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Paweł Mąkosa

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About the Editor

Paweł Mąkosa

As a Professor at John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin (Poland), he specialises in religious education and catechetics. Over the years he also studied at Sacro Cuore University in Milan (Italy), and has been a visiting researcher at the University of Oxford and the Institue of Education in London. He has also collaborated with the University of Malta, University of Split (Croatia) and the Theological Institute in Lviv (Ukraine). He has authored numerous books and articles.

Preface to "Catholic Education"

The Catholic Church has been providing education in schools and universities for many centuries all over the world. Moreover, it is the Church that has always been a pioneer and promoter of research and education. Catholic schools and universities are important educational centers in which a high level of education is combined with social, moral, and religious education. In many countries the Church still runs numerous schools and universities. This kind of education grant the opportunity to base education on Christian anthropology and to shape students' personality in the light of the Gospel. The cultural, ethical, and religious formation of young generations is very important not only for the Church but also for the entire society.

However, now Catholic education faces many challenges, mainly due to secularisation. This applies to both content and methods, as well as teacher training. In response to these challenges, the publication titled "Catholic Education" has been prepared. This topic is understood very broadly and includes all dimensions of education provided within the Catholic Church, in Catholic schools and Catholic communities around the world. The main aim of this book is to specify and answer new challenges for Catholic education and Catholic religious education that arise from secularisation and other reasons. This reprint contains 17 chapters authored by researchers from various countries and different traditions. Drawing from their diverse experiences, they not only address the issues within their own environments but also analyze global problems. Papers presenting Catholic education and Catholic religious education in historical, contemporary, and future perspectives are also present.

We hope that this publication will be helpful for researchers and practitioners in the field of education. The papers included here may serve as inspiration for further research and contribute to the development of new concepts in Catholic education and religious education.

Paweł Mąkosa
Editor

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Article

Methodical Approaches to Intercultural Education in Confessional Religious Education in the Republic of Croatia

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Abstract: After many years of neglecting the religious dimension within intercultural education, today there is a broad consensus in Europe that religious education represents an important dimension in the intercultural education of young people. Awareness of the connection between intercultural and interreligious learning is becoming increasingly stronger and more present. One of the important questions related to intercultural education in general, and especially to the religious dimension of that education, relates to the qualification of the confessional religious education teachers with regard to the achievement of intercultural goals and especially the qualification to develop intercultural competence in students. This paper consists of two parts. The theoretical part elaborates on issues related to the development of intercultural competence in confessional religious education. The second part presents some of the results of the quantitative research (descriptive statistics methods were used), which was carried out in the Republic of Croatia and aimed to examine the attitudes and opinions of religious education teachers regarding the necessary intercultural competence for work in schools. The results have revealed that religious education teachers highly value the development of intercultural competence in students, as well as great motivation and openness of religious education teachers of confessional classes for the development of intercultural education. At the same time, they point to the relative scarcity of methods within religious teaching that promote intercultural and interreligious learning.

Keywords: religious dimension of intercultural education; intercultural education; intercultural competence; religious education teachers

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1. Introduction

The emergence of globalization and plural societies strongly affects all areas of human life. As a result of increasingly frequent migrations, virtual mobility, economic globalization and, consequently, the complexity of modern societies that are becoming multi-ethnic and multicultural, there are more and more frequent conflicts related to coexistence, and a crisis of the value system is fairly noticeable. Migration movements have created neighbourhoods with people of different cultural origins, religions and lifestyles. In societies with the increasing pluralism of cultures, religions and life philosophies, the main question is how to deal with differences and how to deal with conflicts that may arise from these differences (Malović and Vujica 2021). This issue particularly affect public schools that students attend, regardless of their cultural or religious affiliation. The challenges of a multicultural society require an educational response. In fact, recognizing the value of education is a key moment for facing the challenges and complexity of the contemporary globalist and pluralistic society.

Education for coexistence represents one of the biggest challenges of modern education. According to the Report of UNESCO's International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century, "learning to live together" is one of the fundamental pillars of education in the 21st century. One of the key questions raised in that document refers to the need to establish education that would enable peaceful resolution of conflicts and respect

for others, their culture and their spiritual values (Delors 1998, p. 103). Because migrations have always existed, various models of solving coexistence issues have been considered throughout history, such as elimination, assimilation, segregation, melting pot, coexistence, dichotomy, universalism, multiculturalism and interculturalism (Portera 2011, pp. 25–26; Perotti 1995, pp. 63–64).

The intercultural approach emerged in Europe in the second half of the 20th century, especially at the beginning of the 1970s, and it was developed in a special way under the influence of the guidelines of European institutions, especially the Council of Europe, which to this day remains the most important factor in the design and promotion of intercultural education (Perotti 1995; Hrvatić 2007). The intercultural approach is still the most appropriate pedagogical response to the new situation caused by the globalization and migration dynamics of the modern Western world, which contribute to the increasing diversity of modern society. Concepts such as "identity" and "culture" are less and less seen as static values, and their dynamism, that is, openness to permanent development, is more and more noticed; the state of being different, migrations and life in a complex and multicultural society are no longer seen as risks for coexistence and security, but as opportunities for mutual enrichment and for individual and collective development—meeting a foreigner, an ethnically or a culturally different subject represents a challenge, an opportunity to meet and reflect on the level of values, rules and behaviour (Portera 2011). The intercultural approach emphasizes the possibility of dialogue, confrontation, and interaction. The prefix "inter-" presupposes a relationship, interaction or exchange of two or more elements. Relationship is the core of intercultural education; interaction, not abstraction, is the fundamental pedagogical activity of intercultural education (Perotti 1995). We define societies as multicultural, as they manifest the presence of people with different customs, religions and ways of thinking, while the strategies of educational activities should be of an intercultural type, in the sense of promoting meetings, interaction and the like. According to A. Portera (2011), the intercultural approach, as the most acceptable pedagogical approach, is found between universalism (transcultural pedagogy) and relativism (multicultural pedagogy).

For a long time, the religious dimension was neglected in the intercultural education framework, because European societies excluded religion from public life, especially from education, backed by the idea that it belongs to the area of an individual's private life (Perotti 1995, p. 15). The Council of Europe included the topic of religion in the context of intercultural education only in 2002 (Jackson and O'Grady 2019, p. 248; Razum et al. 2021). The "return of religion" occurred as a result of the settlement of immigrants in European countries for which public expression of religiosity is self-explanatory (Perotti 1995, pp. 15–16). The tragic events that took place on 11 September 2001 provided an additional incentive for the inclusion of the religious dimension in the framework of intercultural education. Today there is a broad consensus across Europe that religious education has an important place in the school system and that it represents an important dimension in the intercultural education of young people. Awareness of the connection between intercultural and interreligious learning is increasingly strong and present (Ziebertz and Leimgruber 2009, p. 401). Cultural diversity cannot be studied and promoted without taking religion in consideration (Jackson 2004). Religious education, however, is not an unambiguous term.

Many European documents point out that non-confessional religious education is more compatible with the goals of intercultural education than confessional education, and that it has a stronger potential to contribute to education for knowing, respecting and accepting different religious beliefs and worldviews (Razum et al. 2021). However, despite the tendency to introduce non-confessional religious education, religious education is still confessional in most European countries (Pajer 2010; Rothgangel et al. 2014a, 2014b, 2016, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c). The experience of confessional religious education in recent years in most European countries shows an increasing openness towards religious pluralism and the demands of intercultural education (Razum et al. 2022). Since the Second Vatican Council

(1962–1965) onwards, ecumenical and interreligious dialogue has been an important part of the official teaching of the Catholic Church (Kovač and Božić 2021), so interreligious learning is becoming an increasingly important part in the contents and goals of the curriculum of confessional religious education. Strict mono-denominational teaching, which is thematically limited to one confession or religion, is unable to respond to the demands of religious education in the context of religious pluralism. Confessional religious education is more and more obviously expected to include, in addition to promoting religious learning in which other religious traditions are respected, the promotion of such religious learning in which students can learn together and from each other. Within the context of confessional religious education, the design of various encounters that should lead to a deeper understanding of religions, reflection on the religious experiences of other traditions and deepening the answers for one's own life and faith continuously gain more and more importance. (Ziebertz and Leimgruber 2009, pp. 394–95).

Given that the Republic of Croatia is a member of the Council of Europe and the aforementioned recommendations and documents are included in the guidelines implemented in the educational system, their application is expected in the school subject of religious education and in the initial education of religious education teachers. Until now, however, no research has been conducted on the topic of religious education teachers. After reviewing the literature from the scientific field of Croatian pedagogy and religious pedagogy, we can conclude that previous research focused on classroom teachers and teachers of other subjects, but not religious education teachers (Previšić 1994; Hrvatić 2011; Bedeković 2011; Piršl 2011; Mlinarević et al. 2013; Drandić 2016; Mlinarević and Tokić Zec 2020). No research has been conducted in the Republic of Croatia on the views of religious education teachers on the development of intercultural competence. The only research that was related to intercultural sensitivity examined the attitudes of religious education teachers towards differences in classrooms and teaching. It was conducted in 2015 and did not directly refer to the intercultural competence of religious education teachers (Filipović 2016).

Intercultural competence, which includes a religious dimension, is necessary for coexistence in a society filled with different people. High-quality interculturally trained teachers of either non-confessional or confessional religious education, which is the case in the Republic of Croatia, represent an essential condition for the achievement of goals related to intercultural education. Only an interculturally competent teacher is able to organize the teaching and learning processes aimed at the acquisition of students' intercultural competence, including its religious dimension. The basic premise of this paper stems from the fact that the development of students' intercultural competence is possible in confessional religious teaching, and the work methods used by the teacher are one of its core prerequisites. This thesis will be examined through the theoretical concepts developed by previous researchers in Europe, which will set the epistemological concepts for a discussion on the development of intercultural competence in confessional religious education. The results of the quantitative research will show the attitudes and opinions of the examined religious education teachers in the Republic of Croatia regarding the methods they use in religious education when speaking about intercultural topics, then the development of intercultural competence in religious education, as well as the attitudes regarding the motivation and competence of religious education teachers for implementing the religious dimension of intercultural education aimed at the development of intercultural competence.

Considering the fact that the development of intercultural competence has not been researched in the context of confessional religious teaching and religious education teachers in the Republic of Croatia, this research provides data on the state of confessional religious teaching, i.e., in the classroom, with regard to questions of methods, motivation and competences for the implementation of the religious dimension of intercultural education. In addition, the presentation of research results contributes to the actualization of the religious dimension of intercultural education as part of confessional religious education in the Republic of Croatia and indicates the ability of confessional religious education to develop intercultural competence in students.

In the following section, we will first consider the theoretical background of the religious dimension of intercultural education, especially intercultural competence, and then present the results of empirical research on the attitudes and opinions of religious education teachers regarding the intercultural competence necessary for realizing the religious dimension of intercultural education, conducted among religious education teachers in the Republic of Croatia.

1.1. The Religious Dimension of Intercultural Learning and Teaching

Students meet children and young people from other nations and other religions in the school environment on a daily basis, which presents a challenge for everyday communication. An encounter with the unknown can cause different reactions: from fear of the foreign and unknown, apathetic distance, callous indifference to acceptance based on curiosity, empathic appropriation and recognition, as well as uncritical assimilation and radical conversion (Garmaz and Mendl 2022, p. 33). Learning to live with differences necessarily includes the need to know, understand and positively value that diversity (Keast 2007, p. 62). The Council of Europe advocates the stance that young people who have adequate knowledge and understanding of religion are more tolerant of differences within society than those who lack this knowledge (Jackson and O'Grady 2019, p. 255). In this sense, REDCo's research (Weisse 2009, p. 10) is also interesting, as it shows that students who have the opportunity to learn about religious diversity at school are more willing to discuss religions and worldviews with students from other backgrounds than those who are not given that opportunity. Likewise, it is emphasized that the main prerequisite for peaceful coexistence between people of different religions and worldviews is knowledge regarding religions and worldviews, as well as common interests and common activities.

Intercultural education is based on principles that promote openness to others, respect for diversity, mutual understanding, tolerance, providing equal opportunities and fighting against discrimination. The question is how to implement these principles, which are generally accepted at the theoretical level, into pedagogical approaches and methods. It is fundamentally important to take into consideration the fact that the intercultural approach in school should not be reduced to a new school subject or to additional inclusion in the existing ones with content related to the immigrant children present in the classroom. An approach that would be reduced to the occasional introduction into the existing programmes of ad hoc content related to students belonging to another culture is not acceptable either. The intercultural approach encompasses the entire strategy of school teaching. It is about the need to include the intercultural perspective in every school subject, as well as every school activity involving either the teaching or non-teaching staff (Portera 2011, p. 30; Perotti 1995, pp. 85–86; Filipović 2021, p. 555). School, as an intercultural educational community, is not only a place for acquiring intercultural knowledge, but also a place where coexistence, cooperation, tolerance and equality are continuously learned (Hrvatić 2007, p. 248). In order for these goals to be realized and lived later on in real life, it is necessary to design and implement classes in which mutual understanding and respect, cooperative learning and dialogue and intercultural sensitivity are taught and learned by directly experiencing it. Quality learning and teaching in the classroom becomes a necessary condition for the effective implementation of the religious dimension of intercultural education (Jackson and O'Grady 2019).

1.2. What Is Intercultural Competence

Intercultural competence is a concept that is closely related to the goals of the intercultural approach. Given that each country, and therefore each culture and religion, has its own characteristics that affect a certain level and features of intercultural competence, it cannot be determined in a universal way, but is adapted to the conditions and needs of a particular area, and therefore the authors who implement research on its dimensions take different approaches. The term intercultural competence was first used by Byram and Zarate in 1997 as a label for "the ability to interact with others, accept other perspectives

and think about the world, the ability to mediate between these perspectives as well as the awareness of existing differences" (Belmonte and Agüero 2019, p. 192). The development of Byrame's model of intercultural competence was related to foreign language learning and places it in the knowledge, attitudes and skills categories. Attitudes are related to being (knowing how to be), and knowledge (knowing) refers to active learning about events, identities and social characteristics, while skills are related to action (knowing how to do, understand, learn) in intercultural situations (Byram 2009, pp. 322, 324). Darla Deardorff also developed a model of intercultural competence, according to which she defines intercultural competence as "the ability to interact effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations, based on specific attitudes, intercultural knowledge, skills and reflection". (Deardorff 2004, p. 256) Her model of intercultural competence is shown in the table through the following components of each dimension:

Intercultural competence (Deardorff 2004, p. 198)		
Knowledge	Attitudes	Skills
• Cultural self-awareness • Deep understanding and knowledge of • culture (including contexts, role and • impact of culture and others' world • views) • Culture-specific information • Sociolinguistic awareness	• Respect (valuing other cultures, cultural diversity) • Openness (to intercultural learning and to people from other cultures, withholding judgment) • Curiosity and discovery (tolerating ambiguity and uncertainty)	• To listen, observe and interpret • To analyse, evaluate and relate

The division of intercultural competence into knowledge (cognitive dimension), attitudes (affective dimension) and skills (behavioural dimension), as a premise of this paper, is confirmed by a research study on instruments that measure intercultural competence, aiming to define its key dimensions based on the analysed instruments. The study confirms the thesis regarding the difficulty of reaching a universal definition because scientists differ in their definitions of intercultural competence depending on the context. The review of existing instruments measuring intercultural competence emphasizes "the existence of multiple measuring instruments in different contexts and that the existing instruments focus on different dimensions. The position of the author and the conclusions of the research process is that intercultural competence is a process of cultural learning that includes cognitive, affective and behavioural learning processes" (Matveev and Merz 2014, p. 129). Therefore, the authors Matveev and Merz (2014) talk about the affective, cognitive and behavioural dimensions of intercultural competence.

Given that the main respondents in the research presented within this paper were religious education teachers and considering the fact that we were interested in the development of intercultural competence in religious education classes, the descriptions of intercultural competence should contain its religious dimension. We have previously pointed out the variety of approaches in defining intercultural competence where the authors did not take religious beliefs into account, so when it comes to the theoretical settings of intercultural competence that includes religious dimension, this research relied on the guidelines listed in the Recommendation CM/Rec(2008)12 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the dimension of religions and non-religious convictions within intercultural education (Council of Europe 2008a), a document that opened the topic of the religious dimension of intercultural education. Bearing in mind that the Republic of Croatia is a member state and that the defined guidelines are implemented in the educational policies of the member states, it turned out to be reasonable that the theoretical questions regarding the development of intercultural competence in the teaching of religious education arose from the mentioned document. Also in 2014, the Council issued a manual

aimed at disseminating the Recommendation and its better application in member states (Jackson 2014). The Recommendation defines the components of intercultural competence as well as the ways it should be developed in the classroom:

1. Developing a tolerant attitude and respect for the right to hold a particular belief, attitudes based on the recognition of the inherent dignity and fundamental freedoms of each human being;
2. Nurturing a sensitivity to the diversity of religions and non-religious convictions as an element contributing to the richness of Europe;
3. Promoting communication and dialogue between people from different cultural, religious and non-religious backgrounds;
4. Promoting knowledge of different aspects (symbols, practices, etc.) of religious diversity;
5. Developing skills of critical evaluation and reflection with regard to understanding the perspectives and ways of life of different religions and non-religious convictions;
6. Combating prejudice and stereotypes vis-à-vis differences which are barriers to intercultural dialogue, and educating in respect for equal dignity of all individuals;
7. Fostering an ability to analyse and interpret impartially the many varied items of information relating to the diversity of religions and non-religious convictions, without prejudice to the need to respect pupils' religious or non-religious convictions and without prejudice to the religious education given outside the public education sphere. (Council of Europe 2008a, #5).

Intercultural competence is considered to be the ultimate outcome of intercultural education. The authors of this paper have divided the descriptions of the development of intercultural competence defined by the Council of Europe into corresponding categories for clearer data analysis: the cognitive dimension (knowledge) represents knowledge regarding one's own religion and knowledge regarding others; the affective dimension (attitudes) refers to tolerance and respect for the other and the different; the behavioural dimension (skills) includes empathy, communication skills, mediation, analysis and integration skills, and critical thinking.

1.3. The Connection between the Work (Competencies) of Religious Education Teachers and the Development of Students' Competencies

Intercultural competence of teachers is a prerequisite for the development of the intercultural competence of students (Piršl et al. 2016). Quality teacher training is a key condition for the successful integration of teaching about religions and worldviews into the goals of public schools (Pépin 2009). Some European research show, however, that many teachers feel ill-prepared to deal with the cultural and religious diversity they encounter in their classrooms (OSCE/ODIHR 2007, p. 55). Related to this, there is a lack of teaching resources that represent multi-religious or interreligious approaches (Pépin 2009, pp. 43–44).

The acquisition of intercultural knowledge and practical skills should be introduced at the very beginning of teacher training (Council of Europe 2008b). Intercultural competence does not only presuppose teaching about other religions and cultures, but also the development of mutual understanding, intercultural sensitivity, collaborative learning and the creation of relationships that presupposes the discovery and acceptance of similarities and differences (Hrvatić 2007, p. 250). In other words, religious education teachers' qualifications imply that they possess knowledge of religions, but also knowledge of appropriate teaching methods and how to successfully apply them (Pépin 2009, p. 44). According to REDCo experts (Weisse 2009, p. 12), the teacher training curriculum should include the development of skills in the matters of organizing and moderating classroom discussions on controversial religious issues and conflicting worldviews. Even the best curriculum or teaching materials will have little effect on achieving learning outcomes in the classroom if teachers are unable, for any reason, to impart quality knowledge and organize student learning. This particularly applies to the school subject of religious education due to the high demands that such a subject places on the teacher. Therefore, the importance of teacher

qualification and appropriate initial as well as permanent teacher training is highlighted in several European documents (OSCE/ODIHR 2007; Council of Europe 2008b). Bearing in mind that the status of teachers in the classroom gives them the opportunity to have a great influence on students in discussions of personal matters, such as those related to religion and beliefs, it is extremely important that teachers are competent and professional.

The teaching and learning processes differ from country to country, from school to school, from teacher to teacher, from situation to situation. Different types of teaching/lessons can be used effectively when teaching about religions and beliefs. First of all, teacher-centred teaching differs from student-centred teaching. Both of them carry their own risks as well as advantages. In teacher-centred teaching, the focus is on the teacher and his or her knowledge of the teaching content that he or she conveys to the students, and on the quality of the teaching materials being studied. In student-centred teaching, the teacher plays the role of moderator of the learning process. Although the teacher's knowledge of the content remains crucial, in classes conceived like that, students have a much more active role, especially in discussions, debates, research, group work, collaborative learning, project work, role playing, presentations and the like. Because that type of teaching is student-centred, students' opinions, experiences, feelings and reflections are very important when learning about topics related to religions and belief systems. Students are encouraged to reflect on their own beliefs, values and decisions (OSCE/ODIHR 2007).

Learning that encourages the presentation of students' personal views, reflections and experiences is particularly suitable for the model of religious education that we call learning religion or learning from religion. In the model of religious education called learning about religion, or the multi-religious approach, students' experiences and attitudes are not so much at the centre of the teaching and learning process. It relates to learning about the different manifestations of religion without necessarily taking a personal stand. A teaching model that encourages the expression of one's own beliefs, attitudes and values, with all its advantages, carries, however, the danger that certain students may feel uncomfortable publicly sharing something that they consider their personal matter. That is why creating a pleasant and stimulating learning atmosphere in which every student feels comfortable and safe is an important task of every teacher. A teacher's success in creating such a positive atmosphere is closely correlated with his or her competencies. (OSCE/ODIHR 2007, p. 46).

Preferred methodological approaches that promote intercultural learning include cooperative learning, empathic communication, dialogical approach, the method of "distancing and simulation" and learning through differences (Milot 2007; Keast 2007; Hrvatić 2007). Ziebertz and Leimgruber (2009) have proposed a subject-cantered "didactics of world religions". This approach is realized in five steps which are partly connected or partly overlapping in practice: learning to perceive religious testimonies; interpreting religious phenomena; learning through encounters; respecting permanent diversity; engaging in existential confrontation. Interreligious learning also implies meeting members/witnesses of other religions (Filipović 2021). All these ways of teaching and learning aim to promote better self-awareness, better acquaintance with others, discovering similarities and differences and spotting existing prejudices and closed-mindedness, as well as cooperation and togetherness in achieving common goals.

It is obvious that multicultural diversity calls for new models of learning and teaching, i.e., intercultural and interreligious teaching and learning. The emphasis is, therefore, on learning methods that highlight cooperation, exchange and joint activities, all for the purpose of preparing students for coexistence in a democratic society, i.e., for the purpose of achieving the fundamental goal of modern education, which is "learning to live together".

2. Results and Discussion

2.1. Methods and Forms of Work in Religious Education

We wanted to find out from the respondents which form and method of work they most often use when dealing with content regarding other religions and confessions in religious education classes. Given that the implementation of the goals of intercultural

education is most often associated with the realization of interaction when learning about others, and bearing in mind that students taking confessional religious education classes are most often homogeneous in terms of religious/denominational affiliation and they need forms of work that include visits to other religious institutions so that interaction could take place, we were interested in the extent to which such forms of learning are used in religious education.

Based on the presented results, it can be concluded that according to the opinions of the religious education teachers who participated in the survey, the most frequently used form of work is collaborative learning (37.8%), followed by debate methods, discussions regarding the doctrines of other religions (35.2%) and finally by the methods of studying the texts and documents of other confessions and religions (33.9%). Although cooperative learning came first, it is more likely that it meant learning in groups, rather than interdenominational or interreligious learning, which involves a religious education teacher of another denomination/religion teaching a class. This is indicated by the high percentages of negative responses regarding hosting members of other confessions and religions. The least used form of learning is precisely the one that should be promoted the most in order to achieve the goals of the religious dimension of intercultural education, and that is learning through interaction and action, meeting the other and the different, without which it is difficult to truly know the other. As many as 87.4% of religious education teachers do not host members of other confessions and religions as a form of learning, and 76.5% of religious education teachers do not visit religious institutions of other confessions and religions.

2.2. Development of Intercultural Competence in Religious Education

We wanted to examine the views of religious education teachers on the level of development of certain components of intercultural competence among students in religious education classes. Intercultural competence is seen as the result of a general approach to the entire content of religious education, not only the parts dealing with other religions/confessions/non-religious beliefs. Considering that this research sought to examine the religious dimension of intercultural education, the development of intercultural competence was examined in that context, in a necessary connection with the processing of content concerning other religions and non-religious beliefs, as mentioned in the 2008 Council of Europe's Recommendation. Claims regarding the development of intercultural competence can be categorized into cognitive, affective and behavioural dimensions.

According to the views of religious education teachers, intercultural competence in religious education is developed to a high degree almost equally in all components. Religious education teachers attributed the highest value to the affective dimension, the development of attitudes of tolerance (88.3%) and sensitivity to diversity (82.8%), and to the behavioural dimension, the fight against stereotypes and prejudices (89.1%). The lowest percentage of responses was connected to the development of analytical skills (61.3%) and critical thinking (66.1%). A high percentage of responses was focused on the development of knowledge and communication skills (76.7%). The results indicate that the cognitive and behavioural dimensions do not develop to the same extent, though they should be complementary. Learning about others cannot remain only at the informational level; it is necessary to have evaluative and analytical abilities while communicating as that will lead to the integration of acquired knowledge. The results point to the conclusion that the attitude of religious education teachers regarding the development of intercultural competence among students in religious education classes is extremely positive, and that they consider almost all components of intercultural competence to be equally important, developing them in students to the same extent. A slightly lower percentage of responses was recorded for the development of communication skills and critical thinking skills, which can also be linked to the lack of certain work methods important for the development of communication skills. Given that the previous results showed that religious education teachers rarely visit other religious communities and that they do not invite representatives

of other communities to their classes, this result is not surprising. It confirms the necessity of a method complementarity for the development of certain competences.

2.3. Motivation of Religious Education Teachers for Implementing Intercultural Education

We wanted to find out from the respondents to what extent they feel motivated to implement intercultural education in religious education classes. Although external conditions can represent a satisfactory foundation and a prerequisite for achieving the goals of intercultural education, a kind of internal motivation of religious education teachers is also needed, not only external motivation that comes from institutions and the curriculum or religious content that they are obliged to implement.

The results show a high degree of motivation among religious education teachers. As many as 376 religious education teachers (81.7%) are motivated to implement intercultural education in religious education. A very small percentage (18.7%), which is of course a certain indicator of heterogeneity in opinions, indicates a lack of motivation among a certain part of religious education teachers, more precisely 84 of them.

2.4. Competence of Religious Education Teachers for Conducting Intercultural Education

We wanted to obtain some insight on how the respondents self-assess their own ability to implement intercultural education. This result does not point to a generally applicable conclusion about the qualification of religious education teachers for the implementation of intercultural education in confessional religious education classes, but rather represents their personal opinions in the form of self-assessment, which is also a certain indicator considering the lifelong learning process of religious education teachers.

The results show a high degree of affirmative responses (62%), but also a significant percentage of negative responses (38%). According to religious education teachers, 175 of them do not consider themselves competent, while 285 of them think that they are sufficiently qualified. This is an important indicator for the further work of responsible institutions for the initial and lifelong education of religious education teachers. Plans and programmes, curricula and religious textbooks represent only one of the levels at which intercultural content needs to be implemented. The previously mentioned results indicated a high degree of motivation among religious education teachers. However, motivation is not a sufficient factor. Without knowledge and competence, religious education teachers cannot convey the necessary content to students or create the necessary stimulating atmosphere for intercultural learning nor develop the expected intercultural competence in students.

3. Materials and Methods

This research was conducted within the scientific research project RELIGOBRAZ—The Contribution of Religious Education to Coexistence in a Multicultural Society. The aim of the project is to explore the contribution of religious education in the Republic of Croatia to education for coexistence in a multicultural society. This contribution is explored on two levels: on the level of the curricula of subjects that mediate religious knowledge in primary and secondary schools and on the level of intercultural competence of the teachers themselves. This paper presents partial results of the research "Intercultural competence: attitudes, opinions and specific behaviours of religious education teachers".

The general goal of the research was to examine the knowledge of the basic features of interculturalism and the religious dimension of intercultural education, to examine the attitudes and opinions of religious education teachers regarding intercultural competences and the specific behaviours of religious education teachers related to intercultural competence necessary for the implementation of the religious dimension of intercultural education. This paper presents the results related to only one of the five specific research objectives: the attitudes and opinions of religious education teachers regarding the necessary intercultural competences for holding classes in schools. The survey method was used to carry out the quantitative research, for the purpose of which the survey questionnaire "Intercultural

competence: attitudes, opinions and specific behaviours of religious education teachers" was created by Jurišić and Razum (2021). The questionnaire was approved on 10 November 2021 by the Ethics Committee of the Catholic Faculty of Theology of the University of Zagreb. Some of the questions were taken, with written approval, from two questionnaires developed by Prof. Elvi Piršl, Ph.D. The questionnaire consists of 30 questions, 2 of which are open-ended and 28 are closed-ended, and the most frequently used form of response is the Likert scale. At the end of the data collection, the collected data was verified and prepared for processing, after which they were processed and analysed in the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 28.0). The processing of the results included the application of a quantitative analysis, and descriptive statistics was used to show absolute and relative frequencies, mean values and measures of dispersion. The quantitative research was conducted in the period from November 2021 to January 2022. Four hundred and sixty respondents participated in the research, of which 103 (22.4%) were men and 357 (77.6%) were women. At the national level, in the public schools of the Republic of Croatia, the subject Religious Education is taught in several confessional and religious versions by representatives of individual religious communities. For this purpose, religious education teachers affiliated with the Catholic Church, the Islamic Community, the Orthodox Church and the Heritage Reformed Congregations were asked to participate. A representative sample was not created; therefore, the results cannot be applied to the general population of religious education teachers. Three hundred and seventy-five Catholic religious education teachers (81.5%), 65 religious education teachers affiliated with the Heritage Reformed Congregations (14.1%), 18 Orthodox religious education teachers (3.9%) and 2 Islamic religious education teachers (0.4%) participated in the research.

We examined the opinions of religious education teachers regarding the methods and forms of work in religious education and the attitudes regarding the development of intercultural competence using a scale of 7 statements, and they marked each statement on a rating scale from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much). The obtained evaluation values of each particle are presented in 2 categories: 'YES' and 'NO'. The 'NO' category includes assessments from 1 (not at all) to 3 (moderate), and the 'YES' category from 4 (a lot) to 5 (very much). The obtained results are shown in Tables 1 and 2. We examined the opinions of religious education teachers regarding their own motivation using a rating scale from 1 (not motivated at all) to 5 (very motivated). The obtained evaluation values of each particle are presented in 2 categories: 'YES' and 'NO'. The 'NO' category includes assessments from 1 (I am not motivated at all) to 3 (I don't know/cannot answer), and the 'YES' category from 4 (motivated) to 5 (very motivated). The obtained results are shown in Table 3. We examined the opinions of religious education teachers regarding the competence to promote intercultural education in religious education using a rating scale from 1 (not competent at all) to 5 (very competent). The obtained evaluation values of each particle are presented in 2 categories: 'YES' and 'NO'. The 'NO' category includes assessments from 1 (I am not competent at all) to 3 (I do not know/cannot answer), and the 'YES' category from 4 (competent) to 5 (very competent). The obtained results are shown in Table 4.

Table 1. Methods and forms of work in religious education.

	Methods and Forms of Work in Religious Education	NO (%)	YES (%)
1.	Hosting members of other confessions and religions.	87.4	12.6
2.	Visiting religious institutions of other denominations and religions.	76.5	23.5
3.	Studying texts and documents of other confessions and religions.	66.1	33.9
4.	Debates, discussions regarding the doctrines of other religions.	64.8	35.2
5.	Collaborative learning.	62.2	37.8
6.	Role playing.	70.4	29.6
7.	Dialogue with members of other religions.	68.00	32.00

Table 2. Views of religious education teachers on the development of intercultural competence in religious education classes.

	Intercultural Competence in Religious Education Classes:	NO (%)	YES (%)
1.	The development of tolerance and respect.	11.7	88.3
2.	Cultivating sensitivity towards the diversity of religious and non-religious beliefs.	17.2	82.8
3.	Promoting communication and dialogue.	23.3	76.7
4.	Promoting knowledge regarding different aspects of religious diversity.	23.3	76.7
5.	Development of critical assessment and reflection skills.	33.9	66.1
6.	The fight against prejudices and stereotypes.	20.9	79.1
7.	Development of the ability to analyse without bias and interpret numerous different data.	38.7	61.3

Table 3. The level of motivation for implementing intercultural education in religious education classes.

Motivation to Implement Intercultural Education	NO (%)	YES (%)
	18.3	**81.7**

Table 4. Competence for promoting intercultural education in religious education classes.

Competence for Promoting Intercultural Education in Religious Education Classes	NO (%)	YES (%)
	38.00	**62.00**

4. Conclusions

The religious dimension of intercultural education, at the level of European documents, but also of numerous works by different authors, is gaining more and more importance. It is increasingly being recognized and acknowledged that there is no complete intercultural education without a religious dimension. European documents clearly emphasize the importance of teacher training so they would be qualified to teach the religious dimension of intercultural education.

The existing form of confessional religious education, which is still the predominant form of religious education in most European countries, is increasingly opening up to intercultural education. Teachers, as such, play a key role in promoting the said education. The theoretical concept of European research on religious education in Europe revealed that confessional religious education classes (learning religion) encourage the presentation

of one's own beliefs, attitudes and values, which is a key prerequisite for the development of intercultural competence. Adequate selection of methodological approaches is extremely important for intercultural learning. Research conducted among teachers of confessional religious education in the Republic of Croatia shows that among teachers there is an increasing awareness and openness towards the promotion of knowledge, attitudes and skills that can be closely linked to intercultural education. Religious education teachers are open to the application of work methods that encourage intercultural learning among students, but there is still a low percentage of those religious education teachers who apply the learning methods that enable real encounters, existential confrontation and actual communication with members of other confessions/religions as part of religious education classes. The development of the behavioural dimension of intercultural competence is at a lower percentage compared to the others. However, it is precisely this dimension that is related to work methods that require interaction and critical thinking, although they are poorly represented in confessional religious education. The results confirm the thesis of the paper according to which the methodical approach in confessional religious education classes affects the development of students' intercultural competence. Confessional education classes possess theoretical assumptions for their development, but it seems that an appropriate methodical approach is still lacking.

It is clear from these results that religious education teachers are aware of the importance of intercultural education and that they have a positive attitude towards it. However, it should be noted that the situation in the Republic of Croatia regarding the student population is still quite homogeneous. Current migrations, however, change the situation in modern society on a daily basis. Previously an extremely homogeneous ethnic and religious situation, Croatian society will probably soon become more plural considering the pluralism of cultures, religions and life attitudes. This situation will be felt even more strongly in classrooms. Multicultural diversity calls for new models of learning and teaching, i.e., intercultural and interreligious teaching and learning. The necessary development of students' intercultural competence will require additional efforts by the responsible institutions for initial and lifelong education in order to enable religious education teachers to acquire additional knowledge, improve their skills and build the appropriate attitudes necessary for working in pluralistic classes. For more adequate solutions and appropriate programmes of the mentioned institutions, there needs to be further research and new data. Given that this research did not have a sufficient number of respondents for a representative sample, which prevented the application of the obtained results to the general population, future research could focus on a larger number of members of other religious communities in the Republic of Croatia in order to obtain more comprehensive and representative results.

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Religious Education in Transition: From Content-Centred to Student-Centred

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Abstract: Catholic Religious Education as a subject in school curricula is an area in which the need for change is constantly felt. This change is driven by the paradigm shift in anthropology brought about by Vatican Council II, which sought to put the human being at the centre. Notwithstanding this shift proposed more than 50 years ago, we are still struggling to handle and implement this change. In practice, this calls for a re-evaluation of the traditional doctrinal methods, which have been associated with teaching Religious Education in the past and seeking to adopt new methods which are more anthropological and depart from where the human being actually stands and seek to answer the existential questions which contemporary human beings pose. The point of departure for such a vision is the etymological meaning of the term 'education' from the Latin root *educere*. In practical terms, such a shift from a content-centred to a more student-centred approach entails adopting a constructivist approach and putting into practice the principles of what is referred to as 'Adaptive Religious Education', which seeks to educate children in all the six dimensions of the human being simultaneously in a holistic way.

Keywords: religious education; adaptive religious education; constructivist approach; student-centred approach

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1. Introduction

The teaching of Religion as a subject in schools has always been the subject of controversies and of debates in different fora, both ecclesial and educational. Most of these debates centred amongst others on whether Religious Education should form part of the disciplines which are studied in schools by students as a formal curricular subject, whether students have an entitlement to it in virtue of holistic education, and how it should be assessed (Boeve 2016, pp. 136–50; L'Anson and Jasper 2017, pp. 30–32). At the same time, in our contemporary times, much more attention is being given to the way in which Religious Education is taught in schools and whether the approaches and methods used to teach Religious Education are adequate for our contemporary postmodern societies (Erricker 2010, pp. 43–68). This paper adopts the stance of a Catholic Religious Education and seeks to depart from the paradigm shift brought about by Vatican Council II, which through an anthropological shift, placed the human being at the centre of all pastoral activity. In this respect, Catholic Religious Education (CRE) is seen as a pastoral activity through which the faith of students is nourished, thus making CRE a form of education for the faith. This stance is used as the background against which contemporary CRE is analysed with the specific aim of proposing the Constructivist Approach in general and Adaptive Religious Education specifically as tools, amongst the many others, which render CRE more in line with the anthropological paradigm entreated by Vatican Council II.[1]

CRE intended in this paper is distinct from Catholic Education. Catholic Education refers to all the different forms of education which are imparted in Catholic Schools through their ethos, through curricular and through extra-curricular activities. For the scope of this paper, CRE will be taken to mean Religious Education as a subject that is taught as an

academic discipline in schools, with all the theological and educational nuances that the combination of the two terms 'Religious' and 'Education' call for. The context in which CRE is presented in this paper is situated in the context of the Maltese Islands and contexts which have similar legal and constitutional educational provisions. In Malta, it is the Constitution of Malta that states that the official religion of the Republic of Malta is the Roman Catholic Religion and that Religious Education is to be a compulsory subject in all State Schools (Constitution of Malta 1964, art. 2). Still, there is freedom of religion and one can privately and publicly adhere to whatever religion s/he wants (Constitution of Malta 1964, art. 40). The constitutional provision for the teaching of Religious Education in State Schools was further regulated by an Agreement between the Church and the State in 1989. This Agreement outlined the modes in which Catholic Religious Education was to be offered in Maltese Schools and who would be responsible for what (Repubblica di Malta and La Santa Sede 1989).

In this particular context, the meaning of a confessional religious education characterised as Catholic Religious Education also needs to be qualified. What is meant here by Catholic Religious Education is not an education for the faith, which is identical to catechesis in terms of faith formation. Catholic Religious Education is an education that seeks to situate the Catholic religion in the light of the culture and of the cultural development of the student in the light of holistic education. In this respect, it is distinct from catechesis but complementary to it (Sultana 2020). The main aim of such a Catholic Religious Education is not to augment the faith of the student, since this is the specific role of catechesis, but to help the student to link the Catholic religion with daily life and endeavours. This also includes studying how other major world religions look at the existential questions of the human being and see how they respond to the deepest cravings of the human being for meaning. Consequently, although the religious education imparted is from the Catholic point of view, it also considers the fact that our contemporary society is no longer homogenous, and alongside themselves, students encounter others who adhere to different beliefs.

2. A Shift in the Church

Vatican Council II, being a council of a pastoral rather than of a dogmatic nature, brought a radical paradigm shift in the way in which the Church considered itself and its role. The result of this paradigm shift sought to bring about a radical transformation in the way of being Church in our contemporary times. The pre-Vatican Council II Church was a pyramidal Church characterised by a dichotomy between the *ecclesia docens* (the teaching Church) and the *ecclesia discens* (the learning Church). In this model of being Church, revealed truths were specifically entrusted to the hierarchy who were duty bound to explain and teach these truths to the laity. On their behalf, the laity were considered as the flock who were called to listen to and to follow the teaching of the Church in a passive way (Alberich 2001, pp. 171–72; Alberich and Vallabaraj 2004, pp. 164–66). With Vatican Council II and the newly proposed outlook, this institutional and juridical model started being gradually replaced by a more charismatic ecclesiology, which was characteristic of the proceedings of the Council. In this ecclesiological model, the Church was considered a community that is made up of different ministries and charisms which function distinctly but in harmony with each other through the work of the Holy Spirit. In this model, the laity had an important role to play, and they became protagonists in the Church together with the hierarchy (Alberich 2001, pp. 172–75; Alberich and Vallabaraj 2004, pp. 166–68).

This radical shift in the outlook of the Church was also emulated in education. In this part of the paper, the focus is on the Declaration on Christian Education *Gravissimum Educationis* (GE). However, it is interesting to note that all the different Constitutions, Decrees, and Declarations of Vatican Council II, to some extent, have something to say about education in terms of the Christian understanding of the human person in relation to the Church and the world (Marauri Ceballos 2016, pp. 100–7). The Declaration on Christian Education *Gravissimum Educationis* (GE) acknowledges this from the opening paragraphs, which clearly state that the Church "must be concerned with the whole of man's life, even

the secular part of it insofar as it has a bearing on his heavenly calling" (Vatican Council II 1965). In the rest of the document, GE demonstrates this new outlook of the Church in various ways. Contrary to the pre-Vatican II custom, where the hierarchy was considered as the rightful and sole educators of the people, GE claims that parents are considered as the primary and the most important educators of their children (Vatican Council II 1965, p. 3). Parents are duty bound to educate their children and to see that they are those who are on the frontline where the education of their children is concerned (Vatican Council II 1965, pp. 3, 6; Congregation for Catholic Education 2009, p. 2). Therefore, parents share in the educational mission and task of the Church.

The community, with its particular educational structures, is not ruled out from the education of children. It is here that the school acquires a significant and prominent role. According to GE, schools do not exist to help children and adolescents to develop cognitively only, but through the right education, children are taught to make the right choices and to transmit human values (Vatican Council II 1965, p. 5). Notwithstanding this, the role of the Church is neither diminished nor insignificant. The Church still sees itself as having the responsibility of educating in the faith, but parents, teachers, and schools, who are part of the Church, help in accomplishing this task (Vatican Council II 1965, p. 3; Congregation for Catholic Education 2009, pp. 2, 4).

When all these partners collaborate together for the good of the education of the interlocutors, a more holistic education ensues. This holistic education is in line with the vision outlined in GE, which distanced itself from seeing an education that is stratified between education in the faith and other forms of education (Trenti 2004, p. 93). Moreover, the new vision of education as outlined in GE did no longer consider education in the faith as more important and as above other forms of education. All education was to take care of the holistic development of the child as a human being in pursuit of living a good life in society and of believers who seeks to answer the fundamental and existential questions of life (Vatican Council II 1965, p. 1). This is where CRE comes in.

The new vision outlined in the holistic development of the child meant that education was now to take advantage of the newly emerging pedagogies, of the latest innovations in psychology, and of the novelties in communication techniques that help in the congruous development of the cognitive dimension with all the other dimensions of human development, namely the social, the moral, the psychological, the physical and the religious dimensions (Vatican Council II 1965, p. 1). This trend seeking the holistic development of the child was reiterated and consolidated in subsequent Church documents, such as the *General Directory for Catechesis* (Congregation for the Clergy 1997, pp. 73–76); the *Circular Letter to the Presidents of Bishop's Conferences on Religious Education in Schools* (Congregation for Catholic Education 2009, pp. 1, 10); and the *Directory for Catechesis* (Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelization 2020, p. 314) which clearly posit that Religious Education must necessarily be holistic in nature. Moreover, the holistic education of children, which entails the collaboration of several partners, namely parents, schools, and teachers with the Church, was also reiterated in Church documents following GE: *General Directory for Catechesis* (Congregation for the Clergy 1997, p. 76), *Circular Letter to the Presidents of Bishop's Conferences on Religious Education in Schools* (Congregation for Catholic Education 2009, pp. 1–4); *Directory for Catechesis* (Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelization 2020, pp. 317–18).

3. Continuity with Approaches in Use

The vision of the holistic development of the child, which Vatican Council II sought to push forward, was in line with what was already happening in some European countries such as Germany and Austria during that period. In the most influential central European countries, the traditional approach of teaching, which consisted in what is referred to as the Doctrinal Approach, was being put aside in favour of methods that took a more pedagogical stance (Trenti 2004, pp. 92–93). The Doctrinal Approach was adopted from lessons that were given to children in parishes. This approach originally arose as a reaction

to the Protestant Reformation (1517) and consisted of the teaching of the *Catechism* as a book by heart. The aim of teaching the text of the Catechism was to ensure that children and adults could distinguish good from inaccurate teachings. With the introduction of schools, this approach used mainly in adult catechesis was automatically transferred to children in the school classroom (Buchanon 2005, pp. 21–22, 34). Consequently, Religious Education in schools gave a predominant and insistent position to knowledge with little importance to the children's ability to grasp the meaning of the information being given. The method of teaching consisted of little explanation, but the text was learnt through repetition with mnemonics as an aid (Biancardi and Gianetto 2016, pp. 30–57; Buchanon 2005, p. 22).

Education in the faith using the Doctrinal Approach, however, brought about dissatisfaction since knowing the Catechism by heart did not automatically mean that it could be put into practice. On the other hand, innovative methods used in other subjects were leaving better results because they were using the recent developments in psychology as a foundation for teaching academic subjects. Such subjects started using a more student-centred route to teach: moving from the known to the unknown, from the concrete to the abstract, and from the simple to the more difficult. The discontent in Religious Education using the Doctrinal Approach started as back as 1887 in Austria and Germany. This brought about a renewal movement commenced by the DKV—the German Catechists' Association and which ended in the development and adoption of a new method which became known as the Munich Method (Biancardi and Gianetto 2016, pp. 166–70).

The Munich Method emphasised the pedagogy to be used for educating in the faith by introducing the concept of formal grades or teaching steps. The Munich Method was made up of five successive stages: the preparation stage, where the lesson was linked to previous lessons or knowledge; the presentation stage, where the main points of the lesson were shared with the students. This was followed by an explanation stage which then led to synthesis and an application of what had been learnt. It was only during the fourth stage—synthesis—that the text of the Catechism was introduced (Biancardi and Gianetto 2016, pp. 170–91). The Munich Method was adopted as the method for Religious Instruction in 1912 during the Congress of Vienna.

A reaction to the Munich Method came with the evolution of the Kerygmatic Approach, which did not emphasise the pedagogical process of teaching but the contents. The origins of this method can be traced back to the Faculty of Theology of Innsbruck, Austria. The driving forces behind this emerging method in the 1930s were the well-known theologians Karl Rahner, Hugo Rahner, Josef Andreas Jungmann, and Franz Xavier Arnold. Their proposal was that religious instruction should distance itself from the scholastic theology, which was typical of the day, and seek a more kerygmatic proclamation. The paradigm which they proposed as a perfect example of a kerygmatic proclamation was Peter's speech on Pentecost (Acts 2, 14–41). This speech was not made up of dogmatic formulas or scholastic rhetoric but a narration of the experience of the apostles with Jesus (Biancardi and Gianetto 2016, pp. 201–15, 223–27; Buchanon 2005, pp. 23–25). This method was adopted as the method for Religious Instruction during the Congress of Eichstätt in 1960.

GE, in 1965, indeed encouraged experimenting with new approaches and methods of teaching and of educating children (Vatican Council II 1965). Consequently, the adoption of new approaches to Religious Education continued in the years following Vatican Council II (Buchanon 2005, pp. 25–33; Gearon 2014; Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelization 2020, p. 316).

4. Religious Education in our Contemporary Times

Throughout history, the teaching of Religion as a subject in schools has mostly been seen as a way to strengthen children in the faith. In this sense, the study of Religion as a school discipline sought to clone the beliefs of parents in the lives of their children. In the past, this formed part of the traditional processes of handing on the faith from parents or guardians to offspring together with other methods of religious socialisation (Scott 1994, pp. 276–80; Gearon 2014, p. 52). Today, these traditional processes of transmission of the

faith are no longer effective and have become mostly dysfunctional due to processes of secularisation and of pluralisation. Therefore, Religious Education as a subject in schools has taken over the task of these traditional methods of religious socialisation while seeking to achieve the same end, that is, the gradual handing on of the faith to the child. However, this type of religious formation as an induction into a religious tradition is running aground today in that the desired results are not being achieved even after numerous years of schooling (Scott 2005b, pp. 81–82). Moreover, Gearon (2014, p. 52) posits that:

> Outside of faith settings, contemporary religious education is invariably defined by a separation of religious education from religious life. The problem of modern religious education remains: how to ground the subject when it is no longer grounded in religious life.

It is in virtue of this that we have to move from the teaching of Religion intending to propagate the faith to Religious Education. Religious Education not only seeks to give relevant information about the faith (theological component) but also strives to make the faith intelligible (educational component). This Religious Education seeks to safeguard the interplay between continuity and adaptation to our contemporary society (Scott 2005b, p. 82). Being an academic discipline, Religious Education must meet the academic rigour of school-based educational disciplines. In this respect, there is no space for indoctrination, but it has to teach students how to think, how to reason things out and thus have a critical outlook (Scott 1994, pp. 283–88; Gearon 2014, pp. 58–60) Amongst other things, this can be conducted by studying fundamental texts of a religious nature which provoke students to think (Scott 2005a, pp. 74–75; Gearon 2014, pp. 61–62)

In this perspective, Religious Education evokes a particular type of interaction that is based more on dialogue than on a deductive monologue (Jarmy 2021, pp. 146–47). In the Religious Education class, topics are debated and not simply covered as the syllabus may require. Debates open the door to a particular interaction in class where all students are ready to listen to each other, learn from each other, and help each other to grow by offering them different points of view and different interpretations of the same idea. This innovative approach to Religious Education seeks to help students to be critical of whatever they are learning. It helps them to seek to pose the right questions in order to clarify ideas and concepts. Most of all, while not negating or picking and choosing what one believes, it is in line with the postmodern outlook of the searching human being (Scott 2005a, pp. 70–72). When Religious Education as an academic subject seeks to bring about a change in the understanding of the student, we can truly speak of a process of learning and of education because "it fosters religious literacy, cultivates religious understanding and lessens religious prejudice" (Scott 2005a, p. 73).

While in the past, the philosophy of education was based on a particular anthropological outlook, the contemporary philosophy of education seeks to put the child at the centre of all forms of education. Today, we can speak of a movement from a content-centred approach to a more child-centred approach in education. While in the past, the concept of education was based on the etymology of the Latin verb *educare,* which meant to train and to mould a person, the contemporary concept of education tends to be based more on the etymology of the Latin verb *educere* which means to draw out and to lead out. While the former—*educare*—considered children as empty recipients who had to be filled with the contents imparted during the process of education, the latter—*educere*—considers children as active interlocutors during their education. In this respect, education seeks to enlighten children to discover the hidden potential within themselves (Craft 2017, p. 9). This brings to mind Lev Vygotsky's notion of situated and collaborative learning and of the zone of proximal development, where he argues that in education, there are two levels: a lower level which can be mastered by the person by him/herself; and an upper level which can be mastered with the help of a teacher. It is this upper level that is targeted during the process of education. With the help of the teacher, who acts as a facilitator, the student can master new levels and discover new insights (Vygotsky 1978, pp. 79–91). Moreover, in the specific case of Religious Education, it is not only the teacher who can help the student to reach

new limits but considering a constructivist student-centred approach, even classmates and other significant people who form part of the educational community of the students such as parents or guardians, and other family members play a significant role. All these may help the student to reach beyond him/herself to new heights.

This contemporary philosophy of education is also applicable to Religious Education since this needs to be considered as a school discipline in the true and proper meaning of the term, with all the benefits and the scientific rigour required by academic disciplines. Considering Religious Education as an academic discipline is in line with the vision of the Church for Religious Education (Congregation for Catholic Education 2009, pp. 17–18; Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelization 2020, p. 315). Considering Religious Education as an academic discipline that seeks to help students discover the hidden knowledge within them opens us to a myriad of approaches and techniques that can help in rendering the subject truly scholarly. Amongst these, we find the Constructivist Approach and Adaptive Religious Education as a technique that is in line with the Constructivist Approach.

5. The Constructivist Approach

Considering Religious Education not simply as the transmission of contents of a religious nature to students but as a way in which students are empowered to discover the treasures hidden deep within them finds one of its strongest allies in the Constructivist Approach. The constructivist approach, which is akin to a student-centred approach, is directly opposed to the Doctrinal Approach, which was typical of Religious Instruction in the past. While in the teacher-centred or content-centred approach, the teacher dispenses facts and knowledge, and the student listens and seeks to memorise in a passive way,[2] in the Constructivist Approach, students are the focus of attention whilst not neglecting the nature of the contents which need to be passed on (Grennon Brooks and Brooks 2001, pp. 15–22).

The Constructivist Approach is not a pedagogy in itself, but it is an approach to education that seeks to demonstrate how learning is possible (McLeod 2019). One may rightly ask about what is specific to the Constructivist Approach which makes it so suitable for contemporary Religious Education. The answer to such a query is that the Constructivist Approach, with all its positive aspects, fits perfectly with the anthropological outlook put forward by Vatican Council II. The anthropological outlook was the fundamental process used by the Conciliar Fathers during the Council to read the signs of the times and to seek to re-connect with the contemporary human being. The anthropological outlook is opposed to the deductive Doctrinal (philosophical) Approach, which was mostly in use at that time. In fact, the anthropological outlook takes an inductive approach by starting from where the human being actually stands, with all the preoccupations and questions raised by the human being. These are then studied in the light of the faith in order to be able to shed some guiding light on them. When this is achieved, a return journey to the daily life of the human being is made in order to use the inspiration and guidance achieved through the faith as a light for one's path (Morante 2002, pp. 203–4). This is exactly what contemporary CRE seeks to do: to shed light on the existential questions of the human being. The Constructivist Approach, therefore, helps educators to truly start from the human being and to put the child at the centre of all educational endeavours.

The fundamental structure on which the constructivist approach is built is the concept of scaffolding. As scaffolding is used to sustain builders to reach new heights while constructing a building, so is scaffolding a necessary component in the constructivist approach to help the teacher to reach new heights. Scaffolding in the constructivist approach also serves as an incentive for students to feel safe and to reach just beyond their limits (Wheeler n.d.), and so deepen their learning (Erricker 2010, p. 65). This recalls Vygotsky's theory of socially constructed learning (Vygotsky 2012, pp. 82–153).

Applied to CRE, constructivism opens the door to a myriad of methods and techniques, which render it a more intelligible and engaging academic subject. This is primarily due to

the fact that it posits a hands-on approach, with students themselves engaging in a personal journey of enquiry for knowledge and for learning rather than receiving instructions and knowledge from the teacher. Learning is procured through a collaborative and cooperative activity both with the teacher and with peers (Comoglio 2019, pp. 62–63). In fact, the constructivist approach gives equal dignity to all the stakeholders in the classroom who are seeking to learn from each other (Colasanti 2004, p. 130). Most of the knowledge acquired in this way is therefore linked to the personal experiences of the students; it is not theoretical knowledge that may be irrelevant to their daily lives (Erricker 2010, p. 65). In this respect, CRE acquires a more experiential outlook (Buchanon 2005, pp. 25–27; Gearon 2014, pp. 64–66), which is made up of moments of imagination, personal reflection, and individual inferences, where students are not fed with the knowledge of a religious nature in a quasi-indoctrinating way, but through facilitation by the teacher, they get to their own understanding of this knowledge (Lamon n.d.).

In the Constructivist Approach, the classroom environment is open, dynamic, trusting, and respectful, and it gives adequate space for both objective and subjective learning. In this type of classroom environment, the teacher's role is to provide structure to the teaching activity taking place and to facilitate the students' acquisition of knowledge by helping them to explore the hidden innate potential for knowledge (*educere*) that they possess (Lamon n.d.). The database of knowledge that teachers seek to give to their students is not edified by instructing children in the faith through content dissemination, but it is the student who has to construct this for him/herself through the orientation given by the teacher (Erricker 2010, p. 64). Students can achieve this with the help of many didactic aids, amongst which we find the formal presentation of particular themes, discussions, slideshow presentations, and video clips which enable the exploration of themes from multiple perspectives. This allows CRE classes to be approached and delivered through multiple yet at the same time complementary teaching and learning styles (L'Anson and Jasper 2017, pp. 144–54). This evokes Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences, in which he argues that every individual has a frame of mind which is geared at a particular way of thinking and learning, and the more we diversify in our teaching and learning styles, the more will our teaching be effective (Gardner 2011, pp. 3–11, 77–292).

By way of conclusion, we can state that the Constructive Approach applied to CRE emphasises the construction of knowledge and not the simple reproduction of information about the faith. Moreover, the construction of knowledge is aimed at practicality and applicability and seeks to solve newly emerging problems in life through the promotion of higher-order thinking skills, and not simply to reproduce what one has learnt by heart. Using the Constructivist Approach for teaching CRE emulates the complexity of the contemporary world, thus doing justice to students who will have to face real life situations in the future (Concept to Classroom n.d.). In this scenario, errors are not seen as a negative thing but as an opportunity to grow and refine one's thinking skills (Grennon Brooks and Brooks 2001, p. 82).

Notwithstanding all the positive implications of the Constructive Approach, unfortunately, we still may have several instances where the Doctrinal Approach is still preferred to the student-centred approach, to the detriment of the students themselves and to CRE. The major reasons for this are two-fold. The first is a question of time since it is a known fact that adopting a constructivist approach employs more time. The second reason is that some teachers still feel more confident using the Doctrinal Approach, which they think yields better results.

6. Adaptive Religious Education

Adaptive Religious Education (ARE) is a technique that seeks to put the student at the centre of CRE. In this respect, it can be considered as exploiting the Constructivist Approach. CRE seeks to make human beings more humane by discovering the riches which lie hidden within through the process of education. This process of human development is greatly aided by the insights gained through God's pedagogy. In fact, the foundations of ARE lie

in God's pedagogy. God's pedagogy refers to our human understanding of the way in which God gently called and formed his chosen people to be able to listen, understand, and give heed to his words (Hodgson 1999, pp. 11–49). Throughout the ages, God treated his people in such a way that they were gradually led to his discovery and to discover his love in a plan of salvation. Throughout the ages, God spoke to his people using a myriad of languages that they could understand. God never spoke to his people in languages that were unintelligible to them or could have gone unnoticed. God's pedagogy in history can be divided into three phases: the Old Testament pedagogy; Christ as God's ultimate word; and the time of the Church (Congregation for the Clergy 1997, pp. 36–45, 141–93).

The Old Testament is made up of a progressive pedagogy that took advantage of the Kairos in which God would speak using a particular language and method, according to the phase in the formation and education of his chosen people. The Old Testament sheds light on the multiple faces of God, with the first being that of a saviour and of a liberator from the bondage of human slavery. This was followed by many others, amongst which we find God as a creator, God as a merciful father, God as a teacher and as a wise person, God as a creative and insightful teacher who transforms daily events into lessons of wisdom, as a God who patiently waits for his people to grow up and mature. During the different periods of the formation and education of his people, God also used third parties whose aim was to help the people to listen to, decipher, and to comprehend his message. It is in this light that we have to understand God's messengers, such as the Prophets, the Judges, and even the Monarchy. These messengers were sent by God to guide and teach his chosen people (Congregation for the Clergy 1997, p. 139; Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelization 2020, pp. 157–58).

God's progressive formation of his people found its culmination in Jesus Christ, who is God's ultimate word. Both the words and actions of Jesus shed light on his pedagogy: he invited all the people to follow him, especially the poor and the lowly; he proclaimed the Kingdom of God through words and deeds; he was kind and delicate with everyone, but at the same time he was very strong in his demands; he invited all to follow him in a lifestyle that frees the human being from the bondage of evil and promotes life to the full; he carefully and patiently formed his disciples and sent them out on missions (Congregation for the Clergy 1997, p. 140; Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelization 2020, pp. 159–63).

God's progressive pedagogy is still unfolding today under the guidance of the Holy Spirit during the time of the Church. As Church, we are called to continue uncovering and showing God's infinite love for his people (Congregation for the Clergy 1997, pp. 141–42; Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelization 2020, pp. 164–66). This can be conducted in a myriad of ways, amongst which we find CRE. We, as Church, do not possess any revealed pedagogy for the faith. Had we been in possession of a revealed pedagogy for the faith, this would have helped us a lot in our endeavours since all we would be called to do is to apply it to our particular context. Notwithstanding this, the pedagogy of God in the Old Testament and the pedagogy of Christ in the New Testament do present us with innumerable hints which can help us in our educational endeavours. We are called to educate using the same guiding lines which God's pedagogy gives us as hints for effective education for the faith. However, Theology cannot do this all by itself. CRE is, by its very nature, intrinsically interdisciplinary. Whilst Theology remains a scientific field in itself, we need the help of the Sciences of Education for a fecund CRE, which is truly beneficial to students (Erricker 2010, pp. 43, 195–215; Gellel 2006, p. 1094; 2011, pp. 100–1).

Drawing from the way in which God has always sought to communicate revealed truths with his chosen People, ARE is based on four foundational principles:

1. Respect for the human person;
2. A tension and, at the same time, complementarity between the individual and the community;
3. The use of differentiated methods;
4. A progressive formation of the self (Gellel 2006, pp. 1103–106; 2011, pp. 103–4).

The primary value in all CRE is the dignity and the value of the human being. It is the uniqueness of each and every individual that calls all educators to consider the human being in a holistic way with all his/her particular traits and characteristics, including one's preferred learning styles. In this sense, the traditional way of teaching religion in the form of teaching doctrine and the Magisterium in a deductive way leaves much to be desired (Jarmy 2021, pp. 143–45). On the other hand, ARE seeks to delve deeper into understanding the richness of the uniqueness of each student (Gellel 2006, pp. 1103–104). This requires the teacher to think outside the box and to seek to adapt all knowledge to the particular needs of the students using a number of differentiated teaching methods, which put the student at the centre of the teaching process (Gellel 2011, p. 103). At times, this involves considering a leap forward into unknown territory. "If, following Spinoza, we do not know in advance of what a particular being is capable, a key purpose of education becomes the fashioning of events and encounters that lead students out from their point of departure through open engagement and exploration" (L'Anson and Jasper 2017, p. 149).

Adapting one's classroom to the variety of individual needs of the students requires that the teacher knows the students quite well in advance. There are three particular benefits to getting to know the students well from the very beginning:[3]

1. The students are given the message that their individuality and uniqueness are important and that the teacher values this positively and not as a hindrance to teaching.
2. Feeling accepted as they are, the students commit themselves and strive to work even through difficult moments since they actively seek to work for a teacher who values their individuality and uniqueness.
3. The teacher has access to an opening into the individuality of each and every student. This is an opening that is an ever-growing insight into the student as an individual learner and seeker (Tomlinson and Imbeau 2010, pp. 78–79).

Although ARE seeks to take advantage of human uniqueness, nonetheless, we must keep in mind that human beings are relational beings. They seek to be connected and in relation with themselves, with God, with others, and with the created world (Hay and Nye 2006, pp. 131–59). This means that if CRE is seeking to respect the student in a holistic way, this has to be conducted in the context of the community. In this light, the classroom should be the preferred teaching and learning environment (Gellel 2006, p. 1104). Therefore "learning within a community is preferred to individualized learning" (Gellel 2006, p. 1104).

Applying ARE to CRE implies that one should strive to use differentiated methods as much as possible. The use of differentiated methods can prove to be very tricky and challenging. It also calls for careful planning and assessment of the learning that is taking place in the classroom (Stronge 2007, p. 70). Notwithstanding this, in the end, it produces the best results since the different methods adopted can target the students' different and preferred learning styles (Gellel 2006, p. 1105). A specific aid that helps in differentiated learning is the use of the symbol system. In general, we have a three-fold symbol system. In this system, all didactic aids and resources can be classified under a tri-part scheme: visual, verbal, and concrete. Verbal resources are those which are limited to sound only, especially speaking; visual resources exploit the human eye and vision; concrete resources revert especially to the senses of touch and smell. One is not limited to using these three aspects of the symbol system in an individual way. One may combine two or even three together to create a more attractive resource. However, when speaking about differentiation, there are other variables that are at play, such as the classroom environment, the type of resource book which is used, and the teaching method. All these are at play in creating a truly differentiated CRE class using ARE (Gellel 2011, pp. 106–8).

The most important thing in a CRE class is that students are exposed to different symbols through different teaching techniques so that their particular learning style is matched in at least one part of the lesson. This helps students to engage more with what is happening in class, and this makes it easier for them to learn. "Students are most engaged and achieve most successfully when instruction is appropriately suited to their achievement levels and needs" (Stronge 2007, p. 71). This can be achieved in practice by dividing a lesson

into smaller steps which are then delivered using a variety of didactic techniques, which in their turn make use of a different symbol every time (Gellel 2011, p. 108). A successful teacher must be able to present the academic subject as a challenge for the majority of the students in the class, but at the same time, not make it too difficult for them to be successful in grasping what is being discussed. Research has also indicated that teachers who use and adapt their teaching to the different learning styles of the students are more effective as class and subject teachers. This calls the teacher to embark on an ongoing evaluation of what is going to be covered and discussed in class so that it constantly and continually seeks to be in line with and in tune with the needs of the students (Stronge 2007, p. 70). This also stands for CRE.

When this is conducted, one hopes to achieve a stage where the progressive formation of students starts to become evident. This is the final fundamental aspect on which ARE is built and which it seeks to achieve. The differentiated techniques with which ARE seeks to tap into the uniqueness of each student ultimately seek to help the students to progressively mature through the formation. Students can mature progressively when they are challenged to move a step further in the right direction from where they actually stand. The whole concept behind ARE is to challenge students to find innovative solutions to new and ever-growing complex issues by adapting to new situations which present themselves. This leads to a realistic progressive formation of students who learn to apply knowledge to new and slightly altered situations which have never been encountered before and which require the putting together of knowledge acquired at different moments and using different methods (Gellel 2006, pp. 1105–106).

7. Conclusions

Religious Education has had a turbulent past due to its constant striving to retain a substantial and influential position in the academic realm. To some extent, this has been achieved in some countries, and Religious Education has secured a place within the curricula of compulsory schooling. However, we cannot just be at peace knowing that Religious Education is part of the curriculum. We constantly need to tap into the effect that Religious Education is leaving on students or otherwise. This has called for conversion and for a constant transition by Religious Education to make it more relevant to the lives of the students by being up-to-date with the latest developments in the pedagogical and educational field.

The Constructivist Approach and ARE as a technique have been presented as two ways in which CRE can be relevant to students in our contemporary times. In this respect, the use of ARE, amongst others, constitutes the future of Religious Education because it does not simply seek to give knowledge to the students, but it actively chooses to adapt itself to the needs and to the learning styles of the students. In this way, CRE will be distancing itself from the Doctrinal Approach used in the past to more student-centred and constructive techniques, which are typical of today's education and acceptable to students, to the educational community and to contemporary society at large.

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Notes

[1] The Constructivist Approach and Adaptive Religious Education mentioned here are not to be seen as exclusive of all the other different approaches and methods that can be used in CRE but parallel to them. They have been chosen here while respecting the contents that need to be transmitted to interlocutors, at the same time allowing a lot of space for creativity and for student-centredness.

[2] This brings to mind the pre-Vatican II ecclesial model in the form of a pyramid and the roles of each and every sector within this hierarchical grid.

[3] Tomlinson and Imbeau give several tools in a teacher's toolkit of how one can get to know the students better in very creative ways. See (Tomlinson and Imbeau 2010, pp. 151–74).

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Article

Leading the School Wisely and Purposefully: Design of a Practical, Wise Leadership Practice to Fulfil the Mission of Catholic Education

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Abstract: Regarding the educational endeavour of their schools, Catholic school leaders are challenged to maintain "mission integrity", and to remain faithful to the principles of Catholic education. While their daily praxis is characterised by multiple interruptions, even school leaders with profound theoretical knowledge and extensive experience do not automatically know how to deal with them in a way that aligns with the distinctive and authentic principles of Catholic education. This article argues that a practical, wise leadership practice based on Christian discernment practices provides a kind of executive function that helps Catholic school leaders to decide and act wisely and purposefully. A generic design for interrelated strategies of practical, wise school leadership is presented that in a profound way does justice not only to the ethical but also to the transformative nature of the endeavour of Catholic education. The design consists of four clusters of strategies, characterised by practical wisdom and well-chosen reflective questions to activate these strategies.

Keywords: Catholic school leaders; interruption; practical wisdom; educational design research; soft strategies; reflective questions

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1. Introduction

Catholic education is characterised first and foremost by a Christian vision on education that espouses the humanisation of the world and mankind. Based on this vision, Catholic schools endeavour to practise good education. School leaders have a crucial responsibility regarding the educational endeavour of Catholic schools, and the development and maintenance of a consistent culture and ethos. In particular, they are challenged to maintain mission integrity; that is, to match the rhetoric of the principles of Catholic education with reality (Grace 2010, 2018; Fincham 2021). While their daily praxis is characterised by multiple incidents that interrupt the expected course of events, Catholic school leaders are nevertheless expected to remain faithful to the principles of Catholic education. By what means can they navigate through their day-to-day experiences and yet remain faithful to these principles?

This article explores how Catholic school leaders may be able to maintain mission integrity; not in an instrumental way, but in a way that justifies the ethical and transformative nature of the educational endeavour of Catholic schools. Catholic education is oriented to the *telos* of humanisation, but its realisation cannot be enforced or controlled. Catholic school leaders would therefore benefit from soft strategies that acknowledge the non-enforceability of educational aims and purposes. A practical, wise leadership practice that is based on Christian practices of discernment would involve such strategies.

The design of the article is as follows. First, it explores the issue of how Catholic school leaders act, in view of their responsibility to maintain mission integrity. Next, theoretical considerations are presented to deepen the understanding of the issue. In order to contribute to a solution to the issue of their actions, an educational design perspective is taken to lay out an intervention for Catholic school leaders. This intervention aims

to support Catholic school leaders in making wise and purposeful decisions regarding the educational endeavour. Based on design requirements and a design proposition, a generic design for practical, wise leadership practice is presented. The article ends with a conclusion and a contribution for the discussion.

2. School Leaders and the Mission of Catholic Education

Catholic schools endeavour to provide good education, with a view to the future of their students and of society. Their educational mission is closely linked to the mission of the Church, which is evangelisation and the humanisation (Vatican Council II 1965, sct. 8). In Catholic schools, therefore, good education goes beyond a simple list of societal assignments—such as acquiring literacy and mathematics skills, and internalising social and democratic behaviour—intending to contribute to the greater good of humanisation, which can be expressed in the pedagogical aims and purposes of the school. These aims and purposes are ethically oriented towards the good life, and their distinctive articulation and interpretation are based on and motivated by the Catholic religion having its origin in the person of Christ, and its roots in the teachings of the Gospel (Groome 1998; Conroy 1999; Miller 2007).

Catholic education is characterised most importantly by a Christian vision on education in view of the humanisation of the world and mankind. By including ethically oriented and religiously inspired pedagogical aims and purposes as its transformative *telos,* Catholic education criticises the "buffered self" of modernity, i.e., not being open, porous and vulnerable to a transcendent world (Taylor 2007). From a Christian vision on education, Catholic schools strive for the integral formation of the whole student; and that includes love for wisdom, passion for truth, and the integration of faith, culture and life. Knowledge acquisition is not a goal in itself, but oriented to the formation of students and their dignity. The integral formation is founded on a Christian anthropology which not only reaches out to the whole person, and to each and every person, but also takes into account their vulnerability, weakness and strengths, and their transcendent destiny (Vatican Council II 1965, sct. 1–2).

By developing and maintaining a coherent culture and ethos of shared values and commitments, Catholic schools are able to strive for good education, and appear to be rather successful in doing so (Casson 2018; Fincham 2021). However, the endeavour of Catholic schools to provide good education should not be understood particularly in terms of strong rationality, instrumentality and plannability; but rather in terms of receptivity, openness and looking forward to a future that is yet to come (*adventus*) (Roebben 2017). In a Christian vision of education, the realisation of good education is the work of human hands enabled by God's grace.

At a Catholic school, the school leaders have a crucial responsibility regarding the school's educational endeavour, as well as the development and maintenance of a consistent culture and ethos. In particular, they are challenged "to maintain 'mission integrity', which can be described as the matching of the rhetoric of Catholic educational principles with reality." (Fincham 2021, pp. 8–9). Weak mission leadership may encourage a Catholic school to move away from its mission commitments, a "mission drift" (Grace 2018). By remaining faithful to the principles of Catholic education, school leaders are expected to facilitate the realisation of a distinctive curriculum based on pedagogical aims and purposes, and to enhance and continue the realisation of a coherent culture and ethos. However, contemporary societal developments such as detraditionalization (Rymarz 2021), declining religiosity and familiarity with the Christian tradition (Wilkin 2018) and impatient requests for individual freedom and personal autonomy (Pring 2018) challenge school leaders' maintaining of mission integrity. These developments affect not only the plausibility of Catholic schools and their educational project, but also the possibilities for school leaders to interpret the Catholic tradition while remaining faithful to the principles of Catholic education (Scott 2008). How are leaders at Catholic schools able to maintain an ethically oriented and religiously inspired culture and ethos for the school in society's predominantly

secular culture? How are they able to strive for an educational endeavour of shared aims and purposes, when the teachers, the students, their parents and other people involved assert their individual freedom and personal autonomy?

The marketisation of education also affects the responsibility of school leaders to maintain mission integrity. This refers to the phenomenon that schools gain market share only by striving for visible, measurable academic success, which is regarded almost exclusively as the sole criterion for judging a "good school" (Grace 2018). Society's impatient quest for learning outcomes, performance and accountability has driven Catholic schools, like others, into the arms of a technical and instrumental rationality (Biesta 2010; Buchanan 2015). Following this rationality, the educational praxis is scrutinised through statistics and performance data. Failure to find a perfect match between input and output must be "fixed", overcome by the application of strong, secure and predictable methods and procedures. However, from a Catholic perspective, pedagogical aims and purposes are of a transformative nature, open to what can possibly occur, and cannot be enforced. Education originates in a different epistemology. Biesta (2017, p. 52) presents it as

> "a critique of immanence and an argument for transcendence, an argument for the idea that not everything that occurs in our lives is generated through our own acts of sense-making (construction or interpretation) but that there are things that come to us from the outside."

How are school leaders of Catholic schools able to remain faithful to the principles of Catholic education when the dominant culture in education is that of measurability, instrumentality and plannability? How can they come to decisions that emphasise receptivity, grace and the transformative nature of the educational endeavour?

While they are expected to facilitate the realisation of a distinctive curriculum from a Christian vision on education, as well as enhancing the realisation of a coherent culture and ethos, Catholic school leaders are confronted with serious dilemmas and challenges. The issue of actions concerns the question: in the present context of detraditionalization, secularisation and individualism, as well as the marketisation of education, how should school leaders act with a view to maintaining mission integrity?

3. Theoretical Considerations

With the intention of contributing to a possible solution, we now further explore the issue of the actions of Catholic school leaders. By looking firstly at their day-to-day reality, we intend to find out how and when the issue of the actions that maintain mission integrity manifests itself. This exploration should provide leads for a new understanding of the acting issue. We then turn to the capacity of school leaders to deal with issues in the course of their daily activities, and to agogic practices of the Catholic tradition, in order to discover new possibilities for dealing with issues.

3.1. Daily Reality of School Leaders

Because maintaining mission integrity is about "fidelity in practice and not just in public rhetoric to the distinctive and authentic principles of a Catholic education" (Grace 2010, p. 8), it translates to the realisation of educational principles and mission commitments within the everyday reality (Fincham 2021). What are the day-to-day experiences of school leaders?

A school leader's job can be characterised by its complexity, among other things, which presents itself in day-to-day experiences. Due to societal and political developments, as well as an increase in pressure on schools to perform and an emphasis on accountability, the complexity of the job has increased significantly over the last few decades (Leithwood and Earl 2000; Odhiambo and Hii 2012). In a context of increased pressure and expectations, school leaders are often confronted by incidents that manifest themselves as problems. The incidents occur and evolve in ways that were not expected or could not be predicted, and in which it is not clear how the various elements are related to each other. They may concern events such as an unusual request from a school department concerning the

curriculum, a serious row between a teacher and a student, an impatient demand from a group of disgruntled parents regarding student attendance at religious services, or the unexpected announcement of a pandemic. These and many other events require responses and decisions from school leaders. The occurrence of such events interrupts the daily reality of the school and puts the school leader's repertoire of acting strategies to the test.

Dealing with these and many other daily problems is by no means easy. From a systemic perspective, school leaders can deal with these problems in an instrumental way by shrinking back from the issue and attempting to apply their usual strategies (Bakker 2016). They can try harder by using repair strategies, for example by urging students to attend religious services and insinuating to their parents that attendance is obligatory. They can also opt for strategies to develop or extend the current system further, for example by expanding school protocols on curriculum renewal or student behaviour. By using these instrumental strategies, an interruption is put aside, and a problem may well be solved in the short term. However, this approach equates to ignoring or glossing over the interruption, and seldom leads to a serious investigation of the underlying issue and its ethical orientation.

A more fruitful approach must address the ethical quality of the school leader's job. A school leader is confronted with ethical questions and issues on a daily basis. Daily interruptions evoke ethical questions and issues because they can be interpreted in numerous ways and looked at from various angles; therefore, they call for reflection and judgement in the context of the educational endeavour of the school. A request from the department could mean serious criticism of the current school curriculum, but could also supplement it, complement it or renew it entirely. It could also mean more than one thing: what appears to be a long-awaited supplement may turn out to be a profound renewal. The occurrence of an interruption such as this calls for reflection and judgement. According to which motivations should the request be valued: efficiency, mastery and control, care, ethics or normativity (van Groningen et al. 2016)? Which aims and purposes are at stake? What is the just and righteous thing to do? In the societal context of an impatient quest for learning outcomes, performance and accountability, the ambiguity of daily interruptions that could have happened differently or not at all can cause confusion, stress or helplessness in school leaders (Hammersley-Fletcher 2015). Remaining faithful to the principles of Catholic education does not mean an instrumental application of logical premises. School leaders are expected to deal with interruptions beyond a systemic, instrumental way, and in a way that justifies the ethically oriented educational endeavour of the school as a Catholic school. What kinds of strategies should Catholic school leaders use to listen, interpret, discern and judge, in order to satisfy the endeavour for good education?

In short, maintaining mission integrity in the course of leading the school is especially put to the test in complex day-to-day reality, often punctuated by interruptions that evoke ethical questions and issues. The question becomes: what is the preferred way for school leaders to deal with these daily interruptions, in a way that aligns with the distinctive and authentic principles of Catholic education?

3.2. Practical Wisdom of School Leaders

When confronted by interruptions, even school leaders with profound theoretical knowledge and extensive experience do not automatically know what to do regarding the educational endeavour of the school. In the course of leading the school, they must make holistic judgements to deal ethically with individual interruptions. Practical wisdom is perceived as the capacity to make such judgements.

Lately, practical wisdom has been enjoying a significant revival, as the conceptualisation of a moral compass for navigating through contemporary professional praxis and orienting human action in the sense of the good (Bondi et al. 2011; Kinsella and Pitman 2012; Schwartz and Sharpe 2010). In the context of management literature, this revival of interest has engendered a broad and sometimes divergent theoretical field involving various conceptualisations, interpretations and terminologies. Though worded in various ways

("wisdom of practice", "prudence", "practical reason", "phronesis"), practical wisdom generally refers to the capacity to integrate ethical considerations with instrumental concerns; to exercise moral leadership; to envision aims and be aware of personal limitations; to seek the advice of others; to illuminate the ethical dimension of decision making and to solve complex problems, especially in contexts of uncertainty (Küpers and Pauleen 2016; Bachmann et al. 2018; Schwartz 2011). In management literature, one of the core issues regarding practical wisdom is that of the improvement of judgement and decision making. Rather than blindly maximising performance quantities, practical wisdom considers which aims and purposes are worth pursuing. It "introduces ethics in decision making by considering both the end or goal pursued and the means to achieve such an end from the perspective of the human good" (Melé 2010, p. 642).

