cultural goods that build national identity. Their preservation in the right condition is important not only for the owner, but also for the public authorities, whose duty is to preserve them for future generations. The study concerns the financing of sacral monuments in Poland. Its aim is to indicate the legitimacy of financing the revalorization of sacral monuments from public funds, the solutions applied in this area in Poland, and the sources and amount of support provided to the owners of these objects in the years 2017–2022. In it, the authors: (1) refer to such concepts as: public good, cultural good and cultural heritage, (2) define—based on Polish regulations—the concept of a sacral monument and indicate the multiplicity of functions that these objects perform, (3) present the number and types of sacral monuments in Poland, taking into account their location, (4) identify available sources of public funds for the revalorization of sacral monuments in Poland. The analyses carried out show that in Poland, every year, public funds play an important role in the revalorization of sacral historical monuments. In real terms, its volume remained at a similar level over the period considered. The methods used in the development are as follows: critical analysis of the literature and legal acts and selected methods of descriptive statistics.

Keywords: public good; cultural good; sacral historical monument; functions of historical monuments; financing revalorization of historical monuments; public fund

1. Introduction

Every historical epoch leaves its trace in the public space, in objects—including those of everyday use, documents, buildings and edifices—some of which over time gain particular importance for the nation's identity, becoming its cultural goods, i.e., a special public good.

Cultural heritage must be taken care of. It needs to be developed and passed on to future generations, and the state has an important role to play in this respect, although it is not always the owner of the heritage sites. The State is responsible for protection; the owner or holder of the facility is responsible for care.

The share of public funds in financing the revalorization of religious monuments is a kind of compensation for the interference of the State in the property rights of the Church as the owner of these objects. However, according to the authors, the main rationale for such financing is the wide range of functions which these monuments perform today and which have been described earlier. Many of these functions go well beyond the original use of sacred sites (the function of religious worship and the place of worship) and coincide with the objectives pursued by public authorities at different levels to preserve cultural heritage for future generations.

The public sector's involvement in the financial support of cultural heritage varies, and empirical evidence points to differences between countries (van der Ploeg 2006; Klammer

et al. 2013; Inkei 2019). Various solutions and tools are used, including direct and indirect public spending (Rizzo and Throsby 2006), to support the owners of sacral historical monuments. This paper presents solutions applied in Poland with regard to financing the revalorization of sacral monuments.

The reason for choosing the example of Poland is the importance of sacral monuments among historical objects (as indicated in the text). The specificity of the situation in Poland results from the effects of war damage, which affected other groups of monuments to a greater extent. Also, the political and economic system operating in the years 1944–1989 resulted in limited possibilities of financing the restoration of monuments via private capital, which caused the consolidation of the model of financing the revalorization of monuments from public funds. Today, despite the changes in the system, this model is expected.

The aim of the study is to indicate how public authorities in Poland participate in financing the costs of the revalorization of sacral historical monuments, i.e., what solutions are used in this area and from what sources and in what amount such support was provided to the owners of these objects in the years 2017–2022. It is worth emphasizing that it is not an assessment of the financial effectiveness of spending public funds on the revalorization of sacred monuments. The rationale for spending public funds here cannot be reduced to measurable financial results alone. Most of them are immeasurable.

The authors of the study, referring to the concept of public good and cultural heritage, show that spending public funds on the revalorization of religious monuments is justified, even though most of these objects are privately owned. The figures presented in the study are intended to show the scale of this funding. In the article, the authors sequentially: (1) refer to such concepts as: public good, cultural good and cultural heritage, (2) define—based on Polish regulations—the concept of a sacral monument and indicate the multiplicity of functions that these objects perform, (3) present the number and types of sacral monuments in Poland, taking into account their location, (4) identify available sources of public funds for the revalorization of sacral monuments in Poland.

2. Theoretical Review

The public good may be *sensu stricte* or *sensu largo* (Owsiak 2005, pp. 32–36). A public good in the strict sense (the so-called pure public good, classical public good) is a public good financed (collectively paid) for the use of which is not charged. It is consumed in an egalitarian manner. The use of the good by a given person does not limit the access of others (this applies to both the quantity and the quality of the good). No one can be excluded from its consumption; there is no need to compete for access to it. For natural reasons, this good may serve the local community or society as a whole. The benefits of using this good are indivisible. You cannot isolate a part of that good and assign it to a person. Some of them (natural resources) must be protected. In addition to the above, public goods in the sense of *largo* include the following: social goods, which are relatively limited and usually paid for, and thus partly financed by public funds. They can be produced both by entities from the public sector and entities from other sectors (Juja 2011, p. 40). They cannot be bought in quantities corresponding to our tastes and the abundance of the wallet. The consumption of these goods is forced, which limits the ability of individuals to choose the destination of their income, i.e., the consumption of private goods (Holcombe 1997). Cultural goods have the characteristics of public goods because they bring positive externalities or diffuse benefits that can be claimed (Throsby 2006).

The term “cultural good” is defined in the literature and legislation. Cultural goods are the artistic and cultural achievements of humanity, subject to aesthetic evaluation according to accepted criteria in specific historical conditions (Tomaszewski 2000, p. 9). It is a good having artistic and aesthetic values, which is a source of inspiration or a distinctive symbol. It has a social value, important for identity and heritage (Klamer 2004, pp. 138–39), as well as a non-economic cultural value (McCain 2006), sometimes higher than economic value, including aesthetic, spiritual and authenticity (Throsby 2001, p. 28). For example, temples

have cultural value, because their existence is connected with religious practice and evokes the religious and spiritual values of that tradition (Klamer 2004, p. 150).

The quintessence of the cultural value of the good is its ability to evoke the experience of sublimeness (Kant 2004, p. 140), and with it the admiration that “moves” the soul and gives the opportunity to experience the sublime or sacral nature of the good, to see its beauty, to recognize its place in the history of culture (Klamer 2004, p. 139 et seq.).

Cultural goods allow each of us to build cultural capital, which does not lose its value with use, but on the contrary, its value increases (Klamer 2004, p. 151), thanks to which our subsequent experiences are greater.

Legislation defines “cultural goods” at international and national levels. At the international level, the first attempts to define the concept of “cultural goods” were made in the Hague Convention of 1954, in the context of dealing with them during armed conflicts. It was then established that these are objects of great importance for the cultural heritage of the nation, that they may be objects of architecture, art and religious and secular history, archaeological sites, manuscripts, books and scientific collections, i.e., immovable and movable objects (Convention 1954, Art. 2). The 1972 Paris Convention specifies that cultural objects must have “exceptional universal value” and may take the form of the following: individual objects, historical complexes forming a certain whole, as well as places with a larger concentration of historical objects (Convention 1972, Art. 2).

At the national level, in the case of Poland, the legal provisions concerning cultural goods can be found in the Constitution (Constitution of the Republic of Poland 1997) and specific acts dedicated to them—the Act of 1962 and the Act of 2003 currently in force. The Constitution of the Republic of Poland defines the good of culture as the source of the identity of the Polish nation, its survival and development (Constitution of the Republic of Poland 1997, Art. 6). The Act of 1962 (Act 1962, Art. 2) specifies that a cultural good is any movable or immovable object, ancient or contemporary, of importance for cultural heritage and development because of its historical, scientific or artistic value. In the current Act (Act 2003), whose regulations already take into account the requirements of the European Union (Poland became a full member of the EU in 2004) and international standards in this field (Gerecka-Żołyńska 2007, p. 52), there is no longer the term “cultural good”. The Act was dedicated only to former cultural goods, i.e., monuments, which were defined in this legal act as immovable or movable property, their parts or assemblies, which are the work of man or are connected with his activity and constitute a testimony of a past epoch or event and whose preservation is in the public interest due to their historical, artistic or scientific value (Act 2003, Art. 3(1)). In view of the above, the authors—like K. Zeidler—believe that cultural goods are a broader concept than monuments. Not every cultural asset is a monument, but every monument is a cultural asset (Zeidler 2007, p. 42).

Defining the concept of “sacral monuments”, to which this study is devoted, based on the provisions of Polish law, is complicated, which results from the ambiguity of the concept of “monument” and the valuation of these objects.

According to the Polish legislator, the definition of a monument contains undefined phrases and general clauses (Sienkiewicz 2013, p. 303). As it is written, the monument must be a work of man and be a testimony of a bygone era. However, the legislator did not specify the time frame that the monument should meet in order to receive the status of a testimony of a bygone era. Another design of the monument is to take into account the social interest, which creates problems with regard to the sacral monument.

It introduces an element of discretion and subjective assessment, used to pressure and abuse both by conservators, and owners of sacred objects that could potentially be considered historic (Witwicki 2007, p. 77). In this evaluation, however, attention should be paid to the general interest of selected groups of society, rather than the sum of individual interests (Zalasińska 2020). An additional difficulty in defining sacral monuments is their diversity and sometimes their multifunctionality and hence the difficulty in classifying such objects as the following: churches, chapels, altars, pulpits, doors, paintings, sculptures, reliquaries, stables, ornates and vota piety (Bijak 2019, p. 258). In view of the above, in

Poland the terms “sacral space” and “sacred place” and conservation practice should be used to define a sacral monument.

Sacral space can be considered from three points of view, i.e., systemic, physical and symbolic (Przybylska 2005, pp. 381–87). In the first, the sacral space is understood as a subspace of geographical space and the basic subject of the study of the geography of religion, in the second, as a concrete sacred place (object or area) and in the third, as a symbolic space (cultural, spiritual, social). In the context of the problem discussed in this article, it is most interesting to look at the sacral monument through the prism of the sacred place.

The term “sacred place” can be found in canon law (Code of Canon Law, canon 1205), which states that “sacred places are those places which, by consecration or blessing, according to the prescriptions of the liturgical books, are destined for divine worship or for the burial of the faithful”. So they are churches, chapels, sanctuaries, altars and cemeteries (Przybylska 2005, p. 383). “Sacred place” is therefore a broader concept than “sacral object” (not every sacred place will be called a sacral object). Sacred buildings should not include parish houses, parishes, schools and other institutions owned or run by persons of the clerical or religious state. These objects can be called ecclesiastical, but not sacral, because they do not fulfil a sacral function, although they often condition it. (Przybylska 2005, pp. 383–84). It is also worth noting that a sacred place may consist of many sacral objects.

In their practice, conservators, when defining a sacred object, refer to the formula from the First Concordat (1925, Art. XIV), which specified that sacred objects are immovable and movable property dedicated exclusively to the service of God, i.e., churches, objects used for worship, etc. (Decree 1933). In the current agreement between the Holy See and the Polish State, ratified on 23 February 1998 (Concordat 1993), on the basis of canon law in canon 1214, the term “church” means a sacred building intended for divine worship, to which the faithful have the right to enter in order to perform this worship, especially in public (Flisek and Żelazowska 2014). It is an object which by the decision of the appropriate ecclesiastical authority was destined for worship. In order for this object to be a monument, it must additionally have the previously indicated characteristics specified in the Act on the Protection of Monuments and Care of Monuments (Act 2003).

Sacral historical monuments fulfil many functions, which can be classified according to four main criteria: (1) the original reason for their creation, (2) the way in which the space is used, (3) the sphere of influence and (4) the type of social needs being met. Taking into account the original reason for its creation, the functions of a sacral monument are as follows: basic function and additional functions. The basic function is considered mainly as a determinant of the form of a monument and is the starting point for its history, understood as the continuity of fate from its creation to the moment of contact with the recipient (Dorosz-Turek 2014, p. 92). In the case of a sacral monument, it is the function of religious worship (Nowiński 2011, p. 269), within which specific functions can be distinguished, i.e.,

- (a) places where religious practices are held;
- (b) prayer;
- (c) meditation (Moon and Somers 2023);
- (d) pilgrimage;
- (e) healing.

Prayer is inextricably linked to a sacral monument, i.e., a temple, which is a place of religious worship and the spiritual heritage of human communities (Gilchrist 2020). This connection is clearly seen in the consecration prayer of King Solomon:

“Is God indeed to dwell on earth? If the heavens and the highest heavens cannot contain you, how much less this house which I have built! Regard kindly the prayer and petition of your servant, LORD, my God, and listen to the cry of supplication which I, your servant, utter before you this day. May your eyes be open night and day toward this house, the place of which you said, My name shall be there; listen to the prayer your servant makes toward this place. Listen to the petition of your servant and of your people Israel which they offer toward this

place. Listen, from the place of your enthronement, heaven, listen and forgive. If someone sins in some way against a neighbor and is required to take an oath sanctioned by a curse, and comes and takes the oath before your altar in this house, listen in heaven; act and judge your servants. Condemn the wicked, requiting their ways; acquit the just, rewarding their justice. When your people Israel are defeated by an enemy because they sinned against you, and then they return to you, praise your name, pray to you, and entreat you in this house, listen in heaven and forgive the sin of your people Israel, and bring them back to the land you gave their ancestors". 1 Kgs, 8: 27–34 (The New American Bible 2012)

Prayer has an individual dimension—it expresses a person's very intimate relationship with God (Thurston 2009; Baesler 2002; Marshall and Mosher 2013) and "needs" space. For every believer, it is a temple, called a "house of prayer" (Betz 1997; Wischmeyer 2015). This place is sanctified by the special presence of God (Ottosson 1978), and through the liturgy (Boselli 2014) and the practice of community help (Traynor (JCL) (2013)), it becomes a school of prayer.

The above remarks can rightly be formulated in the context of all religions where "transcendence" takes on a specific dimension of deity, and a personal encounter with a personal God requires a special place. The need for a special meeting place with holiness is evident in the "religions of the Book" (Gilbert and Segal 1995; Dimmock and Hadfield 2008). But it is even more evident in Christianity, which is the "religion of the Book", but above all the religion of the Incarnate and Living Word, which takes for granted the truth that the personal God hidden in the Host dwells with man in the silence of the tabernacle. For Christians, the temple is a place of particularly sacred prayer. It is a signpost for the man seeking the way to God and a visible sign of separation and at the same time protection of the sacred from the profane.

From the point of view of the issue of this study, other functions of sacral monuments are also important, distinguished due to the way in which their space is used or the sphere of influence.

Respect for the remains of the deceased is rooted in most cultures and common in European cultures (Rytel 2014, p. 265). Often the desire to see the tombs of famous clergy and lay people, located in their crypts, as well as plaques commemorating people important for the history of a given nation, accumulated works of art (Kaczmarek et al. 2002), or books, is the reason for people of different faiths or religions from all over the world to visit these objects. Some sacral spaces do not perform religious functions, but only museum functions (e.g., the complex of Buddhist temples in Angkor, Cambodia, churches carved from volcanic tufa in Cappadocia, Turkey) (Durydiwka 2015, p. 437). The museum function gives the monuments the status of historical documents and allows them to preserve to the highest degree their basic values, including the tradition of the original function, and guarantees the preservation of the authenticity of the entire exhibition and uniqueness (Szot-Radziszewska 2014, p. 291). In addition, sacral monuments are often places of exhibitions, readings, collections of books and documents (Doroz-Turek 2014, pp. 103–8). Visiting a sacral monument has an educational dimension (Kulik et al. 2022), and in many cases part of it has been or is being used for such purposes (Zürcher 1989; Akın 2016).

Sacral historical monuments are spaces of cultural memory (de Wildt et al. 2019), witnesses of often important political events (e.g., the Church of St. Bridget in Gdańsk in Poland) (Durydiwka 2015, p. 431) and mirrors of times. They never belong to just one generation or era, as they are woven into the turbulent history of the place where they are (Deibl 2020). Aesthetic values and their embodiment in sacral monuments can be important tools supporting educational processes. They have combined educational activities with religious activities for a very long time (e.g., Zürcher 1989). This approach is very close to the idea of psychodidactics, which uses psychological knowledge and methods to support didactic–scientific processes (some believe that nowadays, this is the overriding function of a monument, because it results from its essence—Molski 2014, p. 193).

The sacral monument has objective beauty attributed to objects and artefacts and subjective beauty (Ossowski 1958). Architectural space influences the development of the individual (Keel 1969; Mesquida and Inocêncio 2016) and is naturally associated with the value of beauty. The beauty that it represents is intended not only to serve man and satisfy his subjective needs, but also to be a testimony of divinity, which is why in sacral architecture, it evades particular interpretations and refers to a higher, more objective order, thus corresponding to the value of truth (Battaino 2020). The analyzed objects build the identity of the place and are landmarks in space (Halemba 2023).

Today, sacral monuments perform many functions at the same time, which evaluate, change and develop as a result of cultural, demographic, economic changes, etc., often making them multifunctional objects. The State had a significant impact on the functions of sacral monuments, as indicated earlier, including the development of its cultural and educational function. The sacral monument is not an enclave of another world (architecture, art), but adapts to its surroundings and fulfils new roles. Any action to stop this process would be unnatural and contrary to the idea of preservation of the monument, contrary to the role of the monument—an object active in the cultural space (Barełkowski 2014, p. 60). A change of function in a historic building and a cultural object may increase its attractiveness. Thus, it may allow for its wider, often more interesting and effective use as heritage (Włodarczyk 2014, p. 318).

Sacral historical monuments are an element of cultural heritage, which must be interpreted as a collection of assets with specific characteristics that influence consumption and investment decisions, “a heterogeneous collection of goods that, over time and in the process of historicalization, are recognized as the bearers of specific cultural traditions” (Guerzoni 1997, p. 107). The appreciation of this heritage in contemporary societies is an expression of a growing concern for its preservation, expansion and concern for its economic and social impact (Snowball 2013). It is capital that encourages the consideration of the aspects of its sustainable development (Rizzo and Throsby 2006), which is not easy. When economic difficulties come to the fore, cultural problems come to the fore. Cultural spending seems wasteful, especially since cultural needs, such as the need for identity and aesthetics, are usually seen as luxuries—the most distant in Maslov’s hierarchy of needs (Klamer 2004, p. 139).

The State plays an important role in the protection and promotion of cultural goods. To this end, many institutions have been established in Poland, among which the leading role is played by the following: the National Heritage Institute, the National Museum Institute and the Polish Academy of Sciences. The existence of these institutions is a manifestation of the responsibility of the State to preserve the cultural heritage of the nation and to ensure the access to culture for all citizens.

According to Polish legislation, the protection of monuments carried out by the State (Act 2003, Art. 4) consists, among other things, in taking measures aimed at ensuring legal, organizational and financial conditions enabling the permanent preservation of monuments and their development and maintenance, and preventing threats that may cause damage to the value of monuments. The care for a monument (Act 2003, Art. 5) involves, among others, ensuring the conditions for scientific research and documentation of the monument, carrying out conservation, revalorization and construction works on the monument, securing and maintaining the monument and its surroundings in the best possible condition, and disseminating knowledge about the monument and its importance for history and culture.

Public funds (Act 2003, Art. 77) can be obtained for many works carried out on the monument, which include the following:

- the preparation of technical and conservation expertise;
- the preparation of conservation documentation;
- the execution of a construction project in accordance with the provisions of the construction law;
- safeguarding and preserving the substance of the monument;

- the structural stabilization of the components of the monument or their reconstruction to the extent necessary for the preservation of the monument;
- the revitalization or completion of architectural plasters and cladding or their complete reconstruction, taking into account the characteristic colours of the monument;
- the revalorization or complete reconstruction of windows, including door frames and shutters, exterior doors, roof trusses, roofing, gutters and drain pipes;
- the modernization of electrical installations in wooden monuments or monuments that have original wooden components and accessories;
- the purchase of conservation and construction materials, necessary for the execution of works and works on the monument entered in the register.

All these conservation activities aimed at restoring utility values and exposing the cultural heritage of both architectural monuments and urban complexes in architecture are referred to as revitalization (Sołkiewicz-Kos et al. 2022).

Statutory and non-statutory regulations, including the formal recognition of a sacred object as a monument, result in State interference in the property rights of the owner or user of the historic object (Sienkiewicz 2013, pp. 301–33). The decisions of the conservator affect the costs of revalorization of the site (e.g., the need to use specific materials and specialized services) and the costs of its ongoing maintenance (e.g., the impossibility of installing photovoltaics on the site and its surroundings). However, it is a price to pay to keep cultural assets, including religious monuments, in good condition for future generations. If these goods are destroyed, there will be nothing to renew. The State's financial support for these activities therefore seems self-evident and justified (Peacock 1994, p. 151), even where such an asset is not public property.

3. Methodology

The hypothesis of the article is to state that sacral monuments in Poland being unique public goods—cultural goods, constituting cultural heritage forming the identity of a given nation, performing many functions important for the development of individuals, society, territory and economy—require State participation in financing their revalorization.

The methods used in the development are as follows: critical analysis of literature and legal acts and selected methods of descriptive statistics. The data presented in the study on sacral historical monuments come from the digital library of immovable and movable objects in the register of monuments (however, the problem is the aggregation of numerical data on monuments, including sacred objects). The sources of financial data are as follows: reports on the implementation of the state budget, available on the website of the Ministry of Finance (www.mf.gov.pl—link: financial reports), analyses of the implementation of the state budget, available on the website of the Supreme Audit Office (NIK) (www.nik.gov.pl—link: audits/analysis of the state budget) and databases of the Statistics in Poland (www.gus.gov.pl—link—Local Data Bank—public finances). Unfortunately, the degree of aggregation of these data made it impossible for the authors to indicate the pool of public funds allocated for the revalorization of particular groups of monuments. For this reason, these objects are treated together, although the authors are aware of the existence of their types.

4. Results

4.1. Sacral Historical Monuments in Poland—A Statistical Approach

The data collected in the register of historical monuments allow them to be presented divided into monuments: immovable, movable and archaeological objects. The authors present sacral historical monuments against the background of total monuments in a given category, across voivodships/regions in Poland (NUTS-2). The location of sacral monuments has a notable importance in the context of applying for public funding from the local government budgets.

The National Institute of Cultural Heritage (NIDA) has identified 500 functions that can be fulfilled by registered immovable historical objects. Based on these characteristics, the authors grouped these objects into five user groups.

Based on the data from Table 1, it can be seen that most monuments are used for residential purposes (40.28% of the total number of immovable monuments in Poland) and the least for military purposes (about 3500 objects—4.40%). A special group of immovable historical objects are sacral objects (18.97% of all immovable historical objects). These properties are unevenly distributed throughout the country. Most of them are located in the Dolnośląskie and Wielkopolskie voivodships (over 1500), and the least in the Świętokrzyskie, Opole and Pomorskie voivodships (less than 600 objects). The share of historical sacral properties in historical properties in voivodships in Poland is presented in Figure 1.

Table 1. Number, kind, location of immobile historical monuments in Poland (as of 20 July 2022) (Register of Immovable Monuments 2023).

Voivodship/Region	Residential	Military	Civilian	Sacral	Others	Total
Dolnośląskie	3976	192	1671	1672	1465	8976
Kujawsko-Pomorskie	1218	182	866	606	765	3637
Lubelskie	1258	297	654	1060	1120	4389
Lubuskie	2851	152	557	635	489	4684
Łódzkie	1168	75	469	611	641	2964
Małopolskie	2727	425	881	1046	1332	6411
Mazowieckie	3149	374	1389	1312	1855	8079
Opolskie	1615	124	483	578	567	3367
Podkarpackie	1945	385	752	1216	1004	5302
Podlaskie	785	239	396	718	313	2451
Pomorskie	1502	198	813	597	658	3768
Śląskie	2432	131	848	626	671	4708
Świętokrzyskie	537	162	275	561	431	1966
Warmińsko-Mazurskie	3034	301	1069	1084	985	6473
Wielkopolskie	2888	186	1676	1510	1684	7944
Zachodniopomorskie	954	75	768	1259	1357	4413
Total	32,039	3498	13,567	15,091	15,337	79,532

Legend: residential: tenement houses, residential buildings, huts, palaces, castles and social facilities; military: barracks, barbarians, defensive walls, shooting ranges, etc.; civil: public facilities, social facilities, factories, manufactories; sacral: churches, chapels and cemeteries regardless of religion, etc.; other: roads not classified above, alleys, retaining walls, railway lines, tram lines or other infrastructure objects.

The highest ratio of immovable sacral monuments to the rest of the monuments can be found in the Podlaskie, Zachodniopomorskie and Świętokrzyskie voivodships. Sacral historical monuments in these voivodships account for almost 1/3 of all immovable monuments. The worst on this background are the historic sacral objects in the Silesian and Lubuskie voivodeships, where only every tenth monument is a sacral object. This unevenness of the presence of sacral monuments in Poland may cause differences in the approach to the issue of the protection of monuments. Where such density of sacral historical monuments is higher, the expenditure on the protection of monuments, including sacral historical monuments, should be increased. This also applies to public funds.

Another group of monuments analyzed are movable monuments. More than 273,000 movable objects entered in the Register of Monuments were listed. There were nearly 202,000 objects connected with the cult (up to 73.84% of all movable monuments). As in the

case of the group of immovable monuments, their share in the total pool of monuments in this group varies across individual voivodships (see Figure 2).

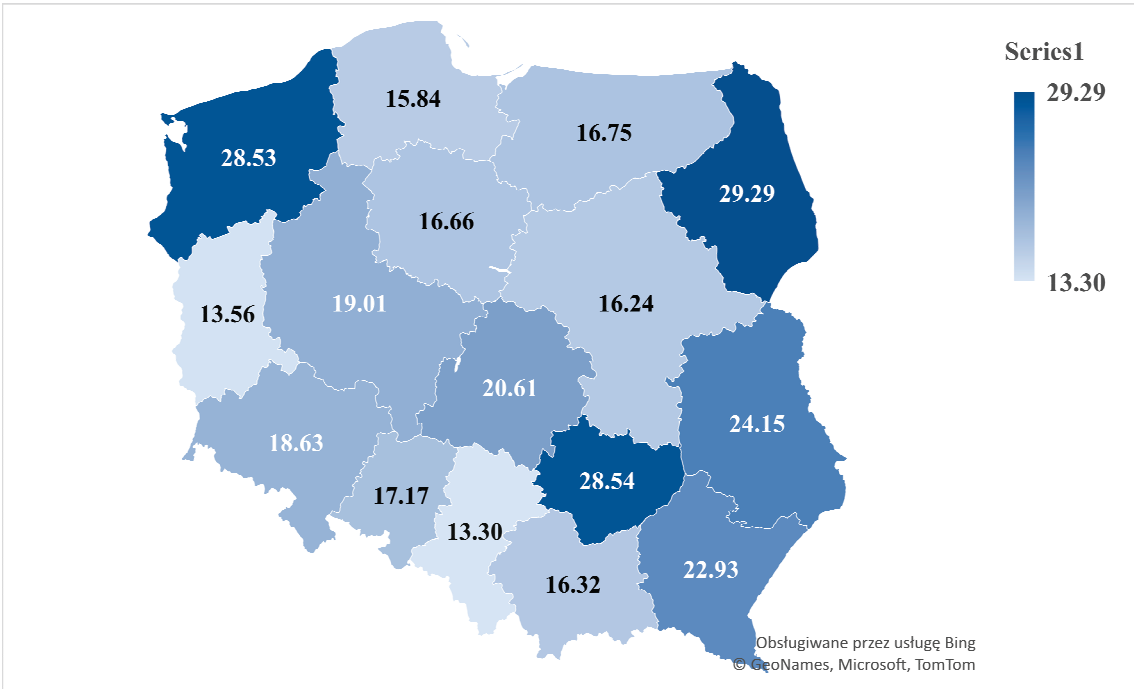


Figure 1. Share of sacral historical monuments in the historical properties in voivodships in Poland (as of 20 July 2022, in %) (Register of Immovable Monuments 2023).