The concept of practical wisdom also resonates in academic reflection on school leadership. It is seen as "a mature, deliberative capacity that helps to illuminate the ethical dimensions of (. . .) decision making and leadership" in schools (Bohlin 2022, p. 157). With a view to allowing students to flourish educationally, practical wisdom

> ". . . with its capacity to absorb uncertainty, to welcome dialogical conflict, to encourage critical self- and institutional reflection, with its propensity to action, with its commitment to the development of virtue incrementally over time and its ethical imperative, equips the disposed Principal with a mode of leadership that is necessary to navigate the school through both the still and choppy waters of such a project." (McCutcheon 2009, p. 202)

Because "knowing what works" appears not to be sufficient, school leaders should be able to use (self-)reflection to deal effectively and successfully with the complexity of day-to-day realities (Geijsel 2015). Practical wisdom is understood first and foremost as a reflective, deliberative capacity of school leaders to deal with complex, ambiguous and contingent incidents. In view of their shared aims and purposes, practical wisdom helps school leaders to respond to these incidents with the consideration required to take the right action. In the praxis of school leaders, practical wisdom "guides problem setting and problem solving, integrating apperception, judgment, choice, planning, and action in a single continuous arc. (. . .) The distinguishing characteristic (. . .) is the ability to effectively size up novel situations that cannot, by definition, be specified in advance." (Halverson 2004, p. 96). It "acts as an executive faculty that identifies which aspects of the environment are worthy of action, employs the appropriate means, and evaluates the results" (Halverson 2004, p. 100). Practical wisdom is helpful in responding to all the various dilemmas school leaders face in the course of their leadership; but especially in situations when they do not know what to do.

> "Thus, practical wisdom is vital to school leaders who desire to (a) identify and rally others around a common aim in support of flourishing; (b) notice and make sense of dynamic and varied situation-specific contexts; and (c) respect the dignity and empower the agency of all constituents, so they can chart an effective (. . .) course of action aligned with shared aim(s)." (Bohlin 2022, p. 158)

Practical wisdom, as the capacity to navigate through contemporary professional praxis and to orient human action in the sense of the good, consists of various strategies. Some scholars emphasise the importance of attentive receptivity (Dunne 2011), some accentuate reflective strategies (Geijsel 2015; Kinsella and Pitman 2012) and others highlight strategies of judgement and decision making (Melé 2010). Halverson (2004) suggests that practical, wise leadership in schools integrates strategies of apperception, judgment, choice, planning and action. Bohlin (2022) proposes a Practical Wisdom Framework that consists of four successive coping strategies—reflective listening, reflecting, recalibrating and responding—to activate the internal compass with a view to formative decision making. Her framework appears promising in terms of dealing with the various problems and issues school leaders face in their daily occurrences.

3.3. Christian Discernment Practice

Practical, wise school leaders act based on their interpretation of contextual particulars (Halverson 2004). By merely interpreting daily interruptions as problems, however, school leaders fail to seize opportunities to maintain mission integrity. Recognition of the mystery of the ambiguous and contingent occurrence of interruptions as a complement to common problematisation could open new avenues of understanding. Recognition of the mystery is not to be confused with limited understanding, but should be understood as an essentially positive act of the mind (Marcel 1950). By being attentively receptive to the reality that presents itself and recognising its mystery, school leaders will be able to discover the emergence of the good in an incident that appears filled with defectiveness, vulnerability or failure. By being hermeneutically attentive to the mystery of reality, they will be able to discover new and unexpected possibilities to make the good visible and powerful. From a transformative perspective, what appears to be a problem from a systemic point of view could well be a possibility to open a "perspective to that which transcends harsh reality, and directs man to the good life" (Speelman 2022). In short, interruptions should not be seen as a problem, but interpreted as a welcome opportunity to avert narrative foreclosure and to discover new and unexpected possibilities in terms of making the good visible and powerful (Boeve 2007).

When confronted by an interruption, how might a school leader open new avenues of understanding to maintain mission integrity? A design for interrelated strategies of practical, wise school leadership has not yet been provided that does justice in a profound way not only to the ethical but also to the transformative nature of the endeavour of Catholic education. This transformative nature refers not only to the orientation of the educational endeavour towards a future that is yet to come (*adventus*), but also awareness of its non-enforceability, receptivity and unexpectedness. To establish what this means in terms of a coherent assemblage of acting strategies that are open to the good that is yet to come, we deepen our understanding by relating practical, wise leadership to discernment practices. We thus aim to fill the knowledge gap regarding coherence by working out how to move from reflection to judgement in order to act wisely and purposefully.

The Christian tradition includes various agogic practices for how to live well with and for others with a view to the lasting, ultimate good. In this tradition, discernment is the paradigm of receptive and critical reflection and interpretation, deliberation, and judgement in a specific situation in order to strive for the ultimate good (Waaijman 2002, 2013). Although the Christian tradition encompasses various forms of discernment practices, they may be characterised by four core qualities, each made up of soft strategies (Waaijman 2002; Hermans 2021; van der Zee 2022).

- Firstly, to look outwards. Discernment starts with seeing differences, which involves attentive receptivity, openness for what emerges, allowing it to draw one's attention, and wondering about it. To look outwards aims not only at seeing different positions or perspectives, but also at sensing the good that emerges in what others bring in or in what happens next.
- Secondly, to look inwards. Discernment proceeds with reflection and self-examination. Reflection aims to interpret an incident to discover which values and ethical commitments are at stake or about to emerge. Self-examination aims to investigate how we are involved with these values and commitment to what happens, what we find desirable and what our motives are. Being attentive to emerging deep feelings is very important for reflection and self-examination.
- Thirdly, to deliberate with others. Discernment is not conceivable without critical deliberation. To discover possibilities to strive for desirable values and ethical commitments, discernment must involve genuine deliberation with others. Insights and arguments should be placed in the "critical middle" in order to come to a new, unexpected and shared understanding.
- Finally, to decide what to do. Possibilities should be judged carefully, and in two ways. Discernment involves a principled judgment—not so much with a view to "solving

> the problem" of an incident, but in order to act in a contemplative way; that is, with a view to the ultimate good—and a pragmatic judgement, in order to choose the most desirable option in this particular situation. The desirable option should then pass the test of justice and fairness.

In the course of history, Christians have developed various agogic practices with the quality of allowing users to discern what to do in reaction to specific incidents in order to endeavour for the ultimate good in God's eyes. It should be noted that discernment practices are not merely of an instrumental nature, but also enhance an openness to what is to come to us from the outside. Discernment should therefore not be perceived as the result of an intellectual and intuitive reflection only, but as the prospect of a "breaking through" of insights and ideas that are characterised by immediacy. Thomas Aquinas (2006, II-II, q. 52) hints at this possibility when he discusses the virtue of prudence in his *Summa Theologiae*. He refers to new insights as gifts of counsel about what must be done for the sake of the actualisation of the good (Keenan 2002).

It can be hypothesised that Catholic school leaders could effectively navigate the multiple challenges they face daily by using the soft strategies of practical wisdom that emanate from discernment practices. However, little is known regarding possible ways to activate these strategies, to establish what to do when confronted by an incident that interrupts the course of their leadership praxis. The question that orients our research reads: what would the design of a practical, wise leadership practice for Catholic school leaders look like in order to navigate through their everyday reality and know what to do?

4. Methodological Considerations

From an educational design perspective, the development and implementation of a solution could contribute to resolving the issues around how school leaders should act (McKenney and Reeves 2019). A possible contribution to their issue of maintaining mission integrity is the generic design of an intervention to facilitate a practical, wise leadership practice. Based on a generic design, school leaders should be able to create specific ways and practices that establish how they should act regarding their responsibilities and obligations in their context. In order to develop the design of such an intervention, we present the design requirements and a proposition below.

4.1. Design Requirements

Design requirements describe *what* the intervention will address and give guidance on what is to be accomplished in the context of a school (McKenney and Reeves 2019, pp. 126–60). The intervention of a practical, wise leadership practice addresses the ethical dimension of the school leaders' day-to-day existence and aims at enabling them to decide on an effective action. Such an intervention would guide Catholic school leaders in making correct and just decisions on actions that support an educational endeavour that is of a transformative nature.

Theoretical and functionality design requirements must be included. Based on the aforementioned theoretical considerations, the following elements are to be included in the intervention: paying attention to the daily praxis of school leaders, addressing the ethical dimension, making decisions to act, including reflection and deliberation, and taking a transformative perspective. They are discussed below.

Design requirement 1. Pay attention to the complex daily occurrences of school leaders. In a context of accountability and increased pressure to perform, school leaders are confronted with multiple interruptions on a daily basis and required to respond by taking action (Bohlin 2022; Hammersley-Fletcher 2015). The intervention should be grounded in the contextual dynamics of this complex daily reality.

Design requirement 2. Address the ethical dimension of the day-to-day reality. Catholic school leaders have a great responsibility regarding the ethically oriented educational endeavour of Catholic schools, as well as the development and maintenance of a consistent culture and ethos. In order to fulfil their responsibility, they must deal ethically with

interruptions to their daily activities (Bohlin 2022). From a teleological perspective on ethics, they are invited to orient their professional conduct towards the ultimate good *(telos)* of the educational endeavour of the school, and the local good *(bonum)* in the eyes of the students. The intervention should include indications regarding how to do this.

Design requirement 3. Enable school leaders to come to decisions in order to act. A crucial part of the daily routine of school leaders is judgement and decision making. In proposing a coherent whole made up of relevant and interrelated strategies, the intervention should contribute to the improvement of judgement and decision making by including principles of Catholic education (Melé 2010; Halverson 2004).

Design requirement 4. Include reflection and deliberation. Reflection is needed in view of the motivations and commitments that are part of decision making. Deliberation involves the welcoming of diversity in the dialogue by enabling the participation of practical, wise others as well as the inclusion of (religious) stories of practical wisdom (van Groningen et al. 2016; Habisch and Bachmann 2016). The intervention should include strategies for reflection and deliberation so as to come to new, unexpected possibilities.

Design requirement 5. Take a transformative perspective by treating interruptions as opportunities to let reality present itself and to be hermeneutically attentive. While Catholic school leaders commonly deal with interruptions as problems to be solved, they should be invited to perceive interruptions as possibilities that have become actual, and to treat them as opportunities to allow the good to emerge, made visible and powerful. Usually the good in interruptions is barely visible, and even then only in a veiled and inconclusive way (Speelman 2022). The intervention should invite school leaders to open up for the good to emerge.

Functionality requirements may be imposed regarding practical and formal constraints and opportunities. Catholic school leaders should address constraints and opportunities when expanding a generic design into specific solutions for their context, for example regarding the availability of time, resources and space to deliberate. Practical wisdom is not about cutting corners, but asks for pauses before proceeding to the next step (Delbecq et al. 2004).

4.2. Design Proposition

Design propositions provide guidance as to *how* the intervention will help school leaders to achieve effective decisions to act. They are determined primarily by theory and expertise, and secondarily by empirical testing in the context (McKenney and Reeves 2019, pp. 126–60). Following CIMO logic (Denyer et al. 2008), design propositions must provide details regarding in which Context the use of which Interventions induces which Mechanisms in order to achieve which Outcomes. We first elaborate the various elements, and then present a design proposition for a practical, wise leadership practice.

First, the context. In a societal context of detraditionalization, secularisation and individualisation, and of the marketisation of education, Catholic school leaders strive to maintain mission integrity, but are confronted by incidents that interrupt the course of their leadership and put their commonly used strategies to the test. They want to know what to do when interrupted in order to fulfil their responsibility—not in an instrumentally systemic way, but in an ethical and transformative way.

Second, the intervention. The primary focus of the intervention is to ensure the school leader will come to decisions that result in wise and purposeful action. While there are different types of educational intervention (McKenney and Reeves 2019), we opt for an intervention that includes processes such as strategies, tactics and sequences to support decision making in order to act wisely and purposefully. Dialogical interactions are the main avenue for activating the necessary processes and involve not only the exchange of insights and arguments, but above all, "sensemaking" conversation to generate new, sometimes unexpected possibilities. School leaders must have a dialogue with themselves; with practical, wise others; and with (religious) stories of practical wisdom. The intervention

consists of a protocol of reflective questions that promote dialogical interactions to activate strategies of practical wisdom.

Third, the mechanisms. The intervention aims to activate four groups of strategies of practical wisdom to be used consecutively in order to come to decisions on an interruption that will maintain mission integrity: to look outwards, to look inwards, to deliberate with others, and to decide what to do. Each of the four groups consists of various strategies for action.

Finally, the outcomes. The intended outcomes are not only the one or more decisions required to respond to an interruption, but also ways to convert these decisions into action. By using strategies of practical wisdom, Catholic school leaders achieve agency and are able to act practically, wisely and purposefully for the benefit of the ultimate good *(telos)* of the educational endeavour of the school, and the local good *(bonum)* in the eyes of the students.

Design Proposition: When confronted with an incident of interruption (context), Catholic school leaders are able to achieve decisions and act practically and wisely concerning the educational endeavour of their school (outcome) by using reflective questions in various dialogical interactions (intervention) that activate strategies of practical, wise leadership (mechanism).

5. Design of a Practical, Wise Leadership Practice

Core features of a practical, wise leadership practice are presented here that should be expanded by Catholic school leaders into specific solutions for their context. We first present some general remarks on the process, and then aggregate various elements in Table 1.

Practical, wise leadership practice encompasses various dialogical interactions engaged in by Catholic school leaders when confronted by an interruption. The core dialogical interactions align with the four core actions of Christian discernment practices: to look outwards, to look inwards, to deliberate with others, and to decide what to do. Each core quality involves several strategies of practical, wise leadership that are activated consecutively by raising reflective questions. It is important that these questions are raised in such a way that a diversity of answers is encouraged. Dialogical interactions are on the look-out for variance, not for a mean or median. It is in a dialogue that various divergent and convergent insights, beliefs and ideas come to the fore, and can generate new, unexpected possibilities.

Table 1 below aggregates the various strategies and reflective questions into a cohesive whole, divided into four components, that could form a practical, wise leadership practice for Catholic school leaders. The list is not comprehensive but consists of examples of well-chosen questions.

Table 1. Strategies for practical, wise leadership, and reflective questions.

Strategy	Reflective Questions to Activate the Strategy
To look outwards - become sensitive to different positions, experiences and perspectives - be able to wonder	- What has happened? What is my first observation of it? How do others observe it? How am I affected by what I observe or learn from others? Do I perceive it as an interruption in the course of my leadership? - Do I interpret it as a worthwhile or an inconvenient interruption? What do I sense in what emerges in the interruption? What kind of appeal is made by what emerges? How does it relate to the coming of the good?

Table 1. *Cont.*

Strategy	Reflective Questions to Activate the Strategy
To look inwards - discover which values and ethical commitments are at stake or are about to emerge - investigate how I am involved with these values and commitments, what I find desirable and what my motives are	- Which deep feelings can be traced? On which appraisals of values and ethical commitments are they based? Are the core values and commitments of our school at stake? In what sense? - How am I to reach out to the values and ethical commitments at stake? By entrusting myself to them, can I make sense of the situation? What motives drive my actions: are they from the coming of the good or from motives driven by my ego?
To deliberate with others - discover new possibilities to strive for good education	- How do practical, wise people sense and interpret the issue? What does the reading and interpretation of (religious) stories contribute to the case? What kind of variance of interpretation appears? Which insights, beliefs and ideas come to the fore in an open space? What is revealed to us as a possibility to strive for values and ethical commitments that are open to a constant transcendence of the current ones? How do the possibilities converge with the school's educational endeavour?
To decide what to do - make a pragmatic and principled judgement - establish if the proposed acts pass the test of justice and fairness - arrive at action(s) to be taken	- If the good of humanisation is already emerging in the situation, what would I then do or would I refrain from action? Which possibility to act is judged as the most desirable option for our school in this situation? What are the small steps that can be taken consecutively? - Do the possibilities contribute to what is considered to be good in the eyes of our students? Are they just and righteous, taking into account not only our well-being but that of each individual (future) student, in an appropriate way and to promote humanisation? - Do I have the courage to take action? What else is needed, in order to act? Am I able to take up my leadership appropriately?

6. Conclusions and Contribution to the Discussion

Catholic school leaders have a significant responsibility to maintain the mission integrity of their schools (Grace 2010; Fincham 2021). While their daily routine is characterised by multiple incidents that interrupt the expected course of events, they are expected to remain faithful to the principles of Catholic education. How should they navigate through their day-to-day experiences and remain faithful to these ethically oriented and religiously inspired principles?

Previous research has provided a coherent set of practical, wise coping strategies for dealing with problematic incidents or conflicts that interrupt the expected course of events (Bohlin 2022). By interpreting an interruption merely as a problem, however, school leaders fail to seize opportunities to maintain mission integrity. By understanding an interruption as an opportunity to be hermeneutically attentive to the mystery of reality, new and unexpected possibilities could emerge that make the good visible and powerful. However, this is not a matter of instrumental application or similar logic but requires soft strategies that acknowledge the unenforceability of the good. This article dealt with the question of how Catholic school leaders are able, in an unenforceable and rather receptive way, to open up a new perspective that transcends harsh reality. A generic design is presented for interrelated strategies of practical, wise school leadership that in a profound way does justice not only to the ethical but also to the transformative nature of the endeavour of

Catholic education. The design consists of four clusters, made up of strategies of practical wisdom as well as well-chosen reflective questions to activate these strategies. Catholic school leaders must expand these into solutions for their specific context. By elaborating and then implementing a practical, wise leadership practice, Catholic school leaders are able to make the decisions necessary for them to act wisely and purposefully.

Research into practical, wise leadership praxis is necessary not only to validate the design, but also to establish how its elaboration and implementation may affect the agency of Catholic school leaders. While discernment has been shown to be a powerful predictor of transformational leadership (Hermans 2021), research is needed to establish what the impact is of the use of practical, wise strategies on the agency of school leaders in their daily routine, filled with interruptions. A promising avenue for research would be a narrative approach, with the use of *phronetic* narratives as articulations of practice and practical wisdom (Halverson 2004). An important aspect of the research on practical, wise leadership concerns the emerging praxis of distributed leadership (Spillane 2006). In more and more schools, leadership is distributed over a team of school leaders who share the responsibility of maintaining mission integrity. What would be the impact of practical, wise leadership if understood primarily as a distributed practice? Another aspect is that of the continuing development of school leaders, becoming more and more conditioned to act wisely and purposefully (Grace 2018; Bohlin 2022). It is to be expected that the character of school leaders would be formed through persistent participation in practical, wise leadership practices. Evidence is still sparse concerning the effectiveness of interventions of formal and informal learning, in terms of professional development and character formation (Daniëls et al. 2019).

This article is a modest contribution to resolving the issue of the actions of Catholic school leaders, by presenting a generic design for a practical, wise leadership practice. Hopefully it will not only serve as a spur to the further development of Catholic school leadership, but also highlight the need for further knowledge and study of Catholic education.

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The Effect of Catholic Education on Economic Ideology

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Abstract: Religious adherence, church attendance, and economic ideology have long been intertwined. We discuss the compatibility between Catholic doctrine and individual-based free market systems and then examine the effect of Catholic school attendance on an individual's belief in and support for a capitalist economic system. Using individual level survey data, we find a positive relationship between attendance at Catholic schools and capitalist ideology as measured by an index that contrasts individual versus government action and responsibility in the economy. While attendance at Catholic school is associated with a stronger emphasis on individual, rather than governmental, responsibility in the economy, the effect is driven largely by Catholic high school or college attendance, reflecting an increased exposure to Catholic faith during the formative years of late adolescence.

Keywords: Catholic education; Catholic school; capitalism; capitalism index; economic ideology

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1. Introduction

Religious beliefs, church attendance, and economic ideology have long been intertwined, appearing in Weber's Protestant work ethic hypothesis (Weber 1956) and more recent refutations and nuanced discussions (Guiso et al. 2003), but both church attendance (J. M. Jones 2021) and support for capitalism (Knight 2019) are in decline. The work presented here discusses the compatibility of Catholic doctrine and individual-based free market systems, broadly labeled as capitalism, and then examines the relationship between attending Catholic school and this economic ideology.

Christian/Catholic views on wealth, property, freedom, markets, and economic systems have evolved since the first century AD. While Jesus, the apostles, and the early church fathers caution that wealth and greed can have a negative impact on spirituality, property and possessions are not considered evil in themselves. In fact, property and wealth are gifts from God that can be used to alleviate poverty (Wansbrough 1985). Later, as the persecutions of the early church subsided and the state began to favor Christianity, the church was forced to reckon with secular views of work, freedom, and markets. While still cautioning against the "love of money", church teachings from 400–1200 AD generally favored trade, the profit motive, "just" pricing, and a lack of government intervention in the economy. Concerning the comparison of economic systems, Catholic Popes have generally come out in favor of capitalism and against socialism given that the free market system seems the best at alleviating poverty. To the extent that Catholic schooling reflects church teaching, students who attend Catholic schools are expected be exposed to a pro-capitalistic ideology.

In this paper, we investigate the relationship between Catholic schooling and personal commitment to capitalist ideology. Using individual level survey data, we find a positive relationship between having attended Catholic school and agreement with capitalist ideology, as measured by responses to survey items regarding individual versus government action and responsibility in the economy. While attendance at Catholic school is associated with a stronger emphasis on individual, rather than governmental, responsibility in the economy, the effect is driven by an increased exposure to the Catholic faith during the formative years of late adolescence—in other words, during Catholic high school or college attendance.

2. Background

Using Rodney Stark's definition, capitalism is "an economic system wherein privately owned, relatively well organized, and stable firms pursue complex commercial activities within a relatively free (unregulated) market, taking a systematic, long-term approach to investing and reinvesting wealth (directly or indirectly) in productive activities involving a hired workforce, and guided by anticipated and actual returns" (Stark 2005).[1] In other words, a capitalistic economic system, as opposed to a socialistic economic system, relies on free individuals using private assets and labor to seek returns through productive activity. Government intervention in capitalist systems is minimal and is reserved to providing public goods (such as defense and law enforcement activities), to stifling monopolistic behavior that restricts the free entry of firms into the marketplace (i.e., rent-seeking behavior), and to stepping in when productive activity hurts society (e.g., pollution).

The relationship between church doctrine and economic systems is complex and to trace Catholic thought through the last two thousand years is beyond the scope of this paper. However, we provide a broad background of Catholic church teaching on property, wealth, and economic systems through the select writings of Saint Augustine of Hippo, Saint Thomas Aquinas, and of two modern Popes: Pope Leo XII and Pope John Paul II. These writings move from affirming the duty to provide aid to the poor, to the duty to act justly in business dealings, and, finally, to the adoption of free market concepts, with minimal government involvement, related to capitalism.

Prior to the conversion of Constantine (312 AD) and the Edict of Milan (313 AD), church history was dotted by persecutions (both localized and statewide). Church debates centered around theological issues (for instance, the Trinity) and practical issues including the church position concerning believers who denied the faith during the harsh persecutions but wanted to return to the church afterwards (i.e., the "Lapsed"). During these early times, the life of the church was generally local with ties to the larger churches in the region when matters of faith were debated.[2]

In terms of teaching, the church generally focused on personal salvation and personal duties to God and neighbor. Concerning issues related to wealth and property, the church taught that God owns all resources and that Christians are to be stewards of wealth and provide alms for the poor and care for widows and orphans.[3] For example, Irenaeus of Lyons (130–200 AD) stated that Christ "prohibited anger; and instead of the law enjoining the giving of tithes, [He told us] to share all our possessions with the poor; and not to love our neighbors only, but even our enemies; and not merely to be liberal givers and bestowers, but even that we should present a gratuitous gift to those who take away our goods" (Roberts and Donaldson 1965–1969).[4] This statement is an example of the church emphasizing individual care for the poor rather than collective action.

In additional to providing for others with their wealth, Christians, based on 1 Timothy 6:10, are tasked with watching over their souls, because greed could ensnare Christians away from God (Wansbrough 1985). Around 258 AD, Cyprian of Carthage said "A blind love of one's own property has deceived many; nor could they be prepared for, or at ease in, departing when their wealth fettered them like a chain. Those were the chain to them that remained—those were the bonds by which both virtue was retarded, and faith burdened, and the spirit bound, and the soul hindered" (Roberts and Donaldson 1965–1969).[5]

The Edict of Milan (313 AD), which ended state and local persecutions of Christians, showcases a view of property in Roman culture that moved beyond personal duties to others. In particular, the Edict commanded the return of all property confiscated during the persecution of the early church under the emperors Decius, Valerian, and Diocletian.[6]

Thus, while the fourth century Christian church had found a great ally in the state, the idea of private property began to change as Roman ideas permeated the church. Stark notes this timing: "soon after the conversion of Constantine, the church ceased to be dominated by ascetics, and attitudes toward commerce began to mellow" (Stark 2005, p. 57).

One of the great theologians of the early church is Saint Augustine of Hippo (354–430). Known for his keen theological insights and his controversy with Pelagius over the doctrine of original sin, Augustine also fostered a basic understanding of markets and the role of government in society. He argued that man's chief goal is to pursue happiness, and the Christian's happiness is found in God, particularly in the world to come; however, he acknowledged that there are "good things" in this life that are common to both Christians and non-Christians (Schaff 2004).[7] These goods derive value based not only on producer costs but also on the value attached to the goods by the buyers who desire to enhance their utility: "a person who evaluates according to reason has far more freedom of choice than one who is driven by want or drawn by passion" (Schaff 2004).[8] Of course, this consideration is a precursor to modern utility theory and is conditioned on market freedom in, what we call today, economic decision making.

Essential to his views on the state and on commerce were his views on human nature; Augustine viewed humankind as inherently flawed and sinful. Augustine believed that the "state was willed by God and was primarily necessary because of the existence of evil persons who had to be controlled" (O'Neil 2003). While there was a great potential for deceit in trading, the issue was not inherent to commerce but was the responsibility of those engaged in business. Commerce provides goods that improve the lives of others, and profit is simply compensation for the service of bringing the good to market (Schaff 2004).[9] To summarize Augustine's contributions, humans are given freedom to pursue their happiness through trade, and governments are designed to dampen the evils of human nature.

Skipping centuries of the development of economic thought, we now consider Thomas Aquinas' (1275–1274) contributions. Aquinas, heavily influenced by Aristotle's concept of justice and markets, developed two main types of justice: communicative and distributive. Distributive justice concerns the relations between society as a whole and the private individual. Society is often represented by people, such as princes, officers, etc., who, by reason of their social position, are superior to the private individual. On the other hand, communicative justice regulates the relations of things to private individuals who are considered equal as individuals and not in relation to the whole (Baldwin 1959, p. 62).

Business transactions were matters of communicative justice, in which two individuals traded voluntarily and reciprocally. The price of trade, or the "just price", is the mutually agreed upon, noncoercive price that is available to all potential buyers (no price discrimination) (Stark 2005, p. 65). In addition, profits were compensation for labor and transportation costs, the care of the good, and the risk bearing that faced the entrepreneur (Baldwin 1959). In addition, Aquinas allowed for property holdings on the condition that the control of property did not exceed legitimate needs (Smyth 1948).

In addition to allowing profits, Aquinas conceived of market transactions and even an early form of a competitive market structure. Consumers value a good based on the utility received at the prevailing price and sellers sell the good if the price is above cost (which is the long-run price). If consumers do not value the good at the prevailing price, the price falls and some producers will leave the market (Baldwin 1959). While Aquinas "seemed relatively uninterested in speculating about the best form of government" (O'Neil 2003), he generally favored property rights, free commerce, the profit motive, and honesty in transactions.

Over the next several centuries, the church moved beyond freedom and personal duty in trades, to consideration of economic systems. Given that the theories of Marx (1818–1883) and Engels (1820–1895) were gaining tremendous popularity, the Catholic church needed to clarify its stance on the market system. In 1891, Pope Leo XII's *Rerum Novarum* points out the issues associated with socialism that will cause the entire system to fail, should it be implemented. He stated:

> The door would be thrown open to envy, to mutual invective, and to discord; the sources of wealth themselves would run dry, for no one would have any interest in exerting his talents or his industry; and that ideal equality about which they entertain pleasant dreams would be in reality the levelling down of all to a like condition of misery and degradation. (LEO XIII 1891, p. 15)

In other words, a socialist system violates the right to private property and diminishes personal innovation, as individuals have no incentive for productive capacity. This violation ultimately leads to a diminished society and a low standard of living for all.

Nearly a century later, and drawing on a long line of Papal statements, Pope John Paul II's *Centesimus Annus* argued that the freedom to engage in economic activity is a fundamental human right given and that humans are called to be creative. Restricting this freedom impoverishes countries and the human beings that make up those countries (John Paul II 1991, p. 13). Fundamentally, a socialistic system kills the creative spirit and, thus, humanity itself. Pope John Paul II goes on to state that socialist systems teach a person to hate his neighbor for the wealth that person has accumulated.

Booth (2009) addressed these Papal statements by concluding that a free market economy helps to harness the productive capacity of a society through markets. When self-interest becomes exaggerated, the market system prevents abuses far more than a society built with centralized power, and while a free market system allows for the flourishing of a society, Christians should conduct market-related activities with honesty and virtue. "As consumers, business owners or managers, we should regard the exercise of economic freedom, a crucial aspect of our God-given dignity, as an aspect of the exercise of true freedom to seek and do what is right" (Booth 2009, p. 65). In other words, the Catholic perspective on economics is simply a balance between freedom, on the one hand, and the desire for human dignity on the other as concluded by (Zdun and Fel 2017). While the Catholic church has certainly tackled some social issues by advocating government interventions, the umbrella of Catholic teaching on economic systems is an appreciation human creativity, private property, freedom, mutually advantageous trade, and limited government.

A remaining question concerns what Catholics actually believe about free markets, and the matter was explored by Guiso et al. (2003). Using the World Values Survey, they found that, compared to other Christian denominations, Catholics are more supportive of private property rights and economic competition but are more willing to accept a bribe. In addition, Catholic attitudes are conducive toward economic growth. These results are supported by Jones et al. (2019), who found that persons of any Christian affiliation are more likely to have pro-market views. Paradoxically, however, Jones et al. also found that respondents with Christian parents are less pro-market than respondents with agnostic or atheist parents.

These findings emphasize the importance of considering, or at least controlling for, individual belief development as adolescents question the beliefs of parents (their conferred identity) and begin to form their own constructed identify (Marcia 1993). Erikson (1968) postulated that adolescents are often concerned with how they are viewed by others; thus, they typically adopt the ideals of their role models. This search for role modeling aligns with Catholic education's emphasis on interpersonal relationships and affective educations (Ognibene 2015). However, during this search period and questioning, an adolescent may decide that he or she cannot trust certain individuals or belief sets and cast those views aside. Thus, this paper examines the effect of educational experience, specifically Catholic school attendance, during these critical years on later-life beliefs and economic ideologies.

3. History of Catholic Education in the United States

The Catholic Church is the largest non-government education provider in the world (Wodon 2021) and operates the largest network of private schools in the United States.[10] The origins of Catholic education in the United States include great sacrifices made by many, such as sister-teachers who braved long journeys, hostile environments, and austere conditions to set up the early schools. However, physical conditions were not the only

barrier to establishing Catholic schools. Prior to the American Revolution, institutions of Catholic higher education were deemed illegal in the thirteen colonies (Rizzi 2018). Following independence, these restrictions were lowered, and shortly thereafter, the first three Catholic colleges in the United States were established: Georgetown College (1789), St. Mary's Seminary (1791), and Mount St. Mary's College (1808).

Rizzi (2018) divided the historical development of Catholic higher education in the United States into five broad eras. During the Frontier Period (1789–1862), the primary mission of Catholic colleges was to provide access to education to underserved populations. In the *Morrill* Act/Land-Grant Period (1862–1920s), the mission shifted to preserving the religious and cultural foundations of Catholic immigrants while also assisting them in obtaining education that would allow them to assimilate along economic dimensions. The Inter-War Period (1920s–1945) expanded opportunities for women to attend Catholic colleges, first at Marquette University where sisters were allowed to attend weekend courses. Today, other than seminaries, all-male Catholic colleges no longer exist in the United States. The GI Bill Period (1945–1967) brought a dramatic increase in enrollments due to educational funds made available to WWII veterans. Finally, the Land O'Lakes Period (1967–present) is marked by a document drafted by leading Catholic university presidents in a Wisconsin retreat that outlines specific ways that Catholic universities can maintain broader professional standards of higher education while maintaining a Catholic mission.[11] These include "promoting theological scholarship, encouraging interdisciplinary dialogue (especially with theology), emphasizing undergraduate formation, serving the Church and the less fortunate, and providing a nurturing environment for student to grow intellectually as well as spiritually" (Rizzi 2018).

Catholic parochial school growth peaked in the mid-1960′s when there were more than 5.7 million children in parish elementary schools. This represented fully 12 percent of all United States children enrolled in schools at the time (Walch 2001). For the academic year 2016–2017, total Catholic elementary/middle school and high school enrolment was 1,878,824 across 6429 schools.[12] As of the latest reporting by the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities, there are about 250 Catholic institutions of higher education in the United States, with about 700,000 enrolled students in 2019–2020.[13] Estimates vary, but between 40% (Wodon 2022) and 60% (USCCB) of undergraduate students self-identify as Catholic. Students choose Catholic colleges and universities based on factors such as institutional size, research opportunities, internships, and job placement, as well as religious affiliation (Wodon 2022). However, it is assumed that Catholic education will influence students' academic, moral, and spiritual formation, and some empirical evidence to this effect does exist (Lapsley and Kelley 2022).

In the earliest era of Catholic higher education in the United States, theological instruction was mostly confined to seminaries in the form of professional training for priests. Catholic colleges, in contrast, focused on a curriculum called the Ratio Studiorum, which focused more heavily on classical languages and philosophy (Rizzi 2018). Later, in the Morill Act/Land-Grant Era and the Inter-War Years, theology courses were introduced under a new interdisciplinary paradigm called Neo-Thomism or Neo-Scholasticism. Named after Thomas Aquinas and the Scholastic Theologians of the early second century AD, this curriculum placed an emphasis on reason and Aristotelian philosophy. Critics of this approach worried that secular philosophy would replace Catholic theological teaching.

Indeed, at primary, secondary, and higher education levels, many authors note the variation from one region, diocese, and parish to the next regarding the balance of religious and secular content, even though most would agree that Catholic moral instruction is an important part of the curriculum (e.g., (Walch 2001)). Spanning the two sides of this tension are others, such as Heft (2021, p. 128) who stated a Catholic university "is neither secular nor sectarian. It is not secular because it affirms the importance of the religious realm as an area of scholarship. It is not sectarian because an integral part of being Catholic is seeking truth wherever it can be found."

The mission and method of Catholic schools are not the only matters of debate in Catholic educational institutions; the teachers themselves are also confronted with the relationship between faith and the profession of teaching. Some authors note that Catholic school teachers are not adequately equipped to teach their faith, as many teachers are educated in secular universities (Roberts and O'Shea 2022). In fact, Cho (2012) and Convey (2014) confirmed that teachers motivated primarily by teaching as a ministry are the most committed to Catholic educational institutions. This has led to various proposed models for the integration of personal faith with the professional life (Fussell 2021).

Despite the varied balance of religious and secular education in Catholic schools, there is little doubt that from the beginning of Catholic education in the United States, the establishment of parochial schools has been based on an "unwavering belief that the education of children is the primary responsibility of family and the Church, not the government" (Walch 2001, p. 46). Said another way, Catholic education came coupled with the deeply held value that the formation of educational institutions and selection of the curriculum was an independent endeavor, free to borrow from advances in science and the professions outside the Catholic religion but not dependent on governments to make these choices for them. In contrast, common public schools started from the assumption that the state should own the task of education (Walch 1996).

To conclude this section, we note that Catholic schools vary in their curricular embrace of Catholic theology and that Catholic teachings may emphasize both social issues (helping the poor) and capitalist (free markets and small governments) ideology. While all Catholics have likely encountered the duty of helping the poor, the distinguishing factor for an overall commitment to Catholic teaching is the extent to which a person embraces government involvement in that work. Booth, in his defense of capitalism from a Catholic perspective, stated "it is a fundamental error to conflate the role of the political system in seeking to help the poor through redistribution with that of people acting spontaneously out of charity" (Booth 2009, p. 65). Thus, in our analysis below, a commitment to Catholic teaching on capitalism will emphasize a lack of government intervention and a commitment to personal economic action.

4. Survey and Data

To examine the effect of exposure to Catholic schooling on economic ideology, we leverage anonymous, individual-level survey data from Jones et al. (2019) and a modified version of the Capitalism Index from Hadsell et al. (2013). Two rounds of survey data were collected, the first in December of 2015 and the second in June of 2016 using Amazon's Mechanical Turk program, mTurk. Amazon's program is a microtask website used to match remote "workers" with "requesters" to complete small tasks that can be completed in a remote environment. Completing surveys is one such task. Amazon mTurk allows for a wider subject pool and more diversity in respondents than traditional convenience samples (Mason and Suri 2012). After dropping responses that failed an attention check, were insufficiently complete, or where respondents indicated they rushed or responses were unreliable, the two survey rounds yielded 2404 responses.[14]

While the survey was not initially designed to investigate Catholic schooling, survey items pertaining to primary guardian affiliation, attendance by school type, etc. allow us to proxy for Catholic schooling experience and its relationship to economic ideologies. We assume that respondents who attended religious school, and who indicated their primary guardian was Catholic, attended a Catholic school. The combination of a Catholic primary guardian (735 responses) and having attended a religious school (793 responses) yielded 382 respondents we interpret as having attended Catholic school.

In addition to proxying for Catholic school attendance, we use an index of latent economic ideology using Likert-type responses to ten statements about respondents' beliefs such as whether people are poor because of their own actions and whether the government should ensure all people are provided with housing. The index is created by summing numeric coding for Likert-type responses with a scale of 1 = strongly disagree

to 7 = strongly agree. Of the ten statements, three are worded such that agreeing with the statement aligns with a more capitalist, or free market, view of the economy, and seven are worded such that agreement aligns with a more interventionist view. The seven interventionist-oriented statements are reverse-coded such that summing responses to all ten statements yields a scale with larger values indicating a more capitalist view.[15] A full list of statements is presented in Table 1, while Table 2 presents the capitalism index for the sample and subsamples.

Table 1. Capitalism index scale items.

"Please Indicate Your Level of Agreement with the Following Statements:"							
	Strongly Agree	**Agree**	**Slightly Agree**	**Neutral**	**Slightly Disagree**	**Disagree**	**Strongly Disagree**
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Statements							
1.	If people are poor, it is mostly because of their own actions						
2.	The price of pharmaceutical drugs should be regulated by the government. *						
3.	Within the US, at birth, everyone has an opportunity to become rich.						
4.	Tax money should NOT be used to subsidize the development of technologies designed to be environmentally friendly						
5.	People with high incomes and wealth should be heavily taxed.*						
6.	The government should ensure that all people are provided with basic housing. *						
7.	The government should provide benefits and training to help the unemployed get back on their feet. *						
8.	The government should help the poor. *						
9.	Healthcare is a basic human right that must be guaranteed by the government. *						
10.	High levels of income inequality are bad for society. *						

* Items are reverse-coded prior to index aggregation such that a higher value represents a more capitalist view. The index is created by summing numeric coding for Likert-type responses with a scale of 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree.

Table 2. Capitalism index by religious school attendance.

	N	**Capitalism Index Mean**	**Std. Dev.**	**Min.**	**Max.**
Full Sample	2404	29.33	11.12	10	69
Non-Catholic Primary Guardian	1670	29.48	11.40	10	67
Catholic Primary Guardian	734	28.98	10.46	10	69
Respondent Left Catholicism	394	26.54	10.18	10	64
Respondent Stayed in Catholicism	340	31.81	10.08	10	69
Did not attend religious school	141	30.37	8.98	10	57
Attended religious school	193	32.91	10.74	11	69
At least attended religious school in:					
Grade School	138	31.60	10.28	11	68
Middle School	122	31.72	10.96	11	68
High School	93	32.28	11.64	11	69
College	39	34.38	8.27	19	52
ONLY attended religious school in:					
Grade School	28	33.11	9.57	16	56
Middle School	9	33.78	11.57	18	57
High School	17	38.35	13.77	19	69
College	22	35.77	7.01	22	48

5. Survey Analysis and Discussion

To the extent the Catholic doctrine is compatible with free market views, as discussed above, additional exposure to the faith, such as attending a Catholic school, should increase an individual's sympathy toward a free market system that deemphasizes government involvement, as measured by the Capitalism Index (CI) described above. To examine variation in economic ideology, we compare subgroup CI averages in Figure 1 starting with the complete sample and subsequently parsed the sample to compare respondents who

were raised by a Catholic primary guardian and who identified as Catholic by whether they attended religious school. Each subgroup was compared using a *t*-test of subgroup CI means. Arrows between boxes in Figure 1 show the difference in subgroups' CI mean and a *t*-value shown below. Asterisks on the differences indicate statistical significance, with * indicating a 90% confidence interval, ** indicating 95% confidence, and *** indicating a 99% confidence level.

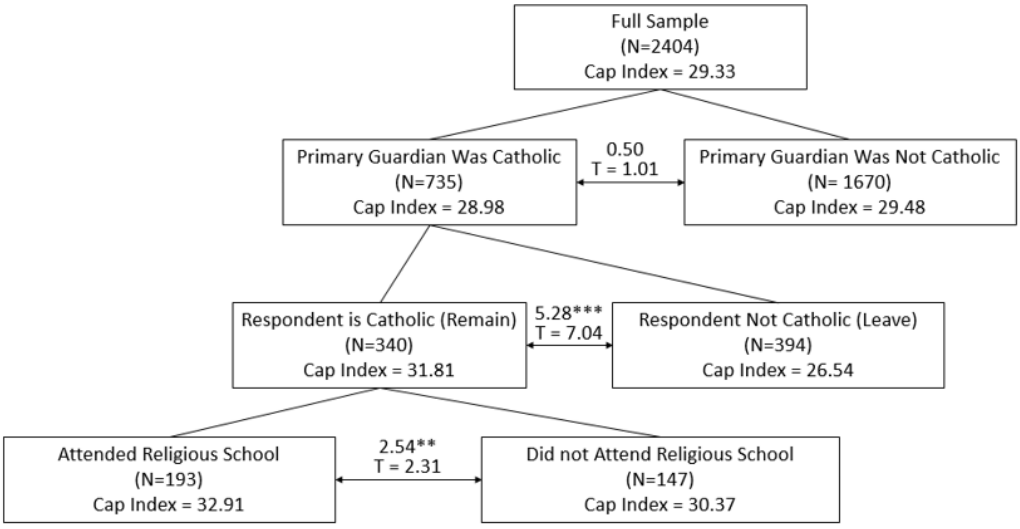

Figure 1. Capitalism index by subsample. The number next to connecting arrows represents the difference in subgroups Capitalism index scores, and asterisks indicate the level of statistical significance from a *t*-test. ** $p < 0.05$, and *** $p < 0.01$.

Interestingly, there is no statistical CI differences between respondents who grew up with a Catholic primary guardian (CI = 28.98) versus those who did not (CI = 29.48). However, Catholic "remainers", respondents who grew up with Catholic primary guardians and who still identify as Catholic, provided more capitalist responses (CI = 31.81) than "leavers", respondents who grew up with Catholic primary guardians but who no longer identify as Catholic (CI = 26.54). Catholic remainers' capitalism scores were roughly 20% higher than leavers, equivalent to a half a standard deviation in the full sample and, thus, a modestly higher score. The difference in CI scores for remainers versus leavers likely reflects the remainers acceptance of Catholic dogma, compatible with a capitalist system, whereas leavers have rejected the Catholic beliefs, including the emphasis on the private property and the individual that are foundational to capitalist ideology.

Further sub-setting the sample, we divide the remainers, those who identify as Catholic and whose primary guardian was Catholic, into those who attended religious school versus those who did not attend religious school. Among Catholic remainers, having attended religious school leads to a CI score that is approximately 8% higher than Catholic remainers who did not attend religious school, a statistically significant difference. These results warrant further investigation into whether the quantity or level of school attended is associated with respondent ideologies.

Erikson's (1968) seminal work on identity suggests that individuals develop their identity, including political and economic ideologies, during adolescence, and Marcia (1993) went farther, suggesting that individuals in late adolescence move from their conferred identity to a "constructed" identity. While a full review of the identity development literature is beyond the score of this article, the field's discussion of when identity is formed suggests that not all education levels will have the same effect on an individual's later life ideologies. Thus, we break out Catholic school attendance by school level and present the results in Figure 2.[16]

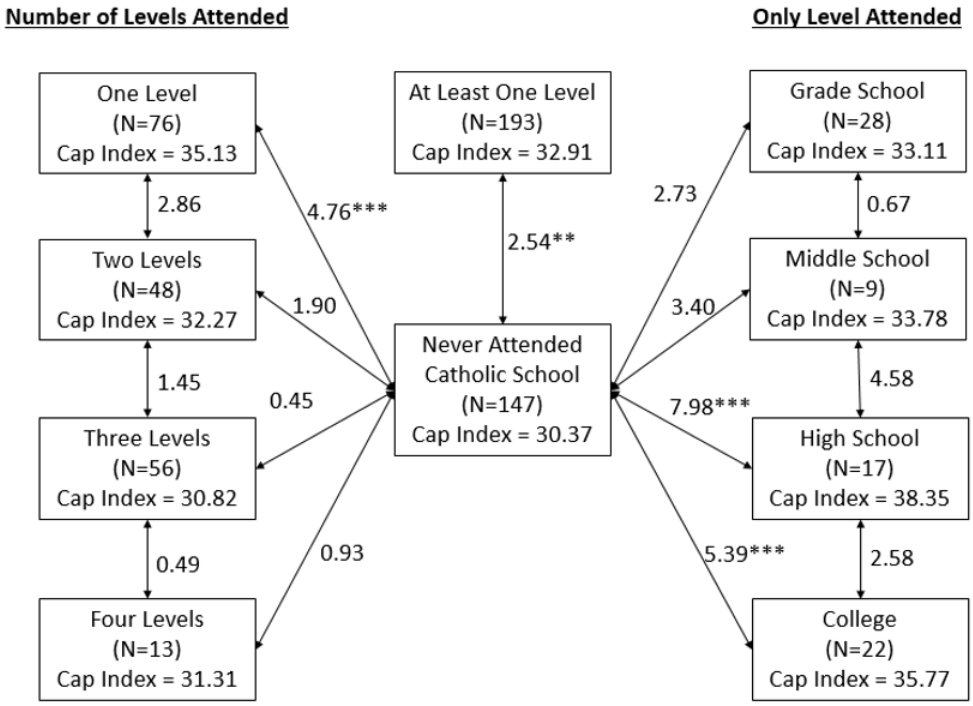

Figure 2. Remainers' Capitalism index by Catholic school attendance. The number next to connecting arrows represents the difference in subgroups' capitalism index scores, and asterisks indicate the level of statistical significance from a *t*-test. ** $p < 0.05$, and *** $p < 0.01$.

Figure 2 presents three variations on the comparison of Catholic school attendance for remainers. In the middle of Figure 2 is the CI for Catholic remainers who never attended any Catholic school (CI = 30.37). The first comparison is the against Catholic remainers who at attended at least one level of Catholic school (CI = 32.91); this comparison is the same as the one at the bottom of Figure 1. However, the binary (yes/no) nature of having attended Catholic school obscures the potential exposure effects, how long or many Catholic schools the respondent attended, and timing effects when the respondent attended Catholic school. The left side of Figure 2 presents comparisons for how many levels of Catholic school were attended, while the right side of Figure 2 presents comparisons of CI based on which level was attended.

Examining the CI levels for remainers by the number of school levels attended, potentially one through four levels, is an admittedly crude proxy for exposure levels to Catholic education, but our data do not contain the total number, nor specificity, of years in which the respondent attended Catholic school. For example, attending two years of Catholic grade school counts as one level, while attending a year of Catholic grade school and a year of Catholic middle school counts as two levels, because the respondent attended at least some Catholic school during two different levels of school. Nevertheless, a pattern begins to emerge when examining respondents' CIs by number of levels. The left side of Figure 2 suggests attending one level of Catholic school is associated with stronger, and significantly different, CI scores than having never attended Catholic school. On the other hand, CI scores for those attending multiple levels of Catholic school are stronger, but not significantly different, than CI scores for respondents who never attended Catholic school.

Taken on their own, these results may suggest a diminishing effect and even a negative marginal effect of additional Catholic education. However, the number of levels attended, and which levels were attended are not randomly distributed across the sample, with respondents who attended Catholic grade school more likely to attend additional levels than those who first attended Catholic school above the grade school level. While the left side breakout suggests that attending Catholic school may be associated with higher CI scores, the similar CI score between respondents with a large exposure and those who

never attended Catholic school suggests that higher CI scores maybe be driven by the timing of exposure rather than the duration.

For the 2021–2022 school year, enrollment in Catholic primary schools was slightly more than double the enrollment in Catholic high schools (National Catholic Education Association 2022). Our sample follows a similar pattern with significantly more respondents indicating they attended Catholic primary school; 154 respondents compared to 93 respondents indicated they attended Catholic high school. Further, of those indicating they attended Catholic high school, 82% indicated they also attended some level of Catholic primary school; respondents with a larger number of levels attended were likely exposed to Catholic schooling at a younger age. However, Erikson (Erikson 1968) and much of the psychological literature suggested that individuals question beliefs and form their own ideologies in late adolescence. Thus, it is likely necessary to examine when an individual attended Catholic school to identify the relationship between schooling and CI scores.

Following these considerations, the right side of Figure 2 presents CI scores for respondents who only attended one level of Catholic school versus those who never attended Catholic school.[17] While respondents for each level of school have a higher CI than for those who did not attend Catholic school, only high school and college attendees have a significantly higher CI score. These results suggest that the impact of Catholic schooling on later life CI scores is mostly pronounced in the formative years of high school and college. Respondents attending only Catholic high school have CI scores 26% higher than respondents who never attended Catholic School, and respondents only attending Catholic college have CI scores 18% higher. These results have implications beyond simply how Catholic education influences economic ideology; they suggest that the propagation of Catholic beliefs may be most effective through religious education during high school and college years, a finding in contrast to the most popular level of Catholic education, primary education.

Finally, because the discussion above focuses on Catholics respondents who were raised by a Catholic primary guardian, (i.e., "remainers"), it may be instructive to look at the relationship between Catholic education and the CI for non-Catholics who were raised by Catholic primary guardians, (i.e., "leavers"). The relationships between Catholic education and CI, as estimated through a regression analysis, is presented as Table 3 (instead of the diagram format, as in Figure 2).

Four different models are analyzed with a natural log of the capitalism index, CI, as the dependent variable in each model. For remainers, model REM 1 regresses the CI on whether or not respondents attended any Catholic schooling, while model REM 2 regresses CI on the actual level of Catholic school attended. For leavers, models LV 3 and LV 4 follow the same procedure, respectively.

Interestingly, some Catholic education is positively associated with CI for those who remain in the faith (see model REM 1), the opposite relationship compared to those who leave the faith (see model LV 3). This difference is visible as a positive coefficient on *attended religious school* for remainers and a negative coefficient on *attended religious school* for leavers. The opposing relationships may suggest that those who were more exposed to the Catholic teachings through schooling rather than only through their home life tend toward a stronger relationship with the faith, either acceptance or rejection. Interesting, though, the level of school or point in time when they were exposed does not appear to matter for the negative relationship of leavers, as shown by the lack of significance on any of the education level variables in column 4.

Additionally interesting from these models is that women who remain in the Catholic church have significantly lower CI scores than men even after controlling for Catholic educational attainment and other demographic variables. In addition, older persons who have left the Catholic church have stronger views toward capitalism than younger persons who have left the church, although the overall impact is relatively small in magnitude.

Table 3. Regression results for capitalism index and Catholic education by remainer (REM) versus leaver (LV).

Dependent Variable: Ln Capitalism Index	**REM 1**	**REM 2**	**LV 3**	**LV 4**
Attended Religious Sch.	2.569 **		−1.960 *	
	(2.43)		(−1.90)	
Only Level Attended				
Grade school only		3.246 *		−1.344
		(1.66)		(−0.84)
Middle school only		3.868		−3.532
		(1.03)		(−0.99)
High school only		7.282 **		0.393
		(2.06)		(0.14)
College only		5.950 ***		−0.763
		(3.27)		(−0.23)
Female	−4.042 ***	−3.211 **	−2.008 *	−2.144
	(−3.50)	(−2.42)	(−1.87)	(−1.64)
Age	−0.0151	0.135	0.200 ***	0.218 ***
	(−0.23)	(1.61)	(3.55)	(3.15)
Ethnicity	✓	✓	✓	✓
Employment Status	✓	✓	✓	✓
Intercept	34.61 ***	19.20 ***	23.07 ***	24.54 ***
	(6.12)	(2.82)	(4.18)	(4.38)
N	340	223	394	283
R2	0.080	0.171	0.102	0.133

t-statistics in parentheses. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, and *** $p < 0.01$.

6. Conclusions

Historically, Catholic theology has emphasized individual freedom, responsibility, and action in the proper ownership and moral use of economic goods. This responsibility includes caring for oneself and one's family, as well as alleviating needs among the poor and less fortunate. The economic system most closely aligned with this perspective is capitalism, which embraces relatively free, unregulated markets, private property, and the pursuit of economic returns through productive activity. Our research offers support for this alignment. In particular, we discovered that, among respondents who grew up with Catholic guardians, those who continue in the faith expressed stronger agreement with capitalist principles than those who no longer identify as Catholic. This is consistent with research that shows that, in general, persons of any Christian denomination are increasingly sympathetic to free markets compared to non-Christians (Jones et al. 2019) and that Catholics, in particular, embrace capitalistic teaching compared to Christians in other denominations (Guiso et al. 2003). In addition, our work extends in a more specific context prior empirical research, demonstrating the link between religion and economic attitudes (Iyer 2016).

The question that this paper addresses is whether these Catholic beliefs are passed on to children in Catholic families and to children who attend Catholic schools. Catholic schools provide a unique educational experience for students by combining traditional academic studies with at least some level of training in the Catholic belief system. To the degree that Catholic education aligns with markers of economic freedom, one would expect that students would leave Catholic schools with a greater understanding of, and perhaps a greater appreciation of, the capitalist economic system. Our research also offers support for this relationship. Among respondents who grew up with Catholic guardians and continue to identify as Catholic, the degree of agreement with capitalist ideology among those who had attended religious school was statistically higher than it was for those who had not attended religious school. This effect was especially pronounced among those who had attended religious school at the high school and college levels. Catholic education, it

appears, has its greatest impact on the formation of economic views when it occurs during the developmental period of late adolescence.

Similar to the broader educational landscape today, Catholic education in the United States faces important challenges in the days and years ahead. Among these are declining enrollments, rising operating costs and tuition, and to some extent, perceptions of parents and students of Catholic institutions (Wodon 2021). Determining the appropriate balance between the secular and the moral and spiritual development of students is likely to be an ongoing concern. Ognibene (Ognibene 2015) highlighted the convergence of Catholic curriculum and public school curriculums starting in the 1940s, beginning with the short lived, life adjustment education, and followed by discipline centered curriculum reform (Wodon 2021). Nevertheless, the "Mission and Catholic Identity" remain an important part of catholic education.

The future impact of Catholic education on economic views rests heavily on individual Catholic schools, as well as the larger Catholic church. Although a Catholic background and Catholic schooling tend to increase individual free market viewpoints, as noted earlier, Catholic educators vary in their preparation to teach the moral and spiritual elements of their faith. Similarly, these educators, and perhaps even Catholic educational institutions themselves, embrace differing economic perspectives. Promoting viewpoints on capitalism that are held by the church and then adequately explored in Catholic schools would constitute a relatively deliberate strategy to solidifying the training of educators and students. However, Catholic schools have the unique opportunity to simultaneously engage in true intellectual discourse over both spiritual and secular matters. A more productive approach may be for Catholic educators to fully consider the balance between creativity, freedom, and the duties to human dignity (Zdun and Fel 2017). Educators who can clearly articulate the Catholic viewpoint, based on the teachings of the church, and fairly compare it to other economic viewpoints will be one of the most valuable resources in the Catholic education system.

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Notes

1 Given that Marx was the first to coin the phrase "capitalism", use of the word has come to mean the oppression of the working class by the owners of capital. In our paper, use of the term "capitalism" is non-pejorative and simply refers to the harnessing of private and free economic activity by the market system.

2 Until the fifth century, the "Church" was composed of both the churches of the West (Rome as the primary church) and the churches of the East (Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch of Syria, and Jerusalem as the largest churches).

3 These teachings are consistent with Galatians 2:10 and James 1:27 (*The New Jeruselem Bible*).

4 Cited from "*Against Heresies*", Book 4, chp. 13, para. 3. The citation can be found in Roberts and Donaldson (Roberts and Donaldson 1965–1969, vol. 1, p. 477).

5 Cited from "On the Lapsed", Paragraph 11. The citation can be found in Roberts and Donaldson (Roberts and Donaldson 1965–1969, vol. 5, p. 440).

[6] The Edict of Milan can be found in Lactantius' exposition "On the Manner in which the Persecutors Died", chp. 48. The citation can be found in Roberts and Donaldson (Roberts and Donaldson 1965–1969, vol. 7).

[7] Cited from "*The City of God*", Book 1, chp. 8. The citation can be found in Schaff (2004, vol. 2, p. 5).

[8] Cited from "*The City of God*", Book 11, chp. 16. The citation can be found in Schaff (2004, vol. 2, p. 214).

[9] Referenced from "Expositions on the Psalms", Psalm 71. The reference can be found in Schaff (2004, vol. 8, pp. 315–326). See, in particular, para. 15.

[10] See https://www.usccb.org/offices/public-affairs/catholic-education (accessed on 30 November 2022).

[11] See University of Notre Dame, "The Idea of the Catholic University," Articles II-X, 1967, https://archives.nd.edu/episodes/visitors/lol/idea.htm#:~:text=In%20a%20Catholic%20university%20all,given%20due%20honor%20and%20respect (accessed on 30 November 2022).

[12] See https://www.usccb.org/offices/public-affairs/catholic-education (accessed on 30 November 2022).

[13] See https://www.accunet.org/About-Catholic-Higher-Education (accessed on 30 November 2022).

[14] Rouse (2015) suggests the use of a question allowing respondents to indicate their data are unreliable.

[15] Cronbach's alpha, a measure of internal consistency, for the capitalism index of 0.88 is well above the commonly accepted threshold.

[16] Regression tables generating the differences and statistical significance are contained in the appendix, along with a regression table, including a full set of the control variables.

[17] Jones et al. (2019) included religious school attendance in their analysis but did not limit responses to those who only attended one level of schooling; thus, respondents attending multiple levels of schooling with heterogeneous effects confounded the results.

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The Integral Formation of Catholic School Teachers

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Abstract: The Catholic Church has a long history of conducting schools as part of its mission to evangelize. This paper will contend that in order for teachers to implement the evangelistic mission of Catholic schools, they themselves need an integral formation that puts every dimension of their human nature—body, emotions, will, and intellect—in ongoing communion with Christ and His Church. A brief examination of the impact of secularization in the United States on the Catholic school mission indicates that teachers are inadequately formed to fulfill that mission. Contemplative practice, a common faith formation practice used for Catholic school teachers, will be evaluated as insufficient for achieving its goal because it does not fully account for the way God created human beings. Contemplative practice relies heavily on the work of John Dewey, who applied inadequate anthropological principles to the task of human learning and teacher education. By contrast, faith formation efforts that account for human nature engage both the *intellectus* and the *ratio*, and in so doing engage the teacher's whole integrated person. Teacher faith formation can facilitate the teacher's encounter with God, allowing Him to form her, by providing analogical encounters with Him through the transcendentals and sacramental encounters with Him in the liturgy.

Keywords: Catholic schools; faith formation; teachers; Christian anthropology; transcendentals

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1. Introduction

The Catholic Church has a very long history of conducting schools as part of its mission in the world flowing from what is known as the *Great Commission*: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you . . . " (Matthew 28:19–20). In every period of the Church's history, this imperative of evangelization has remained the foundation of the Catholic school's mission, right up to the most recent teaching from the Congregation for Catholic Education in January 2022, *The Identity of the Catholic School for a Culture of Dialogue* (Congregation for Catholic Education 2022, #6). Furthermore, the 2020 document, *Directory for Catechesis* reiterated the consistent teaching of the Church regarding the Catholic formation of teachers: "It is required that the teachers be believers committed to personal growth in the faith, incorporated into a Christian community desirous of giving the reason for their faith through professional expertise as well" (Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization 2020, #318).

This paper will contend that in order for teachers to implement the evangelistic mission of Catholic schools, they themselves need an integral formation that puts every dimension of their human nature—body, emotions, will, and intellect—into ongoing communion with Christ and His Church. It will begin by examining contemplative practice, commonly used in the faith formation of Catholic school teachers and educational leaders of the United States. It will proceed to argue that an adequate anthropology empowers teachers to fulfill the mission, because it presumes a particular vision of human learning, a vision that contemplative practice cannot adequately fulfill. It will then evaluate the vision of human learning articulated by the American educational philosopher John Dewey, whose ideas permeate teachers' professional formation in the United States. It will maintain that

the nature of the human person is such that learning must integrate all her[1] powers to discover truth. Thus, the paper will argue, human learning must integrate all the person's powers to arrive at the truth and to make a willing commitment to God. Finally, the paper will propose intentionally and strategically applying the transcendentals to teacher faith formation in order to form the teacher's whole person through analogical encounters with God.

2. Historical Context

Catholic schools in the United States inherit and implement the Church's mission and vision for its schools. This mission, reiterated in *The Identity of the Catholic School for a Culture of Dialogue*, extends Jesus' Great Commission by educating the whole person for union with God. Rather than simply responding to a civic or social need to educate young people, Catholic schools "participate in the evangelizing mission of the Church" (Congregation for Catholic Education 2022, #30) for the sake of "proposing" the Gospel to the next generation (Benedict XVI 2008). Furthermore, in educating the whole person, Catholic schools help students "come to the fullness of Christ's life" by interweaving evangelization with integral human development (Congregation for Catholic Education 2022, #13). Because the Church is both Mother and Teacher, its schools "must be concerned with the whole of man's life, even the secular part insofar as it has a bearing on his heavenly calling" (Congregation for Catholic Education 2022, #10). In fulfilling this mission, the Catholic school endeavors to form students in the Catholic faith. Faith, in the Catholic understanding, is a gift of God and a human response to that gift, so that the recipient of the gift in turn "gives personal adherence to God and freely assents to the whole truth that God has revealed" (Catechism of the Catholic Church 2009, Glossary).

However, growing secularization in the United States presents challenges to Catholic schools' fulfilling the mission. Polls (such as Smith 2019; Diamont 2020; Smith 2022) continually show low levels of faith practice and belief among Americans, including American Catholics, implying that fewer people want to enroll their children in Catholic schools for the sake of forming them in the faith. Enrollment in Catholic schools in US has declined since peaking in the 1960s at about 5.2 million students to fewer than 1.7 million students in the 2021–2022 academic year, indicating that fewer students have the opportunity to learn the Catholic faith in Catholic schools than did 60 years ago (National Catholic Education Association 2022a, 2022b). Catholic schools have fewer religious and clerical teachers to hand on the Catholic faith, in religion class and throughout the whole curriculum. Consequently, Catholic schools are relying heavily on lay teachers to fulfill the mission.

It is clear, however, that many lay teachers have been inadequately prepared to fulfill the Catholic school mission. In 1997, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops released a report stating that after reviewing a number of commonly used religion texts, they had found ten doctrinal deficiencies that consistently permeated these texts. Corrected texts were not available until August 2011. Catholic teachers, formed in the faith as students in Catholic schools or parish schools of religion, often suffered inadequate faith formation as a result of these deficiencies.[2] Those who did not supplement their inadequate formation could not adequately hand on the faith to their own students. Furthermore, most Catholic school teachers are professionally prepared as educators in secular institutions that do not address spiritual formation. As a result, these teachers do not receive professional formation that equips them to implement the evangelizing mission of Catholic schools. It seems, then, that the current context of Catholic schools in the United States is such that teachers need faith formation in order to carry out the mission effectively. How then, can we begin to address the issue of Catholic identity among teachers who need to be formed adequately to fulfil their mission?

3. Contemplative Practice, Commonly Used in the Faith Formation of Catholic School Teachers

One common practice in teacher faith formation, contemplative practice, is insufficient for the purpose of establishing authentic Catholic identity in a school because it relies on subjective experience that may or may not be informed by objective truth.[3] Advocated for by Merylann Schuttloffel of Catholic University of America (Schuttloffel 2013), promoted by the National Catholic Education Association and in continued use by Catholic educators (Fussell 2021), contemplative practice is a "metacognitive approach to support [Catholic educators'] decision-making, communication, and interactions with members of the school community" (Schuttloffel 2016, p. 179). Through contemplative practice, Schuttloffel encourages teachers and school leaders to "think about their own thinking" and its effect on the Catholic identity of the school (Schuttloffel 2013, p. 84). She states that "explicitly gospel values, Catholic theology, and Church tradition" inform activities and decisions in the school, as teachers and leaders "consider personal values, beliefs, and philosophy [to] think about *why* they think the way they do" (Schuttloffel 2013, p. 83). She presumes that "the values, beliefs, and philosophical anchors are taken from gospel values, Church teaching, our Baptismal call for evangelization, and the Catholic Church's intellectual tradition" (Schuttloffel 2013, p. 83). These anchors embed teachers' "interpretive reflection . . . in a Catholic worldview [that is] rooted in a well-formed Catholic identity" (Schuttloffel 2013, p. 83). Schuttloffel's vision of contemplative practice acknowledges that "who" a teacher or leader is, affects the decisions they make and the example they set for students, an indispensable outcome for any teacher faith formation. However, Schuttloffel does not allow for the fact that the prior professional and faith formation that teachers bring to Catholic schools does not always include the influence of objective Church teaching and practice. She herself states that contemplative practice assumes that teachers have received or currently receive "explicit faith formation" especially in the sacraments and parish life (Schuttloffel 2013, p. 84). Since polls repeatedly show low levels of belief and practice of the Catholic Faith, Schuttloffel's assumption seems unfounded.

Moreover, contemplative practice does not account for the effects of the Fall on the teacher. Traditionally, the Catholic Church has defined the Fall as the original sin committed by the first human beings, causing all human beings to be conceived without God's grace, bringing about a "darkened intellect" and a "weakened will" that are not completely removed when God's grace is given in Baptism (Catechism of the Catholic Church 2009, Glossary and #1264, #1426, #2515). These effects imply that teachers do not necessarily know, understand, or believe the truths of Catholicism without those truths being taught to them, and they do not always act virtuously or embrace Catholic values. A brief examination of the world today suggests that all human persons, teachers included, suffer from these effects. While "thinking about one's thinking" gives teachers opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness of their values and practices, the teachers' evaluation is subject to ignorance, misinterpretation, or even moral failing.

Finally, contemplative practice presumes that teachers are responding to their call to union with God and asking for His grace. Polls showing American Catholics' poor and infrequent attendance at Sunday Mass means formators cannot assume teachers seek God or His grace and truth apart from what faith formation efforts provide. While it might be safe to assume that a poll of Catholics teaching in Catholic schools would show a higher percentage of regular Mass attendance relative to all other American Catholics, it seems probable that a significant number of Catholic teachers do not avail themselves of God's grace in an active sacramental life, much like the rest of the culture.

Given the current state of American Catholics' faith belief and practice (as highlighted in the previous section), Schuttloffel seems excessively optimistic to assume that teachers and school leaders have the foundational formation that they need to carry out contemplative practice fruitfully in their schools. Nevertheless, Schuttloffel's model is widely utilized in faculty faith formation. The implications of the current situation in Catholic schools means that faith formation for teachers will have to make up for the aforementioned

deficiencies. Contemplative practice, in and of itself, does not adequately provide what teachers need to fulfill the mission of Catholic schools. To adequately provide what teachers need, we must first examine the nature of the human person.

4. Adequate Anthropology Empowers Teachers to Fulfill the Mission

Designing faith formation efforts that account for human nature empowers teachers to fulfill the Catholic school mission.[4] Human nature is characterized by relationality, the spiritual (non-material and therefore non-sensate)[5] powers of intellect and will, and the union of the body and the soul. With regard to relationality, the human person is created in the image of the Trinity—three persons, one God. The nature of the Trinity as a communion of persons who exist in relation to one another and in communion with one another implies that teachers, created in God's image, are created precisely for communion with God and with other human beings. In fact, "the deepest core of the human person lies in [her] capacity for relationship" (Granados 2010, p. 295), a capacity that is fulfilled first by relationship with God and then with other human beings (Ratzinger 1990, p. 445 and Congregation for Catholic Education 2007, #8). Accommodating the communal aspect of human nature when forming teachers includes forming them for their final end, which is union with God (Second Vatican Council 1965, #1). This end informs the fundamental mission of Catholic schools—educating the whole person for union with God. The teacher will necessarily have to have received this kind of formation in order to form her students accordingly. Thus, teacher faith formation must include fostering her relationship with God as well as with her human community.

Communion between persons demands all the human powers: not just the emotions and the body, but also intellect and will. Inevitably, human beings must know the truth about those with whom they are in relationship in order to cultivate that relationship, and they must do good for them. Experience demonstrates that knowing very little about or doing harm to another person weakens the relationship. The human intellect seeks truth while the human will is directed toward the good (Aquinas 1922, I, 16, 1)—including the true and the good about the other person. Truth and goodness, as stable realities existing outside the person, originate in God, who is Truth (Aquinas 1922, I, 16, 5) and Goodness (Aquinas 1922, I, 6, 1–2). For teachers, then, the intellect and the will are spiritual powers that enable them to seek God Himself when seeking truth and goodness (Aquinas 1922, I, 79, 1 and I, 82, 3). Consequently, teacher faith formation needs to form the intellect and will to seek God Himself, as well as to seek the truth about God and to imitate Him in goodness. Furthermore, the union of body and soul, material and spiritual, implies that the spiritual powers of intellect and will require a body to be exercised. For human beings, bodily experiences inform the intellect, shape the will, and even stir the emotions—all of which are important for facilitating communion with God (Granados 2010, p. 297). The Incarnation demonstrates *par excellence* that the bodily and the concrete opens the door for communion with the spiritual and the divine (O'Shea 2013, p. 457). This indicates that teachers' faith formation needs to address their bodies, affectivity, will, and intellect as they are invited into deeper communion with God. While Schuttloffel's contemplative practice rightly accounts for bodily experience, it assumes rather than provides for the bodily experiences that give communion with God, namely, the sacraments.

The above has hinted at a crucial point for teacher faith formation: the human powers do not act independently but rather are integrated with one another. Aquinas argued that in the human person, the intellect moves the will *and* the will moves the intellect together with all the powers of the soul (Aquinas 1922, I, 82, 4). The will can move the sensitive power (Aquinas 1922, I, 81, 3), the ability of the bodily senses to perform their designated function and thereby to perceive accordingly what is presented to it (Aquinas 1922, I, 80, 1–2). Conversely, the sensitive appetite, the inclination to perform or not perform the functions of the senses, can also move the will (Aquinas 1922, I-II, 9, 2). These movements of the soul are expressed by the body (Aquinas 1922, I, 81, 3), even as bodily experience influences the soul. John Damascene referred to this continual movement between faculties of the

soul using the Greek word, *perichoresis* (a dance—John of Damascus 2022, sct. 57–58). His primary concern was to offer an explanation of the operation of the Holy Trinity, in which the Persons mutually indwell one another in an indivisible unity while simultaneously distinct from each other (Catechism of the Catholic Church 2009, #253–255). He further argued that, since human beings are created in the image of God who is a Trinity, there is an analogical similarity in the way they operate. In other words, the human person functions in a way that is analogous to the Trinity (Fourth Lateran Council, *Canon 2*).[6] This fruitful idea has found its way into much contemporary theology. Moreover, while it is true that the separation of human beings from God that resulted from the Fall damaged human capacities, the wounded powers are not isolated from one another.

This perichoretic integration of the human faculties implies that our learning, and thus teacher faith formation, must account for more than just the intellect. The notion *perichoresis* and its influence on contemporary theology has already been noted. Other ancient and medieval philosophers such as Aristotle and Aquinas, and the contemporary German authors, Joseph Pieper (Pieper [1948] 1998, pp. 9–20) and Joseph Ratzinger (later Benedict XVI; see for example Ratzinger 2002),[7] add further dimensions to this idea. Humans do not learn by exercising their intellect alone, but through the integration of all their powers. In this view, the human intellect includes the *ratio* (or reason) and the *intellectus*. The *ratio* is the ability to discover truth through abstraction, analysis, logical reasoning, and the like. The *intellectus* enables the intellect to see the truth by "simply looking" (*simplex intuitus*), by taking in input from the bodily senses, from the sensitive appetite, from the whole of a person's experience. The *intellectus* informs the *ratio* of what it has observed. The *intellectus* receives truth, and the *ratio* uses the truth received from the *intellectus* to do the difficult work of reasoning its way to rational knowledge. The knowledge received by the *intellectus* is "connatural knowledge," an understanding acquired through the integration of all the human powers and a participation in some way with the nature of the object that is known (Taylor 1998, p. 64). The *ratio* cannot produce connatural knowledge, but rather connatural knowledge forms the basis for some significant activity of the *ratio.*

Distinguishing and clarifying the roles of the *intellectus* and the *ratio* is critical for the faith formation of teachers. In his 1979 document *Catechesi Tradendae*, Pope John Paul II stated that the aims of catechesis are "understanding" and conversion. The word he chose for "understanding" was *intellectum*, not *ratio.* The goal of understanding in faith formation is not limited to the knowledge attained through analysis, discursive reasoning, and active labor. Rather, faith formation has the goal of connatural knowledge, an integrated knowledge of the object known, and even a "participation" in the object known—in this case, God. It might be said that the *ratio* can lead to teachers' knowledge about God, but the *intellectus* can lead to teachers' knowledge of God Himself.

Mother Veronica Namoyo Le Goulard, a Poor Clare nun, recounts a personal experience that illustrates the *intellectus* at work. Le Goulard was born to atheist parents who decided to raise her in Morocco so that "nobody could speak to me of God, and no one could influence the development of my mind with oppressive superstition" (Le Goulard 1993, p. 23). But when she was three years old, she witnessed a glorious sunset, whose beauty overwhelmed her. She recalls:

> "I was caught in limitless beauty and radiant, singing splendor. And at the same time, with a cry of wonder in my heart, I *knew* that all this beauty was created, I knew God. This was the word that my parents had hidden from me. I had nothing to name him: God, Dieu, Allah or Yahweh, as he is named by human lips, but my heart knew that *all was from him* and him alone and that he was such that I could address him and enter into relationship with him through prayer . . . Not once could I dismiss this experience, whatever my intellectual doubts might have been in the following years". (Le Goulard 1993, p. 30)

Le Goulard's experience of observing the sunset, taken in through simple intuition, prompted the understanding of the *intellectus* to recognize the Creator of this beauty, even though she had never been told of such in her conscious memory. In spite of her *ratio*

raising objections in later years, she could not forget or dismiss the understanding she experienced as a small child. This understanding of the *intellectus* gradually resolved those objections, and ultimately connected her *ratio* to her concrete experience.

Countless faith formation efforts account only for the *ratio*. In contemplative practice, teachers "think about their thinking," about their values, about why they think as they do. Another frequent practice in faith formation focuses on strictly instructional approaches to teaching doctrine. Arguably, the hyper-emphasis on the *ratio* in these faith formation practices has led to many teachers knowing about God and knowing about themselves, but not knowing God. Jose Granados argues that "Christianity is not a cold reflection on a purely spiritual idea, but is rather a living experience of God that embraces the whole of man's being," which the *ratio* alone cannot accomplish. For contemplative practice to effectively form teachers in such a way as to enhance the fulfillment of the mission of Catholic schools, teachers must have experiences that present God Himself to their whole person.

A vision of human learning, and therefore a vision for teachers' faith formation, follows from an understanding of human nature. It is necessary, then, to examine and evaluate the anthropology that undergirds the vision of human learning that permeates most American teacher training today.

5. The Vision of Human Learning Articulated by the American Educational Philosopher John Dewey

Predominant understandings of human learning often do not account fully for this integrated, Christian vision of the human person. The views of American educational philosopher John Dewey can be counted among these. Dewey significantly influenced the professional formation of teachers in the United States through his teaching and writing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Today, educational philosophy textbooks in most American universities quote heavily from Dewey. As we shall see, Dewey's principles arguably influenced Schuttloffel's contemplative practice. Like all philosophers, Dewey derived his philosophical principles from philosophers who preceded him. Because of his pervasive influence on teaching and learning United States classrooms, which is often imitated in faith formation efforts, this section will analyze and evaluate some aspects of Dewey's vision of human learning and the anthropological presumptions that undergird them.[8]

Dewey used and valued an empirical method of learning (see for example Dewey 1965c, pp. 158–59, 166–68), which only measures the material but cannot measure the spiritual. In this respect he can trace his philosophical roots to Rene Descartes, whose attempt to scientifically "disprove" religious skepticism prompted him to try to "demonstrate truth in an exclusively rationalistic and systematic way" (Taylor 1998, p. 108). Ultimately, Dewey's Cartesian belief led him to dismiss the spiritual dimension of the human person since it could not be demonstrated empirically. The result of Dewey inserting Descartes' position into mainstream American education is twofold: the common challenge to "prove" spiritual matters by empirical method, or the reactionary response of accepting spiritual assertions on "blind faith" divorced from reason. Contemplative practice reflects this divorce by failing to explicitly form the teachers' spiritual dimension, prompting teachers to "think about their own thinking" rather than cultivating their relationship with God. Furthermore, Schuttloffel's contemplative practice does not account for the spiritual effects of the Fall, which cannot be scientifically "proven" by any empirical methodology.

Another hallmark of Dewey's educational philosophy is his view (like that of Kant) that things cannot be known in themselves, that their nature is assigned to them by the observer rather than inherent in their being (Dewey 1965b, pp. 94–95). His view developed from applying to learning Darwin's theory of evolution (Dewey 1965a, pp. 1–2). Dewey held that knowing evolves according to the influence of the learner's environment. For Dewey, truth changes and so human beings should not bother searching for objective truth (Dewey 1965c, p. 164). Contemplative practice relies on the subjective experience of the

teacher, prompting the teacher to assign meaning to their experiences and to discover her values. To the extent that her experiences and values have been formed by the objective truth conveyed by the Church, the teacher may be able to benefit from contemplative practice in a way that helps her to foster her communion with God. However, if the teacher is unaware of objective truth or has explicitly rejected it, contemplative practice is unlikely to facilitate her own communion with God or that of her students, hindering her ability to fulfill the Catholic school mission.

Dewey further held that experience and empirical method determine truth rather than discover it. If there is no objective truth, then no search for it will lead to its discovery. Instead, human beings observe, recall, inquire, define, research, judge, test and the like in order to "reconstruct" thoughts and to solve problems. In Dewey's view, thinking is active, doing, and "intelligence is a method" (Dewey 1929, p. 220). He denies an "*a priori* form of non-reflective knowledge, one which is immediately given" (Dewey 1929, p. 221). He believed students needed to be taught *how* to think, rather than *what* to think (Dewey 1925, pp. 177–78). Dewey's position finds its roots in Kant's belief that human knowing requires "active mental effort . . . [knowing] is *activity*, and nothing but activity." (Pieper [1948] 1998, p. 10). For Kant, all human knowing is work, and knowing is only valuable to the extent that it has been acquired through the kind of work that Dewey advocated for student learning.[9] This anthropological position has informed contemplative practice, which appears to rely on the teacher's effort to distill from personal experiences all that is needed for her to cultivate her relationship with God and thereby contribute to the Catholic school mission.[10]

Ultimately, Dewey's anthropology, which undergirded his educational philosophy, eliminated the spiritual dimension of the learner, negated the possibility of finding objective truth, and held that all learning must be the result of effort, the *ratio.* While the above is a simplified and incomplete summary of Dewey's principles, he nevertheless developed his theory of learning out of anthropological principles that do not account for all that a human person is. The nature of the human person is such that learning must integrate all her powers to discover objective truth—a stable reality that includes the material and the spiritual. No less does anthropology factor into teachers' faith formation. All of her powers need to be integrally formed for the purpose of fulfilling her need for union and communion with God.

6. An Integrated Approach to Arrive at the Truth and to Make a Willing Commitment to God

Teachers' faith formation will be more complete and more likely to foster union with God if it integrates the *intellectus* as well as the *ratio*. In contrast to Kant, Dewey, and others, ancient and medieval philosophers held that the *ratio* can perform its work of knowing when it also participates in the *intellectus*, which understands by receiving from the senses and from the sensitive appetite, from the will, and sometimes by the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

The *intellectus* can give the *ratio* a participatory and experiential kind of knowing by taking in data from the bodily senses as well as by means of direct inspiration. The senses perceive the concrete realities of the teacher's experience and the objective truth of those realities. Jose Granados argues that for embodied human beings, experience requires bodily participation in the world, a requirement indicative of how teachers can encounter God: "The Christian tradition connects the bodily senses to the experience of the divine . . . this connection means that the bodily senses are open to transcendence, and that the spiritual senses grow out of the bodily ones" (Granados 2010, pp. 293, 298). This position accounts for the union of the body and soul, the material and the spiritual, in human beings and roots teachers' *ratio* in bodily experience of reality. Connection between bodily and spiritual senses means that teacher can encounter God through the sacraments, allowing God to vivify all her human powers with His grace. For this reason, teacher faith formation must include provision of the sacraments to facilitate their union with Him.

Unlike focusing on the *ratio* alone, integrating the *intellectus* allows for and evokes teachers' capacity for connatural knowledge. The bodily senses stimulate the sensitive appetite, more commonly known as the emotions. Teachers, like all human beings, love and desire that which they perceive as attractive and beautiful; they are repulsed and fearful of that which they perceive as harmful or ugly. When God and the things of God are presented to the teachers attractively, they are drawn to a desire for union with Him and are drawn by their response of love to Him. But targeting teachers' faith formation to the *ratio* alone demands significant intellectual labor from the teacher that Pieper contends results in a weariness and hardness of heart that stifles the teacher's desire for God (Pieper [1948] 1998, p. 14). To illustrate, the English philosopher John Stuart Mill describes his experience of being educated strictly according to the *ratio*:

> "The habit of analysis has a tendency to wear away the feelings: as indeed it has, when no other mental habit is cultivated, and the analyzing spirit remains without its natural complements and correctives . . . I was thus left stranded at the commencement of my voyage with a well-equipped ship and a rudder, but no sail; without any real desire for the ends which I had been so carefully fitted out to work for: no delight in virtue, or the general good, but also just as little in anything else . . . There seemed no power in nature sufficient to begin the formation of my character anew, and create in a mind now irretrievable analytic, fresh associations of pleasure with any of the objects of desire". (quoted in Taylor 1998, pp. 113–14)

Pieper and Taylor, relying on the anthropology of Aquinas, hold that the *intellectus* receives, whereas the *ratio* labors. Laboring without receiving wearies the human heart, rendering it "stony" and unable to receive (Pieper [1948] 1998, p. 14). By contrast, when teachers experience satisfaction, joy, delight in concrete objects that stimulate a desire for more, the Holy Spirit can act (Granados 2010, pp. 296, 298). When the teacher's heart is not hardened by her own insufficient efforts to learn, it is free to allow God to stir her affectivity, her love for Him and His revelation. Love for God prepares the teacher to receive and embrace His revelation.

Love for God, stirred by integrating the *intellectus,* facilitates teachers' freely willed obedience to God. In creating human beings with free will, God necessitated that He would not violate that freedom by forcing a response to Him. However, Aquinas viewed the role of the sensitive appetite is to move the will to act. Thus, teacher's love for God moves her to respond to Him by choosing to follow Him and to imitate Him, as His commands make known. The teacher's *ratio* demonstrates the goodness of God and His commands, but creating the conditions for allowing the *intellectus* to receive allows the teacher to freely and willingly follow God.

None of the above should suggest that the *ratio* is unimportant and to be dismissed in teacher faith formation. Rather, it should show the danger of targeting the *ratio* alone, for such an exclusive focus diminishes the formation of the teacher's spiritual dimension and her communion with God. To integrate the *intellectus* in teacher faith formation, formators can intentionally and strategically apply the transcendentals.

7. A Way Forward: Applying the Transcendentals to Teacher Faith Formation

The Italian educator Maria Montessori, and those who have applied her ideas in the area of faith formation (particularly Sofia Cavalletti and Gianna Gobbi) made a strong case for the view that it was not only intellectual, discursive, input that mattered in the formation of the human person (see Cavalletti 1992; Gobbi 2000). Montessori used explicit Catholic language to explain what was happening in the development of a human being. She referred to it as "progressive incarnation in which the spirit and flesh are brought into an ever more perfect harmony" (Standing 1957, p. 210). Standing noted that Montessori's observations show an "unexpected affinity" with Aristotelian philosophy (Standing 1957, p. 212). This could be better described as an affinity with Thomist philosophy. It is, indeed, here that we must seek Montessori's perception of what Thomas Aquinas referred

to as *simple intuition* (Aquinas 1922, I, 59, 1). That is, in the field of religious formation, human beings need more than reflection and contemplative practice such as Schuttloffel recommends. They need an opportunity to receive inspiration directly from God.

Montessori emphasized the use of the senses, famously insisting that practical life activities gave students the opportunity for reflection and more importantly, spiritual contemplation (Standing 1957, pp. 212–28). She demonstrated that these contemplative opportunities worked better if they were associated with unhurried movements of the body (dusting, polishing, flower arranging and the like). In this way, she gave us a key to unlock access to the *intellectus*.

It seems that adults also respond to these opportunities for contemplation. The starting point is an acknowledgment of the unity of body and soul activating the perichoretic operation of every human faculty. It is never just about engaging the mind in abstract thought. Through the Church, teachers encounter God in the sacraments, where He appears behind the veil of signs perceptible to the bodily senses. However, faith formation for teachers can also provide analogical encounters with God through the transcendental properties of being present in every existing thing according to its own nature—beauty, goodness, and truth (Willey et al. 2008, p. 65). These transcendentals are manifested in concrete reality and perceived through bodily senses. They originate in God, the Source of all being, and while material manifestations of the transcendentals are not God, they do point to God, allowing teachers to encounter Him in the world He created. Balthasar, echoing Aquinas, links each transcendental with a Person of the Trinity, so that beauty points the teacher to the Son, goodness leads to the Holy Spirit, and truth directs to the Father (see McInerny 2020; Aquinas 1922, I, 39, 8). Such linking does not imply that one Person of the Trinity monopolizes the transcendental linked to Him. Rather, because the transcendentals are united within themselves (much as the Persons of the Trinity are united and indivisible), this linking makes distinctions that can assist in facilitating teachers' communion with God. God engages teachers' spiritual and relational dimension through these analogical encounters with Him in the transcendentals, and He thereby forms them for their final end of union with Him.

God also acts upon teachers' human faculties of intellect and will through their engagement with Him in the experience of the transcendentals. Beauty permeates bodily senses, moving the heart to love the good, which opens the mind and makes it receptive to the truth. This order is consistent with Aquinas' view of the integration of the human powers and the procession of human learning. It also illustrates the transcendentals' contribution to the *intellectus*. By "simply looking" at material manifestations of beauty, goodness, and truth, the *intellectus* can participate in the reality of it, and with God as the Source of it.

Furthermore, the theological virtues operate upon teachers' faculties, taking them beyond their natural capabilities alone. The theological virtues are gifts from God, but each can be strengthened by a corresponding transcendental:

> "Our yearning for truth leads us to seek the kind of truth that is beyond our intellectual capabilities—*faith*. Beauty is perfected by the incomparable harmony and perfection to be found in God, which is the wellspring of *hope*. Human goodness is called by Christ to the higher goal of *supernatural charity"*. (O'Shea 2018, p. 235)

Since the mission of the Catholic school is more than just instruction in teachings of the Church, but educating the whole person for union with God, teacher formation should address the virtues, and can do so through the integration of the transcendentals.

Strategically applying the transcendentals to teachers' faith formation allows teachers to analogically encounter God in ways that transform her whole integrated person to become "like God." Faith formation efforts, then, incorporate beauty to attract teachers through their bodily senses. Examples of beauty can include God's creation and man-made images of it, as well as sacred and religious art, music, literature, and the dramatic arts. Each of these forms of beauty—to the degree that they are also good and true—

communicate religious truth in ways that move teachers to embrace the good and flee evil. By participating in beauty, through looking, listening, reading, or watching, the teacher can be moved to the good and recognize the objective truth contained in the concrete reality. Celebrating liturgies for teachers beautifully makes it more likely that they will be attracted to God and the truth He reveals. Furthermore, formators can point out the truth communicated by the beauty and what the beauty manifests about God.

Incorporating goodness in faith formation likewise attracts teachers and points them to the all-good God. The goodness of human community in fellowship and service can move teachers to love and charity. Not to be overlooked is teachers' prayerful reading of Scripture that can stir affective love of God through the Holy Spirit who inspired it. Teaching *lectio divina*, Liturgy of the Hours, or Ignatian meditation, as well as allowing time for teachers to practice these gives them encounters with God that incline their hearts and strengthen their wills toward the good. Prayerfully reading Scripture, then, sets the stage for teachers' moral formation to engage the discipline of the body and the reasoning mind (*ratio*) to discover and live out goodness. This approach relies on God's presence and grace to assist the teacher to do good, overcoming the effects of the Fall on her.

Including truth in teachers' faith formation can include approaches such as contemplative practice and the truth teachers might recognize through that process. However, formators cannot disregard communicating the objective truths taught by and through the Church. First among these objective truths is the *kerygma*, the principal proclamation of the Gospel which announces God's loving desire to save His people, which firmly orients all faith formation toward teachers' final end of union with God. Teachers' *ratio* can be fruitfully engaged in reasoned explanations of doctrine once the foundation has been established by addressing the *intellectus*. The objective truths of the Faith can be more readily understood by the *ratio* when the whole integrated person of the teacher has been engaged through the *intellectus*, and reasonably explaining these truths prevents errors that arise from using contemplative practice alone as a faith formation tactic.

8. Conclusions

Human pedagogical efforts need to take account of the nature of the person who is the subject of these endeavors. The most essential aspect of any such formation for work in Catholic schools can perhaps be summed up best in the idea of *perichoresis*—an acknowledgement of the interplay of every aspect of the person in pursuit of the truth, beauty and goodness of God.

In applying these transcendentals, it is possible to make use of the concrete and material means through which God Himself can form teachers. An analysis of contemplative practice shows that it is insufficient for providing all that a teacher needs to fulfill the mission of the Catholic school. By contrast, an adequate anthropology empowers teachers to fulfill the mission, because it presumes a vision of human learning that accommodates the fullness of human nature as it has been created by God: not just the teacher's bodily nature, not just her *ratio*, but her entire human nature as a spiritual, relational, integrated person who learns and engages in relationship with God through all her powers. Contemplative practice, on the other hand, relies upon key anthropological and educational principles asserted by John Dewey, whose vision heavily influences teacher professional training in the United States. Dewey's ideas, developed from assumptions made by Descartes, Kant, and others, target the *ratio*, which wearies teachers and hardens their hearts toward God. These views are not in keeping with a Catholic understanding of reality and would constitute an inherent contradiction if used in a Catholic context.

Instead, pedagogically creating conditions that facilitate a teacher's encounter with God allows Him to form her whole person, in all her integrated powers, so that she receives objective truth and makes a willing commitment to God. The mission of the Catholic school to educate the whole person for union with God requires that the teacher's whole person—including her body, emotions, will, and intellect—needs to be formed to empower her to fulfill the mission. More importantly, however, the teacher will be formed for her own

final end of union with God. By forming the teacher in her whole person, through fostering analogical encounters with God through the transcendentals and providing sacramental encounters with Him in the liturgy, Catholic schools can fulfill their mission to educate not only students, but teachers, for union with God.

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Notes

1 This paper will use the pronoun "she" in any reference to the human person to more easily distinguish the human person from God.

2 In 2020, the USCCB noted that a number of liturgical hymns manifested these same ten deficiencies, indicating that teachers and students who go to Mass are formed in the faith by music that does not communicate the fullness of the Catholic faith. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Committee on Doctrine. 2020. Catholic Hymnody at the Service of the Church: An Aid for Evaluating Hymn Lyrics. Available online: https://www.usccb.org/resources/catholic-hymnody-service-church-aid-evaluating-hymn-lyrics (accessed on 29 September 2022).

3 This paper will understand "contemplative practice" as Schuttloffel describes it. "Contemplative practice" in this work does not refer to meditation or contemplation rooted in Eastern mysticism. "Mindfulness" can be understood to encompass more than Schuttloffel appears to imply in her description of "contemplative practice," and so "mindfulness" will not be understood in this paper to be included by Schuttloffel's terminology.

4 In *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School*, the Congregation for Catholic Education observed that "any genuine educational philosophy has to be based on the nature of the human person, and therefore must take into account all of the physical and spiritual powers of each individual" (Congregation for Catholic Education 1988, #63).

5 Frank Sheed explains "spirit" in humans and in God in the first two chapters of *Theology for Beginners.* In humans, "spirit" is "the element in us by which we know and love" (Sheed [1958] 1981, p. 9) thereby making the "spiritual powers" the powers of intellect and will. God, he states, is infinite spirit (Sheed [1958] 1981, p. 17) and thereby all-knowing and all-loving.

6 All human language about our encounters with God must be referred to as analogical. In the words of Aquinas, "we can know God only from creatures . . . .Thus, whatever is said of God and creatures is said in relation of the creature to God" (Aquinas 1922, I, 13, 5). Following Aquinas, the Catholic Church teaches that human knowledge of God is necessarily limited. This real but inadequate knowledge is referred to as "analogy" (Catechism of the Catholic Church 2009, #40–43). The classic Catholic understanding of the role of analogy comes from Canon 2 of the Fourth Lateran Council, 1215 AD: "Between the Creator and the creature there cannot be a likeness so great that the unlikeness is not greater."

7 Joseph Ratzinger has alluded to this understanding in multiple works, including but not limited to his 2002 message "The Feeling of Things, the Contemplation of Beauty."

8 The authors are indebted to the thesis (A Thomistic Reply to John Dewey's Approach to Learning. Master's Degree of Thomistic Studies, Dominican House of Studies, Washington, DC, USA) of Sr. Mary Thomas Huffman (2019), OP for an understanding of Dewey's ideas.

9 Dewey expressed his belief that humans had "but one sure road of access to truth—the road of patient, cooperative inquiry operating by means of observation, experient, record and controlled reflection" (Dewey 1934, p. 32). This conviction eliminated all possibility of knowing the spiritual.

10 While contemplative practice has been the primary target of this critique, many faith formation efforts that seek to communicate objective truth and Catholic Church teaching likewise fall into the error of hyper-emphasizing the *ratio*. In his book *Poetic Knowledge*, James Taylor observes that after the Council of Trent, faith formators began presenting the Faith as a "demonstration that requires proof" (Taylor 1998, p. 108). The Catholic Church has acknowledged teachers' need for reasoned explanations of Church teaching. But focus on the *ratio* alone fails to address the integrated powers of the human person, and the need to account for all human powers in cultivating teachers' relationship with God. The Church calls for teachers to have "a mastery of the

knowledge of the truths of the faith," as well as "mastery of the . . . principles of spiritual life that require constant improvement" (Congregation for Catholic Education 2007, #26).

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Article

The Pedagogical and Religious Dimensions of the Rites of the Sacrament of Children's Baptism

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Abstract: The topic of the article "The Pedagogical and Religious Dimensions of the Rites of the Sacrament of Baptism for Children" deals with the sacraments in the Catholic Church, particularly baptism as the first of the seven sacraments. As signs, sacraments are also meant to instruct, and indeed they do, for the meaning and grace of baptism are made clear in the rites of its celebration Union with Christ leads to confession of faith in the One God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The profession of faith, closely related to baptism, is eminently Trinitarian. The Church baptises: "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28,19), the Triune God to whom the Christian entrusts his life.The basis for analyzing the rites of baptism will be the Order of Baptism for Children during mass, which contains very important instructions that can be grouped into three points: (1) instructions about God the Father, (2) instructions about the essence of baptism and its importance for the parish and the baptized, (3) instructions about the duties of the baptized and their parents and godparents. In the sacraments God occupies the central place, and the sacrament of baptism, by instructing about God the Father, the first issue, brings closer three fundamental truths about God: (a) God's initiative in the salvation for man, (b) God's omnipotence (universal, loving and mysterious), and (c) God's goodness. The second issue deals with: (a) the essence of baptism based on the terms given in the Rite of Receiving the Children (baptism, faith, the grace of Christ, admission to the Church, and eternal life); (b) the meaning of infant baptism for the parish community; and (c) the meaning of baptism for the child. Likewise, the third issue is also divided into two parts, with an instruction (a) on the duties of the baptized and (b) the duties of baptized children, parents and godparents.

Keywords: baptism; God; values; community; parish; duties; parents of the child receiving baptism; godparents

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1. Introduction

Ongoing rapid social and cultural changes have negatively impacted the religiosity of the young generation of Poles. In the last decade, the number of sacramental marriages has dropped significantly; meanwhile, there is a specific fashion for informal partnerships. What was socially unapproved a dozen years ago has now become almost the norm, accepted by one's parents, closest family members, friends and colleagues. Moral relativism, which is upheld not only by young people but also by the older generation, is taking its toll. Many followers of Christ willingly admit their faith, yet at the same time they do not obey almost any Christian standards, neither evangelical, doctrinal nor moral (Słotwińska 2019).

An example of such behavior that the Church has to deal with is the baptism of infants born into non-sacramental relationships. It is becoming common practice that young people do not conclude the sacrament of marriage despite the absence of impediments, and at the same time necessarily request the baptism of their children. This is an example of either extreme hypocrisy or a lack of elementary knowledge of what the sacrament of baptism is. It is surprising that the overwhelming majority of priests willingly agree to administer this sacrament, although they know very well that the promise they made during a baptism to

raise a child in the faith has little chance of taking place, since the parents themselves, often also godparents, live in sin and have no consideration for God's commandments.

Perhaps it is high time for the Polish Episcopate to undertake corrective measures that will stimulate moral renewal and contribute to the spiritual revival of the young generation of believers in the Catholic Church (DC 2020, p. 288). Before this happens, however, I would like to show, in this study, the importance, power and beauty of this most important sacrament in its various dimensions. I consciously use the term "most important sacrament" because without the sacrament of baptism the other six sacraments cannot be administered (DC 2020, p. 70):

> Christ instituted the sacraments of the new law. [. . .] The seven sacraments touch all the stages and all the important moments of Christian life: they give birth and increase, healing and mission to a Christian's life of faith. There is thus a certain resemblance between the stages of natural life and the stages of spiritual life. (cf. CCC 1992, p. 1210)

Baptism, the foundation of all Christian life, the gateway to the life in the Spirit and the gateway to other sacraments, frees the baptized from sin, making them children of God and members of Christ, and instills them in the Church, and so we become partakers in her mission (CCL 1983, can. 204, § 1; 849; CCC 1992, p. 1213). "Baptism is the sacrament of rebirth through water and in the Word" (CCC 1992, p. 1213). It occurs as the first sacrament of Christian initiation (I: baptism, confirmation, eucharist; II: penance and anointing of the sick; III: priesthood and marriage):

> The purpose of the sacraments is to sanctify men, to build up the body of Christ, and, finally, to give worship to God; because they are signs they also instruct. They not only presuppose faith, but by words and objects they also nourish, strengthen, and express it; that is why they are called "sacraments of faith". They do indeed impart grace, but, in addition, the very act of celebrating them most effectively disposes the faithful to receive this grace in a fruitful manner, to worship God duly, and to practice charity. (SC 1963, p. 59)

This text, from the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, emphasizes the theological, pedagogical and religious dimensions of the sacraments. These two dimensions are very closely related. The subject of this article focuses on the pedagogical and religious dimensions of the first sacrament, baptism. This, in turn, requires taking into account the statements from the Catechism of the Catholic Church, which emphasize that "the meaning and grace of the sacrament of baptism are seen in the rites of its celebration. By following the gestures and words of this celebration with attentive participation, the faithful are initiated into the riches this sacrament signifies and brings about in each newly baptized person" (CCC 1992, p. 34).

Thus, the pedagogical and religious dimensions of the sacrament of baptism form the rite, consisting of acts and words for its celebration. By attentively participating in them, the faithful will know "what this sacrament means and what it brings about" in those who receive it (CCC 1992, p. 1334). The basis for the analysis of the rite of baptism will be the Order of Baptism for Children (OBC 1994, pp. 80–94), which contains many very important instructions, namely about: (1) God the Father, (2) the essence of baptism and its importance for the parish church and the baptized, and (3) the duties of the baptized, their parents and godparents.

2. Teachings about God the Father

God the Father is the source and goal of the entire liturgy of the Church (cf. CCC 1992, p. 1077). Hence, He occupies a central place in the liturgy of the sacraments, including baptism, which praises Him as the Father making the baptized his children. Three truths are emphasized: (a) God's initiative in the work of human salvation, (b) God's omnipotence and (c) God's goodness.

A. In the history of salvation, God in dialogue with man always appears as the first person acting as the initiator of salvation. The first word of God spoken to a newborn child is the word "love", cleansing him or her of original sin and making the newborn His adopted child. On the other hand, the liturgical sign that expresses this truth about God's initiative concerning man's salvation is the procession of the celebrant, with the assistant, representing God, leading from the altar to the front door of the church. Here the celebrant teaches that God, whose gift is a child, now wants to give him the gift of "his life of grace" (OBC 1994, p. 112).

B. God's omnipotence, as the only one of His attributes, stands for the symbol of faith, as noted in the Catechism of the Catholic Church. It adds that "to confess this power has great bearing on our lives. We believe that his might is *universal*, for God who created everything (cf. Gen 1:1; John 1:3) also rules everything and can do everything. God's power is loving, for he is our Father (Cf. Matt 6:9), and *mysterious*, for only faith can discern it when it 'is made perfect in weakness'" (2 Cor 1: 9; CCC 1992, p. 268).

The call to "God, the Father almighty", emphasizing the faith of parents and godparents, the fatherhood of God, and His creation of heaven and earth, are found in the Confession of Faith (OBC 1994, p. 135). By taking part in this activity, parents and godparents profess their faith in the universal omnipotence of God (they confirm that they believe in "God [...] almighty") as loving (they confirm that they believe in God *the Father* almighty) and mysterious (when asked, "Do they believe...?" they confirm that they believe).

In the Rite of Baptism for Children, the instruction about all three attributes of God's omnipotence is found in the Prayer of the Faithful (OBC 1994, p. 125), along with an exorcism (OBC 1994, p. 127 A and B), and in the prayer for anointing with Holy Chrism (OBC 1994, p. 139).

The recognition of God's universal omnipotence is already found in His definition as "Almighty", "Creator of Heaven and Earth" and "Creator of the World". God's loving omnipotence manifests itself in calling Him "Father", "Merciful" and "Good". The faith necessary to recognize the omnipotence of the mysterious God in the celebrant is contained in the text he offers. This presents specific requests, and the faithful confirm this text with their requests and "Amen". In prayers containing requests, the most numerous represent teaching and faith in God's loving omnipotence, in requests for mercy, to join the community of the Church, for boldly confessing Christ, for growing in grace, for abiding in one faith and love, to save the world from hunger, fire and war, to be delivered from original sin, to make them His temple and others (OBC 1994, p. 125).

C. God's goodness is emphasized in the Catechism of the Catholic Church in many places. The first point of the "Introduction" states that "God, infinitely perfect and blessed in himself, in a plan of sheer goodness freely created man to make him share in his own blessed life" (CCC 1992, p. 1).

In the prayer for blessing the water, the liturgy for the baptism for children calls God "the infinitely good Father". Next, God is worshiped for what He has already done for people through baptism, namely: He gave them, and occupies a central place in, their new life as God's children, united them in Christ into one people, and gave them freedom. At the end of this prayer there is a request for the blessing of the water so "that those baptized with it may receive eternal life" (OBC 1994, p. 132).

The goodness of God is shown in the introduction to the Prayer of the Faithful, in the request "for mercy for these children who are to be baptized, for their parents and godparents and all the baptized" (OBC 1994, p. 125). Moreover, the goodness of God is also confirmed by seven different requests in this prayer. In praying the exorcism, the same theme of God's goodness is in the plea to God, in the words that He "set these children free from original sin, making them His temple and house of the Holy Spirit" (OBC 1994, p. 127 A), and that a humble request to God for deliverance from original sin (...), be strengthened by Christ's grace and constantly guarded on their path of life (OBC 1994, p. 127 B). In turn, in the Rite of Anointing with Holy Chrism, the celebrant first recalls God's blessings that the baptized children received. It then lists the benefits that they receive along with the

anointment with the "chrism of salvation", meaning it includes them in the people of God, the fruit of which will be perseverance "in union with Christ the Priest, Prophet and King for eternal life" (OBC 1994, p. 139).

3. The Essence of Baptism and Its Importance for the Parish and the Baptized

The topic of the second point will be presented in three groups on the following themes:

1. The essence of baptism as contained in the terms given in the Rite of Accepting Children;
2. The importance of children's baptism for the community of the parish church and the baptized child;
3. The responsibilities of the baptized, their parents and godparents.

3.1. The Essence of Baptism According to the Definitions Contained in the Rite of Receiving Children

The celebrant welcomes those present, especially the parents and godparents, recalling the joy with which they have welcomed their child, a gift from God, who now wants to give them an even greater gift, which is God's life of grace (cf. OBC 1994, p. 112). Next, the celebrant speaks with the parents and asks them the question: "What are you asking the Church of God for your child?" In addition to the answer "for baptism", the parents can answer: "for faith", or "for the grace of Christ", or "for admission to the Church", or "for eternal life". All answers express the essence of baptism (OBC 1994, p. 113).

(a) By answering that they are asking for baptism (Greek *baptizein*—to immerse in water), the parents of the child claim and emphasize that they are asking for the child to be immersed in the water of baptism, which is a symbol of burying him or her in Christ's death, from which they arise through resurrection with Him as a "new creation" (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15; CCC 1992, p. 1214). A strong foundation for this truth is the teaching of St. Paul:

> Or are you unaware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in the newness of life. (Rom 6: 3–4; cf. Col 2:12)

Throughout the history of salvation, God prepared water to express the grace of baptism: at the beginning of the world, God's Spirit hovered over the waters (Gen 1: 1–2), giving them the power to sanctify. The waters of the flood put an end to vices and gave rise to virtues, becoming a symbol of rebirth. The Israelites were freed from the captivity of the pharaoh after walking on the dry bottom of the Red Sea (Ex 13,17–14,31), which became part of the image of the future baptized community. Jesus Christ was baptized in the waters of the Jordan and thus anointed with the Holy Spirit (Matt 3:13–17; Cf. Mark 1:9f; Luke 3:21f; John 1:31–34). Blood and water flowed from the side of Christ, who died on the cross (John 19:33–35; see OBC 1994, p. 54 A). Christ, by ordering his disciples to baptize, allowed them to bestow people with the great blessing of being born again in water and the Holy Spirit, to be born to a new life as a child of God and entering the kingdom of God.

(b) In another answer of the child's parents to the celebrant's question as to what they are asking for, the word "baptism" can be replaced with the word "faith". This teaches that baptism is a sacrament of faith necessary for salvation. The necessity of faith for baptism was clearly emphasized by Jesus Christ after His resurrection, in His last missionary command to the apostles: "Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved; whoever does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:15–16). After Pentecost, the apostles and their associates, strengthened by his power, baptized everyone who believed in Christ. (Acts 2:41 *First Conversion of the Jews*; 8:12–13 *Philip in Samaria*; 10:48; 16:14–15; Cf. CCC 1992, p. 1226; Acts 16:30–34).

The closeness between baptism and faith is confirmed by the fact that the parents, children and godparents, and all those present confess their faith before the baptism of the child (OBC 1994, pp. 135–36). This declaration of the faith should make everyone realize just how great a treasure is God's gift of faith, which the celebrant will confirm at the end, stating that its confession "is our pride..." (OBC 1994, p. 136). Faith, therefore, is inseparable from baptism, which is "in a special way a sacrament of faith because it is the sacrament of entry into the life of faith" (CCC 1992, p. 1236).

(c) The next possible request from the parents for the baptism of their child calls this sacrament "the grace of Christ". This teaches us that baptism is the greatest grace for human beings due to the death and resurrection of Christ (OBC 1994, p. 47-C: This is a plea for "the children who are to receive the grace of holy baptism . . . to be justified by the grace of Jesus Christ" *Introduction and the fourth point of the Prayer of the Faithful*). The catechism extends this title for baptism to many rites, stressing that "the meaning and grace of the sacrament of baptism are clearly seen in the rites of its celebration..." (CCC 1992, p. 1234). An example of this is the sign of the cross, which "marks with the imprint of Christ . . . and signifies the grace of the redemption Christ won for us by his cross" (CCC 1992, p. 1235).

(d) Another possibility for asking for baptism is given by the request "for acceptance into the Church". This phrase is given in the analyzed Rite of Baptism for Children: "Furthermore, baptism is the sacrament by which human beings are incorporated into the Church and are built up together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit". This is shown in "the very celebration of the sacrament in the Latin liturgy . . . [made] clear when the baptized are anointed with Chrism, in the presence of the people of God" (OBC 1994, General Introduction, no. 4). This theme is also emphasized by the catechism, which states:

> Baptism makes us members of the Body of Christ: "Therefore we are members of one another" (Eph 4:25). Baptism incorporates us *into the Church*. From the baptismal fonts is born the one people of God of the New Covenant, which transcends all the natural or human limits of nations, cultures, races, and sexes: "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body". (1 Cor 12:13; CCC 1992, p. 1267)

Acceptance into the Church as a name for baptism is confirmed by the requests mentioned in the Prayer of the Faithful and the Celebrant's Prayer at the anointment with Holy Chrism (OBC 1994, 47 A-1; B-1; E-2; 62; 139 another name for "acceptance into the Church" is "belonging to the people of God").

(e) Finally, the parents' response to the celebrant's question is also justified by the following: "What are you asking of the Church of God for your child?" They answer that they are asking "for eternal life". The person who is baptized thus receives the right to heaven. This is confirmed by numerous passages included in the Order of Baptism for Children, namely, the General Introduction (OBC 1994, p. 6), biblical texts (OBC 1994, pp.208: Ez 36:28, 223: John 6:47, 221: John 3:1–6, 210: Rom 6:3–5, 211: Rom 8:28–32), requests during the Prayer of the Faithful (OBC 1994, 47 C-4; OBC 47 E-1), the Prayer of Blessing the Water (OBC 1994, 54 C), the Prayer of Anointing with Holy Chrism (OBC 1994, pp. 62, 139) and the Prayer for Blessing (OBC 1994, 70 A). In addition, it is worth noting that writing the child's name in the Book of Baptisms is a sign confirming that it was written in heaven in the "Book of Life". The second important point cautions against committing sins, as they can cause the baptized to be erased from the "Book of Life" and lose their promised place in heaven.

All of the above-discussed answers to the celebrant's question, "What are you asking the Church of God for (name)?"—"for baptism", "for faith", "for the grace of Christ", "for acceptance into the Church", or "for eternal life"—make clear and demonstrate the wealth that this sacrament signifies and brings about.

3.2. The Importance of Children's Baptism for the Community, Parish and Child

(a) The importance of children's baptism for the parish

Baptism, in addition to giving the greatest values to the child, also gives the parish more people, and together with this gift, this community has joy. That the enlarged parish experiences joy through baptism makes it welcome its new member with love. This is confirmed by the song that accompanies the procession to the door of the Church (OBC 1994, p. 111).

The texts of the Old Testament combined singing and joy to highlight important political or religious events. For example, after the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea, "Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the LORD: I will sing to the LORD, for he is gloriously triumphant; horse and chariot he has cast into the sea" (Ex 15:1–21).

On David's return after striking down the Philistine, women came from all the cities of Israel to meet Saul the king, singing and dancing, with tambourines, joyful songs, and stringed instruments. The women played and sang: "Saul has slain his thousands, David his tens of thousands" (1 Sam 18:6–7). Similarly, when the Ark of God was brought from the house of Abinadab to Jerusalem, "David and all the house of Israel danced before the LORD with all their might, with singing, and with lyres, harps, tambourines, sistrums, and cymbals" (2 Sam 6:5). Singing, and especially the singing the psalms, emphasized both the joyful nature of serving God (see 1 Chron 6:16; 25:6–7; 2 Chron 23:13; 23:18; Neh 12:8; 1 Macc 4:54; Ps 2:14, 30:5, 66:4, 81:2–4) and the piety of the people of the Old Testament (see Ps 7:18, 9:3, 12, 13:6, 33:2–3, 42:9, 59:18, 71:23, 92:2, 104:33) and the New Covenant. In his letter, the apostle James, giving various exhortations and warnings, among other things, wrote: "Is anyone in good spirits? He should sing praise" (James 5:13). The content of the "new song"—probably sung in a happy disposition—about which Revelation (5:9) speaks, is the praise of Christ for his redemptive work, which entitles one to open the book of destinies (Jankowski 1959, 171–172; Cf. Rev 14:3; 15:3). In the year 112, Pliny the Younger wrote that "during the liturgy, Christians expressed their faith in joyful hymns ... Christians sing in honor of Christ as if in honor of God (Carmen Christo quasi Deodicere)" (Leon-Dufour 1986, pp. 605–6).

St. Augustine pointed to singing as an expression of joy, unity and love when he said: "he who loves sings". The truth that singing is an expression of the joy with which the Christian community now welcomes newly baptized infants is expressed by the celebrant before marking them with the sign of the cross ("Dear children, the Church of God receives you with great joy . . . ." OBC 1994, p. 117).

Thanks to its pedagogical and religious dimensions, baptism administered during the Holy Mass becomes a very important catechesis for those participating in it. We can speak here of liturgical catechesis, that is, catechesis for liturgy, through liturgy, and from liturgy (Igbekele 2021). It reminds Catholics of many important truths, both in word and action. Among them is the truth that they constitute a "royal priesthood, a holy nation and a people acquired by God for as His own;" that several or several dozen years ago they were also included in the community of the Church; that they should boldly confess Christ, because they became participants through baptism in the death and resurrection of Christ; that they should grow in grace as living members of the Church; that by participating in baptism they should renew the grace of their baptism so that, together with all Christ's disciples, becoming one bread, they may remain in one faith and love; and that they may bring petitions to God "that He may save the world from hunger, fire and war". These truths and obligations arise only from the Prayer of the Faithful during the baptismal rites. Thus, the entire rite of baptism, with its prayers, activities and symbolic signs, is a great call to review one's Christian and Catholic life.

A child is conceived as a gift of God (OBC 1994, p. 112), and after birth and at baptism, God gives it "his life of grace", and she or he becomes a full member of the Church. The truth that a child is a gift of God is proclaimed by the celebrant after greeting its parents and godparents (OBC 1994, p. 112). God, being the source of all life, after creating man blessed his fertility and assigned him the task of populating the earth (Genesis 1:28). However, by giving men and women the gift of sexuality and fertility, He reserved His presence in the use of these gifts to the process of bringing people to life.

This consists in the fact that God gives the right to such cooperation with Him only to those who, before the sexual act, were united with Him through the sacramental marriage union. The life passed on through the marriage act is the fruit of the action of three people: the father, mother and God the Creator. God has committed that whenever parents bring a child to life by giving it a material body, He will simultaneously breathe a rational and immortal soul into that body. In this way, the person brought to life will become, from the very first moment of its existence, a gift of God, an everlasting living being and a gift of God for its parents, community and homeland.

God gives "His life of grace" to this divine gift, a child, in the sacrament of holy baptism (OBC 1994, p. 112). The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that it is "God's life of grace", stating that in baptism, "all sins are forgiven, original sin and all personal sins, as well as all punishment for sin" (CCC 1992, p. 1263), "but also makes the neophyte "a new creature", (2 Cor 5:17) an adopted son of God (cf. Gal 4:5–7), who has become a "partaker of the divine nature", (2 Peter 1: 4) a member of Christ (cf. 1 Cor 6:15, 12:27) and co-heir with him (Rom 8:17), and a temple of the Holy Spirit" (cf. John 13:12–15, CCC 1992, p. 1265).

The fact that the child is given a name (OBC 1994, p. 113) proclaims the truth that the child not only belongs to the Church, but also becomes a full member of the Church after being baptized. A name is not only an accepted way to address a person or thing, but represents something about a person's essence, what they bear or what a thing is. It defines one's destiny, one's tasks and the roles one has to fulfill in life. The angel Gabriel, announcing Mary's selection to be the mother of the Savior, said:

> Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end. . . . Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. (Luke 1:31–33,35)

Thus, giving a name to the Messiah is related to recognizing His origin from the Father and the actions and tasks He was to perform. When God called everything into existence, He gave names even to the heavenly bodies (cf. Isa 40:26; Ps 147:4; Bar 3:33–35). When God changes someone's name, it means that He is giving them a new personality and taking possession of it. This is what God did with Abraham (cf. Gen 17:5), Sarah (cf. Gen 17:15) and Jacob (cf. Gen 32:29). Christ did the same for Peter (cf. Matt 16:18–19).

Naming a child signifies their destiny, their hopes and their social opportunities. The custom of giving a name at baptism goes back to the first centuries. Receiving a name during the sacrament of baptism emphasizes the ability to enter into dialogue with God. From now on, God will call this child by name and wait for her or him to answer, and a person's value depends on the intensity of their dialogue with God (Słotwińska and Głowa 2001). It is also important to maintain a fruitful dialogue with the community of the parish church and with its presider, the parish priest.

A sign confirming that a candidate for baptism belongs to the Church is marking them with the sign of the cross (*signatio*)—"the sign of Jesus Christ, our Savior" (OBC 1994, p. 117). This gesture probably comes from Africa and refers to the practice of sealing or tattooing the forehead of soldiers with the sign of belonging to the ruler. St. Augustine compares the sign of the cross on the catechumen's forehead to circumcision. Just as this sign made an Israelite belong to the chosen people, so the sign of the cross makes the baptized person belong to the Church community ("The sign of the Old Covenant—circumcision on a covered body; the sign of the New Covenant—the cross on the open forehead". St. Augustine (1993), *Sermones* 160,6).

The same Father of the Church also states that this sign of the cross gives him or her the name of a Christian: "You are a Christian, you bear the cross of Christ on your forehead" (St. Augustine 1994, *Sermones* 302,3).

The sign of the cross on a child's forehead is the seal that God marks on her or him as His own. Many times in the Apocalypse, St. John the Evangelist mentions the "seal of the

living God", impressed on the foreheads of the chosen ones, signifying belonging to the eschatological community of the saved. Moreover, the Catechism of the Catholic Church, teaching about the sign of the cross on the forehead of a child, states that it "marks with the imprint of Christ the one who is going to belong to him and signifies the grace of the redemption Christ won for us by his cross" (CCC 1992, p. 1235).

The rite of "clothing with a white garment" (OBC 1994, p. 141) is very eloquent within the rites of baptism. In the Bible, a robe, like bread and wine, is a sign of blessing, and nakedness and hunger are symbols of a curse. A robe is also a symbol of the "world ordered" by God the Creator and also heralds the "regaining of the glory" lost in Paradise (Haulotte 1973). Hence, putting on the garment in the sacrament of baptism means removing nakedness, that is, a cursed state, and entering the world ordered by God and regaining the glory that the first parents lost in Paradise by committing original sin. In the sacrament of baptism, putting on a garment is also a symbol of "putting on Christ" (cf. Gal 3:26–28; cf. CCC 1992, p. 1243).

As the sacrament of enlightenment, baptism makes the child become a child of light who accepts the obligation to be "the light of the world". This truth is spoken in the "handing on of a lighted candle" (OBC 1994, p. 142). By interpreting this sign, the celebrant teaches that it is a call "so that your children, enlightened by Christ, may walk always as children of the light and, persevering in the faith, may run to meet the Lord when he comes with all the Saints in the heavenly court" (OBC 1994, p. 142). The above truths about baptism are also conveyed in the Catechism of the Catholic Church (1243), which states that "the candle, lit from the Easter candle, signifies that Christ has enlightened the neophyte. In Him, the baptized are "the light of the world" (cf. Matt 5:14; Phil 2:15).

4. Duties of the Baptized, Their Parents and Godparents

4.1. Duties of the Baptized

The baptized person entering the Church, apart from receiving numerous rights (to receive the sacraments, to be nourished by the Word of God and to benefit from the spiritual help of the Church), also has obligations towards the People of God. Namely, these dictate that the baptized person belongs no longer to himself (1 Cor 6:19) but to Christ (cf. 2 Cor 5:15); (s)he is called to submit to others (cf. Eph 5:21; 1 Cor 16:15–16), to serve them (cf. John 13:12–15) in the Church community, to "obey your leaders and defer to them" (Heb 13:17), surrounding them with respect and love (cf. 1 Thess 5:12–13; CCC 1992, p. 1269), that (s)he may confess to people their faith, which (s)he has received from God through the Church, and participate in the apostolic and missionary activity of the People of God (AD 1965, p. 7, 23; CCC 1992, p. 1270).

The sign of the cross on the forehead, the most exposed place on a person, obliges catechumens to bear witness that Christ was crucified out of love for people, for their salvation. (In one of the petitions in the prayer of the faithful, there is the following request to God for children: "We ask you that, marked with a holy cross, their lives may boldly confess Christ, the Son of God". OBC 1994, p. 47 B.) It is a duty to follow Christ on the way of the cross, the way of renunciation and mortification, because only this path leads to the glory of the resurrection.

Furthermore, it should also be remembered that the sign of the cross, which is "the sign of Jesus Christ our Savior" (OBC 1994, p. 117) is the seal with which the baptized person is marked as God's property. This property cannot be squandered or be appropriated to anyone else, because God will claim what belongs to Him in due time.

During the rite of Anointing with Holy Chrism the celebrant prays for the baptized to "remain members of Christ, Priest, Prophet and King unto eternal life" (OBC 1994, p. 139). At baptism, God first goes out with His grace to the baptized, delivering them from sin and giving them new birth from the water of the Holy Spirit, thus inviting them to cooperate in the preservation of goodness.

The need to preserve one's "Christian dignity" and "bring it unstained into eternal life", received in baptism, is stated in the special rite of "clothing with a white garment"

(OBC 1994, p. 141). White in the Bible is the color of light and life, a sign of festive joy, innocence and purity; it is the color denoting the beings accompanying God's glory, the heavenly beings, the transformed beings (cf. Ez 9:2; Luke 24:4; Acts 10:30; Rev 4:4); it is also the color of the Son of Man (cf. Rev 1:13f.), Christ: "His clothing was white as snow, the hair on his head like pure wool" (Dn 7:9). Giving the baptized person a white garment emphasizes that, being born again, (s)he already shares in the glory of heaven. It also calls him or her to a life of innocence and chastity.

The rite of Handing on a Lighted Candle consists of a sign (the lighting of candles for individual children from the paschal candle), and the words of the celebrant, who interprets this sign, saying, "Receive the light of Christ". In the next words, we learn that the children were enlightened during baptism by Christ and therefore that they should always act as children of the light. Moreover, the celebrant reminds the children's parents and godparents of their duty to keep this light alive, since their salvation depends on it. The words "Light of Christ" recall the Easter vigil, when the deacon, carrying the paschal candle lit from the fire, sings "the Light of Christ" three times.

Next, the faithful light their candles from the paschal candle to remember their baptism—the sacrament of enlightenment—and in doing so emphasize that the light of the Risen Christ enlightens all believers. God in His mercy "called us from darkness to His wonderful light" (cf. 1 Peter 2:4–5; 9–10; OBC 1994, p. 215). This call takes place at the moment of baptism, when "Christ has shone upon us" (Eph 5:14) and we are truly "enlightened" (Heb 6:4). By receiving this sacrament, Christians should live as "children of light" by drawing others to God. The same truth about baptism is conveyed in the Catechism of the Catholic Church (1243), stating that "the candle, lit from the Easter candle, signifies that Christ has enlightened the neophyte. In him the baptized are 'the light of the world" (cf. Matt 5,14; Phil 2,15).

The many duties that are associated with being baptized require God's help to carry them out—hence the understandable and necessary requests contained in the Prayer of the Faithful to help baptized children be good witnesses of God (OBC 1994, p. 47 A-2; OBC 47 E-3; OBC 47 B-2; OBC 47 D-2; OBC 47 E-3).

4.2. Responsibilities of Parents and Godparents of Baptized Children

Already in the Rite of Receiving the Children, the celebrant makes the parents aware that they accept the obligation to educate their children in the faith. This faith should be manifested in works, especially in keeping God's commandments and loving God and one's neighbor (OBC 1994, p. 115). At the same time, the celebrant accepts the godparents' readiness to help the parents fulfill their educational obligation (OBC 1994, p. 116). However, since living according to God's commandments is difficult, appropriate prayers are made to God in the Prayer of the Faithful (OBC 1994, p. 47 D-4; OBC E-5).

To preserve "God's life from being contaminated by sin and its constant growth", children need their upbringing, apart from the commands and prohibitions, to be supported by the good example of their parents. The celebrant calls the parents to do this before renouncing evil and professing faith (OBC 1994, p. 133). Confirmation of the importance that parents and godparents live according to the faith is found in the Prayer of the Faithful (OBC 1994, pp. 47 A-4, 125).

This prayer, with its intentions, covers not only children receiving the sacrament of baptism, their loved ones and the entire Church, but the whole world. In this way, those gathered at the celebration of baptism fulfill their priestly function, which, moreover, is emphasized by the relevant texts in the above-mentioned prayer (OBC 1994, p. 125). Realizing the truth that baptism involves participating in the common priesthood should lead the participants to be grateful for the sacrament and desire to fulfill this priestly function, first of all, by transforming their lives from ones lived selfishly to lives "for others" (pro-existence) (Słotwińska 2017), and thus by taking greater care to properly participate in the eucharist (DC 2020, pp. 125, 232).

Children enlightened by Christ at baptism are prepared to "always walk as children of the light" until Christ comes again. It is the task of parents and godparents to maintain this light in baptized children because, among other things, their salvation depends on it. Such a task for parents and godparents is symbolized by the rite of Handing on of a Lighted Candle (OBC 1994, p. 142).

The analysis of the rites of baptism of children, in pedagogical and religious dimensions, revealed a wealth of tasks, challenges and activities that baptized children face as well as parents, godparents and the entire community of believers. The lack of knowledge of these basic truths means that the sacrament is often treated instrumentally or serves as an opportunity to meet with family and friends in order to gain material benefits. Many times in conversations with priests there is a problem and deep awkwardness concerning "how to refuse parents the baptism of their child". Priests know perfectly well that the parents live in a non-sacramental relationship or have even received the sacrament of marriage but do not identify with their declared faith in any way and do not take part in religious life, thus giving no hope that they will raise their children as Catholics.

The Code of Canon Law, canon 868, paragraph 1 states: "For the infant to be baptized licitly" requires that "2. there must be a founded hope that the infant will be brought up in the Catholic religion; if such hope is altogether lacking, the baptism is to be delayed according to the prescripts of particular law after the parents have been advised about the reason" (CCL 1983, p. 868).

In addition, the Order of Baptism of Children, adapted to the customs of Polish dioceses in the theological and pastoral introduction, part II, Duties and activities in administering baptism (OBC 1994, pp. 4–7), clearly indicates how to proceed before, during and after administering this sacrament. Thus, pastors have a powerful weapon in the form of the Code of Canon Law and the Order of Baptism for Children, which clearly indicate that this sacrament cannot be administered thoughtlessly, to simply prevent someone from being exposed to bad opinions or comments from pseudo-followers of the Catholic Church. Therefore, it should also be postulated that the highest bodies in the Polish episcopate should issue a document that will regulate the above issues and at the same time contribute to courageous attitudes on the part of the clergy in order to properly and fairly treat this most important sacrament (because it is the first), without which the other six will not be granted.

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Article

"No Fiancé, No Baptism": Historicizing the Education of Girls through a 1953 Episode in the RCM Convent Girls School, Benin City, Nigeria

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Abstract: In 1953, officials of the Roman Catholic Mission (RCM) Church in Benin City, Nigeria, requested schoolgirls of Benin–Edo ethnic origin at the local Convent Primary School preparing for baptism to bring their fiancés to school as a condition for baptism. The demand for the presentation of their fiancé was the first time such a condition for baptism was given to young teenage girls since the establishment of the RCM in Benin City in 1923. The condition and demand affected the girls' relationship with the RCM denomination. In examining and historicizing this episode, this paper asks and answers the following questions: Why did the local RCM officials change their policy to demand fiancés as a condition for the baptism of schoolgirls of Benin–Edo origin? How did the policy affect schoolgirls, particularly their relations with the Catholic faith, and their response? This paper uses archival documents, personal interviews with some former Convent school girls and Catholic church members, and written sources to find answers to these questions and reconstruct the history of women's education under the RCM in Benin City Parish under colonial rule.

Keywords: Benin; fiancé; girls; baptism; convent; Roman Catholic; nuns; interdenominational rivalry

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1. Introduction

In 1953, officials of the Roman Catholic Mission (RCM) Church in Benin City, Nigeria, requested schoolgirls of Benin ethnic origin at the local Convent Primary School preparing for baptism to bring their fiancés to school as a condition for baptism. The demand for the presentation of their fiancés was the first time such a condition for baptism was given to young teenage girls since the establishment of the RCM in Benin City in 1923. From the arrival of the RCM in the late 19th C, they signified their intention of winning and sustaining their female converts and molding them in Catholic doctrines and values. The RCM had arrived at a time when many missions were already establishing themselves and developing their policies toward women and girls. Their arrival soon led to fierce competition between the various denominations for the souls of the women and girls. The denominations employed various strategies, and nearly all prioritized establishing schools and training centers for girls and women. But what was of utmost concern to the various missions was the post-school life of the girls, which was critical to the future of the missions in the community. This concern was at play in the policies and practices of the agents of the various missions in their schools. It influenced the inter-denominational rivalry that characterized the relations among the missions and affected the local people, including the pupils of their schools, particularly the girls.

The Society of African Missions (SMA), the agency of the RCM that brought the Catholic Church, was a latecomer to the missionary field in Benin City, arriving only in 1923, twenty-four years after frittering away the opportunity of being the pioneering mission in Benin city. By 1923, the Church Missionary Society (CMS) and the Baptist Mission were already settled with their churches and schools. Similarly, some other missions entered Benin simultaneously with the RCM and shortly after, such as the Salvation Army, the Apostolic, United Native African Mission, Methodists, and so on.

Though a latecomer, the RCM was viewed as a significant threat in the Benin mission field. The RCM took advantage of the presence of some Catholics in the city to start its work. Yet the RCM had to compete with other missions, particularly the already established ones, to win converts from the majority indigenous population of Benin City and the vast Benin Division (of over 4000sq. miles) that constituted Benin City station. To this end, the RCM, like its rivals, adopted the school as an instrument of conversion strategy and established schools to entice children with girls as unique targets. They were able to attract enough girls to compete in establishing a girls-only school, and many of them were baptized annually, almost without incident. However, in 1953, the policy towards the baptism of Benin girls was changed to include the girls' presentation of their fiancés as a condition for baptism. This paper interrogates and historicizes this change in policy by asking and trying to find answers to the following questions: Why did the local RCM officials change their policy to demand fiancés as a condition for the baptism of schoolgirls of Benin-Edo origin? How did the policy affect schoolgirls, particularly their relations with the Catholic faith, and their response?

To answer these questions, this paper uses the oral testimonies of a few Benin women who recounted the incident and their experiences to the author during another study.[1] In addition, archival and other written sources were also employed to interrogate and historicize the development of girls' education, particularly by the RCM in Benin and other missions.

The paper is divided into four sections, with the first section discussing the second coming of the Roman Catholic Mission and its implications for Benin women and girls, while the second section examines how inter-denominational rivalry influenced the RCM activities toward the education and training of girls in Benin Division. The third section looks at how the church's view of girls as the future of the church influenced their policies towards girls and is demonstrated in the fourth section, which discusses the no fiancé no baptism episode of 1953 and its effects on some of the girls.

2. The Second Coming of the Roman Catholic Mission and Implications for the Benin Woman

The Benin Kingdom in present-day Nigeria was one of the earliest places in Africa to receive Catholic missionaries. The Portuguese, Spanish, and Italians tried to spread Roman Catholic Christianity in the 16th and 17th Centuries, but it failed to take root (Ryder 1969, Chapter 4). It was only after the conquest and colonization of the Benin Kingdom by the British in 1897 that Christian missionaries entered the territory for evangelization work. The Church Missionary Society (CMS) was the first mission that entered Benin in 1901 and remained the only mission for the next two decades. A dispute in the Benin CMS in 1921 with the European Priest Rev. Ralph Kidd forced many in the congregation to leave, after which these separatists invited the Southern Baptist Mission to take over their affairs (Uwagboe 2004, pp. 152–62). The CMS did not view the Southern Baptist mission as a significant threat and only complained about the Baptists accepting "the congregation which they know has broken away from us" and polygamists into their fold (NAI CMS Y2/2 15 Payne Report 1922). The Southern American Baptist Mission lacked the financial muscle to compete effectively with the CMS. Between 1922 and 1930, there was an influx of Missions, including The Apostolic, the RCM (1923), the Salvation Army (1926), United Native African Church (1930), and so on.

The Missions' agenda was the establishment of their roots in the community and women were primarily viewed as the means to pursue and achieve this agenda. This required conversion of women to the faith and doctrine of the denomination and turning them into makers of exemplary Christian families that would guarantee a future for the denomination. Though the denominations saw the Christian family as the foundation of the Christian community and church and essential for their future, their attitude to women and girls' education varied.

From the beginning, the SMA Fathers in the Prefecture Apostolic of Western Nigeria (to which Benin belonged) were interested in women's conversion. Father Carlo Zappa, the Prefect (1896–1917), stressed the importance of women and girls in evangelization work and stated that "only they (sisters) have the vocation and the special capacities to work successfully on the rehabilitation of the woman and the Christian education of the young girls. As long as this gap is not filled, our task will not be complete" (Les Missions Catholiques 1912, p. 508). Father Zappa and, to some extent, his successor Bishop Thomas Broderick (1918–1933), were said not to be great fans of schools as instruments of conversion because of their fear of the "young people whose family loyalty and traditions would be disrupted thereby." (African Missionary 1965, November–December page 5). The insistence on maintaining "family loyalty and traditions" was likely to influence the church's attitude towards the marriage, education, and training of women. To this end, the Nuns of Our Lady of Apostles from France were brought to start evangelization work amongst women and girls (Ibewuike 2006, pp. 148–49). However, these nuns who were to assist in implementing the RCM's policy towards women were to arrive in Benin much later, after the CMS had started winning girls and women into their fold.

The CMS under Bishop James Johnson, who introduced the CMS to Benin in 1901, had depended on the influence of royal women for land acquisition (Aisein 2002, pp. 204–5) but was constrained by funds to address the issues of women and girls. His African Catechists successors, who managed the station before 1918, and Rev. Kidd, who ran the Mission until 1922, continued to depend on the membership of the few women who had joined the church and wives of their members in the possible hope that their male members would eventually adopt a monogamous Christian family.

The issue concerning women that the Missions had to contend with was mostly about marriage. Firstly, the Benin culture endorsed polygyny, practiced infant betrothal marriage,[2] and eschewed divorce. These issues, particularly polygyny, conflicted with the belief of all the missions, while the RCM converged with the Benin people on divorce. In addressing these issues, the CMS encouraged young women to break infant betrothal marriage contracts, refuse forced marriages to "heathens," and seek divorce from non-Christian husbands. These Benin customary practices, namely infant betrothal and arranged marriages, were contested by the CMS with the colonial administration (NAI CMS Y2/2 15, Motions 29 and 30 October 1925). The colonial administration and the Native Administration were consequently pressed to reform the indigenous marriage and divorce practices through some rules (NAI BP 199/22 Oba and Council 28 October 1924). The RCM did not seem in any position yet to engage the colonial administration on the issues of marriage and the right of divorce by women on the refund of dowry because of late arrival. Nevertheless, the RCM registered its opposition at a meeting of Catholic missions in Southern Nigeria (with representation from the Prefecture Apostolic of Western Nigeria, which administered Benin) held at Akure in 1927, where it resolved and appealed to the Governor

> that Native Courts be not allowed to grant a divorce to Christians who, before conversion, were married according to native law. The granting of divorce by Native Courts is a source of disturbance to the stability of marriage, and this could at least be restricted by removing those who have accepted Christian principles from their jurisdiction in this matter" (NAI RCM BD 5/1, Catholic Mission Akure 27 April 1927).

It remained just their viewpoint without changing the policy line that the government had enunciated. The RCM had views of the Benins as a people who were stuck in their customary traditions, including infant betrothal marriage, and therefore threw its resources into winning the hearts and minds through girls' education. Education of girls seems to be the key to the future of the missions, particularly the RCM in the territory.

3. Inter-Denominational Rivalry and Girls' Education and Training

The issue of girls' education and training as instruments of conversion by the missions did not seem of major concern before 1922/1923. This was probably because the CMS

virtually monopolized the field and their African agents lacked the funds to address it. The coming of Rev. W.J. Payne and his wife in 1922 and the entry of the RCM in 1923 changed the attitude and approach towards girls' education and training. The SMA arrived when the CMS was changing its operations in Benin under the newly appointed Rev. William Payne, ably assisted by his wife. Rev. Payne's wife was very concerned with women's issues. Mrs. Payne initiated various strategies to attract women and girls to the church and schools. Immediately after she arrived in Benin in 1922, Mrs. Payne started to organize classes for the women on Sundays and teach sewing to the girls twice a week. The RCM's establishment of a Church and a school in 1924 and 1925 galvanized the CMS into becoming more upbeat about women and girls with resultant inter-denominational rivalry. This inter-denominational rivalry was exacerbated by the influx of many other Protestant missions immediately after the arrival of the RCM (Usuanlele 2002, p. 52).

The CMS quickly went into a frenzy, as the resource potential of the RCM, doctrinal differences, and the CMS's experiences of rivalry with RCM elsewhere made the arrival of the RCM in Benin in 1923 a significant challenge to the CMS. The CMS had to brace for intense rivalry. Rev W. J. Payne of the CMS was greatly alarmed by the arrival of the Southern Baptists and RCM and quickly reported in 1923 that "there are many opportunities of advance [of the CMS], but the polygamous churches [Baptist Mission][3] and the Romanists [RCM] will take our people unless we provide them with proper teaching and supervision." (NAI CMS Y2/2 15, Payne Report, 1923). Rev. Payne was advised by the CMS headquarters to "go full steam ahead" (NAI CMS Y2/2 15, Payne Report January 1924) in the provision of education and training to neutralize the activities of the RCM. Rev. Payne monitored every move of the RCM and reported on them, including the acquisition of land by the RCM in Benin City in 1924, which he interpreted to mean that "they [RCM] are evidently intending to begin aggressive work" and he, therefore, reminded the CMS headquarters again that "it is all the more important that we should adequately occupy the opening before us." (NAI CMS Y2/2 15, Payne Report May 1924) Although this began the battle for the soul and body of the people of Benin, the CMS headquarters did not seem to act fast enough to neutralize the RCM.

Rev. Payne had complained that "We are both [Payne and wife] very much concerned about the fewness of girls attending school." (NAI CMS Y2/2 15, Payne Report January 1925) As a result of this problem, the CMS intensified its activities amongst women and girls, particularly among the wives of CMS school teachers and clergy. The CMS employed an African seamstress who joined with Mrs. Payne and another European woman, Mrs. Melville Jones, in teaching sewing to the women twice weekly. (NAI CMS Y2/2 15, Payne Report May 1927). The emphasis on sewing was part of the domestic education policy of the CMS aimed at creating wives for educated Christian men. As Laray Denzer argued, needlework and sewing fit into the traditional Yoruba women's weaving and dyeing artisanship and were welcomed as an additional skill (Denzer 1992, p. 118). The same craft skills were also obtained by Benin women who embraced the opportunities of these new forms, which created self-employment for women as seamstresses.

Although a Diocesan Women's Guild was also organized for Benin women, CMS work among women gave less emphasis to elderly women because they were feared to "have a bad moral influence over the young women and girls" (NAI CMS Y2/2 15, Payne Report January 1929). More attention was given to issues affecting young women and girls. For example, they developed welfare schemes to attract young mothers and their infants. By 1928, the CMS reported that the number of girls attending its two schools had increased from six to thirty-two within the year because of the teaching of sewing by Mrs. Payne and her African seamstress, while another thirty children and above school-age girls were in a Kindergarten school (NAI CMS Y2/2 15, Payne Report January 1929).

In addition to sewing lessons to attract girls, the CMS sent a girl to the CMS Girls Training Centre, Akure, for Domestic Science training in 1928 and another for midwifery training at CMS Hospital, Iyi-Enu, in 1933. To attract more girls to schools in rural areas, the CMS abolished the fee payment by girls in rural schools in 1931 (NAI CMS Y2/2 15,

Payne Report January 1933). By 1933, the CMS strategies had yielded high dividends. The CMS boasted of sixty-seven girls in their infant and primary schools and a female pupil teacher for Domestic Science, while Mrs. Payne's Kindergarten classes had over one hundred children and above school-age girls.

The RCM could not join the rivalry over girls' education on arrival because of its different working strategies and inadequate personnel. The RCM immediately built the Holy Cross Church (now a Cathedral) in 1924. The following year, they built the Holy Cross RCM Primary School and started aggressive evangelism to win converts for the church and children for the school. The RCM could not immediately tackle the problem of educating women and girls as they did it through their nuns. However, they did not have enough nuns to go around their stations at the time. Even some of the nuns in the vicariate lacked the requisite educational qualifications to engage in such work for it to be recognized by the government and qualify their institution for a much-needed government grant in aid. In 1938, Bishop Leo Taylor had cause to inform the Mother Superior that "the days of unqualified sisters teaching in our schools are passed; there is more useful almost necessary work of other kinds." (OLAAC IEOLA/4/3/2/1-14 Taylor 6 July 1938) Despite this lack of education qualification problem, a sister arrived from Ireland in 1932 without a certificate and was sent to the classroom without prior training. However, she later enrolled for a City and Guild Certificate in Domestic Science, which she did not complete, and was sent to work in Benin in the 1940s (OLAAC IEOLA 2/4/3/2/1 Geary 27 April 2001). The problem of getting nuns was further compounded by the departure of members of the OLA France Province and their replacement with the Irish Province (created only in 1932). It was against this background that the RCM went into rivalry with the CMS in trying to use education and training to win the girls and women into their fold. See the Table 1 for details.

Table 1. No of registered pupils in christian mission schools showing low enrolment of girls.

Mission (Enrolment)	1928		1932		1934	
	Boys	**Girls**	**Boys**	**Girls**	**Boys**	**Girls**
Baptist	120	4	354	30	145	26
CMS	431	40	926	15	748	211
Evangelical Band	16	4	-	-	-	-
RCM	403	7	514	18	-	-
UNA	20	4	248	13	-	-

Source: National Archives, Ibadan File BP6/27 Education Returns, and BD27 Vol. II Education: Reports and Returns 1931-5.

As shown in the above table, the population of girls in schools owned by the various denominations was small compared with boys. It was not different in the government-owned schools, whose officials also complained, "Everywhere there are long waiting lists for admission to government schools, but girls make few applications." (NAI BP 6/1927 Superintendent of Education 4 February 1927) Out of 2099 pupils in the mission schools in the Benin Division, only 66 were girls in 1932 (NAI BP 27/Vol II Education Reports and Returns 1931–1935). This problem was caused by many factors, amongst which was the lack of employment opportunities for female school leavers,[4] which made such investment materially unrewarding. There were also sexual violations of female pupils by missionary agents,[5] resented by parents, ignorance of the value of female education, and distant locations of some of the all-girls mission schools from the many rural communities.[6] In addition was the cost, especially of sending female children to schools in distant places such as Akure, Abeokuta, and Iyi Enu, where the Mission institutions for secondary and training schools were located. To further worsen the situation, the Girls Training Centre at Akure and Iyi-Enu in Onitsha were far and over a hundred miles from Benin City.

In trying to address some of the problems that kept the population of girls low in the 1920s, some missions, particularly the CMS and RCM, resorted to the establishment of single-sex girls-only schools in Benin City. In 1933, the CMS decided to build a girls-only school. They claimed to have received a promise of contribution from the Benin Oba (monarch), and a committee of men (which included non-CMS) was formed to plan for the building of the school (NAI CMS 2/2 Y15 Payne Report January 1933). The CMS girls' school was opened in 1934. The opening of the CMS girls' school seemed to have prompted the RCM to work hurriedly toward the same end. The RCM quickly brought two nuns, Sisters Demetrius and Lella, to Benin without proper accommodation arrangements in early 1935 (NAI RCM BD 3/5/5 Bartley, 4 March 1935). By August, they demarcated a section of the city's mixed Holy Cross Catholic school to start Our Lady of Apostle Convent Girls' School with fifty girls (OLAACI IEOLA/3/2/10 OLA Convent Notes).

With the establishment of these girls' schools, which also provided training opportunities and were particularly staffed with only female teachers, the attitude towards girls' education started to change. This development seems to have contributed to increasing awareness of the value of girls' education, especially among the local women. According to a report from the OLA/RCM

> "The women seem easy-going and indifferent but not where their children are concerned. Every mother wanted life to be brighter for her daughter than it had been for her, so they brought their girls to the sisters for education . . . The school had to charge fees, but these were very low . . . the value of education was becoming recognized" (OLAACI IEOLA/3/2/10 OLA Convent-Notes).

The opening of the girls' schools had the immediate effect of boosting female school enrolment. See the Table 2 for details.

Table 2. Increase in the number of Girls registered in Christian Mission-owned Girl's Only Schools.

Mission (Enrolment)	1935	1938
	Girls Sch.	Girls Sch.
CMS	211	98 (Excluding the infant school and Rural schools)
RCM	100	212 (Excluding the Rural schools)

Source: National Archives, Ibadan File BD 27 Vol. II Education: Reports and Returns 1931-5 and File BD 27 Vol. VI, Annual Report of Benin Division, 1938, 17.

The increase in girls' enrolment was, in addition, influenced by a combination of factors: the removal of fear of sexual violations in mixed schools staffed by male teachers, reduced cost by having their education in their hometown, and increasing awareness of the value of education of girls, particularly with their employment as teachers, midwives, and seamstresses.

With the arrival of the OLA nuns, the rivalry took on a new dimension as the RCM added domestic science training (which the CMS had been doing since 1922) to its work among women and girls. To this end, land was secured from the Oba on which the OLA nuns built their Convent on Dawson Road in Benin City. It is recorded that the funding for the building of the convent in 1944 was mainly from the savings and earnings from the work of the nuns. The OLA Convent served the dual purpose of training above school-age girls for Catholic marital lives and providing boarding facilities and schools for school-aged girls. The Convent's boarding section also catered to girls from the mixed Government School. According to Sister Arcade Harding in her memoirs, they trained the boarders "to be good housewives and gave them the means of home industries by dressmaking, embroidery, and cookery. . . . Our aim was to form real Catholic homes from where we could expect religious vocations. The school children got a thorough training in our faith." (OLAACI IEOLA/3/2/10 Arcade Harding memoirs). To this end, the nuns concentrated their efforts more on unmarried girls.

The all-girls schools had been established to provide education and training for girls, but they were also used to establish control over the lives and bodies of the girls. The Convent school completely shielded the girls from males, including fellow Catholic pupils. According to a former pupil who had attended both the mixed school and all-girls Convent school, Princess Mrs. Aiyevbekpen Katherine Oronsaye:

> The boys in the Holy Cross RCM School and the girls in the OLA Convent school were separated in 1935. If you were seen talking to a boy or a boy was speaking to you, and the story got to the Convent, you will be driven from the Convent. The boys and we were as far from each other as the earth and the sky (Interview with Princess Oronsaye, 2005).

The goal of the OLA Sisters was the "rehabilitation of the woman," a euphemism for complete immersion in Catholic doctrinal values as the only guide and way to living their lives. This goal of complete immersion in Catholic doctrinal values was what the Convent was supposed to achieve through the nuns.

Once in the convent school, all the girls came under the guiding influence of the OLA nuns. Some of the girls were already teenagers and their moral and religious lives were put under close and constant scrutiny. The girls in the Convent's hostels were under the total control of the nuns. Girls who could not afford the hostels were under the watch of the local catechists who reported on them. These catechists visited converts and schoolgirls at home to observe their home lives. To drive home the point that the new religion wanted to uphold sexual purity or reform sexual activity, unmarried girls who were not virgins were forbidden entry into the convent's Chapel and church's sacristy (Interview with Mrs. Usuanlele, 2005). They were made to believe that violating this rule by sexually active unmarried girls would earn them eternal damnation. The Convent and its school kept growing. In 1948, it boasted three sisters, eight African teachers, and 700 pupils, and the school offered classes up to Standard Seven (OLAACI IEOLA/3/2/10 OLA Convent notes). In addition to the regular school, the Convent offered vocational education for illiterate girls to learn domestic science for two years, after which they were awarded a government certificate.

Another dimension of the training and social services introduced by the missions in their unending struggle over women and girls was maternity services and midwifery training. The CMS established a maternity home in a rented house in Benin city in 1935, and this got Bishop Taylor so furious that he wrote to Cork,

> "The CMS has just opened maternity in Warri; three years ago, they opened one in Benin City . . . we must get Asaba going. I hear the CMS wants to start one at Ogwashi Uku . . . now see how our absence is taken advantage of. If I could have a few sisters (nursing) and a maternity house in Osoro, I could have plenty of conversions (OLAACI IEOLA2/4/3/2/1-14 Taylor 17 June 1938).

The RCM could not respond immediately as it lacked trained nurses and midwives and wanted to build permanent structures. The situation was not helped by the fact that the OLA congregation in the Vicariate was going through a transition in which the OLA French Province was being replaced by the newly formed OLA Irish Province (OLAACI IEOLA2/4/3/2/1-14 Taylor 6 July 1938). Bishop Taylor soon got desperate and again wrote to Cork that "there is great work to be done in dispensary (sic.) and infant welfare . . . a work in which we are behind other missions" (OLAACI IEOLA2/4/3/2/1-14 Taylor 6 August 1938). As OLA Cork could not immediately deploy trained sisters, a nun at Asaba, Sister Laserian, was sent to Benin work on dispensary and midwifery work. Sister Laserian commenced training of the girls in hygiene and first aid. In 1939, one of the girls, Princess Aiyevbekpen Katharine Eweka (sister to the Oba -King), was recommended for midwifery training in the Catholic hospital at Abeokuta.

By 1941, when the St Philomena RCM Maternity Home was opened in Benin City, the first of the locally sponsored midwives, Princess Eweka, who had graduated from Abeokuta, became a pioneer staff member. The Maternity Home also doubled as a midwifery training

school. It became the practice for some of the graduates of the convent school to proceed to the Maternity Home for midwifery training. In 1945, it was reported to be turning out three to four pupils per year for the Grade Two Midwifery Certificate (NAI BP 934 Hoskyn-Abrahall 15 August 1945). The Maternity was patronized by the Benin Native Administration, which supported it with £100 per annum and sent girls for midwifery training for its local dispensaries and maternities, which were being established in the Benin division (NAI BP 934 Assistant District Officer 30 August 1948).

Since not all the girls could become midwives or nuns and there was a great need for teachers, the RCM also ventured into teacher training for girls. Although teacher training (St. Thomas Ibusa, Asaba Division) for men had been established in 1928, and another, St John Bosco at Ubiaja Ishan Division, in 1942, there were none for girls, and the girls' school depended on its graduates and female teachers from elsewhere. In 1944, the Sacred Heart Teachers College was opened in Ubiaja (Ishan Division) under the OLA to produce female teachers for the growing number of Catholic schools. The Sacred Heart Teachers College became another recipient of the products of the convent school in Benin City and female pupils of the rural Catholic schools. It was in 1959 that a secondary school, St Maria Goretti College, was established for girls in Benin City. Before then, the girls who opted for secondary education could only attend Mary Mount College, Agbor (Asaba division), which was opened in 1953.

The slow pace of establishing post-primary schools for girls was not unconnected with the unavailability of trained teachers and funds. Things started to change in the late 1940s and 1950s, mainly because of the changing policy of the colonial government towards African welfare. This change in the policy of the colonial government manifested in the Colonial Development and Welfare Act of 1940, which voted for more money for social infrastructure and amenities, resulting in grants to Missions. For instance, in the 1940s, the government gave a grant of £26,000 to the mission towards establishing colleges and another £2000 for building St Maria Goretti College in 1959 (O'Shea 2006, p. 187). In addition, the RCM started to request lay-trained personnel for its educational and medical work, where religious personnel were unavailable from Nigeria and Europe. By augmenting with lay personnel, it became easy to expand and advance the educational work of RCM among women. These developments provided training and employment opportunities for Catholic girls and increased control over women. The provision of post-primary educational institutions and welfare amenities further consolidated the RCM influence among the female population.

Despite the expansion and advancement, a snag remained in the production of local nuns. The major snag was that *Propaganda Fide* disapproved of African girls joining European congregations and required Africans to form their own congregations (OLAACI IEOLA2/4/3/2/1-14 Taylor 26 June 1939). In the 1930s, Bishop Taylor was enthusiastic about starting an African congregation of nuns and kept requesting nuns from Ireland to assist him in this endeavor. Apart from the fact that he did not want "Rights claimers, clock watchers, and dyspeptics" that "are more likely to do more harm than good" (OLAACI IEOLA2/4/3/2/1-14 Taylor 6 September 1938), qualified nuns were not readily available in the Irish Province to send to the Vicariate. This non-formation of a local African congregation in the Vicariate lingered into the 1950s, even though some African nuns had been trained elsewhere. Apart from the District being unable to meet all the conditions, it was not clear if the local Benin girls were ready for the celibate life of nuns. This was because celibacy was unknown to Benin culture. Even if the girls volunteered to become nuns, their parents might object. Bishop Kelly, in the late 1950s, was still pursuing the issue, as he was hoping that the presence of African nuns from other districts such as Lagos "would be an encouragement for other girls to join." (OLAACI IEOLA2/4/3/2/1-14 Kelly 27 November 1956) Apart from trying to win African girls into religious vocations, the RCM had other pressing concerns.

4. School Girls and the Consolidation of RCM in Benin City

The concern of the RCM Missionaries after winning female converts through schools was how to keep these girls and their future families in the Catholic Church and use them to entrench the church in the community in perpetuity. These girls held the key to the future of the Catholic faith in Benin as future mothers. Still, the major problem was that the girls' parents and/or guardians were often not Christians and could not reinforce, at home, the doctrines in which their daughters had been immersed in the school and church. This problem of lack of reinforcement of the doctrinal values of the church at home was exacerbated because most pupils were not boarders and the Nuns could not effectively monitor their lives outside the school and church. Many girls' families were believed to be practitioners of indigenous religions and associated customs, including infant betrothal and arranged marriages (NAI CMS Y2/2, 15 Payne Report January 1925 and NAI RCM BD 5/1 Catholic Mission, Akure to The Officer Administering the Government of Nigeria, 27 April 1927).[7]

The missions tended to lose control over the girls after they completed school. Some of the girls either stuck with the faith or fell under the supervision of their parents/guardians in matters of faith. In contrast, others drifted to other denominations or faiths depending on their circumstances. The RCM had to contend with the problem of sustaining the girls' faith after their education and/or training and ensuring the passing of the Catholic doctrine to their offspring. For this reason, the RCM Missionaries worked assiduously to discourage any influences that could threaten their doctrinal values among the girls and invariably threaten the church's future.

The fear of losing their girls to other denominations and religions by the RCM was most serious in Benin City. This was because most of the Benins continued to practice their indigenous faith. In 1945, Oba Akenzua II further reinforced the indigenous belief by building a Cathedral-like structure called *Aruosa N'Ohuaren* in Benin, writing books of worship and hymns for the indigenous religion, appointing priests robed in cassock-like dresses, and building schools to support and promote the indigenous faith. These were all modeled along the lines of the Catholic Church (Welton 1969; and Akemien 1979). The establishment of Aruosa made the indigenous religion attractive again, and competitive, and a sizeable population of Benin people sent their children to the schools and worshipped at Aruosa on Sundays (which was also their day of worship). Similarly, the Ahmadiyya Muslims established formal schools for similar reasons, attracting many pupils.

A sizeable population of the Benins who embraced Christianity was divided among the various Protestant Christian missions that predated the RCM. The RCM, because of its later arrival, had fewer Benins than the Protestant missions. Most RCM laity comprised immigrants, particularly Igbo and other ethnicities (NAI RCM 3/5 Kelly undated 1952). Thus, the challenge for the RCM was securing the few indigenous Benins adherents of the Catholic faith, winning more converts and institutionalizing the Church among the indigenous population. The reason for wanting to secure the indigenous Benin population was primarily because the migrant population was usually a floating one without much stake in the society under the indirect rule system of an administration which prohibited migrants from the administration and their ownership of landed properties.

The Benins' incessant challenges to the established authority of the colonial administration and the European Christian missionary hierarchy further heightened the fears of the RCM. The Benins had challenged the autocratic tendencies of the church authorities in the CMS in the early 1920s, the colonial administration since 1930, and the Southern Baptists in the 1940s (Uwagboe 2004).[8] This political activism made the missionaries dislike the Benins for not being docile and servile followers. Consequently, it was believed in some missionary circles that the Benins would not make sound and steady Christians (Interview with Pa Augustine Emumwen 2005). The reputation of the Benins was further tarnished in the eyes of the Irish RCM Clergy when, in 1951/2, the congregation of Benin City Parish led by the Benin indigenes demanded the removal of the local parish priest Rev. Fr. Thomas Bartley. The refusal of Bishop Patrick Kelly to accede to their demands led to their petitions

to Rome, bad publicity in the nationalist newspapers, a boycott of some aspects of mass, interdiction of some of the petitioners, and eventual physical confrontation and police intervention (Usuanlele 2019). Although the crisis was resolved in 1952, it brought ridicule and embarrassment to the missionaries. Against this background of distrust of Benin people by the missions, the RCM denied some Benin girls the sacrament of baptism in 1953.

5. The 'No Fiancé, No Baptism' Episode of 1953

The 'No fiancé, no baptism' episode of 1953 was not the first time the RCM in Benin denied individual Benin girls the sacrament of baptism. Princess Oronsaye claimed that she was denied baptism four times in the 1930s. She further averred that some elderly ladies interceded on her behalf and she had to promise to marry in the church before she was finally baptized (Usuanlele 2005). The case of Oronsaye was explained by her royal status, which customarily entitled princesses to divorce. However, the 1953 mass denial of baptism to Benin girls stemmed from the interdenominational rivalry, the struggle to sustain the loyalty of its former pupils (and their future offspring), and the future of the RCM in Benin.

The genesis of the 1953 episode has been attributed to the action of one Miss Alice Obazuaye, a graduate of the Convent school who was employed as a teacher in the school. As a Benin, her position at the Convent school placed great responsibility on her as a role model and example of a good Catholic to the pupils, particularly the Benin girls. However, in 1953, Miss Bazuaye married a member of the rival Anglican church in the public registry, to the consternation of the RCM clergy. This development might have been seen as a further affront to the already bruised ego of the local clergy, who were still recovering from the immediate past crisis of 1951/2. The marriage of Miss Bazuaye outside the church further added to the sins of the Benins. It also confirmed the unreliability of the Benins as Catholics, especially in the face of rivalry with protestant missions.