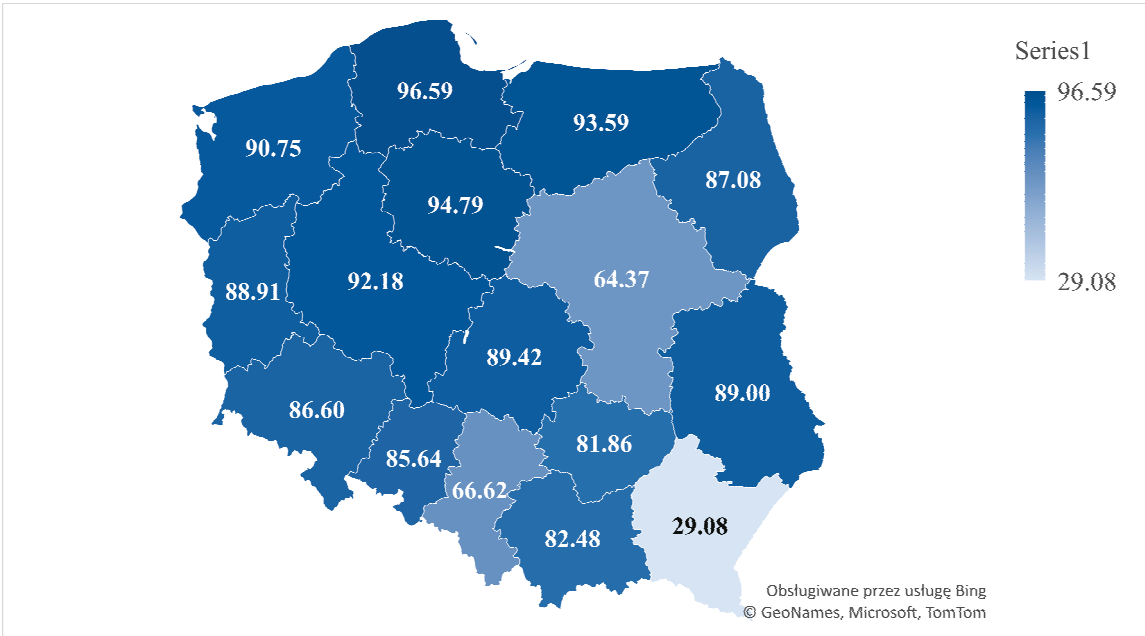


Figure 2. Share of sacred movable monuments in the number of movable monuments in individual voivodships in Poland (as of 20 July 2022, in %) (Register of Movable Monuments 2023).

The largest share of movable sacral objects is located in the Pomorskie voivodship (as much as 96.59% of movable historical objects). In second place is the Kujawsko-Pomorskie voivodship. It is noteworthy that in almost all voivodships, most of the historical movable

objects are sacral objects. The only voivodship in which the share of movable religious monuments differs significantly from the national average is the Podkarpackie voivodship.

The last category of historical objects is archaeological objects. Also among these monuments, you can find sacral objects. The listed objects in the Register of Monuments include fortified settlements, settlements, campsites, cemeteries and others. In total, such facilities as of 20 July 2022 numbered more than 7800. The largest shares of this group of monuments were settlements and campsites (49.28%) and fortified settlements (22.60% of the total archaeological monuments). Most of the archaeological monuments in Poland are located in the Dolnośląskie, Opolskie and Wielkopolskie voivodeships. Figure 3 shows the share of cemeteries in archaeological monuments. The highest density of such facilities is located in Podlaskie, Lubelskie and Pomorskie voivodships.

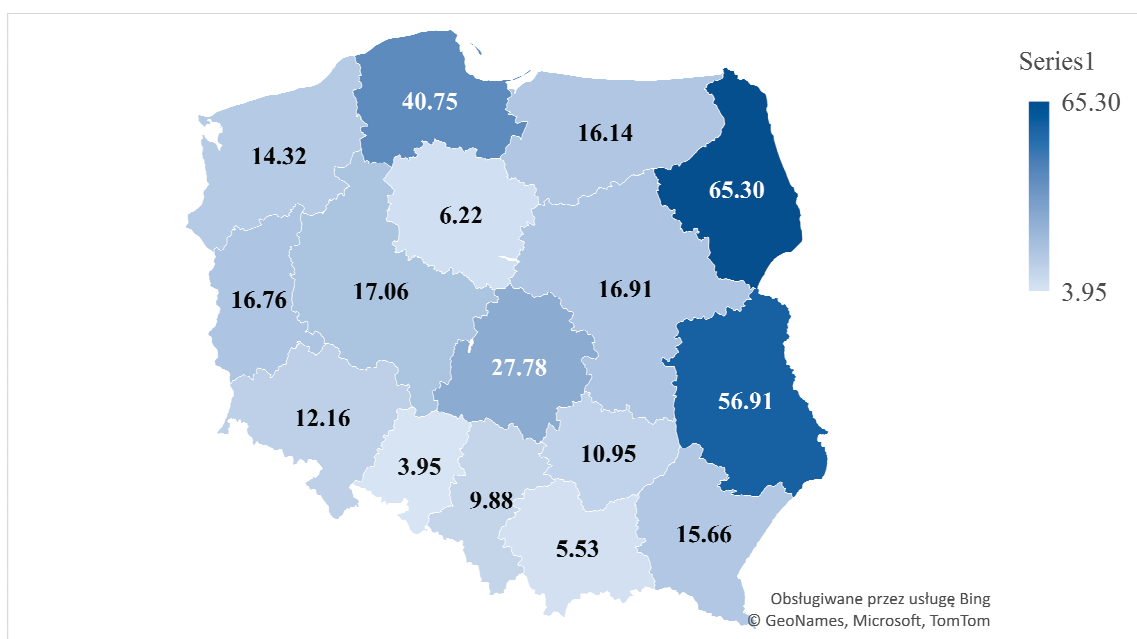


Figure 3. Share of cemeteries in archaeological monuments in individual voivodships in Poland (as of 20 July 2022, in %) (Register of Archaeological Monuments 2023).

4.2. Potential Public Sources of Financing for the Revalorization of Sacral Monuments in Poland

Caring for sacral monuments, including their revalorization, requires financial resources. The main source of these funds is the financial resources of the owner of the monument, i.e., a private entity. In the case of immovable objects subject to special protection within the national territory which:

- (1) constitute a resource of cultural goods registered in the register of monuments, which have significant (due to their historical, scientific or artistic value) significance for the heritage and cultural development of a given nation (Article 6(1) of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland creates conditions for the dissemination and equal access to cultural goods, which are the source of the identity of the Polish nation, its survival and development), and their care and protection is:
 - (a) the task of the State (Article 73 of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland—everyone is guaranteed freedom of artistic creation, scientific research and the publication of its results, freedom of teaching, as well as freedom to use cultural goods),
 - (b) the tasks of local government units at individual levels (Act 1990, Art. 7(1)(9); Act 1998a, Art. 4(1)(7); Act 1998b, Art. 14(1)(3)),
- (2) perform important functions—from the point of view of the development of the individual, society, territory and economy,

it seems necessary and desirable to co-finance their revalorization from public funds, both domestic and foreign, especially since entering a property in the Register of Monuments allows you to apply for subsidies for conservation, revalorization or construction works, which are necessary to preserve the monument in the best possible condition.

The national source of these funds may be income from:

- (1) at the central level:
 - (a) collected in the state budget,
 - (b) remaining in the special purpose funds account:
 - National Fund for the Protection of Monuments;
 - Church Fund.
- (2) at the local government level—collected in the budgets of municipalities, powiats and voivodships.

The external source may be funds collected in the budget of the European Union as well as funds to be distributed under the Financial Mechanism of the European Economic Area (EEA).

In the state budget, in accordance with the binding scale of budgetary classification, the means to finance the protection of heritage monuments, including their renovation, should be sought in a separate part (24)—Culture and protection of the national heritage, in section (921)—Culture and protection of the national heritage, and in chapter (92120)—Protection and care of historical monuments. These funds shall be administered by the following: the Minister responsible for Culture and Protection of National Heritage, responsible for preparing the draft budgetary assumptions concerning the pool of funds which, in accordance with the provisions of the Act (Act 2003), will be allocated for special-purpose subsidies to the owners of monuments for works related to their protection, including revalorization,

- (a) the voivodship conservator of monuments (with regard to funds from the state budget in the part of which the voivodship is in charge).

Analogous with the binding scale of budgetary classification, the funds earmarked for co-financing the revalorization of sacral historical monuments can be found under the expenditure side of local government budgets.

Since 2018, the source of financing for the revalorization of monuments, including sacral historical monuments in Poland, has been the funds of a new special-purpose fund, which is the National Fund for the Protection of Monuments. The fund was created to save the most endangered sites and is managed by the Minister of Culture and National Heritage. Taking into account the sources of revenue of this fund (mainly administrative penalties imposed for non-compliance with the provisions of the Act of 2003 and subsidies from the state budget), it can be concluded that the resources of this fund are a supplementary source of financing for the protection of monuments in Poland.

A dedicated source of financing for the revalorization of sacral monuments in Poland is the Church Fund. The Fund was established under the Act on the takeover by the State of dead-hand property, guaranteeing to parish priests the possession of agricultural holdings and the establishment of the Church Fund (Act 1950, Art. 8) as a form of compensation for the churches for the land taken over by the State. The Fund, in accordance with the principle of equal rights of churches and other religious associations (Article 25(1) of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland), operates for the benefit of churches and other religious associations having a regulated legal status in the Republic of Poland.

The Church Fund has no legal personality. It is part of the Department of Religious Confessions and National and Ethnic Minorities in the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration, and functions within the state budget (part 43—Religious denominations and national and ethnic minorities, section 758—Miscellaneous settlements, chapter 75822—the Church Fund), and its administrator is the Minister for Internal Affairs and Administration.

The amount of subsidies that can be obtained from the indicated public sources for the execution of conservation, revalorization or construction works on a monument entered in the register may vary. In the Act of 2003 (Art. 78), the legislator indicated that it may

be granted in the amount of between 50% and 100% of the necessary expenditure, the amount of which depends on the historical value of the monument. However, it is worth emphasizing that the amounts available to the voivodship conservator of monuments are not high and are treated as ad hoc aid (the amount of the grant does not exceed PLN 100,000). The situation is different in the case of the Church Fund. For example, the draft state budget for 2024 earmarked PLN 11 million for the tasks financed from this fund. The maximum amount of grant from the Fund is to be 200,000 PLN, but in justified cases, taking into account an important social interest, the grant may be awarded in a higher amount “<https://www.gov.pl/web/mswia/fundusz-koscielny> (accessed on 2 November 2023)”. It is worth emphasizing, however, that this fund finances only basic works aimed at protecting the building from weather conditions and cannot finance the costs of repairs and conservation of the objects accompanying the monument.

At the ministerial level, the staff in the appropriate departments provide a preliminary opinion regarding the submitted subsidies applications and pass them to the commission appointed by the department director. The commission examines the submitted applications and makes decisions about providing subsidies.

The voivodship self-government unit was obliged by law (Act 1998b) to perform tasks of a voivodship nature, which also include projects concerning culture and its protection. The Voivodeship Administration for the performance of public tasks related to the implementation of projects in the field of protection and care of monuments must announce a competition, determine the amount of funds for this purpose and the conditions that the applicant must meet in order to obtain these funds. In the field of the protection of monuments, subsidies co-finance conservation, revalorization or construction works, as well as the preparation of the documentation concerning monuments entered in the register, which are of significant historical, artistic or cultural importance and are at the same time in poor technical condition. Similar regulations can be found in the Act on district self-government (Act 1998a). At the municipal level, taking into account the scope of tasks of these self-government units (Act 1990), subsidies may be awarded for conservation, revalorization or construction works on monuments included in the register of monuments or the municipal register of monuments. The terms and conditions for granting such subsidies are determined by a resolution by the governing body of the municipality and granted by the executive body. In all self-government units, an amount is set in the budget for the indicated purpose, which is the limit of expenditure for financing such tasks.

Since 2022, the local government units in Poland have received significant financial support in financing the protection of historical monuments in the form of funds obtained from the Governmental Programme for the Reconstruction of Monuments, based on the regulations in the Act dated March 2020 (Act 2020, Art. 65 para. 28). The aim of the programme is to finance the own tasks of the local government units (LGUs) in the scope of the protection and care of historical monuments. The funds received by the LGUs may be used for works on the monuments owned by them, as well as for special subsidies to the owners of monuments not belonging to the public sector. Applications to receive such support are presented by LGUs to the Prime Minister via the offices of Bank Gospodarstwa Krajowego (BGK). The programme offers three levels of financing: up to PLN 150,000, up to PLN 500,000, and up to PLN 3.5 million. A local government unit may submit a maximum of 10 applications, and the subsidy is paid in the form of a promissory note after completion of the investment. The necessary condition to be fulfilled by the applicant is to have their own share for the implementation of the investment task. The amount of the grant may not exceed 98% of the cost of the entire investment.

As indicated, funds from the European Union budget may also be used to finance the revalorization of sacral historical monuments. Funds have been set up to finance its policy objectives. These funds include the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Areas, and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund. The financial means from these funds are granted to member states within the framework of various programmes. In the period 2014–2020,

the main programme financing tasks connected with the protection of historical monuments was the operational programme Infrastructure and Environment, which realized tasks from axis VIII—the protection of cultural heritage and development of cultural resources, with a budget for Poland amounting to PLN 467 million. The money was used to co-finance the work on the sites included in the UNESCO Heritage List, located in the areas nominated as Monument of History, or representing wood and timber architecture, with the funds from this pool divided according to the degree of the regions' development. In the less developed regions, works were financed up to 90% of the cost of the project, while in those more developed up to 85% of the total cost, and 100% of the costs were covered only in the case of entities from the public finance sector, co-conducted by the Minister of Culture and National Heritage. At the point of completing this study, Poland was awaiting EU approval of the National Reconstruction Plan, which hampers access to funds from the EU budget in the new budgetary perspective.

Other international sources of financing the objective addressed in this study, namely the revalorization of historical monuments, include the EEA Financial Mechanism, whose priorities are, among others, the protection of the cultural heritage in Europe (Podemski 2006, p. 830), together with the reconstruction and maintenance of European culture, and the creation of the product of cultural tourism in historical cities (Tkaczyński et al. 2008, p. 303). In light of the scarcity of specific statistical data, the subsequent part of the study does not address the volume of foreign funds aimed at co-financing the renovation of sacral monuments in Poland from 2017–2022.

4.3. Public Funds Earmarked for the Revalorization of Sacral Historical Monuments in Poland in the Years 2017–2022

Public funds collected in the state budget, special-purpose funds or local government budgets are, e.g., used to co-finance the revalorization of monuments, including sacral monuments. Due to the lack of available data indicating directly which part of them goes to private church owners, most of them are presented aggregated data in this area.

Between 2017 and 2022, the state budget allocated between PLN 1.4 and 2.9 billion annually for subventions and special-purpose subsidies in the field of culture and the protection of the national heritage (section 921) from PLN 1.4 to 2.9 billion (the most in 2022). The money designated for the protection and care of historical monuments in the form of subventions and special-purpose subsidies (chapter 92120) at that time amounted annually to an average of over PLN 100 million (the most in 2021—of almost PLN 170 million). Voivodships included in their budgets the funds allocated for such purposes ranging from nearly PLN 33 million to around PLN 78 million (the most in 2022). Altogether, over the analyzed period, the funds allocated for the subventions and special-purpose subsidies for the protection and care of historical monuments by the Minister of Culture and National Heritage and regional conservation offices, amounted from over PLN 147 million to over PLN 225 million (Table 2). The amounts of funds transferred by conservation offices varied between voivodships (Table 3) and were strictly connected with the number of historical monuments located in the given area (Table 1). The available data suggest that in the case of Opolskie voivodeship, over 94% of the funds allocated by the regional conservation officer were destined for entities not belonging to the public finance sector (e.g., Church authorities), in Świętokrzyskie voivodeship—over 82%, Wielkopolskie voivodeship—over 80%, and in Zachodniopomorskie voivodeship—over 69%.

Aside from the state budget, at the central level in Poland from 2017–2022, funds for the protection and care of historical monuments are allocated from the pool of the National Fund for the Protection of Monuments and the Church Fund (Table 4). In the case of the former, even though the funds allocated for this purpose were included in the financial plans almost every year, they were actually used only from 2021–2022, in incomparable amounts. The Church Fund spent annually on the protection and care monuments during the analyzed years just over PLN 10 million (with the exception of 2018—over PLN 29 million), which constituted from 5.45% to 6.70% financing from the

subsidies allocated in the given year to the Fund from the state budget (except for 2018—over 16% of the granted amount).

Table 2. The state budget expenditure in Poland allocated by the Minister of Culture and National Heritage Protection and the conservators for the protection and care of historical monuments from 2017–2022 (Financial Report of the Ministry of Finance for 2017–2021; Report NIK 2023).

Year	Executed Expenditure from the State Budget			Share of Expenditure on Subsidies and Grants in Chapter 92120		Expenditure from Voivodship Budgets on Subventions and Subsidies in Chapter 92120 (PLN Thousands)	Joint Pool of RESOURCES from the Central Level for Subventions and Subsidies in Chapter 92120 (PLN Thousands)
	Section 921—In Total (PLN Thousands)	Section 921—Subventions and Subsidies (PLN Thousands)	Chapter 92120—Subventions and Subsidies (PLN Thousands)	In joint Expenditure in Section 921 (%)	In Expenditure in Section 921 on Subventions and Subsidies (%)		
2017	3,331,937	2,615,830	115,195	3.46	4.40	32,685	147,880
2018	1,885,191	1,434,056	139,908	7.42	9.76	66,548	206,456
2019	2,542,976	1,766,198	142,160	5.59	8.05	57,352	199,512
2020	4,559,883	2,729,079	141,395	3.10	5.18	51,724	193,119
2021	4,691,419	2,854,563	169,808	3.62	5.95	55,231	225,039
2022	5,144,206	2,958,667	107,000	2.08	3.62	77,892	184,892

Table 3. Expenditure on the protection and care of historical monuments in the voivodship budgets, allocated by conservationists of monuments in 2022 (Financial Report of the Ministry of Finance 2022).

Voivodship (Region)	Expenditure from Chapter 92120 (PLN Thousands)	Share of the Conservationists of Monuments Expenditure in the Joint Pool of Expenditures by Conservation Officers Spent on the Protection and Care of Historical Monuments (%)
Dolnośląskie	8894.7	11.42
Kujawsko-Pomorskie	1497.0	1.92
Lubelskie	0.0	0.00
Lubuskie	769.6	0.99
Łódzkie	1493.9	1.92
Małopolskie	9997.2	12.83
Mazowieckie	18,938.8	24.31
Opolskie	9262.3	11.89
Podkarpackie	9837.4	12.69
Podlaskie	7366.0	9.46
Pomorskie	0.0	0.00
Śląskie	0.0	0.00
Świętokrzyskie	2109.8	2.71
Warmińsko-Mazurskie	4440.0	5.70
Wielkopolskie	2259.2	2.90
Zachodniopomorskie	1026.5	1.32
Total	77,892.4	100.00

Table 4. Financing from purposeful funds allocated for the protection and care of historical monuments from 2017–2022 (Financial Report of the Ministry of Finance 2017–2022).

Year	National Fund for the Protection of Heritage Monuments			Church Fund	
	Investment Subsidies (PLN Thousands)		Subsidies from the State Budget (PLN Thousands)	Expenditure on the Conservation and Revalorization of Sacral Historical Monuments (PLN Thousands)	Share in the Expenditure on the Conservation and Revalorization of Sacral Historical Monuments in Subsidies Allocated from the State Budget (w %)
	Plan	Execution			
2017	0	0	158,750.00	10,636.40	6.70
2018	2321	0	179,747.00	29,713.00	16.53
2019	389	0	170,560.00	10,161.17	5.96
2020	0	0	181,818.00	10,463.53	5.75
2021	290	273	193,664.00	10,710.50	5.53
2022	88,700	83,064	192,800.00	10,509.00	5.45

From 2017–2022, the expenditure on the protection and care of historical monuments was also incurred by the budgets of municipalities, including towns with powiat rights (no data were available in the public statistics regarding the budgets of counties and voivodships); however, these amounts were not substantial (see Table 5). In the budgets of municipalities alone (excluding towns with powiat rights) these funds constituted from 2.9% to 3.5% of the total funds allocated for culture and the protection and care of the national heritage. For instance, just in 2022, all the communes in Poland spent jointly over PLN 505 million on the protection and care of historical monuments, out of which the most (nearly PLN 89 million, i.e., 17.57% of the total) was in the municipalities in the Dolnośląskie voivodship (Table 6), which is not surprising in the face of the data shown in Table 1.

Table 5. Funds in the budgets of municipalities and towns with powiat rights allocated for the protection and care of historical monuments 2017–2022 (Local Data Bank 2023).

Year	Communes without Towns with Powiat Rights		Towns with Powiat Rights *	
	Expenditure in Chapter 92120 (PLN Thousands)	Share of Expenditure in Section 921 in the Total Expenditure (%)	Expenditure in Chapter 92120 (PLN Thousands)	Share of Expenditure in Section 921 in the Total Expenditure (%)
2017	158,922.24	3.0	153,551.24	3.2
2018	308,699.72	3.5	213,119.99	3.4
2019	279,008.96	3.3	212,956.80	3.2
2020	239,974.74	2.9	168,466.19	3.0
2021	244,768.70	2.9	184,172.04	2.9
2022	256,847.97	3.0	248,876.29	2.9

* a town with powiat rights—as of 1 Jan 1999 the status given to: (a) cities with a population over 100,000 residents on 31 Dec 1998; (b) previous capitals of voivodships (excluding those which declined, based on the decision of the then local legislature), (c) some other urban communes not meeting the above conditions, which were not incorporated into counties, considering it either impossible or non-purposive, due to their localization between other towns with powiat rights within an agglomeration, or their specific geophysical location and the large area of the city.

Table 6. Expenditure for the protection and care of historical monuments in the budgets of municipalities, including towns with powiat rights, in Poland in 2022 (per voivodship) (Local Data Bank 2023).

Voivodship (Region)	Expenditure in Chapter 92120— The Protection and Care of Historical Monuments (PLN Thousands)	Expenditure on the Protection and Care of Historical Monuments in the Budgets of Municipalities and Towns with Powiat Rights in Poland in 2022 (in %)
Dolnośląskie	88,857.92	17.57
Kujawsko-Pomorskie	21,562.56	4.26
Lubelskie	39,389.60	7.79
Lubuskie	13,468.54	2.66
Łódzkie	17,614.03	3.48
Małopolskie	56,568.18	11.19
Mazowieckie	58,068.42	11.48
Opolskie	10,553.42	2.09
Podkarpackie	24,652.87	4.87
Podlaskie	10,825.63	2.14
Pomorskie	24,990.23	4.94
Śląskie	53,508.19	10.58
Świętokrzyskie	6810.36	1.35
Warmińsko-Mazurskie	16,706.79	3.30
Wielkopolskie	30,127.08	5.96
Zachodniopomorskie	32,020.44	6.33
Total	505,724.27	100.00

5. Conclusions

One of the functions of the State is to preserve the national heritage (Oniszczyk 2011), which is the material heritage of the nation (Zeidler 2017). Part of this acquis is monuments, which in Poland are largely sacral monuments belonging to non-public entities. The high proportion of sacral monuments in the total monuments (about 19% of historical property and 74% of movable monuments) is the result, among others, of the destruction of other monuments during the Second World War.

As shown in the study, in addition to their primary function as places of religious worship (including prayer), historic sacred buildings also perform many other socially important functions. According to the authors, this justifies the need for public funds for their renewal. The obligations of the State in the field of care of sacral monuments are evident, among others, in the form of their registration, conservation supervision over them, as well as providing financial support (in the form of special-purpose subsidies from the state budget, special-purpose funds, budgets of local government units) to co-finance conservation, revalorization or the construction works carried out on them. The latter task, in a situation of limited resources, the condition of historical objects and related challenges, is currently one of the most difficult (Zalasińska 2010, p. 15).

The inference adopted in the study allowed the authors to realize the assumed goal and verify the adopted hypothesis. However, the problem for the authors of the study, from the point of view of the reliability of the analysis, was the nature of the available statistical data. Their aggregation made it impossible to unequivocally allocate expenses to particular types of monuments (fixed, movable, archaeological) and to link them to the owner of the monument. This should be seen as a marker for further in-depth research.

The figures presented in the study indicate that in the years 2017–2022, public funds financing the renovation of historic buildings in Poland increased nominally, although they changed. According to the authors, it would be more rational to determine the share that these funds should constitute in the expenditures of the state budget, local government budgets and dedicated funds, which would constitute a guarantee of public funds of such expenditures. These figures in local government budgets should also take into account the saturation of the areas of individual local government units with analyzed objects.

The participation of public authorities in financing the revalorization of sacral historical monuments and, more broadly, public goods, including cultural goods, is a very interesting area of research. Although the study deals with the specifics of the situation in Poland, it contains a universal context. It provides an opportunity to compare existing solutions in this area in different countries, and can also be a starting point for searching for and indicating the most optimal solutions. The authors also see the need to clarify the conceptual sphere concerning the protection of monuments, including sacral monuments. The postulated direction of further research seems to be also those concerning the following: (1) the evolution of the function of sacral objects, which occurs with varying intensity but systematically in the countries of Western Europe, and (2) obtaining public funding for the renovation of sacral objects used for new purposes.