With Miss Bazuaye's act, the local clergy led by Rev Fr. Thomas Bartley, who had been described as a very rigid person (Higgins 2003, p. 27), decided to find ways of securing the girls who had been converted through the schools. As a result, in 1953, a new rule mandated that girls being prepared for baptism that year present their fiancés for interview and confirmation of their Catholic faith before they could be baptized. This demand of the clergy to present their fiancés for an interview before the baptism of their fiancés was similar to what the Holy Ghosts Fathers practiced among the Igbo of the Eastern Provinces before the 1930s (Ejikeme 2003, p. 135). It was only in this way that girls with Catholic fiancés would be known and baptized as Catholics. This seemed to be the only way to guarantee that the baptized girls would remain Catholics, marry in the Catholic Church, and impart their faith to their offspring.

In addition to the mature and above school-age girls who were being prepared for Catholic family life and vocational training, a few girls in the convent school were known to be already engaged (Ekeh 2008, p. 90). Although the child betrothal marriage tradition existed among the Benins, it was already waning in the city by the 1950s. Most of the girls in the convent school were teenagers, not yet engaged, and opposed to the customary practice of infant betrothal. Many of these girls were looking forward to continuing their education after graduation. There was the case of a girl who wrote a petition to the Provincial Resident to convince her parents to stop pestering her with marriage proposals because she wanted to continue her education (NAI BP 545/XII Asemwota 2 December 1953). No schoolgirl would want to miss the educational advancement opportunities provided during this period. The Colonial Development and Welfare Act Of 1940 and 1945 largely used Nigerian funds to establish teachers' training colleges and other institutions and programs to provide secretarial, nursing, and midwifery training for girls, and the gradual opening of employment opportunities for women in the colonial service (NAUK CO 583/272/4 and NAUK CO 583/272/2). The parents also increasingly realized the value of female education and investing in it. Some girls whose parents could not support their school fees

engaged in trading after school to finance their education (Interviews with Mrs. Usuanlele and Mrs. Edomioya 2005).

These changes in the attitude of parents and girls towards customary practices and education, on the one hand, and the colonial administration's new policies towards African welfare, on the other, were taking place against the background of a worldwide phenomenon that has been described as the modern girl. The modern girl phenomenon was characterized by declining domesticity and marriage, increasing professionalism, work outside the home, and consumerism of beauty products (Weinbaum et al. 2008, p. 96). Many schoolgirls of this period were not insulated from these ideas and were exposed to modern Western ideas about life, marriage, and womanhood. They acquired these in school and from books and popular women's magazines, and local newspapers with special pages for women's issues. There has also been a cinema house in the city since the 1930s. Some of the girls, such as Princess Oronsaye, went to the movies and watched western movies, which had some influence on them. According to Princess Oronsaye, (Interview with Princess Oronsaye, 2005), their aspirations as schoolgirls were to have a Western-style marriage, particularly in the Church, and have a monogamous marriage and nuclear family life. However, a condition for church marriage, which the girls aspired to, was baptism, and this made baptism dear to them.

Another attraction the Churches held for the girls apart from elementary education was their professional training opportunities in teaching and midwifery/nursing. These professions held promises of a better life and career for these girls. They were aware of the salaries members of these professions earned and their employment prospects. These young women did not want to live in drudgery as petty traders and farmers like their mothers. The preconditions for sponsorship for training in any of these new professions were baptism and the recommendation of the missionaries. Consequently, baptism and confirmation were life-changing milestones for many girls, and they prepared hard and looked forward to it.

The request to produce a Catholic fiancé was impossible for many of the girls. This was because Catholicism came late after the Benin elite had embraced other denominations. The crème of Benin society in this period was either Anglican (CMS) or Baptist[9] because of the longer establishment of the CMS and the mass exodus from CMS to Baptist in the 1920s. The adherents of the indigenous faith were also sizeable among the elite, as they constituted the bulk of title holders or chiefs who monopolized political power under indirect rule of the administrative system. Another difficulty was that the demands and doctrines of Catholicism—prohibition of divorce and polygyny—made adherence and willingness to marry in the Catholic Church unattractive to some young males. As a result, Catholic male suitors were few. Even the young men were not sticking to the infant betrothal marriage arrangements that formerly made teenage girls have fiancés.

The catechumens (having prepared for three years), many of whom had no fiancés, were shocked by this new rule requiring them to produce fiancés on baptism eve. Parents, particularly in the urban areas, had increasingly, over the years, abandoned infant betrothal practices. Given the danger that involvement in relationships posed to the educational and career aspirations of the girls,[10] many avoided involvement in relationships. As a result of these developments in the lives of girls and their education, the demand of the local clergy for the girls to produce fiancé, preferably Catholic, before baptism was viewed by the young girls as an obstacle to their progress and, therefore, retrogressive.

The new condition challenged the girls' agency, as some of them had chosen the Convent school and Church of their own volition. As a result, some of the girls ably supported by their parents were reported to have bribed Catholic friends and relations to pose as their fiancés. The clergy had no means of detecting the trick, especially as some parents came with the girls to affirm the betrothals to their impostor fiancés. Not all the girls resorted to such tricks. Others either did not have the courage or chose not to engage in such antics. Mrs. Edomioya, for instance, claimed to have waited until the day of baptism, hoping that the clergy would change their mind and allow the girls to be baptized.

However, the clergy remained resolute; as a result, the girls who could not produce their fiancés were denied baptism. Mrs. Edomioya claimed to have fallen ill because of the denial. She consequently withdrew from the Catholic Church and became a protestant.

The policy was discontinued in subsequent years. The discontinuation of the 'no fiancé, no baptism policy' would not have been unconnected with the apparent bad press it was giving the church in the community. The local laity also was not happy with the development, especially as they were only just being won back after the crisis of 1951-2. More so, the policy seemed to have backfired as some girls left the Church because of this episode.

Such withdrawal from the schools and church was made possible by the increased opportunities and alternatives available to women during this period. The churches no longer held the key to training opportunities for girls. The Provincial colonial authorities opened a teachers' college. The Native Administration also opened many schools and maternities and sought educationally qualified girls for training in government-owned institutions. Mrs. Edomioya, a victim of the RCM policy, was sponsored by the Benin Divisional Council for training as a Midwife. Many others went to the Benin Provincial Teacher's Training College, which opened in 1952. Three years later, the Western Regional government introduced free universal primary education and started awarding overseas educational and professional scholarships to people in the region. The development of alternative opportunities in the secular Native Authority and government institutions gradually neutralized the missions' influence. It made their methods unworkable and less attractive to the local people. Given the limited impact of the missions on the emergent African nationalist politicians who took over the administration in 1956, the missions had to find other ways of winning and sustaining the membership of female members.

6. Conclusions

The paper examined the development of girls' education in Benin with particular emphasis on RCM education and their use of education to establish control over the girls who were viewed as key to the future development of the church and its values. It shows that the development of Catholic girls' education was undertaken in the context of inter-denominational rivalry with the CMS, whose earlier arrival on the scene gave a relative advantage in producing a local elite. Although the RCM matched the CMS in providing education and training for the girls, the Catholic mission's late arrival resulted in a slow development of a local Catholic male elite class to match the girls for marriage and build to strong Catholic families. A Catholic-trained girl's contracting of a mixed marriage with an Anglican man in 1953 aroused the ire of the local clergy, who ruled that the catechumen (girls) of the Convent school must produce their fiancés before baptism. The policy of 'no fiancé, no baptism' was implemented at a time when infant betrothal marriage had been abandoned and was being shunned by both young men and girls. There had also developed secular alternative schools and training opportunities for girls in the territory. The girls' responses went from fakery of fiancés to non-presentation with resultant denial of baptism to those who presented no fiancés. The backlash of the further bad press made the RCM discontinue the policy in subsequent years. The damage was already done as it led to the withdrawal of some of the girls from the church and mission institutions. It is unclear if the local infant betrothal marriage practice influenced the Church's policy, but if it did, the RCM misread the attitude of the Benin people toward the marriage practice (which was already abandoned) when the policy of 'no fiancé, no baptism' was employed, and that was why it backfired with the loss of some girls by the church. It concludes that the RCM's provision of education for girls achieved the objectives of establishing and securing the future of the church in the territory with the conversion of girls, but the context of inter-denominational rivalry drove the church into a practice that made retention of all the girls as builders of Catholic families unrealizable.

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Notes

1 The records of this event have so far not been found in the Mission archives, but the incident cannot be dismissed for lack of archival validation as it is corroborated by some local Catholics. Moreso, only some of the activities of the mission agents were officially documented.

2 Infant betrothal is a marriage arrangement in which an adult approaches the father of an infant girl to propose marriage and engagement to the girl. A man can also engage his infant daughter with any man of his choice. Before the marriage is consummated, the man gives gifts and provides occasional labor services to the girl's parents. The girl is obliged to marry the man or his son or another male relative that he so chooses when the girl attains puberty.

3 The Southern Baptist Mission in Benin City in the early 1920s allowed alleged polygamous men into membership of their church and it was in the 1940s that American Missionaries prohibited polygamous members who evicted the Americans and renamed the church as Benin United Baptist Church, while the Southern Baptist established a new church without polygamous men. Uwagboe, *The Baptist Mission in Edoland, 1921–2003, A history of Christianity and the Southern Baptist/Nigerian Baptist Convention Missionary work in Edo State, Nigeria*.

4 The colonial administration gradually began the employment of women in the 1930s in restricted positions, and amongst other factors was the pressure from educated African elites. National Archives, Ibadan, CSO 26/1 File 03571/S.1-4 Employment of African Women in Government Service, Vols. I and II 1922–1940.

5 The files of the CMS contain numerous reports of the sexual dealings of mission agents. See National Archives, Ibadan, CMS Y2/2 File 15 Reports on Benin District.

6 There was only one Government School and many mission schools in Benin City, while the many communities scattered over 4000 square miles of Benin Division had few schools, which were mostly infant schools till the 1940s and as a result, those who desired complete primary education had to go to Benin City. See Usuanlele, "Colonial State and Education in Benin Division, 1897–1960" Adebayo Oyebade(ed.) *The Transformation of Nigeria*, 64.

7 The rival CMS had opposed and championed the abolition and dissolution of infant betrothal and arranged marriages, particularly those between Christian girls and non-Christian men. These practices were not opposed by RCM because of their doctrinal opposition to divorce.

8 Uwagboe, *The Baptist Mission in Edoland, 1921–2003, A history of Christianity and the Southern Baptist/Nigerian Baptist Convention Missionary work in Edo State, Nigeria*.

9 The earliest converts were Anglican; hence the first University Graduate was the son of a CMS Catechist.

10 Girls who became pregnant were expelled from elementary and midwifery schools, while those who were pregnant out of wedlock were dismissed as mission teachers and midwives. Interviews with Princess Mrs. Aiyevbekpen K. Oronsaye, Mrs. Bernadette Emumwen, Pa. Nicholas Idahosa and Mrs. Edomioya.

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Mrs. Bernadette Emumwen, aged 84 years, retired Catholic School Teacher at her Benin City Residence, 14th June 2005.
Pa Nicholas Idahosa, aged 94 years, retired Catholic School Teacher at his Benin City Residence 3rd October 2005
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Article

Formation of Lay Catholics: Franciscan Inspirations

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Abstract: Currently, the formation of lay Catholics is one of the key tasks of the Church. The Synod of Bishops, *Towards a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission*, convened by Pope Francis, served as a reminder of this. In its new format, i.e., phased consultations and meetings, the Synod calls for the involvement of lay Catholics in listening to one another and recognising directions for the Church renewal. This emphasises the need for an ongoing effort to form the faithful. There are many suggestions in the Church for the formation of lay Catholics. Franciscan spirituality, which continues to inspire and attract people, is one of these suggestions. In his teaching, the current pope likes to refer to St. Francis of Assisi, drawing from his writings and example of life. This work aimed to present selected elements of Franciscan spirituality that seem useful in the formation of lay Catholics for their service in the Church and the world. Six elements that can be drawn from rich Franciscan spirituality were analysed and they seem relevant for today's Church: fidelity to the Church, openness to the world and rejection of its evil, apostolate "in via", promotion of the laity, poverty at the service of the Gospel, and openness to the people rejected by society. The discussion of these elements is preceded by a synthetic presentation of the nature and purpose of the formation of lay Catholics.

Keywords: lay Catholics; formation; St. Francis; Franciscan spirituality

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1. Introduction

The renewal of lay theology should be considered one of the most important achievements of the Second Vatican Council. Lay theology results in, among other things, restoring the dignity and role that derive from their membership in the community of the Church to the lay faithful. By restoring the subjective character of being in the Church to the lay faithful, the value of their salvific activity in the Church and the world was thus recognised.

The evangelical allegory of the vine and the branches in John Paul II's post-synodal exhortation, *Christifideles laici*, emphasises the call for lay Catholics to continually grow, mature, and bear fruit. God invites a person with free will into His vineyard, and this invitation includes the need for both an integral and continuous formation (ChL 57). Formation is the foundation for the full and proper involvement of lay Catholics in the life and mission of the Church. The lay person, formed according to the teaching of the Church, can avoid both the passivity that is so present today and actions that are appropriate to clergy and consecrated persons but are incompatible with the vocation of the lay person in the Church and the world.

The formation of lay Catholics is currently an important and even urgent challenge for the Church, and it should be agreed that there is still much to be done in this area both at the level of awakening the awareness and concrete commitment of lay Catholics, as well as the functioning and cooperation of all the faithful in the Church (see EG 81; Czaja 2006). The issue has taken on a new meaning in the light of the Synod of Bishops initiated by Pope Francis, *Towards a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission*, which has a new format and is divided into three phases that are spread over three years: local phase, continental phase, and universal phase. In this synodal process, which aims to consult and listen to all who are baptised, lay Catholics have a special role (The Preparatory Document for the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops 2021).

It seems appropriate to ask what original contribution Franciscan spirituality can make to the formation of lay Catholics. After all, Franciscan spirituality continues to inspire many Christians around the world, and its topicality seems to be stressed by Pope Francis, who not only took the name of the Saint of Assisi, but also likes to refer to his example and guidance in speeches and documents, such as in the encyclicals *Laudato si'* (2015) and *Fratelli tuti* (2020). In seeking to answer this question, it is necessary to first synthesise what the formation process is and what is its purpose (I), and then to present some Franciscan inspirations that can be used in the formation of lay Catholics (II).

2. Materials and Methods

The main research hypothesis of the article is that Franciscan spirituality contains specific elements that can and should be used in the contemporary formation of lay Catholics. The source materials used in this work include selected documents of the contemporary Church (documents of the Second Vatican Council and teachings of the popes) and the writings of St. Francis of Assisi (Rules). The former materials served as a synthetic presentation of the Christian formation of lay Catholics: its assumptions, goals, and dimensions. The latter materials were used for identification of useful and current elements of Franciscan spirituality in the formation of lay Catholics at this stage of the Church's life and activity. Moreover, reference was made to selected studies addressing the role and tasks of lay Catholics and their formation, as well as the Franciscan Order, elements of Franciscan spirituality and its influence on the pastoral activity of the Church.

In this article, the method of analysis, synthesis, interpretation, and comparison has been applied. In the first step, an analysis of selected source texts and literature is made in terms of the formation of lay Catholics, its main assumptions, goals, and dimensions. Then, using the method of synthesis, the most important elements that make up formation are collated. Similarly, the selected writings of St. Francis and selected literature addressing aspects of the Franciscan Order were analysed and typical elements of Franciscan spirituality that are useful when considering the formation of lay Catholics were identified. In a second step, the obtained data were compared, interpreted, and applied to the formation of lay Catholics, identifying typical elements of Franciscan spirituality that can be applied in today's process of said formation.

3. Results

3.1. Formation of Lay Catholics

Franciscan spirituality, with its focus on living according to the Gospel, has strongly penetrated the fabric of the Church. This relationship must be kept in mind when addressing the issue of defining the formation process itself and its dimensions. In terms of the formation of lay Catholics in the Franciscan spirit, it is important to emphasise the relationship with the Church and her teaching: in this case the teaching that concerns formation that is generally defined as a process aimed at forming someone, giving him/her a certain form. This formation includes what is traditionally called the process of mind and will training.

The human person, made in the image and likeness of God (see Genesis 1:26), was called to achieve the perfection intended by the Creator. Hence, the formation of human beings is to serve the purpose of embodying the image of God in their humanity. The fullest and most perfect embodiment of the image of God was accomplished in Jesus Christ, in whom the ideal human being is revealed (Second Vatican Council 2002d; Fiałkowski 2009). In a biblical-theological sense, formation means striving for spiritual and human perfection through the imitation of Christ (Wątroba 1999). In this spirit, in his exhortation *Christifideles laici*, John Paul II defined Christian formation as "a continuous process of personal maturation and conformity to Christ, according to the will of the Father, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit" (ChL 57). Therefore, it can be said that formation is an activity aimed at forming consciousness, beliefs, and attitudes that enable the faithful to

live the Christian life according to their self-identified vocation (Second Vatican Council 2002a, Declaration on Christian Education; see Marauri Ceballos 2016).

According to the Second Vatican Council, the formation of a person is a process that begins from early childhood and covers all stages of human life. It uses the example of parents and educators and the pedagogical means available (Second Vatican Council 2002b, Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity). Christian formation is a growth initiated in baptism, in a spirit of evangelical love and freedom in order to develop one's personality. In the process of formation, it is also essential to know the world in the light of faith (Second Vatican Council 2002a, Declaration on Christian Education).

The teaching of the Church emphasises that formation is a multifaceted process that encompasses human, intellectual, spiritual, and apostolic dimensions and, at the same time, involves an integral process that harmoniously develops all dimensions of human life. At the same time, formation is self-formation, which indicates a conscious and responsible influence on one's own development that continues throughout a person's life (see ChL 60, 63).

Formation aims to help laypeople discern their vocation and accept it with joy and gratitude as an expression of God's care for each person and as a source of dignity. It is also about taking on God's appointed tasks with faithfulness and generosity. The discernment of God's will for the life of the believer is a life-long process, however, it is possible to identify particularly important and decisive moments in the discernment of God's call and in the undertaking of the mission entrusted by God. Such a moment in the life of a lay Catholic is undoubtedly youth. This does not mean, however, that God does not reveal His will in every season of life, which obliges the lay Catholic to make a constant effort to be alert and listen to the voice of God (Fiałkowski 2009).

The first and primary vocation of the Christian is the call to holiness. The call to holiness springs from baptism and is renewed in other sacraments. God not only calls to holiness but also gives the human person His help. Christian holiness, which involves perfect love of God and neighbour, is by its very nature dynamic and presupposes constant growth. The measure of this perfection is Jesus Christ, who is obedient to the will of the Father, and the agent of sanctification is the Holy Spirit, of whom the believer should be the temple. Therefore, the fruitfulness of all Christian work depends on union with Christ (see GeE 19–21).

It is believed that holiness is a privilege that is reserved for the clergy and the consecrated persons, and the call to holiness is rather associated with the necessity of detachment from, or even escape from, temporal reality. However, the Second Vatican Council teaches that "all the faithful of Christ of whatever rank or status, are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity" (Second Vatican Council 2002c). Hence, it is necessary to form people in such a way as to avoid the widespread belief that holiness is an extraordinary life, accessible only to "geniuses" who are often detached from everyday life.

The ways of holiness are manifold and suited to every vocation, and we are to sanctify ourselves in the most ordinary circumstances of our lives (see John Paul II 2001. Novo millennio ineunte; GeE 11, 14). The formation of lay Catholics must lead to the discovery of their specific vocation, which is a way of life and sanctification. By God's will, lay Catholics remain in the world, and this is a situation planned and intended by God. Laypeople are called and intended to worship God by using temporal things and contributing to the temporal progress of society (Second Vatican Council 2002d).

Lay Catholics, however, are not called to fulfil their mission only in the world. This is because they not only belong to the Church, but they also constitute the Church in which they occupy their proper place. As full members of the Church, who are embraced in her mystery, they are endowed with a specific vocation that distinguishes them but does not separate them from the clergy and the consecrated persons (ChL 9).

The discovery of vocation by lay Catholics, which is the goal of formation, cannot stop at the stage of merely discerning what the Lord God demands of them. Their vocation must manifest itself in concrete actions in various life situations. Hence, the task of the lay

Catholic is to know and understand, increasingly, the richness of his/her vocation and at the same time to live it ever more fully (ChL 59; see Fiałkowski 2010).

3.2. Selected Elements of Formation of Lay Catholics in the Franciscan Spirit

In the process of the formation of lay Catholics, it is advisable to take advantage of the interest in St. Francis of Assisi and Franciscan spirituality in its broadest sense. It can be considered that its peculiarity, compared to other spiritualities, is its simplicity and universal character, which makes it a still valid and relatively simple proposal for contemporary believers. The rich Franciscan spirituality appears to be multiform and difficult to define in a clear way. It is composed of many elements, and it is difficult to definitively point to characteristics that clearly distinguish Franciscan spirituality from other spiritualities existing in the Church. Perhaps, as has already been mentioned, Franciscan spirituality has so deeply penetrated the fabric of the Church and culture at large that it is difficult to identify its original elements today. In view of this, it seems to be necessary to select those aspects that are particularly relevant to today's challenges and use them in the formation of lay Catholics. This is not an easy task; such a choice is often debatable and is more of an impetus for further exploration. The main inspiration for proposing this subject is an interesting study on St. Francis of Assisi by the eminent French medievalist Jacques Le Goff (1924–2014) and elements highlighted in it, which ought to be looked at from the perspective of the process of the formation of lay Catholics (Le Goff 2001).

3.2.1. Fidelity to the Church

St. Francis of Assisi, "a Catholic and apostolic man of God" (Julian of Speyer), was a faithful son of the Catholic Church throughout his life. The Catholic Church was always his mother and mistress. For St. Francis of Assisi, living the Gospel of Jesus Christ and living in the Catholic Church were realities that he never separated. St. Francis desired that his followers always be subject and submissive to the Church, truly grounded in the Catholic faith, and faithful to the Gospel of Jesus Christ (St. Francis 2002b). St. Francis' devotion and love for the Church and his emphasis on due fidelity to the Church clearly set Franciscan spirituality apart from most religious movements of his time. Often those movements had anti-church and anti-sacramental attitudes, which led to resentment against the clergy. St. Francis of Assisi respectfully referred to the Pope, bishops, and priests, emphasising their dignity derived from God through the sacrament of Holy Orders.

It can be said that St. Francis did not make a revolution, he did not go against the Church and its unworthy members, nor did he seek to create an alternative community; St. Francis of Assisi transformed the Church with his conversion, repentance, and life according to the Gospel. St. Francis' fidelity to the Church was not blind or naive. He saw the sins and weaknesses of people of the Church, and in his *Rule*, he included the possibility of insubordination when superior's orders are not in line with conscience (St. Francis 2002b).

It seems that today this dimension of Franciscan spirituality can be very useful in the formation of lay Catholics. This is because they, like most people today, follow a trend of dislike, suspicion, and even denial of all institutions. Nowadays, evident disillusionment and rejection of the Church can be tempered by the humble approach of St. Francis of Assisi, who sought to separate sin from the sinner and weak people from the lofty causes and realities they serve. This allows one to embrace the Church as a community of both saints and sinners, in which the mission of Jesus Christ continues.

3.2.2. Openness to the World and Rejection of Its Evil

The attitude of St. Francis of Assisi demonstrates an admiration for the world around him, in which he sees the beauty of the Creator Himself and the expression of God's love for humanity. It would be fair to say that this affirmation stems from St. Francis' belief in God's creation of the world, as well as his conviction of God's constant care for the world and His presence in history. At the same time, it is possible to notice St. Francis of Assisi's

opposition to evil and sin present in the world and, above all, his opposition to rejecting God as Lord and Saviour (Le Goff 2001).

The former opposition clearly arises from the reflection of the biblical approach to the world that is viewed ambiguously in the Scripture. The world is the work of God, created out of His infinite love and wisdom and directed towards all that was accomplished in Christ. Therefore, the world is a purposeful reality that has meaning. The creation of the world begins the story of salvation, and the world itself becomes the setting where the story takes place. It is clearly a positive worldview (Gocko 2003). However, it should be noted that the world in the Scripture also has a negative meaning. This is particularly evident in the theology of the Gospel of John, in which the world is associated with the temporal, the transient, the evil, and the destructible. The Gospel of John sees the world more in the anthropological sense. According to St. John, such a world is a world of people who are indifferent or hostile to Jesus and his disciples (see Jn 7:7; 16, 20, 33; 1 Jn 3:1) and a world that does not have the Holy Spirit (see Jn 14:17) but has its own spirit that is bound to sin—thus becoming a place of Satan's activity (see Jn 12:31)—and can betray God (Lesquivit and Grelot 1990).

Even today it seems highly desirable to form the right attitude towards the world, for we are in danger of becoming totally focused on the things of this world, which partly or completely obscure the perspective of eternity. This is compounded by failing to see sin, disregarding it, or even considering it a good thing. Such an extreme can also create counter-productive attitudes that reject the world, solely treating it as evil. The perspective adopted by St. Francis of Assisi, which is deeply biblical and inscribed in the faith of the Church, seems to be a good antidote to the above-mentioned dangerous tendencies and thus it could be used in the Christian formation of today's Catholics.

3.2.3. Apostolate "In Via"

St. Francis broke the pastoral patterns of his time and boldly went out to the people. He was not afraid, in a sense, to draw on the experience of spiritual movements that proposed a reform of the Church by defying it. At the same time, St. Francis of Assisi did not reject all the solutions that were used in the activities of the Church of his time. He respected and renewed those solutions, poured new life into them, and adapted them to new conditions. To a certain extent, St. Francis contesting the social order of the time and certain attitudes in the Church did not lead to a revolution that could have ruined everything, but rather opened the Church—and, in a sense, the world—to true reform. The Saint of Assisi transformed the Church and the world in which he lived by living the Gospel and also by loving the Church (Le Goff 2001; Matura 1999).

This newness and openness are evident in the missionary activity of the followers of St. Francis of Assisi, to whom he suggested that they preach the Gospel among infidels, especially by setting a good example. St. Francis of Assisi was the first of the founders of religious orders who included in his *Rule* a chapter on missionary expeditions to countries inhabited by pagans (see St. Francis 2002a, 2002b; Iriarte 1999; Prejs 2011). His followers were not to engage in arguments and disputes but be submissive to all creatures for God's sake, and openly acknowledge that they were Christians. In this approach, witnesses of Christ do not focus on fighting, judging others, and engaging in polemics, but they show by their lives who Jesus Christ, in whom they believe, is for them (St. Francis 2002a).

Following the example of their founder, Franciscans courageously sought new solutions and new pastoral spaces, but also tried to preserve tried-and-tested models. Franciscan apostolic activity is distinguished by openness to new forms of activity and a courageous search for more effective means of action. At the same time, there is a strong emphasis on the use of apostolic solutions that better serve the Church at a given moment in history and are more relevant to the needs and expectations of specific social groups. This requires, first of all, getting to know the milieu of the people among whom a Franciscan carries out his ministry. In this context, it is worth mentioning the work of the Franciscan St. Maximilian Kolbe (1894–1941), who, in his apostolic activity, boldly used the latest achievements of

technology and organisation (Dyczewski 1992). Kolbe wrote, "Limiting private needs as much as possible, leading a life as poor as possible, we will use at least the most modern means. In a patched habit, in torn shoes, on an airplane of the latest type, if this is necessary for the salvation and sanctification of more souls" (Kolbe 1937).

This characteristic feature of the apostolate in the Franciscan spirit seems appropriate to the conditions of mission that is undertaken by the Church today. Dynamic and diverse transformations of the contemporary world need courageous reactions and openness to new solutions that better address the people living today. This adapted apostolate, however, must maintain the unchanging principles from Revelation and not disregard the experience of previous generations. However, this does not mean merely maintaining old solutions, but courageously and creatively confronting new challenges and problems while proclaiming the Gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ to people living in specific circumstances. Therefore, the point is a formation that will enable lay Catholics to proclaim the Gospel on an Areopagus of modern times, especially that which is new and demanding, such as mixed media. This requires the pastoral and missionary conversion that Pope Francis so often and consistently calls for: "I hope that all communities will devote the necessary effort to advancing along the path of pastoral and missionary conversion which cannot leave things as they presently are. 'Mere administration' can no longer be enough. Throughout the world, let us be 'permanently in a state of mission'" (EG 25).

3.2.4. Promotion of the Laity

From the perspective of the contemporary formation of lay Catholics, is the emphasis on his/her subjectivity in the Church and the world is particularly important. The urgent task is to overcome the peculiar dualism between laity and clergy, which often paralyses the Christian ministry of the Church, generating passivity and a comfortable distance from pressing challenges, and sometimes fuelling clericalism that drives many people away from the Church and the message of the Gospel.

St. Francis can be described as a man who, in a certain sense, contributed to the advancement of lay Catholics in the community of the Church. As he saw their desire to follow Christ radically, which he himself undertook and practised, he offered them his own vision of following Christ (Secular Franciscan Order) that was more suitable to their state of life, well-adapted, and reconciled with the duties of their status (Wróbel 2006). He also addressed a letter to them: *Letter to the Faithful* (St. Francis 2009), classified as one of the main writings of the Saint which can be understood as a message not only for an ecclesial community but also for the whole of lay society (Michetti 2009). As E. Mariani stressed, St. Francis' concern expressed in that *Letter* is pastoral in nature and shows his recognition of the universal vocation of all the faithful, including the laity, to holiness (Mariani 2006).

R. Manselli underscored that Franciscans contributed to the development of an intense religiousness that "far from abstract theological reasoning, spoke to the heart, touched on topics accessible to all, posed simple and concrete questions, went down to reach even the most hidden but no less important aspects of everyday life, such as family life, relations between spouses, relations with children, in general ethics and problems of human relationships" (Manselli 2006). Nowadays, the Church is in need of action that will contribute to imbuing culture at large with the light of the Gospel (see Second Vatican Council 2002d). It is a difficult task in which an irreplaceable role falls to lay Catholics, who are capable of reaching out to a world that is especially given and entrusted to them. According to the Second Vatican Council, a specific characteristic of the laity is their secular character (*indoles saecularis*) (see Second Vatican Council 2002c). By God's will they remain in the world, and this is a situation that is planned and intended by the Creator. It is about a specific vocation, a permanent way of life, and sanctification for laypeople. The laity are called and intended to worship God by using temporal things as they contribute to the progress of society. Because of their "embeddedness" in the world, lay Catholics are called to seek the Kingdom of God and order temporal affairs according to the Creator's plan (Fiałkowski 2015).

3.2.5. Poverty at the Service of the Gospel

St. Francis of Assisi, who was inspired by the poverty and humility of Jesus Christ, made a life choice to break away from the affluent lifestyle in which he had grown up. The economic and social relations of that time divided people into the poor and the rich and privileged: *minores* and *maiores*. St. Francis chose a place among the poor and wanted his community to be *minoritas* (*minores*) (Iammarrone 2001). *Minoritas* meant, above all, adopting the right attitude towards God, recognising one's own limitations and weaknesses, and knowing how to discover in every human being a neighbour with whom Christ is identified. The virtues of poverty and humility are united in *minoritas*; they are the guidelines of the Franciscan way in which there is no place for despising others or judging anyone (Iriarte 1999; Niezgoda 1995).

The simple means of evangelisation continue to be effective even today, as a proof of trust in God on whom, after all, the effectiveness of the work carried out also depends. Distance and freedom from attachment to things, not only in the time of St. Francis but also today, continue to result in availability and mobility, in that time facilitated the distinction between means and ends. The power of witnessing in simplicity and poverty cannot be overestimated. The generous use of available resources for evangelisation in the broad sense also opens up new avenues of charitable activity that is capable of responding to the challenges of the poor today.

As Manselli noted, poverty, which St. Francis embraced, is a sort of condition of uncertainty and of putting one's life at risk every day. It is only in this situation that we can empathise with the psychological and social situation of the poor. It is then easier to give appropriate, truly solidarity-based, and evangelical aid and support to the poor (Manselli 2006).

Poverty framed in this way can speak more clearly not only to believers but also to those who are seeking God, becoming an effective tool for receiving and proclaiming the Gospel in a world that Pope Francis does not hesitate to describe as the world succumbing to an obsession with consumption. The consumerist attitude makes a person focus solely on "having". His/her main goal in life becomes the constant and exaggerated desire to possess, multiply or replace material things, and raise the standard of living. The measure of his/her success in life is material success, and his/her life ideal is prosperity at any price. The emptiness filling the human heart makes a person need more things to buy, own, and consume. The consumerist attitude leads to a hedonistic interpretation of human existence, giving rise to individualism, materialism, a sense of temporariness, uncertainty about tomorrow, greed and injustice, provoking violence, isolation, egoism, and disregard for others, especially those who are unable to succeed in multiplying material goods (see LS 204; Fiałkowski 2017).

Pope Francis notes that today's obsessive consumerism is a subjective reflection of the technocratic paradigm that makes people consider themselves free as long as they retain the supposed freedom to consume (LS 203). It is not difficult then to succumb to the temptation to make material goods and consumption the most important values. This attitude poses a threat to the environment and thus to human beings themselves. Pope Francis sees the cure for such an attitude in restoring God's rightful place in human life, which will result in a proper attitude towards oneself and others, as well as respect, moderation and humility towards the world of creatures (LS 204; Fiałkowski 2016).

3.2.6. Openness to the People Rejected by Society

It could be said that, in a way, St. Francis of Assisi formed himself among lepers at the beginning of his life's journey. The moment he abandoned his prejudices and fears and kissed a leper and then stayed among lepers, ministering to them, he defied certain stereotypes and rules that were prevalent at that time. Lepers were then an excluded and socially marginalised group. St. Francis of Assisi's attitude undoubtedly involved courage and a change of mindset. Furthermore, it also seems that his approach to the divisive and those contesting the Church was original and, in a sense, ahead of his time. St. Francis

of Assisi was not so much focused on fighting heresies of which there was no lack in the Church of his time, but he wanted to convert the erring to restore them to the Church.

This attitude is an expression of a particular openness to the rejected and marginalised, who became particularly close to Francis of Assisi and his followers. This was, in fact, the consequence of a courageous and complete reading of the teaching and deeds of Jesus Christ, who identified himself with the poor and the rejected (cf. Mt 25). The Minorites (Lesser Brothers) tended to settle "where the poor were most numerous and where conditions were most miserable, usually as close as possible to the walls on the inner side, or just outside the walls, in the so-called *borghi* (suburbs). The intention was well-thought-out and long preserved: the desire to be among those most in need of spiritual support and help, including material help from the Brothers" (Manselli 2006).

With greater freedom from things and from the exercise of authority, Franciscans were able to access all spheres of social life. This peculiar "Franciscan revolution" also brought greater apostolic effectiveness, paving the way for an evangelical message supported by the example of a life in conformity with the Gospel (Mariani 2006). As Pope Francis notes, St. Francis of Assisi showed a particular sensitivity not only to God's creatures but, above all, to the poorest and the abandoned. As a mystic and a pilgrim, he lived with simplicity and in harmony with God, other people, nature and himself. His example shows us "to what degree of inseparability, concern for nature, justice for the poor, social commitment and inner peace are united" (LS 10).

This feature of Franciscan spirituality is clearly part of Pope Francis' priority to care for the poor and excluded in the broadest sense, which is the implementation of God's commandment of love and must be relevant to the needs of people who are affected by various forms of poverty. From the beginning of his pontificate, Pope Francis seems to have emphasised that God's mercy is the central truth of the Christian message. This is a clear indication, which comes from the discernment of contemporary "signs of the times", addressed to the Church, especially in the field of the formation of believers undertaken by her (Napiórkowski 2020).

4. Conclusions

The message of Franciscan spirituality, which is still valid as it is re-read today and indicated by Pope Francis, appears as an interesting proposal for the formation of lay Catholics. Franciscan spirituality creates favourable conditions for the formation of Catholics who are faithful to the God they find in the Church. Such Catholics are, at the same time, aware of their own sinfulness and thus of the weakness of the Church, and yet they remain ready to take on their respective tasks in the Church and in the world. Both a good preparation for the apologia of one's faith and a maturity that is not afraid of criticism are no less important in this respect.

The formation of lay Catholics, which is inspired by Franciscan spirituality, helps to form believers who are not afraid of the world and its dynamic development that inevitably brings changes and new challenges. These transformations rather mobilise these believers to read the "signs of the times" in an evangelical way and imbue the world with evangelical values. At the same time, such Catholics do not close their eyes to the evils and dangers of the world, but they are able to see signs of hope that come from the presence of God in such evils and dangers.

Nowadays, there is also a need for formation that teaches Catholics to be respectful of the legacy of their predecessors but also open to contemporary challenges. This involves having the courage to recognise and enter into the new paths that the Holy Spirit is showing the Church. It is necessary to be able to take joint action and be open to cooperation with everyone, including those who do not share our views. Today's Church needs people who attach importance to their own development and undertake formation in the family, in the parish community, and in their work with other people.

Equally important is the ecumenical dimension of formation. The openness and dialogue that characterise Franciscan spirituality should become an important element in

the formation of lay Catholics. Cooperation with representatives of other Churches can result in getting to know each other and breaking down prejudices and stereotypes that exist on both sides. This serves to counteract the creation of closed and hostile environments, which is often a source of scorn and distancing from Christians in the modern world. Openness to other Churches gives mutual enrichment and strengthens the effort to proclaim the Gospel.

In the face of omnipresent consumerism and the tendency to reduce everything to material and horizontal dimensions only, formation in the proper use of material resources is an urgent task. It is about a Christian approach to wealth and possessions, treating them as necessary means rather than ends: 'to have' is to better 'to be'. This excludes both the temptation to become too attached to or even enslaved by possessions and collected things but also rejects their disregard and contempt.

Franciscan spirituality can also inspire the courage to take up the new challenges facing the Church today. This particularly concerns a formation that will prepare Catholics who are capable of creatively responding to the challenge posed by the marginalised and excluded in the broadest sense, i.e., by the contemporary poor. It seems that formation in the Franciscan spirit has the potential to form people who will become, in this field, a sort of avant-garde that will open new paths for the Church and the world.

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Abbreviations

ChL	Christifideles laici
EG	Evangelii gaudium
GeE	Gaudete et exsultate
LS	Laudato Si'
1 Reg	St. Francis. Rule not approved (by the papacy)

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Cultivating Community through Language Learning in a Benedictine Seminary Network

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Abstract: St. Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology, a seminary located in southern Indiana, was founded in 1857 by monks of the Benedictine order of Einsiedeln in Switzerland. The seminary has since been devoted to the education of faith leaders—priests, deacons, and graduate lay students. Due to the growth of underserved Latino populations in the Midwest region of the United States, there is a need to prepare future faith leaders to serve Latino congregations. This work provides an exploration into the ways in which language learning collaborations based on Benedictine hospitality can cultivate community. It outlines a Benedictine pedagogy of community that is threefold. First, given the importance of language to communicate with members of Latino communities in the United States, the cultivation of community is understood in terms of the world readiness standards of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). Second, because Benedictine monasteries were founded on the value of hospitality, these interactions are imbued with Benedictine hospitality. Third, it is argued that Benedictine communities are contexts in which the liminal intertwines with the liminoid, resulting in fertile ground for the creation of what we call liminal/liminoid encounters that have the potential to level asymmetric power relations and lead to meaningful dialogue. The final section shows how this Benedictine pedagogy of community is enacted in one specific Spanish language learning immersion that takes place at a sister Benedictine Monastery abroad, Our Lady of Angels, in Cuernavaca, Mexico. It also provides a small sample of seven students' responses to two critical questions from a survey questionnaire. Even though this small qualitative sample is not generalizable, it helps illuminate how these interactions may lead to the development of cultural sensitivity, of a sense of community, between students and members of this language learning immersion abroad. Responses indicate that students who participated in this program for at least eight weeks exhibit an interest in continuing to interact and collaborate in multicultural communities as well as a willingness to learn the target language beyond this experience.

Keywords: Benedictine hospitality; language learning; communities; liminal; liminoid; ACTFL

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1. Introduction

St. Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology, a seminary located in southern Indiana, was founded in 1857 by monks of the Benedictine order of Einsiedeln in Switzerland. The seminary has since been devoted to the education of faith leaders—priests, deacons, and graduate lay students. Most of this seminary's ordained priests are placed in parishes across the rural Midwest of the United States, a region with a growing number of underserved Latino immigrant populations.[1]

Susan Dieterlen (2015) notes that, according to the 2010 US Census, even though Latinas/os constitute 7 percent of the Midwest region's overall population, Latino immigration to this region is growing at a staggering rate, increasing by 49 percent since 2000 (p. 8). The growth of the Latino population in the Midwest far outpaced that of the overall population of the Midwest, which grew by only 4 percent during these same years (Dieterlen 2015, p. 8). In their study of Latina/o immigrants and Mexican Americans in the Midwest United States, Millard et al. (2004) argue that unlike other regions of the

United States, in the Midwest there exists "a racial hierarchy of privilege and opportunity with whites at the top" (p. 115). In fact, most of the opportunities available to Latina/o immigrants are predominately those created by the meatpacking, food processing, and light manufacturing industries with lower labor costs and less unionization (Dieterlen 2015, p. 8; Millard et al. 2004, p. 115). They also observe that most non-Latinas/os who participated in their study, who they refer to as Anglos, denied being prejudiced, while every Latina/o in this same study reported having experienced discrimination (p. 115).[2] For this reason, parishes as spaces of safety and refuge are critical for Latina/o newcomers, immigrants, and their first and second generations, whose faith practices are tied to daily lived experiences in their newly found homeland.

The National Study of Catholic Parishes with Hispanic Ministry underscores the importance of parishes as places of refuge and safety for Latina/o Catholic immigrants. As Hosffman Ospino (2015) points out, the parish is the place where Latina/o immigrants choose to establish a familiar experience of community in the United States (p. 9). Moreover, the Spanish language "plays an important role in the process of faith formation of Hispanic Catholics" (Ospino 2015, p. 61). Among the main reasons for the importance of language learning in faith formation is that most adult Latina/o active members of the parishes prefer to use Spanish to live and share their faith. Additionally, faith leaders who develop strong communication skills in Spanish will be better equipped to engage in intergenerational conversations with Latino families. In addition, faith leaders who develop a connection to the culture and history of the Hispanic world are more likely to develop a deeper interest in, and an increased sensitivity toward, members of their underserved communities.

This work provides an exploration into the ways in which language learning collaborations can cultivate community in the formation of vocations by outlining a Benedictine pedagogy of community that is threefold. First, given the importance of language to communicate with the members of Latino communities in the United States, in this work the cultivation of community is understood in terms of the fifth goal area of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), that is, "to prepare language learners to interact and collaborate in multilingual local and global communities" (History ACTFL 2023). Second, this work discusses the premier Benedictine value of hospitality through the lens of Catholic social teaching, arguing that at Saint Meinrad the cultivation of community through multilingual interaction and collaboration is imbued with Benedictine hospitality. In the third section, this work asserts that Benedictine monasteries are ideal sites for active collaboration through encounters and underscores the significance of liminal and liminoid encounters in leveling asymmetrical power relations to allow for meaningful dialogue. Then, it describes several language and international learning collaborations offered at Saint Meinrad. The final section shows how this Benedictine pedagogy of community is enacted in one specific Spanish language learning collaboration; an immersion that takes place at the Benedictine Monastery of Our Lady of Angels, in Cuernavaca, Mexico. It also provides a small sample of seven students' responses to two critical questions from a survey questionnaire. Even though this small qualitative sample is not generalizable, it helps illuminate how these interactions may lead to the forging of affective bonds, of solidarity, and ultimately of a sense of community, between students and Hispanic members of this language learning immersion abroad. Responses indicate that students who participated in this program for at least eight weeks exhibit an interest in continuing to interact and collaborate in multicultural communities as well as a willingness to learn the target language beyond this experience.

2. Cultivating Community through Language Learning

In 2020, the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), an organization that represents language educators and learners globally, decided to question the term 'foreign' in its acronym because "times have changed" (History ACTFL 2023). Using the term 'foreign' "[sends] a message that language learning should be viewed as 'strange' or 'unfamiliar'". Despite this, the final consensus was to keep its acronym, which

represents its highly respected brand, and to add to it the tagline "Language Connects", two words that convey "how language acts as a bridge to cultural competence, career readiness, and empathy . . . and represents [ACTFL's] aspirations to be inclusive and inviting" (History ACTFL 2023). ACTFL's decision to change its corporate identity from representing the unfamiliar, the foreign, to becoming inclusive of difference pervades all areas of language learning and it opens new horizons in the field of language education.

The realization that communication is key to cultural competence and the primordial role of language learning in connecting cultures and building inclusive multicultural communities led ACTFL to revise their standards for language education. In 2015, the National Standards Collaborative Board (2015) incorporated two new goal areas to the World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages (W-RSLL 2015): connections and communities. Today, the standards target five goal areas for teaching and learning languages: communication, cultures, connections, comparisons, and communities. The main objective of the five goal areas is to develop cultural competence by linking communication and culture "which is applied in making connections and comparisons and in using this competence to be part of local and global communities" (W-RSLL 2015). This work addresses the 'communities' goal area, which is to prepare language learners to communicate and interact with cultural competence to participate in multilingual local and global multilingual communities (Table 1).

Table 1. Communities Goal Area (W-RSLL 2015).

Communities Goal Area 5	Communicate and interact with cultural competence in order to participate in multilingual communities at home and around the world
School and Global Communities Standard 5.1	Learners use the language both within and beyond the classroom to interact and collaborate in their community and the globalized world
Lifelong Learning Standard 5.2	Learners set goals and reflect on their progress in using languages for enjoyment, enrichment, and advancement

Unfortunately, there is a dearth of research on ACTFL's new goal area of communities. This may be due to the difficulty in assessing learning goals and outcomes when language is acquired collaboratively and outside of the traditional classroom setting. As Lisa Ferrante Perrone (2015) notes, despite its importance, language teachers find the communities goal area not assessable, nebulous, and out of their control. Another problem is the broad definition of the communities goal area and the difficulty in measuring it, either quantitatively or qualitatively. Yet, it is an essential part of the ACTFL standards, of equal weight to, and inseparable from the other goal areas. All five goal areas "intertwine, support, and depend on one another", and attention to all goal areas is essential to create a cohesive language curriculum (Perrone 2015, p. 466).

Particularly for future faith leaders and those who work in professions of care, including education, it is critical to emphasize the importance of building communication skills by interacting with and establishing bonds with members of the communities they wish to serve. Hence, this work focuses on cultural sensitivity as a main component of cultural competence. The American Psychological Association defines cultural sensitivity as an "awareness and appreciation of the values, norms, and beliefs characteristic of a cultural, ethnic, racial, or other group that is not one's own, accompanied by a willingness to adapt one's behavior accordingly" (American Psychological Association 2023). Following Matthew Maruggi (2012), it is argued that "individuals first develop a sense of solidarity, of common humanity or interconnection with others, and then enlarge and refine that notion with an understanding of difference" (310). Thus, the acquisition of cultural sensitivity, of a sense of a shared community with others of a different culture, begins in solidarity.

3. Benedictine Hospitality through the Lens of Catholic Social Teaching

In his article titled, "Hospitality in the Benedictine monastic tradition", Raverty (2012) argues that Benedictine hospitality goes beyond a mere tolerance of difference; it is an active welcoming of others, the ability "to think of all people as our guests" (p. 252). The idea of cultivating community through Benedictine hospitality can be understood through the lens of the Catholic social teaching of solidarity, including the theme of option for the poor and vulnerable (USCCB 2023). As Elena Foulis (2020) notes in her work on the Latino experience in the state of Ohio, one of the main priorities of Latina/o faith leaders is "a commitment to solidarity as a component of ethical faith practices rooted in the protection of the most vulnerable" (p. 29). As a radical welcoming of others, Benedictine hospitality necessarily presupposes a commitment to solidarity that includes a sense of responsibility for the disadvantaged other. In their work on Benedictine leadership, Hisker and Urick (2019) argue that St. Benedict's Rule serves as an ethical structure to educational theories of corporate leadership, for Benedictine hospitality may instill "a welcoming and collaborative pattern of behavior . . . [breaking] down barriers between individuals and groups" (p. 261). This radical welcoming of guests underscores the culture of encounter that characterizes Benedictine communities. By actively welcoming others, Benedictine learning contexts consistently generate opportunities to engage in lived experiences with others from different cultures. Benedictine monasteries are ideal sites for the creation of spaces of active collaboration across the curriculum.

The idea of cultivating community is associated with Pope Francis' understanding of solidarity as the development of "a new mindset which thinks in terms of community and the priority of the life of all" (Francis 2013, p. 188). Pope John Paul II recognizes that solidarity entails the interdependence of all nations, communities, and peoples "as a system determining relationships in the contemporary world . . . and accepted as a moral category . . . the correlative response as a moral and social attitude . . . is solidarity" (John Paul II 1987, p. 38). Pope John Paul II further defines solidarity as a moral obligation that "helps us to see the 'other' . . . not just as some kind of instrument . . . but as our 'neighbor,' a 'helper'" (cf. Gen 2:18–20, SRS 39). Thus, the first step in entering solidarity is to "see" the Other. This seeing must be devoid of self-centered interest, an instance in which we become "visible" to the Other. As Corey Beals (2007) argues, following Emmanuel Levinas, "the human begins in original responsibility for the Other" (p. 27). Thus, solidarity is an unavoidable responsibility, a Christian duty, that binds us all regardless of our disposition toward others. Therefore, disavowing the moral duty of solidarity does not exempt us from our obligation to others. Pope John Paul II calls on us to act on this moral obligation to others, "to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all" (John Paul II 1987, p. 38). Recognizing our responsibility for the wellbeing of others, particularly the poor and vulnerable, is to acknowledge the face of the Other, who, in the words of Emmanuel Levinas, demands that I say, "Here I am!"

Therefore, for the Benedictine tradition, hospitality becomes a guest apostolate in the service of others, a call to embrace difference. As R.D.G. Irvine (2011) notes, the centrality of the guesthouse in all Benedictine monasteries is evidence of how faithfully the tradition of hospitality has been upheld through history (p. 41). The table is an essential feature of the Benedictine community, as the Rule states, "the abbot's table must always be with guests and travelers" (Raverty 2012, p. 252). In addition, guests are invited to stay until well rested, "adequate bedding should be available there" (Raverty 2012, p. 252). Further evidence of the importance of hospitality is the fact that St. Benedict designated a porter to actively welcome guests as they arrive (Raverty 2012, p. 252). Chapter 66 of St. Benedict's Rule is entirely dedicated to the porter, describing the required protocol to be followed as guests arrive at the monastery, "As soon as anyone knocks, *or a poor man calls out*, he [the porter] replies, 'Thanks be to God' or 'Your blessing, please'; then, with all the gentleness that comes from the fear of God, he provides a prompt answer with the warmth of love"

(Raverty 2012, p. 252). It is noteworthy that the Rule specifically instructs that the poor should be welcomed in the same manner as all other guests.

But the recognition of our responsibility for others can become a challenge in today's modern world, as Pope Francis (2019) asserts, "among the most important causes of the crises of the modern world are a desensitized human conscience, a distancing from religious values and the prevailing individualism . . . that deify the human person and introduce worldly and material values in place of supreme and transcendental principles" (DHF). In contrast to the modern world, Benedictine monasteries display an architecture of stability that is timeless, as represented by the Abbey's tower, "with its bell ringing out, [that] not only announces the monastery's presence and its continuity with the past; it also asserts the perpetuity of a cycle of prayer which transcends the here and now" (Irvine 2011, p. 37). This ambience of stability also permeates monastic life, given by "a timetable of prayer . . . which emerges through the coordination of times for prayer, meals, work, and so on" (Irvine 2011, p. 36). Benedictine monasteries contrast with the unstable modern world outside the monastery's walls, with their timeless presence and vow to stability amidst the instability and fragmentation of the modern world.

Benedictine monasteries can also be thought of as "way stations of hospitality", sacred sites of healing, places where the marginalized and all the pilgrims who have suffered from conflicts, wars, violence, and intolerance "can find some remedy in the healing balm of monastic hospitality" (Raverty 2012, p. 254). Chapter 53 of the Rule of St. Benedict states, "Great care and concern are to be shown in receiving poor people and pilgrims, because in them more particularly Christ is received" (Raverty 2012, p. 252). St. Benedict's particular mention of the poor and the stranger, the pilgrim, transforms Benedictine monasteries into spaces of safety, where the marginal other and the pilgrim can find refuge, even if temporary.

Despite its radical openness to others, the Rule teaches discernment through prayer in the treatment of guests (Raverty 2012, p. 253). Rev. Timothy Fry OSB notes that fundamental to the Benedictine tradition is the guidance of disciples through the discernment of spirits "along the path of self-renunciation" (RB 1980 2016). Discernment is also evident in its architecture, as Benedictine monasteries provide separate spaces for guests, including a separate quarter for visitors, seminarians, and monks. A guest is "invited to participate in the life of the community, yet he is spatially separated from the monastic community in the Abbey church, in the refectory and in his sleeping quarters" (Irvine 2011, p. 43). This separation and the practice of discernment has enabled Benedictine communities to preserve their way of life through history, and they continue to be places of prayer and healing in today's modern world.

4. Of Liminal and Liminoid Learning Encounters

4.1. Engaging with Others in the Dialogue of Life

Raverty (2012) notes that at Benedictine monastic communities, people are invited to engage in the "dialogue of life"; we invite the Other "to share stories of struggles, hardships, and joys", engaging in an exchange where we get "caught up in the movement of the Holy Spirit as an invitation to learn about the Other" (p. 123). This dialogue of life is the foundation of the language and international learning collaborations in the Benedictine educational setting. The students consistently engage in dialogues of life with natives through conversations, which are structured but also spontaneous, by engaging in pilgrimages and retreats, participating in the presentations of Latina/o leaders, exchanging personal stories, and attending immersion programs abroad. However, as Rachel Gilmour (2016) notes, "many educators report the resistance of students to the concept of multiple voices and interpretations of these voices", (p. 117). Creating dialogic spaces, asserts Laura Leming (2016), "will almost inevitably reveal difference and the need to grow in skills for negotiating difference" (p. 9). Leming suggests that because these "places of constructive resistance" can grow into social critique, they must be accompanied by deep reflection and be motivated by a search for wisdom (p. 9). The Vatican's document on *Dialogue*

and Proclamation (1991) also states that there are many obstacles to dialogue that impede reciprocity, "intolerance, which is often aggravated by association with political, economic, racial and ethnic factors . . . can lead to frustration" (Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue and Proclamation n.d., p. 52). This complicates dialogical theories of pedagogy that assume ideal conditions—symmetrical relationships. Following Dean Brackley SJ, Matthew Maruggi (2012) argues that decentering the privileged position is crucial to level these asymmetric power relations and achieve solidarity (p. 309). The concept of liminality is useful in attempting to level asymmetric power dynamics.

4.2. On Social Solidarity and the Liminal/Liminoid

Victor Turner (1974) explains that liminal and liminoid phenomena must be understood in the context of Durkheimian solidarity. As Emile Durkheim (2019) argues, mechanical solidarity, which existed in pre-modern societies, would turn into organic solidarity with the advent of individualism in modern societies. Historically, liminal phenomena were generated cyclically in tribal and "primitive" societies whose members related though similarities and were tied by obligations (p. 85). Following Slavoj Zizek, Dan Krier et al. (Krier and Swart 2012) argue that like Durkheim, Bakhtin also recognized that the rotary motion characteristic of pre-modern societies allowed for "a cyclical reproduction of relatively stable culture over time" (p. 145). In contrast, modern societies, which are characterized by specialization and innovation, thrive on the mainstream idea of progress at the cost of the loss of the sacred and stories of the past. In the early twentieth century, Durkheim saw the loss of sacred and traditional stories as contributing to the moral crisis of modernity; he writes, "What constitutes the strength of the collective states of consciousness is not only that they are common to the present generation, but particularly that they are for the most part a legacy of generations that have gone before . . . it is almost entirely a product of the past . . . The authority of the collective consciousness is therefore made up in large part of the authority of tradition" (p. 233). Following Durkheim, the sociologist Stjepan Meštrović (1993) sees the secularization of education as a form of sacrilege, given the religious origin of schools, a process that contributed to the 'moral crises' of a modern society dominated by the cult of the individual person (p. 95).

Benedictine educational contexts have been able to reproduce mechanical solidarity, recreating spaces where members still bond through similarities instead of differences and individual characteristics. This is key to Catholic education, for as Durkheim explains, "this particular structure enables society to hold the individual more tightly in its grip, making him more strongly attached to his domestic environment, and consequently to tradition" (p. 242). In the case of Benedictine communities, explains Eviatar Zerubavel (1980), St. Benedict introduced a "unique sociotemporal order" that has allowed Benedictine communities to survive through history by balancing mechanical and organic solidarity (p. 167). Because in Benedictine monastic communities individuals share a strong collective consciousness, the community's interests are placed above those of the individual (Mishra and Rath 2020, p. 4). This collective consciousness constitutes shared beliefs and ideas represented by emblems and tied to a common higher moral authority that creates a binding force to ensure solidarity and stability within the group. Thus, monastic communities, like pre-modern societies, are bonded by a collective system of representations that carry a much deeper significance than those of its individual members.

Liminality becomes liminoid in capitalist societies, where people bond through differences and solidarity becomes organic. Turner's distinction between the liminal and the liminoid is constructive, for it helps explain how encounters function in the context of monastic communities today. Turner deduced that "in liminality is secreted the seed of the liminoid". (p. 86). Whereas the liminal arises in societies that are bonded by similarities and obligations, the liminoid is characterized by ludic interplay and optionality, as Turner notes, "One works at the liminal, one plays with the liminoid" (p. 86). Members of a church feel an obligation to participate in the sacraments, a liminal experience "whereas one queues up at the boxoffice to see a play by Beckett, a performance by Mort Sahl, a Superbowl

Game, a symphony concert, or an art exhibition" (p.86). As Savova-Grigorova (2016) explains in her work on community engagement through bread-making in Bulgaria, liminoid experiences define "ritual re-enactments that are framed as leisure and are open to choice and re-structuring" (p. 9). Savova-Grigorova's successful project consists of community networks of bread-making for the disadvantaged, (former prisoners, gang members, orphans, people with various physical and mental needs, etc.), where people connect to each other through "rich meaning-making processes out of the memories, associations, and stories" (p. 2). Moreover, bread-making has led to the creation and development of local art, music, painting, pottery, theatre, etc., uniting people from all ways of life in today's divided Bulgaria (p. 2). Because liminoid phenomena stems from and resembles the liminal, they intertwine with the liminal and intensify in religious contexts.

4.3. On the Recreation of Self-Narratives

In his study of how counselors recreate their self-narratives, MacKay (2008) explains that during the disintegrating phase of liminality, a broader, deeper narrative, such as a sacred or sacramental tale, is needed to hold the fractured parts of a person together (p. 197). MacKay likens Winnicott's transitional space to Turner's liminal space, claiming that in these spaces the undoing of structures has the potential for creativity and transformation. Symbols may be rearranged, and new narratives can connect with larger stories, accessing deep layers in a person's self-narrative. In the context of a monastic community, liminal and liminoid experiences can break down asymmetric power structures. The disruption of power structures, is critical for accessing deep layers in a person's self-narrative through a process of rearranging and conjoining of symbols, shaping a persons' emotions, especially when these symbols are lived by the members of the group (MacKay 2008, p. 197; LaMothe 2010, p. 59). In monastic communities, liminal encounters with others from different cultures are lived through mechanical solidarity, allowing students to acquire cultural sensitivity through a variety of activities, such as casual or formal conversations, alternative narratives, including poetry, participation in rituals, pilgrimages, playing games, and participation in sports or educational field trips. Because these learning experiences share traces of both liminal and liminoid phenomena, in this work they will be referred to as liminal/liminoid encounters.

5. Language and International Learning Collaborations in Saint Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology

It is argued in this work that cultivating community, as stated by the ACTFL communities goal area, within a Benedictine context, is critical to developing students' capacity to become empathetic leaders who appreciate diverse communities. One way to awaken students' desire to serve the disadvantaged is to create liminal/liminoid encounters with others as part of the language experience. In their practical theology of liminality, Carson et al. (2021) argue that when liminal thresholds are added to the Catholic curriculum, students' imagination "can be fostered by experimentation and asking, 'what if' questions or inviting artistic renditions of the text or activity at hand" (p. 148). These liminal/liminoid encounters should be authentic and meaningful learning experiences, lived within a learning community in a Catholic educational context.

Particularly for faith leaders who wish to serve in diverse congregations, it is not enough to acquire communication skills in the target language; the community experience must awaken a sense of bonding, or camaraderie, with the native members of the larger community and a sense of respect for its culture and history. Saint Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology has addressed this need by engaging in collaborations with educational and faith institutions locally and abroad.

5.1. Local Language Learning Collaborationss

Locally, Saint Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology has incorporated three language learning collaborations into its Spanish program as part of its Catholic curriculum (Table 2).

Table 2. Language Learning Collaborations.

Name	Description
TalkAbroad: Online conversations with natives	Students communicate (in Spanish) with natives from all countries of Latin America through an online platform called TalkAbroad.
Latino/a Presentation Series	Students learn about the culture and history of Latin America through the testimony of Latina/o faith leaders and educators.
Spanish Tables	Native Latina/o students and guests are intentionally included at designated "Spanish tables" during lunch on specific days of the week for all community members who wish to interact in Spanish and learn about Latino culture in a more informal fashion.

5.2. International Learning Collaborations

Saint Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology has also created spaces for global citizenship education by organizing international learning collaborations in the form of pilgrimages and retreats. Students who participate in these international learning collaborations interact and bond with others through authentic religious experiences abroad. These collaborations are learning communities that immerse students in both pre-planned and spontaneous liminal/liminoid encounters as well as a dialogic pedagogy based on multiple narratives and reflection. Table 3 shows three international learning collaborations that currently form part of the Saint Meinrad's curriculum.

Table 3. International Learning Collaborations.

Name	Description
El Camino de Santiago Pilgrimage and Retreat	As students become pilgrims, they deepen their faith and sense of community with their peers and other pilgrims, on the route to Santiago de Compostela. Moreover, non-Latina/o students may realize that there exist many layers of socio-economic and cultural diversity among Hispanics in the world.
Holy Week in Seville, Spain	Students who participate in the Holy Week in the Seville trip learn firsthand about this profoundly religious experience through encounters with others, talks with members of brotherhoods, the *nazarenos*, and visiting local churches and national buildings.
Central American Martyrs Pilgrimage and Retreat	Students on the pilgrimage and retreat to Guatemala experience and learn comparatively about the life of two saints: Blessed Father Stanley Rother **and** Peter of Saint Joseph de Betancur y Gonzáles, OFB (1626–1667), Hermano Pedro. In addition, students on this trip engage in encounters with locals by visiting churches, schools, and national buildings.

6. Benedictine Monastery of Our Lady of Angeles: A Language Learning Community Abroad

6.1. Toward a Benedictine Pedagogy of Community

This last section focuses on the creation of a summer immersion program at a sister Benedictine Monastery of Our Lady of Angels, in Cuernavaca, Mexico. This language learning collaboration has been co-organized by Saint Meinrad Seminary and School of

Theology, this Benedictine Mexican community, and local educators. Even though this immersion program is in Cuernavaca, Mexico, its diverse monastic body is composed of Latin American monks from many countries, and one monk from Spain. The students who attend this Spanish immersion program for eight weeks participate in a variety of learning liminal/liminoid encounters with native locals and members of this diverse monastic community. In line with the ACTFL communities goal area and the Association of Theological Schools (ATS), standards 3.3 and 3.4, the main goal of the language learning community at the Benedictine Monastery of Our Lady of Angels in Cuernavaca, Mexico, is to increase students' cultural sensitivity, global awareness, and engagement in diverse communities by offering opportunities for learning in international contexts.

One advantage of immersion programs over service-learning abroad is the opportunity for reflection embedded in language immersions. As Haynes (2011) argues, "students learn more deeply by coupling concrete experiences with reflective thought" (p. 21). Reflection allows learners to "examine their beliefs and enter into the threshold of discovery"; this brings about an increased knowledge and reinforced dialogue that creates a lifelong learning posture (Carson et al. 2021, p. 148). For as Carson et al. (2021) argue, the idea of discipleship is based on this engaged dialogic pedagogy, "the disciples themselves, including the women, could not have carried on to build the Early Church without this formative practice of learning from Jesus in the years before his death and resurrection" (p. 148). Students in this immersion program learn through daily encounters with locals, native monks or priests, workshops, field trips, pilgrimages, masses, and the Liturgy of the Hour—all in Spanish and locally organized in collaboration with local Latin American teachers and faith leaders. They also have the opportunity to reflect on these encounters and connect these multiple voices to the culture and history of Mexico during classroom instruction. It is also expected that students develop affective ties with and within this language learning community, increasing their willingness to continue to participate and serve in diverse communities.

Table 4 shows the different types of liminal/liminoid learning encounters at the Benedictine summer immersion program in Mexico, by which students are expected to acquire cultural sensitivity.

Table 4. Types of Liminal/Liminoid Learning Encounters.

Types of Liminal/Liminoid Learning Encounters at the Benedictine Monastery of Our Lady of Angels, Cuernavaca, Mexico
• Learning of the local culture through classroom learning and extracurricular activities.
• Singing and praying the Liturgy of the Hour (in Spanish).
• Participating in the choir.
• Having daily informal conversations with native monks, teachers, and lay members of the community.
• Getting to know the locals after service and during their leisure time away from the monastery.
• Participating in guided field trips and pilgrimage with monks, teachers, and their families.
• Participating in candle-making workshops (taught by monks).
• Harvesting coffee with the monks.
• Picking and storing avocados with the monks.
• Cooking and helping in the kitchen.
• Playing games and participating in sports with the monks and lay members of the community.

As Langat and Addington (2018) argue, it is not enough simply to invite culturally and ethnically diverse students and resources into a classroom space to develop cultural competency (p. 9). Instead, they propose counterbalancing asymmetric power relations through practices of hospitality and submission to the other (p. 9). Because the lived experiences and reflective activities of students at this collaborative language immersion are imbued with the Benedictine value of hospitality, it is expected that the students develop affective bonds with the members of this community, transforming learners' self-representations and shaping their ways of being in the world.

Matthew Maruggi's (2015) theory of kaleidoscopic learning measures students' attitudes of solidarity toward members of underserved communities. Following anthropologist Diane M. Nelson, Maruggi (2015) has adopted the notion of "fluidarity" as a replacement of the more controversial notion of solidarity (p. 300). In the kaleidoscope, he argues, three types of narratives are interconnected through dialogue. The first narrative represents the students' own reflections "upon their own life stories in terms of social and spiritual identity development and sense of change agency" (Maruggi 2015, p. 313). The second narrative represents the alternative stories of others, multiple voices in the form of testimonies and through meaningful dialogue. The third narrative represents what Maruggi calls "narratives of liberatory religion and spirituality" (Maruggi 2015, p. 313). These are memoirs and biographies of minority leaders, such as Martin Luther King, Jr., Dorothy Day, and Cesar Chavez, that decenter homogenizing historical narratives, creating "both personal and social transformation that is counterhegemonic as opposed to perpetuating systems of domination" (Maruggi 2015, p. 313). Maruggi's theory is based on Paulo Freire's idea of the narrative character of education and the importance of dialogue in learning (p. 312). This exploratory work departs from Maruggi's theoretical underpinnings by defining solidarity, or fluidarity, in terms of the ACTFL goal area of communities and placing all these learning collaborations within Benedictine contexts, thus imbuing these experiences with the Benedictine value of hospitality.

6.2. Findings and Results

Students who participated in this Spanish language immersion were asked to complete a post-immersion survey questionnaire to evaluate many aspects of their immersion experience. This section shows responses of a small sample of seven students to two critical questions from this post-immersion survey questionnaire. These two critical questions were designed to look into students' experiences and shed light on how this experimental pedagogy may lead to the forging of affective bonds, of solidarity, and ultimately of a sense of community with others from a different culture, in this case within a diverse Mexican community. Therefore, because this specific immersion program in Mexico is still in its experimental phase, this section provides an exposition of selected students' responses to two key questions: (1) Would you say that your immersion experience abroad affected the way you think/feel about other cultures? If so, how? (2) Do you feel that your immersion experience made you better equipped to lead Latino congregations in the future? Following Maruggi's theoretical structure, these two critical questions are based on three key narratives: the students' own experiences of transformation and self-reflection; the alternative stories and multiple voices experienced through liminal/liminoid encounters, including the meaningful dialogues with others; and historical accounts about the culture and history of Mexico, learned more formally during classroom instruction. Tables 5 and 6 contain the responses of this selected sample of seven students, who participated in the program either in 2021 or 2022. For privacy purposes the students' names have been omitted, and they will be known as student A, B, C, D, E, F, and G.

Table 5. Question #1.

Question #1: Would You Say that Your Immersion Experience Abroad Affected the Way You Think/Feel about other Cultures? If So, How?	
Student A	If anything, I have a deeper love and respect for my Hispanic brothers and sisters in America, and especially, Alabama. The classes increased my desire to know the Hispanic community and all communities in my area. I attribute this to the teachers and their families. They treated us with love and patience and even a part of their own family.
Student B	Yes. What was best was when the professors decided to meet with us in the afternoons for a conversation hour. This forced us to use our Spanish for a prolonged period of time more than anything else we did in Mexico. The professors would mostly ask us about ourselves and that's what we talked about, ourselves. They were patient, understanding, engaging, y simpáticos.
Student C	Immersion absolutely affected the way I think about other cultures. Interacting with people in the community, taxi drivers, shop owners, families, and the like, helped me understand the importance of relationships within the culture, especially familial relationships.
Student D	Yes, I think I have a greater appreciation for the Latino culture and the connections they have through emotion and family. I saw that at work many times in Mexico. I love different cultures and I respect them greatly but I am also more thankful for my own culture now and the comfort I feel when I am able to enjoy interacting and being in my culture.
Student E	This was my first time traveling outside of the United States, Canada, or Western Europe. There are many opportunities that we take for granted that are not extended to individuals from outside the developed West. Aside from this, there really are a lot of cultural similarities between the United States and Latin America.
Student F	The conversation. We would often wander into different topics that required increasingly esoteric vocabulary. Found it to be incredibly effective. It did clear up some of the realities of the current immigration crisis we are having in the united states. I can say that I have a new empathy for the immigrant now. The many interactions I had with locals would often circle back to discussions dealing with this matter.
Student G	My favorite part about the program were the excursions we did with the teachers and the afternoon one-on-one conversations. Having time outside of the classroom with them was really fruitful and helped build vocabulary associated with actions/contexts that helped solidify them. I absolutely loved the program that we attended and was happy to do so with my fellow seminarians. Having a communal context already established while coming into the program helped ease the transition.

Table 6. Question #2.

Question #2: Do you Feel that Your Immersion Experience Made You Better Equipped to Lead Latino Congregations in the Future?	
Student A	Yes. I am more confident in speaking Spanish with those who do not speak English well or at all. We were not only taught the language, but we learned about their history and culture. It helped me learn Spanish, fueled a desire to know Spanish in order to communicate with more of God's people, and I built relationships that I feel will last a lifetime all while being in a beautiful country that offers so much
Student B	Just by comparing the differences between America and Mexico did the good and bad things about them. I certainly have more respect and sympathy for Mexican culture than I did before.
Student C	Respect: I wish Americans were more family and community oriented like Mexicans are. Furthermore, the people in Mexico were all very patient when speaking with me, and they were willing to help me.
Student D	I know that everyone is different, but for me, at my age, I do not believe that I would have had any level of success without being in community with my fellow seminarians. Having that encouragement and help made all the difference. My goal is to know enough Spanish to communicate, and to understand the Latino culture as well as I can so that I can minister to those in my Archdiocese effectively. I am happy that Saint Meinrad is offering a Spanish Mass practicum and being proactive in its approach to helping those of us who desire to minister to immigrants from Latin America.
Student E	I am happy to say that I now try to understand and be sensitive to those emotions from all cultures.
Student F	On the whole I was very pleased with my immersion experience. For me personally, I think I am at a level where I need to continue finding opportunities to practice conversation, which can be hard to find in the Midwest. I also hope that I can be placed in a parish that offers the sacraments in Spanish when I am assigned somewhere in theology III next year.
Student G	Yes, it has made me much more aware of the different mindsets and context that people bring with them into interactions with others. Meaning that cultural norms and expectations need to be accounted for when trying to convey an idea to someone. I already had some knowledge about this, but to exercise it over so long a period was really fruitful.

The response portions that appear in Tables 5 and 6 above underscore students' willingness to participate in language learning collaborations beyond their immersion experience. Responses to both questions reveal an increase in students' interest in continuing to interact and collaborate in multicultural communities and the globalized world. The responses indicate that standard 5.1 of the ACTFL communities goal area, school and global communities, as outlined in Table 1, has been met. This is evident in expressions such as the following:

- "*Increased my desire* to know the Hispanic community"
- "I certainly *have more respect and sympathy* for Mexican culture"
- "*Helped me understand* the importance of relationships within the culture, especially *familial relationships*"
- "I have a *greater appreciation* for the Latino culture and *the connections* they have through emotion and family"
- "There really are a lot of *cultural similarities* between the United States and Latin America"
- "*I have a new empathy* for the immigrant now [because of] the many interactions I had with locals"
- "*Having a communal context* already established while coming into the program helped ease the transition"

Likewise, standard 5.2 of the ACTFL communities goal area, lifelong learning, as outlined in Table 1, is also evident in students' responses to these two critical questions.

The following expressions, taken from Tables 5 and 6, highlight students' willingness to continue to learn the target language, Spanish:

- "*fueled a desire* to know Spanish in order to communicate with more of God's people, and I built relationships"
- "*I wish* Americans were more family and *community oriented like Mexicans* are"
- *"My goal is to know* enough Spanish to communicate, and to understand the Latino culture as well as I can so that I can minister to those in my Archdiocese effectively"
- "I need to continue finding opportunities to practice conversation"
- "*it has made me much more aware* of the different mindsets and context that people bring with them into interactions with others"

7. Conclusions

This work outlines a Benedictine pedagogy of community that underscores the importance of language learning collaborations in the development of students' cultural sensitivity within a Benedictine network. It focuses on one specific institution of learning, St. Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology, a seminary located in southern Indiana, which was founded in 1857 by monks of the Benedictine order of Einsiedeln in Switzerland.

In this work 'communities' is defined in accordance with the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), as the ability to interact and collaborate in multilingual local and global communities. The cultivation of community becomes critical for future faith leaders who aspire to serve in underserved congregations in the Midwest region of the United States.

This work defines Benedictine hospitality as an active welcoming of others and discusses its relevance for Catholic education today through the lens of the Catholic social teaching of solidarity, including the theme of option for the poor, two necessary values for the formation of culturally sensitive faith leaders. Following Matthew Maruggi, it is argued that the first step in the acquisition of cultural sensitivity is a sense of solidarity.

However, dialogical theories of pedagogy that assume ideal conditions, or symmetrical relationships, fail to consider the asymmetrical power relations between non-Latina/o students and the Latina/o members of underserved communities. The creation of liminal/liminoid encounters as part of the Catholic curriculum can disrupt asymmetric power relations and lead to meaningful dialogue. Together with a dialogic pedagogy that includes multiple alternative voices and reflection, liminal/liminoid encounters may lead to the cultivation of community in students.

The final section sheds light on how this Benedictine pedagogy of community is applied to one specific language learning collaboration. This is an experimental Spanish language learning immersion that takes place at the Benedictine Monastery of Our Lady of Angels, in Cuernavaca, Mexico. Based on a small sample of seven students' responses to two critical questions from a survey questionnaire, it is suggested that students who participated in this program developed a sense of solidarity and a willingness to interact and collaborate with and within multicultural communities locally and abroad. Despite these encouraging findings, this small sample is not generalizable, and it only represents the experiences of these seven students in this specific Benedictine setting. Due to the preliminary nature of these results and the small student sample, it is suggested that further research is needed to draw generalizations and shed light on the relevance of the ACTFL's goal area of communities, particularly in the context of Catholic education.

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

Notes

[1] Although common usage of the term Midwest may add or subtract various states, the US Census Bureau defines the region as the states of Kansas, Nebraska, North and South Dakota, Minnesota, Iowa, and Missouri to the west and Wisconsin, Illinois, Michigan, Indiana, and Ohio to the east (Dieterlen 2015, p. 8).

[2] Either in the form of verbal messages, such as "Go back to Mexico", or "getting beaten up by Anglo gangs".

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Article

Teaching Mariology in Catholic Seminaries in the USA

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Abstract: This article begins by explaining the importance of Mariology for Catholic theology. It provides an overview of a 2015–2016 survey of 32 Catholic seminaries in the USA on how Mariology is covered in the curriculum. It then examines documents of the Congregation for Catholic Education on the teaching of Mariology in Catholic seminaries. It also looks at what the sixth edition of the US Bishops' Program for Priestly Formation (2022) says about Mariology and Marian devotion in seminary formation. The article discusses why some believe Mariology should be covered in Ecclesiology because of Vatican II's choice to integrate Mariology into Lumen Gentium, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church. Whether Mariology can be adequately covered in courses in Ecclesiology is then considered. The article ends with a recommendation for having Mariology taught as a required stand-alone course in all Catholic seminaries.

Keywords: Mariology; Vatican II; seminaries; Congregation for Catholic Education; Program for Priestly Formation

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1. Introduction

This article has a narrow but important focus. It seeks to explore the teaching of Mariology in Catholic seminaries in the USA. Mariology refers to the systematic study of the Blessed Virgin Mary within Catholic theology. Although Marian devotion has been part of Catholic life since apostolic times, systematic Mariology only began in the late 16th century with the Jesuit, Francisco Suárez (1548–1617), who has been called "the founder of systematic or scholastic Mariology." (O'Carroll 2000, p. 334; Bover 1948, pp. 167–68) The actual term "Mariology" first appeared in 1602 with the publication of *Summa sacrae mariologiae pars prima* by Placido Nigido (c. 1570–1650) (Hauke 2021, p. 91; O'Carroll 2000, p. 231). From the 17th century to the present, Mariology has been considered a distinct discipline within Catholic dogmatic theology.

Why is Mariology important for Catholic education? In his 1988 apostolic letter, *Mulieris dignitatem*, Pope John Paul II notes that the Blessed Virgin Mary is at the center of salvation history:

> "When the time had fully come, *God sent forth his son, born of woman"*. With these words of his Letter to the Galatians (4:4), the Apostle Paul links together the principal moments which essentially determine the fulfilment of the mystery "pre-determined in God" (cf. *Eph* 1:9). The Son, the Word one in substance with the Father, becomes man, born of a woman, at "the fullness of time". This event leads *to the turning point* of man's history on earth, understood as salvation history. . . . Thus there begins *the central event, the key event in the history of salvation:* the Lord's Paschal Mystery. . . . A woman is to be found *at the center of this salvific event*. (John Paul II 1988: no. 3)

According to St. John Paul II, the Blessed Virgin Mary is at the very center of salvation history, and, therefore, at the center of the Catholic faith. Is, though, the Blessed Virgin Mary at the center of Catholic education? After the Second Vatican Council, concerns were raised whether Mariology was being given adequate treatment in Catholic institutions of

higher education and seminaries. From the late 1960s, many Catholic seminaries began to downplay the importance of Mariology as a required course or as a required component of the academic curriculum (Neumann 1972, pp. 12–38). This downplaying of Mariology coincided with a noted decline in Marian devotion. Some saw Vatican II as a victory for ecclesiocentric Mariology, which understood the Virgin Mary in relation to the Church rather than in relation to Christ and the work of redemption. In a book originally published in German in 1980, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger observed that "the immediate outcome of the victory of ecclesiocentric Mariology was the collapse of Mariology altogether" (Ratzinger and von Balthasar 2005, p. 24).

On 25 March 1988, the Congregation for Catholic Education [CCE] issued a letter entitled, *The Virgin Mary in Intellectual and Spiritual Formation*. This letter came in the midst of the 1987–1988 Marian Year proclaimed by St. John Paul II and it was addressed to "theological faculties, to seminaries and to other centers of ecclesiastical studies" (CCE 1988: Introduction). It notes that its message is not restricted to the Marian Year. Instead, "the promotion of knowledge, research and piety with regard to Mary of Nazareth . . . must be permanent since the exemplary value and mission of the Virgin are permanent" (CCE 1988: Introduction).

I have been teaching at a major Catholic seminary since 1999, and I teach Mariology as an elective course. I am also a member of the Mariological Society of America (MSA) and the Pontifical Marian Academy International (*Pontificia Academia Mariana Internationalis*=PAMI). I know that members of both the MSA and PAMI have raised concerns over whether future priests are being given adequate formation in Mariology.

On 16 October 2015, a Marian Forum took place at the International Marian Research Institute in Dayton, Ohio on the theme, "Teaching Mariology in Catholic Seminaries." I was one of the two speakers along with Fr. Benedict O'Cinnsalaigh, Rector of the Athenaeum/Mt. St. Mary's Seminary in Cincinnati, Ohio. In preparation for the Forum, I began a survey of 35 major (graduate) Catholic seminaries in the USA. The survey was my own initiative. I received no funding or institutional support. As a Catholic seminary professor in the USA, I was aware of what states had major seminaries and which did not. The 35 seminaries I selected for the survey included all graduate seminaries in the USA for training diocesan priests and the graduate seminaries for certain religious orders.

2. The Results of the 2015–2016 Survey on the Teaching of Mariology in US Catholic Seminaries

I ultimately received responses from 32 (Appendix A) out of the 35 seminary deans I contacted (24 replied prior to the 16 October 2015 Forum and 8 afterwards). Of the 32 seminaries, 26 were seminaries for diocesan priests (although 5 of these were affiliated with religious orders). The other six replies came from seminaries/schools of theology with seminary formation primarily conducted for religious congregations (two for Jesuits, two for Dominicans, one for the Congregation of Holy Cross, and one for the Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter). The survey consisted of four questions with an optional section reserved for further comments. The first question was:

1. Does your seminary have a required stand-alone Mariology course for all candidates for priestly ordination? If so, how many credits?

Responses: Nine responding seminaries had a required stand-alone Mariology class required for all candidates for priestly ordination. One had a 1-credit required course; two had a 1.5-credit required course; four had a 2-credit required course; and two had a 3-credit required course. One seminary had a 2-credit required course in Mariology for seminarians pursuing the S.T.B. degree but not for the others. Six other seminaries had required courses with Mariology or Mary mentioned in the course title. These courses ranged from 2–3 credits. Two of these had the required course entitled "Ecclesiology and Mariology." One had "Christology and Mariology." One had "Mariology and Eschatology"; another had "Mary and the Saints"; and another had "Ecclesiology, Mission, and Mariology."

The second question was:

2. If you do not have a single stand-alone required Mariology course, do you have any required courses that cover Mariology? If so, what course or courses in your required curriculum are expected to cover Mariology and how much time is devoted in these classes to Mariology?

Responses: Of the seminaries that did not have a required course either exclusively on Mariology or a required course with Mariology or Mary in the title, all but two stated that Mariology was treated to some extent in the required courses. Eight stated that the required courses in Ecclesiology cover Mariology with 1–2 classes or 2–4 h expected as the amount of time to be given to Mariology. Five mentioned Mariology as being mostly covered in Christology; another mentioned Mariology being treated in the required course on Liturgy, and another mentioned Mariology being treated in the history of dogma. Others mentioned several required classes in which Marian themes are touched on.

The third question was:

3. If you do not have a single stand-alone Mariology course requirement, do you have a Mariology elective that seminarians can take? If so, how many credits is this elective and how often is it offered?

Responses: All but one of the seminaries that do not have a required course in Mariology had electives either in Mariology alone or in classes that treat Mariology (e.g., an elective on the third part of Aquinas' *Summa theologiae*). Most of the seminaries without a required course in Mariology offered a 2–3 credit elective in Mariology once every 2–3 years (so all seminarians will have the opportunity to take an elective on Mariology). Several deans mentioned that most seminarians take the Mariology elective even though it is not required. One dean, in fact, estimated that 95% of the seminarians in his seminary take the Mariology elective. One dean, however, reported that the Mariology elective is offered "rarely," and another said it is offered on "an irregular basis."

The fourth question was:

4. Does your seminary have any programs or opportunities for Marian devotions to supplement the Marian themes contained within the liturgical calendar and the Liturgy of the Hours? (Examples of such devotions would be communal Rosary recitations, Marian consecrations, novenas, etc.).

Responses: 22 of the deans mentioned communal recitation of the Rosary being performed in their seminaries or in affiliated houses of formation. In a few cases, these are required during October and May or on certain Marian feast days. Most of the communal Rosary recitations were voluntary, but they were very popular. Eight deans mentioned special devotions connected to the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe; three mentioned the Immaculate Conception as the Patronal Feast of their seminaries; and three noted special devotions connected with the Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes. Six deans mentioned the recitation of the Angelus as either mandatory (3) or voluntary (3). Four mentioned special Marian processions; two mentioned opportunities for Marian pilgrimages; five mentioned Marian Novenas, and five mentioned communal May crownings of Mary. Three seminaries had Marian groups that seminarians can join (e.g., the Legion of Mary, *Militia Immaculata).* Six seminaries provided programs preparing for the total consecration to Mary according to St. Louis de Montfort on a voluntary basis. One seminary recited the Akathist Marian Hymn on a regular basis, and one seminary participated in Advent Stations that have a significant Mariological component.

Finally, there was an optional section for "further comments." Only a few deans answered this section. Several wished to explain the nature of their curricula and how Mariology is expected to be covered in a variety of courses. Several mentioned they are currently undergoing curriculum review and are considering having Mariology as a required course.

3. Comments on the Survey

The most encouraging result of the survey was the level of participation, which was slightly over 91%. Another encouraging sign was the opportunity for (or requirement of) Marian devotions outside the liturgical calendar or the Liturgy of the Hours. In quite a few cases, though, these devotions seemed to be voluntary or student initiated. With

regard to the teaching of Mariology, only 9 out of the 32 seminaries responding had required stand-alone courses in Mariology, which would be 28%. Another six, though, had required courses with "Mariology" or "Mary" in required course titles, which increases the percentage to 47%. Of the remaining seminaries, all but one had elective courses in either Mariology alone or in classes that treat Mariology extensively. Two of the deans, though, reported that the Mariology elective is offered only rarely or on an irregular basis. In spite of these exceptions, 29 out of the 32 seminaries responding had either required courses or regularly offered electives in Mariology (or electives with extensive coverage of Mariology) in their curricula. This means that slightly over 90% of the seminaries responding provided opportunities for the study of Mariology on a regular basis.

While this might seem to be encouraging, the fact remains that only 28% of the seminaries believe Mariology is important enough to have a stand-alone course in Mariology required for all those preparing for priestly ordination. In terms of the *required* curriculum, most seminaries do not include Mariology—even though it is given some treatment in other required courses such as Ecclesiology and Christology. Nevertheless, 28% in the 2015 survey is an improvement over the 15.4% of the responding seminaries, theological faculties, and theologates that required Mariology as an independent course according to the 1994 survey by Fr. Johann Roten, S.M. (Roten 1994, p. 235).

4. The Expectations of the Magisterium with Regard to the Teaching of Mariology in Catholic Seminaries

In the 1950s, manuals of dogmatic theology used in Catholic seminaries treated Mariology as a distinct topic following Christology. For example, the Spanish Jesuits in their *Sacrae Theologiae Summa* had a distinct *Tractatus* on *Mariologia* authored by P. Joseph de Aldema, S.J., which is 129 pages long (De Aldema et al. 1950, pp. 196–216). Fr. Ludwig Ott, in his *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma* (first published In German in 1952), likewise treats Mariology in a distinct section following Christology (Ott 2018, pp. 212–33).

After Vatican II, there was the widespread impression that Mariology should not be treated as a separate required course but integrated into other courses, especially Ecclesiology. Such an approach was thought to be more in line with the 29 October 1963 decision made at Vatican II—by a vote of 1114 to 1074—to integrate the Marian schema into the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* (*Lumen Gentium*). Some theologians believed that Vatican II "saw a danger in treating Mariology too much in isolation" preferring instead to link Mary's role more closely with the Church, which was "the main theme of the Council" (Dulles 1966, p. 13). This was often accompanied by a similar neglect of Marian devotions. The National Conference of Catholic Bishops (now the USCCB) responded to this de-emphasis on Marian piety by its 1973 pastoral letter, *Behold Your Mother: Woman of Faith*. Paul VI's 1974 apostolic exhortation, *Marialis Cultus*, can also be seen as a response to a more widespread decline in Marian devotion in the Church.

In terms of seminary formation, the decline in Marian doctrine and devotion was addressed by the Congregation for Catholic Education [CCE], which, until January 16, 2013, oversaw seminary formation for the Catholic Church. Since 1980, it has made three important interventions regarding the need for seminaries to give more attention to Marian doctrine and devotion.

The first of these came on January 6, 1980 when the CCE issued a *Circular Letter Concerning Some of the More Urgent Aspects of Spiritual Formation in Seminaries*. This letter underlines "four of the most urgent guidelines which the work of spiritual formation for future priests ought to follow" (CCE 1980: II. Guidelines). One of these urgent guidelines points to the need for a seminary to be "a school of filial love toward her who is the Mother of Jesus and whom Christ gave to us as our mother" (CCE 1980: II. Guidelines, 4). The letter notes that Marian devotion "must not merely be a pietistic and sentimental note attached to spiritual formation" but "an integral part of the formation program of a seminary" (CCE 1980: II Guidelines, 4). The *Letter* also underscores the importance of a proper teaching of Mariology, which is a matter of fidelity to the "Marian mystery" (CCE 1980: II Guidelines,

4). It states that "Christology is also Mariology" and proper devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary "can and must be a guarantee against everything which would tend to eradicate the historicity of the mystery of Christ" (CCE 1980: II Guidelines, 4). In addition to *Lumen Gentium* of Vatican II (1964), the *Letter* recommends study of Paul VI's 1974 exhortation, *Marialis Cultus*, and the writings of St. Louis Grignion de Montfort (1673–1716).

The second intervention of the Congregation was the 1988 letter entitled, *The Virgin Mary in Intellectual and Spiritual Formation*. This document was addressed to "theological faculties, to seminaries and to other centers of ecclesiastical studies" (CCE 1988: Introduction). The document sought to implement St. John Paul II's hope for the Marian Year, especially as expressed in his 1987 encyclical, *Redemptoris Mater* [RM] which sought to give an authentic understanding of what Vatican II taught about the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, in the mystery of Christ and the Church (John Paul II 1987: no. 48).

The 1988 CCE document deserves careful reading. In the present context, though, a number of passages should be emphasized with a few highlighted phrases:

- Considering the importance of the Virgin in the history of salvation and in the life of the people of God, and after the promptings of Vatican Council II and the Popes, **it would be unthinkable that the teaching of Mariology be obscured today: it is necessary, therefore, that it be given its just place in seminaries and theological faculties** (no. 27).

  Such teaching, consisting of a "systematic treatment" will be:

- *Organic*, that is, inserted adequately in the program of studies of the theological curriculum.
- *Complete,* so that the person of the Virgin be considered in the whole history of salvation, that is, in her relation to God; to Christ, the Word Incarnate, Savior and Mediator; to the Holy Spirit, the Sanctifier and Giver of life; to the Church, sacrament of salvation; and to man—in his origins and his development in the life of grace, and his destiny to glory.
- *Suited* to the various types of institutions (centers of religious culture, seminaries, theological faculties) . . . (no. 28).
- It is necessary, therefore, that every center of theological study—according to its proper physiogomy—plan that, in its *Ratio studiorum,* the teaching of Mariology be included, having the characteristics listed above; and, consequently, with the teachers of Mariology being properly qualified (no. 30).
- With this letter the Congregation for Catholic Education wishes to reaffirm the necessity of furnishing seminarians and students of all centers of ecclesiastical studies with Mariological formation which embraces study, devotion and life-style. **They must: (a) acquire a complete and exact knowledge of the doctrine of the Church about the Blessed Virgin Mary** . . . . (b) nourish an *authentic love* for the Mother of the Savior and Mother of mankind . . . . (c) develop the *capacity to communicate* such love to the Christian people through speech, writing and example, so that their Marian piety may be promoted and cultivated (no. 34).

The third intervention of the Congregation was its 15 December 2008 summary report of the 2005–2006 Apostolic Visitation of the U.S. seminaries and houses of formation. In Section 7 dealing with intellectual formation, the CCE states: "The programs of theology are usually well-thought out. Yet, nearly all Visitation reports noted lacunae in the programs. **Mariology** and Patristics were frequently mentioned as being among these lacunae" (emphasis added). The report goes on to say that "the Congregation realizes that it is sometimes not easy to fit in all required disciplines into the seminary schedule with its many demands . . . Nevertheless, all candidates for the priesthood must have a solid, basic grasp of the **main branches of theology**. If, to allow for **this fundamental teaching**, it should be necessary to prune away some in-depth specialized courses or electives, or to limit the seminarians' pastoral experiences, then this should be done" (emphasis added) (CCE 2008: no. 7). It is very clear from this report that the CCE considers Mariology

fundamental to the theological formation of future priests. The pruning away of electives is one of the ways recommended by the Congregation for the coverage of Mariology, which was frequently mentioned as one of the lacunae in programs of theology in U.S. seminaries. These comments of the 2008 report manifest a concern regarding the lack of sufficient attention to Mariology in seminary curricula in the USA.

Beginning 4 August 2022, Catholic seminaries in the USA are expected to follow the Sixth Edition of the *Program for Priestly Formation* [PPF], which received recognition from the Congregation for Catholic Clergy on 22 March 2022 (Program for Priestly Formation 2022: x). The PPF in no. 256, following canon law (CIC, c. 246§3; CCEO, 346§2.5), states: "Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, and to the saints must be encouraged." This promotion of devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary is complemented by the need for the study of Mariology in the core of dogmatic theology. The PPF, in no. 328 states:

> In dogmatic theology, the core **must** include theology of the Blessed Trinity, Christology, pneumatology, creation, the Fall and the nature of sin, redemption, grace, and the human person, ecclesiology, sacraments, eschatology, **Mariology** and missiology. A separate course on Holy Orders, with a thorough study of the nature and mission of the ministerial priesthood including a history and theology of celibacy, is required (emphasis mine).

In the above-cited passage from the PPF, no. 328, there is a footnote (n. 396) following the mention of Mariology. This footnote is to the 1988 letter of the Congregation for Catholic Education [CCE], *The Virgin Mary in Intellectual and Spiritual Formation*. This 1988 document, therefore, provides the background for the inclusion of Mariology in the core of the dogmatic theology program for Catholic seminaries in the USA. Although the PPF does not state explicitly that there must be a required course in Mariology, the footnote to the 1998 document of the CCE would indicate the need for coverage of Mariology that is organic and complete.

Before moving to a conclusion, two factors should be treated: Vatican II's approach to Mariology and whether Mariology can be adequately treated when integrated into other courses.

5. How Should Mariology Be Covered in a Catholic Seminary's Curriculum?

Because the Fathers of Vatican II opted by a vote of 1114 to 1074 to integrate the Marian schema into the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* (*Lumen Gentium*), some Catholics believe that Mariology should be included in ecclesiology courses rather than as a separate required course in seminaries. This approach, though, fails to understand that *Lumen Gentium* considers Mary not only in relation to the Church (nos. 60–65) but also in relation to the economy of salvation (nos. 55–59) and devotion (nos. 66–67). It is also important to understand the reasons for the vote in favor of including Mary in the *Dogmatic Constitution of the Church*. The following reasons should be considered:

1. The vote for the integration of the Marian *schema* into *Lumen Gentium* was actually a return to an earlier plan of integration that was in force from October 1960 until January 1962. The theological commission, however, opted for a separate document after receiving the *schema* from the drafting committee in January 1962. The theological commission approved the *schema* as a separate document on 23 November 1962. In September 1963, seven council Fathers, however, requested a return to the earlier plan for integration. A vote was taken on this request on 29 October 1963 with the option for inclusion being adopted by a vote of 1114 to 1074 (O'Carroll 2000, pp. 352–53). To see the vote for inclusion as a major shift in Catholic Mariology is, I believe, reading too much into what took place at the council.
2. Prior to the vote for inclusion of 29 October 1963, two Cardinals were chosen to present the respective arguments in favor of a separate Marian document and in favor of integrating the Marian *schema* into the Constitution on the Church. Cardinal Santos of Manila argued in favor of a separate document and Cardinal König of Vienna

argued for integration. Both Cardinals agreed that there was a very close connection between Mary and the Church. Cardinal Santos, however, citing St. Bernard of Clairvaux, argued that Mary is not merely a member of the Church but one who freely cooperated in the establishment of the very existence of the Body of the Church. Mariology, moreover, pertains not only to ecclesiology but also to Christology and soteriology. Including the treatment of Mary in the constitution on the Church could give the impression that the council was opting for "Ecclesio-typical" Mariology over "Christo-typical" Mariology. Cardinal König said he had no disagreement with the points made by Cardinal Santos. He noted, though, that the Church was a central theme of the council and integrating Mariology into the constitution on the Church would highlight Mary's role as "the most sublime cooperatrix of Christ in both the accomplishment and the propagation of the work of salvation through his grace." The integration of the Marian schema into the constitution of the Church would not, therefore, be an option in favor of an "ecclesio-typical Mariology, in which the Blessed Virgin is only shown as a member of the Church among other members passively receiving the fruits of the Redeemer." Rather, Mary, with the Church, actively cooperates with Christ in the distribution of the fruits of redemption. The arguments presented by both Cardinal Santos and Cardinal König manifest general agreement. At no point do they ever argue that Mariology should be reduced to ecclesiology. In fact, they both resist this view (*Acta Synodalia* 1972, pp. 338–45; my translations).

3. The Blessed Mother's intimacy with the Church is based on her intimacy with Christ. Just as we cannot separate Mary from Christ, we cannot separate the Church from Mary. Pope Benedict XVI expressed this understanding in his homily of 8 December 2005 commemorating the fortieth anniversary of the solemn closing of Vatican II. In this homily, he recalls Paul VI's 21 November 1964 proclamation of Mary as Mother of Church, and he says, "Indelibly printed in my memory is the moment when, hearing his words: '*Mariam Sanctissimam declaramus Matrem Ecclesiae*'—'We declare Mary the Most Holy Mother of the Church', the Fathers spontaneously rose at once and paid homage to the Mother of God, to our Mother, to the Mother of the Church, with a standing ovation." He continues by stating that with this title, Paul VI "summed up the Marian teaching of the Council and provided the key to understanding it. . . . Mary is so interwoven in the great mystery of the Church that she and the Church are inseparable, just as she and Christ are inseparable" (Benedict XVI 2005).
4. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* does not present Mariology as merely a component of ecclesiology. In fact, it treats the Marian dogmas of the Immaculate Conception, divine maternity, and perpetual virginity immediately after Christology (CCC, 487–511).
5. The 43rd edition of Denzinger-Hünermann (2010), following the example of other standard theological manuals, includes Mariology in its systematic index between Christology and soteriology.
6. The perception that Vatican II mandated an "ecclesio-typical" Mariology had a negative impact on Marian devotion and doctrine after the Council. In his co-authored book, *Mary, The Church at the Source*, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger argues that post-conciliar misunderstandings of what Vatican II actually taught about Mary led to some unfortunate results. He points out "that the new, ecclesiocentric Mariology . . . remained foreign, precisely to those Council Fathers who had been the principal upholders of Marian piety" (Ratzinger and von Balthasar 2005, p. 24). Paul VI's declaration of Mary as "Mother of the Church" at the end of the Council "was a conscious effort to answer the crisis that was already looming on the horizon" (ibid.). Cardinal Ratzinger then states that "the immediate outcome of the victory of ecclesiocentric Mariology was the collapse of Mariology altogether" (ibid.). Paul VI's 1974 apostolic exhortation, *Marialis Cultus*, was an attempt to set in motion a "rethinking" of how the Marian doctrine of Vatican II was being perceived (Ratzinger and von Balthasar 2005, p. 25). According to Ratzinger, "we cannot assign Mariology to Christology alone or to ecclesiology alone (much less dissolve it into ecclesiology as a more or less

superfluous exemplification of the Church) . . . Mariology goes beyond the framework of ecclesiology and at the same time is correlative to it" (Ratzinger and von Balthasar 2005, p. 29)

7. In *Lumen Gentium,* 54, we are told that the Council "does not have in mind, however, to give a complete doctrine on Mary, nor to decide those questions which the work of theologians has not yet fully clarified." While any class on Mariology must include *Lumen Gentium*, chapter eight, it would be wrong to believe that covering this chapter in an ecclesiology course provides sufficient coverage of Catholic Mariology. In its 1988 document, the Congregation for Catholic Education specifically mentions the importance of covering Paul VI's *Marialis Cultus* and John Paul II's *Redemptoris Mater*. Moreover, there are so many other important documents on Mariology prior to Vatican II that merit study.

6. Can Mariology Be Adequately Covered When Integrated into Other Required Courses?

When Mariology is offered as an elective, not all students are able to fit this elective into their programs. The question, then, is whether Mariology can be adequately covered in the core of required courses without a distinct required course. At my own seminary, Mariology is expected to be chiefly covered in Ecclesiology. Having taught Ecclesiology for some 23 years, I can testify that it is impossible to cover Mariology according to the characteristics listed by the CCE in its 1988 letter (i.e., organic, complete, and suited to the needs of seminarians) as simply part of a course in Ecclesiology.

The study of Mariology, to be complete, must include a systematic investigation of Mary in Sacred Scripture and the development of the principal Marian doctrines (her perpetual virginity, her status as the Mother of God, her Immaculate Conception, her Assumption, and her association with Christ in the work of redemption and the life of the Church). Students should know the development of these doctrines and be familiar with the magisterial documents that support them. A course in Mariology should also cover Mary in the liturgical life of the Church. This is especially important for future priests who will be expected to preach on the Marian solemnities and feasts. Likewise, a course in Mariology must cover Marian spirituality and devotion. It is absolutely essential that future priests be trained to guide the faithful in sound Marian devotion, knowing what Marian prayers, titles, apparitions, and devotions have been approved by the Church. Finally, a course in Mariology should show the importance of Marian doctrine for ecumenism, interreligious dialogue, and anthropology.

From my experience as a seminary professor since 1999, I think a required Mariology course of at least 2 credits is needed to fulfill the expectation of the Magisterium as expressed by the 1988 Letter of the CCE, i.e., a presentation of Marian doctrine that is organic, complete, and suited to the needs of seminarians. From a pedagogical perspective, having a course devoted simply to Mariology allows a more focused approach. Such a required course in no way isolates Mariology from the rest of dogmatic theology. In contrast, it would allow the students to see how important Marian doctrine is to other fields of study such as Christology, ecclesiology, soteriology, anthropology, eschatology, and ecumenism. Having a required course would also commit seminaries to having professors well-trained in Mariology according to the mind of the Magisterium. When Mariology is expected to be covered in diverse classes, there is often a treatment that is fragmented and inconsistent rather than organic and complete. Moreover, not all professors teaching these courses have proper training in Mariology or a sound understanding of Marian doctrine.

7. Conclusions

The 2015–2016 survey of 32 Catholic seminaries in the USA shows some encouraging signs, but the fact remains that only 28% of the seminaries responding at that time required a stand-alone course in Mariology. Although students are given the opportunity to study Mariology either by electives or in other courses that treat Mariology, there are many reasons

to believe that the expectations of the Church expressed in the CCE's 1988 letter, *The Virgin Mary in Intellectual and Spiritual Formation*, are still not adequately being met. Seminaries must always make decisions about required courses according to the best interests of the seminarians and the expectations of the Church. In this regard, the Congregation for Catholic Education in 1988 wrote:

> It is necessary, therefore, that every centre of theological study—according to its proper physiognomy —plan that in its *Ratio studiorum* the teaching of Mariology be included, having the characteristics listed above; and, consequently, with the teachers of Mariology being properly qualified. (no. 30)

Because Mary is the Mother of the Church, Catholic seminaries in the USA must give sufficient honor and attention to Mary, who, according to the CCE's letter just cited, "is not a peripheral figure in our faith and in the panorama of theology; rather, she through her intimate participation in the history of salvation, 'in a certain way unites and mirrors within herself the central truths of the faith'" (CCE 1988: no. 5; *Lumen Gentium*, 65). A required seminary course in Mariology—taught by qualified professors faithful to Catholic doctrine—will insure that future priests can properly instruct and guide the faithful in authentic devotion to Mary, who "occupies a place in the Church which is the highest after Christ and yet very close to us." (*Lumen Gentium*, 54)

The importance of the Blessed Virgin Mary for seminary formation has been noted more recently by the Congregation for the Clergy. In its 8 December 2016 *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*, *The Gift of the Priestly Vocation*, the Congregation states: "Seminarians ought to cultivate an authentic and filial devotion to the Virgin Mary, both through her liturgical celebrations and popular devotions, particularly the recitation of the Holy Rosary and of the Angelus" (Congregation for the Clergy 2016: no. 112). The Congregation then cites St. John Paul, who, in 1992 apostolic exhortation, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, wrote:

> Every aspect of priestly formation can be referred to Mary, the human being who has responded better than any other to God's call. Mary became both the servant and the disciple of the Word to the point of conceiving, in her heart and in her flesh, the Word made man, so as to give him to mankind. (John Paul II 1992: no. 82)

Pope Francis has also recognized the importance of Mariology. In his 4 December 2019 Message to the Pontifical Academies, he gave special attention to the work of the Pontifical Marian Academy International, and he described Mariology as "a necessary presence for dialogue among cultures and is capable of nourishing fraternity and peace" (Pope Franci 2019).

In anticipation of the sixth edition of the US bishops' *Program for Priestly Formation*, I wrote to Cardinal DiNardo, then President of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB 2022); Cardinal Tobin, then chairman of the USCCB's Committee for Clergy, Consecrated Life, and Vocations; the other bishops on this USCCB committee; and Cardinal Beniamino Stella, then prefect of the Congregation for Clergy. I was pleased to receive gracious replies from these important prelates. Although I cannot reveal the contents of their letters, I can say they all affirmed the importance of Marian doctrine and devotion in seminary formation. Several seminary deans have also told me of their desire to require Mariology, but they wish to have faculty support before mandating this requirement.

I believe seminarians and seminary administrators are becoming more aware of the importance of Mariology and Marian devotion. In the wake of the clergy sex abuse scandal, Marian devotion seems even more important for future priests. As Pope Pius XII wrote in 1954,

> The eminent way to protect and nourish an unsullied and perfect chastity, as proven by experience time and again throughout the course of centuries, is solid and fervent devotion to the Virgin Mother of God. . . . Therefore in a paternal

> way We exhort all priests, religious men and women, to entrust themselves to the special protection of the holy Mother of God who is the Virgin of virgins and the "teacher of virginity," as Ambrose says, and the most powerful Mother of those in particular who have vowed and consecrated themselves to the service of God. (Pius XII 1954: no. 64)

Marian doctrine and Marian devotion complement and reinforce each other. A solid grounding in Mariology will help future priests guide the faithful in healthy and sound Marian devotion. Seminarians should recognize the Blessed Mother as their "Mother in the order of grace" (*Lumen Gentium*, 61) and "the teacher of true theology" (Pope Francis 2014). The Blessed Mother teaches us to ponder the mysteries of the faith in our hearts (cf. Lk 2:51). Catholic education cannot ignore the Mother of God. Seminaries are privileged places of Catholic education, and future priests should be properly trained in Mariology. In this way, they will come to love the Blessed Mother more deeply and come to know how she "unites in herself and re-echoes the greatest teachings of the faith" (*Lumen Gentium*, 65).

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Appendix A. Major Seminaries in USA Responding to the Survey

1. Boston College School of Theology and Ministry (includes the ecclesiastical faculty of the former Weston Jesuit School of Theology that prepares members of the Society of Jesus for ordination to the priesthood)
2. Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C. (provides academic training for Theological College, Washington, D.C. and for seminarians of various religious orders and institutes)
3. Dominican House of Studies, Washington, D.C./Pontifical Faculty of the Immaculate Conception
4. Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology, Berkeley, CA
5. Immaculate Conception Seminary, South Orange, NJ
6. Jesuit School of Theology, Berkeley, CA
7. Kenrick Seminary, St. Louis, MO
8. Moreau Seminary, Notre Dame, Indiana (for seminarians of the Congregation of Holy Cross who receive their academic program from the University of Notre Dame)
9. Mount Angel Seminary, Mt. Angel, OR
10. Mount St. Mary's Seminary/Athenaeum of Ohio, Cincinnati, OH
11. Mount St. Mary's Seminary, Emmitsburg, MD
12. Mundelein Seminary/University of St. Mary of the Lake, Mundelein, IL
13. Notre Dame Seminary, New Orleans, LA
14. Oblate School of Theology, St. Antonio, TX
15. Our Lady of Guadalupe Seminary, Denton, NE (for the Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter)
16. Pontifical College Josephinum, Columbus, OH
17. Sacred Heart Major Seminary, Detroit, MI
18. Sacred Heart Seminary and School of Theology, Hales Corner, WI
19. St. Charles Seminary, Philadelphia, PA
20. SS Cyril and Methodius Byzantine Catholic Seminary, Pittsburgh, PA
21. SS Cyril and Methodius Seminary, Orchard Lake, MI
22. St. John's Seminary, Brighton, MA
23. St. John's Seminary, Camarillo, CA
24. St. John Vianney Theological Seminary, Denver, CO
25. St. Joseph's Seminary, Yonkers (Dunwoodie), NY
26. St. Mary's Seminary, Baltimore, MD

27. St. Mary's Seminary, Cleveland, OH
28. St. Mary's Seminary, Houston, TX
29. St. Meinrad Seminary, IN
30. St. Patrick's Seminary, Menlo Park, CA
31. St. Paul's Seminary, St. Paul, MI
32. St. Vincent Seminary, Latrobe, PA

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Kenyan Catholics' Religiosity and Understanding of Marriage on the Basis of Individuals Associated with Shalom Center in Mitunguu: Educational and Pastoral Perspective

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Abstract: This article presents the results of research into religiosity and understanding of marriage among a selected group of young Catholics, all of whom are current students or graduates of Shalom Center in Mitunguu, Kenya. The goal of our study was to determine the correlations between the two variables so as to reach some conclusions and suggestions for religious education and pastoral care. The research made use of Stefan Huber's Centrality of Religiosity Scale, while the respondents' understanding of marriage was analyzed with the use of a questionnaire prepared by the authors of this study. As our research shows, one's Catholic understanding of marriage increases alongside an increase in interest in religiosity and in one's religious convictions, while it does not correlate—or does so only weakly—with a centrality of religiosity. Correlations with centrality occurred more often among men than among women. Mutual connections were most frequent among the youngest group of respondents, those who were up to 20 years of age and current students. This may indicate that religious formation and education of youth in the Shalom Center exerts a clear impact on shaping Catholic views on marriage. With the passing of time, traditional cultural precepts seem to gain prominence among the graduates.

Keywords: marriage; religiosity; Catholic education; pastoral theology; pastoral care of families; empirical theology

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1. Introduction

Marriage is closely connected with God's creation of a human being as a man and a woman (Cf. Gen 2:18–24), and marriage in itself is God's creation (Cf. *Gaudium et spes* 1965, no. 48). Formed "in the image and likeness of God," a human being was created of love and for love (Cf. John Paul II 1981, no. 11). An individual can find the meaning of life and happiness thanks to uncovering and realizing God's plan of love. The Catholic church teaches that a man and a woman constitute two ways of participating in the Divine Being (Congregation for Catholic Education 1983, no. 26), while at the same time underscoring the orientation of human sexuality towards conjugal love: "The human body, marked with the sign of masculinity or femininity, 'includes right from the beginning the nuptial attribute, that is, the capacity of expressing love, that love in which the person becomes a gift and—by means of this gift—fulfils the meaning of his being and his existence'"(Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith 2004, no. 6; John Paul II 1980, no. 1). Thanks to each other, as conjugal partners a man and a woman may discover human predisposition for love inscribed in the human heart as a mutual gift of self. Within the institution of marriage they may also realize their calling for love not as separate individuals but as a couple, as a community of love (Cf. Congregation for Catholic Education 1983, no. 26). Owing to this, they contribute to each other's development, help each other shape their identity, and make each other more of a man/woman (Cf. Francis 2016, no. 221). Despite the emerging attempts to contest

God's intention (See Kowalski 2021), a man and a woman—as internally conditioned for sexual unity and fecundity—through their partner experience community with God in their marriage and participate in God's creative love (Cf. Congregation for Catholic Education 1983, no. 26; Goleń 2022).

The Second Vatican Council emphasizes a personalist vision of marriage, calling it "the intimate partnership of married life and love (. . .) rooted in the conjugal covenant of irrevocable personal consent"(*Gaudium et spes* 1965, no. 48; see Wąsik 2021). The council accentuated the need to overcome a legalist understanding of marriage as a contract for the sake of marriage as a personalist covenant of a man and a woman (See Kobak 2018). Conjugal unity engages a man and a woman as persons in an integral way, that is physically, psychically, and spiritually, both as individuals and socially. In such a take, a vital role is played by the mutual gift that the spouses become for each other. The gift in question is not only of a private character but pertains as well to communal and social life. A marriage between baptized individuals is a sacrament in which the earthly reality is included by God in the dynamics of salvation. In this way, the relationship of a man and a woman married "in the Lord" (1 Cor 7:39) is not severed from the everyday and the worldly but adds a deeper dimension to the earthly realities by situating them in the perspective of eternity. As a complete personal community of life and love rooted in God, marriage constitutes a foundation for high ethical requirements related to the indissolubility of marital union, to conjugal purity, and to openness to life (Cf. Vidal 2005, pp. 104–7; Faggioni 2022). Christian spouses, linked as they are through a covenant of mutual love, faithfulness, and honesty—based both on the divine and sacramental as well as social and cultural realities—aim to realize a twofold goal of marriage, namely mutual help and procreation. The divine mercy heals, perfects, and elevates human love, which not only unites the married couple but also radiates onto the surrounding world, especially through the gift of giving birth to and raising children (Cf. Granados 2014, pp. 52–56).

In Central Africa marriage is often understood and experienced not so much as an event or state of life, but rather as an ongoing process with a rich cultural framework engaging extended family and local community. It encompasses customary, religious, and civil elements. The custom of bridewealth payment is deeply ingrained, with families of the bride and the groom negotiating its amount (Baral et al. 2021, p. 5). Marriage is associated with the development of broad and diverse bonds between the families of the spouses (Manderson and Block 2016, p. 206). Even for Catholics, it is common to first have a traditional wedding and only some time later a church ceremony. One of the reasons for postponing the latter is the fact that it requires a rich and costly set-up. This is related to a general social acceptance of informal and traditional relationships. Strictly civil marriages, however, are almost completely devoid of social validation (Baral et al. 2021, p. 7).

Religiosity may be approached from a theological, philosophical, religious studies, psychological, or sociological perspective. This diversity, on the one hand, constitutes an advantage and opportunity for a multi-faceted understanding of the issue, while on the other it may lead to a lack of terminological or methodological clarity (Cf. Holdcroft 2006, p. 89; Szymczak et al. 2022, pp. 1–2). From a theological perspective, religiosity may be rendered as a virtue of justice towards God, which finds its reflection in worship and obedience towards him (Cf. *Catechismus Catholicae Ecclesiae* 1997, nn. 2095–2103, 2135, 2144; Słomkowski 2000, p. 151). Within social studies, in turn, religiosity is treated as a conglomerate of specific attitudes and behaviors related to faith and to inner and outer religious commitment. A precise study of religiosity, especially a quantitative one, needs to focus on its various dimensions, such as experimental, ritualistic, ideological, intellectual, and consequential—as proposed by Glock and Stark, or the ones enumerated by Chumbler, that is subjective, cognitive, behavioral, social, and cultural (Cf. Holdcroft 2006, pp. 89–91). Huber's idea for the study of centrality of religiosity seems especially valuable with the view of applying the research results to theological and pastoral analyses (Huber and Huber 2012).

Social research shows that in comparison with individuals not identifying with any denomination, Christians and the followers of the majority of other religions evince more traditional attitudes to marriage, its indissolubility, and its unique and key value for the society (See Thornton 1985; Pearce and Thornton 2007; Adamczyk 2013; Halman and Van Ingen 2015; Wilkins-LaFlamme 2016; Aman et al. 2019). Individuals who are more actively involved in religion share more traditional views on marriage (See Jaspers et al. 2007; Finke and Adamczyk 2008; Adamczyk and Pitt 2009; Liefbroer and Rijken 2019). Some studies indicate that living in a religious environment per se has a bearing on more traditional convictions on marriage even among individuals who do not declare themselves as following any particular religion (See Thornton 1985; Moore and Vanneman 2003; Finke and Adamczyk 2008; Adamczyk and Hayes 2012; Wilkins-LaFlamme 2016; Liefbroer and Rijken 2019). This contingency, however, is not universally espoused (See Jaspers et al. 2007; Adamczyk 2008).

Research has confirmed a positive correlation between one's active involvement in a religious community and one's satisfaction with marriage (See Bahr and Chadwick 1985; Willits and Crider 1988; Marks et al. 2016; Dollahite et al. 2017) and a level of support that a family offers to its members (See Ellison and George 1994). Research shows as well that marriages of partners professing the same faith are more stable (See Curtis and Ellison 2002; Lehrer and Chiswick 1993; cf. Bahr 1981, p. 260; Maxwell et al. 2020) and are characterized by a higher level of satisfaction with conjugal life (See Koenig et al. 2001; Olson et al. 2015). Furthermore, religiosity is related to greater involvement in marital life and satisfaction with marriage (See Larson and Goltz 1989; Burr et al. 2012; Mahoney et al. 2001; Sherkat and Ellison 1999; Wieradzka-Pilarczyk and Pilarczyk 2016; Spencer et al. 2021), and it is especially the husbands' higher religiosity that leads to the wives' greater satisfaction with marriage (Rose et al. 2018). One's declaration of belonging to a given denomination does not correlate with the quality of marital life if it does not go hand in hand with religious involvement. However, when partners show a similar level of participation in religious practice, it correlates positively with the quality and stability of their marriage (See Call and Heaton 1997; Curtis and Ellison 2002; cf. Bahr and Chadwick 1985, pp. 410–11; Lakatos and Tamás 2019). The spouses' religiosity is also related to a higher stability (See Call and Heaton 1997) of their marriage and to faithfulness, as well as to a greater level of marital satisfaction and involvement in the relationship (See Bahr and Chadwick 1985; Thomas and Cornwall 1990; Doherty et al. 1998; Langlais and Schwanz 2017; Latifa et al. 2021). What is more, religiosity is linked to a perception of marriage as a holy union. Spiritual intimacy constitutes a resource for the couple, deepening their mutual trust, attachment, emotional safety, and sense of belonging to the spouse (Padgett et al. 2019).

A number of studies show as well that a couple's religiosity correlates positively with their ability to deal with life's problems (See Brody et al. 1994; Ellison et al. 1999; cf. Goodman et al. 2013, pp. 820–21; Pollard et al. 2014; Wendołowska and Czyżowska 2021), even though for some spouses, religiosity may be related to resorting to destructive methods of problem-solving (Sherkat and Ellison 1999; Dollahite et al. 2018).

This article aims to analyze the perception of marriage of young Catholics—students and graduates of the Shalom Center in Mitunguu in Kenya. A key question in this respect is how young people who have received Catholic formation understand marriage and conjugal love. It has been assumed that religiosity (attitudes to Catholicism) affects one's understanding of marriage in Catholic terms. Even though the present research is of a preliminary character and is not based on a representative group of respondents, the results that it generates have significant informative value, especially for religious instruction and pastoral care. If religious formation and the education of youth at the Shalom Center exerts a clear impact on the shaping of Catholic views on marriage, it is imperative that priests and teachers impart it in a proper and responsible way. For this reason, present analysis aims also to point out conclusions and pastoral suggestions for Catholic education and pastoral care of families.

2. Methods and Participants

2.1. Research Design

The research was conducted among individuals associated with the Catholic Shalom Center in Mitunguu in Central Kenya (Cf. Schools—Catholic Diocese of Meru 2022).

The Shalom Home pastoral center is located in Matetu, which is part of the Saint Francis of Assisi parish in Mitunguu, in the diocese of Meru in Meru County, close to the equator in Central Kenya. The center was established in 2011 by Rev. Francis Gaciata, who has been the parish priest since 2008. The Shalom Home pastoral center consists of a center for children who have been orphaned, abandoned, or are in danger of abuse, as well as of primary school, secondary school, and vocational school, which can be attended by outsiders as well. Orphaned children as well as all the teachers and the majority of other employees live in the center, creating a community based on prayer, formation, education, and cooperation. The relatives and friends of those who live in the center are also connected to the place, at times participating in its various events or in the events organized by the parish with the help of the inhabitants of the Shalom Home. The orphaned, abandoned, and vulnerable children who live in the Shalom Home primarily come from the Gakaromone slums in the town of Mitunguu. The Shalom Home took on its first 40 children in 2011. As a result of its dynamic activity, in 2018 it had approximately 400 wards, while at present, in 2022, it has about 500 individuals and 50 teachers and other employees, including two mission and seven religious volunteers. Former wards also keep in touch, sometimes working for the center and receiving help in furthering their education and becoming independent. The center takes care of children and youth from the age of 3 to the age of 25. The Shalom Home pastoral center was established thanks to funding by two Italian charity organizations: Melamango and Val di Sole. At the moment, the activity of the center is also supported in terms of money, organization, and content by the Diakonia for Missions of the Light-Life Movement, through the programme of Remote Adoption and missionary voluntary work (La Loro Storia n.d.; Interview conducted on 19 November 2022 by the authors with the volunteers of the Diakonia for Missions of the Light-Life Movement n.d.).

2.2. Procedure and Participants

As sociological and pastoral studies indicate, "if the starting point of the research project is pastoral theology, an analysis containing all the elements of theological reflection is indispensable in order to maintain its specificity, autonomy and theological identity. Thus, the formulated indications remain in the theological sphere" (Szymczak 2020, p. 523). Empirical research within practical theology follows the model of a three-stage study: the normative stage, the execution stage, and the praxeological stage. The description of the procedure and participants as well as the presentation and analysis of the empirical research results correspond to the second of these, that is the execution stage (Kamiński 2018, p. 35).

The empirical research conducted to date was comprised of two stages: (1) The respondents' religiosity has been studied from a psychological perspective with the use of Stefan Huber's Centrality of Religiosity Scale (which measures the following aspects: intellectual dimension, ideology, public practice, private practice, and religious experience) (see Table 1). (2) The respondents' understanding of marriage has been studied through a survey method with the use of a questionnaire specially designed for the purposes of this study. The questionnaire was composed of 14 close-ended questions (see Table 1).

The questions were created by the authors of this study on the basis of the teaching of the Catholic Church on marriage, sexual morality, and parenthood. Some aspects of the cultural specificity of the region that the respondents came from were also taken into consideration. Subsequently, the choice of questions was verified by competent raters, whereby the team of seven raters was composed of experts in Catholic sexual ethics, theology of marriage and family, practical theology, social psychology, psychology of family, and sociology of family. The accuracy and internal consistency of the survey was measured through Cronbach's alpha, whose value was established at 0.68, while the average correlation between the statements was 0.20.

Table 1. Research tools—descriptive statistics.

Marriage Understanding Questionnaire	Descriptive Statistics (N = 156, 100%)		
	Mean	**SD**	**Median**
1—Parents or society can decide about the marriage of their children	−0.87	2.15	−2
2—Friendship between husband and wife is very important to a marriage	2.47	0.96	3
3—Spouses should be completely faithful to each other	2.32	1.12	3
4—Sexual bind is very important for a marriage	2.15	1.24	3
5—In a marriage the woman has a lower status than the man	−0.99	2.18	−2
6—Love of husband and wife is the basis of a marriage	2.44	0.93	3
7—Only union between one man and one woman can be considered to be a marriage	1.88	1.69	3
8—Spouses should be honest with each other	2.38	1.07	3
9—Spouses should have respect to each other	2.47	0.99	3
10—Marriage should be blessed in the Church	2.22	1.10	3
11—A marriage can only be successful through God's grace, which works in the sacraments	2.14	1.34	3
12—In some situations violence against the spouse can or should be used	−1.59	1.73	−2
13—Marriage is for life	2.03	1.40	3
14—Husband and wife should pray together	2.27	1.08	3
Huber's Centrality of Religiosity Scale	**Descriptive Statistics (N = 156. 100%)**		
	Mean	**SD**	**Median**
Intellectual dimension	12.42	1.99	13
Ideology	14.10	1.66	15
Private practice	13.54	1.70	14
Religious experience	12.60	1.94	13
Public practice	13.58	1.94	15
Centrality	66.24	6.78	67

SD—standard deviation.

The study was conducted in March 2022 among the oldest students of the Catholic Shalom Center in Mitunguu in Central Kenya and the school's graduates. The method of purposive sampling was used to choose the respondent group. The respondents were selected on the basis of their participation in the education process in the Catholic Shalom Center and in Catholic formation as well as their involvement in the center's activity after their graduation. For this reason, the respondents were divided into three age groups (below 20, from 21 to 25, and over 25). The survey was prepared and the research was carried out in English. Because education in the Catholic Shalom Center is in English, the respondents had no problems answering the survey questions. The data was selected with the use of CAWI (Computer Assisted Web Interview) during the researchers' meeting with the students and graduates (auditorium questionnaire). The survey was of a voluntary and anonymous character.

The respondents were first asked to fill in Huber's CRS questionnaire, and subsequently to respond to the statements provided by determining to what extent they agree

or disagree with them. The statements were assessed on the scale from −3 to 3, where the lowest number indicated total lack of acceptance, while the highest—complete acceptance of the statement (−3—I definitely disagree, −2—I disagree to a large extent, −1—I rather disagree, 0—It is hard to say, 1—I rather agree, 2—I agree to a large extent, 3—I definitely agree). The data was then statistically processed to check the correlation between one's religiosity and understanding of marriage with the use of Spearman's rank correlation coefficient.

The research sample was 156 individuals professing Catholic faith. Men comprised 51.3 percent of the respondents, while women constituted 48.7 percent (see Table 2). 38.5 percent of the respondents were between 21 and 25 years of age, with 32.0 percent over the age of 25, and 29.5 percent below 20. Residents of small towns comprised 55.1 percent of the respondents, while residents of the countryside—30.8 percent, and city-dwellers—14.1 percent. Half of the respondents described themselves as religious (50.0 percent), with a subsequent 41.0 percent as very religious, and only 9.0 percent of the respondents as weakly religious or religiously indifferent. 62.5 percent of the respondents were raised in complete families, with both parents present, while the remaining individuals came from various types of incomplete families, polygamous families, and others. 84.6 percent of the respondents were single, 1 in 10 was in a Catholic or civil marriage, and 3.8 percent were in an informal relationship.

Table 2. Characteristics of the study group.

Characteristics	Categories	Parameter	
		N/M	%/SD
Sex	Women	80	51.3
	Men	76	48.7
Age		25.97	9.10
	Below 20	46	29.5
	Between 21 and 25	60	38.5
	Over 25	50	32.1
Conjugal-familial situation	Church/civil marriage	16	10.3
	Informal relationship	6	3.8
	Single	134	85.9
Place of residence	Countryside	48	30.8
	Town	86	55.1
	City	22	14.1
Family	Family with both parents	96	61.5
	Other types of family	60	38.5
Siblings	None	38	24.4
	Yes	118	75.6
Affiliation with a religious organization	Yes	140	89.7
	No	16	10.3
Attitude to faith	Very religious	64	41.0
	Religious	78	50.0
	Non-practicing believer	6	3.8
	Spiritual but not religious	2	1.3
	Indifferent	6	3.8

N—frequency; %—percentage; M—mean; SD—standard deviation.

It should be emphasized that the respondent group was selected in accordance with the theological-pastoral goal of the project and its pilot study character. The use of statistical methods, however, made it possible to formulate certain conclusions and theological-pastoral and pedagogical suggestions. Still, it needs to be remembered that our sample was not representative and does not account for the distribution of the socio-demographic features within the Kenyan society or its specific regions. For those reasons, caution needs to be exercised while extrapolating the results of our study.

2.3. Statistical Methods

The first step of analysis was the characterization of the respondent group, with the percentage and frequency of occurrence of each of the categories provided. Quantitative variables were statistically processed to calculate mean and standard deviation. Spearman's rank correlation coefficient was used to check the correlation between religiosity and an understanding of marriage. The impact of the independent variables of sex and age on the results has also been taken into consideration.

3. Correlations between Religiosity and Understanding of Marriage

Research into religiosity and opinions on sacramental marriage conducted in Papua New Guinea (See Niścigorski 2022, pp. 183–319) corroborated the existence of correlations between the two, legitimizing our study of views on marriage among the selected group of Kenyan Catholics. Our study shows that in general such correlations do not occur frequently. The Catholic convictions on the role of conjugal love, the sexual bond of the partners, and the need for mutual respect correlate positively in a statistically significant way on a low level with intellectual dimension and ideology, but do not correlate with centrality of religiosity. An unethical conviction that in some situations violence against one's spouse is acceptable or necessary (12) correlates negatively with centrality of religiosity. This means that the respondents tend to agree with this statement ever more rarely as the centrality of religiosity in their lives increases. However, it seems puzzling that there are no statistically significant correlations between religiosity and two other problematic opinions: that the parents or the community may decide about their children's marriage (1) and that the woman has a lower status in marriage than a man (5)—see Table 3.

Table 3. The value of correlation (r) between the respondents' religiosity and their opinions on marriage.

Core-Dimensions of Religiosity According to S. Huber (CRS)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Intellectual dimension	−0.01	0.03	0.10	**0.16**	0.03	**0.25**	**0.16**	0.12	**0.19**	0.09	0.08	−0.08	0.02	0.13
Ideology	**−0.17**	0.07	0.07	**0.27**	0.06	**0.17**	0.01	0.10	**0.21**	**0.24**	**0.22**	**−0.27**	**0.17**	**0.31**
Private practice	−0.01	−0.08	−0.01	0.05	0.14	0.06	−0.01	0.01	0.04	−0.10	−0.10	**−0.29**	**−0.16**	−0.08
Religious experience	0.11	−0.12	0.00	0.08	0.13	0.12	0.08	0.03	0.13	0.01	0.04	−0.09	−0.02	0.11
Public practice	−0.11	−0.15	0.00	−0.03	−0.05	−0.02	0.03	−0.04	−0.05	0.14	0.05	**−0.16**	−0.11	0.07
Centrality	−0.05	−0.10	0.03	0.12	0.11	0.14	0.11	0.04	0.13	0.11	0.06	**−0.20**	−0.06	0.14

The results relate to the Spearman Correlation Test (r). The results in bold indicate that for this correlation the significance level $p < 0.05$. Statements about marriage: 1—Parents or society can decide about the marriage of their children; 2—Friendship between husband and wife is very important to a marriage; 3—Spouses should be completely faithful to each other; 4—Sexual bind is very important for a marriage; 5—In a marriage the woman has a lower status than the man; 6—Love of husband and wife is the basis of a marriage; 7—Only union between one man and one woman can be considered to be a marriage; 8—Spouses should be honest with each other; 9—Spouses should have respect to each other; 10—Marriage should be blessed in the Church; 11—A marriage can only be successful

through God's grace, which works in the sacraments; 12—In some situations violence against the spouse can or should be used; 13—Marriage is for life; 14—Husband and wife should pray together.

The presence of and increase in statistically significant correlations between the respondents' religiosity and opinions on marriage is affected by the variable of sex. Among men, some positive statements on marriage correlate positively but on a low and average level with religiosity (intellectual dimension, ideology, and centrality). An increase in religiosity goes hand in hand with the more frequent acceptance of statements that the spouses should respect each other (9), that marriage is based on love between the husband and the wife (6), and that a sexual bond is very important in a marriage (4). For women, in turn, a more pronounced religiosity (intellectual dimension, ideology) is significantly related to a stronger conviction that partners should be married in church (10) and that the spouses should show mutual respect (9)—see Table 4.

For men, religious experience correlates positively with a traditional cultural conviction that the parents or the community may decide upon their children's marriage (1) and with the view that a woman's position in a marriage is lower than that of a man (5). For women, in turn, a stronger centrality of religiosity correlates negatively (on an average level) with the belief that sometimes one may or should resort to violence towards their spouse (12), which means that the higher the centrality of religiosity, the more strongly women disagree with the statement. An increase in religiosity does not correlate among women with their rejection of the belief that a woman has a lower position in a marriage than a man (5)—see Table 4.

Table 4. The value of correlation (r) between the respondents' religiosity and their opinions on marriage, taking into account the variable of sex.

Core-Dimensions of Religiosity According to S. Huber (CRS)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Men														
Intellectual dimension	0.14	0.06	0.15	**0.24**	0.03	**0.30**	0.12	0.06	**0.35**	−0.14	−0.05	−0.10	0.08	0.08
Ideology	−0.01	0.14	0.02	**0.27**	0.09	**0.24**	0.01	−0.14	−0.02	0.11	0.22	−0.07	0.16	**0.26**
Private practice	0.16	0.06	0.04	**0.23**	0.12	0.09	0.17	0.04	0.22	−0.10	0.03	−0.18	0.08	0.08
Religious experience	**0.23**	0.08	0.16	0.14	**0.25**	0.19	0.15	0.16	**0.31**	0.06	0.10	−0.20	0.08	0.07
Public practice	−0.16	**−0.30**	−0.12	−0.17	−0.21	−0.13	0.00	−0.11	−0.06	0.13	0.09	−0.05	−0.03	0.11
Centrality	0.09	0.02	0.13	0.19	0.07	**0.24**	0.21	0.07	**0.32**	0.06	0.10	−0.17	0.11	0.21
Women														
Intellectual dimension	−0.16	0.03	0.09	0.13	0.05	0.21	**0.27**	0.17	0.09	**0.35**	**0.25**	−0.06	−0.05	0.18
Ideology	**−0.36**	−0.02	0.07	0.22	0.06	0.10	0.06	**0.24**	**0.33**	**0.34**	0.20	**−0.43**	0.16	**0.36**
Private practice	−0.12	−0.15	−0.02	−0.07	0.16	0.03	**−0.22**	0.02	−0.02	−0.08	−0.20	**−0.39**	**−0.36**	**−0.23**
Religious experience	0.03	**−0.27**	−0.12	0.03	0.02	0.05	−0.03	−0.07	0.01	−0.04	−0.02	0.02	−0.09	0.15
Public practice	−0.08	−0.04	0.08	0.07	0.12	0.09	0.07	0.03	−0.05	0.14	0.01	**−0.25**	−0.20	0.04
Centrality	−0.16	−0.19	−0.04	0.08	0.19	0.05	0.01	0.03	0.02	0.19	0.04	**−0.22**	−0.20	0.09

The results relate to the Spearman Correlation Test (r). The results in bold indicate that for this correlation the significance level $p < 0.05$. Statements about marriage: 1—Parents or society can decide about the marriage of their children; 2—Friendship between husband and wife is very important to a marriage; 3—Spouses should be completely faithful to each other; 4—Sexual bind is very important for a marriage; 5—In a marriage the woman has a lower status than the man; 6—Love of husband and wife is the basis of a marriage; 7—Only union between one man and one woman can be considered to be a marriage; 8—Spouses should be honest with each other; 9—Spouses should have respect to each other;

10—Marriage should be blessed in the Church; 11—A marriage can only be successful through God's grace, which works in the sacraments; 12—In some situations violence against the spouse can or should be used; 13—Marriage is for life; 14—Husband and wife should pray together.

Research results vary in a statistically significant way when the respondents' age is taken into consideration. This is most clearly visible for the youngest group of respondents (below 20 years of age), for whom there are clear positive correlations between centrality of religiosity and the Catholic convictions that: a marriage is a relation of one man and one woman only (7), that the foundation of marriage is love of the husband and the wife (6), that partners should be married in church (10), that a husband and a wife should pray together (14), and that the spouses should be completely faithful to each other (3). These results are further enhanced by the co-presence of an increase in religiosity and the rejection of the "need" to use violence against one's spouse in some situations (12)—see Table 5.

For the respondents between 21 and 25 years of age the results show correlation only with respect to the rejection of violence against the spouse (12). Surprisingly, in this group of respondents there occurs a negative correlation of religiosity with the Catholic belief that friendship between a husband and a wife is very important in a marriage (2). What is more, private practice and religious experience correlate positively with the belief that the parents or the community may make decisions about their children's marriage (1)—see Table 5.

Table 5. The value of correlation (r) between the respondents' religiosity and opinions on marriage, taking into account the variable of age.

Core-Dimensions of Religiosity According to S. Huber (CRS)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Under 20														
Intellectual dimension	−0.08	0.24	**0.38**	0.17	0.16	**0.50**	**0.39**	0.27	**0.30**	**0.36**	0.28	−0.16	−0.02	0.25
Ideology	**−0.36**	**0.29**	0.21	**0.44**	0.06	**0.49**	**0.40**	0.10	0.23	**0.46**	**0.34**	**−0.31**	**0.43**	**0.67**
Private practice	0.12	**0.31**	**0.39**	0.21	**0.33**	0.29	**0.39**	0.27	0.20	**0.31**	0.25	**−0.43**	−0.01	0.23
Religious experience	0.08	0.15	**0.30**	**0.41**	**0.44**	**0.48**	**0.40**	0.09	0.25	**0.43**	**0.44**	−0.11	**0.31**	**0.59**
Public practice	0.10	−0.11	−0.05	0.07	−0.01	0.24	0.03	−0.17	−0.18	0.11	0.08	**−0.33**	−0.08	0.07
Centrality	−0.03	0.18	**0.35**	0.28	0.26	**0.56**	**0.43**	0.10	0.21	**0.47**	0.29	**−0.29**	0.14	**0.52**
From 21 to 25														
Intellectual dimension	0.25	−0.07	0.01	0.23	0.06	0.11	0.24	0.11	0.14	0.05	0.24	−0.13	0.22	0.10
Ideology	−0.05	0.04	0.04	**0.36**	0.03	0.06	−0.20	0.16	0.22	0.14	0.24	**−0.27**	0.06	0.05
Private practice	**0.26**	**−0.32**	−0.18	−0.04	0.15	**−0.33**	−0.19	−0.08	−0.09	−0.18	**−0.31**	−0.17	−0.22	−0.23
Religious experience	**0.30**	−0.12	0.02	0.01	0.04	−0.23	0.08	0.16	0.16	−0.12	−0.11	−0.13	−0.03	−0.07
Public practice	−0.16	**−0.27**	−0.11	−0.03	−0.16	−0.25	−0.07	−0.21	0.02	0.06	−0.09	**−0.28**	−0.25	−0.13
Centrality	0.17	**−0.31**	−0.13	0.12	0.02	−0.22	0.02	0.01	0.15	0.00	−0.04	**−0.31**	−0.13	−0.10
Over 25														
Intellectual dimension	−0.22	−0.03	0.00	0.06	−0.14	0.18	−0.08	−0.01	0.13	−0.12	−0.25	0.05	−0.25	0.03
Ideology	−0.12	−0.04	0.06	−0.04	0.04	−0.02	−0.07	0.09	0.22	0.26	0.16	−0.16	−0.01	**0.31**
Private practice	**−0.46**	**−0.30**	**−0.30**	−0.03	−0.02	0.11	−0.19	−0.26	−0.11	**−0.42**	−0.26	−0.14	**−0.41**	**−0.32**
Religious experience	−0.26	**−0.37**	**−0.34**	−0.21	−0.07	0.17	−0.18	−0.20	−0.10	−0.23	−0.18	0.19	**−0.53**	−0.22
Public practice	−0.28	−0.01	0.20	−0.08	0.04	0.04	0.15	**0.30**	0.06	**0.30**	0.22	0.07	0.07	**0.31**
Centrality	**−0.33**	−0.22	−0.09	−0.11	0.04	0.10	−0.07	0.03	0.05	−0.07	−0.10	0.06	**−0.30**	0.03

For the respondents over 25 years of age, a stronger centrality of religiosity coexists with the rejection of the belief that the parents or the community may decide about their children's marriage (1), while at the same time a stronger religiosity is related to the rejection

of the Catholic belief that a marriage is a relationship for life (13). An increase in individual parameters of religiosity (private practice and religious experience) goes hand in hand with a lack of acceptance of the Catholic beliefs that friendship between the husband and the wife is very important in marriage (2) and that the spouses should be completely faithful to each other (3). What is more, in this group of respondents a stronger religiosity is not related to a repudiation of violence in a marriage or the questioning of a woman's lower position vis-à-vis that of a man.

The results relate to the Spearman Correlation Test (r). The results in bold indicate that for this correlation the significance level $p < 0.05$. Statements about marriage: 1—Parents or society can decide about the marriage of their children; 2—Friendship between husband and wife is very important to a marriage; 3—Spouses should be completely faithful to each other; 4—Sexual bind is very important for a marriage; 5—In a marriage the woman has a lower status than the man; 6—Love of husband and wife is the basis of a marriage; 7—Only union between one man and one woman can be considered to be a marriage; 8—Spouses should be honest with each other; 9—Spouses should have respect to each other; 10—Marriage should be blessed in the Church; 11—A marriage can only be successful through God's grace, which works in the sacraments; 12—In some situations violence against the spouse can or should be used; 13—Marriage is for life; 14—Husband and wife should pray together.

4. Conclusions and Suggestions for Catholic Education and Pastoral Care of Families

On the basis of our research results, the following conclusions and pastoral suggestions may be legitimately formulated within practical theology:

1. The correlations between centrality of religiosity and an understanding of marriage occur rarely, but with more frequency with respect to certain individual parameters of religiosity. These correlations are of a low or average level. Positive correlations (simultaneous increase in indicators) are present most often between certain parameters of religiosity and positive Catholic convictions on marriage. Negative correlations (increase in religiosity coexists with disapproval of a given conviction) pertain most frequently to some ethically dubious convictions on marriage which are rooted in the respondents' local culture, but not to all of them. Some ethically problematic beliefs—such as the notion that the parents or the community may decide upon their children's marriage (1) and that a woman has a lower position in marriage than a man (5)—essentially show no statistically significant links with the respondents' religiosity. This may mean that in general terms religiosity—including the mature religiosity of a central character—is not related to and does not modify (neither enhances nor weakens) the respondents' patriarchal and traditional mentality. In light of generally weak correlations between religiosity and convictions on Catholic marriage, pastoral and pedagogical work should concentrate on the need to consistently lead a life based on faith, also within the conjugal and familial sphere (See Polak 2022). On the other hand, religious instruction and education of youth declaring themselves as Catholics and identifying with the Catholic church should place more emphasis on crucial ethical and theological content pertaining to marriage (See Bujo 2009, pp. 37–61, 94–99, 130–32).

2. Some positive opinions on marriage correlate with religiosity both among men and women, but more frequently among the former. For men, an increase in some parameters of religiosity is linked more often than in the case of women both with acceptance of some Catholic convictions on marriage and of some non-Catholic ones. At the same time, for men there is no negative correlation between religiosity and opinions of a negative ethical character (1), (5), (12), while, on the contrary, positive correlations are sometimes present. This may mean that for men, religious formation and education does not impact in a satisfactory way the shaping of Catholic convictions on marriage nor does it sufficiently amend traditional but unethical mental patterns and customs. Pastoral care of men should therefore place more emphasis on the Christian model of marital relations, pointing out aspects of the cultural paradigm of Kenya that are valuable and those that require change.

The selection of particular methods of influencing men should privilege those that are more likely to reach them (See Churu 2015, pp. 138–47).

3. For women, a stronger religiosity (of a central character) is rarely connected with positive Catholic convictions on marriage. At the same time, it is linked rarely but clearly with a rejection of some ethically negative statements, such as the idea that violence against one's spouse is acceptable or necessary in some situations (12). What seems troubling is the indication that a stronger religiosity among women does not correlate with their repudiation of the belief that a woman's position in a marriage is lower than that of man (5). This may show that, for the Kenyan women surveyed, religious formation and education shapes Catholic convictions on marriage even more rarely and weakly than for men. Granted, some unethical convictions are more markedly corrected, but not all of them. In light of the above, it seems imperative to further research the model of relationships between a husband and a wife which operate in Africa and to conceive of and implement pastoral care with the view of decisive rejection of violence as well as of acceptance of the equality of the sexes (See Kisemo et al. 2010, pp 117–42). Pastoral care and education should address children as well, who oftentimes experience corporal punishment, violence, and the unequal treatment of women in their families (See Kisemo et al. 2010, pp. 143–58; Nambiri 2017).

4. For the youngest group of respondents, religiosity correlates positively most often and most strongly with the majority of positive convictions on marriage and negatively with the rejection of violence against one's spouse (12). This seems to corroborate the effectiveness of Catholic education and formation that current students receive at the Shalom Center. For older respondents, however, an increase in religiosity correlates with stronger disapproval of some positive Catholic beliefs on marriage. What is more, for the older respondents an increase in religiosity is typically unrelated to disapproval of unethical convictions on marriage.

One can conclude, therefore, that the present-day formation and education in Shalom Center is more integral, profound, and effective than several years ago and more. This notwithstanding, the results may also testify to the youngest group's fresh memory of the content inculcated in them in Shalom Center or simply indicate their stronger idealism, which in the face of everyday life may soon undergo a serious crisis. For this reason, it seems crucial to organize and improve pastoral care of engaged and married couples as well as families, and offer it to individuals that underwent valuable religious formation in their youth (See Mwangi et al. 2015, pp. 54–60).

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Religiousness of Young People in Poland as a Challenge to Catholic Education: Analyses Based on a Survey

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Abstract: The aim of this paper is to perform a sociological and pastoral analysis of the religiousness of young people in Poland, which is a challenge to Catholic education. The authors analyse this issue based on the empirical study conducted in 2019 and 2020. The study employed an online survey questionnaire. The study included 1171 people, students in grades 7 and 8 of primary schools and of secondary schools in the Małopolskie and Podkarpackie Voivodships in Poland. The paper focuses on young people's self-declarations concerning: the religion they profess, faith, affiliation with a religious community, a bond to the community, the respondents' and their parents' attending religious services, celebrations/masses and praying individually. It was regarded as important to determine the correlations between the self-declarations of affiliation with a religious community and self-declaration of the religion professed and between the self-declarations of faith and bond to a religious community and self-declaration of the religion professed. These issues are enriched with the respondents' opinions on religion as a school subject. They provide an insight into not only the respondents' religiousness but also a diagnosis of young people's attitudes towards religion as a school subject. They allow for conclusions to be drawn on Catholic education in the secularising society, especially with young people increasingly often quitting religious lessons in schools.

Keywords: youth; religiousness; religious lessons; Catholic education; Poland; sociology; pastoral theology

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1. Introduction

The religiousness of young people in Poland is among the key issues lying in the sphere of interest of researchers in sociology, pedagogy and theology, as well as practicians—religion teachers, educators and priests. (See, e.g., Baniak 2015; Dziedzic 2016; Głowacki 2019; Instytut Statystyki Kościoła Katolickiego 2021; Kaźmierska 2018; Kućko 2019; Mariański 2018, 2019, 2021; Skoczylas 2017; Święs 2018; Urbańska 2021). The quality of changes in the religious life of the young generation of Poles has been discussed for many years (see, e.g., Baniak 2015; Mariański 2018; Urbańska 2021). Among the issues most frequently raised are relations between young people's self-declarations and religious practices and morals (see, e.g., Boguszewski and Bożewicz 2019; Mariański 2018, 2019). The considerations also deal with issues related to religion lessons in schools and one's involvement in the Church by participation in various communities and religious movements. (see, e.g., Jedynak 2018, 2019; Kielian and Witos 2017; Sowa-Behtane 2020; Zubrzycka-Maciąg 2021). These issues, presented from the perspective of various scientific disciplines, not only provide a deeper insight into young people's relations with the Church, their needs and expectations, but they also help to identify the challenges faced by Catholic education in Poland, provided in various circles, particularly in the family, in schools, parishes and in the media. They

also help to develop new proposals regarding reaching young people, meeting them and establishing dialogue—first as with any human being, and then making evangelisation attempts. This is because there is no effective Catholic education in the family, at school, in a parish or in social media without proper knowledge of the current religiousness status of the target population—in this case, young people. Hence, the religiousness of young people in Poland is still a topical research area. Properly identified, it provides a challenge to Catholic education. It allows for properly programming the didactic, educational and evangelisational activities in various environments.

When discussing religiousness, one should note that it is not a uniform feature but rather a collection of features, with each one having its own characteristics (Potocki 2017, pp. 25–26). One's attention is directed towards the external dimension of the real and dynamic personal relation of a human being to the transcendental reality, understood as a personal God in our culture, on whom a human feels dependent both in his/her existence and actions, and who is the ultimate goal imbuing human life with sense (Wiszowaty 2002, p. 13). One must also take into consideration the selected parameters of religiousness, understandable to contemporary youth, which are rooted deeply in sociological research. These include self-identification of religiousness, religious experience, obligatory practices (as required by the canon law) and non-obligatory ones, and bonds to a religious group and to the Church (Potocki 2017, pp. 26–27; Wiszowaty 2002, p. 14).

In order to respond to the question about the challenges that the current religiousness of young people presents to Catholic education, selected parameters of religiousness were examined, and opinions on religion lessons at schools were collected. This will help to present the subject matter defined in the paper title. The findings of this study will be juxtaposed with the results of a study of young people from around Poland and religion teaching at schools. These data will help to reveal a whole picture of the reality under study and to draw conclusions.

2. The Socio-Cultural Context of Religiousness among the Polish Youth

An overview of the education of Polish youth cannot be separated from an analysis of the dynamically changing context. The impact of the contemporary global culture, in which the subjective conviction becomes a norm of human thinking and the subjective conscience—the norm of conduct, is a challenge for education (Zellma 2014, pp. 111–12). With intensively progressing secularisation, dechristianisation and reducing religion to its private aspect, Christianity becomes one of many options for life (Czupryński 2017, pp. 148–49). Increasing popularity is enjoyed by axiologically neutral educational models, and attempts, although often in a concealed manner, are made at reformulating the moral foundations of social and individual life (Życiński 1998, p. 139). The value of faith and religious practices are being discredited, and the church is increasingly often perceived as an archaic institution and one which is completely useless in a contemporary, modern world. (Szauer 2020, pp. 129–45; Twenge 2017, p. 119; Chałupniak 2007, p. 706). Increasing popularity is also enjoyed by the idea of reducing Christianity to the norms of social conduct without reference to transcendence and the ultimate goal (Mariański 2007, p. 524). Focusing on the mundane dimension of life leads to a consumption-oriented model of life, as a result of which many young people subordinate their lives to material values (Roguska and Antas-Jaszczuk 2020, p. 39).

Sociocultural transformations also apply to the religiousness of young people. It is on them that young people's reference to God, the Decalogue, the Church and religious education depends. They point to the need for examining the declarations of young people from various circles (countries, regions) to draw conclusions based on this in the area of programming and providing religious education in a specific country.

3. Study Methodology

The digital revolution and the social and economic transformations that it brought about have caused—along with huge benefits—phenomena unknown earlier and not

always desired. The need to monitor and constantly analyse the trends related to the axiological and religious preferences of young people prompted researchers representing the Faculty of Theology of the Pontifical University of John Paul II to join an international study project conducted at the Tilburg School of Catholic Theology. Their aim is to diagnose and interpret the behaviour of European adolescents in the area of axiology and religiousness. This is a Polish part of a broader, international research, with participants including young people in the Netherlands, Poland, Germany and Czechia, and its findings are published regularly (van Dijk-Groeneboer et al. 2021).

The study was conducted by the method of a survey as a way of collecting knowledge of structural and functional attributes and the dynamics of social phenomena, opinions and views of selected populations, intensification and directions in which specific phenomena develop, of other not institutionally localised phenomena—educationally important—based on a specially selected group representing the general population in which the phenomenon under study occurs (Pilch and Bauman 2001; Łobocki 2010). An Internet survey was applied as the study technique, with the questionnaire as the tool, which was used to gather young people's self-declarations on matters associated with religiousness and religion lessons (Zellma 2019).

This study employed the questionnaire entitled Youth and religion, which has been used in The Netherlands for over 20 years to evaluate religious attitudes, beliefs, values and outlooks on the world among secondary school students (van Dijk-Groeneboer and Maas 2001, 2005; van Dijk-Groeneboer et al. 2008; van Dijk-Groeneboer 2010, 2015; van Dijk-Groeneboer and Brijan 2013). The socio-cultural context of religiousness among the Polish youth was also taken into consideration. The questions in the questionnaire were translated from English into Polish by native speakers of the language in cooperation with the research staff from the Faculty of Theology of the Pontifical University of John Paul II in Kraków and—when needed—adapted slightly to the local context, for example, in the case of such terms as "Protestant", "Lutheran", "Evangelical" and "Orthodox" (instead of the original Dutch Reformed). Specific religiousness in Poland also includes affiliation—usually with one religious community, rather than with many at the same time. What is more, the term "religious community" is understood by religiously involved young people more in the sense of "a pastoral group" or a "youth parish group" rather than different religious institutions. Hence, the meaning of some values is difficult to grasp. A complete original questionnaire (in the Polish and English versions) can be obtained from the authors.

The study was conducted between September 2019 and June 2020 by the CAWI (Computer-Assisted Web Interview) method on a population of grade 7 and 8 primary school students (single structure education covering both ISCED level 1 and 2) and secondary school students (ISCED level 3—upper secondary general and secondary vocational schools) in Poland aged from 15 to 20 years. From school year 2019/2020 those students who have graduated from 8-year primary school enter upper secondary education at the age of 15. There are three types of higher secondary schools in Poland: 4-year high school, 5-year technical school and 3-year vocational school. Students can choose one of them within the compulsory education up to the age of 18 (cf. Eurydice 2019). The age of the respondents is illustrated in Figure 1.

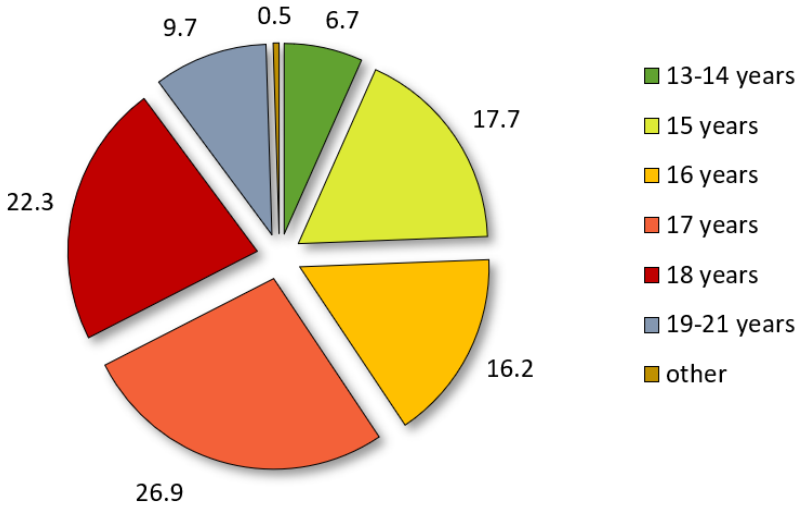

Figure 1. Age of the respondents (%). Source: the author's own research.

A convenient method for the choice of a sample was applied in order to select the respondents. It sometimes happens that when ethical or religious elements appear in research, many schools refuse to take part, which is why it is difficult to find schools willing to participate in this type of study. The staff of the Faculty of Theology of the Pontifical University of John Paul II in Kraków have contacts with primary and secondary public schools, in which theology students have their practical training supervised by experienced CRE (catholic religious education) teachers. This is why the schools which participated in the study were those in which the teachers were known to the researchers. This, obviously, has an impact on the possibility of data generalisation (Zellma 2019). All of the students were able to fill in the questionnaire in an electronic form on their own devices.

Complete responses were provided by 1171 students from 29 schools, including from 20 in the Małopolskie and Podkarpackie Voivodships in Poland: 867 responses from 14 schools in Kraków (Małopolskie Voivodship), 144 from 3 schools in Krosno (Podkarpackie Voivodeship) and 119 from the Complex of Economic Schools in Dębica (Podkarpackie Voivodeship). All of the necessary consent forms to conduct the study were obtained in each of these schools. The respondents were informed that the data they provided were completely anonymous. The survey was accessible through a link to the Internet website of the Kraków Archdiocese, which is why there were also 41 voluntary responses from students from other schools (e.g., from Łódź, Nowy Tomyśl, Świętochłowice, Olsztyn, Elbląg, Garwolin, Szczecin and Rabka-Zdrój).

The collected data were saved and are protected in accordance with the rules of data protection in scientific research. They do not contain personal data as understood by the GDPR and can be presented only as statistical data. The information will be kept as the original information source at the Faculty of Catholic Theology of Tilburg University for ten years and will be available to other researchers to check the reliability of the analyses and conclusions. The study was approved by the Data Management Unit at the Faculty of Catholic Theology of Tilburg University.

4. Characteristics of the Respondents

The students who completed the questionnaire mostly came from the south and south-east of Poland, and they lived in three towns: Kraków (a population of 800 thousand, an important academic centre), Krosno (a population of 46 thousand) and Dębica (44 thousand) and in surrounding towns and villages, from which they commute to the schools in these three towns. The respondents were students who attended non-obligatory lessons of the Catholic religion, organised under the relevant regulations in public schools in Poland, which does not mean that they were all declared Catholics. With an intention to present the religiousness of young people from a narrower perspective than the national perspective, to

present the local dynamics and diversity, the study was conducted in towns situated in the regions with the highest religious practice rates in Poland. The rate of attendance in religion lessons in the region exceeded 94% in 2019 (Instytut Statystyki Kościoła Katolickiego 2021). The concept of the region used above should be understood in its geographic-historical-cultural meaning as a socio-spatial whole, whose residents participate in the common cultural resources, generating a homogeneous structure with a specific identity and the level of development and a sense of distinctiveness. Due to the study area, one should emphasise the importance of religious distinctiveness among the anthropological features of culture. A bond to the region can result in negative judgements and opinions arising from asserting one's distinctiveness. One of the objectives of the research is to grasp such features which potentially characterise the cohort under study in association with religious beliefs (Castells 2001; Román del Río 2001, pp. 59–62; Różańska 2015, pp. 207–9).

5. Analysis of Empirical Data

The results of empirical studies apply to the religiousness parameters—selected, understandable to contemporary youth, and relatively easy to diagnose. Some of them will be presented in correlation with the self-declaration of the professed religion.

In order to define their attitude to religion, the young people under study had fifteen categories to choose from: Christian, Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Lutheran, Jew, Sunni, Shi'ite, Alevi, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, uninvolved in any church, religion or philosophy of life, atheist, humanist or other religious or non-religious philosophy of life. Although Roman Catholicism is considered to be one of the Christian churches, as well as Orthodox or Lutheran, these categories have been distinguished here to estimate whether the respondents place themselves in a wider, multidenominational category or rather choose a specific community. As a result, the strength of their religious self-assignment can be assumed, taking into account divisions within Christianity. These Roman Catholics, as representatives of the largest religious group in Poland, who assign themselves to Christians, may seem less attached to denominational differences and more to common Christian values, but this hypothesis requires a deeper study. However, classifying oneself into one of the mentioned above groups required the respondents to be able to look into themselves, self-reflect, and to be able to evaluate the reality of their own faith. Therefore, the declarations of the young people under study are introspective and subjective. All of the respondents gave their responses to these questions. In total, they declared themselves to be Christians in general (51.8%), Roman Catholics (28.4%), uninvolved in the church, religion, philosophy of life (7.7%), atheists (4.9%) or others (1.2%)[1] (Figure 2). Self-declaration of the professed religion. Nearly two-thirds of the respondents are young people who see themselves as Christians and Roman Catholics. The other individuals declare uninvolvement or even atheism.