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Article

Historical Sacral Objects as Places of Prayer—But Not Only: Towards Multifunctionality

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Abstract: Under conditions of rises in the maintenance costs of religious objects, declining numbers of visitors to most of them, and greater public awareness of their potential, the following is becoming important: (1) the pressure to increase the ways in which their space is used and (2) to take advantage of the “added value” that these objects bring to the localities in which they are located. The owners of religious objects are increasing the functionality of these objects; therefore, they can expect more financial support for their maintenance, including from public resources. Local entrepreneurs undertake and develop types of economic activities that are directly or indirectly related to the existence of the designated objects in the area, and the local government, thanks to the tax revenue raised from them, improves the standard of living of the people in the area. The purpose of this article is to collect, organize, and systematize the knowledge of the functions of Christian historic religious objects and the possibility of their influence on the external environment. This study fills a research gap in this area, for the information on this topic in the literature is scattered and unstructured. The method used in this study is a critical analysis of legal acts and literature. From the analysis, it is clear that Christian religious buildings today perform multiple functions. In addition, the strength of their impact on the external environment creates the economic development of an area and results in an increase in the income level of its inhabitants.

Keywords: historical sacral objects; functions; multifunctionality; entrepreneurship; local development

1. Introduction

Each building object has individual physical characteristics (area, volume, room proportions, etc.). During its design, all these features are adapted to the function that the facility is to perform in the future (Adamska 2014, p. 11).

The functions of an edifice define its designation and the means for its utilization, and these describe its usefulness in more detail, constituting an individual and constantly evolving element, even though its current designation has been established for many years or centuries (Barełkowski 2014, pp. 57–58, 61). This is a non-material factor linked to the material structure of buildings subjected to the strong pressure of change—civilizational, technological, economic, cultural, and even fashion-oriented change. This applies equally to buildings and sites serving religious purposes.

A sacral object is a place for continual and regular meetings among believers or followers of a given religion (denomination) for the purposes of participating in a religious service and/or other organized forms of religious worship (Judgment of the Supreme Administrative Court 1991). It is a building designated for practicing religious observances and participating in religious services (Polish Classification of Building Objects 1999, class 1272). Therefore, religious sites comprise churches, chapels, Orthodox churches, mosques, synagogues, lapidaries, etc., as well as cemeteries and places related to burials. At the same time, a historical sacral site is a place that documents a past era and/or event, whose preservation is in the public interest due to its historical, artistic, or scientific importance (Act 2003, art. 3 pkt 1).

While it is sometimes difficult to talk about the stability of functions in relation to various buildings due to changes in the way they are used, we observe such stability in relation to temples that are still used by the religious communities that built them (Stepień 2014, p. 273).

This study was devoted to collecting, organizing, and systematizing the knowledge of the functions of historic religious objects and the possibility of their influence on the external environment (many publications mention this, but each author describes these issues through the prism of the problem he analyzes). This study hypothesizes that, currently, the primary function of such objects—the function of Christian religious worship, including prayer—is supplemented by many other, no less important functions, thanks to which it is possible to increase the attractiveness of these objects for visitors and increase the pool of potential sources of funding for the existence of these objects. At the same time, historic religious objects are a factor in local development, they determine the types of economic activities carried out in the area in which they are located, and they affect the finances of business entities and households. The method used in this study is a critical analysis of legal acts and literature. Due to the author's primary familiarity with Polish settings, the examples presented in this study regarding ways to use the space of historic religious objects mostly concern those located in Poland.

2. The Fundamental Function of Sacral Objects

The fundamental function of sacral objects, including those of a historical character, can be distinguished according to the criterion of the reason for their construction, and this is the function of religious worship (Figure 1).

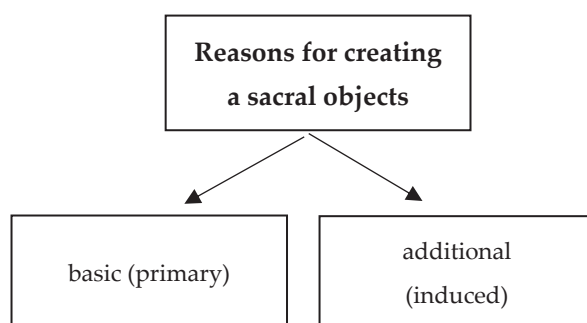


Figure 1. Functions of sacral objects according to the reasons for their creation (own elaboration).

The function of religious worship in historical sacral objects (Nowiński 2011, p. 269) determines its form and constitutes the point of departure for creating the site's (historical monument) narrative, which is understood as the continuity of events from the time of its creation up to the point of contact with a given recipient (Doroz-Turek 2014, p. 92). It is associated with individual and collective religious practices. The kinds of religious practices and the related way of using the historical sacral objects analyzed allow for the distinguishing of a few detailed aspects within this function (Figure 2).

For the members of a given denomination, a sacral object constitutes, above all, the place of conducting religious observances, including Holy Mass and various other religious services of a unifying, thanksgiving, or supplicating character. Frequently, during such religious observances, sacraments particular to a given denomination are performed (in the Catholic Church, e.g., baptism, the first communion, confirmation, marriage, or priesthood). Some of these objects, owing to their special significance to members of a particular denomination (related to phenomena such as revelations and miracles officially recognized by the Church), carry out the role of a pilgrimage destination, and this function can have both a national and international character. In Poland, the historical sacral sites for Catholic pilgrimages are mainly related to the worship of the Virgin Mary, among which there are the following: the Sanctuary of Jasna Góra in Częstochowa (4 to 5 million pilgrims received annually), the Sanctuary of Kalwaria Zebrzydowska (around 2 million),

the Basilica of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Święta Lipka near Kętrzyn (around 2 million), and the Sanctuary of Our Lady in Gietrzwałd. Other popular destinations for pilgrimages include Pałacowska Calvary near Przemyśl, the Sanctuary of the Holy Cross Wood Relic near Sandomierz, and St Anna Sanctuary near Opole. For the Orthodox Church, such sites and locations in Poland are the Orthodox Monastery Complex in Grabarka near Siemiatycze, the Supraśl Orthodox Monastery, and the Monastery of St Onufry in Jabłeczna.

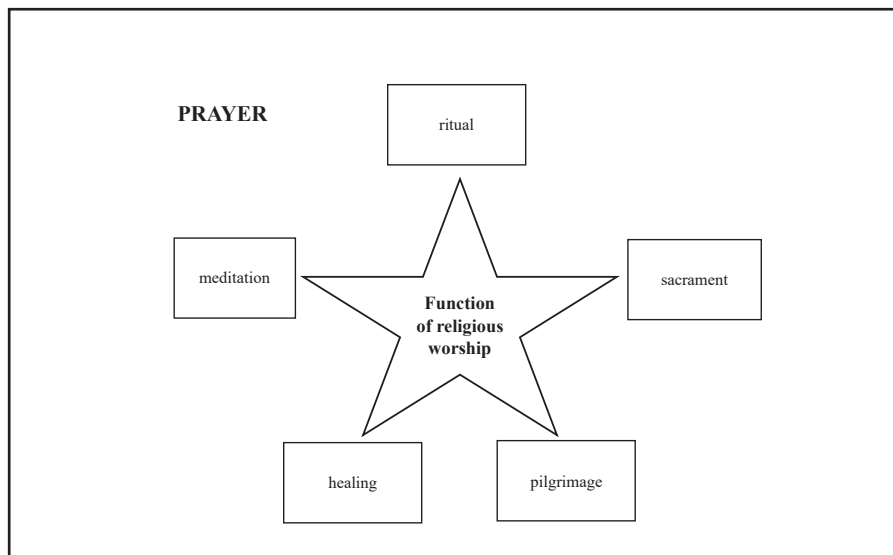


Figure 2. Detailed functions of sacral objects distinguished by their fundamental function (own elaboration).

Every year, over 220 million believers worldwide take part in pilgrimages, among whom the most numerous group are Christians (around 150 million), with approximately 7 million Poles (according to the estimates by the Department of Geography of Religion at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków). The most popular pilgrimage destinations in the world are the historical sanctuaries dedicated to the Virgin Mary, out of which the most frequented site is the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City—with around 20 million pilgrims annually—whilst in Europe, the most popular sites are the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Fatima (Portugal) and the Sanctuary of Our Lady in Lourdes (France), which are visited annually by over 5 million believers. Other historical sacral sites popular among pilgrims from all over the world include the Basilica of Our Lady of Aparecida (Brazil), the Basilica of the Annunciation in Nazareth (Israel), Santa Casa Sanctuary in Loreto (Italy), the Saint James Church in Medjugorje (Bosnia and Herzegovina), the Basilica of Saint Francis in Assisi (Italy), the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington DC (the USA), the Cathedral of St James in Santiago de Compostela (Spain), and, obviously, Saint Peter’s Basilica in Vatican (Italy), with, on average, 12 million pilgrims every year. It is worth noting that the flow of pilgrims was greatly reduced and then completely ceased during the COVID-19 pandemic, but it is now returning to pre-2020 levels.

People participate in pilgrimages for a variety of reasons; for some of them, these are the healing properties of such sites, which can be of a spiritual or physical nature, as well as an individual or communal dimension (Böhme 2006). Undoubtedly, in Poland, the therapeutic healing function is primarily performed, such as in the following: the Sanctuary of the Divine Mercy in Łagiewniki near Krakow (the world center of the cult of Divine Mercy preached by St. Faustina Kowalska) due to the Image of the Merciful Jesus in it, the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Sorrows, due to the miraculous spring and image of Our Lady of Licheń in Licheń Stary in Wielkopolska, and the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Czestochowa in Jasna Gora due to the miraculous image of Our Lady of Jasna Gora. Sacral sites are

considered sacred places (Jackowski and Soljan 2001) due to the fact that they contain relics of the saints and of the blessed. Relics in Poland are to be found in many religious objects, including those of a historic nature. At the same time, these are not only relics of Polish saints (the number of Polish saints and the blessed is more than three hundred, of which as many as 170 have been elevated to the altars in the 20th and 21st centuries) but also others. These special locations favor meditation and concentration; thus, the realization of another function of these historical sacral sites is analyzed, given that meditation does not have to be of a purely religious nature.

All the detailed functions listed within the function of religious worship are united by one function that is present in all of them—namely, the function of prayer. Prayer accompanies all religious rituals, sacraments, pilgrimages, healing, and meditation, and the fundamental space for its expression is a sacral object, including that of a historical character.

Prayer is one of the most significant aspects of spiritual/religious life (Zarzycka et al. 2022) and the most widespread means of religious observance (Bartczuk and Zarzycka 2020). As part of common religious life, it is included into liturgies with appropriate formulas and times (Pinkas 2023), and it constitutes a rich and very diverse field of internal human experiences. Prayer accompanies thoughts and sheds light on relationships with other people and the outside world (cf. Walesa and Tatala 2020; Wojciechowska 2017), and it also brings about positive reinforcement, thus causing an increase in the subjective meaning assigned to it (Tatala and Wojtasiński 2021).

Prayer is a spiritual method of dealing with stress that can be effective both in extraordinary, life-threatening circumstances, such as in the case of cancer patients (Roh et al. 2018) and people with post-traumatic stress disorder (Exline et al. 2005; Tait et al. 2016) and in typical everyday situations for people who confront stressful situations¹ (Pargament 1997). In order to be beneficial, it requires a relationship with God based on trust and faith (Wnuk 2023).

The meaning of prayer is the believer's hope that what he is unable to achieve by the strength of his moral consciousness will be achieved with God's help. Research shows that this becomes highly popular during times of illness (Wachholtz and Sambamoorthi 2011), as was seen in particular during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the study by Boguszewski et al. (2020), 21.3% of the Poles questioned declared that they spent far more time on prayers and other religious practices than ever before.

The psychological literature distinguishes various types of prayer and several methods of measuring it. One of the most common typologies of prayer is the one based on its manifestations. Another is conducted due to the content of the prayer. This criterion allows us to distinguish prayers of praise, thanksgiving, propitiation, or request (Kulpaczyński and Tatala 2000). Prayer can be collective and individual (Wiśniewski 2018). Individual prayer is a spontaneous prayer that characterizes the course of revelation, because it is man's response to God's love. Public prayer is a continuation of individual prayer, but conducted in a community (Rosenzweig 2005, p. 312). While individual prayer can take place basically anywhere, places for collective prayer are primarily sacred buildings. It is there that fuller integration occurs and spiritual bonds with God and mutual bonds between people are established (Kulpaczyński and Tatala 2000; Ladd and McIntosh 2008).

Prayers can be assessed using single-point measures (e.g., Braam et al. 2007; Bradshaw et al. 2008) and multiple-point measures (e.g., Prayer Functions Scale—Bade and Cook 2008; Types of Prayer Scale—Poloma and Pendleton 1989, 1991). These measures show that prayer and their meaning as an expression of religious observance are conditioned by the religiosity, gender, and age of the praying person (Walesa and Tatala 2020). Moreover, one can also observe the existence of multigenerational changes; from one generation to another, the level of religious faith and regularity of religious practice is decreasing, with the latter mainly reduced when people enter into adulthood. The observed trends indicate that it is necessary to undertake steps aimed at “retaining” young people in the Church. A first step in this direction could be to encourage young people to visit religious sites by pointing out the many functions they serve. In the case of historical sacral monuments, this

could be easier due to their exceptional properties, allowing for a relatively much wider range of possibilities for using their space.

This study is devoted to identifying additional functions of historic religious objects and the manner of their impact on the external environment. This study posed the hypothesis that, at present, the fundamental function of such objects—the function of religious worship, including prayer—is complemented by many other no less important functions. Their number is growing, resulting from the wish to increase the accessibility and attractiveness of historical sacral monuments to visitors. In this study, the author presents additional functions of historic religious objects, as well as the directions of impact of these objects on the environment, and indicates a change in the contemporary perception of the functions of historical Christian sacral objects. The methods used in this study are critical analyses of legal acts and literature.

3. Additional Functions of Historic Religious Objects

Fairly often, religious motives are neither the only nor the most fundamental aspects determining the purpose for visiting particular sacral historical monuments. Often, these objects are visited for other reasons, which include the additional functions of these objects (Figure 3).

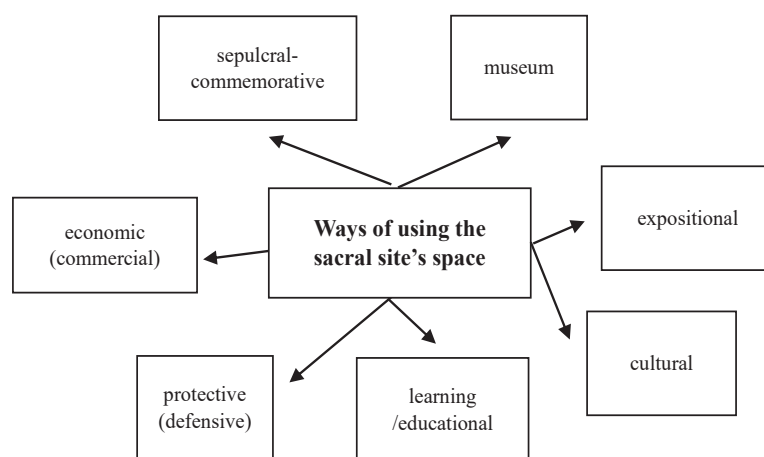


Figure 3. Additional functions of historical sacral objects distinguished according to the usage of their space (own elaboration).

The majority of cultures, including European cultures, have a rooted respect for the dead (Rytel 2014, p. 265), which is demonstrated in sacral historical monuments with a special room (a crypt) dedicated to them. In Poland, there are crypts under many historic churches. Some of them are open to the public. Example of the latter include, for example, the Crypt of the Deserved at Skalka, located in the basement of the Basilica of St. Michael the Archangel and St. Stanislaus the Bishop in Krakow; the crypt under the Chapel of Our Lady on Jasna Góra in Czestochowa; and the crypt in the Wawel Cathedral, with Polish kings buried there (e.g., Jan III Sobieski, Stefan Batory), as well as poets (e.g., Juliusz Slowacki, Adam Mickiewicz) and notable leaders (e.g., Prince Józef Poniatowski, Tadeusz Kościuszko). Both the members of a given denomination and tourists are interested in visiting places of burial containing tombs of lay and religious personages, which are often accompanied by special plaques commemorating individuals and events important to national history. In Poland, the presence of patriotic symbols in historical sacral sites is very frequent, and these are based on historical settings and also connected to very strong links between religious worship and Polish national identity, particularly in the period following the Partitions (from 1795 to 1918), when Poland vanished from the map of Europe.

In these historical sacral sites, one can also view special expositions of art collections (Kaczmarek et al. 2002) (e.g., paintings in Sandomierz Cathedral and Świdnica Cathedral),

liturgical vessels, robes, and volumes (Doroz-Turek 2014, pp. 103–8) (e.g., the Treasury in the Archcathedral in Lublin). Moreover, their main space is often used to stage lectures and concerts (classical music, choral music, organ concerts—e.g., The International Festival of Organ and Chamber Music at the Cathedral in Kamień Pomorski, on the occasion of Christmas—at St. Mary’s Church in Krakow, etc.); thus, in view of the above, it can be stated that contact with such a multifunctional space has an educational dimension (Kulik et al. 2022). It should also be added that their construction and architectural structure meant that, especially in the past, they were used for defense purposes (e.g., the Jasna Gora Monastery complex in Czestochowa during the Swedish Deluge in late 1655), during periods of military hostility (Akin 2016), and for protection from natural cataclysms. Nowadays, they often provide shelter from high and low temperatures outdoors.

Historic religious buildings also enable the implementation of an economic function. Some of them are used for commercial purposes, including trade. There are points (shops) on the premises where you can buy religious press, devotional items, and souvenirs closely related to the monument (such points are in cathedrals, basilicas, or sanctuaries in Poland). This function, like other additional functions of the analyzed objects, correspond to that of satisfying lower-level needs (according to Maslov’s pyramid of needs), as opposed to the basic function of the object, which satisfies higher-level needs (Ściepień 2014, p. 274).

Nowadays, historical sacral objects perform many different functions at the same time, which emerge and evolve in strict conjunction with their fundamental functions. Hence, it should be noted that they complement this fundamental function, creating an attractive, comprehensive, and spiritual, yet commercial, “product” both for the members of a given denomination as well as for tourists. These additional functions are, on the one hand, a response to the reported needs of visitors (to be able to purchase souvenirs, light a candle with certain intentions, go sightseeing in the edifice, and examine the attractive artefacts collected there) and also of the owners and administrators of these objects (enabling the collection of fees, as well as the accessing of public funds for the renovation of the space of these facilities, as well as the artifacts collected in them—possible due to the fact that they are cultural assets that have built Polish national identity). This also applies to the originally single-function historical sacral sites belonging to the Catholic Church. Such sites, similar to the places of worship of other denominations (e.g., La Mezquita mosque in Cordoba in Spain or Hagia Sophia in Istanbul in Turkey), whose spaces were used from the very beginning for a variety of purposes (Robson 2009, p. 44), are today becoming multi-functional sites (e.g., the Sanctuary in Sary Licheń in Poland—see Klekot 2008). Importantly, these functions are developing as a result of the changes taking place in society—cultural, demographic, and economic.

In Poland, as in many other countries, the state had a significant influence on the emergence of some of the new functions of historical sacral objects. During the Second World War, in Poland—and especially in its capital, Warsaw—many historical monuments were destroyed; among those that survived, there were numerous sacral sites. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that they have become part of the national cultural heritage as enclaves of the domain of art and architecture, which, apart from their function of religious worship, have also been opened to the performing of many other additional functions. Today, these sites have been adapted to the needs of their environment. Changing their functions is a way to increase their attractiveness, as well as their wider and often more interesting usage as parts of the common national heritage (Włodarczyk 2014, p. 318). Actions aimed at obstructing this process would be unnatural and contradictory to the concept of the conservation of historical monuments, as well as contrary to their key role as active objects in a cultural space (Barełkowski 2014, p. 60).

In summary, it should be noted that the indicated ways of using the space of historic religious buildings in Poland are still additional functions, although they have been permanently incorporated into their space. It is unlikely for sacred spaces in Poland to not have religious functions at all, only providing museum-like functions, as is the case, for example,

in the complex of Buddhist temples of Angkor in Cambodia and in the churches carved in volcanic tuff in Cappadocia in Turkey (Durydiwka 2015, p. 437).

4. The Spheres and Type of Impact of Historic Sacral Objects

Historic sacral objects influence the external environment. Taking the character of this impact into consideration, as well as the related interactions between these sites and persons who visit them and/or live in their neighborhood, the following spheres of impact and its kinds can be indicated (Figure 4).

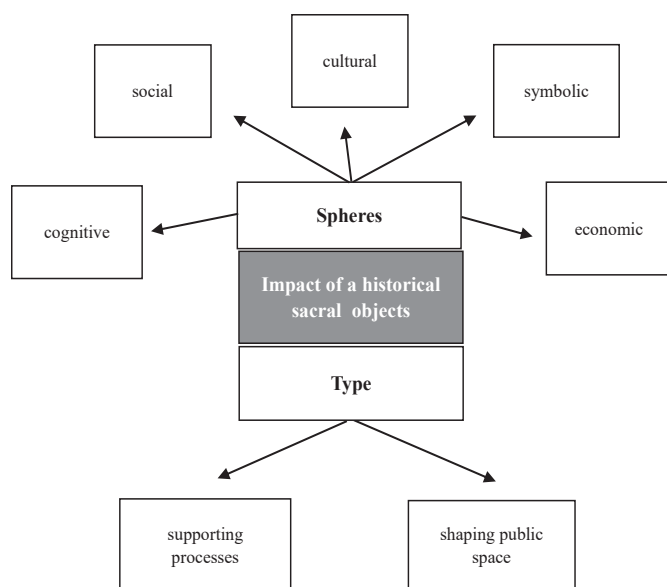


Figure 4. Spheres and type of impact of historical sacral objects (own elaboration).

Historical sacral objects have a strong impact on the cognitive sphere, and they therefore enable the following: exploring the rudiments of religious beliefs (Kulik et al. 2022), obtaining information about them, as well as the times and circumstances in which they emerged, and allowing for the shaping and building of knowledge resources by those who visit these objects (Roth 2008, p. 476).

By impacting on the social sphere, historical sacral objects build the identity of a given religious denomination (de Wildt et al. 2019), integrate its believers (Halemba 2023), and facilitate the internal development of these persons (Paris 2019; Kulik et al. 2022). Taking into consideration the fact that these sites can also house events of a non-religious nature, they provide a place for socializing (Placci 2022) and entertainment (concerts and even fashion shows—see Durydiwka 2015, p. 431), which can take on a cyclical character.

The impact of historical sacral sites on the sphere of culture is linked with building a cultural memory (de Wildt et al. 2019) and cultivating folk traditions, thanks to them. The latter type of impact is so strongly rooted in the tradition of certain localities that the analyzed objects are imbued with a ludic function (Durydiwka 2015, p. 438). This function is exemplified in Poland by open-air fairs and dances taking place during the ceremonies of traditional religious celebrations (giving thanks for a good harvest, feasts for the site's Patron Saint/s, etc.), which are organized in selected sites in a highly ceremonial way (such as a procession of the congregation dressed in traditional folk costumes). In Spain (Sanctuary of Our Lady in El Rocío in Andalusia), an example of this can be the Pentecostal indulgence feast called *Romeria del Rocío*, where the atmosphere of silence and concentration is interspersed with elements typical of an Andalusian fiesta.

The symbolic influence of historical sacral sites is shown via their contribution to creating a common heritage for the followers of a given religion (Schroer 2015), as well as in recording their role of a “witness of its time”, serving as a link among the past, the present, and the future. Historical sacral sites placed in a certain space (Aulet and Vidal 2018)

witness important political events (e.g., in Poland, in the Church of St. Stanislaus Kostka in Warsaw's Żoliborz district, where, before martial law was imposed in Poland in 1981, "Masses for the Homeland" were celebrated by the chaplain of the Solidarity Trade Union—Blessed Father Jerzy Popiełuszko; St. Brigid's Church in Gdansk—the center of pastoral care for striking workers, after 13 December 1981—thanks to then-pastor Father Henryk Jankowski—an important point of resistance against the communist regime) (Durydiwka 2015, p. 431) and armed conflicts whose traces are still visible on their facades (many such monuments still have cannon balls embedded in them and bullets holes left on their surfaces). Such sites do not solely "belong" to one generation or era but, being part of their local history at a given time, belong to their contemporary inhabitants; hence, they are a reflection of past eras and are of a timeless nature.

Historical sacral objects affect the economic sphere; they are a tourist product (Behrens 2014) that "sells well" but also stimulates the development of enterprises in their environment, creating an impact on the revenue of local businesses.

Tourists/pilgrims significantly influence the types and structures of economic entities operating in a given area, determining the types of economic activity of the local population. Entrepreneurs produce goods and provide services directly addressed to people visiting the facilities analyzed. This includes the production of souvenir products, the supply of accommodation, the provision of catering, transport, and other services for which there is a reported demand.

Historic religious buildings are an important factor in economic recovery (Durydiwka 2015, pp. 431–35). Thanks to them, the income of entrepreneurs, individual residents, and their families increases, as well as that of local government units through the system of taxes and fees paid by them and whose authorities are therefore willing to implement investment projects—the effects of which benefit both residents and visitors. Improvement in the economic situation thanks to them is visible not only in the areas surrounding them (Vukonić 1998) but also in areas located along the roads leading to them (Beinhauer-Köhler and Leggewie 2009). A separate but very important issue is the improvement of the condition of historic religious buildings thanks to donations directly made by visitors for these objects, as well as paid to the account of the parish to which the object belongs. A lack of pilgrims/tourists has a negative impact on entire communities operating in these areas, individual families, people, and the historic religious buildings themselves. A pertinent example is the abandonment of historical sacral sites located in Bethlehem during the armed conflict between Israel and the Palestinian organization Hamas.

Historical sacral objects induce a variety of processes in their visitors; hence, considering aesthetic values and their embodiment in the sites described, it can be said that they constitute an important educational tool, aiding didactic and pedagogical processes in terms of education concerning both religious values and socio-ethical values (Kulik et al. 2022). The Church has long combined educational and religious activities (e.g., Zürcher 1989) (in Poland, kindergartens, primary schools, and high schools run by, among others, the Ursuline Sisters operate in these objects or next to them). This approach is very close to the idea of psychodidactics, which uses the knowledge of psychology and its methods to support didactic and scientific (Molski 2014, p. 193) as well as educational processes (Steć et al. 2021). For religious minorities, historical sacral monuments are often associated with their emancipation efforts (de Wildt et al. 2019) and provide a place to hold public debate (Halemba 2022).

Historical sacral sites contribute to the surrounding space due to their architectural and aesthetic attributes (some of them are monuments inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List, e.g., the Mannerist architectural and landscape complex and pilgrimage park in Kalwaria Zebrzydowska, the Churches of Peace in Jawor and Świdnica, and the wooden churches of southern Małopolska—Binarowa, Blizne, Dębno, Haczów, Lipnica Murowana, and Sękowa), and they affect their visitors as well as persons who live in the neighborhood. An architectural space strongly impacts individual development (Keel 1969; Mesquida et al. 2016) and is connected with one's sense of beauty in a natural

way. These monuments usually represent objective beauty associated with objects and artefacts (Ossowski 1958). Such beauty is a testimony of deity; hence, in sacral architecture, it escapes particular interpretations and refers to a higher, more objective order, at the same time corresponding with the value of truth (Battaino 2020). Feelings aroused by the architectural form of a historical sacral monument can trigger the process of the spiritual development of an individual and becomes an important aspect of their psychological wellbeing (Kosiński 2011).