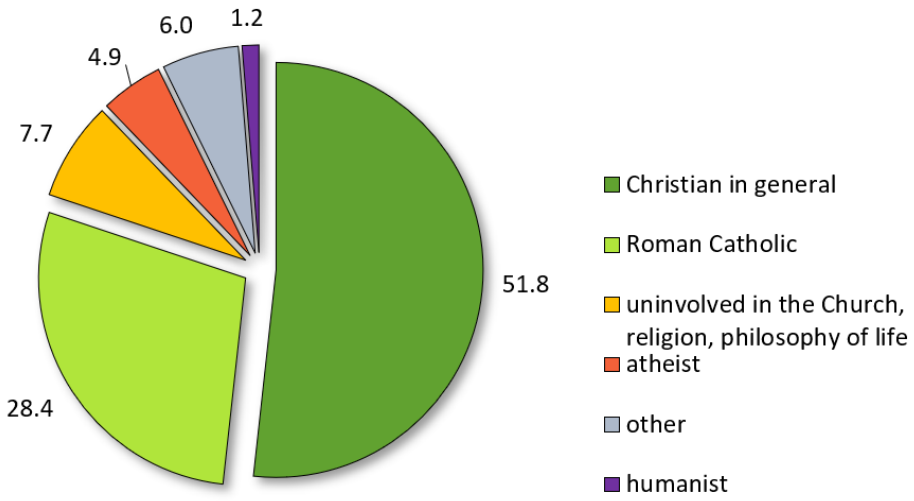

Figure 2. Self-declaration of faith (%). Source: the author's own research.

In order to examine the attitude of the youth under study toward the religion they profess, they were asked about their affiliation with a religious community (Figure 3).

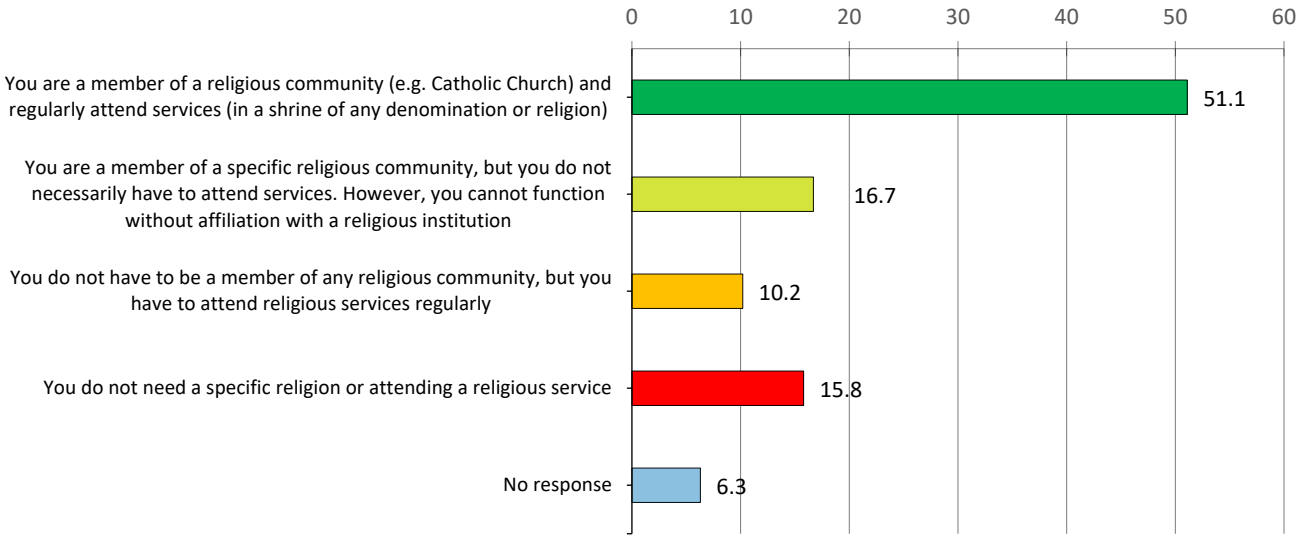

Figure 3. Self-declaration of belonging to a religious community (%). Source: the author's own research.

The respondents had four responses to choose from. The largest portion of respondents (51.1%) declared to be members of a religious community (e.g., the Catholic Church) and to attend religious services (in a church or other shrine) This can be compared to a 2018 Polish national youth survey according to which 63% of 18–19 y.o. declared as being religious or deeply religious and to a similar 2021 survey that unfolded a 9% drop to 54% religious youth (cf. CBOS 2019, 2022). The study group also included individuals who declared affiliation with a specific religious community, but they did not have to attend religious services (16.7%). They emphasised that they could not live without an affiliation with a religious institution. Moreover, 15.8% of the respondents claimed that they did not profess a specific religion or attend religious services. In turn, 10.2% declared not being a member of any religious community but that they had to attend religious services regularly (compare: Figure 10 below), and 6.3% of the respondents did not respond. Therefore, it is obvious that a large group (42.7%) of the respondents are influenced by the processes of secularisation, individualisation and privatisation of faith and liberal culture. They are guided by a subjective approach to the religion they profess, and they do not see religious practices as necessary. Considering this, it is worth looking at the self-declarations of affiliations with a religious community in correlation with a self-declaration of the professed religion (Figure 4).

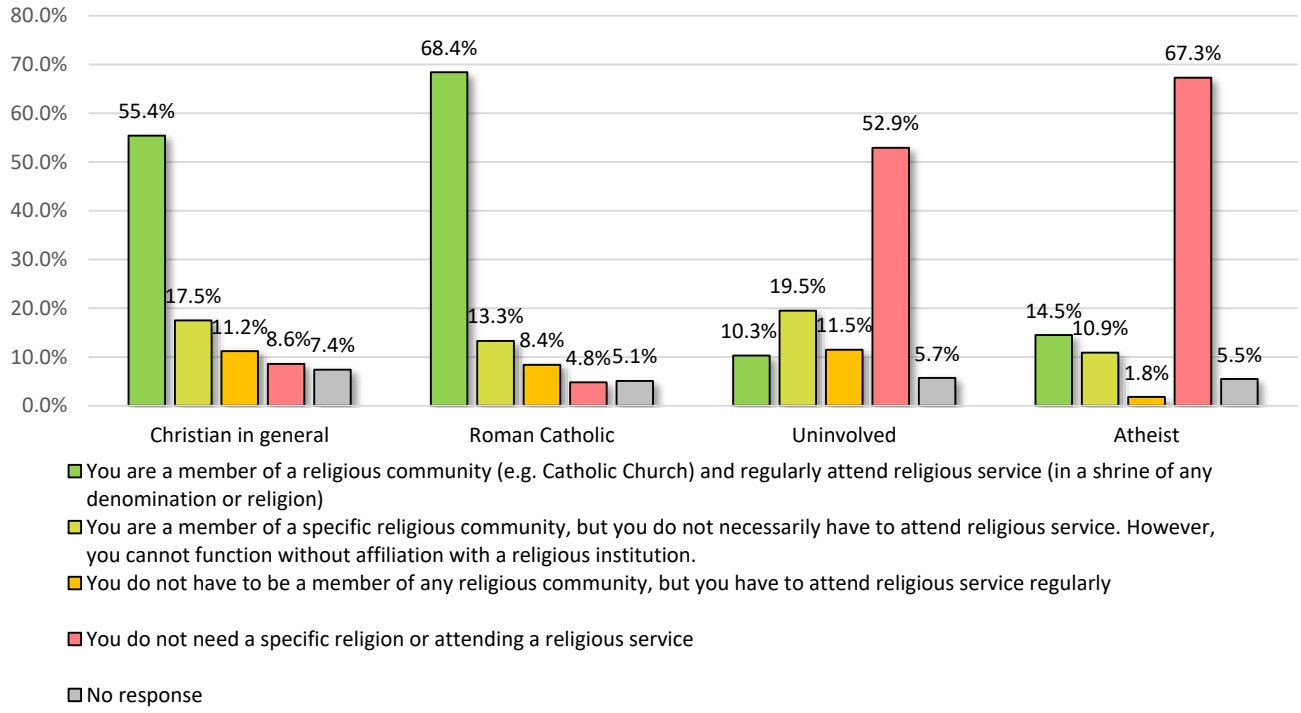

Figure 4. Belonging to a religious community in correlation with self-declaration of professed religion (%). Source: the author's own research.

The highest percentage of those declaring themselves as Christians in general are those who respond that they are members of a religious community and attend religious services in a shrine regularly (55.4%). Therefore, more than half of the individuals declaring themselves to be Christians in general demonstrate a consistent approach to faith and religious involvement. Far fewer Christians in general under study declare that they are members of a specific religious community, but they do not necessarily have to attend religious services. However, they cannot live without an affiliation with a religious institution (17.5%). This may indicate a considerable motive for affiliation with a group and identification with a specific circle without a strictly religious reference, based on a personal relationship with God. Therefore, it seems that, in this case, affiliation with a religious community is more emotional than rational and not yet preceded by conscious reflection or decision. This type of behavior is typical of adolescence. It is puzzling that there is a high percentage (11.2%) of respondents who do not have to be members of any religious community, but they have to attend religious services regularly. The smallest portion of those declaring to be Christian (8.6%) do not need a specific religion or to attend religious services.

Affiliation with a religious community as correlated to a self-declaration of faith was the most marked among Catholics. As many as 68.4% of the respondents declaring themselves to be Catholics claimed to be members of a specific religious community and to attend religious services regularly. Only 4.8% of the Catholics under study do not need a specific religion or to attend religious services. This group also contains a puzzlingly high percentage (8.4%) of respondents who do not have to be members of any religious community, but they have to attend religious services regularly. A question arises: Is this caused by a certain type of traditional religiousness—"cultural obviousness"—inherited from one's parents? May it be a consequence of a certain pressure from one's parents or grandparents? The data in Figure 4 show that individuals with more established convictions belong to two polarised, opposite groups: Roman Catholics and atheists. This may indicate the tight-knit nature of the group of their fellow believers, sharing similar views, or greater confidence in the declared views (possibly together with a lower ability to establish open dialogue; however, this cannot be inferred from the study), as opposed to people with more flexible views, as Christians in general and the uninvolved, potentially more labile

and prone to change those declarations. The latter can still hesitate about which side to choose—whether to join the others or to keep a distance. The responses of those who declared being uninvolved religiously are rather predictable—52.9% of the respondents claimed that they did not need a specific religion or to attend religious services. A much smaller percentage of the respondents—19.5%—do not have to attend religious services despite a sense of affiliation with a religious community (institution). Such declarations are justified in the group of uninvolved individuals. Further responses were surprising—11.5% of the religiously uninvolved respondents, who declared not being members of any religious community, also declared attending religious services regularly. 10.3% of the religiously uninvolved respondents declared to be members of a religious community (e.g., the Catholic Church) and attending religious services regularly (in a church or other shrine), which may be surprising. It seems that those declared to be religiously uninvolved, like Christians in general and Catholics, although to a smaller extent, choose what suits them best and treat religion like one of many activities to choose from.

This picture is complemented by the responses of individuals declaring themselves to be atheists. Obviously, the largest group of respondents (67.3%) claimed that they did not need a specific religion or to attend religious services. The most puzzling responses are those of 14.5% of the atheists, who claimed to be members of a religious community (e.g., the Catholic Church) and to attend religious services in a shrine regularly. In light of these data, one can suppose that the respondents did not believe in God, and they regard religion as contrary to science and reason, but they do not discard outer forms of religiousness for some reasons. This may also be motivated by non-religious factors, such as: the beauty of sacred music and architecture or regarding a shrine as a place where one can experience peace and quiet and find inner harmony. These self-declarations may also show a lack of consistency between one's beliefs and outward behaviours (attitudes).

The self-declaration of faith and affiliation with a religious community is interesting (Figure 5).

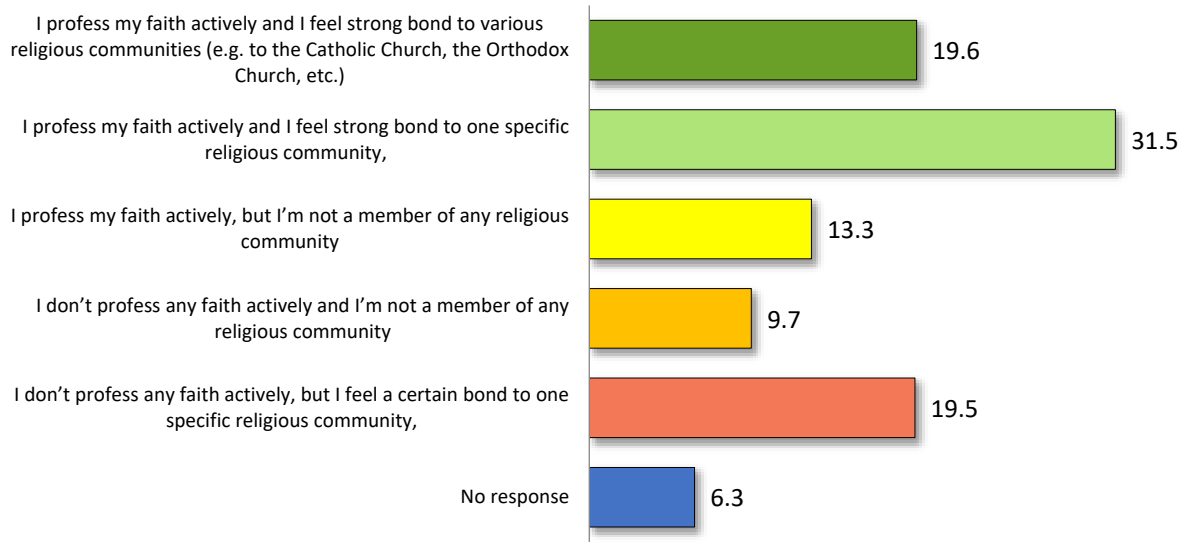

Figure 5. Self-declaration of faith and belonging to a religious community (%). Source: the author's own research.

Professing one's faith actively and a feeling of a strong bond to one specific religious community was declared by 31.5% of the respondents, and 19.6% of them professed their faith actively and felt a strong bond to various religious communities (e.g., Catholic Church, Orthodox Church, etc.). A similar percentage of the young people under study (19.5%) declared not to profess any faith actively but felt a certain affiliation with one specific religious community. The responses chosen by those who claimed to profess their faith actively but not to be members of any religious community (13.3%) are puzzling. 9.7%

of the respondents declared not to profess any faith actively and not to be members of any religious community. These statements reflect the young people's courage in their religious self-declarations. They also testify to the individualisation of faith and the possible abandoning of the institutional framework of religion. No response was provided by 6.3% of the young people taking part in the study. This may be caused by the difficulty they face when self-declaring their faith and affiliation with a religious community or a reluctance to answer questions about their faith and bond to any religious community.

Very interesting conclusions can be drawn from an analysis of self-declarations of faith and affiliation with a community in correlation with a self-declaration of the religion one professes (Figure 6).

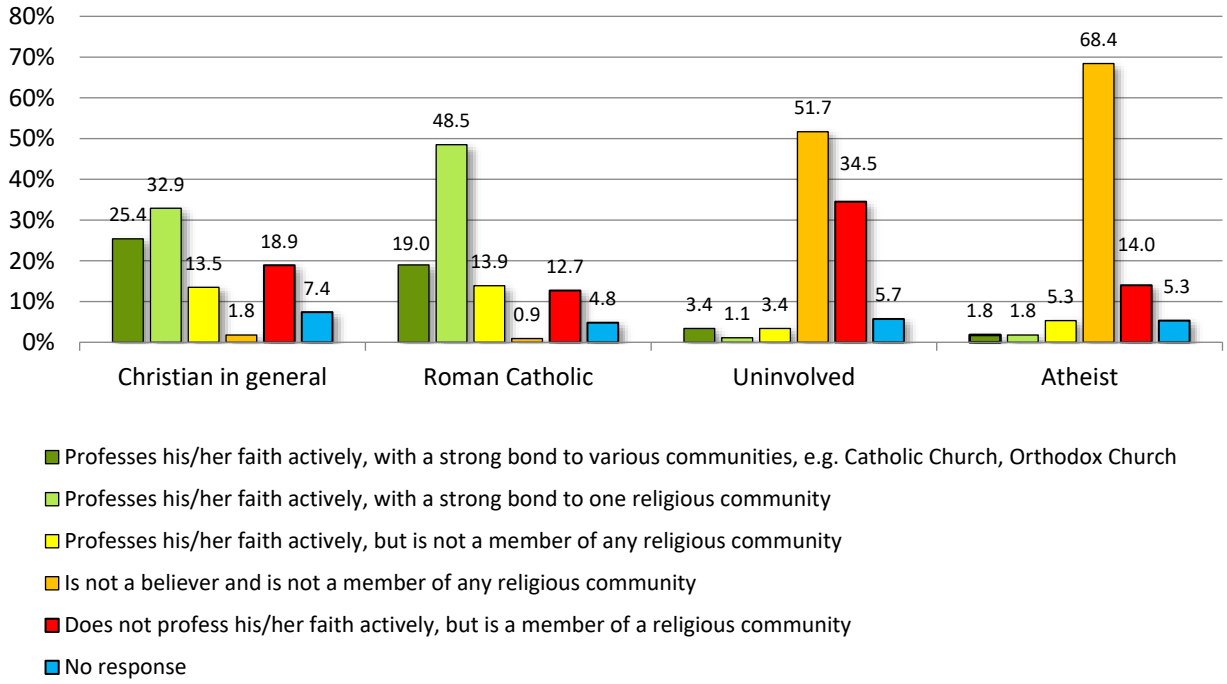

Figure 6. Self-declaration of faith and attachment to a religious community in correlation with the self-declaration of the professed religion (%). Source: the author's own research.

The largest percentage of the declared Christians in general (52.0% of the total study population) responded that they professed their faith actively and felt a strong affiliation with a specific religious community (32.9%). A little smaller percentage of them (25.4%) were those who professed their faith actively and felt a strong bond to various religious communities (e.g., Catholic Church, Orthodox Church, etc.). Moreover, 18.9% of the respondents declared not professing any faith actively but felt a certain affiliation with one specific religious community. Probably, in some cases, those are non-practicing or hardly practicing believers. It is notable in this context that 13.5% declared not to be members of a religious community while professing their faith actively. They must be respondents whose faith and religious practices have an individual and subjective dimension. They value their autonomy and freeing themselves from the influence of tradition. The attitudes of the others are more stable. Only among the Roman Catholics is affiliation with a group unrelated to professing one's faith actively high enough (12.7%) to indicate that it satisfies the need for social belonging and acceptance, and this is seen by this group of respondents in the church community. A relatively small percentage (1.8%) of the declared Christians in general did not profess any religion actively and were not members of any religious community. In some cases, these are certainly respondents who—despite having been baptised—do not identify themselves with faith and they do not want to publicly declare their affiliation with a religious community. This is different from declared Catholics (28.0%

of the total study population). In this case, a definitely larger percentage (48.5%) are those who declared that they professed their faith actively and felt a strong bond to one specific religious community. At the same time, 19.0% of this study group declared professing their faith actively and felt a strong bond to various religious communities (to the Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church, etc.). Furthermore, 13.9% of Roman Catholics declared professing their faith actively while not being members of any religious community. This may indicate that the phrase "religious community" was considered by the responders not to be synonymous with "official religion" but rather to be identical with small religious groups and/or movements within the certain religious organisation. It is interesting that 12.7% of the declared Roman Catholics did not profess any faith actively, but they felt a certain affiliation with one specific religious community. These are certainly non-practicing individuals. It is also notable that 4.8% of the declared Roman Catholics did not provide any response, and 0.9% claimed not to profess any religion actively or to be members of any religious community. This latter group of respondents can be perceived as religiously indifferent individuals. The responses of religiously uninvolved individuals (8.0% of the study population) are also noteworthy. Over half of the respondents (51.7%) in this group declared not to profess any religion actively and not to be members of any religious community. Far fewer of those religiously uninvolved (34.5%) responded that they did not profess any faith actively but that they felt a certain affiliation with a specific religious community, which indicates their indecisiveness, non-established convictions but inclined somehow to seek for a kind of religiousness. Only 3.4% of religiously uninvolved respondents declared that they professed their faith actively and that they felt a strong affiliation with various religious communities (e.g., the Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church, etc.), and the same percentage (3.4%) responded, "I profess my faith actively and I am not a member of any religious community". The fewest religiously uninvolved respondents (1.1%) declared that they professed their faith actively and they felt a strong bond to one specific religious community. The religiously uninvolved individuals who did not provide any response accounted for 5.7%. These data do not in any way indicate an advanced process of individualisation and pluralisation of religion. They suggest that also for young, religiously uninvolved people, faith and affiliation with a religious community become an object of important, individual considerations, leading to individual choices and preferences. It is also notable that 68.4% of the declared atheists did not profess any faith and were not members of any religious community. Such declarations are justified, and they arise from the very essence of atheism. At the same time, 14.0% of the respondents in this study group declared not to profess any faith actively but did feel a certain affiliation with one specific religious community. This may come from family and/or social traditions. There are some puzzling responses in which declared atheists responded that they professed their faith actively and that they were not members of any religious community (5.3%), they professed their faith actively, and they were strongly bonded to various religious communities (1.8%). Self-declarations may be a manifestation of the lack of consistency between one's inner convictions and attitudes, and a full explanation would require further studies. The rate of the lack of response is also notable (5.3%). Possibly, the respondents in this group have some problems with justifying their self-declarations.

The next responses of the young people in the study group concerned their religious practices. The study focused on selected, regular and occasional religious duties. Therefore, the respondents were first asked whether they often attended religious services/celebrations/masses (in a synagogue, church, mosque, etc.). The results are shown in Figure 7.

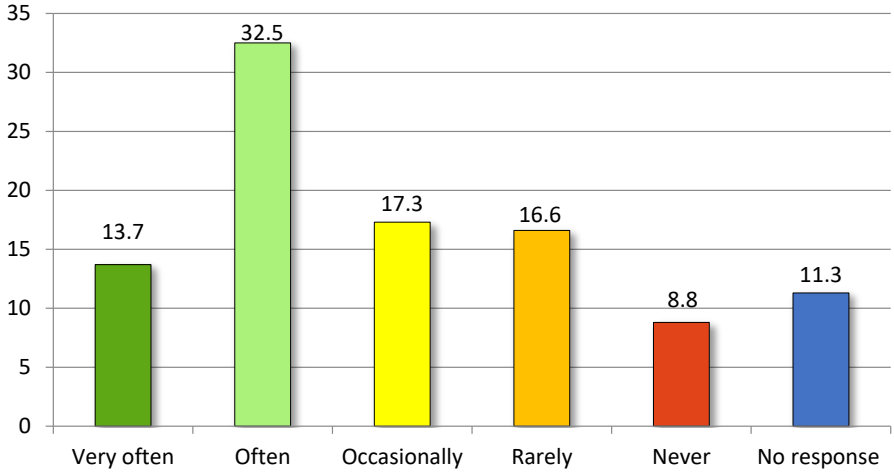

Figure 7. Do you often attend religious services/celebrations/masses (in a synagogue, church, mosque, etc.)? (%). Source: the author's own research.

The results indicated that 32.5% of the respondents declared attending religious services frequently. The other respondents attended such services very frequently (13.7%), from time to time (17.3%), rarely (16.6%) or never (8.8%). 11.3% of the respondents did not respond. In order to obtain more data on this issue, the respondents were asked to answer whether they attended religious services/celebrations/masses (in a synagogue, church, mosque, etc.) on major holidays. The answers are shown in Figure 8.

Practicing believers account for 56.9% of the whole study population, including 29.6% who declared that they attended religious services on major holidays (understood as holidays regarded as the most important ones in a specific religious tradition) very often, and 27.3%—often. Only 13% of the respondents attended religious services on major holidays from time to time, 10.8%—rarely, and 8.0%—never. As many as 11.3% of the respondents did not answer this question. Possibly, the young people taking part in the study—while experiencing a relatively strong bond with God and with the ecclesial community—do not abandon the obligatory religious practices en mass in favour of their individual preferences. This is probably affected by various social and cultural factors, especially one's family situation. Therefore, the respondents were asked: do your parents attend religious services/celebrations/masses (in synagogue. church, mosque, etc.)? The answers are shown in Figure 9. According to this, 28.8% of the parents often go to religious services, 27.9% of them do it very often, 13.2%—from time to time, 11.2%—rarely and 7.7%—never, and 11.3% of the respondents did not respond. The respondents' declarations about their parents attending religious services/celebrations/masses are diverse.

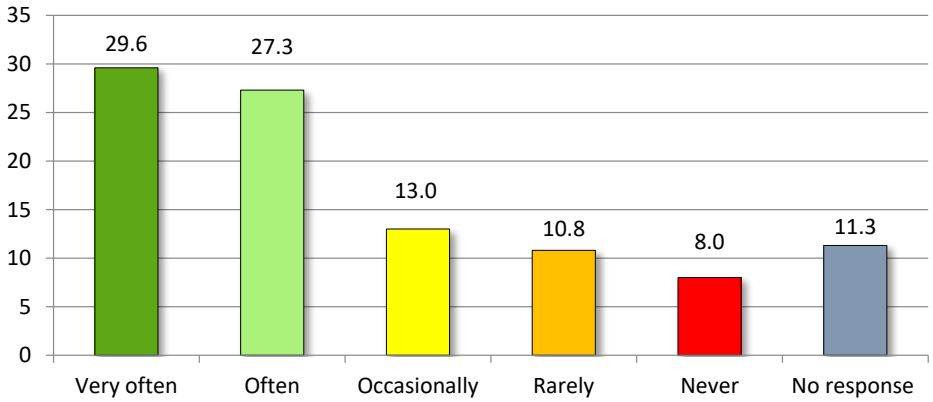

Figure 8. Do you attend religious services/celebrations/masses (in a synagogue, church, mosque) on major holidays? (%). Source: the author's own research.

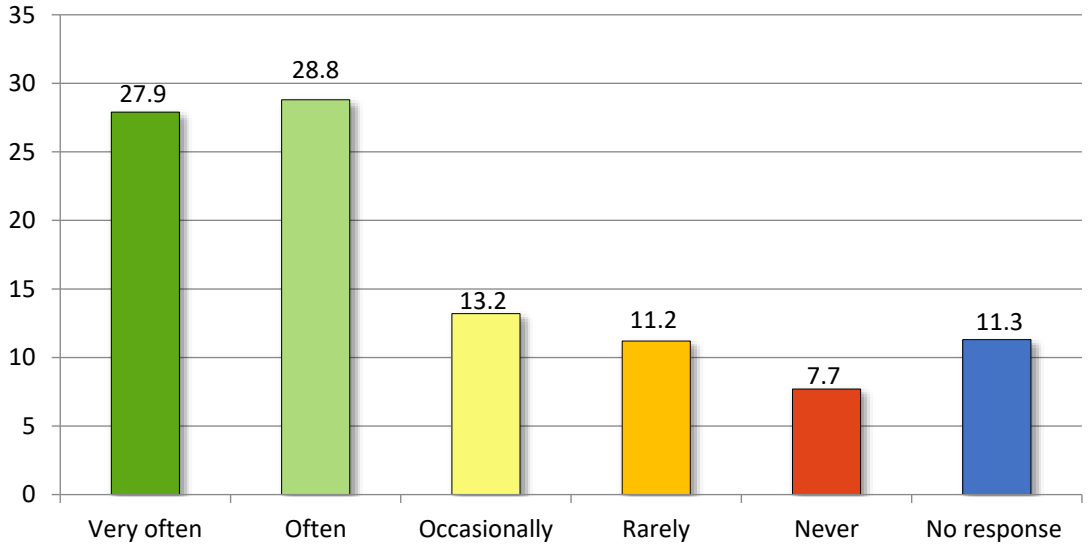

Figure 9. Do your parents attend religious services/celebrations/masses (in a synagogue, church, mosque, etc.)? (%). Source: the author's own research.

There is still a vertical transmission of religious attitudes, although it is weakened. Figure 9 shows that there is a 10% deficit of religious practices in the vertical transmission between the parent and children generations.

The respondents' declarations on the frequency with which their parents attend religious services show that their parents' attitude to faith and religious practices is very important. This is also a conclusion drawn from the responses to the following question: have your parents ever made you attend religious services/celebrations/masses? (Figure 10).

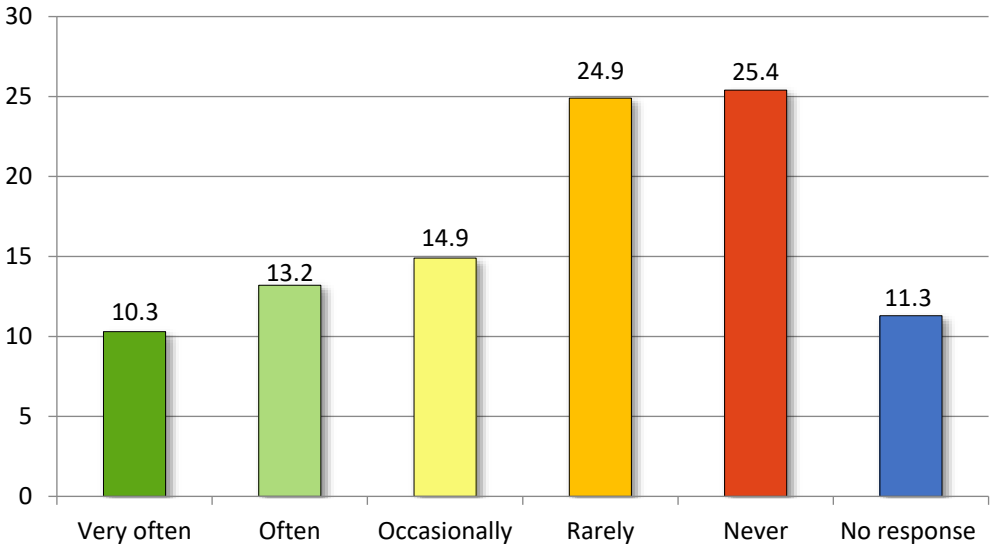

Figure 10. Have your parents ever made you attend religious services/celebrations/masses? (%). Source: the author's own research.

Interestingly, 24.3% of the respondents declared that their parents had never made them attend religious services/celebrations/masses, and 24.9% responded that they had done it rarely, while 14.9% of the respondents declared that their parents had made them attend religious services/celebrations/masses from time to time, 13.2% responded that they had done it often, 10.3%—very often, and 11.3% of the respondents did not answer. According to Figure 9, there are a total of 56.7% practicing parents (the sum of the "often"

and "very often" responses). Figure 7 shows that there are 46.2% of practicing young people (very often and often). This gives a 10.5% deficit, which leads one to the conclusion that the example provided by parents is met with more effective neutralising tendencies, which include the impact of mass culture or other factors which were not analysed in this study. Moreover, Figure 10 shows that more than half of the respondents had not been made to attend religious practices (rarely + never = 50.3%). This means that the parents practicing and giving an example with their actions and religious education were more frequent than making young people attend religious practices. Therefore, one can conclude that the bond to religious traditions and practices is still strong in the south and south-east of Poland, i.e., the regions under study, especially in the generation of the respondents' parents, although this bond diminishes in the vertical transmission. This tendency can be demonstrated in further studies.

Bearing in mind that individual prayer is an important manifestation of one's religiousness, the respondents were asked whether they pray, how often and when. The responses show that the respondents' attitudes to these issues varied (Figure 11).

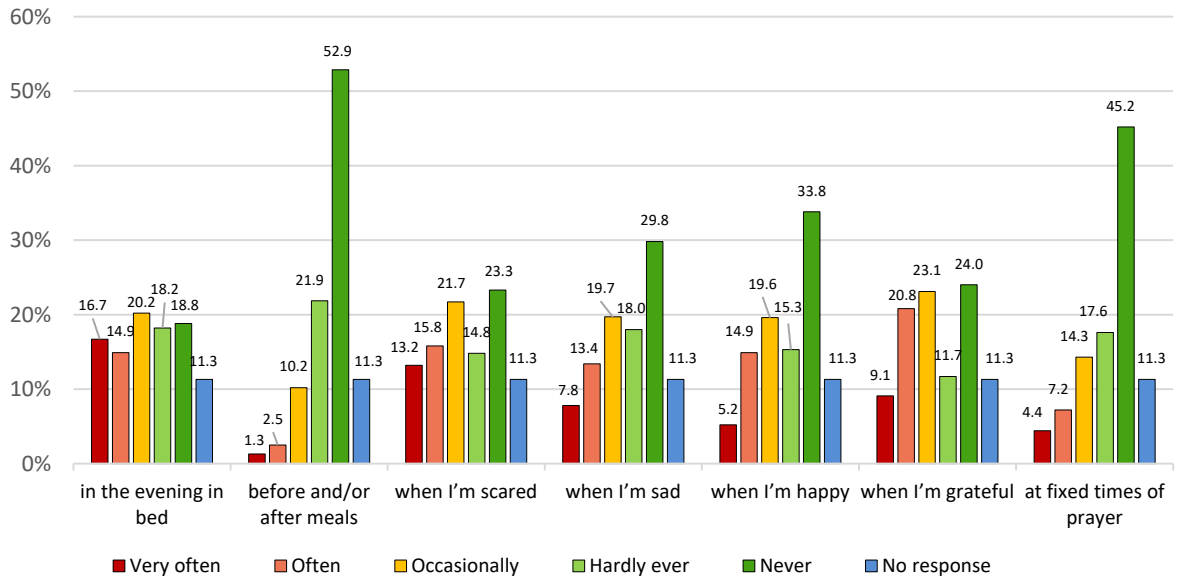

Figure 11. How often and when do you pray? (%). Source: the author's own research.

A total of 51.8% of the respondents pray in bed in the evening (20.2% pray from time to time, 16.7%—very often, 14.9%—often), 18.8%—never, and 18.2%—hardly ever. Praying was not associated with the meal ritual. 52.9% of the respondents never pray before and/or after meals, 21.9%—hardly ever, and 14.1% of them admit that they pray (10.3%—from time to time, 2.5% often, 1.3% very often). Fear is not a motive for praying for 23.3% of the respondents. It seems to be a very weak motivator for praying for 14.8% of the respondents who chose the "hardly ever" response. However, as many as 50.7% of the respondents pray when they are anxious or concerned, including 21.7%—from time to time, 15.8%—often, 13.2%—very often. Furthermore, 29.8% of the respondents declared that they never prayed when they were sad. However, as many as 40.9% of the respondents pray when they sad (19.7% pray from time to time 13.4%—often, 7.8%—very often). When they are happy, 19.6% of the respondents pray from time to time, 15.3%—hardly ever, 14.9%—often, 5.2%—very often. No praying when they were happy was declared by 33.8% of the respondents. Gratitude is a reason for praying for 53% of the respondents (23.1% pray from time to time when they are grateful, 20.8%—often, 9.1%—very often), 11.7% hardly ever pray in such situations, and 24.0% of the respondents never pray when they are grateful. Not praying at fixed times was declared by 45.2% of the respondents did not pray at fixed times and 17.6% hardly ever prayed. 14.3% of the respondents declared praying at fixed times from time to time, 7.2%—often and 4.4%—very often. As many as 11.3%

of the respondents did not provide an answer in each category specifying the time and place of praying (like with the questions about attending religious services, about their parents attending such services and about their parents making them attend such services). The data show the young people's highly diverse attitude to praying. A large majority of them pray for emotional and personal reasons (e.g., sadness, gratitude, happiness), with no fixed timeframe and with no link to meals. Therefore, it is more an individual than a community-related practice, usually with no link to home and family rituals.

Let us note the respondents' opinions on religious education provided as part of religious teaching at school. They gave their opinions on religion lessons at school. Closed matrix questions with one possible answer, according to Likert's five-point scale, were applied (Figures 12–14). The conversion index was also indicated by providing the percentage of people who did not give an answer in the questionnaire.

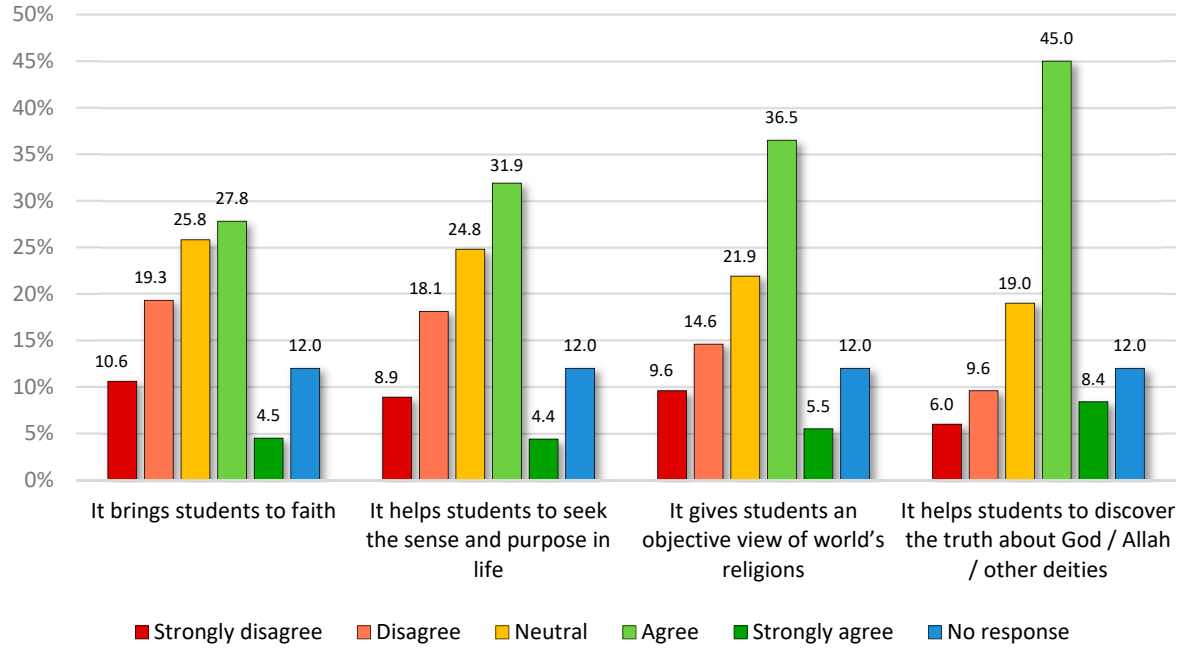

Figure 12. Opinion on Religious Education as a school subject (%). Source: the author's own research.

Figure 12 shows that the respondents gave diverse opinions on whether religious lessons bring students to the faith. 27.8% of respondents agreed that religious lessons brought students to faith, and 25.8% saw them as neutral. 19.3% disagreed with this statement, and 10.6% definitely disagreed. Only 4.5% of the respondents definitely agreed that religious lessons brought students to faith. Therefore, 32.3% of the respondents agreed that religious lessons brought students to faith, and 29.9% of them disagreed. Therefore, the responses in this category are comparable, with a majority of the negative responses (half of the respondents in whose opinion religious lessons do not bring students to faith chose the answer "definitely not"). The respondents also answered the question of whether religious lessons helped students to seek the sense and purpose of life. 31.9% of the respondents agreed with this statement. 24.9% of respondents were indifferent about it, 18.1% disagreed, and 8.9% definitely disagreed. Only 4.4% of the respondents agreed that religious lessons helped students to seek the sense and purpose of life. Therefore, only 36.3% of the respondents were convinced that religious lessons helped students to discover the sense and purpose of life to a lesser or greater extent, with 51.8% of them being of the opposite view or indifferent. It is puzzling that there was a high percentage (12.0%) of those who did not answer. This may indicate serious deficits in teaching religion in schools. The respondents also found it difficult to mention the positive aspects of religious lessons in schools.

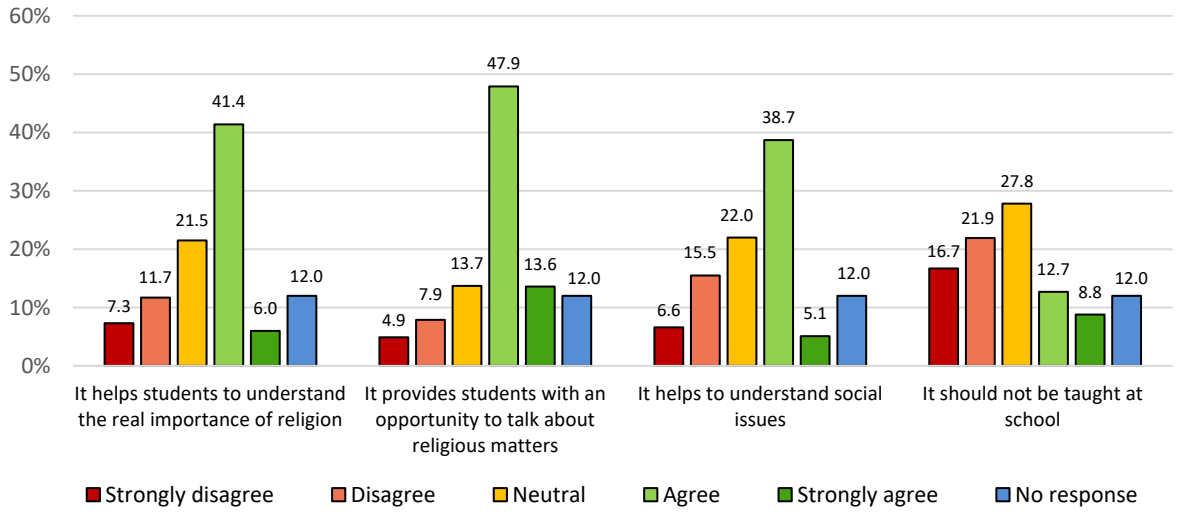

Figure 13. Opinion on Religious Education as a school subject (%). Source: the author's own research.

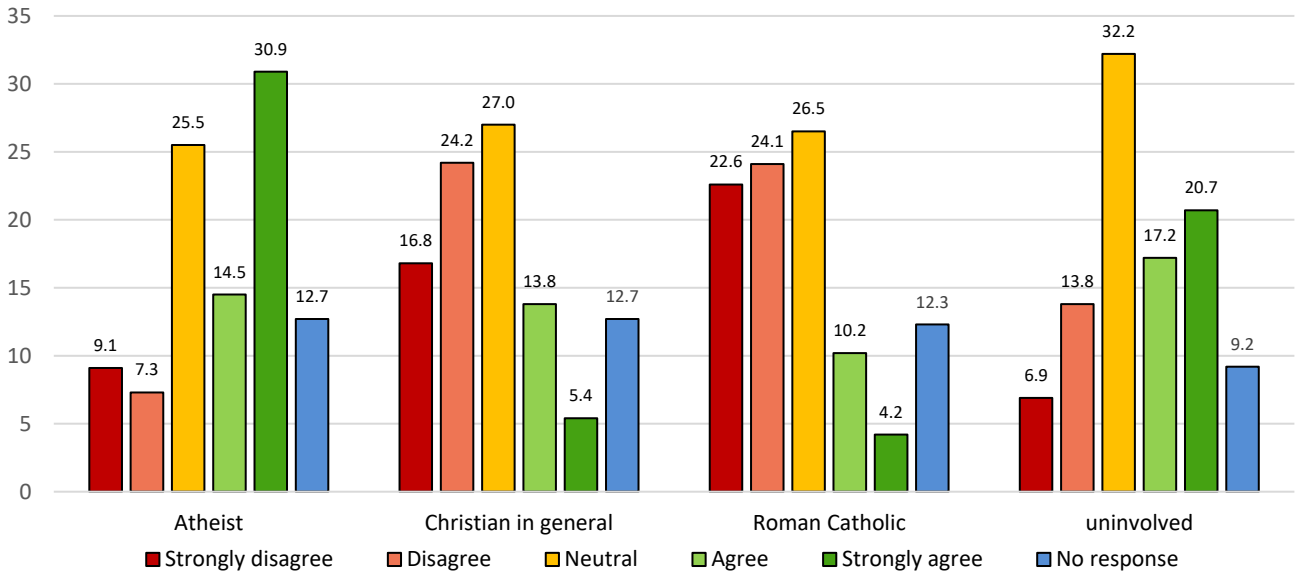

Figure 14. Religious Education should not be a school subject (%). Source: the author's own research.

Of interest are also the respondents' opinions on developing an objective view of the world's religions and discovering the truth about God. 42% of the respondents agreed (including 5.5% of those who gave their definite support) that religious lessons gave students an objective view of the world's religions, and 21.9% expressed their indifference. Only one in four respondents did not agree (14.6% disagreed, and 9.6% definitely disagreed).

It is also worth pointing out the respondents' opinions on whether religious lessons enable students to discover the truth about God/Allah/other deities. 53.9% of respondents agreed (including 8.4% definitely) that religious lessons enabled students to discover the truth about God/Allah/other deities, 19.0% were indifferent, 9.6% disagreed, 6.0% definitely disagreed that religious lessons enabled students to discover the truth about God/Allah/other deities. Twelve percent of the respondents did not give an answer in any category of options to choose from.

A total of 47.4% of the respondents, including 6% definitely, agreed that religious lessons helped students to understand the true meaning of religion. 21.5% saw it as neutral, 19% disagreed, including 7.3% who disagreed definitely. Therefore, a large majority agreed with this statement, but the opposite opinions are relatively more intensive, although

they are shared by a smaller cohort—in total nearly every fifth respondent. Only 12.8% of the respondents disagreed—including 4.9% who definitely disagreed—that religious lessons provided students with an opportunity to discuss religious matters, 13.7% neither agreed nor disagreed, 61.5% agreed—including 13.6% definitely—with the statement. 43.8% of the respondents agreed—including 5.1% definitely—that religious lessons helped to understand social problems. 22% of the respondents neither agreed nor disagreed. 22.1% of the respondents disagreed—including 6.6% definitely—that religious lessons helped to understand social problems. 27.8% of respondents were indifferent to whether religion is taught as a school subject. As much as 38.6% (including 16.7%, who responded: "definitely disagree") disagreed with the statement that religion should not be taught at school, i.e., they accept religious lessons in schools. There were individuals (12.7%) among the respondents who thought that religion should not be taught at schools. A definitely negative opinion on the presence of religious lessons at schools was expressed by 8.8% of the respondents. Therefore, a total of 21.5% of the respondents are against teaching religion at schools, 38.6% of them are of the opposite opinion, with a relatively large group of indifferent respondents (nearly 28%).

The results show the respondents' diverse attitudes to religious education offered at religious lessons at schools. Some respondents mentioned positive, didactic and educational aspects, while others declared indifference. The negative and definitely negative attitudes of some respondents to the didactic and educational tasks pursued in the lessons are a cause for concern. It shows that the secularisation and individualisation trend is present and accelerating. However, this is opposed in regions with strong and well-established (culturally or socially) religious convictions, which, however, are weakening. Further studies may reveal long-term trends.

These considerations can be summarised by juxtaposing the answers to the question about the presence of religion at school with the self-declaration about the religion one professes (Figure 14).

Definitely positive opinions on the presence of religion were expressed by 22.6% of the Roman Catholics, 16.8% of the Christians in general, 9.1% of the atheists and 6.9% of the uninvolved. This group of respondents definitely disagreed with the statement that religion should not be taught at school. A positive, although weaker opinion on this matter was expressed by those who chose the "I disagree" response: 24.2% of the Christians in general, 24.1% of the Roman Catholics, 13.8% of the uninvolved and 7.3% of the atheists were in favour of the presence of religion lessons at schools, i.e., they disagreed with the statement that this subject should not be taught at schools. Their indifference to this issue was expressed by 32.2% of the uninvolved, 27.0% of the Christians in general, 25.5% of the atheists and 26.5% of the Roman Catholics. One should note that there were individuals among the respondents who agreed that religion should not be taught at schools. This opinion was expressed by 14.5% of atheists, 13.8% of Christians in general, 10.2% of Roman Catholics and 17.2% of the uninvolved. Their objections to the presence of religion at schools were expressed by 30.9% of the atheists, 20.7% of the uninvolved, 5.4% of the Christians in general and only 4.2% of the Roman Catholics. This shows a polarisation of the respondents' opinions on the presence of religious lessons at schools, with a majority of those who are in favour of it (in total: 16.4% of the atheists, 41% of the Christians in general, 46.7% of the Catholics and 20.7% of the uninvolved). However, this was accompanied by a relatively high indifference rate, with the highest percentage in all the groups except the atheists. Self-declarations on the professed religion are important in the respondents' attitude to this issue. Those who declare atheism or religious uninvolvement objected to the presence of religious lessons at schools more often and in a more definite manner. It was found that 12.7% of atheists, the same percentage of Christians in general, 12.3% of Roman Catholics and 9.2% of the uninvolved did not give an answer to this question.

6. Discussion and Conclusions

All the data under analysis were based on young respondents' self-declarations. It should be noted that the young people's self-declarations, especially regarding their faith and religious practices, provide a set of more personal answers, which help to grasp and understand the respondents' religious sphere. Naturally, they are subjective. They are often emotional. However, they can show the direction of changes in religiousness in a specific community. They also help to get to know the place that religion occupies in young people's lives. They do not show the respondents' uncertainty and hesitation. Moreover, they do not give the possibility of giving their free opinions on the matter, e.g., on religious lessons. These data were collected from a sample that is not sufficient to project the conclusions onto the whole population of young people in Poland. They should be juxtaposed with the findings of studies conducted in other regions of the country. For example, a decrease in the number of young people attending religious lessons and distinct secularisation processes are noticeable in the north, west, south-west and north-east of Poland (Instytut Statystyki Kościoła Katolickiego 2021).

This study shows that the religiousness of the respondents in the south and south-east of Poland, i.e., ones with the highest religious practice rate in Poland, does not show any distinct secularisation trends. The data show that a majority of young people in the region of Poland under study still declared that they took part in religious practices often or very often. Religiousness and affiliation with religious communities, mainly among the Christians in general and Roman Catholics, may be mentioned as a characteristic feature of the socio-cultural picture of the region in the period and cohort under study. The young people's self-declarations show that they are not abandoning religious practices in total and that their faith is becoming privatised and individualised to a small extent. According to their declarations, young people attend religious services. Their religiousness is based on praying, bonds with religious communities, and attending celebrations, religious services, and masses. The young people declare being members of (and to feel bonds to) communities (e.g., Catholics, Christians in general). The young people's self-declarations show that their religiousness does not tend to be deinstitutionalised, individualised, selective or privatised.

The majority of the respondents demonstrate a positive attitude toward religious lessons at schools. They declare sporadically that religious lessons play no role in shaping their views, discovering the sense of life, learning about other religions, and learning the contents of faith. Such attitudes of the respondents do not correspond to the opinions of those in national surveys. They are different, positive and optimistic. It is difficult to say in which direction the views of these people on religious lessons at schools will evolve. A question also arises whether their religiousness will be stable or will change dramatically. The findings of the empirical quantitative studies conducted by Antoni Głowacki, Dominik Kiełb and Paweł Mąkosa, Janusz Mariański show that the religiousness of young people in Poland is trending towards selectivisation, individualisation, privatisation and deinstitutionalisation. They also show that the number of young people declaring themselves to be practicing believers is diminishing in Poland, even in its south-eastern part, which has always been more religious than the other parts of the country (Kiełb and Mąkosa 2021). Religiousness is becoming more of a social phenomenon than a strictly spiritual one for many young people (Głowacki 2019; Mariański 2019, 2021). Therefore, young people, even if they declare faith and bond to the Church and attend religious services, do not feel a personal relationship with God and do not feel responsible for the Church (Grabowska 2021; Mariański 2021; Kiełb and Mąkosa 2021). Therefore, negative attitudes to the Catholic Church as an institution are increasingly frequent, which is associated with an unethical lifestyle of some of the clergy, including the sexual exploitation of minors (Kiełb and Mąkosa 2021; Szymczak et al. 2022).

The respondents' self-declarations, which show their negative or neutral attitude toward the Church community, including attending religious services and celebrations, prove to be consistent with the findings of studies by Wioletta Szymczak, Paweł Makosa and Tomasz Adamczyk (Szymczak et al. 2022). The young people participating in these

authors' study distance themselves from institutional forms of religion. Their relationship with the Catholic Church is based on a traditional model (Szymczak et al. 2022). It is not a personal bond to the Church, which leads to involvement and shared responsibility for the community. According to their self-declarations, the respondents have not given up praying individually (Kiełb and Mąkosa 2021). Such self-declarations concerning praying are consistent with the findings of the current study. The respondents' answers about individual praying, though diverse, help one to understand the place it occupies in young people's lives.

Reviewing the respondents' self-declarations on atheism brings to mind the thesis put forward by James Emery White. In his opinion, functional atheism is at the heart of contemporary secularism (White 2017, p. 20). A contemporary young person ignores the idea of God instead of rejecting it. Therefore, not being an important part of young people's lives, God erodes continuously, and their spiritual needs are transferred to those spheres of contemporary culture, which offer attractive content and ideas for young people (White 2017, p. 20; see also Drozdowicz 2022).

Attending religious lessons and reference to this school subject is correlated with the transformation of young people's religiousness in Poland. They have been seen to distance themselves from the teaching of religion since 2016 (Instytut Statystyki Kościoła Katolickiego 2021, pp. 31–34; cf. Jedynak 2018). The answers provided by the current respondents regarding this school subject correspond to community opinions on teaching religion at schools (Głowacki 2019; Instytut Statystyki Kościoła Katolickiego 2021, pp. 31–34; Zubrzycka-Maciąg 2021). The group of respondents under study includes individuals who cannot see the sense or importance of religious education in the Polish school, which is why they quit religious lessons (Instytut Statystyki Kościoła Katolickiego 2021; Jedynak 2018, 2019). For them, religious lessons are not an opportunity to discover the sense of life, seek the truth, solve existential problems, learn about other religions, or learn the content of faith and personal encounter with God. This is also confirmed by national studies on attending religious lessons and the quality of this school subject (Instytut Statystyki Kościoła Katolickiego 2021; Jedynak 2018, 2019; Zubrzycka-Maciąg 2021). Therefore, the religiousness of young people in Poland is expected to change. However, it is difficult to predict in which direction it will evolve and whether it will stop or change dramatically.

7. Final Reflections

The picture of religiousness that emerges from these partial analyses is a challenge to Catholic education. Without a doubt, it requires a multi-faceted, permanent diagnosis and an evaluation of the current state of religious teaching in Poland, especially in secondary schools, but also seeking and implementing new educational and formation solutions, with the active participation of young people. One must also bear in mind that it is not possible to define one specific strategy of action. The diversity and creativity of religious teachers and priests in thinking and actions also seem important.

Reaching out to young people and reaching them through social media and listening to their needs and expectations should also be regarded as significant. A greater value should be assigned to the attitude of openness, the ability to listen, to be with and for young people, to stay dialogue with both those involved in any religious communities and the unaffiliated ones. Creating authentic relations with young people, without aggression and apologetics, and supporting them gradually in their discovery of the community of the Church is also important.

It is also justified to make use of young people's interest in art, music, literature, new communication and information technologies, even if they are of little interest to teachers of religion, tutors and priests. Therefore, dialogue should be conducted with young people on the basic topics concerning ethics, arts and science and on seeking transcendence. In this, one needs the courage to seek new signs, new symbols and new ways of transmitting the Word. Moreover, proper methodical, pedagogical, communicative and information skills are required.

Regardless of the outer activity of individuals involved in Catholic Education, this cannot be done without their testimony of faith. Therefore, one should care about evangelisation, catechisation and formation of adults, especially parents, religion teachers, and priests.

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Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: The information will be kept as the original information source at the Faculty of Catholic Theology of Tilburg University for ten years and will be available to other researchers to check the reliability of the analyses and conclusions.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Note

[1] This category included the responses in which the respondents declared themselves as Orthodox, Lutheran, Jew, Buddhist, Muslim, Hindu.

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Youth Attitudes towards Religious Education in Poland

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Abstract: This article presents a sociological and catechetical-pastoral overview of the results of an empirical survey that was carried out at the beginning of 2022 among 257 pupils aged 13–18 who were taking part in religious education in public schools in Poland. In the empirical measurement, a computer-assisted interview technique was applied (i.e., computer-assisted web interview). Participants of religious education were asked about their independence in making the decision to attend religious classes, about their motivations, activity during the lessons, and their opinions on the lessons and teachers. The students were asked about the content, methods, atmosphere at the classes, and the impact on their knowledge and their attitudes to life. The analysis of data framed in an interdisciplinary approach indicated that the students had mildly positive attitudes towards religious education, despite secularisation changes and the confessional character of religious education in Poland. This research shows that religious education classes have an impact on particular aspects of the student's life, their knowledge and faith, and their good assessment of the educational content, methods, and atmosphere during classes. The main conclusion of this research is that it is necessary to develop a less confessional and more open concept of religious education in Poland, which will be more inclusive and more interesting for pupils.

Keywords: religious education; religious motivations; young Catholics; Poland

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1. Introduction

Religious education in Polish schools is an institutionalised form of education and upbringing. In the legal order, religious education should be correlated and integrated with the main goals and educational assumptions of the school. In Poland, religious education is an optional subject (Tomasik 2003) but its presence in schools is a matter of great debate. The basic problem is the concept of religious education (Chałupniak 2000). These issues have been organised by one of the documents of the Catholic Church *Dyrektorium katechetyczne Kościoła katolickiego w Polsce* (Konferencja Episkopatu Polski 2001). This document defines the main aims of teaching religion at school, which are evangelisation, transfer of religious knowledge, and also religious education combined with the axiological dimension. Taking into account the issue of shaping the moral attitudes of the students, religious education belongs to the group of humanities that aim to shape ethical and moral attitudes. Religious education in Polish schools thus plays an auxiliary role towards parents in the process of religious and moral education of young people (Konferencja Episkopatu Polski 2001).

Religion is taught in many European countries, both those that declare one religion to be the national religion (e.g., Denmark, Finland, Greece, Norway, and the United Kingdom) and those that have not reached such a decision (e.g., Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, the Netherlands, Ireland, Germany, and Romania). In Poland, religious education is taught in all public schools, including those that are not Catholic (Chałupniak 2003). However, religious education in Poland is a non-compulsory subject, which means that a parent, or a pupil after becoming an adult, can withdraw from these classes and at the same time can declare a wish to participate in ethics classes (which are similarly non-compulsory). In Poland, religious education has a confessional or even catechetical-evangelistic character (Buchta et al. 2021). This means that a particular religious community (in the case of Poland,

in the vast majority of cases, the Catholic Church) is responsible for shaping religious education, its goals, content, methods, and forms, which delegates that teachers should be witnesses of faith and belong to the religious community. Thus, the main goal of religious education is to strengthen the student's belonging to the Catholic Church and improve their knowledge of the principles of faith and morality. In the case of non-believing young people, religious education aims to encourage them to receive the faith and become members of the Catholic Church (Mąkosa 2011, 2015).

The assumptions of religious education often generate ideological conflicts between students and their parents. Young people often declare themselves to be non-believers, although they participate in religious education with different motivations. These conflicts occur especially in situations in which a significant number of students participate in compulsory religious practices such as masses, prayers or pilgrimages, in addition to religion classes. It is also caused by the fact that the student's attitude towards religious faith is often redefined in adolescence (Gołąbek 2005).

A review of the literature on religious education makes it possible to point to several studies based on quantitative or qualitative sociological research. Significantly, most of the research was published in Polish, therefore foreign researchers had limited access. The method of these studies was mainly paper-based survey questionnaires or computer-assisted survey techniques. W. Jedynak conducted a study in 2019 in which he elaborated on the attitudes of Polish society towards religious education. The result of his research was the claim that these opinions are relatively stable and that students overwhelmingly participate due to their interest in the content conveyed during classes. This researcher did not take into account questions about the voluntariness of participation in religious education and engagement during lessons (Jedynak 2019). In contrast, R. Bednarczyk published a study in 2016 on the effectiveness of religious education in the context of the Christian faith. The author showed the extent to which religious education translates into students' faith, which is primarily concretised in participation in religious practices. The conclusion of his research is that religious education has little impact on the faith of young people. His analyses seem to be oriented unilaterally only from the point of view of the Catholic Church without a broader consideration of sociology (Bendarczyk 2016). M. Gwiazda in 2016 elaborated on the issue of youth attitudes towards religion. Her study is monodisciplinary in that it presents specific data without attempting an in-depth pastoral analysis. The research covered the whole of Poland and did not take into account individual regions of the country, so it seems that the inference was overgeneralised. The conclusion of the research is that young people have a moderate opinion about religious education. Similar to other researchers, the author does not ask about the autonomy of the decision to attend classes (Gwiazda 2016). Research on religious education was also conducted by P. Mąkosa, G. Zakrzewski, and M. Zając. Their study concerns the motivation for opting out of religious lessons. The study was based on qualitative research and included several dozen students. The authors indicate that the main reasons for dropping out of classes are the Catholic Church's lack of acceptance of LGBT communities, the confessional nature of religious education, and sexual scandals in the Church (Mąkosa et al. 2022). Research on religious education but in the context of youth religiosity was also conducted by A. Zellma. The study was conducted in 2019 and 2020 on a large survey sample of more than a thousand students through the CAWI technique. One aspect concerned young people's opinions about the classes. The moderately positive attitude did not take into account the motivation and autonomy of the decision to participate in activities (Zellma et al. 2022). In addition to the studies indicated, many other theoretical studies have been conducted on the history of religious education and its concepts, but they are not related to sociological research.

Describing the research context, it is necessary to recall a series of quantitative studies on young people's attitudes towards religious education and religion conducted in a variety of Western countries. In particular, the measurements indicated two important parameters of religious knowledge and religious practices, which are not high (Smith and

Denton 2005; Kay and Ziebertz 2006; Valk et al. 2009; Robbins and Francis 2010). Taking into account the changing religious situation, these studies indicate the beginning of a process of change when it comes to attitudes towards religious education. In contrast, qualitative measurements on the concept of religion itself were conducted by Dan Moulin in 2011. This research was more universal because it involved members of different communities, including the Jewish community and various denominations of Christianity. They revealed, on the one hand, students' reluctance to reveal their religious identity as well as young people's criticism of the concept of religious education and especially towards the expectation imposed on them to be a witness to their religion (Moulin 2011). A wide-ranging qualitative study on attitudes towards religious education was conducted as part of the project "Religion in Education: A contribution to dialogue as a factor of Conflict in transforming societies of European Countries 2006–2009" (Weisse 2010). Importantly, the study covered eight countries and showed significant differences in attitudes towards education depending on the contextual factors taken into account, such as the role of religion in the national society, the local town, educational programmes, teacher training, and confessional or non-confessional education (Bertram-Troost 2011). This seems to be a very important conclusion in relation to research on youth attitudes in Poland because of the presence of contextual factors that have a special impact on the religious diversity of society. The call for the consideration of religious education in research on religious education and on the subject itself is made by Anders Sjöborg (2013), who conducted a study in the Swedish context with a sample of 1850 students (Sjöborg 2013). Similarly, Alexander Unser (2022) points to social inequalities in the context of religious education. The results of a study in Germany with a sample of 952 pupils showed that religious socialisation and the sex of the pupils are relevant for unequal learning conditions, whereas family socio-economic status has a marginal impact (Unser 2022). The research therefore suggests the need to include social factors in sociological measurements. An analysis of young people's attitudes towards religious education in the context of secularisation changes was presented by Ewa Stachowska (2018). The result of the analyses was the conclusion that often the confessional conception of religious education and the content it conveys is an attempt to stop changes concerning religiosity, which is taken up by religious communities influencing the confessional design of religious education (Stachowska 2018). The most extensive sociological research on young people's attitudes towards religion has been published by the Pew Research Center (2018a, 2018b) showing the dynamic change in the examined area. The survey covered Poland and a number of other European countries. The measurements showed the process of secularisation of societies mainly in Western and Central Europe as well as religious needs, which generates expectations related to religious education (Pew Research Center 2018a, 2018b).

This study captures the views of young people concerning religious education through several research dimensions. The first dimension was to define the respondents' motivations to participate in the activities, and in particular to find its centre of gravity towards personal consent or external compulsion. The second dimension draws attention to the students' activities during religious education at school. The third dimension was to assess the various aspects of religious education, including themes, methods, atmosphere, and the impact on knowledge and attitudes. Finally, the fourth dimension was to assess the students' opinions about the teachers of religious education classes. In view of the lack of publications on all aspects indicated, the main research question is the following: what are the attitudes and opinions of students participating in religious education provided in public schools in Poland?

This study is sociological and catechetical–pastoral in nature. It refers to empirical research in order to show clear data on young people's attitudes and opinions about religious education, and it is pastoral–catechetical, i.e., referring to the practical part of theology in order to show the need for changes in the current concept of education in order to improve its practical impact. The secularisation and sociocultural changes that are taking

place in Polish society point to a theological reflection that will take more account of young people's opinions on education itself and its content.

2. Methods

To measure these research dimensions, an empirical study of adolescents aged 13–18 was carried out in 2022. This is a period of dynamic and sudden changes in the life of young people, and it is characterised by the transformation of a child into an adult, which affects key spheres of life, such as physical, mental, social, and religious and ideological development (Bee 2004). Consequently, the readiness of young people to express opinions regarding their own views, faith, or the Church is observed. Despite the fact that this change is associated with a strong need for adolescent autonomy, it is a strong point of the study of this social group. However, the study of adolescents also suffers from a number of weaknesses, which include changes in the students' views, which dynamically change under the influence of various factors (e.g., social media and peer groups, low level of abstract thinking, and a high rate of responding).

A computer-assisted web interview was selected as the survey technique. To carry out the measurement, the research tool was placed on the GoogleForms platform. This technique has many advantages, which includes quick access to many respondents and their full anonymity, the ability to quickly fill in and thus collect empirical material, reduced risk of errors by interviewers, and a quick preview of the research results. However, apart from these advantages, this technique suffers from a number of disadvantages that can be eliminated by careful planning of measurements, a sufficiently large research sample, and a properly constructed research tool. The key problem seems to be the representativeness of the study (i.e., the answer to the question to what extent, on the basis of the obtained results, it can be concluded with reference to the entire population). Studies of sociological measurements have shown that online surveys give an average of an 11% lower rate of credible responses (Manfreda et al. 2008). Due to the fact that the online survey may suggest a high pace of selected responses, without stimulating the respondent to deeper reflection, superficial responses may be another disadvantage.

In the process of collecting empirical material, a questionnaire developed by the authors was used. The research tool contained 12 questions about gender, place of living, people they live with, parents' religiosity and individual dimensions directly related to religious education, such as motivation to participate in classes, involvement during classes, class evaluation, and opinions about teachers conducting classes. To minimise frequent methodological errors, the questionnaire was divided into individual parts. At the beginning of the questionnaire, an information clause was included, in which respondents were informed of the full anonymity and voluntariness of the study, the consent of the university ethics committee, and the agreement of the school principals to conduct the empirical study in the proposed form. Due to the fact that the students were mostly minors, it was necessary to obtain the consent of the students themselves, and their parents or legal guardians as well as that of the individual teachers to mediate the empirical measurement. As a first step, the consent of the principals of the individual schools from the selected random-target method was obtained to participate in the study. In a second step, a request was made to the teachers to mediate the scientific study. Subsequently, teachers had contact with parents or the legal guardians of the underage pupils requesting them for consent to participate in the study. However, pupils expressed their consent by filing questionnaires. In the case of consent from school management, teachers and parents, and pupils who had given their own consent by completing the questionnaire, were asked to answer the questions. The respondents received a link generated by teachers of religious education, to whom it was sent by e-mail. While completing it, they could not proceed to the next parts of the questionnaire if they omitted the answers to the previous questions. In total, 257 people were invited to participate in the study, all of whom were randomly selected to reflect the social characteristics of the population living in the region of south-eastern Poland. Participation in the study was voluntary, anonymous, and participants were not

rewarded. All of the students completed the questionnaire. The procedure was approved by the relevant Scientific Research Ethics Committee.

The research group was a representative part of the population, who were proportionally selected from large cities (47%), small towns (11%), and villages (42%) (GUS 2022). Population data were taken from the Central Statistical Office, which is the national office that surveys population characteristics. Based on this, criteria for the selection of a reflective research sample were defined. From among all functioning schools in large cities, small towns, and villages, the number of schools corresponding to the above proportions was selected using a random-target method. In the case of a disagreement among the school principal, parents, or teachers, another school was selected to reflect the proportions of the Central Statistical Office (GUS 2022). Girls constituted 56.7% and boys 43.3% of the research group. This selection of respondents allowed for a statistical and typological analysis focused on qualitative inference. The vast majority of respondents came from Catholic families, in which 61.4% of the fathers and 72.6% of the mothers actively practice the Catholic faith. Most of the surveyed youth live with both parents (90%), and the rest live only with their mother (7.2%), father (2%), or legal guardian (0.8%). Quantitative and qualitative data interpretation methods were used in the analysis. The survey instrument and the data obtained in the measurement have been placed in the university's scientific repository and are available with the required approvals.

3. Analysis of the Research Results

Motivations for Participation and Involvement in Religious Education

Motivation is a crucial factor in taking any action. It inspires and directs a person to achieve specific goals. It also has a significant impact on obtaining satisfactory results in the process of education and development in adolescence. Therefore, it also influences the participation and implementation of the tasks of religious education. Meanwhile, Janusz Reykowski defines motivation as "a complex regulatory process that performs the function of controlling activities so as to lead to the achievement of a specific goal—a result realized by the subject" (Reykowski 1976). To find out about the motivation of students participating in religious education, the respondents were asked direct and indirect questions about this issue. In south-eastern Poland, religious classes are mostly conducted by clergymen. Over 78% of respondents indicated that the priest conducts these classes. Meanwhile, 10.6% of the respondent indicated that religious instruction was conducted by a nun. Similarly, 10.6% stated that classes were conducted by a layperson, including 3.2% by a teacher and 7.4% by a teacher.

The results show that the motivations related to participation in religious education may result from one's own decision or be related to the feeling of compulsion, which is illustrated in the following figure (Figure 1).

Three out of four respondents (72.6%) declared that participation in religion classes was the result of their own (conscious and voluntary) decision. However, nearly 17.9% of the respondents participate in these classes because the decision was made by the parents. Few (2.3%) say that they have no choice because there are no alternative ethics classes. The others did not express an opinion in this regard.

However, passive participation in religious education does not significantly translate into the achievement of educational goals or the development of the students' faith. Achieving the assumptions of religious education is closely related to the activity of students during these school activities. In the question regarding this aspect, the respondents defined their commitment during the classes. The results are presented in Figure 2.

The respondents highly assessed their involvement during the classes. Three out of four respondents (75.1%) indicated that they actively participate in religious education, and one in four is always active during classes. Nearly 20% respondent declared passivity.

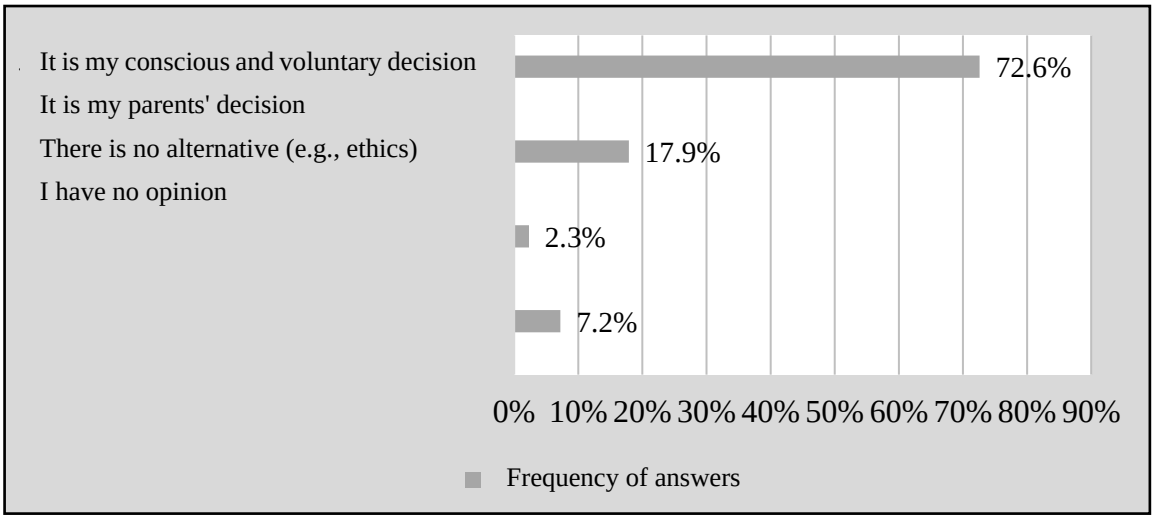

Figure 1. Why do you attend religious education classes? (Source: own study).

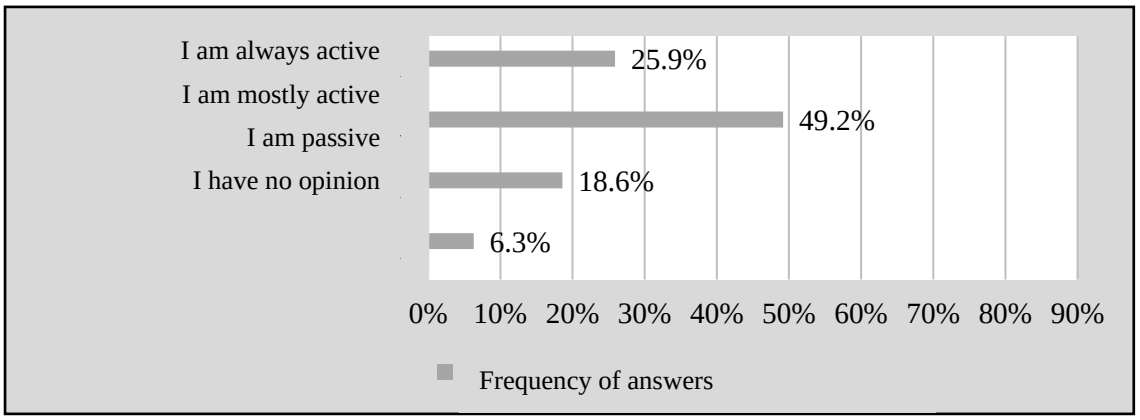

Figure 2. How do you evaluate your participation in religious education? (Source: own study).

This study also examined the correlation between the motivation to participate in religion classes and commitment during these classes. The results of these tests are presented in the following table (Table 1).

Table 1. Motivations for participation in religious education and commitment during classes.

	I Am Always Active	I Am Mostly Active	I Am Passive	I Have No Opinion	
It is my conscious and voluntary decision	33.8%	55.2%	9.4%	1.6%	100.0%
It is my parents' decision	3.2%	34.0%	45.7%	17.0%	100.0%
There is no alternative (e.g., ethics)	8.3%	25.0%	50.0%	16.7%	100.0%
I have no opinion	7.9%	34.2%	34.2%	23.7%	100.0%
Overall	25.9%	49.2%	18.6%	6.3%	100.0%

Source: own study.

The level of activity in religious education classes is strongly related to the motivation for participation. Students who consciously and voluntarily participate in these activities are very active (33.8%) or mostly active (55.2%). In comparison, students who are "forced" to attend classes by their parents are most often passive (45.7%). Students who would

prefer to take ethics classes behave similarly. Interestingly, students attending religious education classes due to a lack of ethics are more likely to be very active (8.3%) than those forced by their parents (3.2%). It can be assumed that in their case religious education is an activity that is focused on contesting the content and criticism, especially in high school classes. In order to verify whether there is a sociological relationship between the analysed characteristics, a chi-square test was performed, which is $\chi 2(9.257) = [161.43; p = 0.000]$ and thus indicates such a relationship. However, as indicated by Cramer's V coefficient, the strength of the relationship is only moderate, as it is 0.320.

The issue of student involvement seems to be very important. Their active participation determines the effectiveness of teaching and religious education. As theologians note (Łabendowicz 2018; Mastalski 2002; Zellma 2021), this issue is conditioned by several tasks that should be fulfilled by the teacher of religious education to increase its effectiveness and activate the students, including arousing interest in the topic in class, establishing emotional contact, showing the teacher's passion for the content, correct communication, and a friendly atmosphere while taking into account various methods and forms of communication (Białas 2020). Although these elements are not the only ones that influence student involvement, they are crucial and have a positive effect on the students' motivation and evaluation of the activities. It seems that the lack of implementation of these aspects is the main cause of inactivity, which results in the student's passivity during classes and, consequently, their low effectiveness.

4. Assessment of Religious Education

Sociological studies conducted at the time of reactivation of religious education in 1990 after the communist period (during which time religious education was absent in schools) indicate a positive assessment of the vast majority of society as it pertains to the presence of these classes in Polish schools. Both parents and students showed support for religious education (Grabowska 1995). As Lucjan Adamczuk points out, religious education at the time of its introduction in 1990 was almost universally accepted. This is evidenced by the percentage of students, which reached 97.3% in cities and 99.3% in rural areas (Adamczuk 1995). Since 2010, there has been a decline in participation in these classes and in 2020 it reached about 88% nationwide (ISKK 2020). However, it should be noted that there is a discrepancy in the number of people participating in religion classes, depending on the age and type of school attended by young people, especially at the stage of secondary education. According to the Public Opinion Research Center and the National Bureau for Counteracting Drug Addiction, 75% of young people declared participation in religious classes in 2016. These studies indicate that this decline is systematic and is still progressing (Gwiazda 2016).

As noted by W. Jedynak: "relatively high attendance at religious education classes is an indicator of high interest in these classes. It also shows that religious education classes are also attended by students with poorly developed faith or even non-believers" (Jedynak 2019). It seems that one of the reasons for this state of affairs is the fact that the topics discussed and the general satisfaction with religious classes attended by young people are generally satisfactory. Research conducted in 2013 indicated that every third adolescent declared that religious education classes are interesting, interestingly conducted, and concern important issues in their lives. In turn, every fourth student thought that these classes were boring and not very interesting (Bulkowski et al. 2016). The measurement of these aspects carried out in 2016 showed that 40% of respondents indicated that they are interested in the topics covered in religious education classes, 38% of respondents said that these classes do not differ from other subjects, and 22% of respondents declared a negative attitude towards these classes. The research on the attitude of Polish youth to religion classes over the years 1991–2016 is compared in the works by Wojciech Jedynak, who states that:

> The assessments of young people regarding the quality of teaching religious education were stable, because only a few, several percent changes were noticed.

> The fact that two fifths of students over 25 years believed that teaching religious education stands out from other subjects and arouses interest among young people is undoubtedly an advantage of these classes. (Jedynak 2019)

The empirical research that is currently conducted in Poland allows us to observe that a relatively large number of students are unsubscribing from religious education (Zakrzewski 2021). Although this is conditioned by various factors, religious education lessons are usually conducted at the last hour of school, and this may have a major impact on the decisions of young people. The tendency to quit these activities is steadily increasing and becoming an increasingly serious problem from the point of view of the Catholic Church. Many students declare their willingness to withdraw from these classes because of other subjects, examinations at the end of primary school, the secondary school-leaving examination, or extracurricular activities, of which students have a lot (Zakrzewski 2021). Despite the fact that in south-eastern Poland the percentage of young people giving up religious education is definitely lower than in other regions of Poland (Konferencja Episkopatu Polski 2001), the lack of interest of a large number of the young people that we surveyed in the content of religious education and the lack of a sense of their impact on real life indicates that that the trends in Poland also exist in this region. A deeper analysis shows that the reasons for unsubscribing from religion classes are the same as in the rest of Poland. Presumably due to the strong institutional position of the Church and the opinion of the community, young people do not formally withdraw from religious education but the presence itself does not significantly affect their religious knowledge and life attitudes.

To measure the assessment of religious education among students from south-eastern Poland, they were asked to evaluate the issues discussed, the methods used, the atmosphere in religion classes, and the perceived impact of these classes on their knowledge, behaviour, and faith. The results of these studies are presented in Figure 3.