The sites examined in this study build the identity of the place in which they are located and often provide a point of orientation in a local space (cathedrals and churches tower over buildings in towns and villages) (Halemba 2023). Whether located in urban centers (both large-city agglomerations and in small towns) or in rural areas, they often become a central point due to the usually large size of the edifice, becoming the key element of that space (Cerasi 1999). These sites are of a particular character (Böhme 2014) and actively participate in the shaping of the public space and the movement within it because they determine the layout of roads and the location of other places relevant to the local community. Interestingly, these sites shape the local landscape even when there is no significant representation of the religious community that would regularly use these sites and even when the given religious denomination has been long absent in that locality (such as in the case of historical synagogues). Their continued existence means that although they no longer serve purposes of religious worship, they are still “remembered” in the public space (Halemba 2023).

In summary, it can be said that historic religious buildings not only allow visitors to benefit from the value of a place and what is collected there but also open themselves to other possibilities created by their spaces. They influence a number of processes that occur in visitors and have a strong impact on the spaces surrounding them. Historic religious buildings “inform” about events, allow for the gathering of knowledge, and enrich visitors. They help cultivate and develop local traditions, as well as integrate the local community. Moreover, they “create an atmosphere” for these communities to undertake joint activities, which in turn makes these objects “live” (there is something occurring there all the time, even outside the hours of typical religious practice). These activities are especially valuable in the era of self-alienation (“closing people in on themselves”). In smaller towns, this function of historic religious buildings—in addition to the function of religious worship—may even become a modern “mission” of these objects.

5. Conclusions

Based on the analyses carried out, it should be concluded that the objective of this study has been achieved, and the hypothesis set in it has been verified. This study collected, organized, and systematized the functions of Christian historic religious objects that occur today, pointing to their primary function, i.e., religious worship, which is internally bound by the ubiquitous function of prayer, as well as additional functions, which are realized through the different uses of these objects, which was supported by specific examples. In addition, the “added value” that historic religious objects generate for the external environment was pointed out. The influence of historic religious objects on the external environment, i.e., on the local development of the areas where these buildings are located by stimulating entrepreneurship directly or indirectly related to them, cannot be overestimated. This refers to creating jobs, encouraging economic activity, and consequently—through the actions of local government authorities—raising additional budget revenues, thus improving the standard of living of residents in a given area.

According to the author, the functions of historic sacral objects require further in-depth empirical research, which would provide, among other things, important information about the perception of the functions performed by these objects and on the changes to these functions by people of different ages, as well as different ways of performing religious practices, or the religion practiced in general. It would also be inspiring to study the type and extent of the impact of historic religious sites on local development, local

entrepreneurship, and the finances of the households of those living in the area where these sites are located. Such studies can be carried out in any country (they may be supranational or supra-religious), and their results can be used to prepare generalized, cross-cutting analyses in this field. The author hopes that this study is part of the current of this type of research, indicating the functions of historic religious buildings and the spheres and directions of their impact on the environment, which can be the subject of potential research areas.

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Notes

- ¹ For 84.4% of a sample of pharmacy students at the University of Khartoum, prayer was the most common strategy for coping with academic stress (Yousif et al. 2022).

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Article

Stability of the Roman Catholic Church Financing System Based on Germany

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Abstract: To effectively carry out its tasks, the church needs a stable financial system. The aim of this article is to present issues related to ensuring the stability of the Catholic Church financing system in times of significant demographic and socio-cultural changes. This study identifies and characterizes the main sources of income and directions of expenses of the available financial resources. The challenges faced by church authorities in this regard are also described. State authorities finance places of prayer for social, cultural, and psychological reasons. Churches have been places of support in difficult times for centuries as well as places of survival and mental support for society.

Keywords: financing system stability; church financing model; place of prayer

1. Introduction

A religious association is a specific type of organized human community. It has a specific internal structure and is capable of creating authorities that represent the union externally and perform internal functions, including determining the rights and obligations of its members. The basic criterion distinguishing a religious association from other social organizations is the purpose of its operation, which can be defined as ensuring the possibility of meeting the religious needs of its members (followers). Religious associations differ in their adopted dogmas of faith, religious rituals and practices, and organizational structures. In the case of the Catholic Church, we are dealing with a centralized organization that gathers its followers into one organizational and legal body (Krawczyk 2015).

In addition to its mission of exercising and spreading religious worship, the Catholic Church plays a particularly important social role. The types and scopes of functions performed by the Catholic Church to meet the individual and collective needs of the population have changed over the years, adapting to the requirements of the times. Uruszczak (2007) includes social functions among others such as education and upbringing, public safety, social assistance and charity activities, and healthcare.

To achieve its goals, the church needs financial resources. Church finances are not an end in themselves but a tool to fulfil its mission and tasks. For the financial system to fulfil its role, it should be stable, and the available funds should be spent in a way that ensures the implementation of designated tasks. The aim of this article is to present issues related to ensuring the stability of the Catholic Church financing system in times of significant demographic and socio-cultural changes.

In particular, the following research questions were asked:

- What factors determine the stability of the Catholic Church financing system?
- What is the meaning of the stability of the financing system in implementing the role and tasks of the church?
- What challenges and threats do socio-demographic changes pose to the stability of the church financing system?

The indicated issues will be presented using the example of the financing model of the Catholic Church in Germany.

2. Financial Stability—Introduction to the Issue

The concept of financial stability most often appears in macroeconomic terms and is identified based on the stability of the financial system. The concept of financial system stability can be defined from the point of view of the functions performed by the financial system. In this context, financial system stability indicates “a state in which the financial system performs its functions continuously and effectively, even in the event of unexpected and unfavorable disturbances of a significant scale” (Narodowy Bank Polski 2023). In turn, Mitrović Mijatović (2013) perceives the stability of the financial system through the stability of its elements, i.e., financial markets and institutions.

Some authors define the stability of the financial system as opposed to the concept of “financial instability”. For example, Allen and Wood (2006) describe financial stability as a situation with a low probability of financial instability, which Davis (2003) defines as an increased risk of a financial crisis. Mishkin (1997) goes a step further by defining the instability of the financial system in relation to the financial sphere and the real economy. Financial instability in this approach means a situation in which shocks occurring in the financial system disrupt the flow of information in such a way that the financial system is unable to perform its key function, i.e., the effective allocation of capital.

In the literature on this subject, one can find definitions of financial stability from a microeconomic perspective. Gorczyńska (2013) describes a financially stable company as one that operates on purpose despite disruptions. It is able to withstand shocks without deviating from the path of development. Financial stability allows the enterprise to fully implement economic functions related to raising capital; dividing it; and using it appropriately in operational, investment, and financial activities. Pikhotskyi et al. (2019) understand the concept of the financial stability of a company in a similar way. They describe financial stability as the ability of an enterprise to function and develop in a changing business environment, despite disruptions. A stable company is therefore able to achieve its goals and meet its obligations through the effective use of financial resources.

From the microeconomic perspective, financial stability is also identified based on possession and a constant ability to generate a surplus of revenues over expenses in an amount that allows an entity to function freely and achieve its goals. A financially stable company is therefore able to maintain financial liquidity at an appropriate level and properly manage its debt. The determinants of the level of an entity’s financial stability are therefore the sizes and types of revenues, the scopes and structures of expenses, and the sources and costs of obtaining external capital.

In the case of the Catholic Church, the issue of financial stability may concern the church as a whole or its individual organizational units (e.g., parishes).

3. Model of Financing the Catholic Church in Germany in the Context of Its Stability

The description of the financing system of the Catholic Church in Germany will begin with the identification and characterization of its main sources of financial resources. Next, the main directions for spending the available financial resources will be discussed. The stability of the church financing system depends on the ability to ensure a constant inflow of financial resources in an amount higher than the expenses (Figure 1).

The main source of financing for the Catholic Church in Germany is the church tax. This tax is calculated from the payroll tax or income tax of members of the community. Churches inform the relevant registration offices about the commencement of church tax obligation, and they forward this information to employers (if the church tax is withheld via payroll). The church tax is also levied on capital gains. In this case, since 1 January 2015, this tax has automatically been collected by the relevant credit institutions. Each federal state has its own legislative bodies that regulate the collection of church taxes. This tax is determined in the form of a percentage rate. The tax rate varies depending on where you live; e.g., in Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg it is 8%, while all other states charge 9%. Almost all of Germany (except Bavaria) has an upper limit on the amount of church tax (the so-called *kappung*), which means that the tax burden cannot exceed a certain percentage

of the taxable income. This ceiling varies depending on the federal state and ranges from 2.75% to 4%. This tax is collected through the tax office and is then transferred to churches. For this service, the state receives about three percent of church tax revenues. The net revenue from the Catholic church tax is presented in Figure 2.

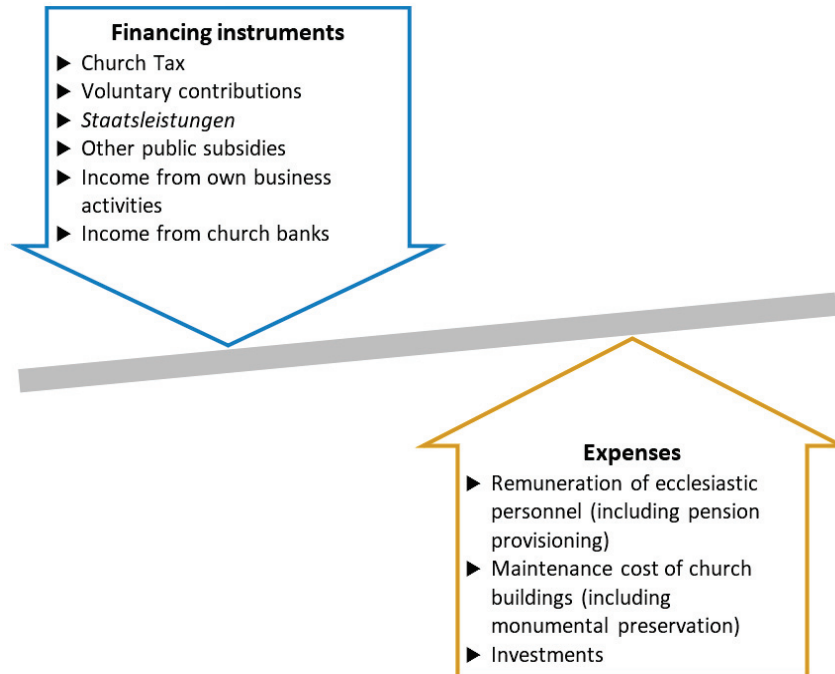


Figure 1. Stability of church financing. Source: own elaboration based on Biermeier (2019).

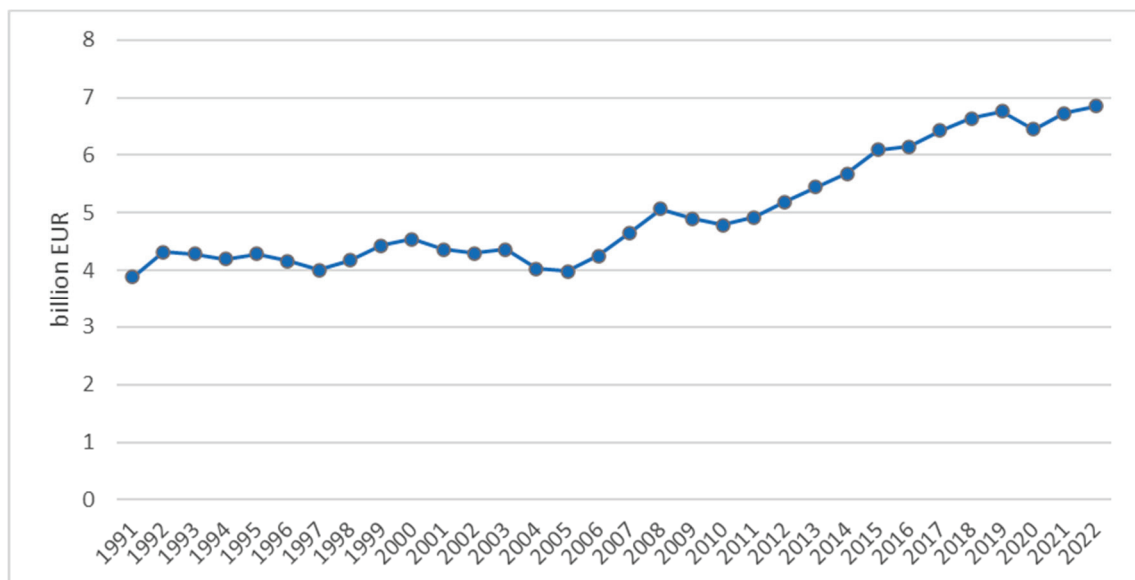


Figure 2. Net revenue from Catholic church tax in Germany from 1991 to 2022. Source: Statista (2024).

It should be noted that the impact of the revenue from the church tax is influenced by the demographic structure of believers and their incomes. Children and young people, elderly people with low pensions, and the unemployed do not receive salaries or pay income tax and therefore do not pay the church tax. In total, this group constitutes almost half of Catholics in Germany (Katholische Kirche in Deutschland: Zahlen und Fakten 2022/23 2023).

Another source of financing is voluntary contributions, i.e., all kinds of resources donated to the church. The resources in question may be monetary or non-monetary, i.e., in the form of material goods or volunteering. Documented donations are tax-deductible, but only at the congregational level. This type of financing constitutes a small share in the structure of church revenues. It is also unstable and unpredictable.

The third source of financing for the Catholic Church in Germany is *Staatsleistungen*, i.e., benefits from the German state resulting from the expropriation of the church carried out during the Napoleonic secularization period. The proceeds are transferred to the salaries of bishops and employees of the diocesan chapter and are also used for the maintenance and renovation of church buildings (Hartmann 2014). Although this source's share of the church's finances is small, due to its nature it is the subject of many political debates.

Another source of financing is state subsidies. They take the following forms (Biermeier 2019):

- Tax relief on donations made to the church.
- Direct sponsorship and subsidies, i.e., earmarked funds that can only be spent for previously defined purposes. They are directed, for example, to church academies (*Bildungshäuser*), schools, kindergartens, community centers, sheltered workshops, and other social institutions to cover running costs related to the operation of these institutions.
- Financial support in performing social welfare tasks, e.g., subsidies for drug clinics and mobile nursing services.
- Financial support for the process of teaching religion and pastoral care by financing the remuneration of teachers of Catholic religious education in public schools; running theological schools and faculties at universities; and paying for pastoral care in institutions such as the army, hospitals, and prisons.
- The remaining state aid is provided on a one-off basis, depending on emerging needs.

The church also obtains revenues from its property resources and its own business activities. Owned properties bring profits to the church in the form of dividends, interest payments, capital gains, and income from rents and leases. Church institutions also conduct business activities. Examples of such activities include media companies (www.katholisch.de), television (www.kirche.tv), and broadcasting agencies as well as breweries (*Bischofshof*) and wineries (*Bischöfliches Weingut Rüdesheim*).

Currently, 14 banks in Germany and Austria are owned by church institutions or orders (Biermeier 2019). These banks, called church banks (*Kirchenbanken*), offer their services exclusively to ecclesiastical and social welfare institutions and to church employees. The exception is clients who, although not employed by the church, have proven their commitment to the church and religion. Most church banks operate as cooperative banks (registered cooperatives), with regional churches and related institutions being members and clients at the same time. They are focused on supporting religion, the religious community, and humanity, unlike other banks, which are focused on profit maximization.

Among the church banks in Germany, five are Catholic banks owned by dioceses. Four of them, namely the *Darlehnskasse Münster*, the *Bank für Kirche und Caritas*, the *Bank im Bistum Essen*, and the *PAX-Bank*, are located in North Rhine-Westphalia, which is connected with a number of Catholics in this area. The fifth bank, the *LIGA Bank*, is located in Bavaria. In addition to the above-mentioned church banks, there are also two Catholic monastery banks. The first is *Steidler Bank*, which is managed by the Confraternity of the monks 'Society of the Divine Word'. The second is *Bank für Orden und Mission*, which is run by the Franciscan Order and serves its members throughout Europe. This bank is in fact a branch of the secular bank *VR Bank Untertaunus*.

Church banks, by definition, are predisposed to ethical and responsible investments. Their offerings could be attractive to clients interested in sustainable investing. However, as mentioned above, their clients are limited to church institutions and their employees. This limitation is sometimes criticized because opening up to clients from outside church

organizations could contribute to the dissemination of faith-related values in the financial area. Although churches have their own banks, they sometimes also use the services of secular banks, whose offerings are sometimes more favorable.

From the point of view of stability and the possibility of predicting the financial resources that will be received, it is worth dividing the sources of financial revenues into those of a market nature, those based on contributions from community members, and those coming from the state. The first group includes income from business activities, income from real estate and financial instruments, and income from church banks. The second group includes church tax revenue and voluntary contributions. The last group includes *Staatsleistungen* and public subsidies (Figure 3).

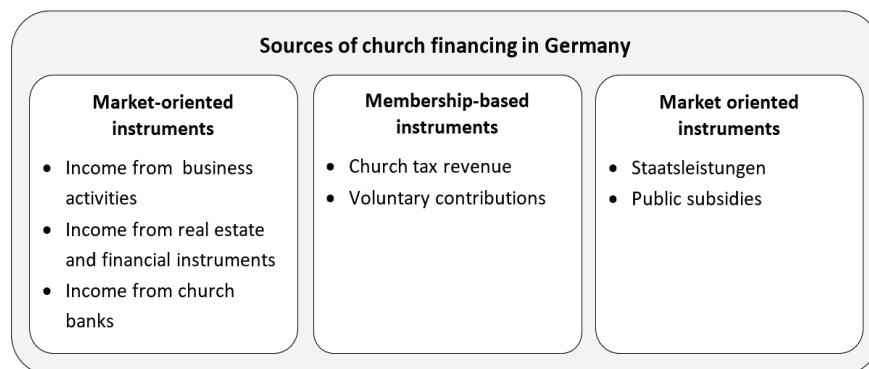


Figure 3. Three types of sources of church financing in Germany. Source: own elaboration based on Biermeier (2019).

Financial resources are used to finance current expenses related to the church's activities, including employee salaries, expenses related to pastoral service, and the maintenance of church buildings, or are used for investments. It is important that the amounts spent are adjusted based on the financial capabilities of the church, i.e., that the money is used effectively and the costs of acquired foreign capital are optimized.

The stability of the financing system requires the adjustment of expenses based on the revenues generated and a guarantee of the stability of the sources of revenues. In the context of fulfilling the church's mission, this requirement poses a great challenge to church institutions. Expenditures are determined by the needs reported by the faithful, both in terms of church services and helping those most in need. Therefore, it is the sizes and scopes of the requirements that determine the need to obtain revenue. This is a reversal of the budgeting principle, where the revenues obtained determine the expenses. From this point of view, the following question arises: how important are economic calculations in implementing the mission and tasks of the church? It seems obvious that the ability to operate a church effectively requires knowledge and the ability to manage its financial resources. However, in the implementation of the church's tasks, the long-term nature of the undertaken activities is important. Therefore, guaranteeing stable sources of income is necessary for the efficient functioning of the Catholic Church.

Socio-demographic changes have caused a change in the structure of revenues, i.e., tax revenues are decreasing. Undoubtedly, this is one of the most important and difficult challenges for church authorities, who, observing the changes taking place, should consider whether the implementation of tasks requires an increase in the state's share (e.g., through subsidies) or whether the church's economic assets should be used to a greater extent (development of economic activities).

When considering the sources of church financing, it is worth paying attention to the importance of their stability in the context of the most important mission of the church, which is to create a church community and strengthen the bond of the faithful with God. This is possible through the provision of pastoral services by clergy as well as through their presence in the lives of the faithful through conversation and praying together.

Prayer is the foundation of the religious and moral lives of believers. The importance of prayer as a way of meeting God was pointed out by St. Paul. “Therefore faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes from the word of Christ” (Rom 10:17).

Prayer is individual and direct communication with God based on love. In one case, it serves to consider the provisions of the Holy Scripture and deepen the understanding of the truths conveyed in it, and in another it is a way to share with God the joys, worries, hopes, and doubts that abound in our lives.

The content of prayer can be diverse. In prayer, standing in the presence of God, we discover our innermost feelings. Depending on the current needs and the mental and physical condition of the faithful, it may take the form of a prayer of supplication, thanksgiving, or an expression of appreciation and praise.

In the Holy Scriptures, you can often find references to prayer of supplication. Jesus Christ not only actively uses such prayer but also encourages it. He emphasizes the value of simple, sincere, and trusting prayer. Prayer can also be a way to express gratitude for receiving a wonderful thing and God’s mercy. This type of prayer results from recognizing the totality of all events and experiences, both favorable and unfavorable, as God’s gift.

An important part of prayer is also praising the greatness and benefaction of God. This type of prayer results from seeing God in his unlimited and infinite perfection. “Praise is that form of prayer in which man most directly acknowledges that God is God. It praises Him for His own sake, it gives Him glory not because of what He does, but because HE IS” (Catechism, 2639).

The importance of prayer can be considered not only in a religious context but also in a social context. Various sciences, i.e., the psychology of religion, psychiatry, and nursing, study the impact of prayer on human health and indicate that in a psychotherapeutic context, prayer can support the treatment of patients and deepen the bond between a psychotherapist and a person seeking help. For many people, prayer is becoming a particularly effective way of dealing with the challenges of everyday life, which is why it is so important for it to be present in the lives of believers.

4. The Most Important Challenge in the Process of Ensuring the Stability of the Catholic Church Financing System

Beyond historical precedent, the financial support of the church by the state serves as a conduit for fostering social cohesion and preserving cultural identity. Religious institutions often play a pivotal role in shaping societal values and norms (Putnam and Campbell 2010). By providing financial assistance, the state reinforces the pivotal role of the church in shaping the moral fabric of society, thereby contributing to a sense of unity and shared cultural identity.

This support is not solely rooted in history but is a contemporary phenomenon observed in various countries worldwide. For example, in countries with a predominant religious identity, the state’s financial backing of religious institutions aligns with a broader effort to fortify the national identity and cultural cohesion (Putnam and Campbell 2010).

The intertwining of state and church finances carries significant economic ramifications, often sparking debates about resource allocation and economic efficiency (Gornick 2002). Critics argue that funneling public funds to religious institutions may divert resources away from essential public services, leading to potential economic inefficiencies. The argument here is that public money should be directed towards sectors that directly contribute to the well-being and development of society, such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure.

For instance, Gornick’s (2002) examination of the role of religion in welfare-to-work programs underscores the potential economic trade-offs. When state funds are allocated to religious institutions that provide social services, there is a risk that resources are not distributed optimally, potentially hindering the overall economic development of a society. This perspective emphasizes the need for a careful balance between supporting religious institutions and ensuring the efficient allocation of resources for broader societal needs.

On the contrary, proponents of state support for the church argue that the economic benefits arising from a stable and cohesive society, facilitated by state-supported religious institutions, far outweigh any potential drawbacks (Iannaccone 1998). This viewpoint suggests that the stability and cohesion fostered by religious institutions contribute to an environment conducive to economic growth.

Moreover, tax exemptions granted to religious organizations often contribute to their financial stability, allowing them to engage in charitable activities that might otherwise burden state resources (Iannaccone 1998). By encouraging charitable work, religious organizations can play a direct role in addressing social issues, such as poverty and homelessness, thus lessening the burden on the state to provide these services directly.

For example, research by Iannaccone (1998) delves into the economics of religion, emphasizing the positive externalities associated with religious activities. When religious institutions engage in charitable work, they often serve as an extension of the state in providing essential services to the community. This collaborative effort can lead to a more efficient allocation of resources, with religious institutions playing a complementary role in addressing social and economic challenges.

The economic implications of the intricate relationship between the state and the church are further illuminated by Sandberg's (2008) exploration of church–state relations in Europe. This interdisciplinary approach delves into legal models and provides valuable insights into the economic dynamics at play in various European contexts.

Sandberg's (2008) work highlights the importance of legal models in shaping church–state relations. Different legal frameworks influence the degree of financial entanglement between the state and religious institutions. For instance, in countries where there is a closer legal integration of church and state, financial support may be more explicit and institutionalized. Understanding these legal nuances is crucial for comprehending the economic implications of state support for the church.

Critics, drawing on Sandberg's (2008) interdisciplinary perspective, argue that the economic implications of state support for religious institutions can vary significantly based on the legal models in place. For example, in countries where the legal model mandates a strict separation of church and state, the allocation of public funds to religious institutions may face stronger opposition. This resistance is often grounded in concerns about the misuse of public resources and potential violations of the principle of secularism.

Conversely, in countries where the legal models allow for a more integrated relationship between the state and the church, proponents argue that the economic benefits are more evident. Sandberg's (2008) research underscores the importance of considering legal frameworks when assessing the economic implications of state support for religious institutions. The legal context shapes the extent to which financial support is provided, and understanding this dimension is crucial for finance professionals navigating the complexities of church–state relations.

Additionally, Sandberg's (2008) interdisciplinary approach prompts us to consider the broader societal and economic consequences of state support for the church. Beyond the immediate financial transactions, the stability and cohesion fostered by religious institutions underpin societal well-being and, consequently, economic development. This holistic view encourages a nuanced understanding of the economic dynamics involved, recognizing that financial support for the church is embedded in a complex interplay of legal, cultural, and economic factors.

The economic implications of state support for the church take on added depth when considering insights from Nick Haynes' research report on church–state relationships in selected European countries, which was commissioned by the Historic Environment Advisory Council for Scotland (HEACS) in June 2008. Haynes' research provides a nuanced understanding of how state support influences economic dynamics, particularly in the context of historic buildings and cultural heritage.

The report by Haynes (2008) underscores the intricate relationship between the state and religious institutions, emphasizing the historical and cultural dimensions that shape

financial interactions. In many European countries, state support for the church extends beyond contemporary economic considerations; it is deeply rooted in the preservation of historical and cultural assets, including religious buildings.

One economic implication highlighted in Haynes' research is the role of the state in funding the maintenance and restoration of historic church buildings. These structures often carry significant cultural and historical value, contributing to the identity of a nation or region. State financial support for the upkeep of these buildings not only serves a cultural purpose but also generates economic activity through heritage tourism and related industries.

Moreover, the economic implications of state support for the church, as revealed in the research report, extend to the broader historic environment. Churches and religious sites are integral components of the cultural landscape, and state support often translates into the preservation of a nation's heritage. This preservation, in turn, contributes to the tourism sector, promoting economic growth and generating revenue for local communities.