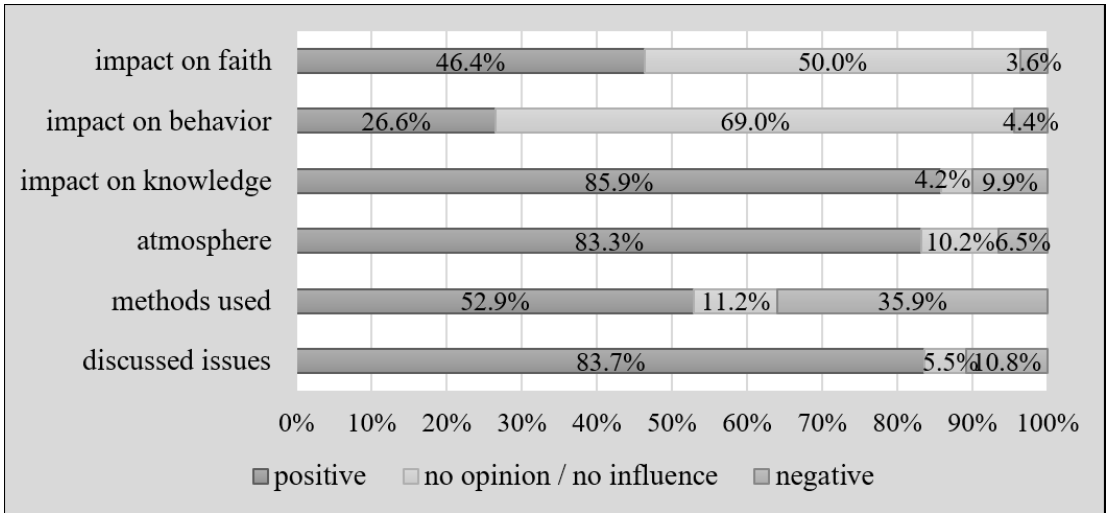

Figure 3. Assessment of selected aspects of religious education classes. (Source: own study).

The surveyed students assessed the content discussed in religion classes very highly. Over 38% found them interesting and useful in life choices, whereas 45.6% said they were interesting. With regard to the atmosphere in the classroom, 38.4% indicated that the climate is friendly and 44.9% reported that the atmosphere is good. The respondents assessed the applied methods as slightly worse. For half of them (52.9%), they are interesting and activating. For nearly one in four, 24.9%, they are not very interesting, and for 11%, they are boring.

The second aspect examined is the influence of religious education. The respondents indicated that they most often felt a positive influence on acquiring knowledge (85.9%). In the opinion of nearly half of the respondents, religious classes also have a positive

impact on personal faith. Meanwhile, only every fourth respondent (26.6%) feels a positive influence on behaviour and shaping life attitudes. It should be emphasised that religious education has generally not been observed to have any negative influence.

5. Index of Attitude to Religious Education

Attitude towards religion classes was determined on the scale of positive and negative grades. The frequency of declarations in individual questions was assigned a number of points from −1 to +1 to determine the weight of individual respondents' answers and then to determine the index on the attitude of young people to religious education. The scale is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Index of attitudes towards religious education classes.

	Points for Answers		
	−1	**0**	**1**
Motives for participation	- parental decision - no alternative	- I have no opinion	- my conscious and voluntary decision
Activity	- passive	- I have no opinion	- always active - mostly active
Issues discussed	- uninteresting	- I have no opinion	- interesting and useful - sometimes interesting
Methods used	- not really interesting - boring	- I have no opinion	- interesting and activating
Atmosphere	- bad	- I have no opinion	- friendly - good
Impact on knowledge	- I am not learning any new content	- I have no opinion	- I learn new content - sometimes I learn something new
Impact on behaviour	- negative impact	- I have no opinion - have no effect	- I behave better
Impact on faith	- destructive impact	- I have no opinion - does not matter	- faith deepens

Source: own study.

The Religion Classes Index is a summary indicator of the motives, participation, grades, and impact of these activities on participants. This indicator was created by totalling the points awarded for the answer for eight statements. Thus, the index assumed values from -8 (compulsion, passivity, negative assessments of content and methods, no impact) to +8 (autonomously made decision, activity and commitment, positive assessments of content and methods, feeling the impact). The index has been divided into five categories as follows: low rating (−8–−6 points in the index), rather low rating (−5–−2 points), average rating (−1–1 point), rather high rating (2–5 points), and high mark (6–8 points). The developed index on the assessment of religion classes on the basis of the above-described scale is presented in Figure 4.

Figure 4 shows the relatively high marks of religion classes in schools. This answer was given by 48.1% of the respondents. The answer showing a rather high rating was indicated by 30.6% of young people. Summing up these two values, it is worth emphasising that it was expressed by 78.7% of the surveyed youth. They emphasise the interest in the issues discussed, point to the interesting methods used and (what is particularly important) note that religion classes influence their Christian attitudes in life. The opposite opinion was expressed by 10.1% of young people, among whom the sociological measurement was carried out.

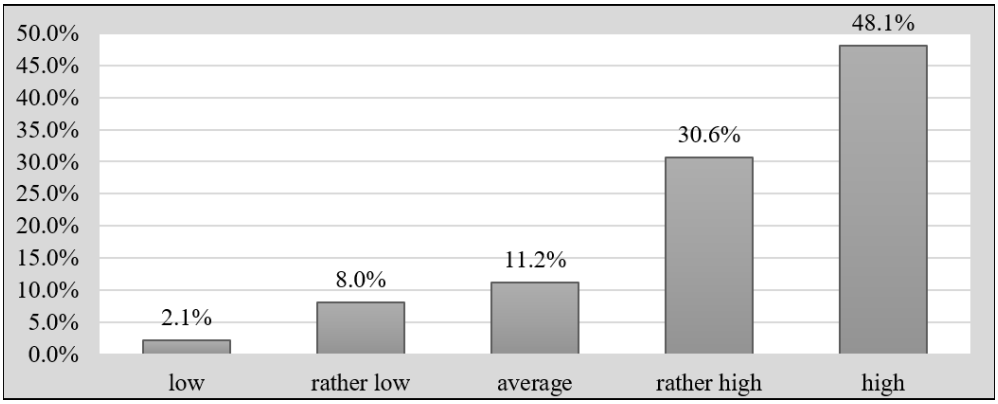

Figure 4. Assessment of religious education (Source: own study).

This research indicates a slightly positive approach to religious education in Poland in public schools. In spite of the secularisation's changes in the field of religiosity and the confessional character of religious education, the vast majority of young people make autonomous decisions to participate in religious education. This finding is confirmed by the degree of their involvement with the educational process itself, their impact on particular aspects of their lives (e.g., faith and religious knowledge), as well as their assessment of the educational content, methods, and atmosphere of the classes. This points to broad implications in relation to religious education. First, these results could be the basis for the conclusion of a firm need for the presence of religious education in Polish schools. The autonomy of its choice by pupils, their involvement, and its high evaluation require care to be taken to ensure the high level of its teaching, the professional preparation of teachers of religious education, their training in modern methods and forms of communication, and new mediums of education. This interest shown by the pupils is also an opportunity to increase the effectiveness of religious education, above all in the passing on of religious knowledge. This requires the adaptation of the educational content to the expectations of young people who, just starting out in adulthood, expect precise content about religion, which they often contest in the area of morality without having a sufficient level of theoretical knowledge. Religious education in the Polish context also requires reference to scientific research presenting its theoretical basis, which may have an impact on the shaping of its model in the future.

6. Discussion

Based on sociological research (including the Pew Research Center, the Public Opinion Research Center, the National Bureau for Drug Prevention), a dynamic decline in the number of young people participating in sacramental and religious life in Poland over the last decade can be observed. This decline is related to the dynamically changing social, cultural, and religious conditions. It can be observed that the secularisation process is gaining momentum and begins to have the character of a uniform trend. However, this differs in particular regions of Poland. These processes focus primarily on adopting negative and sometimes even hostile attitudes towards the Catholic Church in Poland (Mąkosa and Rozpędowski 2022) and especially on contesting its authority in relation to moral issues (Szymczak et al. 2022). Many factors influence these phenomena, including media coverage, social and political discussions regarding the teachings of the Church on bioethical and moral issues, or scandals breaking out around clergy. It seems that a significant cause may also be the confessional, and even evangelistic and catechetical character of religious education, the subject of which is only Catholicism. An increasing percentage of students and parents do not agree with this concept.

The systematic decline in the number of participants in religious education, especially in secondary school, has continued since 2010, when the number of young people participating reached 93% nationwide (Mąkosa 2015). The outflow of young people from

religious classes at school, a decline in religious practices among teenagers, as well as the increasingly popular official withdrawal from the Church show that Polish youth, to a large extent differently than their parents, experience their religiosity in a way that no longer binds them closely with the Catholic Church. Therefore, a permanent study of the religiosity of young people in various aspects is needed, not only to describe this process but also to adequately program religious education into the confessional model. This research should be conducted on a larger scale to comprehensively address an issue that has recently become popular, especially in discussions held both in the Catholic Church and in other secular environments. It will also be of great importance to show the religious values and norms of life professed by young people, as well as the factors underlying their life decisions. It seems that research into the religiosity of young people is interesting not only from the Catholic point of view but also from the perspective of other disciplines of social science such as sociology, pedagogy, or psychology. Measurements by the Pew Research Center (Pew Research Center 2018a, 2018b) show that secularisation processes in Poland are occurring at the fastest rate among the other European countries studied. It is therefore an interesting phenomenon from a scientific point of view.

Despite the quite positive results of the conducted research, it seems that the confessional model of religious education that is currently in force in Poland does not fulfil its role because of the dynamic process of secularisation mainly affecting the young generation of Polish society. The answer to this problem may be the change of the catechetical and evangelistic model of religious education towards the model that is present in Great Britain or Italy. However, such changes would also require systematic catechesis in the ecclesial environment. Religious education at school would then focus on the transfer of knowledge, and the task of evangelisation and catechesis would be entrusted to parishes.

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Article

The Catholic Church in Poland, Her Faithful, and the Restrictions on Freedom to Practise Religion during the First Wave of the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract: In response to the rapid spread of the coronavirus epidemic, the state authorities in Poland—as in other countries—decided to introduce various restrictions on rights and freedoms, including the freedom to practise religion. The purpose of this study is to analyse and evaluate the position taken by the ministers of the Catholic Church in Poland and her faithful towards these restrictions during the first wave of the pandemic. An analysis of source material, including documents published by representatives of the Conference of Polish Bishops and diocesan bishops (or curial deputy officials), leads to the conclusion that, in their official messages, the bishops virtually unanimously supported the restrictions imposed by the state, often granting them the sanction of canon law, or introducing even more restrictive solutions in their own dioceses. Moreover, an analysis of the media coverage of the first wave of the pandemic, as well as sociological opinion research focusing on Poland's Catholic faithful, concludes that both the faithful and 'rank-and-file' clergy exhibited a polarised assessment of the stance adopted by the bishops towards the restrictions. However, this analysis allows for the refutation of the claim expressed in the literature, and shared by some of the faithful, about the bishops' excessive submissiveness to the state authorities. Our research proves that this claim somewhat distorts the reality. Rather, the attitude of the hierarchs of the Church needs to be seen as an expression of their responsibility for the common good. More deserving of criticism, on the other hand, is the excessive focus of the ecclesiastical message of this period on the restrictions on the freedom to practise religion, while the right of the faithful to the spiritual goods of the Church was relegated to the background (Can. 213 CIC-1983). In adopting the research framework developed by Joseph Cardijn ('see–judge–act'), our analysis concludes with the recommendation that, should a similar crisis arise in the future, the institution of the Church should rather focus its message to the faithful on securing the said right in the context of the state-imposed restrictions, by adopting the attitude typical of that of an addressee of legal norms, in line with the conclusions drawn from its own autonomy and independence as underlying principles of the State-Church relationship in both Church teachings and Polish law.

Keywords: freedom of religion; COVID-19; Catholic Church; communication; faithful; canon law; liturgy; media; pandemic; pragmalinguistic

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1. Introduction

1.1. Reasons for the Research and the Research Questions

Issues related to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the regulations adopted in its wake, on the opportunities to practise religion in its various forms have been widely

studied. The authors of these texts have adopted varied research perspectives and methodological approaches (see in particular: Madera 2021a; Martínez-Torrón and Rodrigo Lara 2021; Consorti 2020; Kasper and Augustin 2020; Przywara et al. 2021; Jupowicz-Ginalska et al. 2021; Parish 2020). Also highlighted has been the significance of the research on the response of religious communities to the restrictions imposed by state authorities, leading to preliminary research conclusions (see Martínez-Torrón 2021, pp. 9–11)[1]. These community responses can be analysed as one of the factors that affected the effectiveness of the regulations in force, or even as one of the factors which moulded these regulations—as forms of collective attitudes, either expected or anticipated by the legislators. Notwithstanding the above, an analysis of the motives behind the attitudes displayed by religious communities towards the restrictions imposed can shed light on the inadequacies and shortcomings not only of the legislation itself, but also of the law-making process (Martínez-Torrón 2021, p. 9). Recognising the validity of these research assumptions, the authors of this study undertook a detailed examination of the stance taken towards the restrictions on the freedom to practise religion during the first wave of the pandemic (i.e., March-June 2020) as manifested in the official documents issued by representatives of the Conference of Polish Bishops and individual Catholic diocesan bishops (or bodies acting on their behalf). Since the Church is understood here as a community of believers, the analysis was confined solely to official Church documents. The sociological research in our study covers the assessments formulated by the faithful on the epidemic restrictions on the freedom to practise religion and on the position taken by the Church hierarchy on this issue. Following this line of argument, we also explored how the media portrayed the restrictions in question and the public reaction to them; in this case, the content reported in the domestic Catholic media was subjected to analysis[2].

The discussion in this article aims to assess the position taken by the Catholic Church in Poland regarding the epidemic restrictions on the freedom to practise religion as imposed by the state authorities. This principal aim of the study was achieved by answering the following specific questions: What intentions underlay the official Church documents? What argumentative strategies were used in intra-church communication relating to the issues under analysis (influencing the effectiveness of the state restrictions)? How did this communication framework fit in with the institutional model of the church-state relations in Poland? How was the attitude adopted by the Church hierarchy reported and evaluated in the media, and how was it perceived by the faithful? Pursuing these objectives enabled us to juxtapose the response of the Church in Poland to the epidemic restrictions with those attitudes adopted by religious communities in other countries. In his typology, Javier Martínez-Torrón proposes the following categories of globally attested attitudes: "collaboration (more or less active), perplexity accompanied by resignation, resistance, or even plain objection," even though one needs to take into account the fact that the attitudes in question evolved over time, and that the unequivocal support of religious communities for government action, which was characteristic of the first phase of the pandemic, was later replaced by dissatisfaction, not only with the content of the restrictions, but also with the way in which they were designed (Martínez-Torrón 2021, pp. 9–11).

1.2. Literature Review

Opportunities for practising religion during the pandemic in Poland have already been subject to numerous studies undertaken from the perspective of various scientific disciplines (law, theology and the social sciences). The legal research focused in particular on questions concerning the constitutionality and lawfulness of the restrictions imposed by the state authorities, and abounded with critical views on the issue (see Abramowicz 2021; Brzozowski 2021; Maroń 2021; Olszówka and Dyda 2020; Ożóg 2021; Stanisz 2021; Świto 2021). Yet, the researchers did not focus directly on analysing or assessing the stance adopted by the institution of the Church regarding the state restrictions. At the same time, in the research literature on canon law, there are suggestions that the ecclesiastical authorities in Poland contributed to violations of the right of the faithful to the Church's

spiritual support (Can. 213 CIC-1983), owing to their all-out compliance with the state restrictions and, in the case of some bishops, owing to their own even stricter regulations, which reduced access to the sacraments and sacramentals (see Sitarz 2021).

From the theological-pastoral perspective, COVID-19 was interpreted in the category of *signum temporis* for the Church in Poland (Tutak and Wielebski 2021). The pandemic restrictions and the consequent new challenges in fulfilling her pastoral mission faced by the Catholic Church were also studied (Kwiatkowski 2021; Łoza and Beyga 2021; Zulehner 2021; Mazurkiewicz 2021; Sulkowski and Ignatowski 2020; Grześkowiak 2020; Sawa 2020; Jeziorski 2020) Notwithstanding these findings, no research so far has been dedicated to a pragmalinguistic analysis of the issues at hand. The available research that comes closest to the topic of this article (with methodological references to rhetorical approach, argumentation theory, discourse analysis, semantics and ideological meaning-making, in particular) deals with arguments and values in the public discourse related to the COVID-19 vaccination campaign (for the Polish context, see Ciesek-Ślizowska et al. 2022; Duda and Ficek 2022; for the Italian context, see Załęska 2021). Alongside these publications, COVID-19-related rhetoric was also subject to an analysis focusing on the issue of ecclesiastical preaching (Bryła and Bryła-Cruz 2021).

From the very beginning, social reactions to the emerging pandemic and the consequences of the restrictions imposed in its wake have been extensively studied by sociologists, who have carried out analyses in many countries the world over in their specific social contexts. For obvious reasons, studies have most often addressed the changes that the pandemic brought about in the lives of different religious communities and believers (Boguszewski et al. 2020). These studies found that religious communities were adversely affected by the lockdown and the social isolation it enforced (Mahiya and Murisi 2022). During the pandemic, new transformative trends occurred in religious life, and those which were already active intensified. The most significant of these included the transfer of religious practices to the media and its attendant consequences (Stachowska 2020; Zaręba and Mariański 2021), as well as changes in religious and experiential customs (Lorea 2020). Significant and multidimensional correlations between levels of religiosity, levels of pandemic stress, and anxiety were also reported, and the influence of the opportunities for practising religion on mental well-being has been explicitly highlighted (Thomas and Barbato 2020; Pirutinsky et al. 2020; Długosz 2021; Buchtova et al. 2022). The role of religious institutions and communities in coronavirus transmission and disease reduction, as well as in supporting believers and state institutions, has also been investigated (Lee et al. 2022). Findings from different countries have revealed that both religious leaders and religious institutions responded in different ways to the restrictions on the freedom to practise religion (Osei-Tutu et al. 2021), as did the faithful themselves. Both an increase and a decrease in religious commitment were observed in the attitudes of believers, depending on the country of the study, the religion of the respondents, and the traditions of their environments (Bożewicz and Boguszewski 2021; Bentzen 2020; Gacewicz 2020; Pew Research Center 2020; Lucchetti et al. 2020; Meza 2020; Zaręba and Mariański 2021). In relation to the pandemic-induced dispositions, it has been shown that individuals exhibiting lower levels of religiosity were more likely to accept such restrictions (Schnabel and Schieman 2021), while those with higher levels were more likely to seek reliance on religion (Perry et al. 2020). The sceptical attitudes of believers towards state restrictions and the view that the restrictions constituted a violation of religious freedom was also reported in American studies (DeFranza et al. 2021). It is important to note, however, that such research into social attitudes towards government-imposed restrictions are scarce, especially those that address religion. Nationwide opinion polls conducted in Poland showed that the public attitudes towards restrictions clearly evolved as the citizens became accustomed to the pandemic status quo, the changes in infection rates, and the growing availability of vaccinations (CBOS 2022a). In contrast, a Spring 2022 Eurobarometer survey found that Poles were more likely than other EU societies to consider the government restrictions unjustified (Eurobarometer 2022).

From a media studies perspective, a study of the epidemic restrictions in Poland and their consequences for religious freedom does not represent either a principal or a self-contained research category. This issue has already been explored indirectly, in the context of media discourse studies on the perceptions of religious life and the functioning of the Catholic Church during the pandemic, including the relationship between the Church and the state authorities (Flasiński 2020; Stachowska 2020; Rybka et al. 2021; Chmielewski et al. 2022; Hall and Kołodziejska 2021; Grotowska 2022; Mojżyn 2021; Wadowski and Szulich-Kałuża 2021; Leśniczak 2022). Investigations into the role of the media in shaping religiosity and religious communication have also been carried out, as well as into media activity and media exploitation, including religious and social networks in the context of the pandemic (Pastwa 2020; Przywara et al. 2021; Kindziuk 2021; CBOS 2022c; Boguszewski 2022).

As can be seen in this literature review, only a few studies published so far have recognised the importance of the Church's response to the epidemic restrictions, and addressed them in their research. However, so far these issues have not been subjected to a comprehensive examination. Taking into account the legal, pragmalinguistic, theological, social and media aspects of the issue, the present article attempts to fill this gap in the research.

1.3. The State Restrictions on the Freedom to Practise Religion—An Outline

Between 13 March and 30 June 2020, the Polish restrictions on the freedom to practise religion were regulated by nine consecutive legal acts, each of which was amended several times. On average, every ten days there was a legislative shift that affected the conditions of the Church's mission, and which had to be taken into account both in her activities and communications. Beginning with the enforcement of the Regulation of the Minister of Health of 13 March 2020, which introduced a state of epidemic threat in the territory of the Republic of Poland, limits on participants in religious ceremonies were imposed. However, it never developed into a general prohibition on holding public religious assemblies (although there was a periodic total ban on other kinds of public gatherings), and only in the period with the most serious restrictions the limit in question was reduced to five people per ceremony. A week after Easter (which was celebrated on 12 April 2020), the applicable limits were, for the first time, made dependent on the area volume of the place of the gathering (15 sq. m. first and then 10 sq. m. per attendee; by contrast, the number of people allowed in retail establishments was legally dependent on the number of checkouts from as early as 1 April 2020). The largest loosening of restrictions on the number of participants in religious ceremonies took place before the 2020 summer holidays, when the Council of Ministers enforced its Regulation of 29 May 2020. Pursuant to this act, the only restriction retained, introduced one month after the first batch of restrictions, was the obligation to cover the mouth and nose while inside religious (but also other types of) buildings (which, however, did not apply to the ministers). It should also be added that even during the lockdown phase, there was an exception which allowed people to leave their home if they planned to participate in religious services (Stanisz 2021, pp. 146–48).

In assessing the severity of Poland's restrictions on the freedom to practise religion during the first wave of the coronavirus pandemic, and juxtaposing them against the background of the parallel restrictions introduced in other European countries at the same time, one has to conclude that the Polish legal solutions qualify as moderate. As Alexis A. de La Ferrière found out, more lenient legal arrangements were in place in Bulgaria, Spain and Hungary. The Czech Republic, the Netherlands and Sweden experienced a similar level of restrictions. In contrast, the vast majority of European countries experienced farther-reaching restrictions, with their level described by de La Ferrière as high or very high. These latter states tended to suspend public religious ceremonies on a regular basis, and in countries with a very high restriction level, places of worship were closed (de La Ferrière 2020; OSCE 2020; Mazurkiewicz 2021, pp. 4–6).

It should be noted that, after the initial epidemic restrictions were enforced, the admissibility of their introduction via executive acts had been legitimately questioned in Poland by renowned experts, including the Ombudsman[3]. Although this situation was by no means unique to Poland[4], it undoubtedly contributed to the rise in attitudes of discontent, distrust and even opposition to the decisions of the state authorities in some groups in society.

Finally, it cannot be overlooked that the Holy See's stance towards the epidemic restrictions on the freedom to practise religion was marked by a deep understanding of the grave circumstances. The official Vatican documents not only explicitly recommended the adaptation of liturgical rites to the situation at hand, but even suggested that "in affected countries, where there are restrictions on the gathering and movement of people, bishops and priests should celebrate the rites of Holy Week without the physical participation of the faithful."[5].

2. Research Methodology

Dictated by the subject matter of our analysis, and by the need to ensure interdisciplinary dialogue, this study adopts the methodological framework delineated by Joseph Cardijn in his paradigm ("see—judge—act") (see Przygoda 2011; Sands 2018; Szymczak 2020). In the first phase ('see'), which corresponds to the 'Analysing' section of the article, each scientific discipline has provided research material to address the issue from its specific angle. In its second phase ('judge'), which corresponds to the 'Discussion' section of the article, an interdisciplinary dialogue was undertaken in the light of the teaching and pastoral practice of the Catholic Church. In this way, the topic is not approached in a field-specific manner, and the research outcomes in each discipline are not to be interpreted autonomously, as they are subject to a common evaluation from a theological-pastoral perspective. Also, the third stage of the research ('act') is not a collection of loose elements, but interdisciplinary conclusions and recommendations, referring to the salvific mission of the Church, which correspond to the 'Conclusions' section of the article.

Content analysis was the method applied to explore the ecclesiastical documents and state normative acts, taking into account the principles of the interpretation of legal and canon law texts. The collected media material was also quantitatively and qualitatively analysed. In order to achieve this, we focused on the following text components: (a) thematic categories and their indicators (thematic content analysis); (b) the presence or absence of categories (quantitative content analysis); (c) meanings and associations with categories (qualitative content analysis); and (d) the popularity of categories (frequency analysis).

The sociological research, designed to provide information on how Catholic believers in Poland perceived the Church's attitude towards the state anti-Covid restrictions, was carried out via the online survey method (CAWI) between February and April 2021 (the period of the second wave of the pandemic). The respondents were adults at least 18 years old, formally in the Roman Catholic community, and proportionally representing all of Poland's dioceses. The nationwide survey sample included people with a relatively high level of religious commitment and a potentially strong awareness of the restrictions on religious practices. A total of 1058 respondents took part, and their responses were then processed quantitatively in order to determine the social impact of specific opinions[6]. The conclusions from the sociological analysis were contrasted with the results of CBOS surveys (Bożewicz 2020; CBOS 2020c, 2022f).

The principal research material consisted of official Church documents whose author-sender represented the Church hierarchy, and which were texts of a legal-administrative and regulatory character (160 documents in total)[7]. This collection is dominated by texts related to individual dioceses (the documents of diocesan bishops and curial representatives). Of a supra-diocesan nature are the communiqués of the President of the Conference of Polish Bishops, regulations from the Permanent Council of the Conference, instructions from the Episcopal Presidium to bishops, etc. The content of these documents was juxtaposed

with the documents of the universal Church, issued in connection with the spread of the pandemic in its first wave (the decrees and notes of the Apostolic Penitentiary and documents from the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments—36 in total), as well with the relevant regulations of the applicable Polish legislation adopted at the same time (primarily, the regulations of the Minister of Health and the Council of Ministers concerning restrictions, and orders and prohibitions related to the state of epidemic threat or the state of epidemic). Didactic texts (pastoral letters, sermons and homilies delivered by bishops, 27 in total) were also subject to comparative analysis.

The sociological research was conducted on material collected from questionnaires. The sociological corpus consisted of the results of a nationwide survey conducted online, covering a total of 1058 of the Catholic Church faithful in Poland. They represented all dioceses and age groups. However, since the survey was conducted on-line and was voluntary in nature, its results cannot be considered as being fully representative of the entire Catholic population in Poland. Nonetheless, the size and characteristics of the research sample allow for general conclusions about the prevailing attitudes of the Catholic faithful in Poland. In contrast, a media image of the Church's response to restrictions on religious practice was reconstructed from texts published on the websites of national Catholic portals and weeklies between 13 March and 30 September 2020[8].

3. Analysing the Church's Response to Restrictions on the Freedom to Practise Religion

3.1. The Content of Ecclesiastical Documents: Legal and Pragmalinguistic Explorations

Our analysis of the content of the official statements made by representatives of the Catholic Church in Poland during the period of the first wave of the pandemic leads us to the conclusion that the intention of their authors was to maximise the effectiveness of the state restrictions. The position of the bishops appears to be essentially unanimous, which must have been significantly influenced by the appeals issued by the President and the Permanent Council of the Conference of Polish Bishops. On the day of the announcement of the first batch of epidemic restrictions (13 March 2020), and acting in line with their content, Archbishop Stanisław Gądecki was already urging diocesan bishops "to issue a decree that a maximum of 50 people may remain inside the church during each Mass or service" (XVI.0.3). The day before, the Permanent Council of the Conference of Polish Bishops had already appealed for the granting of dispensations from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass if the faithful fell within one of the indicated categories (the elderly, people with symptoms of infection, school children and adolescents with their immediate carers, and people who feared contracting the disease). These dispensed were explicitly encouraged to avail of their right. At the same time, it was announced that the scheduled Confirmation ceremonies had been postponed, and that school retreats and the pilgrimage of high school graduates to Jasna Góra had been suspended (XVI.0.4).

Similar appeals were made by representatives of the Conference of Polish Bishops, following the enforcement of the regulation introducing the state of epidemic (20 March) and again after the tightening of restrictions on religious practices that followed a few days later (24 March). In the document entitled Indications of the Praesidium of the Conference of Polish Bishops for bishops regarding the liturgical celebrations in the coming weeks [Wskazania Prezydium Konferencji Episkopatu Polski dla biskupów odnośnie do sprawowania czynności liturgicznych w najbliższych tygodniach], published on 21 March 2020, a clear reminder was given of, for example, the necessity to limit the number of participants in religious congregations in order to comply with the applicable regulations, along with the related necessity to grant further dispensations (XVI.0.5). Furthermore, the 24 March 2020 communiqué from the President of the Conference of Polish Bishops featured an appeal to take into account the new restrictions on the number of attendees in religious ceremonies (five people) "in the context of upcoming celebrations, including the liturgy of the Holy Week" (XVI.0.6).

Calls and incentives to comply with the government restrictions were also repeated in other documents endorsed by diverse bodies within the Conference of Polish Bishops,

whose overriding intention was to prevent or minimise an upsurge in infections. In its statement of 26 March 2020 (entitled A Time of Responsibility, Solidarity, Justice), the Social Affairs Council included an appeal "to continue [. . .] the patient and noble effort" to constrain activities "pursuant to what is expected by the public authorities," adding that the restrictions "have been administered justly" (B 27). Furthermore, in its note of 31 March 2020 entitled Jesus Lives and Wants You to Live and devoted to the restrictions on "freedom of movement and assembly," the Commission for the Doctrine of the Faith observed that, although the restrictions are "particularly painful for the faithful, deprived of direct access to the Eucharist and the sacraments of the Church," they nevertheless appear "necessary to combat the epidemic" (XVI.0.7).

Explicit appeals to respect the state restrictions were also almost unequivocally voiced by diocesan bishops, accompanied by their granting of the suggested dispensations. In the early days of the period under analysis, it was pointed out more than once that respecting the restrictions in question should be seen as "an expression of love thy neighbour" (III.1.1, III.2.2), and that the source of the obligation to respect them lies in "our responsibility to each other" (II.1.3). Accordingly, an appeal was made to the faithful "to remain at home on these days, taking advantage of the dispensations granted" (VI.1.5; VI.2.1), and it was even stated that, in the present situation, refraining from attending Mass was a "moral obligation" (XII.2.2). There were also appeals to the clergy that, when fulfilling their pastoral service, they needed to strictly follow "the secular laws in force, the recommendations of the Chief Sanitary Inspector and the authorities at all levels" (VII.2.3). Some documents issued by the bishops in the early days of the period in question contained suggestions for specific measures in parishes to ensure that the limit of participants in religious ceremonies imposed by the state authorities be respected. It was recommended, for example, that information about the applicable restrictions should be posted on church doors (although this was not yet a legal obligation at the time) and that, if the circumstances in a particular parish warranted it, appropriate services should be arranged in those parishes which were in charge of guaranteeing compliance with the relevant legal limits (e.g., I.3.2; III.1.1; VI.4.4).

Thus, it can be observed that, generally, the documents under analysis displayed an almost undisputed directive nature, expressed in the form of absolute/categorical compliance with the state sanitary restrictions. The Church hierarchs made parish ministers the enforcers of the state regulations. A conditional degree of liberty to interpret the recommendations was provided, formulated in terms of prudent discretion. At the same time, this freedom could be expressed both in the relaxation of requirements—or, more precisely, the application of individual solutions within these limits—and in their tightening as well. Of particular importance here is that the decisions implemented (including those concerning the number of congregation attendees) were sometimes accompanied by a canon law sanction. It was held that "having regard to the gravity of the situation and the responsibility for the health and lives of our brothers and sisters, in accordance with Can. 273 and 274 para. 2, the enforcement of these regulations is unconditional, in the context of the awareness of the accountability under secular and ecclesiastical law" (III.1.1; VI.4.4; XII.3.3; also I.3.2; III.1.3).

The prohibitions on religious practices were expressed by the Church hierarchy as being painful and extremely difficult or, at least, not easy decisions, while the documents themselves contained numerous requests, addressed both to priests and directly to the faithful, for their cooperation and understanding. Disseminating these decisions at the parish level, and acting as secondary message senders, the clergy were obliged to explain why they were indispensable. An analysis of the source documents has led the authors to the conclusion that the category of care, defined as concern for the welfare of the faithful, was paramount among that category set which was used textually to justify the need to take (and implement) decisions of one kind or another. The documents reveal a clear correlation of the care argument with the image of the priest—a good shepherd. Accountability, solidarity and unity also played their role in justifying the decisions. While solidarity was expressed in terms of the identity of the voice of the state authorities with the ecclesiastical

hierarchy, unity referred to communities of the clergy together with the faithful. The spirit of unity was part of a commitment to obedience, part of building a community sense of security. Another category applied by the sender to influence the recipients' behaviour, and being at the same time a perfect illustration of the asymmetrical sender-receiver relationship, was the commitment in conscience. In general, a religious interpretation (and justification) of the restrictions imposed was only rarely offered to the faithful in official documents. The key concepts used here were renunciation and sacrifice, fitting in well with the Lenten period and coinciding with the first wave of the pandemic. Both concepts overlapped with arguments regarding responsibility, care and love of one's neighbour.

The stance taken by the bishops on compliance with the restrictions remained materially unchanged thereafter, including over the Easter period. The bishops almost unanimously kept calling for compliance with the restrictions, although the calls noticeably less frequently mentioned the canonical obligation to comply with them. Instead, they sometimes explicitly forbade clerics from formulating any form of "criticism, violation or incitement to disrespect the state regulations" (II.1.2), and obliged them "to strictly adhere to the rules aimed at curbing the spread of the epidemic" (X.1.2; also IX.2.3) or "commissioned" them "with the task of seeing to it that the limits indicated are not exceeded by any means during the services," explaining that "we are not dealing with a persecution of the Church when it is laudable to stand by the liturgical assemblies as a witness to the faith, but clearly, with the responsible cooperation of the ministers with the civil authorities, to save as many of the faithful as possible from the catastrophe of the epidemic" (XIV.3.1). It was also common for previously granted dispensations to be extended (if, of course, they had not previously been granted until revoked) and to finally cover all of the diocesan faithful.

Particularly telling of the attitude of some bishops to the restrictions in force were their own decisions to impose restrictions on religious life that exceeded those requirements imposed by the state authorities. In some dioceses, the opportunity to attend Mass was explicitly limited to only those ordering a Mass intention, and, in the case of a funeral, to the immediate family only (e.g., I.1.2; XIII.3.3; V.1.5; many other bishops recommended this). The most far-reaching decisions were taken by the Bishop of Gliwice, who had already ruled in a decree of 14 March 2020 that "scheduled Mass times in all churches and chapels of the Diocese of Gliwice are cancelled. Ministers are to celebrate the prescribed Masses in parish churches or chapels, according to the intentions set for those days, but without the participation of the faithful (sine populo)" (V.2.1)[9]. Going further than what the Permanent Council of the Conference of Polish Bishops recommended, some bishops also decided to suspend Lenten parish retreats, the joint celebration of Lenten services and all meetings in the first stages of the epidemic (e.g., I.3.2; III.1.1; VI.4.4).

The appeals by the bishops to respect state restrictions did not completely cease even after the restrictions were relaxed in the second half of April 2020. However, there was also encouragement for the faithful to gradually return to churches (e.g., III.1.3; IX.2.2) and, for example, to attend Mass at least once a month (I.2.4). An appeal "to consistently comply with the current sanitary recommendations" (i.e., the still binding obligation to cover the mouth and the nose, or the obligation to keep an appropriate physical distance) was repeated by the President of the Conference of Polish Bishops as late as 9 June 2020, i.e., after the limits on participants for religious ceremonies had already been completely lifted for the holiday months. Encouraging the bishops to revoke the general dispensations previously granted, Archbishop Gądecki also suggested at the time that they should be maintained for certain categories of the faithful (the elderly, those with symptoms of infection, and those who were afraid of infection). Decisions taken by diocesan bishops were in line with this appeal (e.g., II.3.2; VI.1.4; VII.1.3; IX.1.4; XI.2.3; XII.1.5; XIII.3.2). On more than one occasion, bishops also called for continued compliance with the state regulations in force in order to jointly contribute to "creating a sense of security for all those wishing to attend church services" (VI.1.4; similarly: VI.4.3).

Summarising this part of our research, it can be observed that during the period in question (as well as later), Polish bishops strongly urged compliance with the state restric-

tions on the freedom to practise religion. Exceptional voices aired episcopal standpoints reliant solely on the fact that restrictions had been established by the state authorities (XI.1.2; XI.1.3). As can be inferred from the open letter of 15 April 2020 from the President of the Conference of Polish Bishops to the Prime Minister of Poland (In—5), ecclesiastical support for the restrictions continued in spite of growing dissatisfaction among bishops with the format of the then-current legislation. In the context of the anticipated return to a 50-person limit for religious attendees, and taking into account the regulations already in place at that time, which made the permitted number of people present at the one time in retail establishments dependent on the number of checkouts, the President of the Conference of Polish Bishops drew attention to "the need for more consistent, proportionate and fair criteria for limiting the number of worshippers in churches." As is clearly inferable from this letter, this was already his second communication with the Prime Minister on the issue (the first, however, was not made public). It should also be noted that the letter included expressions of respect with which the Catholic Church in Poland welcomed "the measures taken by the Polish State aimed at protecting the health and saving lives of Poles in the pandemic circumstances". A few days later, a flawed adequacy in the provisions in force as of 20 April 2020 was also pointed out in a joint statement by representatives of the Catholic Church, the Churches affiliated to the Polish Ecumenical Council and the Muslim Religious Union (In—4). The President of the Conference of Polish Bishops spoke in a much sharper manner almost a year and a half after the outbreak of the pandemic, undoubtedly expressing the frustration that had been building up for months and had been deliberately suppressed. In an article published in one of the most widely read Catholic weeklies, the President described the state's treatment of the Church during the epidemic as "unprecedented." Indeed, as argued by Gądecki, the state authorities had carried out "acts which hitherto only ecclesiastical authority had been entitled to under canon law, and only for the most serious of reasons." Formulating allegations that the state violated the Constitution and the Concordat, he acknowledged that the state at the time had taken "actions [. . .] parallel to an ecclesiastical interdict covering the whole country. For the Church, there has been imposed a way of dealing with religious matters" (M-N5).

3.2. The Church's Response to the Epidemic Restrictions on the Freedom to Practise Religion as Perceived by the Faithful

The strategies and concrete steps that the official institutions of the Catholic Church in Poland took to comply with the state regulations, and which were subsequently implemented at the parish level, met with various reactions from the faithful. In fact, it was the faithful—church attendees, engaging in or being served with various pastoral activities—who directly felt the burden of the restrictions, yet who were fully familiar with their justification: to protect one's health and prevent uncontrolled COVID-19 infections. Analysing the collective and individual attitudes of the faithful, one cannot ignore the wider socio-cultural contexts in which these attitudes arose, evolved and manifested themselves. Although the emergence of these attitudes was directly influenced by the Church's practical, pastoral and communicative actions, their basis was anchored in the deeply rooted beliefs, cultural conventions and behavioural patterns of Polish society.

Among the socio-cultural contexts that can help understand how Poles assessed the Church's response to anti-covid curbs in Poland, the following seem to be of the utmost relevance:

The first is the level of trust in the institutions of the state, the Church and in medicine. In Poland, as in other democratic countries, state institutions do not enjoy a high level of trust, and the epidemic contributed to its further decline (Eurofound 2020). Seen against the background of trust in the state, the Catholic Church in Poland still enjoys a relatively high level of public trust, despite an obvious downward trend (CBOS 2022b, 2020c). At the same time, a growing polarisation of attitudes among Poles towards the institutional Church has become a matter of fact. In the case of the medical services, the social attitudes observed indicate ambivalence rather than polarisation: a situation that is interesting in that attitudes

concerning the medical services had already been quite polarised before COVID-19. On the one hand, the medical and health services enjoy an idealised image among Poles, with an emphasis on their omnipotence; yet, on the other, they are associated with increasing dysfunction, problems, inefficiency and medical errors (Nowak and Tobiasz-Adamczyk 2018). Sociological studies conducted in Poland during the epidemic indicate that the healthcare system was critically assessed by the public (CBOS 2021), and that it did not inspire confidence among Poles (Eurofound 2020), who were more likely to seek advice on the coronavirus from their relatives rather than from medical experts (Smith 2020).

The second criterion to mention is the specificity of Polish religiosity. Polish religiosity is characterised by unique features, incomparable with other societies (Dyczewski 2015; Mariański 2004; Wadowski 2019). The tradition of attending Sunday Mass, periodic services and collective public church celebrations on major religious festivals is deeply rooted in Polish religious culture. Faith is expressed primarily through practice, and more so in public rather than privately (CBOS 2020b). Participation in religious rituals is particularly common among senior citizens (CBOS 2022c), and, therefore, among those who were the most exposed to the risk of COVID-19 infection. One of the important motivations for limiting the number of participants in religious gatherings was precisely this desire to protect the elderly.

The third factor is the specificity of family relationships in Poland. Poles generally maintain intense family contacts, get together during major celebrations, and care for intergenerational links (Dyczewski 1994). From the earliest days of the epidemic, the public was informed that the coronavirus posed a particular threat to the elderly and the sick. To protect the older generations, other family members were also expected to limit the extent of their social contacts, minimising the risk of viral transmission. In many cases, this meant limiting visits to elderly family members, who were additionally affected by loneliness.

The fourth criterion concerns the unprecedented spread of the epidemic. Over the past few generations, Polish society had basically no experience of an epidemic; thus the coronavirus epidemic was a major turning point (CBOS 2020a). New behavioural patterns were required, new regulations introduced in various areas of social and economic life which required compliance, people had to learn to perceive and evaluate their own and others' behaviour in a new way, and they had to think differently about their own future and that of the whole world. Restrictions on attending religious gatherings were part of this general trend of change in attitudes and behaviour that were formerly taken for granted.

The fifth factor to consider is global trends. Although it was the state institutions in Poland that directly introduced various types of restrictions on religious practices, then implemented at the parish level, supranational health organisations also issued specific recommendations on the subject (WHO 2020). Recommendations and restrictions of various kinds were thus not a means of restricting religious freedom which were only applied by the secular state authorities in Poland against the Church, but which, to a large extent, expressed and reflected in worldwide trends.

The sixth factor of relevance here is the attitude towards the current government in Poland. The role of the political context in Poland at the time cannot be ignored in explaining how public opinion responded to restrictions on religious practices. The restrictions were introduced by a government enjoying relatively stable public support at the time (CBOS 2022e, 2022d). The government represented a political orientation that, in terms of its worldview, fell relatively close to that of the Catholic Church (Guzek 2019; Leśniczak 2020), which won it a relatively high level of support among the deeply religious and senior citizens, who were accustomed to personal participation in community worship. The specific actions taken by the state authorities in response to the various aspects, stages and consequences of the epidemic met with ambiguous reactions in Polish society and provoked heated debates between rival parties on the Polish political scene, along with their supporters. Given the fixed, strong political divide in Poland, it is reasonable to assume that, in many cases, evaluations of the enforced sanitary regulations were conditioned

primarily by the general attitude towards the politicians in power during the epidemic, rather than by their relevance and severity (CBOS 2022a, 2020d).

The seventh factor influencing our analysis is the importance of the media in creating the image of the epidemic and in communicating the restrictions. During the COVID-19 epidemic, the public role and responsibility of the media grew significantly, owing to the expectations regarding reporting on the epidemic, countering its spread, but also commenting upon the actions undertaken by public institutions (Macleod 2021). News of the rapid spread of the epidemic and the increasing numbers of victims worldwide completely dominated the media coverage for some time. This information was usually complemented with content on the restrictions and limitations imposed, including on religious activities, in different countries. Media audiences in Poland, including Catholics, were therefore quite familiar with the prohibition regarding church congregations in France, were able to watch Pope Francis pray alone in St. Peter's Square, and were informed immediately about the number of infections at funerals, the growing numbers of the infected, and even the deaths of active ministers.

The above are not an exhaustive list of the factors that could potentially influence the attitude of the faithful towards how the institution of the Church in Poland responded to the state anti-epidemic regulations. Although they cannot be treated in deterministic terms, they can nevertheless be interpreted as explanatory factors, or at least as cognitive facilitators in comprehending the opinions of Polish Catholics as presented below.

In our research into the perceptions of the faithful regarding how the Catholic Church in Poland dealt with the epidemic restrictions, we asked the respondents the following initial question: "There are opinions that the Church was too submissive to the restrictions imposed by the government, but there are also opinions that the restrictions on religious attendance were too lenient. What is your opinion on this subject?"

The dominant assessment by the respondents was that the nationwide restrictions affected the Church as much as other institutions, and that the Church had little say in the matter (54.4%). This was admitted more often by females (55.8%) than males (52.1%), most often by those aged 45–54 (56.6%) and 35–44 (55.3%), most often living in cities with more than 500,000 inhabitants (61%), most often describing themselves as rather unreligious (70.6%), and most often attending Mass only on major holidays and for important periodical celebrations (72.4%).

Less frequently reported was the respondents' acceptance of the less explicit opinion that the Church may have yielded too easily to the government restrictions, but that this was a security-specific situation (19.7%). This opinion was also more often shared among females (21.4%) than males (16.8%), most often by those aged 65 and over (35%), living in rural areas (23.6%) and small towns of up to 20,000 inhabitants (23.7%), describing themselves as deeply religious (21.5%) and attending Mass at least once a week (22.1%).

19.2% of the respondents strongly agreed with the stance that the Church had yielded too easily to the restrictions. There were more males (23.8%) than females (16.4%) in this group, most often aged 25–34 (22.2%), most often living in towns with a population between 100,000 and 500,000 (21.4%), describing themselves as deeply religious (27.7%) and attending Mass every few months (25%).

The remaining 6.7% of respondents said they had no opinion on whether the Church was or was not too submissive to the government restrictions. These respondents were aged up to 24 years (13.4%), living in towns with a population between 100,000 and 500,000 (9.2%), considered themselves to be total atheists (84.6%) and almost never or hardly ever attended Mass (46.8%).

To sum up, the results of our sociological explorations indicate that just over half of the respondents fully accepted the Catholic Church's complete compliance with the state restrictions. About one fifth had some doubts in this regard, and saw the restrictions as primarily serving the safety of religious congregations. Furthermore, around a fifth of the respondents expressed a strong conviction that the Church had yielded too easily to the government restrictions and therefore—as can be inferred—they found no justification

for this attitude on behalf of the hierarchy and the Church institutions. These findings correspond with the results of a nationwide online survey (covering not only those who formally belonged to the Roman Catholic Church) conducted during the first wave of the epidemic in spring 2020. It was noted there that 48% of the respondents accepted the restrictions and observed them out of concern for their own health and that of others, 27% observed most restrictions but not all, and less scrupulously, noting their negative sides, and a further 25% showed an attitude of indifference to the restrictions, observed them selectively, and without any concern for their own health or that of others. Stronger religious beliefs were also found to foster attitudes that were more critical of the government's anti-epidemic regulations (Boguszewski et al. 2021).

In the light of these results, it can be said that the attitudes towards the government restrictions displayed by the participants in our study who declared themselves to be Catholics do not significantly diverge from the results for Polish society as a whole, which naturally translates into a general assessment of how the institutional Church responded to the restrictions. More often than not, the faithful accepted this response, but almost as often they expressed more or less critical views of it.

3.3. The Media Image of the Epidemic Restrictions on the Freedom to Practise Religion and the Ecclesiastical Responses

The issue of the pandemic restrictions on the function of the Church in Poland surfaced in the national media, which educated its audience loudly and clearly, warning them of the risks, and appealing for responsible behaviour and compliance with the sanitary restrictions (Flasiński 2020, p. 71; Rybka et al. 2021, pp. 103–104). In general, there was a consensus in both the Polish and foreign media that the COVID-19 outbreak posed a threat to human health and life, and thus precautions were needed to ensure the safety of participants in religious services (Leśniczak 2022, p. 185; Rončáková 2022, p. 140). The Polish Catholic media, on the one hand, conveyed the official line of communication of the Church, while, on the other hand, they commented on and interpreted the statements of the bishops, trying to ensure that the message behind the content should reach the widest possible audience. They were helpful in encouraging the faithful to pray and participate in the liturgy of the Mass in an intermediary way. Many press titles started offering liturgical guides, and answered questions from the faithful about watching Mass on TV and the Internet (Kindziuk 2021, p. 51). Research by CBOS indicates that the pandemic contributed to an increase in the use of religious services, especially broadcasts of religious ceremonies (also among seniors), but also of social media. For 41% of respondents, the use of religious websites complemented their religious activities during the pandemic, and 43% of those visiting religious websites declared that, in their case, the frequency of use increased (CBOS 2022c, pp. 6 and 9).

A qualitative-quantitative analysis of the source material allows us to conclude that the media reactions to the epidemic restrictions can be situated along an axis from strongly approving through cautiously approving to disapproving. Overwhelmingly approving reactions dominated the media space. They were represented by texts encouraging the observance of the sanitary recommendations by the clergy and the lay faithful. In the quantitative breakdown of content analysis, the following arguments were highly ranked: commitment/encouragement to observe sanitary rules at places of worship (ranked first out of a total of 14 arguments on websites) and observance of sanitary rules in places of worship (ranked fourth out of a total of 20 arguments in weekly newspapers). Reactions of approval and obedience to the state authorities are conspicuous in the quoted statements by the Polish hierarchy regarding the state sanitary restrictions and in journalistic commentaries and interpretations of the official communications of the Church. The list of the most frequent speakers includes the President of the Conference of Polish Bishops Archbishop Stanisław Gądecki (21 times), Archbishop Marek Jędraszewski (14), Archbishop Wiktor Skworc (13), Archbishop Wojciech Polak (9), Bishop Jan Kopiec (7) and Archbishop Grzegorz Ryś (7). Archbishop Gądecki's media appearances were cited the most extensively. These mostly

concerned comments on the state regulations (M-A4, M-D2, M-D3, M-D5). The president of the Conference of Polish Bishops appealed for dispensation to attend Sunday Mass, disseminated the principles of receiving sacraments in a cautious way in line with the sanitary regime, encouraged the use of online religious broadcasts, appealed to priests to remind participants in services to cover their mouths and noses, and thanked them for following the recommendations consistently and conscientiously. In general, he asked "for prudence and consistency in applying the sanitary recommendations" (M-A4). Such approving reactions were reinforced by requests directed to the clergy: "Brother priests, let us be models of obedience in regard to the sanitary regulations" (M-A5). The Archbishop also urged the bishops to give a clear, decisive, bold and even authoritarian explanation of the current situation to their communities (M-O1), including admonishing those who went against the recommendations of the sanitary services and the Conference of Polish Bishops: "Have the courage to admonish your parish priest when he goes against the recommendations of the services and the Conference of Polish Bishops" (M-W1). In the appeal quoted above, one can also see a cautious criticism of the laxity on the part of the Church authorities.

Approving reactions should also cover these emotional appeals encouraging the faithful to adopt an altruistic attitude, in which love for one's neighbour manifested itself in an ethic of spiritual closeness, solidarity with the sick and those suffering. The ultimate expression of these virtues would be the ethic of physical detachment, undertaken for the good of all (Perzyński 2021, p. 9). There have also been media statements criticising the clergy, altar servers and worshippers who did not observe the sanitary rules; as such, they need to be considered part of the approving line of argument. One could read, for example, that "[i]n many churches, no respect to the sanitary requirements is in place, and no one motivates anyone else to obey the rules. To claim that the pandemic issue is exaggerated, or that communion in the hand is profane, represents a blatant disobedience to the Church" (M-A5); "Nor can I understand why so many lay Catholics disassociate themselves explicitly from the findings of the bishops, who recommend that the safety rules be followed" (M-O1); "Not so long ago I attended a video Mass where the celebrant had a procession of liturgists—the Bible was held in front of the reader, two people served the vessels at the same time, the celebrant and concelebrant generally did not keep their distance, and they drank from the same chalice. Why did they cling so tightly to the traditional Mass ritual? Thousands of spectators watched these scenes, wondering if the people in sanctifying grace were not susceptible to the coronavirus" (M-TP3).

The second type of reaction attested to in the media can be described as being of a less explicitly approving nature, posing questions about the legitimacy of the restrictions on the practices of religious life. As shown above, the overall media image of how the Church responded to the epidemic restrictions shows full approval and compliance with the sanitary regulations. As the outbreak unfolded, however, the media picked up on changes in the attitudes of the representatives of the Church. The Catholic weekly "Niedziela" quoted Archbishop Gądecki's statement about the traumatic effect of the coronavirus on the unity of the Church and the inconsistency of the faithful, who too easily abandoned religious practices in churches, even though they regularly gathered in other public places: "(. . .) fear has also affected churches, i.e., the space that is created for community life. Concern about contracting the virus in a church has, in some situations, become incomparably greater than the fear of infection in other public places, such as supermarkets, post offices, banks, trains or trams. Hence, some people say ironically that the coronavirus is extremely pious: it seems only active in church spaces, and does not present a risk in other areas. (. . .) it will take time to rebuild our interpersonal relationships and our entire social life, including the full spectrum of religious practice" (M-N4). In these words, one can see the conviction of the negative consequences of the regulations restricting the exercise of the functions of the Church. They also imply that churches were treated in a more restrictive manner than secular premises. Among the cautiously approving reactions, one can classify those questions appearing in publications, which, in turn, raised questions on the validity of the

sanitary restrictions among the clergy: "Were and are the introduced restrictions related to the number of believers necessary? For us priests, this is a very difficult experience; something unprecedented (. . .) In circumstances like these, a priest feels lonely, as if he has lost something essential of his mission" (M-F3).

The third type of response is that media content with disapproving overtones regarding the respecting of the sanitary restrictions. The publications belonging to this group quoted opinions that were averse to the restrictions imposed: "The Church has stepped into the role of sanitary inspection" (M-D1); "The authors of the appeals (regarding the ban on the celebration of Mass) do not understand what the Church is or the role of its shepherds. The Church cannot be closed; it is her mission [to stay open]. The Eucharist has a salvific, and therefore also a healing, power" (M-F2). The extraordinary pastoral situation during the first period of the pandemic was conducive to controversial statements by clerical figures, which led to highly emotionally charged media debates. Their common denominator was resistance and critique of the restrictions and limitations imposed. The "anti-pandemic" narratives contradicted, although rather covertly, the official Episcopal documents and decisions. Claims even surfaced that the pandemic was a confabulation of state government or media corporations used to disrupt society, secularise community life, and that it was a planned attack so that the faithful could not receive the sacraments, and that the pandemic should be downplayed when juxtaposed against God's omnipotence. Two examples are quoted here to illustrate the case in point. The first is a media statement by a clergyman: "(. . .) giving Holy Communion poses no risk whatsoever of (. . .) spreading any viruses, because it is a sacred act" (M-A3, see also: M-D6). The categorically negative comments regarding this opinion highlight the fact that the language of pastoral teaching should be clear, precise and free of ambiguity, and that the content communicated should be well thought out. The second example relates to press reactions to a letter from an archbishop. The author called on Catholics to be bold in using holy water and in receiving Holy Communion by mouth, and the letter was hailed in the media as an overt display of irresponsibility. One commentator observed: "The expression: 'Jesus does not spread germs; we are safe in church' is a mental shortcut that can easily mislead a simple man. Jesus does not spread germs, but the hygienically irresponsible distribution of the Eucharist can lead to infection" (M-N2). Nonetheless, the reactions of the weeklies can be described as mixed. "Tygodnik Powszechny" explicitly condemned the quoted statement, reading it as an encouragement to disregard the sanitary rules. "Gość Niedzielny" used a noticeably milder critique in reference to the archbishop's statement: "(. . .) there would be no reason for criticism should these words be uttered beyond the pandemic context" (M-GN1). By contrast, "Niedziela" did not address the controversial statement at all, ignoring the media storm in the wake of the letter.

4. Discussion

Taking into account the discussion above, and referring to the classification of attitudes displayed by religious communities towards the epidemic restrictions on freedom to manifest religion—as outlined in the introduction—one can conclude that the official attitude of representatives of the Catholic Church in Poland during the first wave of the pandemic was permeated by a strong drive for close cooperation with the state authorities. The restrictions on freedom to practise religion enforced under the provisions of applicable laws were never publicly challenged by the hierarchs during the first wave of the epidemic. Moreover, their attitude towards the restrictions can even be interpreted in terms of some sort of bracchium ecclesiasticum—an assurance by the church authorities of the validity of the decisions taken by the state. Absolute exceptions included statements promoting attitudes contrary to the recommendations of the sanitary services, while explicitly worded appeals for faithful compliance with the restrictions imposed prevailed. Admittedly, the course of time created space for confusion, caused by the perceived unfavourable treatment of church congregations by the state, which granted a more advantageous status to secular institutions or activities. Nonetheless, during the first wave of the pandemic, this confusion

did not lead to attitudes of formally aired opposition, even though it found an outlet in less official statements by some hierarchs.

The support that the representatives of the Church in Poland expressed for the state restrictions on the freedom to practise religion, despite at least periodic reservations about their form, was undoubtedly motivated by a sense of shared responsibility for the well-being of the society, which could indeed be threatened by additional factors further destabilising an already unstable situation. From the perspective of the state, the institutional Church in Poland has thus proved to be a responsible partner, guided by the right priorities.

However, looking at the issues under analysis from the perspective of the faithful, one is forced to offer somewhat different conclusions. Some scholars even claim that the Polish bishops were excessively "compliant" to the state, which emboldened the authorities to set restrictions that were too far-reaching (Maroń 2021, pp. 42 and 46; for a more radical view of the issue, see Sitarz 2021, pp. 337–44).

The results of a nationwide online questionnaire for the Catholic Church faithful held in the spring of 2021—as discussed above—indicate that the respondents mostly showed an attitude of moderate acceptance of the imposed restrictions. More than half of the respondents admitted that the anti-pandemic restrictions were nationwide and without exception, which meant that the institution of the Church had no choice but to comply. The interpretation of this position can be twofold. On the one hand, this perspective may unveil a way of comprehending the Church primarily as one of many social institutions, with its autonomy limited by social factors. In view of the universal obligation of all entities operating in the state to comply with governmental regulations, the religious functions and spiritual aspect of the Church activities lose their supremacy. The second interpretation may refer to the fact that the anti-covid regulations were almost universally accepted by the Church entities and hierarchy, were reproduced and clarified in various communications to the faithful, and enforced at the level of individual parishes. The faithful may therefore have regarded them simply as a particular implementation of the state regulations and their adaptation to specific local circumstances. Thus, they were not perceived in terms of restrictions on freedom to practice religion by the state authorities, but rather as the implementation of general regulations to a specific context by Church authorities.

This second interpretation is close to the views expressed by a fifth of respondents in our sociological research, who felt that the Church may have yielded too easily to the government restrictions, but that this step was justified by the need to ensure the safety of participants in religious services and gatherings. The primacy given to protecting life and health over the ecclesiastical spiritual mission and collective participation in religious practices is evident in this case. Opinions of this type also reveal a degree of doubt on the part of the faithful as to how legitimate the attitude adopted by the Church towards the state restrictions was. These doubts are even more pronounced and explicitly expressed in another type of opinion voiced by one fifth of the participants in our research, where the respondents claimed that the Church yielded too easily to the restrictions. It is impossible to determine precisely whether this explicit assessment of the Church's response relates to the degree of subordination or, in general, to the act of subjugating the Church to the state, assuming the position of the supreme regulator of issues that it has not been in charge of up to now. Such opinions may be an expression of the concern of the faithful about state interference in matters hitherto regarded as the internal affairs of religious communities, and, hence, an infringement on the personal freedom of their members. It is also possible to interpret them as a manifestation of the frustration of the faithful with the attitude of the Church, as her compliance with the anti-covid restrictions proved more important than the spiritual needs of individuals and communities.

Generally speaking, during the first wave of the epidemic, the faithful of the Catholic Church in Poland most often yielded to the restrictions imposed and accepted their justification, yet quite a few of them also expressed weak or strong doubts as to the degree of submissiveness of the Church to the state legislation.

At the same time, as regards the allegations of the excessive submissiveness of the representatives of the Church in Poland to the state restrictions, it must be noted that the restrictions—while sometimes inappropriately balanced and marred by flawed enforcement practice—were not fundamentally unjustified, and were doubtlessly implemented with the common good in mind. As noted above, they were among the mildest in Europe. Assessing their adequacy during the first period of the epidemic was particularly difficult, and even today, graver criticism usually concerns the lack of a fair balance between restrictions in different spheres of life, rather than their general validity. One cannot be surprised, therefore, that compliance—understood as the opposite of resistance or rebellion—appeared to the representatives of the Church at the time to be appropriate. The content of the letter of 15 April 2020 issued by the President of the Conference of Polish Bishops also represents a voice against such criticism. After all, the letter was an appeal to change the adopted regulations, which were judged to be formally flawed. The author of the letter—representing the institution of the Church in Poland—cannot therefore be accused of a lack of a critical outlook. Furthermore, his intervention wielded a positive impact on the state regulations, which further confirms the appropriateness of the course of action adopted. In the regulation of 19 April 2020, the limit on the number of persons to attend religious ceremonies inside churches—in accordance with the demands of the President of the Conference of Polish Bishops and the requirements of proportionality—was, for the first time, correlated with the size of the area (albeit with the adoption of a conversion rate that was slightly less favourable than the one proposed in the letter).

On the other hand, the practice that was attested to during the first weeks of the epidemic, where the state regulations to restrict the freedom to practise religion were given a legal canon sanction, need to be approached with reservation. The practice of recognising the validity of secular legal norms under the canonical regime is, of course, known to the Church (see in particular Can. 197, Can. 1290 and Can. 1714 CIC-1983; see Sobański 1999, pp. 10–11). However, one needs to keep in mind that practices of this kind should be implemented with respect to the principle of autonomy and independence that applies to the relations between the State and the Church. This is actually accepted both in the teaching of the Church (see Pastoral Constitution of the Second Vatican Council on the Church in the Modern World Gaudium et spes, no. 76), as well as in the Concordat between the Holy See and the Republic of Poland of 28 July 1993 (art. 1), in the Constitution of the Republic of Poland of 2 April 1997 (art. 25 para. 3), and—using slightly different wording—in the Act of 17 May 1989 on the relationship of the State to the Catholic Church in the Republic of Poland (art. 2). This legal merger has its obvious consequences in the mutual relationship between canon law and state law: systems that remain independent of each other and by definition cover matters belonging respectively (exclusively) to the area of competence of each community (Krukowski 2000, pp. 105–23; Sobczyk 2005, pp. 149–98; Zarzycki 2014, pp. 69–117; Stanisz 2015, pp. 159–85; Stanisz 2020, pp. 37–38 and 56–64). The way the liturgy is arranged (its order, texts, gestures used, etc.) is undoubtedly the exclusive competence of the ecclesiastical legislator. However, the enactment of universally binding laws restricting the freedom to practise religion remains within the competence of the state authorities. Recognising this latter competence in the circumstances of the necessity to protect such important values as public order or public health underpins the limitation clauses in the regulations protecting the freedom of thought, conscience and religion, as provisioned, for example, in the European Convention on Human Rights (Article 9) or the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Article 18). The possibility for the state authorities to restrict religious freedom for the common good (or, in other words, public order) is also recognised in the teaching of the Catholic Church, notwithstanding her strong reservation that such restrictions must not become law arbitrarily (see the Vatican II Declaration on Religious Freedom Dignitatis humanae, no. 7). Giving ecclesiastical sanction to restrictions introduced by state authorities within their field of competence distorts the relationship between the two legal systems. As a consequence, such practices not only unnecessarily expose the ecclesiastical authorities to the moral responsibility to the faithful

for the possible imposition of over-reaching restrictions on their religious freedom (and for the consequent unjustified deprivation of the rights bestowed on them, e.g., pursuant to Can. 213 CIC-1983), but they also imply that it is up to the ecclesiastical authorities themselves to make decisions on these issues, whereas, in this sphere of social life, the Church (and its authorities) are simply an addressee of the regulations issued by the state authorities. A corollary of the above is, of course, the right of the Church (as well as any other addressees of state legislation) to challenge decisions pertinent to its interests, for instance, through court proceedings. After all, the recognition of the competence of state authorities in matters relating to the restriction of freedom to manifest religion is not a blanket recognition (with reference to European convention standards, see e.g., Hill 2020b; Evans 2001, pp. 133–64).

Institutional freedom (autonomy) is, of course, a core value for the Church and other religious communities. Respect for it can, in fact, be considered a contemporary European standard (see Doe 2011, pp. 114–138 and 263). In the opinion of the European Court of Human Rights, "[t]he autonomous existence of religious communities is indispensable for pluralism in a democratic society, and is thus an issue at the very heart of the protection which Article 9 of the Convention affords. Were the organisational life of the community not protected by Article 9 of the Convention, all other aspects of the individual's freedom of religion would become vulnerable" (see, e.g., Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church /Metropolitan Inokentiy/ and Others v. Bulgaria, 22 January 2009, 412/02 and 35677/04, para. 103). However, the autonomy in question relates only to the internal affairs of religious organisations, and certainly does not imply the exclusion of religious communities from the power of state law. One must, therefore, be critical of the argument put forward in the literature of the subject, and upheld by the President of the Conference of Polish Bishops when the first wave of the epidemic was over, that by restricting the freedom to manifest religion on account of the epidemic threat, the state authorities "failed to respect the autonomy (sovereignty) of the Church."

Beyond any degree of doubt, the leading intention of the authors of the Church documents in question was not to directly restrict the freedom to practise religion. Rather, it was a matter of protecting the health of the faithful and their earthly existence, and of supporting those state activities that serve this purpose. From this perspective, these actions can legitimately be judged as having been taken for the common good. It was decided that, in view of the unpredictable consequences of contracting the virus, it was necessary, above all, to protect the health and life of more than just the faithful of the Catholic Church. An unwelcome consequence of this perspective is its defective focus on aspects of sacramental life and the transfer of religious practices to the spiritual sphere (spiritual communion, contrition for sins), supported by modern media communication technologies. The decision-makers were tacitly guided by the conviction that the pandemic was a temporary condition which, on the one hand, constituted a kind of test of faith and, on the other, was an opportunity to purify it, deepen it and strengthen the desire for sacramental life.

Considering the allegations formulated by the President of the Conference of Polish Bishops in the above-quoted letter of 15 April 2020 addressed to the Prime Minister of Poland, it must be observed that the more lenient treatment of supermarkets than that of churches did indeed deserve criticism. The procedures for imposing restrictions to halt the spread of an epidemic needed to be governed by proportionality. These restrictions should not only be proportional to the existing threat, but also to each other. It must therefore be accepted that, when enforcing restrictions, the legislators need to weigh up the objective "gravity" of a given matter for peoples' life, and the assessment of the level of this "gravity" must not stray from the level of freedom that is at stake. Furthermore, restrictions on comparably relevant spheres of activity—as long as the differentiation is not due to factors related to the spread of the disease in diverse environments—should be comparable between these spheres[10].

The allegation made by the President of the Conference of Polish Bishops that the state authorities imposed restrictions on the freedom to practise religion without proper consultation with representatives of the religious communities need to be regarded as legitimate as well. Indeed, the adaptation of this type of action faced the risk of an inadequate assessment of the relevance of particular practices to the religious life (and therefore, to the religious freedom) of individuals. The state authorities are undoubtedly not properly empowered to make this kind of assessment. One must also concede that cooperation between the state and religious communities (let alone dialogue, which is a prerequisite for cooperation) has undeniable positive effects during periods of normal state functioning, but becomes of utmost importance when specific social threats arise (Hill 2020a, p. 18).

Finally, our analysis of the content of the messages delivered by Church hierarchs on the state restrictions on the freedom to practise religion leads to the conclusion that –undoubtedly, contrary to their intentions—they sometimes added to the din of information in public communication. This is because the information communicated on the form of the state restrictions was not always sufficiently precise. For example, when writing about the 50-person limit on participants in religious ceremonies in force during the first epidemic period, the hierarchs often overlooked the fact that this also applied to those who remained outside religious premises. Moreover, referring to the Corpus Christi procession, the bishops erroneously and repeatedly claimed that the 150-person limit on participation in assemblies organised on the basis of the Act of 24 July 2014, the Law on Assemblies, also applied in this case. However, the lack of precision does not seem to be the key problem with these messages. Making reference to the specific content of state legislation at one moment in time under the circumstances of the dynamic spread of an infectious disease has an obvious disadvantage: changes or amendments in the relevant legislative acts render the document, at least partly, null and void. One needs to keep in mind that the state legislators amend laws even before they come into force, albeit after they have already been promulgated. This situation can be illustrated by a case that took place before Easter, when a regulation was published to reapply the 50-person limit for religious ceremonies from 12 April 2020 onwards. However, the reintroduction of this higher limit was then postponed for a week, and then the circumstances of the epidemic left the legislators in the position of having to completely reshape the provision before it even had a chance to come into force. Irrespective of its actual status, an overt announcement of the reintroduced 50-person limit surfaced in some documents issued by Polish bishops.

5. Conclusions

In conclusion, the documents analysed in this article constitute an important component of the communication process between the Church in Poland and her faithful during the first wave of the pandemic. The texts under analysis give an insight into the methods used by the hierarchy in communicating with the faithful of their own religious community, but also outside of it (bishops also officially spoke about the pandemic in public media). The Polish hierarchs adopted an attitude of openness in communicating with the media, thus emphasizing the growing importance of the media in the institutional communication of the Church. The intensification of the Church's media communication activities did not come as late as the pandemic. In theological debates, the topic has surfaced for at the least several decades (González Gaitano 2016, pp. 180–81). The COVID-19 pandemic has certainly accelerated the processes towards a wider media availability of the Gospel message, particularly through the celebration of the sacraments, the Eucharist and other pastoral initiatives. All the same, the texts represent an element of the image of the Catholic Church in Poland and its attitude towards COVID-19 (see Skowronek and Przyczyna 2007).

Issued with the primary intention of protecting the health and life of the faithful, the pandemic-era documents issued by the hierarchs of the Polish Catholic Church apparently reveal their principal normative function (the leading genres in the communication between the Church and the faithful represented legislative actions: decrees, regulations,

instructional guidelines and recommendations for priests and the lay faithful, etc.). Equally relevant is the opinion-forming function, since this is linked with social control as carried out in two dimensions: sanitary behaviour and religious (spiritual) behaviour. Also correlating with the former aspect of social control is the encouragement to be grateful for, and show respect to, the health, sanitary and other uniformed services. In the latter aspect, the faithful were encouraged, among other things, to experience the time of the pandemic as a religious retreat, to renew their spiritual, personal contact with God, and to take care of the sick, the elderly and the needy. Another significant function of the texts under scrutiny is didactic: the authors (re)defined terms for the faithful and reminded them of the doctrine (e.g., dispensation, spiritual communion, online mass).

The arguments used by the Church authorities relating to the pandemic restrictions can be grouped into rational arguments, using the results of scientific research on the effectiveness of confinement and isolation (lockdown); moral arguments, making reference to goodness and moral obligations; and, finally, religious arguments, referring to the content of the Catholic faith. In the case of rational arguments, the generalised justification for "closing churches" boiled down to the following argument: 'this will reduce the risk of death.' Counter-arguments, generally not voiced explicitly in official documents, or else raised sporadically and in a covert way, relied on the following argument: 'churches are closed, galleries are not; there is no evidence of the effectiveness of the lockdown.' The second group of arguments rests on the following argument: 'churches must be closed', complemented by arguments that 'one must sacrifice oneself for the sake of others—not to risk infection (stay at home for the sake of others)'. The counter-arguments in this case—present in religious discourse, but not explicitly in the documents under analysis—include: 'all this compliance of the Church with the state officials leads to the submission of the Church and her faithful to the state (the Church becomes a servant of the state); closing churches is a form of struggle against religion (in a less explicit formulation: 'closing churches is of advantage to the enemies of the Church'). The religious arguments (both for and against) were toned down: 'direct participation in the sacraments is not as important as deep faith (attachment to the sacramental rites is not a supreme factor)'. The argument that 'being attached to traditional forms of religious (including sacramental) life is a relic, or an expression of folk Catholicism' did not surface in the analysed sources at all. Interestingly enough, there occurred religious arguments against: 'never in the history of the Church were churches closed during a plague;' 'the Church always reached out / the saints always reached out to minister to those affected by an epidemic;' (or in a less explicit and a more euphemistic formulation): 'Mass on TV or the Internet is a substitute for (and in the most extreme case, a depreciation of) Mass;' 'closing churches is testimony to the decline of faith in God.'

As far as the substantive and pastoral dimension is concerned, one needs to observe that the message in the texts analysed was consistent, displaying a dominant institution, and aiming at pastoral care for the life of the faithful in all of its aspects. When approached from a theological-pastoral perspective, our research topic should be viewed primarily from the point of view of the Church in pursuit of her mission. The mission is accomplished through the fulfilment of the Church's threefold office: prophetic (teaching), priestly (cultic) and kingly (reigning). Exploring how the bishops of the Catholic Church in Poland reacted to the state restrictions on public religious practices as manifest in the documents gathered in our corpus allows for the conclusion that the hierarchs of the Church both accepted the restrictions imposed by the state, which severely affected the Church's mission, and—in response to the decisions of the state authorities—they introduced their own restrictions, more or less related to their state variants. As regards the prophetic function, it is important to note the low frequency of theological arguments used to explain restrictions on religious freedom or to defend the right to public religious practices (this applies to the initial period of the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic). The teaching of the Church ministers is dominated by instructional, directive, administrative and legal communications (Draguła 2021). During the first stage of the first wave, Polish bishops emphasised the need to

protect health and life, taking a specific perspective and addressing particular aspects of the issue. They did so with evident caution and reticence in emphasising the importance and need for physical, actual participation in the sacrament of the Eucharist. This line of response to the state restrictions, which they ecclesiastically legitimised and reinforced, was sanctioned by the widespread dispensations in dioceses, exempting the faithful from the obligation to physically attend Mass on days defined as festae de precepto. However, from the perspective of the Church's core mission, it seems that she should place a stronger emphasis on man's salvation and eternal life in Christ.

The analysis carried out leads us to the conclusion that, in the context of the state restrictions on the freedom to practise religion, the ministers of the Catholic Church in Poland should draw more definitive conclusions on the basis of the principle of autonomy and independence that governs the mutual relationship between State and Church, recognised in both Church teaching and Polish law. Consequently, facing the restrictions on the freedom to practise religion, the Church should adopt the attitude of the addressee of the norms rather than that of the legislator. The attention of the Church ministers should be directed first and foremost towards maximising the rights of the faithful to the spiritual goods of the Church (Can. 213 CIC—1983) under conditions of the significant restriction of rights and freedoms (including religious freedom). Such an attitude would not only be more in line with the principle of autonomy and independence of Church and State—as mentioned above—as well as with the basic functions (offices) of the Church, but would also free the institutional Church from the accountability for decisions taken by the state authorities (especially when this happens without consultation). This could facilitate a critical stance towards decisions that potentially exceed the limits of lawful restrictions on the freedom to practise religion.

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Notes

1 The conclusions presented in the cited work are based on the studies concerning various countries published in Martínez-Torrón and Rodrigo Lara (2021).

2 The starting point for this research was the authors' collaborative study on the communication of the Catholic Church in Poland with both the internal and external environment during the first wave of the pandemic. See Chmielewski et al. (2022).

3 See the letters from the Ombudsman Adam Bodnar to Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki of 27 March 2020 (VII.565.1.2020), of 3 April 2020 (VII.565.3.2020.ST/MM) and of 4 June 2020 (VII.565.461.2020.ST) (In-1-3). The criticism of the formal aspect of imposing the restrictions in question is widely represented in the judicature, which has repeatedly held that restrictions relating to rights and freedoms can only be imposed by parliamentary acts. This condition was obviously unfulfilled by the regulations issued first by the Minister of Health and then by the Council of Ministers (see, in particular, the recent judgments of the Supreme Administrative Court of 5 April 2022, II GSK 246/22 and of 4 March 2022, II GSK 15/22). On the lack of legal grounds to punish a

parish priest for exceeding the limit of Mass attendees, see the judgment of the Voivodship Administrative Court in Kraków of 6 December 2021 (III SA/Kr 677/21).

4 As Mark Hill writes, "in relation to unconstitutionality, there is a steady stream of cases from around the world, now developing into something of a torrent, where the constitutionality of emergency provisions has been challenged" (Hill 2020a, pp. 4–5). See also Madera (2021b, pp. 4–5).

5 See in particular the decrees of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments of 19 March 2020 featuring guidelines for the celebration of the Paschal Triduum in affected places (DK-2) amended as of 25 March 2020 (DK-3), and Cavana (2021, pp. 279–302) .

6 Females dominated the research pool (62.3% female respondents against 37.7% males). The vast majority of respondents were urban residents (80% vs. 20% rural residents), most often living in cities with a population of between 100,000 and 500,000 (25.6%) and 20,000 and 100,000 (25.2%). Respondents aged 35 to 54 (51.4%) were the largest group, followed by those aged 25 to 34 (17.9%) and those aged 55 and over (17.0%). Younger Poles, aged 18 to 24, were the least represented group (14.1%). The majority of respondents described themselves as religious (66.2%) or deeply religious (29.5%). Those who declared themselves rather non-religious or atheists were rare: 3.2% and 1.2%, respectively. The vast majority of respondents (87.8%) also declared that they attended Mass at least once a week. 4.3% attended Mass every few weeks, while those who attended Mass only on major holidays or for major celebrations accounted for 2.7% of the responses. 4.4% of the respondents admitted that they are not Mass attendees at all. For details concerning the research sample and procedure, see Chmielewski et al. (2022, pp. 149–60).

7 The source document database can be found at https://repozytorium.kul.pl/handle/20.500.12153/3910 (accessed on 28 November 2022). The system of abbreviations was developed according to the stylesheet for the list of sources: the Roman numeral refers to the level of the metropolis (the superior organisational structure of the Church in Poland), the first Arabic numeral to the level of the (arch)diocese, and the second Arabic numeral to a specific text presenting (arch)diocesan documents in the corpus. The acronym DK refers to other Church documents as noted in the list of sources. Abbreviation In—other documents according to comments in the list of sources.

8 The source document database can be found at https://repozytorium.kul.pl/handle/20.500.12153/3910 (accessed on 28 November 2022). The adopted system of abbreviations of media sources: M—media sources, A—Alateia, D—Deon, F—Fronda, O—Opoka, W—Wiara, GN—Gość Niedzielny, N—Niedziela, TP—Tygodnik Powszechny. Arabic numerals—reference number items on the list.

9 In order for this report to be as complete as possible, it should be added that, at the same time, the Bishop of Gliwice ordered "the celebration of one Mass a day to the Divine Mercy for the intention of all the sick, those in danger of death, medical personnel and for the cessation of the epidemic" and, hence, granted priests the right to celebrate two, or even three, masses a day.

10 In this context, one can find instructive a statement in the judgment of the United States District Court of the Western District of Kentucky of 11 April 2020 in the case of *On Fire Christian Center, Inc. V. Greg Fischer, et al.*, declaring as unconstitutional and unlawful a prohibition act issued by one of mayors who did not allow Easter celebrations in groups, even if the participants remained in their own cars, irrespective of his parallel approval of the opening of restaurants and liquor shops, subject to similar regulations: "if beer is «essential», so is Easter" (No. 3:2020cv00264, W.D. Ky. 2020).