However, Haynes' report also highlights challenges in the economic aspects of church-state relations. Financial strains on the state, particularly during economic downturns, may lead to reduced funding for the preservation of historic religious buildings. This raises questions about the sustainability of relying on state support for the long-term maintenance of cultural heritage.

The stability of the church's financing system requires a guarantee of the ability to generate a surplus of financial revenues over incurred expenses. This process requires analyzing the structure of revenues and expenses to determine the expected revenues from each of the individual sources.

The church tax has the largest share in the structure of financial revenues. The amount of annual revenue from this tax is determined by the demographic structure of the church members and the changes taking place therein; the general economic situation of the country, especially the pace of economic development; and the state's fiscal policy. The church tax is levied on top of payroll tax or income tax. Therefore, it is only paid by those members of the church community who work. The aging of the population and the overrepresentation of older people mean that the amount of revenue obtained from this may decrease. The second disturbing phenomenon is secularization, i.e., people leaving the church. Over the last decade, this phenomenon has become increasingly important and, unfortunately, particularly affects younger social groups, which in practice may lead to a deeper decline in tax revenues.

Another important factor influencing the amount of revenue from the church tax is the general economic situation of the country, including the pace of economic development and changes (i.e., increases) in employment. The report *Katholische Kirche in Deutschland: Zahlen und Fakten 2022/23* (2023) shows that the increase in church tax revenues in the recent period was mainly influenced by the very good level of economic development that indirectly resulted from growing employment and an increase in customs duties. At the same time, there were slight adjustments to wage and income tax rates, which contributed to an increase in the number of church-tax payers. It is in this aspect that decisions regarding fiscal policy translate into the amount of revenue from the church tax.

From the point of view of the certainty of financial revenues, public subsidies are an important source of financing. Predictability as to the amount and timing of receipt of funds allows the church to fulfil socially important functions, such as education, healthcare, and charitable activities. Moreover, the funds received can be allocated more effectively.

It is also worth looking at the issue of financial stability from the point of view of expenses and adapting them to the needs and capabilities of church units in a given period. The available financial resources should be used effectively, and the cost of obtaining external financing should be optimized. The forecast of a probable decline in the number of church-tax payers and the resulting decrease in tax revenues should make church authorities think about future investments and, for example, develop the church's economic activities.

5. Conclusions

Nowadays, the church faces a difficult challenge: ensuring the possibility of implementing its mission and social functions in the face of dynamic demographic and socio-cultural changes. Its ability to effectively fulfil tasks depends on the stability of the church financing system. The biggest challenges in this area are the falling numbers of church members and church-tax payers. The change in the revenue structure makes it necessary to discuss the church's financing strategy. Should declining revenues be compensated by increased state aid, and if so, under what conditions? An alternative is to expand business activity and become independent of state support. In this case, however, the question arises how to balance the engagement in raising finances for the church's tasks with the realization of these tasks, which should always be a priority. Regardless of the financing strategy adopted, the available financial resources must be used effectively.

Obtaining financial resources and allocating them effectively requires church authorities to have specialist knowledge in financial management. The Catholic Church is aware of the challenges it faces, which is why more and more clergy are being educated in the management of church finances and property.

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Article

The Entrepreneur's Prayer and the Scholastic Inspirations of Free-Market Economics

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Abstract: The paper explores the historical and philosophical roots of economic thought, drawing connections between the entrepreneurial mindset and the scholastic traditions that have shaped the conceptual landscape of free markets. Through a multidisciplinary approach, the paper examines how religious and scholastic influences have contributed to the development of economic ideas, providing a nuanced understanding of the ethical dimensions inherent in entrepreneurial endeavors. By unraveling the threads that connect entrepreneurship, prayer, and scholasticism, this paper also seeks to illuminate the symbiotic relationship between faith, intellectual heritage, and the principles that underpin free-market economies.

Keywords: biblical foundations of prayer; the rich man's prayer; free market economics; economic freedom; property; history of economic thought; history of ideas; scholasticism; scholastic thought; rational inquiry; pragmatic inquiry

1. Introduction

Economics, in its most fundamental essence, has historically been intricately intertwined with material considerations. Economic thought, as a comprehensive domain, encompasses the multifaceted aspects of material resources, goods, and the foundational principles that exert influence upon their production, acquisition, consumption, and distribution. Consequently, economic relations assume a quasi-social character, subject to regulation by norms that mirror the moral fabric of the society in question. In the late medieval period, specifically within the confines of Latin Western Europe, the public sphere bore witness to the preeminence of the Roman Catholic Church. An institutional manifestation of the societal structure during this epoch, spanning from the early 12th to the late 14th century, was scholasticism. This intellectual framework found its locus in the activities and impact of contemporaneous monasteries, schools, and nascent universities. During the 13th century, scholasticism developed as a system of knowledge (scientia) within the Aristotelian philosophical framework, which became incorporated into Christian cultural discourse. The methodological origins of scholasticism can be attributed to Anselm of Canterbury (1033/4–1109). Anselm's undertaking focused on systematically reconciling the Augustinian principle of "faith seeking understanding" (fides quaerens intellectum) through the application of a rational approach, namely, "by reason alone" (sola ratione). Medieval scholasticism, at its core, constituted a social structure unequivocally demarcated by the rules governing social relationships (Dufal 2020, p. 54).

Scholastic thinkers perceived the society in which they were embedded as synonymous with the Roman Catholic Church. The morality that dictated economic relationships, and by extension, all human interactions, was thus construed as an extension of the Church's morality. This conceptualization posited the Church, theoretically at least, as the universal Christian society (Wood 2002). The paramount concern of scholastic authors in relation to economics revolved around elucidating the compatibility of individual economic actions – encompassing transactions such as buying, selling, exchange, and lending – with prevailing

ethical principles. These ethical precepts also encompassed conditions delimiting the permissibility of profit accumulation. Both biblical and Aristotelian texts adopted by medieval orders proffered prohibitions against profit-seeking under various circumstances. For numerous authors, the pursuit of profit was deemed morally reprehensible (Rosner 2012).

Human cognitive proclivities include an adeptness at recognizing patterns and employing metaphors to facilitate comprehension and interpretation of the surrounding world (Beinhocker 2007). In the medieval scholastic era, deep engagement with economic issues went hand in hand with attention to political issues. Scholarly discourse in both fields shared a common emphasis on moral considerations and questions of justice, covering aspects of power dynamics and price ethics (Langholm 1998; Emmett 2020). In the context of this late medieval society, the existence of entrepreneurs is attested, although the nomenclature itself only emerged centuries later (Blaug 1985; Hébert and Link 2006). Nevertheless, these economic actors exhibited characteristics contemporarily ascribed to entrepreneurs. While Baumol (1968) expresses dissatisfaction with the limited ability of economic theory to thoroughly examine entrepreneurial behavior, subsequent scholars concur on conceptualizing the entrepreneur as an entity catalyzing economic change, a harbinger of imbalance. It is underscored that the entrepreneur's very existence emanates from a state of imbalance, entailing a certain cognitive opacity (Boutillier and Uzunidis 2014, p. 14). The entrepreneur, it appears, possesses an acumen to identify or create opportunities that elude others or are more amenable to exploitation (Earl 1990, p. 738). The economic sphere, both in the medieval milieu and contemporarily, assumes a pivotal role in human existence. Its indispensability to human survival imbues control over the economy with direct influence over the lives of individuals (Earle 2004, p. 70). This control, however, is subject to selectivity and can be exerted by shaping and enforcing societal norms governing conduct deemed appropriate and desirable.

The economic ramifications of a community are significantly impacted by the permeation of attitudes stemming from religious practices that, in turn, influence individual traits such as honesty and work ethic (Barro and McCleary 2003, p. 771). Wuthnow (1996, p. 306) observes that economic commitments of individuals are entrenched within moral frameworks. Some individuals consciously endeavor to reconcile these two spheres – the spiritual and the economic. The views of an individual are characterized as “highly idiosyncratic” (Lowrey and Xie 2019). Griebel et al. (2014) posit that entrepreneurial activity is shaped by the entrepreneurs' need to reinterpret their work in religious terms, thereby mitigating potential psychological tension between faith and the daily pursuit of material goods.

One religious practice with potential psychological tension-reducing effects is prayer. Prayer, as a fundamental and accessible form of religious practice in both individual and communal life, is a ubiquitous phenomenon, with the vast majority of individuals worldwide engaging in daily prayer (Froese and Jones 2021). Irrespective of religious affiliation, prayer assumes significance. On the one hand, prayer manifests in the concrete lives of ordinary individuals, expressing their needs and desires. On the other hand, it constitutes a highly specific religious act, as the act of prayer entails the individual or community addressing a divine entity (Immink 2016). An analysis of prayer necessitates an examination of the divine power to which the supplicant turns. Prayer, in itself, is regarded as an expression of human religiosity. Consequently, prayer emerges as a distinctive emanation and signifier encapsulating the sacred domain within the individual's conceptualization of reality (Kochel 2020). As a direct act, prayer can be construed as a reflection of an individual's stance toward transcendence. In this manner, prayer serves to reflect the divine presence in the world, situating the individual before the divine and telling the narrative of the divine–human interaction (Hiller 2000, p. 325).

How, then, did entrepreneurs of the scholastic period engage in prayer? How was their reality configured, necessitating the formulation of a self-image, a conception of themselves within the societal milieu, and an understanding of themselves vis-à-vis the divine, in whose existence they presumably believed?¹

Economics, as the art of managing a household, has been known to humanity since antiquity (Galbraith [1987] 2017a, pp. 10–34; Roncaglia 2005, pp. 18–31). However, its emancipation into autonomous scientific disciplines is linked to Adam Smith’s formulation in 1776 of the inquiry into “the nature and causes of the wealth” (Smith [1776] 2008). Motivated, in part, by religious considerations (Boer and Petterson 2014), the interest in profit and wealth accumulation, prominently elevated in Smith’s literature as inherently respectable motivations aligning with human nature, initiated the doctrinal reflection of the classical school in economics. This reflection, at least in its initial phase, focused on explaining the market mechanism shaping prices in the economy.

The term “free-market economics”, at times synonymous with economic liberalism, designates the assumptions of an economic system aligned with this concept of socio-economic order. It considers the unrestricted exchange of goods and services as constitutive, assuming that prices are determined by a market mechanism wherein the only reference is the interaction of supply and demand. For such a system to function in practice, additional assumptions are evident, including the freedom of choice for entities participating in the exchange, the reliance of productive efficiency on the division of labor, and the private ownership of means of production and goods acquired during the exchange. The proposal is in line with the principles of the classical school (Smith [1776] 2008, pp. 7–25, 34–52; Kennedy 2008, pp. 29–43) and the foundations of the free market system in the interpretation of one of the most prominent twentieth-century theorists from the Austrian school, Ludwig von Mises (von Mises [1963] 1998, pp. 258–60). It also accommodates state interventionist trends associated with the Keynesian revolution (Mini 1996; Cardim de Carvalho 2008)². Thus, the proposed conception of free market economics transcends the doctrinal entanglements associated with different views of state interventionism. Moreover, it follows the traditional dictionary convention of avoiding one-sided controversies (Foldvary 1998; Rutherford 2002)³.

Intriguingly, similar propositions regarding economic order had been formulated over two hundred years earlier by late scholastic researchers, who had derived them from the analysis of natural law. Their constant reference points were religious inspirations, particularly biblical narratives and the written tradition of the Church’s saints.

The task of this work is to present these inspirations in connection to the historical development of selected economic and social theories and doctrines. These theories and doctrines consistently refer to the evolution of prayerful relations between humanity and the divine.

The attempt to reconstruct specific trajectories, emergence, modification of meanings and development of economic thought, and then to create a coherent conceptual apparatus constituting an ‘economic concept’ or ‘economic doctrine’ is an extremely meticulous task. Roncaglia (2005, p. 1) notes that a knowledge of the history of economic thought appears to be essential for anyone interested in understanding the functioning of economies. The obvious method for such a reconstruction is to try to grasp, document, and, consequently, explain how an element of secular economic thought, or rather, given the conditions prevailing at that time, mercantilist thought, could emerge in the society of Latin Western Europe, subordinated at the turn of the 10th and 11th centuries to ecclesiastical-papal doctrine. Earlier, but also contemporary, numerous scholarly developments in this area have produced interesting results. The following works should be mentioned in this context, among others Capitani (1974), Nuccio (1984), Wood (2002), Greci et al. (2005), Alford (2013), Alves and Moreira (2013), Dierksmeier (2013), Schlag (2013), Niewdana (2015), and Patriarca (2021). Particularly noteworthy in this compilation is the work of Oskar Nucci, who entitled the first part of his planned multi-volume publication on Italian economic thought ‘The Sources (1050–1450). Secular Ethics and the Formation of Economic Thought’ (Nuccio 1984). This work was written from the perspective of a scholar who, drawing on the experience of the present, makes an interesting attempt to build a bridge between the present and the distant historical past. The absence of such a bridge

would mean sanctioning a kind of historiographical void, but in a broader sense also an epistemic void.

Where in the depths of history should one look for the verifiable origins of secular economic thought? It is highly probable that the turn of the 10th and 11th centuries, considered as the beginning of the Italian economic revival in the 11th century, can be considered as the foundation of such secular economic thought (Capitani 1974). From this point, it is necessary to start “identifying certain lines along which the history of the market system or, if one prefers, ‘capitalism’ unfolds” (Nuccio 1984, p. 86).

From today’s perspective, scholars armed with the advanced conceptual tools of the humanities and social sciences would undoubtedly focus on the issue of the dominant culture in Latin Western Europe during the first centuries of the second millennium. The working definition of culture proposed by Goodenough (1964) implies its immaterial nature, suggesting that it serves as a way of “organizing” concepts in peoples’ minds. Sewell (1999) provides a variety of definitions of culture in anthropological and social terms, implicitly building on Goodenough’s concept. At the opposite end of the definition of culture is Bauman’s (1999) concept of culture as praxis. Despite these divergent approaches, they are united by the functional nature of cultural narratives, which are stories that are recurrent in a given culture (Maza 1996).

Through these stories, societies communicate their history, explain what they consider important and influence how people understand themselves and their place in society. From a sociological perspective, such narratives serve as a space for the construction of meaning, in which individuals interpret and give significance to their lives and experiences (Polletta 2006). Cultural narratives found in religious texts or folk tales have the power to deeply imprint our memories (Dehghani et al. 2009). As Lindemann Nelson (2001, pp. 20–23) points out an individual’s self-image is inevitably shaped by the attributes assigned by dominant cultural narratives to the groups to which they belong or with which they identify themselves. Yet, at the same time, this image is embedded in a social and cultural context that promotes certain stories and cultural images while suppressing others.

Cultural narratives have the potential to confine a particular subgroup to a socially limiting position, associating it with stereotypical characteristics. It is also worth referring to White (1980), an experienced historian, who highlights that narrative, in a historical context, often presents a world as complete and ‘finished,’ devoid of a sequel. However, the crucial point is that, since there exists a ‘today’ as a consequence of what ‘yesterday’ brought, there is a likelihood of a ‘tomorrow.’ If ‘tomorrow’ were to be even slightly different, perhaps better, then, guided by the inviolability of axiological categories, the narrative could change, providing inspiration for a yet unknown but somehow anticipated development.

2. Community of the Poor in Biblical Message

*“Incline your ear, Lord, and answer me,
for I am poor and oppressed.
Preserve my life, for I am devoted;
save your servant who trusts in you.
You are my God; be gracious to me, Lord;
to you I call all the day.
Gladden the soul of your servant;
to you, Lord, I lift up my soul.
Lord, you are good and forgiving,
most merciful to all who call on you.
Lord, hear my prayer;
listen to my cry for help.
On the day of my distress I call to you,*

for you will answer me.

(...)

Give me a sign of your favor:

make my enemies see, to their confusion,

that you, Lord, help and comfort me.” Ps 86:1–7.17 (NAB 2012)⁴

A prayer for help in adversity, encapsulated in the biblical Psalm 86, effectively illustrates the Judeo-Christian orientation towards the protection of the poor and oppressed (Rylaarsdam 1968; Scheffler 2015; Hamilton 2020). In the Old Testament, this concern finds enduring normative affirmation in the Book of Deuteronomy, expressed as “the right of the poor” (Pontifical Council For Justice and Peace 2005, p. 12): “If there is among you a poor man, one of your brethren, . . . you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother, but you shall open your hand to him, and lend him sufficient for his need” (Dt 15, 7–8). Its societal implementation is evident in practices such as the inspiring forgiveness of debts during the seven-year Sabbath cycle and the equally cyclical (every fifty years) Jubilee year. The Jubilee provided an occasion for the cancellation of land sale transactions and the emancipation of slaves (Ex 23; Dt 15; Lv 25) (Hoenig 1969; Attali 2002, pp. 38–39; Ringe 1985; Lowery 2000).

In the New Testament, the priority of caring for the poor is deeply rooted in Christ’s teachings, emphatically highlighted in the moral program presented during the Sermon on the Mount in the form of the eight Beatitudes (Mt 5, 3–12). It is further underscored by Christ’s invitation: “Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest” (Mt 11, 28). The contemporary relevance of this concern is affirmed by the later social teachings of the Church, as corroborated by the Pontifical Council For Justice and Peace (2005).⁵ Additionally, the practice of charitable works (*caritas*) is considered a constitutive element of the Christian community (Benedict XVI 2005: 20; Müller 2014, pp. 22–24; Gerd-Rainer [1924] 2008). The extent of this concern is evident in the doctrinally controversial liberation theology, which, from the perspective of the Catholic Church, transfers the biblical message of prayerful supplication for the improvement of the poor’s condition into praxis (Hebblethwaite 2007). This praxis does not exclude the engagement of a full spectrum of political instruments to advance the goal of social inclusion for those marginalized due to their poverty (Nash 1984; Gutierrez 1988; Müller 2014). The prayer for justice, read in a social context, proved to be a catalyst for actions aspiring to a decisive transformation of reality⁶ under the dictate of a model fulfilling the principles of social justice, in relation to the dignity and aspirations of the poor (Casaldàliga and Vigil 1994; Büschges et al. 2021).⁷

This perspective, driven by biblically motivated social activism, remains relevant today (Kristenson 2009; Choi and Cuéllar 2023; Zegarra 2023). It continues to inspire various forms of political and social engagement aimed at improving the human condition in the name of “an integral and solidary humanism.” These words, cited from the Compendium of The Social Doctrine of The Church (Pontifical Council For Justice and Peace 2005, p. 3), evoke a personalist conception of humanism developed by Jacques Maritain (Maritain 1973). This conception emerged in response to the atheistic-communist ideal of justice based on the rejection of transcendence and the focus on the compulsory elimination of private property and the widespread distribution of goods obtained in this manner.

However, if it is true that “economic conditions, like all conditions generally of the material order, are of basic importance in the destiny of spiritual activities among men, that they have a constant tendency to enfeeble them,” it is simultaneously crucial to avoid nonsensically taking material conditioning as the prime determining reason, even concerning its historical existence, for spiritual activity. This caution, articulated by Maritain, emphasizes that the dialectical absolutization of the material factor deepens human alienation, making individuals more unhappy by stripping them of the dignity of being children of God, created in the image and likeness of the Creator (Maritain 1973, p. 49). Therefore, the “poverty” of a person, rooted in adverse circumstances, their pain, and the search for life’s meaning,

ultimately leading to a sense of loss in the sight of God, is shared by both the materially poor and the wealthy. This foundation establishes equality before God, contributing to the universality of human calling and destiny, as echoed in the Book of Proverbs: “Rich and poor have a common bond: the Lord is the maker of them all” (Prov 22:3), and affirmed by the Psalmist: “You of lowly birth or high estate, rich and poor together” (Ps 49:3).

3. Excluding Universality

However, if it is indeed the case, why then is it in vain to seek in the biblical narrative something as moving as the prayer from Psalm 86, the “prayer of the wealthy”? Their situation – considering the multidimensionality of poverty – differs significantly from that of the materially poor. Therefore, it is difficult to imagine that without the charge of hypocrisy, they would cry out to God as “poor and oppressed”. Why, despite the universality of calling and destiny, does wealth in the biblical narrative seem to play the role of a negative character (González 1990; Royalty 1998; Moore 2011; Mathews 2013; Maynard-Reid 1987)? Indeed, in the promise given to Abraham in the Book of Genesis concerning the Egyptian bondage that the Jewish people would undergo, material wealth appears not only permissible but even as a sign of blessing: “Then the Lord said to Abram: Know for certain that your descendants will reside as aliens in a land not their own, where they shall be enslaved and oppressed for four hundred years. But I will bring judgment on the nation they must serve, and after this, they will go out with great wealth” (Gen 15:13–14).

Perhaps this promise should justify the fervent plea for gold and the increase in wealth. However, it would turn out unfortunate in that the wealth foretold to Abraham would become, in the days of the fulfillment of the prophecy after the Israelites’ exodus from Egypt, an instrument confirming sin and betrayal. When the people, impatient after a long journey through the desert, fashion a golden calf with Aaron’s approval (Ex 32), many of the idolaters are severely punished by the sons of Levi. At the same time, although the making of the golden calf is a grave offense against God, the guilt of sin lies with the person and his manifestation of unfaithfulness, not the goods accumulated by him (Fel and Zdun 2014, p. 86). Otherwise, the blessing bestowed upon Joshua, uttered to the Jordanian generations returning to their tents after taking over Canaan, would be impossible: “Now that you are returning to your own tents with great wealth, with abundant livestock, with silver, gold, bronze and iron, and with a very large supply of clothing, divide these spoils of your enemies with your allies there” (Josh 22:8; Grant 1984, pp. 49–63). It does not change the fact that “Better a little with fear of the Lord than great fortune with anxiety” (Prov 15:16), for “the wicked, always carefree, increasing their wealth” (Ps 73:12). This is why King Solomon was so generously rewarded when able to ask God for anything, he chose wisdom instead of wealth, enabling him to rule the Israelites justly (2 Chr 1:11–12). This choice will be summarized in the New Testament in the form of a warning: “no one can serve two masters” (Mt 6:24).

The term “mammon,” derived from the Aramaic language, is mentioned four times by Christ (Mt 6:24; Lk 16:9, 11, 13). It is sometimes translated as “money” (ESV 2014) or “wealth” (Coogan 2010) and directly refers to material goods (Wronka 2010). Each time, it identifies the danger of moral corruption, even appearing in combination with the term “dishonest” (ἄδικοις, Bauer et al. 2021, p. 18), forming a warning. Wealth can distort human goals (Mt 6:19–20), subordinating one’s activities to matters irrelevant to salvation. It can create pressure leading to the emergence of sin, such as the sin of greed (Lk 12:13–15), and sometimes, it is based on the exploitation of others (Jas 5:4). Ultimately, “it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for one who is rich to enter the kingdom of God” (Mt 19:23–24; also: Mk 10:25; Lk 18:25).

It is known that material wealth is created by God and, as such, is good (Gen 1:31). Man is called to “fill the earth and subdue it” (Gen 1:28), and although there is no guarantee that the outcome of his work will be good, there are no obstacles to it. However, the essence of the “goodness” of the products of labor does not lie in them alone but is derived from

the use of material goods. Man's calling is to perform good deeds that glorify God's name and sustain the order established by the Creator (Mt 6:19–23; Lk 12:32–34; 1 Tim 5:17–19). The ways in which these goods are used, in connection with the relationship with God, determine whether the good will be the portion of the wealthy or not. The problem does not lie in possession itself – God does not forbid man to possess goods and take care of them. Furthermore, for the one deserving blessings for his good deeds, they can be confirmed by the increase in his possessions, as the psalm foretells: “Blessed the man who fears the Lord (...) Wealth and riches shall be in his house; his righteousness shall endure forever” (Ps 112:1.3). Therefore, in the Sermon on the Mount, “blessed” are the people who are “the poor in spirit” (Mt 5:3), not just “the poor.” The lack of attachment to owned goods, a certain distance from what can be an instrument of doing good for others, is the essence of blessing. Poverty itself does not eliminate the risk of condemnation – poor people can be just as strongly attached to what they possess as rich people. Thus, wealth in itself – despite Christ's caveat about the “needle's eye” – is not condemned. This allows Jesus to look upon the rich young man with love (Mk 10:21), as well as on the tax collector Zacchaeus, who, even after his conversion, planned to leave half of his wealth in his possession (Lk 19:1–10). What matters is whether the possessed goods are our goal for their own sake (“You fool, this night your life will be demanded of you; and the things you have prepared, to whom will they belong?” (Lk 12:20)), or if they are rather instruments for acting on behalf of others (“Whoever has two tunics should share with the person who has none. And whoever has food should do likewise” (Lk 3:11)).

It turns out that one can “serve mammon”, which is unequivocally condemned by Christ, regardless of the state of possession – this threat applies equally to the wealthy and the materially poor, who focused on themselves and their lack, are closed to the suffering of others. Only the subordination of the use of goods to God's will, in a spirit of obedience, leads to the construction of a hierarchy of values and goals consistent with the Creator's planned order, which, without harm to man, can be rewarded (Deut 15:7–11; Ps 112:5–6.9). This path does not exclude heroism – abandoning goods or selling everything and dedicating oneself to teaching with Christ (e.g., Mt 10:8–10; Mt 19:21; Mk 6:8–10; Mk 10:21; Lk 9:3–4; Lk 18:22) – but this is not the norm. The question then returns: why, with regard to wealth, which is backed by human talents and effort, transforming a resistant reality into potential good, is the biblical distance so palpable? Why is there rather a warning associated with it: “on wealth that increases, do not set your heart” (Ps 62:11b), rather than permission for blessing?

One explanation for this ostracism may lie in the economic reality of humans in an exceptionally long pre-economy period. The cyclical confrontation of the effects of “creeping” technological progress, experienced by humanity until the industrial revolution, with the accompanying population growth, ended unfavorably for the widespread prosperity of the world's population. The phenomenon, more widely known as the “Malthusian Trap” (Kögel and Prskawetz 2001), named after the British author of population law and the static theory of resources, effectively blocked opportunities for mass enrichment for centuries. As G. Clark rightly observes: “The lucky denizens of wealthy societies such as eighteenth-century England or the Netherlands managed a material lifestyle equivalent to that of the Stone Age” (Clark 2007, p. 1). The ancient hunter–gatherer economy allowed the population, on average, to have a more varied diet than the natural economy of feudalism, the later serfdom–farming system, or the developing capitalist trade from the 16th century. Until the solution of the post-Aristotelian corset restricting the development of a commodity–money economy, through the condemnation of interest on loans, the practical possibilities of enriching broader social strata were practically impossible (Cameron 1993, pp. 44–77, 95–99; Tracy 1997; Prak and Zanden 2023). In this context, the biblical aversion to wealth becomes understandable – until the emergence of a market economy, the possibility of getting rich without exploiting socially weaker neighbors and in a morally unobjectionable manner was not illusory, but effectively nonexistent. It is challenging to pray to God for profit in such conditions – there remains only a plea for improvement

of one's fate but also for just punishment for those who unjustly and with a violation of justice became rich. The Judeo-Christian view of man and – more broadly – the entire Creation, filled with the awareness of God-Creator's all-encompassing love, who is the only guarantor of justice and the source of hope for a better future, was different. The intention of God concerning the whole creation, but above all, man as an image of God Himself, was different, as the Book of Genesis teaches. The rejection of paradise happiness in a free act of choice, bringing unintended consequences not planned by God upon all people of all generations, did not separate the human community from the Creator. If a man brings eternal unhappiness upon himself, and his tendencies to disobey God's will still accompany him, provoking him to sin – also against his neighbor – then God is the only Savior and authority for the justice planned from the beginning. In this plan, the rich could only understand their mistake and restore justice by giving back what they wrongly and unjustly took with a violation of justice. The idea of the paradise garden Eden, where everything was given to man for use, and the lack of ownership exposing to pride and selfishness was illustrated by the nudity of bodies, became a model of justice, in which "possession" could symbolize only sin – hence, by its nature, it had to be excluded.

4. The Tearing of the Judeo-Christian Curtain: The Separateness of the Diaspora

Paradoxically, for the first breach regarding the attitude towards shameful wealth, "the poverty of fate" is responsible. The history of the Jewish people necessitated actions ensuring the preservation of religious identity, which, especially after the destruction of the second Jerusalem temple and the ultimate loss of autonomy within the Roman Empire, resulted in the normative organization of laws. This, in turn, opened the era of rabbinic Judaism (Grant 1984, pp. 245–47; Strack and Stemberger 1992, pp. 2–7). The Talmud created as a result, constitutes the Torah in a broader sense – not limited to the Pentateuch of Moses or even the Hebrew Bible – connecting to the oral religious tradition⁸ (Alexander 2007; Pilarczyk 2009; Johnson 1988, pp. 152–55). It forms a kind of legal code based on commentaries on the Pentateuch and biblical books, detailing the principles of life in a world where, after the temple's destruction, the observance of obligations outlined in Mosaic law became impossible (Fraade 2007). In a sense, life in the diaspora after the fall of the revolts against Rome in the 1st and 2nd centuries CE brought injustice upon the Jewish people – fate's adversities depriving the nation of the land given to them by God created circumstances where the relevance of prayers for the oppressed and pleas for the restoration of justice was unquestionable. In such a scenario, the search for signs of blessings that restore strength and bring hope to overturning ill fortune, became essential. In the conditions of dispersion, carrying cultural diversity, where religious discourse was responsible for unity, the importance of the Talmud grew, extending beyond biblical books and creating conditions for a common interpretation of the message. It is in the accompanying commentaries that the perspective on wealth and the significance of affluence changed. Due to its potential as a tool for doing good, wealth became a visible sign of God's blessing. When poverty primarily signifies a state of spirit resulting from exile, wealth becomes a desirable instrument for restoring justice. Therefore, the care for increasing possession becomes a challenge and an expression of responsibility for the nation. Wealth used for the good of the nation, especially to support those in need, becomes a force.⁹ This "New Economic Doctrine", invoking J. Attali's apt designation (Attali 2002, p. 103), not only negates the biblical focus on protecting the poor but, through a call to pragmatism, establishes the foundations for an interpretation where accepting wealth is a sign of obedience to God's love. Simultaneously, it is an opportunity to show this love to others in need, in line with the biblical injunction to protect the poor. Therefore, wealth becomes a task – a sign of responsibility primarily for the nation, in a personal relationship with God, from whom this wealth ultimately comes. To fulfill this task, one must avoid the temptation of pride and not flaunt one's possessions, which, in the conditions of the diaspora, breeds envy. Wealth should, therefore, be accumulated discreetly, naturally excluding its placement in a land where resources are widely visible. This collision –

the need for discretion with the realities of the economy of agrarian relations and later feudalism based on natural economy – pushes the Israelites into a new area of activities related to trade, monetary exchange, savings accumulation, and ultimately the co-creation of the banking foundations of institutions and financial markets (Sombart 2001, pp. 12–23; Galbraith [1975] 2017b; Ferguson 2008, pp. 17–52). Enrichment becomes a necessary task due to the needs not only of individuals but of the entire community, where protecting the poor is still a divine command. There is, indeed, a limitation, a clear warning from The Book of Deuteronomy: “You shall not demand interest from your kindred on a loan of money or of food or of anything else which is loaned” (Deut 23:20). However, the path to bypassing this restriction is indicated in the next verse: “From a foreigner, you may demand interest, but you may not demand interest from your kindred, so that the Lord, your God, may bless you in all”. In a climate of escalating trade and the establishment of an economic structure aligned with mercantilist principles, this potential presents the opportunity for an unparalleled growth in prosperity. It will, however, be blocked for Christian communities, which will interpret the prohibition of charging interest on loans (that is, usury – a term not limited to exorbitant, burdensome interest but encompassing interest on loans as such) much more broadly and rigorously.

5. The Tearing of the Judeo-Christian Curtain: The Universality of Expectation

Interestingly, the Christian tradition of the radical rejection of usury has its origins in the books of the Old Testament that are part of the Torah: The Book of Exodus: “If you lend money to my people, the poor among you, you must not be like a money lender; you must not demand interest from them” (Ex 22:24) and The Book of Leviticus: “Do not exact interest in advance or accrued interest, but out of fear of God let your kindred live with you. Do not give your money at interest or your food at a profit” (Lev 25:36–37; Le Goff 1990, p. 21). These prohibitions find a striking summary in The Gospel of Luke, in a kind of paraphrase of the commandment to love one’s neighbor: “love your enemies and do good to them, and lend expecting nothing back.” This leaves no room for making profit from loans. It recalls the words of Christ from the missionary discourse: “Without cost you have received; without cost you are to give” (Mt 10:8). The mentioned possibility in The Book of Deuteronomy of demanding interest on loans given to foreigners does not apply, of course, to Christians of other nations or to Jews, as they are not “foreign” in a religious dimension. Usury signifies injustice – and as such, it is condemnable for both Christians and Jews, an argument that can be demonstrated rationally even without invoking biblical reasoning.

In this context, scholastic philosophy referred to Aristotle who argued that money, by its nature, serves to facilitate trade and, as such, cannot justify charging interest – since money is unproductive as a means of exchange (Aristotle 2017: 1258b). Saint Thomas Aquinas develops this thought, stating that the injustice of usury essentially lies in demanding payment for the use of money. However, “use” itself does not exist because there is only money as a means of exchange, and therefore it cannot be separated from its use (STh II-IIae q. 78 a. 1co). The borrowed money, in its entirety, is transferred to the borrower, which means the possibility of its use as a means of exchange. Only what has been borrowed can be returned, but based on repayment, not the transfer of what has been purchased using the borrowed money. Money and its use form an inseparable whole that usury attempts to separate by demanding payment for its use.¹⁰

This opinion changed only under the pressure of the early modern, post-mercantilist economic reality and the ideological revolution initiated by the Reformation, especially in its Calvinist variant.¹¹ Maritime trade expansion along with the colonization of the New World soon resulted in new problems stemming from inflation caused by the uncontrolled influx of precious metals (Murray Rothbard [1995] 2006, p. 99). Paradoxically, this strengthened the demand for money. The economic practice of antiquity did not know the concept of investment loans; loans were known, but they mainly covered consumption purposes and were associated with the insufficient amount of money in economic circulation (partially caused by hoarding, although mainly due to the durability of barter exchange).

Additionally, there was a lack of institutional support for loans, systematically lowering their costs. Exploiting these gaps, usurers demanded very high interest rates for loans (John Noonan points to a standard commission of 43.5% annually – Noonan 1957, p. 34 – although Bernard Skrzydlewski cites as much as 266% annually for Lombard usurers – Skrzydlewski 1965, p. 30). In practice, this meant the impossibility of repaying debts and led to the exploitation of the poor. Biblical warnings and commands for unwavering care for those in need directly address such situations. Only semantic shifts in the context of understanding and, consequently, accepting wealth as an expression of responsibility before God, also for the poor and those in need of help, led to questioning the scholastic interpretation and separating the use of money from the money itself (Taeusch 1942, pp. 301–303; Murray Rothbard [1995] 2006, pp. 143–45; Geisst 2013, pp. 90–93; Samellas 2017).

The confrontation with the growing demand for money, which turned out to be a necessary means for equipping a trade expedition promising desired profits, as well as for investments guaranteeing the development of trade and manufacturing, forced the justification of benefits for lenders (von Shael 1993). Pointing out lost opportunities resulting from the transfer of funds as a loan justified compensation in the form of interest, initiating the institutionalization and popularization of loans. Reduced costs, due to easier access to loans, in turn, fulfilled the expectations of biblical calls, reducing the pressure on debtors but also introducing protective mechanisms beneficial to them. In these conditions, the concept of usury was limited to the unjust pursuit of profit, fraud, and outright robbery against those whose life situations forced them to seek dishonest assistance. Borrowing as a form of investment support became widespread and was incorporated into the profit-generating system (de Roover 1974; Ferguson 2008; Decock 2020). Historically, it took time to rationalize the departure from previous arguments and to engage canon lawyers, who would take on this task. The prayer for help in adversity from Psalm 86 gained strength – and late scholastic researchers, especially the Dominican professors from Salamanca, decided to respond to it.

6. The Scholastic Worldview – Nature as Law

The application of the widespread method in medieval philosophical reflection, the scholastic method (Gilson 1955, pp. 246–50; Pieper 1964; Finnis 1998, pp. 20–55), to analyses related to economic issues was influenced by considerations concerning the essence of natural law and the foundation of legal norms. This is related to the methodological rigor of scholastic reflections in ethics, according to which the analysis of the permissibility or affirmation of the duty of certain actions should refer to the interpreted essence of human nature, which is rationality. Analyses were based on the experience of inclinations¹², logical reasoning, and subtle semantic distinctions, with a strong emphasis on biblical arguments and writings of authors recognized by the Church as saints (Vijgen 2018; Roszak and Vijgen 2021). Following Saint Thomas Aquinas, it can be said that “*lex naturalis nihil aliud est quam participatio legis aeternae in rationali creatura*”¹³ (STh I-IIae q.91 a.2co). A person in action decides on a particular course of action based on the good interpreted by oneself – norms of conduct must, therefore, be based on what is considered good for him or her and based on human nature.

Thus, natural law essentially denotes the rational inclination of human nature to actions interpreted as good for humanity. This inclination, if confirmed by compliance with nature, which requires detailed inquiries according to the scholastic method mandating consideration and evaluation of all possible resolutions of a given issue, can be recognized as part of natural law, later confirmed by the corresponding positive law (Finnis 1998, pp. 79–90). As Saint Thomas Aquinas summarized through de Vitoria, “the intention of law and legislators is to make the subjects good” (de Vitoria 1991a, p. 219).

Positive law is perhaps the most well-known form of law, as it affects every individual through its universal applicability. However, its value cannot rely on universality and the legislator’s will to enforce it. In a simplified sense, positive law requires legitimization by natural law – it serves as its foundation. The interpretation of natural law has a

dual character – either it concerns nature necessarily and unconditionally (somewhat instinctive, although this mode of regulating actions is especially characteristic of irrational beings), or it takes the form of specifying principles based on the analysis of the way principles of nature manifest themselves (through properties or relations). This group also includes “*ius gentium*”, the law common to all nations, forming the basis for norms expressing the specific nature of humanity. The problem is that since natural law as the actual interpretation of principles governing human actions, in light of human nature, is the foundation of the entire system of positive (enacted) law, it also requires some foundation. For Thomistic scholasticism, this foundation is eternal law, guaranteeing the immutability and rationality of nature, which allows it to be known. Thus, eternal law is the rationality of a super-individual – in this sense, it remains the foundation for the interpreted principles of natural law. However, as eternal law, it must have a reason for existence in God – and in this way, as divine law explaining the endurance of a rational order of things, the scholastics closed the complex system of law, for which positive law is only a specific operationalization of interpreted principles, not only consistent with human nature but expressing this nature in various contexts.¹⁴ Pointing to the foundation of a given provision in positive law in natural law meant its actual legitimation and confirmed enforceability, constituting the essence of scholastic reasoning in matters relevant to the economic behaviors of humans.

Late scholastics in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Spanish theologians and canon lawyers (Brundage 2008; Giaro 2021) who referred to the work of Saint Thomas Aquinas and interpreted it concerning the conditions of their time, not only resulted in the renewal of Thomistic thought but also cognitively opened it to new areas. The need to reconsider the arguments used in various disputes – also related to issues now incorporated into economic sciences – was reinforced by the pressure from anti-scholastic Protestant thinkers but also practical problems resulting from the colonization of the New World, leading to various legal disputes. The renewal of arguments related to natural law proved to be doctrinally fruitful – both in the field of law and economics. Many opinions and theories formulated by this scientific community found their updating – often without invoking their predecessors – sometimes only after more than 250 years since their outline in the works of late scholastic scholars. However, what is most astonishing is the convergence of their views on issues contemporarily categorized as economic problems, with the perspectives of the classical school and the diverse currents of free-market economics – doctrines that emerged in incomparable cultural and social conditions, and even, owing to the onset of the industrial revolution, civilizational conditions (Joseph Schumpeter [1954] 1994, pp. 73–142; Murray Rothbard 1976; Murray Rothbard [1995] 2006, pp. 99–133; Alves and Moreira 2010, pp. 110–20; Alves and Moreira 2013)¹⁵.

Most of the researchers participated in the academic life of the University of Salamanca, even if temporarily, which is why this group is sometimes referred to as the School of Salamanca (Izbicki and Kaufmann 2023; Grice-Hutchinson 1952; Alves and Moreira 2010; Chafuen 2003). Regardless of whether this is accurate for all representatives of late scholastic Spanish scholars, due to the importance of representatives of the School in this group, the mentioned simplification is not a significant error (Grice-Hutchinson [1978] 2015). It should only be noted that the School of Salamanca is known as a Dominican environment – and the actual environment of late scholastic researchers grouped representatives of various orders, and for understanding their views, this does not matter much. In addition, it constituted a scholarly environment with active theologians and lawyer-practitioners who found important motivation in analytical engagement with the problems of everyday life. For them, the economic order was closely linked to the normative order, comprehended both in a systemic (legislative) and moral-individual context, defined in terms of sin and guilt.

7. Paradigmatization of Property – The Virtue of Poverty in Light of Nature

Illustrating the application of the scholastic method, for example, provides a rationale for affirming the right to private property in positive law. Its protection was by no means

obvious to medieval thinkers, who used arguments from Scripture as equally valid as those not invoking religion. This was especially the case due to the mentioned opinion of Jesus Himself (Lk 18:25) and the communal life practices of the early Christians (Acts 2:44–47). Additionally, the evangelical poverty as a model of Christian life was renewed by the establishment of mendicant orders in the 13th century, especially the Franciscans and Dominicans. Interestingly, this aspect ultimately introduced new elements into the discussion on the justification of private property, thanks to the Avignon Pope John XXII (1244–1344). While combating the Spirituals who adhered to the idea of radical poverty, he engaged in a discussion on whether Christ and the Apostles owned anything or everything collectively. In the document *Cum inter nonnullos* from 1323, the Pope declared it heretical to believe that Christ or the Apostles owned nothing. He later reaffirmed and extensively justified this position in the bull *Quia vir reprobis* from 1329. This justification allowed for the explicit defense of private property in the writings of the Jesuit Leonhardus Lessius (1554–1623), especially in his work *De iustitia et iure caeterisque virtutibus cardinalibus libri IV*, probably from 1605. Lessius became known primarily for resolving disputes concerning sales agreements and accompanying security systems, including guarantees, pledges, and mortgages (Van Houdt 2021). However, he also argued that private property, according to the Scriptures, is not a sin (Chafuen 2003, p. 37), opening the door to detailed discussions. Dominican Domingo de Soto (1495–1560), addressing this thread, emphasized that property as such is not part of nature. In the case of humans, however, it is tainted by sin – people can be greedy but are also prone to wasting their time by avoiding work. This idea hinders the fulfillment of the divine call to “subdue the earth”. And because humans naturally strive more for what belongs to them, private property becomes a guarantee of both the effectiveness of the vocation and a means of doing good (one can only share what one possesses).

Denial of private property, according to de Soto, would therefore prevent acts of mercy, hindering the development of improvements in willpower to which humans are called. Thus, de Soto argued that the denial of private property deserves to be labeled as heresy. While not directly natural law in nature – hence not applicable to animals – the right to private property is interpreted from human nature as a reasonable guarantee for the fulfillment of human inclinations and vocation, linking it to “*ius gentium*”: “For the law of nations includes all that men have logically deduced from natural principles. (...) Considering also the premise that in a corrupted [i.e., fallen] state of nature, if men lived in common they would not live in peace, nor would the fields be fruitfully cultivated, men have deduced that it is more convenient to divide property” (de Soto, quoted in Alves and Moreira 2010, p. 67). It thus has a solid foundation for its affirmation in positive law.

Arguments presented by de Soto, of course, also appeared in the writings of other scholastics, although with a different emphasis. In addition to highlighting the virtues of private property, it was contrasted with public property, indicating that no one truly cares about common property, leading to wastefulness (Alves and Moreira 2010, p. 68–69). Private property was supposed to be helpful in personal development – again linking it to natural law, based on reasoning. It was meant to motivate work, allow better use of resources, protect against daily hardships, and ultimately contribute to maintaining social justice and peace.

Although private property did not have an absolute character, scholastics, emphasizing its source in natural law, highlighted the rights of the owner, even if exercising these rights contradicted community expectations. A relevant argument is presented by the late Franciscan Enrique de Villalobos in 1637, who notes in his work *Suma de la Theologia Moral y Canonica*: “Domain has to do with the substance of the thing; and so, the one who owns it can sell it, transfer it and if he wants, destroy it” (quoted in: Chafuen 2003, p. 41). The owner can transfer the right to possess to others – especially those in need – although he cannot be forced to do so, even in the name of noble goals. As de Soto justifies: “Princely authorities and the republic cannot make positive laws with regard to alms that are more burdensome for the citizens than the laws of nature and the gospel”. And because

“the precept to give alms by virtue of divine and natural law is not binding under pain of mortal sin”, the authorities “cannot force his citizens to give alms by punishing them” (de Soto 2022, art.4). Thus, the obligation to help the poor is a voluntary work of mercy. An exception is the higher necessity associated with protecting rights directly threatened by nature: life or freedom, when the use of a particular good is justified not only without the owner’s knowledge but also against his will.¹⁶ Justification for such a possibility was based on distinguishing rights arising from owning a particular thing from the independent right to use it. Martín de Azpilcueta (1492–1586), also known as Doctor Navarrus, summarized this issue in his work *Manual de Confessores y Penitentes* from 1556: “No one is obliged to donate anything to him who is in extreme need: because it suffices that he lends him what is necessary to liberate him from it, and the person in need has no right to take more of the neighbor’s estate than its owner (...)” (quoted in: Chafuen 2003, p. 44). However, this does not mean that one can feel exempt from responsibility for the poor – quite the opposite: if a poor person commits injustice in defending his right to life, not only will he be justified, but the actual guilt before God will be borne by the owner of the property who failed to help the needy, exposing them to criminal actions. Regardless of the assessment of the validity of this argumentation from today’s standards of evidence and analysis, it is difficult to imagine stronger arguments confirming the right to private property while simultaneously burdening the owner with responsibility for their neighbor.

This attitude had an educational value in this dimension as well, as it linked the realization of good for the needy with the state of possession. Thus, wealth growth could become an instrument for caring for the poor – wealth not only did not have to be associated with greed, but it should be an instrument of mercy: “As a matter of fact, the word alms, (...) means the same as misericordia, that is mercy. Corporal works of mercy have the misery and poverty of the poor as their material object” (de Soto 2022, art.10).

According to this perspective, the Dominican Cardinal Cajetan Thomas de Vio (1469–1534) even protested against the order established by the belief in the permanence of social position based on birth, accepting the possibility of advancement in the hierarchy precisely through wealth, for which hard, profitable work was the foundation. In practice, this meant especially enrichment through trade, which Cajetan undoubtedly promoted (Murray Rothbard [1995] 2006, pp. 99–101).

8. Subjective Rights (Entitlements) in Scholastic Interpretation

In the context of private property, it is worth mentioning a more general issue – the stance of late scholastic concepts on individual rights (subjective rights) in confrontation with the common good. This is a challenging issue because the principles of natural law apply as an inclination of man as such to the realization of the good arising from the needs of human nature. Therefore, the concept of the common good was not a theoretical concept for scholars oriented towards Thomism – it expressed the meaning of nature itself but also conveyed a certain harmonious interaction, guaranteeing social order and building bonds within the community. These were treated – due to the social nature of humans – as objective and natural wholes, certainly not reducible to the sum of individuals (Alves and Moreira 2010, pp. 39–45). Therefore, the category of the common good exerted pressure to limit competing rights concerning this category. However, Spanish scholastics drew attention to individual freedom – and it was individual freedom, along with the equality of individuals and their independence, that served as the basis for subjective rights. This conclusion can be illustrated by opinions expressed in the unprecedented ideological clash in Valladolid in the years 1550–51 when the conquistador practices of the New World were evaluated in terms of their legality. Essentially, the debate, where alternative views were mainly presented by Bartolomé de Las Casas (1484–1566) and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda (1490–1573), collided universalistic concepts of subjective rights from the late scholastic school of Salamanca with the representative of the traditional school of thought, approving the Aristotelian category of “slavery by nature” regarding the Indians (Urbano 2020; de Las Casas et al. 2014).

According to the summary by Dominik de Soto, de Las Casas extensively argued against the opinion of the illegality of the power of the unbelievers and the resulting permissibility not only of armed resistance against them but also of applying all penalties, including death. Traditionally, following the scholastic method, the argumentation focused on the interpretation of the Scriptures and the opinions of Church authorities, but it also pondered the subjectivity with which de Las Casas treated the Indians, confirming the recognition of their rights. This is most strongly echoed in labeling the thesis that “civil ownership was grounded in faith or grace” as heresy (de Las Casas et al. 2014, p. 138), which would justify depriving the Indians of their property and freedom. De Las Casas thus acknowledges that the right to freedom and property is inherent – hence, he considers it proven that “all conquests and wars carried out against the Indians from the time of the discovery of the Indies to the present day have always been and are in the highest degree unjust, tyrannical, hellish”, and those responsible for injustice must rectify all wrongs, especially by returning the seized property. “And there is no remedy for them, if they do not return it and pay for it, and do not spend their entire days weeping over their miserable lives, so great and so unheard-of are their sins” (de Las Casas et al. 2014, p. 139).¹⁷

The essence of de Las Casas’s statement is consistent with the earlier opinion of the founder of the school in Salamanca, the Dominican Francisco de Vitoria (1483–1546), who also became known as a defender of individual rights – of course, not in the sense imposed by contemporary libertarianism: neither in terms of motivation nor in relation to final determinations. Regarding the Indians, he questioned the basis of colonization, pointing out the illegality not only of invoking the “law of the discoverer” (justifying the takeover of what was discovered), which did not apply to the inhabited land previously governed by its own laws, but also of dividing the New World among colonizers through the bull *Inter caetera* of Pope Alexander VI (“The pope is not the civil or temporal master of the whole world, in the proper meaning of ‘dominion’ and ‘civil power’”; de Vitoria 1991b, p. 260) – which, according to de Vitoria, due to the pope’s only spiritual authority over Christians, could not justify the acquisition of very earthly property (Sison and Redín 2021). In this way, the Spanish scholastic pointed to the Indians’ natural right to self-determination – the order they had established demonstrated the rationality of their intentions, and this, as deriving from God, could only be affirmed by other people. In response to questions about the property rights of the Indians, Vitoria is even more decisive than de Las Casas, granting the Indians individual rights: “The conclusion of all this is that the barbarians are not impeded from being true masters, publicly and privately, either by mortal sin in general or by the particular sin of unbelief” (de Vitoria 1991b, p. 246). To justly exercise the right to property on an individual level, it is sufficient to be created “in the image of God,” which means that even children incapable of independently using reason cannot be deprived of this right – a young age does not distort the formation as an image of God (de Vitoria 1991b, p. 249). This scholastic aesthetics of argumentation, from the perspective of contemporary standards, may be unacceptable to many researchers – however, it should be interpreted considering the realities in which de Vitoria lived. His formulated theses were revolutionary for his contemporaries, initiating the theory of individual rights and raising the issue of the inalienability of personal freedoms and property rights so uncompromisingly for the first time, granted to humans as humans, not by the dictates of human lawmakers. This is the tradition on which the free-market economy could emerge at the end of the 18th century.¹⁸

De Vitoria referred to it many times, even in seemingly prosaic issues, such as the prohibition of hunting wild animals for the common people requested by landowners. The position of the respected jurist was unequivocal: he rejected prohibitions, as well as practical arguments confirming them. The justification for such a position is individual freedom, which, as a principle of natural law, demands confirmation by positive law. The right to freedom is a general principle, and the fact that individuals are free and, therefore, have the right to participate in hunting, is only a consequence of this general principle. The same applies to the right to move and reside in a chosen place or freedom of trade – as de Vitoria proves, they are present in the legal systems of all nations, regardless of

their faith, and therefore are part of “*ius gentium*” and as such are either natural law directly or derived from it (de Vitoria 1991b, p. 278). In this way, regulations on international trade were subordinated to human rights, and – as rightly noted by Martin Ortega (1996, p. 100) – Vitoria “propounded a universalist conception of international relations while other thinkers focused their concerns on the state”.

9. From Freedom of Trade to Market Freedom

International trade freedom assumed the existence of a market that facilitated exchange, initiating the necessity to address the issue of value and price. It is irrelevant that due to the specific understanding of social obligations and constraints on the expression of individuals, the “market” of the time was subordinated to the needs focused on survival, with no reference to the automatism of price relations-based offer size and interest (Benton 2020; Chaplygina and Lapidus 2016). Yet, it should be mentioned that various things were emphasized in a systemic sense (in reference to a market so limited in its objectives). Roman law, in this context, emphasized the importance of the transactional agreement between parties, where the price was to reflect the “universality” of the conviction of justice (Grice-Hutchinson [1978] 2015, p. 86), somewhat enigmatically pointing to the role of the market, as a kind of “organizer” of transactions. In connection with this perspective, Thomistic reflection initially pointed to labor inputs and incurred costs as factors influencing the price, but over time, the role of the will of individuals in the price-setting process began to be emphasized more strongly (Langholm 1992; Langholm 2018; Wood 2002). Over time, this will took on more and more characteristics of market forces as understood by the classical school. Market freedom in this regard was especially emphasized by Cajetan de Vio (1469–1534), noting even that the prices of goods depend on the demand presented and the market supply. This can be considered a preliminary description of the market mechanism that would become the theoretical core of classical economics. In addition to this issue, it should be emphasized that we owe to the Dominican representation of late scholastic scholars the initiation of a revision of the long-standing position on the fundamentals of the value of money, although it did not extend to explicit criticism of the prohibition of interest on loans. The environmental conditions changed, necessitating a reconsideration of the practice revealing the natural order of things. However, the conviction of the immorality of profits from loans was too entrenched, even if maintaining the ban was not feasible. The demand for investment loans, therefore, forced circumvention (Galbraith [1987] 2017a, pp. 31–45) or transferred profits to entities not obligated to observe the ban, to the obvious detriment of Christians upholding Aristotle’s archaic notion of the unproductiveness of monetary income. The confrontation of this thesis with the observed change in the value of money due to the influx of metals from the colonies could not go unnoticed by natural law theorists. Their proposed explanation for the observation was a new theory of value, also influencing the theory of prices. It is based on subjective categories, in the form of the buyer’s individual assessment – a proposal formulated nearly three hundred years before the marginalist revolution(!). Murray Rothbard, cited by Marjore Grice-Hutchinson, mentions in this context the disciple of Azpilcueta, Diego de Covarrubias y Leyva (1512–1577), who in *Variarum Resolutionum*, a work from 1554, linked the value of goods to their usefulness for the buyer and availability (scarcity): “The value of an article does not depend on its essential nature but on the estimation of men, even if that estimation is foolish. Thus, in the Indies wheat is dearer than in Spain because men esteem it more highly, though the nature of the wheat is the same in both places” (Murray Rothbard [1995] 2006, p. 110; Grice-Hutchinson [1978] 2015, p. 106). The theory of personal valuation explains all recorded facts, and attempts to generalize it to monetary issues additionally resulting in the formulation of a quantitative theory of money, dependent on the quantity available in the market (Alves and Moreira 2010, p. 79; Grice-Hutchinson 1952, pp. 24–35). This has practical consequences. It turns out that the value of the same metallic coins may differ depending on the country – this is due to the quantity of metal – and merchants

conducting business on a larger scale than national trade must take these differences into account in their agreements.

These findings shed a completely different light on another issue – the problem of usury. Capital turns out to have a value that demands assessment before its use. Furthermore, this value ultimately takes shape in the market and therefore does not have an objective character in the previous, substantial sense. This was a truly revolutionary thesis, and the scholastics who advocated it – especially Martín de Azpilcueta in its mature form – showed extraordinary courage in effectively challenging established truths, anticipating doctrines that would strengthen the theory of free-market economics by several centuries (Sobrino 2022). Consequently, with the issue of usury, maintaining that money has no value-creating potential was overly archaic. However, addressing this issue proved to be too difficult for late scholastic researchers due to doctrinal limitations – therefore, new theories only resulted in elaborate casuistry justifying the practice of interest in essentially loan agreements, despite facts, but treated legally as agreements of another type. Proposed solutions – historically significant, for example, for the contribution to the theory of interest (Joseph Schumpeter [1954] 1994, pp. 104–7) – did not lead to a fundamental change in the attitude towards the authority of St. Thomas Aquinas and established interpretations linking loan interest to harm to the needy. As de Soto (2022, art.10) emphasizes, “The greedy rich act cruelly toward the poor in two ways: first, it is their greed and tenacity which cause them to commit sins, and second, they, in turn, take occasion from these offenses to feed their greed, relentless as they are”. This position was also maintained in the works of Jesuit scholastics defending economic realism and summarizing this trend of analysis: Luis de Molina (1535–1600), the previously mentioned Leonhardus Lessius, and Juan de Lugo (1583–1660). Ultimately, the works of late scholastic thinkers, focused on elaborate casuistry based on extremely subtle semantic analyses, significantly contributed to strengthening the arguments for changing the position on loan interest, but this happened without acknowledgment of their work. Raymond de Roover’s opinion is correct, that the unresolved issue of loan interest throughout the existence of the scholastic school “involved the Schoolmen and their sixteenth-century and seventeenth-century successors in insuperable difficulties that contributed greatly to bringing their whole doctrine into disrepute” (de Roover 1968, pp. 434–35). Paradoxically, the likely obstacle could be seen as the limitations of the scholastic method, which turned out to be so inspiring in all other matters. The authority of tradition and the holy writings of the Church presented such a solid stance on usury that every attempt to examine this issue encountered incontrovertible arguments against taxing loans for the scholastics. Their dilemmas are accurately summed up by Christopher Franks (2009, p. 76): “the usury prohibition and the defense of deference”. In this way, the normativity of concern for others obscured the late scholastic thinkers from the benevolent effects of the widespread use of loans.

10. Conclusions – The Hope of Generosity

Concepts, especially in the social sciences – including economics – acquire content and meaning, develop to create their own history (Koselleck 2006). This is why it is so important to take them up, imbue them with new content resulting from the pressures of a changing environment, and transmit them through new works. The “cultural code” thus formed not only deepens the understanding of social reality, but has practical consequences even in the consumption behavior of entire communities, which perpetuates itself over time (Rapaille 2007). In this sense, the contribution of late Scholastic scholars to the development of the free-enterprise tradition in economic thought is indisputable – as Langholm rightly points out, using price theory as an example (Langholm 1998, p. 85): “It was only with the dissolution of the medieval paradigm, initiated by some of the late scholastics, that a freer play of market forces was permitted to influence the just price”. This has no clear implication for the recognition of the market mechanism, but precisely the inspiration – when, by extending the medieval understanding of the just price to include the condition of freedom of the parties to transact, the possibility of conceptualization towards a subjectivist

theory of value opened up. The idea, of course, remained unknown to the scholastics as a general theory – the question of utility was not even formulated by them as a problem. But the linking of a just price, with the will of the parties, in the context of transactions in the market, opened up the possibility of further clarification of this issue also in the spirit of later marginalism, which from the point of view of the doctrinal development of economics should be considered important.

Spanish scholastics directly or indirectly associated with the school in Salamanca are remembered in legal theory as representatives of the Spanish school of natural law. However, the scope of the issues they dealt with and their impressive contribution pertained to matters that transcended contemporary legal science frameworks. In the field of economics, we owe the restoration of their thoughts to Joseph Schumpeter ([1954] 1994), and the popularization of the recalled source of free-market economics to one of the most distinguished representatives of the Austrian school, Murray Rothbard (1976, [1995] 2006). He was fortunate to build on the meticulous research of Marjorie Grice-Hutchinson and Raymond de Roover, documenting the factual role of late scholastic researchers in promoting libertarian interpretations of the human phenomenon, explaining from the history of ideas the establishment of free-market economics.

The assessment of the actual influence of the analyses of the time on the constitution of free-market economics is not evident to everyone. This is an important caveat because, in the context of the scholastic inspiration of free-market economics, there may occur certain two-way overinterpretations. On the one hand, for the sake of perpetuating doctrines presented in their mature form as part of the development of economics, once it reached the status of an independent science, the discourse conducted may misuse historical anticipations in favor of external support for a given doctrine. Such accusations are sometimes made against representatives of the Austrian heterodoxy of free-market economics, including in particular Murray Rothbard, who is accused of selective treatment of sources. For some, this is a deliberate act (Matthews and Ortmann 2002), although there are also opinions suggesting that restrictions on reporting historical connotations are perhaps debatable but at the same time acceptable for the sake of presenting one's own view more clearly (Trescott 1998; Pack 1998), especially if they are openly announced by the author¹⁹ On the other hand, it is impossible to overestimate the incomparability of "images of the social world" that characterize temporally distant eras. The rejection of continuity in the development of concepts is discouraged, because of the arbitrariness, based on the imposed thesis of inadequacy between historical states of reality. Paying attention to environmental differences does not exclude the sense of searching for historical references. If, as Margaret Schabas points out, pre-classical conceptions of wealth 'were a far cry from more recent conceptions of wealth in terms of maximizing utility' (Schabas 2005, p. 2), then the later 'denaturalization of the economic order' was made possible precisely because of the earlier conceptualization. The maturity of economic thought was due to the discussion and questioning of earlier understandings (Jarrett 1926; Gordon 1975; Wood 2002). Therefore, the theses proclaimed in the past provide inspiration for the doctrinal development of economics, which, of course, does not exclude the direct dissipation of these inspirations.

As example may serve the problem of usury. While the efforts of the scholastic canonists focused on legitimizing the Church's doctrinal position, the ongoing discussion professionalized the contract theory and drew attention to the complication of economic relations. Precisely one of its outcomes was the spread of reasoning, which Wim Decok reduces to a 'paradigm of contextualization' of economic reflection, summarized by the following three components: '(1) market relations are personal and morally ruled by the virtues of charity and justice; (2) intention matters, and one cannot account for a deed by appealing to impersonal market forces; and (3) merchants have a sense of duty toward other merchants and the community as a whole' (Decock 2009, pp. 57–58). It is important to emphasize that trait two is not an assessment of the market pricing mechanism; instead, all the components define the basis of modern business ethics, which has not

abandoned normative seriousness to this day. It presents the axiological basis of economics, pointing out that man is a rational subject capable of responsibility for the common good.²⁰ This is the beginning of corporate social responsibility, including in its modern sense, complemented by an economic challenge making good on the guarantee for ‘social justice’ (Melé 1999, 2013).

In the case of the School of Salamanca, its influence on the strengthening and perpetuation of individual rights and its attention to economic practice as the normative basis for the area is indisputable. However, the Scholastics, in general, did not have a problem identifying duties towards the community. The protection of individual property was not synonymous with the acceptance of social atomism, let alone egoism – as rightly noted by Alves and Moreira: “an important characteristic of the Salamanca School is the emphasis placed on universality” (2013, p. 221).²¹ Not insignificant here is the reference to the scholastic interpretation of reality, which from today’s perspective we could call scholastic epistemology. It was not necessary to break away from predecessors to use methods of analysis resulting in the system of St. Thomas Aquinas to derive libertarian consequences that laid the modern foundations of economics. The Renaissance trap, closing the medieval period in “darkness”, was a clever marketing ploy, cutting off new “humanists” from scholastic competition – unfortunately, with a disregard for the truth about their achievements. The School of Salamanca and representatives of other late scholastic environments pursued predecessors, creatively continuing their work – invoking the words from The Gospel of Matthew, they did not come to discredit the scholastic method but to discover new content through it, to tackle new topics. Late scholastic researchers prevented the stigmatization of resourcefulness, measurable material success, and triumph. At the same time, they pointed out that protecting the poor and those struggling with adversity is our duty. They did not use arguments related to solidarity or the social responsibility of business – but they effectively justified them, not interrupting the continuation of the rooted historical reflection on the human condition.²²

While scholastic reasoning alone may not necessarily lead to the legal formalization of economic behavior, the considerable authority of theologians significantly influences the Christian tradition of economics. An illustrative example is evident in penance manuals, which, since the late 13th century, have sought to popularize theological teachings through confessions, aiming to convey the rules of Christian economic conduct to a broader audience (Langholm 2003). Of course, the lofty ideals presented by the Spanish Scholastics did not automatically translate into changes in everyday life practices. They are sometimes accused of being too minimalist in certain areas, casting a shadow over the achievements of the entire school. For instance, it is argued that the convoluted justification of colonialism by the influential Francisco de Vitoria aimed to perpetuate the injustice of exploitation, finding confirmation in international law (Bohrer 2017). A continuation of such views includes the charge of insufficient criticism of slavery, as manifested by the absence of an abolitionist stance. However, the perceived commitment to improve the condition of slaves justifies such an expectation (both the charge and the appreciation of the role of the Scholastics in changing the stance towards slaves are presented by Iborra Mallent and Valdés Guerrero 2020). Yet, it appears that such assessments are burdened by an ahistorical stance. Measured against the prevailing views of the time, the speeches of the Spanish Scholastics were truly revolutionary. While it might be possible to trace an intellectual path leading to the justification of abolitionism, for the assessment of the role the School of Salamanca had, it is worth mentioning that they initiated a discussion on the inherent rights of the individuals. Colonization practices were deemed as contrary to natural law, setting the stage for discussions on the ‘law of nations’ and the conceptualization of individual subjectivity and its consequences. This is emphasized, for example, by David Lantigua, who mentions the role of the discussions and arguments presented by the Scholastics in shaping the humanistic aspects of the Treaty of Westphalia of 1648, that effectively initiated international law (Lantigua 2020, pp. 10–11).

In order to examine the process of concept maturation initiated by the courage of the Spanish scholastics – processes that involve (from a semantic perspective) network references to specific ideas, their absorption and doctrinal transformation – it is necessary to delve into source-in-depth studies. It is believed that the key figures in the economic reception of late scholastic thought were lawyers who referred to the concept of natural law. It is worth noting that the Dutch lawyer Hugo Grotius (who was mentored by the previously mentioned distinguished scholastic Leonhardus Lessius) and the German lawyer Samuel von Pufendorf (well acquainted with the work of Luis de Molina) continued and creatively developed Grotius's analyses. Both lawyers used scholastic ideas to systematize them. In the cultural context of the Enlightenment, it is noteworthy for the propagation of scholastic ideas that these intermediaries were Protestants. From reflection on the analyzes of the scholastics, the concept of natural law emerged, refined by them and still valid today.²³ As J. Kelly rightly notes: "But it is not until the sixteenth century – and again, with the Spanish 'late scholastics' of their country's 'golden age' – that something like a doctrine on the subject appears, which shortly afterwards, in the early seventeenth century, would be built by Grotius into a system" (Kelly 1992, p. 199–200).

It can be said that without the professionalization of the legal argumentation of the scholastics and the continuation of their considerations within the framework of Grotius' school of natural law, there would historically be no basis for "social justice", not only in the dimension of international law. In his works referring to the thought of the scholastics, Adam Smith particularly refers to their subtle findings regarding justice: "commutative justice" or "distributive justice" (Smith [1759] 2004, p. 318). Through his mentor, Francis Hutcheson, who understood the essence of natural law as interpreted by Grotius and Pufendorf, Smith had no doubt that: "the end of justice is to secure against harm" and "the origin of natural rights is quite obvious" (Smith [1762] 1978, pp. 399–400). This shaped his view of social reality and influenced the final shape of his doctrine (Haakonssen 1996, pp. 129–53). Although we cannot determine precisely the extent of the influence of the thought of the Spanish scholastics on the doctrinal evolution of classical economics, there are strong grounds for contemplating it. Moreover, some authors explicitly refer to them, a notable example being Joseph Schumpeter.

What is impressive when exploring their achievements is their remarkable consistency and cognitive humility. A detailed analysis of all possible solutions to contentious issues, without avoiding unwanted opinions from the perspective of the proposed solution, but always in confrontation with what is troublesome for it – amazes, and evokes respect, and hope... Also not insignificant is the inspiring – especially for those discovering the Word of God in the Bible – reading of the biblical message in the light of new challenges, and current problems. This also applies to the esteem with which late scholastics treat the statements of predecessors when attempting to initiate solutions – their interpretation in relation to new circumstances turns out to be extremely creative, without exposing recipients to the trauma of uprooting from the tradition in which they learned to understand the world. How extraordinary this is, let the words of the prayer for generosity testify, which, in juxtaposition with the words of Psalm 86 initiating the just-concluded analyses, not only do not shock but allow for a deeper understanding, precisely thanks to the Spanish scholastics. These are the words of a prayer attributed to St. Ignatius of Loyola – a claim that is questioned today (Mahoney 2012). Even if it is a later prayer, written by an anonymous Spanish author, it does not change its timeless beauty:

"Lord, teach me to be generous,
to serve you as you deserve,
to give and not to count the cost,
to fight and not to heed the wounds,
to toil and not to seek for rest,
to labour and not to look for any reward,
save that of knowing that I do your holy will."

11. Materials and Methods

Critical and comparative analysis of source texts and extensive literature studies.

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Notes

- ¹ This article will not address the interaction between entrepreneurial identity and relational identity with God. An extensive analysis of this issue is presented in Smith et al. (2023). See also Bataille and Vough (2022).
- ² As Keynes announced: “Thus, apart from the necessity of central controls to bring about an adjustment between the propensity to consume and the inducement to invest, there is no more reason to socialize economic life than there was before” (Keynes [1936] 2012, p. 379).
- ³ This convention is best illustrated by the definition in the “Dictionary of Free-Market Economics”, where it is indicated that free market economics is understood as “the theories of free-market-oriented economists and schools of thought”. Free market there means “a market in which peaceful and honest enterprise and conduct are unrestricted and not arbitrarily (arbitrary) taxed (tax), contracts are enforced, and property rights specified and protected” (Foldvary 1998, p. 145).
- ⁴ If not indicated otherwise, references to the Holy Scripture are based on the translation: (NAB 2012).
- ⁵ In a broader context, this also applies to teachings regarding the educational initiatives of the Church, which maintain content consistency with social doctrine. In relation to the intriguing report on economics, references are provided by (Burrus et al. 2023).
- ⁶ In the opinion of a great number, even excessively radical, due to its proximity to Marxism (Sigmund 1992; Turner 2007). One of the reports prepared for President Ronald Reagan in 1980 stated that through liberation theology: ‘the Marxist-Leninist powers have used the church as a political weapon against private property and the capitalist system of production; they have infiltrated the religious community with ideas which are less Christian and much more communist’ (cited in: Gutiérrez and Müller 2015, p. 23).
- ⁷ One of the initiators of liberation theology, Gustavo Gutiérrez, defines the essence of this movement as: ‘...an attempt at reflection, based on the Gospel and the experiences of men and women committed to the process of liberation in the oppressed and exploited land of Latin America. It is a theological reflection born of the experience of shared efforts to abolish the current unjust situation to build a different society, freer and more human’ (Gutierrez 1988, p. xiii).
- ⁸ The sense of the Oral Torah is briefly summarized by Strack and Stemberger, stating that: “The idea of ‘oral Torah’ is a basic concept of rabbinic Judaism: God’s revelation at Sinai includes not only the ‘written Torah’ recorded in the Bible but also an equivalent complex of traditions” (Strack and Stemberger 1992, p. 31).
- ⁹ This justifies the interpretation of the biblical command: “And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” (Deut 6, 5) in such a way that “with all your might” means “with all your wealth” (Furstenberg et al. 2023, p. 167).
- ¹⁰ “To take usury for money lent is unjust in itself, because this is to sell what does not exist, and this evidently leads to inequality which is contrary to justice. (...) Accordingly, if a man wanted to sell wine separately from the use of the wine, he would be selling the same thing twice, or he would be selling what does not exist, wherefore he would evidently commit a sin of injustice. (...) Now money, according to the Philosopher (Ethic. v, 5; Polit. i, 3), was invented chiefly for the purpose of exchange: and consequently the proper and principal use of money is its consumption or alienation whereby it is sunk in exchange. Hence it is by its very nature unlawful to take payment for the use of money lent, which payment is known as usury (...)”. Online: http://www.logicmuseum.com/wiki/Authors/Thomas_Aquinas/Summa_Theologiae/Part_IIb/Q78#q78a1co (accessed on 15 November 2023). (Aquinas [1268–1273; 1485] 2016–).
- ¹¹ The attitude of the Reformation toward usury is quite complex. Its condemnation was upheld by Martin Luther (Luther 2014), who programmatically did not concern himself with economic issues. On the other hand, the more pragmatic John Calvin, directing his ideas towards the townspeople, had to accept the possibility of charging interest, which conditioned the development

of trade and opened up investment opportunities (Taeusch 1942, pp. 299–301). He rejected usury in the case of loans to the poor but, recognizing the investment potential of money, challenged the assumption that its use does not create new value (on Protestant interpretations of usury – Geisst 2013, pp. 97–136; Nelson 1969, pp. 29–108).

- 12 John Finnis, emphasizing that inference from facts to norms is illicit, rightly observes that in the system of St. Thomas Aquinas: “[the first principles of natural law] are not inferred from speculative principles. They are not inferred from facts. (...) They are not inferred or derived from anything. They are underived (though not innate). (...) Rather, by a simple act of non-inferential understanding, one grasps that the object of the inclination which one experiences is an instance of a general form of good, for oneself (and others like one)” (Finnis 2011, pp. 33–34).
- 13 The “(...) natural law is nothing else than the rational creature’s participation of the eternal law”, online: http://www.logicmuseum.com/wiki/Authors/Thomas_Aquinas/Summa_Theologiae/Part_Ila/Q91#q91a2co (accessed on 15 November 2023). (Aquinas [1268–1273; 1485] 2016–).
- 14 John Berry points out that interpreted in terms of the realization of natural law, religion means rendering worship to God within the boundaries set by cult; however, “the service rendered is primarily directed towards God, but ultimately extends to one’s neighbour through acts of love” (Berry 2023, p. 8).
- 15 Annabel Brett, exploring the impact of late scholastic thought, emphasizes the harmonization of ‘the demands of the organic natural commonwealth with those of individual liberty’ (Brett 1997, p. 8). This significance is difficult to overemphasize in any context that invokes the issue of the relationship between the individual and the community. According to researchers from Goethe University and the Max Planck Institute for European Legal History and Legal Theory, currently conducting a project on Spanish Scholastics, its influence has been and remains immensely substantial across dimensions such as law, economics, social issues and politics. The works of the theologians and canonists who shaped this intellectual environment are considered a unique ‘Global Knowledge Production’ (Duve et al. 2021). The component related to economic issues was so cohesive that despite the School’s title encompassing legal and theological doctrine, it is legitimate to speak of ‘scholastic economic thought’ (Spiegel 2018).
- 16 This is consistent with the opinion of St. Thomas (STh II-IIae q.66 a.7co): “Nevertheless, if the need be so manifest and urgent, that it is evident that the present need must be remedied by whatever means be at hand (for instance when a person is in some imminent danger, and there is no other possible remedy), then it is lawful for a man to succor his own need by means of another’s property, by taking it either openly or secretly: nor is this properly speaking theft or robbery. Online: http://www.logicmuseum.com/wiki/Authors/Thomas_Aquinas/Summa_Theologiae/Part_Ilb/Q66#q66a7co (accessed on 15 November 2023). (Aquinas [1268–1273; 1485] 2016–).
- 17 Similar opinions to those of de Las Casas are presented in an account prepared for the heir to the Spanish throne, the future King Philip II, describing the actions of the conquistadors towards the indigenous population in the conquered lands. In it, he recounts numerous examples of the cruelties committed by the colonizers, concluding: “Such a notion is as absurd as it is stupid and should be treated with the disrespect, scorn and contempt it so amply deserves” (de Las Casas and Griffin 1992, p. 33).
- 18 It should be noted that not all obtained assertions of successive representatives of the School of Salamanca, based on the same analytical method, were shared even within their own environment – as an example of controversy, one can cite the justification of slavery by the Jesuit Luis de Molina (1535–1600). While de Vitoria inferred from “ius gentium” about inherent rights to freedom, property, or self-determination in relation to every human, including the indigenous tribes of the New World, de Molina, in reference to empiricism (e.g., social differences) and “ius gentium”, which he primarily associated with positive law, justified slavery (Alonso-Lasheras 2011, pp. 60–62).
- 19 Rothbard does just that, announcing in the title of his main work that he presents his analyzes from an “Austrian perspective”. This is not a sufficient objection for critics. The most serious allegations include the deliberate abandonment of the perspective of an objective analyst (Lowry 1996), including the position of an ideologist (Samuels 1998, p. 71). Such accusations have only journalistic value, which probably proves the enthusiasm of economists in defending their arguments. However, similar rhetorical measures do nothing to solve the problem – their vector can justifiably be reversed and the authors of such opinions can be accused of ideologizing the message.
- 20 The connections between ethics and economics should be viewed as an exceedingly comprehensive issue, the characteristics of which extend beyond the confines of this article. However, it is worth noting that in the pre-scientific era, economics was regarded as a detailed branch of ethics. Even in the case of Adam Smith, ethical considerations (Smith [1759] 2004) preceded his seminal work (Smith [1776] 2008). Smith’s reflections center on rationality and focus on the method of studying human economic activity (utility and preferences), without presupposing the emancipation of economics from ethics. Unfortunately, this separation did not prevent the narrowing of the axiological dimension of economics to individual selfishness, thereby soon limiting the epistemic potential of the homo economicus model (Horodecka 2022). This exposed various cognitive deficits, ultimately leading to a renewed convergence of economics and ethics (Sison et al. 2017; Rona and Zsolnai 2017; Rendtorff 2020) and the emergence of a new research area. Contemporary business ethics has already evolved into an independent discipline – diverse (Luetge 2013; Duska et al. 2022), yet simultaneously experiencing vigorous development (Palmer 2015; Conrad 2022; Dubbink and van der Deijl 2023). Business ethics, as a field of scholarly inquiry, is maturing in response to challenges prompted by changes in the business environment. The latest proposal related to the experienced dehumanization of the human environment involves an openness to spirituality (Zsolnai 2015a), understood as: “people’s multiform search for a deep meaning of life interconnecting them to all living beings and to ‘God’ or ‘Ultimate Reality’” (Bouckaert and Zsolnai 2011, p. 7). Although presented as an expansion

of business ethics with a dimension of spirituality (Zsolnai et al. 2009; Zsolnai 2011; Zsolnai 2015b), it is, in fact, a proposal for a new paradigm of business economics, co-creating the individual in connection with deepening relationships with other people and God, if such a relationship is accessible to the individual. Spirituality, in this concept, is responsible for strengthening individual identity – based on deepening relationships. It is open to the transcendent dimension, although its inaccessibility is not an obstacle to the development of the nontranscendent dimension of spirituality, enriching the person axiologically and communally.

- 21 This approach paves the way for an attitude summarized by a well-known European definition: “Corporate social responsibility refers to businesses taking responsibility for their behaviour and its impact on society. This can include employment conditions and labour standards, freedom of association, well-being at work, nondiscrimination and gender balance, stakeholder engagement, human rights, preventing environmental harm, including reducing emissions and pollution, and eliminating bribery and corruption” (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/glossary/corporate-social-responsibility-csr.html>, accessed on 30 October 2023). It is precisely this attitude, exemplified by the evident efforts of employers to ensure above-standard safety standards, show concern for employees’ mental well-being, and embrace flexible forms of work, that has helped the world navigate through the COVID-19 pandemic from today’s perspective. (Kacprzak et al. 2021).
- 22 Regarding the contemporary understanding of these issues and current problems: (Marek and Jabłoński 2021; Alves and Booth 2022).
- 23 It is challenging to separate one from the other, despite claims in the literature suggesting that their contributions were, in fact, a rejection of the ideas they acknowledged as starting points for their analyses. Regarding Hugo Grotius, for instance, Lapidus ventures to assert that Grotius, in referring to earlier works by scholastic jurists, “has taken pains to find precursors, as if to diminish the originality of his argument” (Lapidus 2023).

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Review

The Common Good According to Great Men of Prayer and Economists: Comparisons, Connections, and Inspirations for Economics

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Abstract: This paper aims to present and compare contemporary concepts of the common good formulated by economists with reference to the understanding of the common good by the great men of prayer: Augustine of Hippo; Thomas Aquinas; Jacques Maritain; and Popes John XXIII, John Paul II, and Francis. It seeks to determine in what direction the economic theory of the common good can develop, taking into account inspiration drawn from Catholic social teaching (CST). Given the interdisciplinary nature of the common good, a historical and interdisciplinary approach, along with the descriptive method, was adopted. The paper highlights the tendency of economic theory toward one-dimensional and relativistic concepts of the common good and suggests a search for economic ideas of the common good that are simultaneously multidimensional and universalistic. It recognizes the achievements of CST, created by the great men of prayer, in enhancing the understanding of the category of the common good and posits that these teachings can serve as research inspiration for economists.

Keywords: common good; Catholic social teaching; prayer and social science; humanistic economics; economic personalism; heterodox economics; history of economic thought

1. Introduction

The concept of the common good, despite its ancient origins, remains a contemporary and intellectually challenging topic situated at the intersection of philosophy, Catholic social teaching (CST), and economics. Given the interdisciplinary nature of the common good, this paper adopts a historical and interdisciplinary approach, along with the descriptive method. This allows for the presentation of the most important ideas of economists against the background of philosophers and, especially, representatives of CST, contributing to a better understanding of the nature and character of economic concepts of the common good.

The primary objective of this research is to present and compare key contemporary concepts of the common good formulated by economists, with reference to the understanding of the common good by the great men of prayer: Augustine of Hippo; Thomas Aquinas; Jacques Maritain; and Popes John XXIII, John Paul II, and Francis. It seeks to determine in what direction the economic theory of the common good can develop, taking into account the inspirations drawn from the most prominent theorists of the common good in CST.

The choice of and focus on the main CST representatives was not accidental. The authors of the most important concepts of the common good were (or still are) undoubtedly the great men of prayer. Today, most of them are saints of the Catholic Church, but even those not yet canonized are widely recognized as people of God: serving God and humanity. Undoubtedly, prayer had or continues to have a central place in the lives of these people. Indeed, true men of prayer have access to the wisdom of God, who shows them the nature and meaning of the reality they encounter every day—they have some insight into how God himself sees things and matters. Therefore, it seems that one should definitely look at what

the great people of prayer in the Church understood by the common good and be inspired by their thoughts when creating theories in the social sciences, including economics.

The article consists of four main parts. Following the introduction, Section 2 of the study provides a historical overview of the most important concepts of the common good, mostly proposed by CST, from antiquity to the present day, distinguishing various traditions of perceiving the common good. Section 3 presents the concepts of the common good proposed by economists, characterizing the four most significant contemporary approaches. Then, in the fourth part of the article, the ideas of economists about the common good are compared and assessed in light of the concept of the common good within the CST framework. The study ends by defining and comparing the main characteristics of the analyzed concepts of the common good, offering insights into potential future research directions on the category of the common good in economics, consistent with the thought of the great men of prayer.

2. The Contribution of Great Men of Prayer to the Concept of the Common Good

Since the earliest days of philosophical and socioeconomic thought, the concept of the common good has been subject to intense scrutiny. Plato in *De Republica* stated that it is the responsibility of the state to ensure the common good, known as κοινὸν καλόν in Greek, by defining it and convincing citizens through persuasion or force to build it. Therefore, according to Plato, the statutory law is the ultimate arbiter of the common good, which may sometimes conflict with the interests of individuals (Zamelski 2012). On the other hand, Aristotle, a student and critic of Plato, took a different approach in his *Ethica Nicomachea*. He did not view the common good as being at odds with the good of individuals but rather saw it as encompassing both the good of the polis and the good of individual citizens. Aristotle believed that the state existed to enable individuals to achieve their ultimate goal, or telos, which was personal happiness or eudaimonia, attainable through various virtues (Zamelski 2012). Additionally, Aristotle contended that the good of the state was a more perfect and encompassing good than that of the individual (Sadowski 2010).

Christian thought, drawing upon the philosophical achievements of the ancient Greeks and Romans, has played a significant role in the development of the concept of the common good. Augustine of Hippo's understanding of the common good (Latin: bonum commune) differs significantly from that of Plato's. Augustine posited in *De Civitate Dei* that it is not the state but the community that defines the common good through its affections because the pursuit of the common good determines the existence of the community (Sadowski 2010). Thus, the common good cannot be imposed on citizens by the state; it must be chosen and recognized by the citizens themselves.

Centuries later, Thomas Aquinas took a more comprehensive and penetrating approach to the idea of the common good, building upon Aristotle's concepts. Like Aristotle, Aquinas viewed humans as social beings and always considered them as members of a community rather than individuals in isolation (Sadowski 2010). He, therefore, emphasized the interrelatedness of the good of the individual and the good of the community, defining the common good as a shared goal that each member of the community accepts as their own good and a motive for their actions because it serves to achieve their aims and perfection (Zamelski 2012).

The author of *Summa Theologiae* regarded the common good as a distinct value, not simply the sum of individual goods, and considered it higher than the good of the individual, provided that it belonged to the same hierarchy of goods and goals (Sadowski 2010). For instance, a community could not expect its members to sacrifice their personal goal of salvation for a particular common good, as God, their individual goal, is also the highest common good (Latin: bonum commune separatum), hierarchically above all other common goods.

It is important to note that, in Aquinas's view, the superiority of the common good does not threaten the primacy of the human person as an individual and a member of the community (Sadowski 2010). Aquinas believed that the social order unites individual aspirations for the common good and connects the human (social and individual) dimension of

the common good with God as the highest common good through the order of the universe. As such, not only individuals and the community but also authorities play an important role in the pursuit of the common good due to the significance of the social order.

Only a few centuries later, the concept of the common good was significantly redefined by Enlightenment philosophers such as Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau. They approached the common good from different anthropological assumptions, resulting in diverse interpretations. Bruni and Zamagni (2017) note that differences in the understanding of the common good also stem from varying Christian traditions such as Lutheran, Calvinist, and Catholic approaches. Additionally, these differences resulted from a departure from the theological and teleological approach to the common good, which placed God as the ultimate goal of every human being (De George 2004). Instead, subsequent philosophers emphasized the importance of either the individual (as an end in themselves), as seen in utilitarianism or the doctrine of human rights, or society or the state, as developed in later philosophical currents such as Marxism and Hegelianism.

Therefore, in contrast to the integral approach of the medieval Christian thinkers, the definitions of the common good proposed later by Enlightenment shifted towards emphasizing either the role of the individual (referred to as liberal, individualist conceptions) or the role of society (referred to as socialist, collectivist conceptions). This departure broke the inherent bond between the development of the individual and the good of the community (society or state) that was present in earlier Christian thought (Lutz 1999).

The concept of the common good, which integrates the individual and community dimensions, was reintroduced through the social teaching of the Catholic Church. Pope John XXIII defined the common good by referring to St. Thomas Aquinas's understanding, stating that it is "all those social conditions which favor the full development of human personality" (John XXIII 1961, p. 65). The Second Vatican Council also affirmed this approach, stating in *Gaudium et Spes* that the common good encompasses "the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfillment" (Second Vatican Council 1965, p. 26). This definition has become increasingly universal, encompassing the rights and obligations resulting from respect for the entire human race. As such, each social group must consider the needs and legitimate aspirations of other groups, as well as the general well-being of humanity as a whole.

According to Enderle (2018), there are four aspects of this definition of the common good. First, it pertains to the conditions of social life rather than being a substantive goal of all people in society (German: *Gemeingut*), meaning it is an instrumental value (*Dienstwert*) rather than an internal value (*Selbstwert*). Second, these conditions are necessary for both social groups and their individual members to realize their life plans and achieve self-fulfillment. Third, the common good encompasses all of these social conditions. Finally, globalization and increased interdependence across the world mean that these conditions apply to all of humanity.

Jacques Maritain, drawing on the thought of Thomas Aquinas and the teachings of the Church, developed the concept of the common good within the framework of Christian personalism. Maritain's conception posits that the common good is "common to the whole and the parts, the persons" (Maritain 1951, p. 11), thus existing as a distinct entity rather than being the sum of individual goods. Although the common good is deemed more important than the individual goods of society members, it does not imply the subordination of individuals to society at all times. Firstly, the primacy of the common good, according to Thomas Aquinas, applies to values of the same order (e.g., economic values), not to higher values of the human person (cognitive, spiritual, moral, and ideological values) since their infringement would lead to the destruction of the common good. Secondly, no society is an end in itself since it exists for the people who constitute it, and they are separate entities—persons—with their dignity, autonomy, freedom rights, and own aspirations for higher education and life tasks. Therefore, the common good must not conflict with the good of the individual but instead contribute to the good and development of each person.

Thus, it is not “the proper good of the whole”, which, “like the hive with respect to its bees, relates the parts to itself alone and sacrifices them to itself”, but it is “common to both the whole and the parts into which it flows back and which, in turn, must benefit from it” (Maritain 1966, p. 51). Consequently, the rulers of society cannot wholly subjugate individual persons, as the latter ones can be directly and entirely subordinated solely to their ultimate goal, i.e., God, who surpasses all created common goods. Therefore, the authority necessary for the implementation of the idea of the common good must serve the common good and not attempt to control it.

Karol Wojtyła (later known as Pope John Paul II) developed the concept of the common good in light of Christian personalism. He posited that the common good is a distinct social good and not the mere sum of individual goods of the members of society. It determines the good of individuals, and there is no conflict between the “true common good” and the “true good of the person” (Wojtyła 2018, pp. 79–80). According to John Paul II, the most crucial aspect of the concept of the common good is the respect for the human person’s dignity and rights. In this regard, it is imperative to establish the appropriate conditions for each member of society to fulfill their calling. This principle, in turn, translates into the prosperity and economic development of a given community. Thus, according to John Paul II, the common good serves as the cornerstone of the social order, and it is the obligation of society to create conditions that allow for the full development of all its members (John Paul II 1993). John Paul II made numerous references to the common good in his socioeconomic encyclicals, namely *Laborem Exercens* (John Paul II 1981), *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (John Paul II 1987), and *Centesimus Annus* (John Paul II 1991). He proposed a broad and comprehensive definition for it as “the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all” (John Paul II 1987, p. 38). John Paul II emphasized that the common good should not be confused with attitudes that prioritize individual benefits or the interests of one’s own social group through class conflict (John Paul II 1987, 1991). He regarded the common good as a higher value, which provides direction for the necessary transformation of spiritual attitudes that serve as the basis of all human relationships (John Paul II 1987).

Pope Francis’s encyclicals *Laudato Si’* (Francis 2015) and *Fratelli Tutti* (Francis 2020) focus on the practical aspects of the common good, emphasizing its importance as a relational good rooted in social relationships and human interactions. The encyclicals use metaphors such as “a common home” and “brotherhood” to highlight the interconnectedness of humanity and the need for mutual care and responsibility. In *Laudato Si’*, Pope Francis employs the metaphor of the common good as a common home. This metaphor is introduced in the title itself, and at the beginning, he references St. Francis of Assisi to describe “our sister and mother Earth” in its natural and climatic dimensions. By doing so, he extends the concept of the common good to include not only human beings but also common resources and all of creation. Here, the common good is envisioned as a common home that fosters feelings of love and care. *Laudato Si’* emphasizes the interconnectedness between human beings and the environment, calling for a renewed sense of global solidarity and recognizing that environmental degradation disproportionately affects the poor and vulnerable. In *Fratelli Tutti*, another metaphor of the common good is introduced, the one of brotherhood (Fratelli) that exists between people. Considering others as brothers and sisters is crucial for building the common good as it emphasizes the principle of inclusion and the removal of barriers that contradict this principle, such as all forms of exclusion (e.g., of immigrants and people with disabilities). These goals are still present in development strategies, but due to the pandemic, they have become even more significant as rising inequality and unemployment have intensified the plight of vulnerable people. According to Francis, worsening conditions for the most vulnerable individuals lead to the erosion of the principle of fraternity, which, in turn, undermines the common good expressed by this principle.

In summary, it is worth emphasizing that the contribution of the great people of prayer to the understanding of the common good has largely shaped the core values and principles of CST. These include “first and foremost, the primacy of the human person with

his transcendent dignity; solidarity, understood as a fraternal relationship for the common good; the principle of subsidiarity, which guarantees the right and duty to participate responsibly in common decisions”, and “the principle of the common good”, interpreted as “the defence of the quality of human life, in the sense of both the ecology of the natural environment and the spiritual ecology, which advocates respect not only for the material but also for the higher moral and spiritual needs of human life, both individually and collectively” (Marek and Jabłoński 2021, p. 2).

3. The Concept of the Common Good According to Economists

Although the concept of the common good has not been extensively discussed in economic theory, there are a few modern economists who have given it attention, including Sen, Tirole, and Ostrom, who were awarded the Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel.

Sen (2008), in his capability approach, recognized that the primary goal of economic policy should not be limited to GDP growth but rather focused on providing individuals with greater opportunities to choose different “functionings”, i.e., “parts of the state of a person, in particular the various things that he or she manages to do or be in leading a life” (Sen 1996, p. 57). The capability approach is implicitly linked to the common good idea, as Sen (1992, p. 40) conceptualizes capability, i.e., “the various combinations of functionings that a person can achieve”, as oriented towards the freedom to choose different functionings (“beings and doings”), which aligns with liberal theories of the common good. In this sense, the common good is not directly linked to the well-being of the community as a whole and its members, but rather only to the diverse and varying good of its members (cf. Argandoña 2013).

Tirole, in his book *Economics for the Common Good* (Tirole 2017), explicitly refers to the concept of the common good and questions how economics can contribute to achieving it. However, he does not define the common good in detail, stating in general terms that it is “our collective aspiration for society” and understanding it as the “well-being of the community” (Tirole 2017, pp. 2, 5).

Tirole suggests that economics can contribute to the pursuit of the common good in two ways. Firstly, it can focus on the ultimate goals inscribed in the concept of the common good and distinguish them from the means or instruments used to achieve them. This way, the means do not become the ends themselves, losing sight of the ultimate goal of the common good. Secondly, economics can assist in developing tools such as institutions and policies that can help achieve the common good once “a definition of the common good has been agreed upon” (Tirole 2017, p. 5). Therefore, according to Tirole, “economics, like other human and social sciences, does not seek to usurp society’s role in defining the common good”, but “works toward the common good” because “its goal is to make the world a better place” (Tirole 2017, p. 5).

Tirole emphasizes the importance of reconciling individual interests with the general interest in the pursuit of the common good. He asserts that while the common interest permits the private use of goods for individual well-being, it does not allow their abuse at the expense of others. In Tirole’s perspective, economics is a science that incorporates both individual and collective dimensions, analyzing situations where individual interest can be compatible with the quest for collective well-being and those where it can hinder that quest (Tirole 2017, p. 4).

In summary, Tirole sees the common good as a form of the well-being of the community chosen by society. Thus, the common good, as understood by Tirole, in contrast to Sen’s idea, is not directly the good of the members of the community but, first and foremost, the good of the community itself.

It is noteworthy that the concept of the common good was of interest not only to political philosophers but also to early economists such as Genovesi and Smith, a classical economist who is often regarded as the father of political economy. Despite their differing assumptions about human nature, which may have been influenced by distinct Christian traditions, they

arrived at varying understandings of the common good. Genovesi believed that the common good arose from the cultivation of virtues among the members of society, while Smith viewed it as the aggregate of individual values attained (Bruni and Zamagni 2017).

A noteworthy critic of classical economics was Sismondi (de Sismondi 1819), who was the first economist explicitly recognized as a founder of social and humanistic political economy. This school of economics places significant emphasis on the concept of the common good, which aims to connect the common good and individual good, drawing on the original ancient and medieval attempts. The humanistic version of the economics of the common good, promoted by Sismondi, fits into the concept of “civil economy” developed by economists such as Genovesi (1769), Dragonetti (1788), Ruskin (1901), Loria (1910), Fuà (1993), among others, who also referred to the ancient meaning of the common good (Bruni and Zamagni 2017).

Sismondi is referred to by Lutz (1999) in a volume with the same title as the above-mentioned book by Tirole but also with a distinctive and revealing subtitle: *Two Centuries of Economic Thought in the Humanist Tradition*. Lutz (1999, p. 125) has a completely different approach to defining the common good than Tirole, arguing that it “cannot be distilled from the actual preferences of members of society.” Lutz further observes that the existence of diverse tastes and beliefs does not imply the absence of a common good, nor does it render its definition impossible. The solution, according to Lutz, is to find norms, values, or principles acceptable to every rationally thinking person to define the common good. Such principles would provide an objective criterion for determining the different meanings of particular types of “functionings” and “capabilities” required to lead a good life, overcoming the weaknesses of Sen’s concept (cf. Anderson 1995; Nussbaum 1988).

Lutz (1999, pp. 128, 130, 135–36) posits two “principles of normative economics” as objective measures within his concept of “human welfare economics”:

- “material sufficiency”—implying that subsistence and physical health are fundamental human values and that every member of society has an equal right to these goods by virtue of their humanity;
- “respect for human dignity”—asserting that every member of society has an equal and rightful claim to human dignity and being treated accordingly.

Lutz (1999, p. 137) elaborates on the values and moral laws associated with these principles and defines the common good as “good that is equally shared or equally belonging to each and every member of society.” This includes the right to personal freedom, basic well-being, and respect for human dignity. As an economist, Lutz (1999, p. 139) outlines the concept of “economics of the common good” as the translation of these principles and moral laws into economic rights, social policies, and institutions. The economic rights that follow from these principles are the right to the necessities of life (referring to material sufficiency), the right to “economic democracy” (i.e., treating workers with dignity based on respect for human dignity), and the right of future generations to material sufficiency and respect for human dignity (Lutz 1999, p. 139). These rights are implementable within a specific social vision of a market economy, which prioritizes, firstly, a “humanistic enterprise system”, giving human and social capital a special emphasis in the organization of the economy and considers free capital markets as merely instrumental to social welfare (Lutz 1999, p. 141).

Secondly, Lutz emphasizes the necessity for the economy to be integrated with society rather than the reverse to prevent social decisions from being subordinated to impersonal economic competition. He asserts that the achievement of the common good under such a framework can be facilitated by a proactive and protective role played by the government (Lutz 1999, p. 141). Accordingly, Lutz’s concept posits the common good as the amalgamation of the same good for each member of the community rather than as being directly correlated with the welfare of the community as a whole.

Presently, the notion of the common good in economic theory is mainly implicit in the context of the commons and public good issues, which require a distinct approach from market theory. Although Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences winner Ostrom does

not explicitly mention the common good, her concept of “the commons” possesses essential characteristics. While Hardin (1968) underscores the dichotomy between individual and common interests in the situation of jointly owned property or the “tragedy of the commons”, it is Ostrom (1990) who reconciles them, demonstrating how the individual interest can align with the interest of the community, on the condition that the individual adheres to the rules and actions for the common good, which do exist (Ostrom 1990, 1999). The more effectively governing rules regulate community life, the better the long-term results of individual choices. In other words, the tragedy of Hardin’s pasture need not conclude poorly for either the participants or the community. Rather than state distribution or market forces, it is civil society working for the common good that should govern these resources. Such governance may supersede market-driven rationality and lead to positive outcomes for both the community and individuals, resolving the issue of free but limited resources (Bruni and Zamagni 2017).

Ostrom is also critical of Hardin’s anthropological assumption, based on the homo oeconomicus model, and favors Aristotle’s homo politicus or homo sociologicus model. This alternative model suggests that humans are capable of respecting community norms and rules and act in accordance with the values prevalent in society. Ostrom’s concept of the commons and the papal concepts of the common good are both rooted in a fundamentally different understanding of human nature compared to the mainstream economic view. Rather than being solely self-interested actors, humans are considered to be socially and culturally embedded individuals (cf. Polanyi 1977), who pursue not only material utility but also nonmaterial goals and values that exist within the context of their society. The image of individuals as socially and culturally embedded, pursuing aspirations that resonate with their society’s values and fulfilling their visions beyond utility, is characteristic of humanistic economics, within which the primary objective is the comprehensive development (flourishment) of individuals (Horodecka 2015). This shift in perspective highlights the importance of taking into account the role of cultural norms and values in shaping economic behavior and challenges the traditional economic assumption of individual rationality based solely on self-interest.

4. Discussion

In Sen’s view, the concept of the common good is an important overarching goal and a criterion for evaluating economic policy: to provide people with opportunities to realize their potential and thus to offer them opportunities for development. It is undoubtedly very valuable to emphasize that the individual is ultimately at the center of economic policy. Nevertheless, a weakness of Sen’s approach, when compared to the concepts of the common good in CST, is that it does not explicitly emphasize the communal dimension of the common good. Sen’s liberal approach may stem from his observation that an overemphasis on the common good and the adaptation of individuals to cultural conditions can effectively hinder individual development. Sen gives the example of a woman who accepts violence and lacks the will to pursue education because of the community’s expectations of her. Therefore, the concept of capabilities that unfolds at the individual level becomes a litmus test for community issues, as both the reluctance and inability of some women to pursue education may be the result of the social conditions in which the individual finds herself. Coming from a country where violence and the very low status of women go hand in hand, Sen argues not only that individuals should develop goals but also that these actions should be supported by the state, whose role is to ‘enable’ individuals to achieve their own goals. In such a case, individual development serves the progress of the country but gives the community the impression that it is violating its common good—in terms of the shared values that bind it together. However, this is not the common good in the sense we are writing about if it significantly limits individual development.

Unlike Sen, Tirole recognizes the danger of individuals pursuing their own good at the expense of the common good of which they are a part. However, Tirole’s view of the common good as the “ultimate goal” also differs from CST. According to CST and

Christian philosophy, individuals should contribute to the common good while striving for personal well-being, with the common good supporting them in this endeavor. The potential drawback of overemphasizing the community dimension of the common good is that it overlooks the fact that the common good should facilitate the full development of individuals within the community. This is consistent with Tirole's assertion that the common good is defined by a given society. This relativistic concept of the common good may endorse a community that imposes values that are incompatible with the objective truth about human nature and its eternal vocation with God since certain subjective common goods may not correspond to certain objective goods of individuals.

Elinor Ostrom's approach is closer to Tirole's than to Sen's. She emphasizes the importance of the community for the narrowly defined common good, such as the commons. Within this framework, the community establishes principles and rules that reconcile individual and common interests while allowing for individual autonomy. In contrast to the previous two perspectives, Ostrom's concept is integral, emphasizing both the individual and communal dimensions of the common good. It portrays not only the community as the guarantor of the common good but also individuals who, in pursuing their own interests, contribute to the creation of the common good. However, Ostrom's concept shares the weaknesses of the previously discussed approaches in that the common good is subjective and lacks objective criteria for determining what constitutes the common good.

An attempt to create such criteria can be found in the work of Lutz, who defines the common good on the basis of these criteria. His approach to the common good is, therefore, universalist. He also gives examples of common goods, including respect for human dignity, thus drawing on the concept of the common good in Christian philosophy and Catholic social teaching. A weakness of his concept, however, is the lack of emphasis on the communal dimension of the common good, which brings his approach to the common good closer to Sen's proposal in this respect. In these concepts, there is no emphasis on the fact that the individual is rooted in the community in which he lives, as emphasized primarily by the communitarians (Sandel, McIntyre, Walzer). For them, the collectively shared concept of the good is the foundation for community and individual development, a perspective that is also indirectly present in representatives of CST. This undoubtedly has implications for understanding the category of the common good.

5. Conclusions and Future Directions

The concept of the common good has ancient roots and has been revitalized by Christianity. Its philosophical foundations were laid by St. Thomas Aquinas, who drew from Aristotle's teachings and incorporated them into Catholic social doctrine. Jaques Maritain and John Paul II made a significant contribution to the development of the common good by linking it with Christian personalism. Pope Francis has since adapted this concept to address contemporary global challenges, such as environmental threats and growing social inequality, in a more practical and secular manner.

The common good, according to Christian philosophy and Catholic social teaching, has two dimensions: personal and communal. This means that the true common good serves both the good of the individual members of the community (a small group, local community, and citizens of the state) and the community itself. There cannot be a contradiction between the dimensions of the common good, so the concept of the common good has an integral character (it is two-dimensional). It is also a universalistic (objectivist) approach because it refers to objective criteria for determining what the common good is.

In reviewing different concepts of the common good as presented in this paper, several dichotomies in the understanding of the common good have become apparent, including the following:

- Universalist (objectivist) and relativistic (subjectivist) approaches;
- Emphasis on the individual (personal) and/or group (community) dimension;

- Integral (two-dimensional or three-dimensional common good, with the third dimension referring to God) and nonintegral (one-dimensional, one-sided common good) approaches;
- The common good as an end and/or a means to an end (or conditions for achieving the end).

Sen argues that the common good (veiled in his capability approach) is the ultimate goal and has a distinctly individual dimension with a nonintegral character. Tirole defines the common good as the goal that is pursued by society and has a nonintegral nature, but the focus is on the community. Ostrom's concept of the commons sheds light on the role of conditions, such as principles and rules, in achieving the common good, which arises through reconciling individual interests with the interests of the community, indicating the integral nature of the common good. Meanwhile, Lutz's concept emphasizes the individual dimension and non-integral nature of the common good with the universality of his approach attempting to establish objective criteria for defining the common good, in contrast to the relativistic approach of Sen, Tirole, and Ostrom.

Economic theories tend to favor one-dimensional and relativistic concepts of the common good. However, proposing multidimensional and universalist ideas within economic theories could be valuable and is worth trying. In particular, given the growing need for practical applications of the concept of the common good, an illustrative example is the concept of "economy for the common good" (Dolderer et al. 2021), which is rooted in both economics and CST. Moreover, the contributions of the great men of prayer (within CST) to the idea of the common good provide inspiration and can enrich economic theories of the common good, e.g., enabling a more comprehensive understanding of how to reconcile individual and societal interests. Undoubtedly, the concept of the common good presents an intriguing area of inquiry for economists as it offers insights into the interdependence between individual development and the attainment of societal objectives. By adopting the lens of the common good, it becomes evident that there is a need for an alternative to the mainstream economic model, which still primarily relies on the utilitarian-based homo oeconomicus paradigm. This alternative is found in the concept of the human nature of homo persona, a person embedded in society rather than a socially alienated individualist, whose development is linked to the values and virtues of a given society while also being a separate and autonomous entity with inherent worth and dignity that can strive towards self-realization through ongoing personal growth.

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