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Article

Opting out of Religious Education and the Religiosity of Youth in Poland: A Qualitative Analysis

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Abstract: For several years now, a large number of secondary school students in Poland have given up Religious Education. The basic hypothesis is that the religiosity of young people is the main correlate with the abandoning of religion classes. In order to analyze this phenomenon, qualitative research was carried out in the form of in-depth interviews with secondary school students who had opted out of religion classes. The interviews were conducted in January and February 2022, with 29 students of randomly selected general secondary schools from various cities of Poland who had opted out of Religious Education. The technique called computer-assisted web interview (CAWI) was used. Young people were first asked about their reasons for giving up Religious Education, and then about their religiosity. The 16 questions in the interviews were divided into the following groups: attitude to Religious Education at school; and attitude to faith and religious practices, with reference to the Church and Catholic morality. These studies have shown that an increasing percentage of young people do not identify with the Catholic Church and do not want to participate in confessional Catholic Religious Education. The main conclusion of the study is to rethink the current concept of Religious Education in Poland so that it will be more open to students with different religious beliefs and worldviews.

Keywords: religious education; Poland; youth; religiosity

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1. Introduction

Poland is one of the most Catholic countries in Europe. Currently, 84.5% of Polish society belongs to the Catholic Church (Główny Urząd Statystyczny 2021, p. 197). In recent years, however, the religiosity of Poles has been changing dynamically, especially when it comes to young people (Mariański 2021). According to the latest research, 71% of Polish youth currently believe in God. On the other hand, 28.6% describe themselves as non-believers (Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej 2021, p. 10). Notably, in 1992, when research in this area began, the percentage of religious youth was 93%. A particularly clear decrease in positive declarations regarding religious faith has been taking place since 2008. At that time, about 81% of young Poles were considered believers (Głowacki 2019, p. 154). An even greater crisis is related to religious practices. Currently, only 23% of Polish youth admit to regular participation in church services. In turn, a complete lack of religious practices is declared by 36%. Others practice irregularly. In this dimension of religiosity, a very strong downward trend is clearly visible. Suffice it to recall that the percentage of young people attending church services in 1992 was 69% (Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej 2021, p. 10). An increasing percentage of Polish youth do not accept the principles of Catholic morality, especially those relating to sexuality (Dziedzic 2016). The crisis is also noticed in relations with the Church. Its authority is weakening, and fewer and fewer young people are involved in the life of this community (Tilles 2020).

The dynamic process of the secularization of Polish youth was confirmed by research conducted by the Pew Research Center (2018a, 2018b). The results of these studies show

that the secularization of young Poles is the fastest among many countries covered by the study (Pew Research Center 2018a, 2018b). Most often, however, secularization in Poland does not mean a complete rejection of religious needs, but rather their privatization. Polish youth more and more often claim that being religious does not require belonging to any church, accepting any doctrine or moral principles (Hervieu-Leger 2003, p. 166).

A specific manifestation of secularization among young people in Poland is in the opting out of Religious Education (RE) at school. This is undoubtedly a phenomenon on a European scale, because in many countries that are much more secular than Poland, almost all young people take part in RE. In Poland, however, the resignation from Religious Education is large, although it mainly concerns secondary schools. According to reliable data, in the school year 2021/2022, 91.99% of all students attended religion classes in primary schools, whereas only 69.66% did in general secondary schools (Komisja Wychowania Katolickiego KEP 2021). Therefore, it turns out that, in secondary schools, over one-quarter of young people do not attend religion classes. Such a large scale of withdrawal from religion classes is puzzling and requires explanation. For this reason, qualitative research was conducted in the form of in-depth interviews on the motives of giving up Religious Education. The basic research hypothesis is that the religiosity of young people is the main correlate with abandoning religion classes. The main aim of this research was to find out the motivations for young people opting out of religious lessons and to answer the question of whether and to what extent this is influenced by young people's religiosity. This study is one of the first concerning the opting out of Religious Education in Poland; thus, its contribution to the field is significant.

2. Qualitative Research Method

Qualitative research for the purposes of this study was carried out in January and February 2022. In total, interviews were conducted with 29 students at general secondary schools from various regions of Poland who had opted out of Religious Education. These people were selected on the basis of random criteria to ensure the greatest possible credibility of the study. First, five regions of Poland were selected. These included those with a very high number of pupils opting out of RE. In each region, six schools were randomly selected. The technique called CAWI (computer-assisted web interview) was used. For this purpose, a research tool in the form of questions for in-depth interviews was placed in one of the Internet environments. Then, the headmasters of each school were asked to forward the link to a random student who had opted out of Religious Education. As a result, 29 students answered the questions. This number of respondents was sufficient in this qualitative study. This selection of the research sample ensured the anonymity and reliability of the results. All the required standards were complied with in the conducted research. University ethics committee approval required for human research was also obtained. Among the respondents there were 19 girls and 10 boys, aged 16 to 19, from all high school grades. The number of girls was significantly greater than the number of boys, because this was the representative gender ratio of high school students selected for the study. For the same reasons, a significant percentage of respondents (18) were city dwellers. The rest were villagers, although they attended school in towns, because secondary schools are usually located in larger towns. During the interviews, the young people were asked 16 questions, each of which comprised several more detailed issues. The questions were divided into the following groups: attitude to Religious Education at school; and attitude to faith and religious practices, with reference to the Church and Catholic morality. The first group of questions mainly concerned the reasons for resignation from these activities. The next two groups of questions aimed at learning the basic parameters of youth religiousness during the analysis of individual parts of the research; verbatim statements of the youth are quoted. For this purpose, individual interviews were numbered, taking into account the gender of the respondents.

3. Motives for Resigning from Religious Education

The aim of this part of the study was to obtain information on how long young people had not attended religion classes, their opinion of these classes, if they have attended them in the past and, above all, the reasons for unsubscribing from the classes. The interviews confirmed that only 3 out of 29 respondents had never attended RE. The rest attended these classes in elementary school and dropped out in high school, most often in the first grade. Those who attended religion classes in the past could be divided into two groups. The first, to which one-third of the respondents belonged, assessed religion classes quite positively, emphasizing the teacher's friendly attitude and interesting topics: "I liked the teacher's open approach to faith and the possibility of free speech" (Girl 2); "I liked most of the things about religion. I liked these classes, I was interested in these topics. After a while, however, I began to notice that this is not where my place is" (Girl 10). The second group, to which the majority of the surveyed youth belonged, critically evaluated religion classes, pointing primarily to the inconsistency of the content with their own beliefs, as well as the sense of wasted time. The following are examples of such statements: "I did not like the fact that each lesson was based on the pursuit of the superiority of Catholicism over other faiths" (Girl 5); "Religion classes wasted my time and I disagreed with much of the teacher's announcement" (Girl 13); "I didn't like judging whether I go to church or not. Other religions have been demonized by both teachers and textbooks. Throughout the year, there were maybe 2 or 3 classes that recognized that not only Catholics exist after all" (Girl 16). Some also pointed to the low methodological level of religion classes: "We had a teacher who practically did not teach us religion. He once played a film about the pope that we watched for six months" (Girl 19). The research results prove that the confessional and catechetical–evangelistic concept of Religious Education does not suit many young people. They critically evaluate the curriculum of RE, which shows the Catholic Church as privileged in relation to other religions and denominations. If some people evaluate religion classes positively, they do so only in situations where the teacher is open to other views and allows for discussion on the topic.

During the research, young people were asked a direct question about the reasons for withdrawing from religion classes. Among all respondents, only 4 admitted that the main reason for giving up Religious Education was to save time and spend it on extracurricular activities, e.g., sports or music. On the other hand, the other students admitted that the main reason for their resignation was the inconsistency of their beliefs with the content of RE. Most of the youth who dropped out of these classes did not consider themselves religious and did not agree with the teaching of the Catholic Church on doctrinal and moral issues. The following statements are examples of opinions on this subject: "I resigned because I don't believe in God" (Girl 11); "I resigned because I don't think the Church is a place where I feel wanted. I disagree with many of the Church's principles, such as on abortion or LGBT people" (Girl 6); "The reasons for my resignation are the politicization of the Church, pedophile scandals, attitude to sexual minorities, socialist economic views, lack of tolerance" (Boy 8); "Illogical inculcation of ideologies and stereotypes, hate towards LGBT people, topics discussed during these classes, illogical system of assessment and testing, inability to express one's opinion" (Girl 15). Young people give up religion classes because they do not agree with the content and consider them a waste of time. Very often, young people give the negative attitude of the Church towards LGBT people and intolerance towards broadly understood otherness as the main reasons.

There are many negative opinions in the media about the Catholic Church in Poland (Pokorna-Ignatowicz 2002). Taking into account the power of the media coverage, young people were asked about its influence on their personal relationship to the Catholic Church and the decision to withdraw from religion classes. Out of 29 people, 10 admitted that the media had a significant impact on their attitude towards the Church and, indirectly, on unsubscribing from religion classes: "The media coverage helped me learn about the past and present activities of the Church that contributed to my decision to deviate from the faith" (Girl 4); "The impact was big. Interviews, articles, the position of the Church on many

political issues made me realize that this is not for me and I do not want to identify with it" (Girl 7); "I get most of my knowledge from objective websites, books and conversations with others, and it was the broadening of my knowledge that influenced the formation of my views and the realization that I do not want to be part of the Church. It can be said that the Internet has largely influenced my unsubscribing from religion" (Girl 18).

The Polish legal system provides ethics classes for all students who wish to do so. Participants in ethics classes are usually people who have dropped out of religion classes, although the law allows both religion and ethics to be attended. At the same time, there is currently no obligation to attend religion nor ethics classes (Ministerstwo Edukacji Narodowej 2020). All participants in this study chose this option. None of the surveyed students attended ethics classes after giving up religion classes. Some of the respondents explained this as due to a lack of time and willingness to learn the subjects needed to pass the secondary school leaving examination. Others spoke directly of their unwillingness to participate in such activities, believing that they would add nothing to their lives.

The youth were also asked the following question: "Under what conditions could you attend religion classes again?" Half of the respondents completely excluded this possibility and said that no matter what, they would not participate in school religion classes. In turn, the other half allowed such a possibility, but under many conditions. Some argued that they would attend religion classes as long as their conception was changed and they became more like religious studies: "I could participate in Religious Education if such classes involved the study of all religions without claiming that Catholicism is the best" (Girl 7); "I would like to participate in 'religions and cultures of the world'-style classes. The point is that we learn general information about different beliefs so that everyone can find something that suits them and not have one thing to believe in" (Girl 10); "If it weren't a God-worshiping lesson beginning with prayer, it would only turn into something more like religious studies" (Girl 16); "There would have to be a gigantic, almost unrealistic change in the Church" (Boy 6). It turns out, therefore, that half of the youth would be willing to participate in religion classes provided that their subjects were different religions and there were radical changes in the teaching of the Catholic Church, especially in moral matters.

Our research shows that the main reason for opting out of religion lessons is the contestation of the confessional and catechetical–evangelistic concept of Religious Education in Poland. More and more young people do not want to participate in such lessons, which present only a Catholic point of view.

4. Selected Parameters of Youth Religiosity

Another issue raised in the interviews related to the religious identity of students who had dropped out of Religious Education. It could be assumed that the main reason for this resignation was not identifying with the Catholic faith. Indeed, in the interviews, most pupils declared that they did not consider themselves Catholic. A significant proportion of the respondents (20 people) described themselves as people who did not believe in the existence of God. The rest of the interviewees could be divided into three groups. The first was people who defined themselves as agnostics. The following is an example of statements from students who perceived themselves in this way: "I am an agnostic, I don't know if God or any higher power exists, and I don't think humanity is able to answer that question at the moment. Most of the issues around us are explained by science or scientific theories. With the passage of time there is less and less room for God" (Boy 9).

Another group of respondents believed in the existence of a force majeure, some deity, but it was not a Christian God. The following statement can serve as an example: "I believe in a power that helps people, shows them the way, and illuminates their minds if they are ready. Nobody knows what/who this force is. I also believe in smaller holy beings, something like angels, helpers. I do not consider myself a follower of any religion, but this topic is very interesting to me. I am very interested in the whole question of faith and am still looking for purpose and fulfillment" (Girl 10). The next statement presents a similar position: "I am at such a stage in my life that I am not sure yet what faith I feel best in and

what lifts me up. I believe that there is 'something' above us. I have a need for spirituality, just like every human being, but I do not identify with the Catholic Church. I do not believe in the Church, priests. However, I believe that there is someone above us who helps, directs me to the right path. For me, faith is above all a loose conversation with God, which is to give me strength. In the Church, I do not feel it is a suitable way for me to develop my faith" (Girl 7). The third group of respondents was people who defined themselves as Christians but who did not identify with the Catholic Church. The following statement is an example: "I believe in God, I am a Christian, but I do not believe that there is a God in whom I believe in the Church" (Boy 6). Therefore, it turns out that the vast majority of students who dropped out of religion classes did not consider themselves Catholics. Most often they define themselves as persons who do not believe in God. Some recognized the existence of an undefined force majeure. Only a few considered themselves Christians, but did not identify with the Catholic Church. Consequently, they did not see the need to participate in confessional, Catholic Religious Education.

Religious practice was another issue that was the subject of interviews with young people. The idea was not only to obtain information about the current behavior of young people, but also about previous experiences. On the basis of various studies, it could be concluded that the severance of relations with the Church most often occurs after receiving the sacrament of confirmation (Zakrzewski 2021, p. 73). Young people who gave up Religious Education at school were asked if, and if necessary, what sacraments they received in the Catholic Church and what their prayers and participation in church services currently looked like. The research found that only three students had never had any connection with the Catholic Church and did not receive any sacraments. One of them was quite radical on this matter: "I have never been to a Catholic church and I never will be" (Girl 9). The remaining respondents admitted that they had received at least two sacraments—baptism and the Eucharist. Moreover, the majority, 17 respondents, had also received the sacrament of confirmation. Therefore, it turned out that most of the students were baptized in the Catholic Church and received all the sacraments of Christian initiation. Only after receiving the sacrament of confirmation, at the beginning of high school, did they distance themselves from the Church. This is confirmed by the following statement: "As a child I went to church, was baptized, went to First Communion, but I have always not found happiness or satisfaction in it. I went to confirmation and this period was the moment of my 'spiritual awakening'. It was then that I began to perceive the world differently" (Girl 10). Some respondents, however, claimed that they received the sacraments unconsciously, because it was not their personal decision but that of their parents. Additionally, they had never personally accepted or practiced the Catholic faith: "I do not go to church. I was baptized unknowingly and communicated unconsciously as well" (Boy 1).

Although the majority of respondents had received the sacraments in the Catholic Church in the past, they currently do not practice religion. A complete lack of religious practice was declared by 21 students. This percentage is much higher than the average for the entire population of Polish youth (Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej 2021, p. 10). The following words are an example of what this group of respondents said: "My religious practices do not exist. I don't pray, I don't go to church" (Girl 9). Some of the respondents confirmed that they had stopped practicing after confirmation: "I do not go to church for 2 years, since I finished the tiring preparation for confirmation" (Girl 13). However, the remaining eight people performed religious practices although in different ways and with different frequency. Some admitted that their only religious practice was personal prayer, albeit in an original way: "I do not like to pray the 'classic' way, with 'poems'. It does not appeal to me. My prayer is casual conversation, reflections, momentary thoughts during the day" (Girl 7). It also turned out that some of the respondents took part in Catholic services. Such a declaration was made by six people, although only two people declared regular participation in the services. Others only went to church during the biggest holidays or family celebrations. Some admitted that they were not doing it out of an inner need, but

because of social expectations, especially of their parents: "I don't pray. I go to church more out of force to avoid conflicts with my parents, but I do not receive communion" (Girl 5). In her statement, one of the girls also gave a general reason why she stopped attending church services: "Ever since I heard the words that hurt me during the mass, I decided not to attend the masses. I only prayed at home, alone or with my family, but then I stopped." (Girl 17). In conclusion, it can be said that students who have opted out of religion classes usually do not pray and do not attend church services. Those who undertake religious practices usually do so sporadically and due to social expectations, not internal beliefs (Kiełb and Paweł 2021).

Another question young people were asked about was the reference to Catholic moral principles. This is an important parameter of religiosity that also influences the relationship to Catholicism and Catholic Religious Education. The interviews conducted show that as many as 24 people reject the moral teachings of the Catholic Church. Among the statements on this subject, one can cite those that emphasize the alleged anachronism of Catholic morality: "I am not guided by Catholic moral principles in my life. I believe they are out of date. The exceptions are the rules that follow from natural human morality" (Girl 4); "They are old-fashioned. I do not consider them to be any point of reference when making decisions" (Boy 7); "I don't think the rules imposed by the Church are good. All Catholic religion is based on the Bible, a very old book that has been translated, transformed and interpreted in various ways. This is not something credible for me. I believe that everyone should find their own way in life that will make them happy. It should not be based on imposed values and rules" (Girl 10).

Some respondents dismissed Catholic morality primarily because of its strict sexual ethics: "I agree with most Catholic moral principles, but those regarding premarital sex, masturbation, contraception, abortion and sexual orientation are pointless to me" (Girl 13). Additionally, the attitude of the Catholic Church towards LGBT people is often indicated by young people as one of the reasons for rejecting Catholic moral principles and a reason for contesting the Church. On this point, some respondents even say that the Church teaches contrary to Revelation: "I believe that Catholic morals violate the laws that God made. God said to love every human being as he is. On the other hand, the Church treats 'others' as something terrible and people who should not be loved" (Boy 4). Moreover, there have been several opinions that Catholic morals are harmful and limit human development: "I absolutely disagree with the commandments preached by the Church. In my opinion, they limit me a lot, and the attitude of those who practice the principles of the Church sometimes hurts other people" (Girl 6); "Catholic morals are very restrictive. In my opinion, they do not allow personal religious development" (Girl 12); "I think they limit people and some people get it wrong. I try to live the things I believe in and help others as much as I can" (Girl 17). On the other hand, some young people accept only general principles, such as the Decalogue, while rejecting the Church commandments and other detailed moral principles: "I consider the Decalogue to be correct, but when it comes to other principles proclaimed by the Church, I have doubts" (Girl 5).

Another subject of interviews with young people was their attitude towards the Catholic Church. Young people who opted out of religion classes were asked about their attitude toward the Catholic Church, personal experiences with the Church and priests, their sense of connection with the Church, opinion about it, and participation in the life of the Church. Only two students declared a fairly positive attitude towards the Catholic Church and a sense of bond with this institution. Interestingly, however, they also pointed to the problems noticed in the Church: "I feel part of the Church. I go to mass on Sundays and holidays, but not all the behavior and opinions of priests are correct in my opinion" (Girl 3); "My personal experiences are quite positive. I have no objections to the priests I met. However, the whole Church as an institution, in my opinion, does not function properly. The Church should be a meeting place with God, and it becomes a profit-making company. The numerous crimes committed by clergy are swept under the rug. I think the Church could be a great institution, bringing together many wonderful people, but

everything went wrong and instead of bringing people together, the Church divides them" (Girl 10). Seven students described their attitude to the Church as indifferent. They declared that they had no negative experiences related to the Church or the clergy, but they did not take any part in the life of this institution. The following words are an example of such a statement: "I do not feel, nor am I part of the Church community. My attitude towards her is neutral" (Girl 1); "I have neutral experiences with the Church, not negative ones. I do not identify with it. Currently, I do not take part in the life of the Church and parish." (Girl 7).

The remaining interviewees (20 people) declared a negative attitude towards the Catholic Church. Some of them limited themselves to expressing a general opinion on this subject, but a large group of respondents indicated the reasons that determined the negative attitude towards the Church. Examples of such statements are as follows: "I describe my attitude towards the Catholic Church as completely negative. Experiences related to the Church are negative, both in terms of substance and psychology. I do not feel part of this institution" (Boy 8); "I consider the Catholic Church to be very hypocritical. I did not have many experiences with priests, however, from religion classes in primary school, which I attended sometimes, I can say that they often cross borders that should not be exceeded and are not an example for children who are around them" (Girl 12); "In my opinion, the Catholic Church has little to do with religion and focuses on politics and its own material benefits. I don't have any special experiences with the Church and priests. I don't feel like part of the Church. I rate it very negatively and I don't like the way it is conducted. I do not take part in the life of the Church or my own parish" (Girl 13).

Based on the qualitative research conducted, it can be concluded that the vast majority of young people described their attitude towards the Church as negative. The changes that have taken place in the perception of the Church by Polish youth are stunning. There was a dynamic transition from the Church: fighting the communist system in the 1980s, through the triumphant Church of the 1990s under the leadership of the Polish pope, to the Church at the end of the 2000s, torn by secularization and scandals (Bożewicz 2020, p. 6). An indirect consequence of the negative attitude towards the Church is the opting out of Religious Education.

Our research shows that the weakening Catholic religiosity of young people is the main reason for opting out of Religious Education. More and more young Poles do not believe in God, do not follow religious practices, and do not identify with the Catholic Church. For these reasons, they do not want to attend Catholic religion classes.

5. Discussion

Religious Education in Poland is confessional in character. It consists of the fact that the Catholic Church decides the content and methods of teaching religion as well as about who can be a teacher of RE. The Church is therefore the author of the assumptions and textbooks, and also grants the canonical mission to teachers. Religious Education in Poland can also be called catechetical and evangelizing. It is assumed that it will perform all the functions of catechesis appropriate for ecclesial communities: teaching, upbringing, and Christian initiation. In this approach, it is not only about teaching students religious knowledge or even shaping socially desirable attitudes in life, but also to lead an awakening or deepening of faith, to introduce regular sacramental life, and to adhere to Catholic moral principles. Thus, teaching religion in a Polish school is, in its very assumptions, a form of catechesis. The core curriculum of Catholic Religious Education assumes that the entire deposit of the Catholic faith will be discussed twice in primary school and once in high school. Participants in religion classes will become acquainted with Catholic faith, Catholic liturgy, Catholic moral teaching, and Catholic forms of prayer. Moreover, every religion teacher is obliged to be not only a teacher and educator, but also a witness of faith and participant in the active life of the Church.

Current data confirm that every fourth young Pole does not participate in Religious Education. In the qualitative research, an attempt was made to explain the reasons for resignation from these classes. On the basis of in-depth interviews, it was proven that

religiosity is the main correlate to abandoning religion classes. The concept of Religious Education implemented in Poland means that it is addressed primarily to believing and practicing Catholics who want to deepen their faith and belonging to the Church (Mąkosa 2015). Young people give up such Religious Education primarily because they consider themselves non-believers, not belonging to the Catholic Church, and disagree with the teachings of this Church on faith and morals.

The research confirms that the model of Religious Education adopted in Poland encounters a number of problems related to increasing religious and ideological pluralism. For this reason, confessional, catechetical, and evangelizing classes are increasingly being contested by young people. As a consequence, an increasing percentage of secondary school students quit Religious Education. The Polish education system, as well as the Polish Catholic Church, are faced with a dilemma—whether to maintain the current assumptions and systematically lose young people, or to change the concept of Religious Education. It seems that, in the near future, it will be necessary to change the model of religion classes in Polish schools towards a model that will take into account contemporary cultural changes and the pluralistic attitude of participants (Alberich 1982, p. 217). Such an approach does not assume the formation of religious attitudes but the transfer of information on different religions and education to religious and ideological tolerance (Potocki 2007, pp. 101–36).

6. Conclusions

This study attempted to analyze the phenomenon of young people dropping out of religion classes in Poland. In order to show the scale of the phenomenon, reports from the latest statistical research have been cited. In turn, in order to answer questions about the reasons for the resignation, qualitative research was carried out. The religiosity of young people was considered to be the main correlate of unsubscribing from religion classes. The research confirmed that the main reason for abandoning Religious Education is a rejection of Catholic truths of faith and moral principles. Due to the confessional and even catechetical and evangelizing model of Religious Education, a large percentage of young people decided to resign from these classes. They do not identify themselves with the Catholic Church and do not want to participate in activities aimed at deepening the Catholic faith or converting non-believers to Catholicism. This phenomenon is a great challenge for both the school and the Church. It seems that a change in the model of Religious Education is inevitable.

This article is one of the first analyses of the studies on young Poles opting out of Religious Education. The qualitative research conducted in the form of in-depth interviews makes it possible to answer the questions of the motives for opting out of religion lessons. They also confirm the hypothesis that the main correlate of such behavior is the increasingly weakening religiosity of young people. Nevertheless, there is a need for further research on this topic. It would be worthwhile, for example, to conduct a survey representative of the entire population. It would also be worthwhile to perform research on students' suggestions for religious lessons, which would allow a new curriculum to be prepared.

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Article

Sexual Morality of Young Poles as a Challenge for Religious Education

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Abstract: As indicated by numerous sociological reports, the morality of young people is currently undergoing dynamic changes, and this applies especially to morality in the sphere of sexuality. The purpose of this article is to analyze the opinions on sexual morality expressed by young Poles. The results of this analysis can help to develop a better program for their religious education. The analyses are based on the results of social quantitative surveys conducted in 2020 on a random sample of 410 high school seniors (age 18–20) residing in cities of various sizes and in rural areas. The research verified the following leading hypothesis: "The morality of young Poles regarding sexual activity is becoming increasingly autonomous and is formed independently of the morality model that is offered by leading educational institutions, particularly family, Church, and school". The detailed hypotheses were only partially confirmed. The empirical material presented in the article confirms that the moral education of youth in the sphere of human sexuality currently being implemented in Poland is inefficient and requires changes to several pastoral postulates. First of all, young people must not be treated as passive recipients of pastoral programs or strategies. They want to be the creators of the social, cultural, and religious changes taking place. Reaching the hearts of young people with the message of the Gospel requires immersing oneself in their life experience, perceptions, and understanding of reality, as well as their highly individualized axiology and complex decision-making processes. Young people should be set moral requirements also in the sphere of sexuality, as this is necessary for their personal development and the preparation of the foundations for a good life as an adult; however, this must be done with perceptible love and from the position of a witness of a positive and happy life.

Keywords: sexual morality; youth; religious education; pastoral theology

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1. Introduction

Initiated by the "Solidarity" movement, social changes in Poland culminated in 1989 when the communist government suffered an electoral defeat. This was the beginning of systemic transformation, including changes in the sphere of politics, economy, and culture. Important constituents of these processes are changes in the field of religious beliefs and morality, particularly sexual morality. The dynamics of these changes are shown in the results of many sociological studies, which confirm that the sexual morality of young Poles is undergoing a rapid process of individualization. This aspect of morality is becoming increasingly autonomous, and this process is known as the "socio-cultural megatrend" (Mariański 2021, pp. 142–43). An important task for practical theology is to understand the directions of current sociocultural changes in order to develop a better educational program for the young generation. Sex education, in particular, is a major challenge for catechists and priests. On the one hand, in Catholic circles, sexual topics are still to some extent taboo, and there are concerns about addressing sexual issues in open social discourse; on the other hand, young people have the right to receive solid knowledge about sexuality, because without it they will be unable to cope in their personal and professional lives (Levand 2021, p. 3).

In the religious education of young people, it is necessary to simply and clearly present the requirements imposed by the Catholic Church in the sphere of sexual morality. The demand for the education of young people on sexual morality is high, and the authors of this study are aiming to meet this demand. The article uses the results of a social empirical survey conducted among young Poles. Interdisciplinary research in pastoral theology has great potential related to the acquisition and interpretation of multifaceted empirical data and the delineation of new research fields. Cooperation between pastoral theology and the social sciences is therefore essential, but it is always necessary to strictly define the methodological paradigm of this cooperation (Szymczak 2020, pp. 503–27). In this study, the opinions of young people obtained in empirical surveys conducted in accordance with the standards of sociology are used for a theological and pastoral analysis aimed at formulating conclusions and postulates for the improvement of sex education for young people. From an epistemological point of view, it is important to note that all the conclusions and pastoral proposals in this paper are formulated from the perspective of Catholic theology. The reason for this kind of approach is that the young people surveyed in the research are Catholics, like 92% of the Polish population. In addition this paper is prepared for the special issue on Catholic education. The order of the research tasks undertaken is as follows: definition of sexual morality, background of the empirical survey, research assumptions and hypotheses, presentation of survey results, summary of survey results, discussion, and pastoral postulates concerning sex education for youth.

2. Definition of Sexual Morality

Although today morality is the subject of interdisciplinary reflection, defining the concept of morality is still a key issue. For its description, and especially for its use in empirical research, common-sense intuitions about this concept are not enough. Here, the object of study must be clearly defined; therefore, it is necessary to adopt a stipulative definition of morality, i.e., one that will cover a certain set of designators of morality commonly falling under this term. From a sociological perspective, morality is seen as a social phenomenon that encompasses values, norms, orders, duties, and patterns of behavior associated with good or evil. They are recognized in a social group or wider society as binding (Mariański 2015a, p. 424). In a fairly broad definition of morality, T. Luckmann highlights the following elements: (a) morality is a relatively consistent set of ideas about what is right and what is wrong; these ideas go beyond the immediate satisfaction of momentary demands; (b) they are intersubjectively constructed in interactions and transmitted in complex social processes; (c) in the generational transmission, certain perceptions take the form of traditions and are accepted as the basis of a decent life, while others are prohibited; in this way, a certain coherence of views is achieved and becomes the basis of the moral order of society; (d) social reality is created in interactions, and the essence of this community is a certain moral order (Luckmann 2006, p. 938). Similarly, sexual morality, as a subject of research, can be defined as a set of the indicated elements related to sex life.

It should be noted that cultural rules, as the smallest units of the axiological and normative system, do not occur in isolation but group together into larger entities. From a sociological perspective, their integration may concern forms (procedures, institutions, social roles) or content (customs, morals, laws). Undertaking a study of morality, the authors of this article assume, drawing on P. Sztompka, that moral rules "apply to such spheres of life, in which an individual's action is not indifferent to the welfare, happiness, health, or success of other individuals. Such actions cannot remain private because they involve the interests of others, enter their area of autonomy and freedom, can cause them pain. [. . .] They are the strongest expression of man's social nature" (Sztompka 2021, p. 505).

3. Background of the Empirical Survey

In this study of the sexual morality of young people, a sociological perspective is adopted. Its advantage is that in the description of moral phenomena, sociology uses an axiologically neutral concept of morality. In this approach to morality as an object of

study, moral acts are behaviors ethically evaluated both positively and negatively. From a sociological perspective, morality emerges as a historical and social construct, as the result of communication between individuals and social groups. In modern societies, there are institutionalized and non-institutional forms of morality (Mariański 2021, pp. 128–29). The sociology of morality is a sub-discipline of general sociology, adopting its research perspective. As an empirical science of moral facts, it involves the study of environmental variations in morality, changes in morality in social groups and broader societies, and the dependence of moral attitudes and behavior on social, demographic, and cultural factors (Mariański 2015b, p. 771).

In the empirical understanding of sexual morality, an environmental frame of reference was used. The study is about morality actually operating in the youth environment. However, it does not overlook the fact that this model of morality is institutionally, socially, and culturally oriented. In the case of the surveyed young Poles who participate in school religion classes, it is necessary to consider a set of values, moral norms, behavioral patterns, and role expectations present in the normative system of the Catholic Church. These are passed on in the process of socialization by the Church and its cooperating entities for religious education (Baniak 2015, p. 442).

4. Operationalization of Concepts and Research Hypotheses

In the model of sexual morality research adopted in this article, attention is drawn to the attitudes of respondents towards specific norms of sexual life promoted by the Catholic Church and towards behaviors in terms of their acceptance or rejection. Sociologists suggest that based on global changes in the morality of Polish society, a certain picture of its secularization and autonomization can be empirically captured by examining the morality of marital and family life. This is not because these spheres are the most important in the morality of Catholics, but rather is due to the specific nature of tenets of Catholic ethics in the referenced scopes. These tenets differ significantly from the moral ethics of various secular institutions, and even from those of other Christian denominations (Potocki 2017, p. 215). In the face of increasing contestation of the religious and moral doctrine of the Catholic Church, the respondents were asked about their personal views on the most prominent moral issues of recent years, such as intercourse before marriage, living together before marriage, contraception, marital infidelity, abortion, in vitro fertilization, and homosexual relationships.

Based on previous research on youth morality and the authors' own observations, the leading hypothesis was formulated. It reads as follows: "The morality of young Poles regarding sex life is becoming increasingly autonomous and is formed independently of the morality model offered by leading educational institutions, particularly family, Church, and school. Selective attitudes are becoming more and more common in this area". On the other hand, referring to the level of acceptance of specific values and norms, the following detailed hypotheses were formulated:

1. Young Poles mostly condone sexual freedom in relation to certain behaviors.
2. Moral principles related to respect for human life are largely respected or relativized to specific circumstances.
3. The surveyed young Poles cherish pro-family values.
4. In terms of the norms of sexual morality present in the religious model, young females and youth from rural areas show a higher level of acceptance than male youth and residents of large cities.

A quantitative empirical survey was conducted to verify these hypotheses within the archdiocese of Wrocław. The young people researched were selected deliberately, as the research covered only those students who were in their final year of secondary school (in general or technical education). We aimed to determine the views of youth (18–20 years of age) who would be making major life decisions in the next few months. Other criteria taken into consideration included gender as well as the place of residence of the respondents (city or village). The authors are aware of the fact that the deliberate

selection of certain respondents does not fully guarantee the representativeness of the survey. As such, the results are of a purely illustrative nature, aimed at indicating trends of cultural transformation among Polish youth. Such research is particularly useful in the field of practical theology, as it guarantees both realism and greater accuracy of changes proposed in the area of pastoral theology strategies. Due to the fact that the research in question is not fully representative, where possible, the results of surveys that represent the views of the entire population of Polish youth, carried out by national research institutes like the Public Opinion Research Center (CBOS), will be presented alongside our research results, for the purpose of comparison. Therefore, the research results will be validated in comparative categories. This brings our attention to the fact that due to the differences in the methodological conceptualizations and the form of the questions put to the respondents, the results provided by various research institutions might not be fully comparable.

The interviews were carried out by way of questionnaires completed during lessons in the classes that qualified for the survey. The questionnaires were filled out by all the students present on a given school day. The respondents' statements were anonymous in order to comply with the ESOMAR standards. During the survey conducted in classrooms, a total of 450 completed questionnaires were collected, of which 410 statements were qualified for final analysis. The group for analysis included 234 women (57.1%) and 176 men (42.9%). Of those surveyed, 154 students attended a general education high school (37.5%) and 256 (62.4%) attended technical schools. Among the respondents, 50.9% lived in rural areas, 29.6% in cities with up to 100,000 inhabitants, and 19.2% in cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants. The Chi-squared statistic was adopted to determine the relationship between the variables, while Cramér's V coefficient was used to measure the strength of the association. Statistical significance was set at $p \leq 0.05$ (Wieczorkowska and Wierzbiński 2007, pp. 292–309).

5. Survey Results

Marital and family morality includes many norms regulating behavior in this area of life. Conforming to these guarantees order and harmony in family life. Many of these norms are passed on as a tradition, and in this case, they are treated as moral values, more deeply rooted in society. Sociologists concerned with religiosity and the moral attitudes of young Poles draw attention to the processes of secularization and individualization in this area. This is especially true of marital and family morality. This process is not linear; rather, many different directions of changes are seen (Mariański 2018, p. 245). Many sociological studies confirm that the sphere of marital and family morality has significantly emancipated itself from religious precepts. This process is noticeable in the younger generation, which increasingly bases its ethical evaluation on situational conditions. Sociologists of morality speak of a shift from objective to subjective morality, from the morality of precepts to the morality of individual judgments.

The analysis of the survey results begins with a general question about the respondents' views on the cohabitation of partners without legal or religious sanctioning of the relationship. For many young Poles, the final year of high school is a time of intense life choices, among which the decision of where to live is an important element. Many young people decide to share their living space with a person with whom they are in an emotional relationship as soon as they take up studies or professional work outside their current place of residence (Table 1).

In the entire surveyed group, 87.1% believe that cohabitation with a partner without marriage is acceptable, 7.3% think the opposite, and 5.6% of respondents have no clear opinion on this issue. In the teaching of the Catholic Church, cohabitation of young people without sacramental marriage constitutes a usurpation of a right reserved to spouses and is therefore viewed as persistence in mortal sin. However, for the majority of respondents, this way of life is entirely acceptable. Such strong support for living together without a sacramental union indicates the entry of young people into the stream of adult life in terms of worldview. Despite extended education time, young people are quicker to enter a

lifestyle that used to apply to more mature people. Cohabitation before marriage implies that responsibility is assumed only in part. It does not guarantee the stabilization time, consisting of, among other things, starting a family, but it is more about accepting the possibility of adult life "on a trial basis", without the major consequences that come with a legalized union. The phenomenon of cohabitation is already becoming a custom that is gaining increasingly explicit public approval. This phenomenon is no longer stigmatized by the Catholic Church, also in terms of nomenclature (Potocki 2017, p. 216). This opinion is also confirmed by research. In 2021, within a nationwide, representative group of respondents, 20% were of the opinion that cohabitation is always wrong and unjustifiable, 14% were ambivalent, while 63% took the stance that the practice is not wrong and can be justified. Within the last category, 41% of the respondents took an emphatic approach, as evidenced by the highest point achieved on the rating scale (Boguszewski 2021, p. 3).

Table 1. Opinions on the acceptability of living together in cohabitation.

Opinion of Respondents	Women		Men		Rural Area		City of Up to 100,000		City of More Than 100,000		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Acceptable	206	88.0	150	85.2	182	87.1	110	90.2	65	82.3	355	87.1
Unacceptable	17	7.3	14	8.0	15	7.2	6	4.9	9	11.4	32	7.3
No opinion	11	4.7	12	6.8	12	5.7	6	4.9	5	6.3	23	5.6
Total	234	100	176	100	209	100	122		79	100	410	100
Chi-squared = 0.957; p = 0.620; Cramér's V = 0.048					Chi-squared = 3.284; p = 0.511; Cramér's V = 0.063							

The next issue considered is premarital sexual intercourse. This topic is often raised by young people during religion classes at school. The Youth Catechism of the Catholic Church notes that consent to such behavior is impossible due to the absence of a sacramental union and lack of basis for accepting a new life that comes with responsible parenting. It reads "The Church fervently asks young people to abstain from an active sex life until they are married" (Polish Youcat 2011, p. 407). The age of respondents standing on the threshold of adulthood is in a time of many moral choices, including the decision to commence sexual activity. Sociological observations show that the sexual initiation of young people occurs during the period of their high school education or even at earlier points in their lives. The age limit is becoming blurred, though the circumstances of first sexual activities that the moral teaching of the Church are reserved for spouses. According to *the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, "Sexuality is ordered to the conjugal love of man and woman. In marriage, the physical intimacy of the spouses becomes a sign and pledge of spiritual communion. Marriage bonds between baptized persons are sanctified by the sacrament" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1992, No. 2360). In view of this, it was appropriate to ask adolescents about their views on sexual intercourse before marriage. The young people's opinions on the acceptability of sexual intercourse before a church marriage are shown in Table 2.

Nearly three-quarters of the youth surveyed (72.9%) consider sexual intercourse before a church marriage perfectly permissible. The opposite view was expressed by 11.0% of respondents, and 16.1% had no opinion on this issue. Perhaps the latter present a relativizing attitude to the matter. However, the structure of the question makes it impossible to clarify this issue. It is worthwhile to compare the opinions of the youth surveyed to those of their peers from the nationwide population surveyed some years before by the Public Opinion Research Center (CBOS) on a representative sample. There are obvious similarities. Although the question was framed somewhat differently, the answers given by the respondents point to their stance regarding sexual relations of a premarital nature. Of the respondents, 11% agreed with the opinion being evaluated at the time, which stated that "Young people should enter into sexual relations only after

marriage"; 70% disagreed, and 19% did not have an opinion on the subject. Among the persons surveyed, 9% of the males agreed with the statement in question, 73% disagreed, while 18% were indifferent. On the other hand, 14% of the females surveyed agreed with the statement, 68% disagreed, while 19% were indifferent. Within the same research, 77% of the youth surveyed were accepting of the opinion that "It is completely normal that people who love each other have sexual relations, and a wedding is not necessary"; 11% did not agree with this statement, and 12% admitted that they found it hard to take a stance on the matter. A worthy illustration of the issue might be the fact that 54% of the respondents admitted that they had already experienced sexual initiation: 61% of the boys and 45% of the girls fell into this category. The most frequently declared age of sexual initiation was 17. This age was given by 32% of the students who had already engaged in sexual activity (Gwiazda 2017, pp. 166–68). The views of the youth surveyed are similar to those of the general population. In 2021, when asked about the issue of having sex before marriage, people responded as follows: 16% acknowledged that it is always wrong and can never be justified; 63% recognized that there is nothing wrong with such behavior and it can always be justified; the remainder presented a middle approach or had no opinion on the issue (Boguszewski 2021, p. 3).

Table 2. Opinions on the acceptability of sexual intercourse before marriage.

Opinion of Respondents	Women		Men		Rural Area		City of Up to 100,000		City of More Than 100,000		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Acceptable	171	73.0	128	72.7	157	75.1	93	76.2	49	62.0	299	72.9
Unacceptable	28	12.0	17	9.7	19	9.1	10	8.2	16	20.3	45	11.0
No opinion	35	15.0	31	17.6	33	15.8	19	15.6	14	17.7	66	16.1
Total	234	100	176	100	209	100	122	100	79	100	410	100
Chi-squared = 0.929; p = 0.628; Cramér's V = 0.048					Chi-squared = 9.500; p = 0.050; Cramér's V = 0.108							

The data distributions in Table 2 show identical views in the male and female youth populations. More variation, reaching the adopted level of statistical significance, is introduced by the residential environment. It turns out that the greater moral rigorism in this regard is shown by residents of major urban agglomerations. This is somewhat surprising since, in light of other studies, residents of more pluralistic environments are simultaneously more permissive when evaluating moral rules or specific behaviors. Consultations with religion teachers provide some clarity here. Namely, young people living in large cities are covered by catechesis in school to a greater extent than students from rural areas or small towns commuting to high school. In general, however, it should be noted that young people distance themselves from moral norms promoted by the Catholic Church and stop treating premarital chastity as a value worth striving for.

Since the respondents mostly have nothing against sexual contact before sacramental marriage and cohabitation without marriage, it is interesting to analyze their attitudes toward marital fidelity. This is a norm strongly emphasized in the moral teaching of the Catholic Church and is also stressed in religion classes at school. According to *the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, by its very nature, conjugal love requires the inviolable fidelity of spouses. This is the consequence of the gift of themselves that they make to each other. Love seeks to be definitive; it cannot be an arrangement "until further notice". The "intimate union of marriage, as a mutual giving of two persons, and the good of the children, demands total fidelity from the spouses and requires an unbreakable union between them" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 1646). Respondents' answers to the question concerning the evaluation of marital infidelity are shown in Table 3. Inadmissibility or permission for such behavior will give an idea of how much young Poles value marital fidelity.

Table 3. Moral evaluation of marital infidelity.

Opinion of Respondents	Women		Men		Rural Area		City of Up to 100,000		City of More Than 100,000		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Acceptable	1	0.4	9	5.1	4	1.9	0	0.0	5	6.3	10	2.4
Unacceptable	213	91.0	149	84.7	189	90.4	111	91.0	63	79.7	362	88.3
No opinion	20	8.6	18	10.2	16	7.7	11	9.0	11	14.0	38	9.3
Total	234	100	176	100	209	100	122	100	79	100	410	100
Note *	Chi-squared = 9.812; p = 0.007; Cramér's V = 0.155				Note * Chi-squared = 3.203; p = 0.205; Cramér's V = 0.089							

* The first category of answers was excluded from the calculations due to low expected numbers.

Almost 9 out of 10 respondents found marital infidelity unacceptable, and almost 1 in 10 had no opinion on the issue. Perhaps this is a group that would be willing to justify such behavior with specific circumstances. Women were found to be stricter in the evaluation of the acceptability of marital infidelity than men. This difference is statistically significant. The results of other studies on Polish youth show that in recent years there has been a decrease in the percentage of young people who relativize their judgment depending on the circumstances. For example, when asked about the acceptability of marital infidelity, young Poles who chose the answer "it depends" in 1998 accounted for 22.2%; in 2005—12.1%; and in 2017—11.9% of the Polish population (Mariański 2018, p. 252). Other research projects point to the fact that marital fidelity is widely supported in the Polish society. Research carried out by the Public Opinion Research Center (CBOS) showed a high degree of disapproval of marital infidelity. An overwhelming 86% of the respondents were unaccepting of such behavior, 66% of whom considered such behavior absolutely wrong, regardless of the circumstances. Only 3% of the persons surveyed expressed a contrary opinion (Boguszewski 2021, p. 3).

The fundamental issues of sexual ethics include contraception. The Catholic Church has a negative position on this matter. The separation of sexuality and procreation, which occurs when using contraceptives, leads to a situation in which sexuality becomes an absolutely arbitrary sphere of human life. Then, all types of sexuality have the same value (Pope Benedict XVI and Seewald 2011, p. 155). The position of the Church is often challenged, even by practicing Catholics. In the public space in which young people function, the catholic perspective on birth control often appears to be outdated or ridiculous. In public life, especially in the media, the promotion of various contraceptives prevails. The views of young Poles on the acceptability of the use of contraceptives are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Opinions on the use of contraceptives.

Opinion of Respondents	Women		Men		Rural Area		City of Up to 100,000		City of More Than 100,000		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Acceptable	185	79.1	122	69.3	156	74.6	93	76.2	58	73.4	307	74.9
Unacceptable	22	9.4	19	10.8	21	10.0	9	7.4	11	13.9	41	10.0
No opinion	27	11.5	35	19.9	32	15.3	20	16.4	10	12.7	62	15.1
Total	234	100	176	100	209	100	122	100	79	100	410	100
	Chi-squared = 6.097; p = 0.047; Cramér's V = 0.122				Chi-squared = 2.563; p = 0.634; Cramér's V = 0.056							

Nearly three-quarters of the surveyed students (74.9%) approved of contraception without reservation, 1 in 10 expressed the opposite opinion, and the remainder were unable to take a position on the issue. Statistical analysis confirms the significance of the difference in views between the group of women and men. The former proved to be more tolerant in evaluating contraception than their colleagues (a difference of 9.8%). Men were also more likely to be unable to take a position on the issue in question. This fact can be cautiously explained by the slightly lower maturity of males and less concern on their part in the event of conceiving a baby than in the case of women, who show a greater sense of responsibility for the consequences of sexual intercourse. The results obtained correspond to the results of nationwide research previously carried out on youth. This issue turned out to be quite sensitive for young Poles, as close to two-fifths of the respondents refused to take a stand on the matter. However, the responses given by those of the respondents who had already experienced sexual initiation and were willing to answer the question indicate that contraception is a common practice among young people, as confirmed by 79% of those respondents who were sexually active (Gwiazda 2017, p. 169). The students who completed the questionnaires for our survey did not differ in their views from the majority of adult Poles. The data obtained are in line with the views of Poles in general. A study published in 2021 shows that the use of contraceptives was met with almost four times more acceptance than condemnation. This is confirmed by the following indicators: 62% and 17%, respectively (Boguszewski 2021, p. 3).

The sphere of sexual morality also includes the issue of protecting human life. This area includes heated discussions on abortion. In Poland, for many years, these discussions were political in nature and concerned the legal permissibility of pregnancy termination. Recently, this issue experienced a revival, when on 22 October 2020, the Constitutional Tribunal ruled that Art. 4a sec. 1 point 2 of the Act on Family Planning, Protection of Human Fetuses, and the Conditions under Which Pregnancy Termination is Permissible, allowing abortion in situations where there is "a high probability of a severe and irreversible impairment of the fetus or an incurable illness threatening its life", is inconsistent with the Basic Law, which contains legal guarantees of the protection of life. The Tribunal's ruling triggered a wave of protests on the streets of Polish cities. Organized in 2020, the so-called Women's Strike swept across Polish social life, exposing many attitudes that ranged from expressing one's opinion to acts of vandalism and violence. According to some observers, these bottom-up processes are groundbreaking, perhaps revolutionary, and sooner or later will force changes in political life and institutional order (Bendyk 2021, p. 10).

In the research presented in this article, the basic question regarding abortion was very general and concerned its moral evaluation based on two categories: abortion as being acceptable or unacceptable. The results obtained are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Opinions on the acceptability of abortion.

Opinion of Respondents	Women		Men		Rural Area		City of Up to 100,000		City of More Than 100,000		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Acceptable	64	27.5	43	24.4	48	23.0	38	31.1	21	26.9	107	25.9
Unacceptable	100	42.9	82	46.6	102	48.8	46	37.8	34	43.0	182	44.5
No opinion	70	29.6	51	29.0	59	28.2	38	31.1	24	30.1	121	29.3
Total	234	100	176	100	209	100	122	100	79	100	410	100
Chi-squared = 0.818; p = 0.664; Cramér's V = 0.055					Chi-squared = 4.410; p = 0.353; Cramér's V = 0.073							

A smaller proportion of the surveyed youth took a strict stance on abortion. If the category of people who tolerate abortion is combined with those who are undecided, then this part outweighs strict opposing opinions by 11 percentage points. For the purpose

of comparative reference, it is worthwhile to call attention to the results of nationwide research carried out among students in their final year of secondary school (peers of the students surveyed by us). In research conducted in 2021, the respondents expressed the following opinions with regard to legally permissible abortion: in cases where there existed danger to the life of the mother, 86% were in favor of abortion, while 9% expressed a contrary opinion. Where the issue was danger to the health of the mother, 81% of the respondents felt abortion should be permissible, while 11% disagreed. With regard to pregnancy as a result of rape or incest, 81% agreed that abortion was permissible, while 10% thought otherwise. In cases where the child was bound to be born handicapped, 67% of the respondents supported abortion, while 20% were against it. In addition, 48% believed that abortion should be permitted in situations where the mother simply does not wish to have a child, while 38% expressed a contrary opinion; 47% considered abortion permissible in a case where the mother is in financial straits, while 40% thought otherwise; 46% of the respondents felt that a difficult personal situation in the life of the mother was sufficient grounds for abortion, while 41% disagreed. The views of secondary school students with regard to the issue of abortion had become more liberal than they were three years ago, when the same question was asked in a similar survey. There has been a significant increase in the number of persons who are in support of abortion, both in those cases permitted by law, as well as in those where it is legally prohibited (Kawalec 2022b, pp. 159, 161).

The scope of sexual morality also includes important bioethical issues. Among them, there is controversy around the issue of in vitro fertilization. Debates on this issue often put forward arguments such as longing for a child, the right to have a child, and the rights of the individual. In the modern mentality, there is the belief that anything possible is allowed. There is no doubt that infertility is a serious social problem. The World Health Organization classifies it as a "social diseases", which affects between 8% and 18% of couples. In its teaching, the Catholic Church indicates the need for infertility treatment inter alia through NaProTechnology. However, the layman's view of infertility involves couples considering in vitro fertilization, which the Church considers a wicked method (Pope John Paul II 1995, p. 14). Infertility affects many people around the world; it is a significant problem in Poland. In Poland, the discussion on in vitro fertilization has been overshadowed by many other social problems, but many people experience a moral dilemma because of it. Perhaps this topic is also present in the families of the youth surveyed. Therefore, the set of survey questions in the field of morality includes a question about in vitro fertilization. The results obtained are shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Views on in vitro fertilization.

Opinion of Respondents	Women		Men		Rural Area		City of Up to 100,000		City of More Than 100,000		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Acceptable	153	65.4	91	51.7	121	57.9	81	66.4	42	53.2	244	59.5
Unacceptable	34	14.5	35	19.9	37	17.7	14	11.5	18	22.8	69	16.8
No opinion	47	20.1	50	28.4	51	24.4	27	22.1	19	24.1	97	23.7
Total	234	100	176	100	209	100	122	100	79	100	410	100
Chi-squared = 8.098; p = 0.017; Cramér's V = 0.141					Chi-squared = 5.609; p = 0.230; Cramér's V = 0.083							

In the context of the previously analyzed issues, the answers to the question about the acceptability of in vitro fertilization are not surprising. Puzzling, however, is the fact that nearly a quarter of the high school seniors had no opinion on the matter. For a large portion of adolescents, the topic of in vitro fertilization is not yet a subject of in-depth reflection. A much more important topic relating directly to their current existential situation is the issue of premarital intercourse or contraceptive use, which they expressed

in their responses. Ideological and religious conflicts concerning different forms of in vitro fertilization have subsided in the media recently, which is why the topic may be unfamiliar to many young people. From the perspective of independent variables, only sex brings statistically significant variation. Approval is expressed by far more women than men; the former are also less likely to declare indecision. Perhaps the inability to become pregnant is a more meaningful problem for women. It cannot be ruled out that in such a situation, doubt as to their own femininity may arise.

The final moral issue from the sphere of sexual life, about which young Poles were asked, is homosexuality. This phenomenon takes various forms. In modern Western culture, the following types of homosexuality are distinguished: casual homosexuality, personalized homosexuality, and homosexuality as a lifestyle (Giddens 2021, p. 584). The surveyed adolescents live amid growing political correctness and increasingly bold activities promoting homosexuality, including the LGBT movement, which is well-defined and keeps gaining momentum. This movement can be broadly described as "various types of collective actions taken by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex and asexual individuals and allies to initiate and sustain socio-cultural, political and economic changes consisting in the transition from a heteronormative model of society, i.e., a society of compulsory heterosexuality and belonging to one category of the binary gender model, to a society that respects the fact of diversity in psychosexual orientation and gender identity, gender expression and human gender characteristics, and thus to abolish all manifestations of socio-cultural, political and economic discrimination against non-heterosexual people or people with non-normative gender identification/expression (non-heteronormative)" (Bielska 2018, p. 16).

The surveyed group of young Poles was asked in general about their opinions on the acceptability of homosexual relationships. The results of the responses obtained are shown in Table 7.

Table 7. Acceptance of homosexual relationships.

Opinion of Respondents	Women		Men		Rural Area		City of Up to 100,000		City of More Than 100,000		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Acceptable	125	53.6	49	27.8	75	36.2	61	50.0	38	48.1	174	42.5
Unacceptable	46	19.7	82	46.6	77	36.7	30	24.6	21	26.6	128	31.3
No opinion	63	26.7	45	25.6	57	27.1	31	25.4	20	25.3	108	26.2
Total	234	100	176	100	209	100	122	100	79	100	410	100
	Chi-squared = 39.026; $p < 0.001$; Cramér's V = 0.310						Chi-squared = 8.874; $p = 0.064$; Cramér's V = 0.104					

The young respondents largely respect the possibility of homosexual relationships. Perhaps this opinion is influenced by the fact that many people, especially celebrities from the media sphere, "come out" and no longer conceal their sexual orientation. Such testimonies strongly permeate the consciousness of young people, who are increasingly impressed with the distinct sexual orientations of such individuals and thus build support for such attitudes among their peers. In the perspective of surveys representative of all adult Poles, the opinion that homosexuality is a normal orientation is especially true for the youngest respondents aged 18–24 (21%), residents of cities with more than 500,000 inhabitants (25%), self-employed people (21%), students (22%), and housewives (25%). In particular, those who describe their political views as leftist (31%) and those who do not participate in religious practices at all (26%) more often believe that homosexual orientation is normal (Bożewicz 2019, p. 4).

To a large extent, the approach of young Poles to LGBT+ persons could also be indicative of the extent to which homosexual relationships are accepted. The issue of

people's attitude to LGBT+ persons first came up in research carried out among youth by the Public Opinion Research Center in 2021. The premise for its inclusion in the scope of social research was the presence of groups of such people in the public space, as well as demands for the acknowledgment of their rights. This is a noticeable trend of cultural transformation in Poland and a frequent subject of public debate. The Catholic Church in Poland warns against its negative impact on society (the so-called gender ideology). When questioned about their attitude to gay, lesbian, and other LGBT+ persons, 20% of the respondents admitted that they felt aversion to such persons, though in varying degrees. Almost one-fifth of the respondents (19%) stated that they had mixed feelings on the subject—neither aversion nor acceptance; 61% of the youth surveyed admitted to being accepting of LGBT+ persons, 36% of whom expressed complete acceptance of the persons in question (Kawalec 2022a, p. 167).

6. Summary of Survey Results

Based on the results of the survey, one must conclude that young Poles show a high level of tolerance in their approach to the selected norms and behaviors in the sphere of sexual life. Moral consciousness about marriage and family, especially in terms of sexual behavior, undergoes processes of relativization and individualization. Morality in this area is becoming increasingly autonomous, built based on the judgments of one's own conscience and one's own authority. Thus, the leading hypothesis, which conjectured that the sexual morality of young people is gradually moving away from the model promoted by the Catholic Church and becoming increasingly selective, was largely confirmed. The detailed hypothesis that young Poles mostly condone sexual freedom in relation to specific behaviors was also positively verified. This is especially true for sexual intercourse before marriage, cohabitation before marriage, use of contraception, and significant acceptance of homosexual relationships. For the hypothesis that young people mostly respect norms relating to human life, it does not appear to be confirmed. In the assessment of abortion, respondents with approving and undecided attitudes totaled 55.2%, and in the assessment of in vitro fertilization—83.2%. However, the vast majority of the young Poles surveyed value marital fidelity. The hypothesis about the relationship between demographic and social characteristics was partially confirmed. Sex is the only variable that significantly determines differences when evaluating such behaviors as contraceptive use, in vitro fertilization, homosexuality, and marital infidelity. Young people from rural and urban environments do not differ in their views across the issues analyzed. This means that the moral universe of young Poles is becoming increasingly homogeneous. It should also be added that it is marked by "moral liberalism", which, in empirical dimension on a 1–7 point scale, in 2021 reached an average of 3.43 for the youngest group of respondents included in the nationwide survey (Boguszewski 2021, p. 6).

7. Discussion and Pastoral Conclusions

The systemic changes in Poland have strongly affected the spheres of marital and family life. Sociologists have long talked about structural and cultural changes in the family. The former concern increasing family instability, the spread of new forms of communal living, the reduction of the number of children in families, the transformation of social roles of spouses, and the position of a child in the family. They are the result of a complex transformation process of human consciousness; they are a function of the system of shared moral values. At the cultural level, it is possible to observe the privatization of human sexuality, consumerist and permissive attitudes in marital life, and changes in family formation patterns (Slany 2007, pp. 247–52).

These changes need to be viewed more broadly from the perspective of modernity, aptly defined by Z. Bauman: "The society which enters the twenty-first century is no less 'modern' than the society which entered the twentieth; the most one can say is that it is modern in a different way. What makes it as modern as it was a century or so ago is what sets modernity apart from all other historical forms of human cohabitation: the

compulsive and obsessive, continuous, unstoppable, forever incomplete modernization; the overwhelming and ineradicable, unquenchable thirst for creative destruction" (Bauman 2000, p. 28). The "creative destruction" also concerns the ethics of marital and family life, particularly in terms of norms governing sexual life. Today, not only in Poland, there are new phenomena that go beyond structural and demographic transformations of the family. Patterns far removed from the traditional family model based on Christian culture and its value system, are increasingly making themselves known. Postmodernism destabilized the concept of the family understood as a community based upon the covenant of a man and a woman within marriage and including children who are their offspring. The Christian model of marriage and family is confronted with secularized patterns of marital and family life, disseminated in the world. The concept of socio-cultural gender identity, promoted by the "gender ideology", is another component of postmodern ethics. Because of this, men and women are faced with many choices. At any point in life, an individual must be guaranteed a choice of their social role and sexual behavior (Święs 2018, p. 158).

It must be acknowledged that the scope of the debate on human sexuality in Polish society is not as advanced as in, for example, British society, where attempts are being made to overcome the entrenched polarization between the position of conservatives and liberals in their approach to same-sex relationships or non-binary people. The "Living in Love and Faith" project (2018–2020) by the Church of England was aimed at sensitizing the public not only to the issues of people with fluid gender identity but also to issues such as fidelity, stability, and durability of relationships (Cornwall 2021, p. 10). It seems that in the debate on the sexual morality of young people, which in the future will keep emerging in Catholic circles in Poland, one should avoid reducing this debate solely to the problems of people reporting issues with their sense of gender identity, although this issue should not be underestimated. Instead, it is necessary to go beyond the slogans of liberal or conservative activists by conducting an in-depth analysis of theological arguments using biblical hermeneutics and convincing young people what results in their fulfillment in love.

In Polish historical and contemporary circumstances, the morality of the young generation should be considered in the context of religious attitudes. In fact, the classical works of sociology of religion, by Ch. Glock and R. Stark—authors of the multidimensional concept of religiosity—recognize morality as all religious principles that determine how people should act when acknowledging a given religion as their own. This is about the effects of an individual's religious beliefs, experience, and knowledge of the secular areas of their life (Glock and Stark 1998, p. 185). Studies in the US have provided some evidence of a positive correlation between religious attitudes and human sexuality, especially in helping young people reduce risky sexual behavior. Having a full family with two parents, who encouraged their children to avoid sexual relations, was also associated with a decline in sexual exposure. Finally, formally learning how to say no to sex was associated with less risky sexual behavior (Haglund and Fehring 2010, pp. 469–70). The sample group of adolescents predominantly demonstrates selective attitudes in the field of religious faith. Those who declared that "they believe in their own way" and those who "believe but deliberately do not follow all the instructions of the Church" amounted to as much as 63.7%. Those who chose the answer "I am a believer and follow the instructions of the Church" made up only 23.7%. Perhaps in the intergenerational transfer, the young respondents did not receive proper moral formation. When assessing their parents' faith, 39.2% of respondents believed that they try to live according to the principles of faith; 15.2% claimed that their parents, although they declare themselves as believers, consciously do not respect the principles of faith; and 19.9% stated that although their parents consider themselves practicing believers, it is not visible on a daily basis. It is not at all surprising that the parents' waning faith was reflected in an even weaker faith in their children.

According to the declaration "Gravissimum educationis" of the Second Vatican Council, "The Church is bound as a mother to give to these children of hers an education by which their whole life can be imbued with the spirit of Christ and at the same time do all she can to promote for all peoples the complete perfection of the human person, the good

of earthly society and the building of a world that is more human" (No. 3). Especially from theological faculties, the community of the Church expects the transmission of the heritage of Christian wisdom as well as educational models that are adapted to modern requirements. Conclusions and postulates aimed at improving the currently used model of pastoral activity will be done from the Catholic point of view and will be addressed to Catholic educators for the reasons indicated above.

In general, it must be admitted that young Poles—at least as far as declarations are concerned—are close to the Catholic Church (Mąkosa and Rozpędowski 2022). Those of the respondents who see it as a place to meet God and as the home where the merciful Father awaits represent a total of 68.1%. With higher or lower frequency, 90.1% of the respondents encountered the evangelization efforts of the Church. They also mostly agree with the basic dogmatic formulations that are part of the Catholic Creed. There was also a noticeably high level of knowledge about the teaching of the Church on important issues of sexual ethics. The surveyed youth correctly assessed its teaching on abortion, in vitro fertilization, divorce, and same-sex marriage. However, the personal views of those surveyed deviate from what the Church teaches. This is part of a wider phenomenon—the laicization of morality. Nowadays, it is important to realize that not only the Catholic Church but also other Churches no longer have exclusive rights to shape human behavior. They are in competition with other institutions: "The processes of secularization and desacralization make the Church and religion regulate the rhythm of life of many individuals and families as well as society as a whole to a lesser extent than before, lead to deconsecration of customs and the culture of experiencing Sundays and holidays, weaken and even remove the divine element from the consciousness of average people, the view is spread that anything is possible for man. Man's attitude toward the sacred is changing. [...] In place of religion, all types of cults are emerging. These processes together form the phenomenon of laicization" (Dyczewski 2011, pp. 55–56).

The cultural changes also manifest in the weakening of the links between the faith professed and moral beliefs and behaviors. Personal specific behaviors of individuals are increasingly less subject to moral rules of religious origin. Individualism, which emphasizes freedom and autonomy of one's own life choices, comes to the fore. This trend is sufficiently confirmed by current Polish sociological research on the sources of moral norms. It appears that morality is increasingly treated selectively or considered foreign. The consequence of this is a fairly widespread acceptance of phenomena and behavior patterns that are disapproved of from the point of view of Catholic morality, such as premarital sex, contraception, cohabitation, or divorce, as well as leaving it to one's own conscience to decide what is right and what is wrong (Boguszewski 2021, p. 9). This individualism in shaping personal moral convictions, particularly among Polish youth, was also confirmed by the presented study.

The reported results of the empirical study on the moral attitudes of young Poles regarding sex life, as well as data from other sociological surveys and opinion polls, indicate a crisis of institutional morality in the minds of youth, i.e., morality understood as a set of orders and prohibitions. The question remains, what can the Catholic Church improve in its pastoral offer to better prepare young people for responsible decisions in the sphere of sexual life? Based on surveys conducted among lecturers from 17 Catholic universities in the US who tried to introduce changes to student sex education, Mark A. Levand drew the following conclusions. First, it is necessary to overcome the fear of engaging in discussions about sexuality with youth. Second, the dialogue and studies with young people on human sexuality must be continued. In this dialogue, it is important that the emphasis be placed primarily on patiently listening to the youth and only secondarily on giving them advice. Third, the responsibility of Catholic higher education environments is to create resources of modern, holistic knowledge on human sexuality and its relation to the Christian faith (Levand 2021, pp. 6–8).

According to K. Pawlina, young people in Poland see themselves more as creators than addressees of moral norms. In their behavior, they often follow the rule "I do it

because I enjoy it" or "because it's convenient for me". Generally, in moral matters, young people do not accept any third-party interference: "No one can tell me what to do"—they emphasize in their opinions on morality (Pawlina 2019, p. 489). The Catholic Church cannot remain indifferent to such moral attitudes of young people. Therefore, the pastoral care of young people requires seeking new ways of shaping Catholic moral attitudes, building a Christian hierarchy of values from an early age, as well as preparing them well for marital and family life. This is not an easy task to accomplish in the current cultural context but is necessary to preserve any Church community for future generations. A circumstance conducive to the religious education of Polish youth is the fact that 75% of them still live in families with both parents (Roguska 2017, pp. 19–28). The research presented in this paper showed that most young people surveyed still see their mother and, in second place, father as authority figures. However, in order for this to have an impact on the moral formation of youth, including sex education, parishes should intensify pastoral care for families and help parents prepare for their role as sex educators of their children (Goleń 2018). This is not an easy task, which is why many parents deliberately leave this aspect of education to other entities, particularly the school and the media. Unfortunately, a trend has emerged among young people in Poland, especially those living in major cities, to opt out of religious education, which results in the Catholic Church slowly losing an important tool for influencing youth in schools (Mąkosa et al. 2022). In such a situation, what remains are Catholic media and parish pastoral care, as measures for the sex education of young people.

The Catholic Church is obliged to accompany people on their path to salvation, in any environment and at any stage of their journey. It is especially important with regard to young people—to first find them and establish some form of communication, then rebuild the trust in the institution of the Catholic Church, recently weakened by cases of sexual abuse of minors by clergymen. Only then can an attempt be made to engage young people in a dialogue in which there will be room for a conversation about living a meaningful life and about fulfillment in love, which is possible in a well-arranged marital and family life, among other avenues. This lifestyle requires the adoption of and compliance with moral principles in the field of human sexuality. This is not an easy task, yet in Poland, it remains feasible. The Catholic Church has stable moral principles that set stringent requirements for people in terms of sexuality; however, in the pastoral care of youth, it is not enough to communicate these principles; it is necessary to show paths toward their implementation that guarantee lasting satisfaction and not just a temporary feeling of happiness.

According to D. Lipiec, "many problems of the modern youth have the source in a distance from God. A large group of young people have not met Him in their life and have not established a personal relationship with Him. As the primary objective of the youth ministry appears thus leading young people to a personal encounter with God, and then to deepen this relationship" (Lipiec 2016, p. 140). During World Youth Day in Krakow 2016, Pope Francis showed the young people that God is a merciful Father, who is close to a human being. This proximity means a deep involvement of God in human life. The involvement of God is of existential and emotional character. Many people today, especially young people, do not reciprocate God's merciful love. According to Francis, the main reason for this is ignorance of God. It is caused primarily by the fact that no one preached to young people the truth about God and or explained it incompletely (Pope Francis 2016). For this reason, the proximity of priests means being introduced to the closeness of God, understood as guidance to Him, getting to know Him, and existentially adhering to Him. Due to the high dynamics of cultural changes in the generation of young people, it is necessary to constantly search for new effective methods in pastoral care dedicated to them. In the opinion of Pope Francis, "youth ministry needs to become more flexible: inviting young people to events or occasions that provide an opportunity not only for learning, but also for conversing, celebrating, singing, listening to real stories and experiencing a shared encounter with the living God" (Pope Francis 2019, p. 204).

From the perspective of practical theology, the following are especially important for immediate application in the pastoral care of youth: the ability to listen to young people

patiently and sometimes for long periods of time, accompanying them in discovering the meaning of their lives in the world and God's calling in the Church, the effort to search for understandable language and visualizations in the evangelization of youth, as well as supporting the development of Christian life environments in the young generation (Fiałkowski and Sadlak 2021, pp. 87–103). Reaching the hearts of young people with the message of the Gospel requires immersing oneself in their life experience, their perception and understanding of reality, their highly individualized axiology, and complex decision-making processes. They want to be creative participants in the social, cultural, and religious changes taking place. Therefore, they must not be treated as passive recipients of pastoral programs or strategies developed without their involvement. If a priest or lay animator is able to enter the world of young people, they will also be able to set them high moral requirements essential for their development. Abandonment of these requirements, also in the sphere of human sexuality, leads to axiological nihilism, trivialization of personal and social life, and ultimately to depression and personal destruction. Hence, moral requirements should be set for young people, but this must always be done with perceptible love and from the position of a witness of a good, full, joyful, and happy life.

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The Internet, the Problem of Socialising Young People, and the Role of Religious Education †

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Abstract: Alongside the declining religiosity of young Slovenians, there is a growing loneliness among young people. When young people are not motivated or do not have the opportunity to engage in social activities in their free time, they look elsewhere for substitutes. In our study, we highlight the problems young people face with their loneliness, their excessive use of the internet, their low involvement in social activities, and their high tolerance for smartphone distraction. Religious education in Catholic grammar schools in Slovenia plays an important role not only in providing religious content, but also in empowering adolescents to take a critical view of the world, and to actively engage young people in society.

Keywords: internet; loneliness; socialisation; leisure; religious education; young people

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1. Introduction

The internet is neither good nor bad in itself, yet it is not neutral. Young people, who are one of the most vulnerable groups in society, need to be prepared to face the aggressive intrusions of the internet. In this respect, the school, and through it, religious instruction, has an important educational role to play.

School has always been an educational institution, and should continue to play this role. In the past, it was enough to involve young people sufficiently in leisure activities (sports, social engagement, volunteering, etc.) to promote their socialisation. Today, however, other ways must be found to bring young people into contact with each other.

Society today offers many opportunities for young people, but it does not provide them with educational guidance and important normative control. Problems arise when young people, who do not yet have a strong identity, find themselves in a complex social environment without orientation. The family and the school are marginalised by social media and the power of corporations (Vodičar 2021, p. 895). The family no longer has a monopoly on education (Platovnjak 2020, pp. 364–69).

The space, time, and place in which we live, allow many agencies to enter this field. That is why education today is plural. Young people today spend their free time outside the family. In some cases, the family is almost completely absent. Educators and parents must be aware that they are not the only actors in education. Today, social networks have a strong influence on education (Bajzek 2008, pp. 29–31).

Many schools, as well as various government policies in many countries, have programmes to educate young people in media literacy. However, Buckingham notes that many schools have fallen into 3 traps: 1. A defensive or protectionist approach (debates about media violence, the impact of media on addiction, obesity and consumerism), 2. Political anti-propaganda (demystification of the media, replacing 'fake' messages with 'real' ones), and 3. Creativity (spreading the myth of creativity, that young people—the digital natives—are different from others) (Buckingham 2020, p. 84).

Media literacy is not only about knowing how to use certain technological devices to access and/or create media content. It must also necessarily include an in-depth critical understanding of how media work (function), how they communicate, how they represent (represent) the world, how they are produced, and how they are used. To understand media today is to recognise the complexity of contemporary forms of 'digital capitalism'. And if we really want to have competent citizens, we need comprehensive media education programmes that are systematically supported as a basic right for all boys and girls (Buckingham 2020, p. 26).

A critical view of media content must be underpinned by hope and expose the aforementioned enemies of hope: cynicism, fatalism, relativism, and fundamentalism. All of this is possible if we have the understanding that the media are not transparent, that they are not a window on the world that reflects reality, but that they are representations of the world. Buckingham presents four areas of analysis: media language, representations, production, and audience (Buckingham 2020, pp. 68–70).

Slovenia excludes denominational religious instruction in public schools, unlike Austria, Croatia, Italy, Germany, Poland, and elsewhere in Europe. It is officially classified as a country where non-denominational religious instruction is practised. A small number of pupils take such classes (religion and ethics), however, "de facto in Slovenia, it is difficult to speak of the presence of religious instruction in public schools" (Globokar 2019, p. 124).

Poland is the opposite of Slovenia in terms of religious education for young people. Poland is one of the most Catholic countries in Europe: 92% of children in primary schools receive religious instruction. In secondary schools, however, only 70% of young people choose to take religious instruction. Makosa et al. find that the main reason for avoiding religious instruction is opposition to or disagreement with Catholic teaching on sex education (Mąkosa et al. 2022, p. 8).

In Slovenia, the situation is quite different. Surveys of young people (aged 16–27) show that the proportion of religious people has fallen by 30% in the last 20 years (2000 to 2020). Only 44% of young Slovenians consider themselves to be Catholic. The number of young people who do not belong to any religious community has increased by 20% over the same period (Lavrič et al. 2021, p. 383).

In Slovenian Catholic grammar schools, where religious instruction is provided, a very wide range of topics is covered. In the first grade, religious instruction focuses on interpersonal relationships, culture and religion. In the second grade, the Bible, the meaning of life and the personal journey of salvation are discussed. In the third year, the different religions and sects are discussed. In the fourth year, the role of the media in society, the importance of the family, and current issues in bioethics are examined.

Confronting such a breadth of life issues allows young people to look at their faith and religious affiliation from different perspectives, while at the same time providing topics of interest to non-believers or non-Catholics. Religious education is also about moral development, which is intrinsically linked to cognitive, emotional, and social development. "The objective of moral development is an independent and responsible person who recognises the other as a person with the same rights and duties, who is capable of reasonable decisions and is able to choose the good for himself/herself, for society, and for the entire natural environment. A moral personality makes decisions in an autonomous, reasonable, and responsible way" (Globokar 2018, pp. 553–54).

A large survey of parents in the UK in 2016 found that social networks can spread both negative and positive attitudes. Negative traits include the spread of hate, arrogance, ignorance, and judgement. Positive ones include humour, admiration for beauty, creativity, love, courage, and kindness (Jubile Centre 2016).

Communication is fundamental to Christianity and other religions. God communicates with man, and man with his fellow man (Platovnjak and Svetelj 2022, pp. 630–35). We are interested in the world of young people and their communication through the internet in order to better understand their behaviour. To this end, we interviewed young people in Slovenian Catholic high schools about their use of social networks and chat services, their

feelings of loneliness, their motivation for leisure activities, and the whereabouts of their smartphones during their studies.

We hypothesised two things: 1. Young people in Catholic high schools are exposed to the internet for more than an hour a day and have a high tolerance for smartphone distractions while studying. 2. Young people in Catholic high schools do not feel lonely and are very actively involved in leisure activities.

The survey was conducted from 7 to 25 November 2022 in 4 Catholic grammar schools in Slovenia, covering 672 young people aged between 18 and 19 years.[1]

2. Young People's Exposure to Social Networks and Chat Services

The internet has become part of who we are and how we communicate, so it is important to find the best ways to integrate it into young people's lives in a useful way. On the one hand, we have research showing the negative impact of the internet on our lives. This shows that overexposure to social networks has the most negative impact on life satisfaction in young people up to 19 years of age (Orben et al. 2022, pp. 1–10). Girls are at higher risk of mental health problems (depression, self-harm, eating disorders) than are boys (Salk et al. 2017, pp. 783–822).

On the other hand, we have experts who emphasise the positive value of media, if we integrate it properly into our lives. Ten years ago, Henry Jenkins argued that young people have great potential to develop their own digital competencies, that they belong to a culture of participation and are highly creative in the digital sphere (Jenkins 2014, pp. 60–61).

Rather than looking at positive and negative impacts, we need to look at the context in which we live. Jenkins (2014) and David Buckingham found that the biggest problems were for those who work in schools, who were much less media literate compared to the younger generations they work with (Buckingham 2010, p. 55). Buckingham criticises the polarised debates that, on the one hand, see technology as the solution to all problems (cyber-utopianism, drilling and skilling, empowerment), and on the other hand those that blame the media for all problems in society (cyber-bullying, sexting, fake news, trolling, flaming, filter bubbles). The problems are much broader, and have a history in the antecedent media (comics, television, cinema, the polemical press) (Buckingham 2020, pp. 50–55).

According to a 2016 survey in Slovenia, young people spend 2.3 h a day on a computer or tablet, and 3.4 h on a mobile phone. It is telling that most young people do not resort to delinquent behaviour. The most common forms of unwanted behaviour among young people are cheating on tests and conflicts with parents (Rek 2021, pp. 32, 76).

In our survey, we wanted to know how much time young people spend on the internet each day. We distinguished between internet use on a PC and on a smartphone. Young people spend much more time using the internet on their smartphones. In the 'Very often', category, that is, 3 to 6 h a day, 35% of young people are exposed to the internet on their smartphones, compared to only 7% on their PCs. For 'Very rare', that is, less than 1 h a day, 12% of young people are exposed to the internet on their smartphones, compared to 56% on their PCs. Finally, in the 'Frequently' category, or 1–3 h a day, 46% of young people are exposed to the internet on their smartphones, while 33% are exposed to the internet on their PCs (Figure 1).

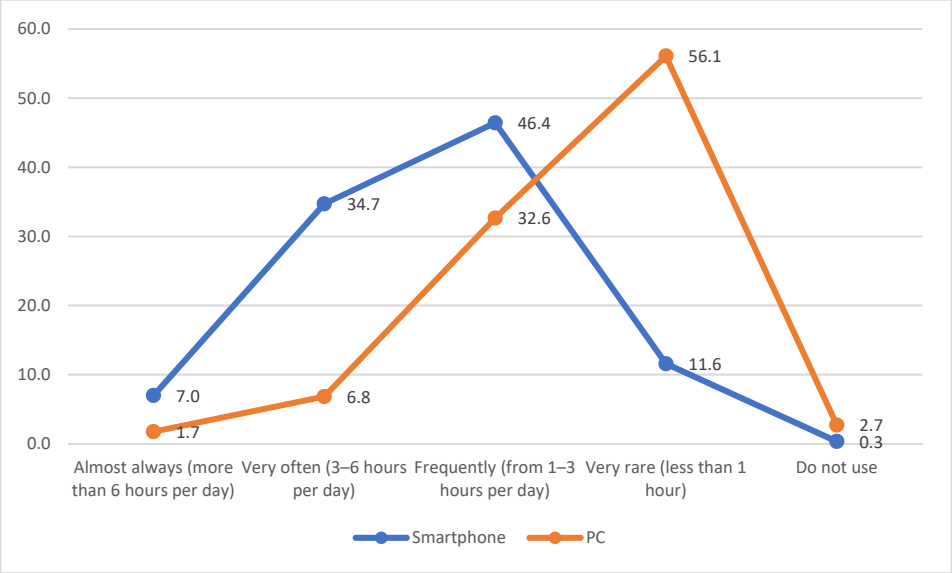

Figure 1. Exposure to internet.

Based on these data, we can assume that young people mainly use smartphones for chatting, while PCs are more likely to be used as a learning tool.

As young people are more exposed to the internet via smartphones than PCs, we investigated whether there are any gender differences. The data show that 3% of girls are more exposed to the internet via smartphones. However, there are no statistically representative differences by gender in terms of exposure to the internet via PC. We found that 87% of boys and 89% of girls use the internet daily via the smartphone. Also, 6% of boys and 8% of girls use it for more than 6 h a day. We also found that 36% of boys and 34% of girls use the internet very often (3–6 h), while 46% of boys and 47% of girls use the internet frequently (1–3 h per day), and 12% of boys and 11% of girls use the internet rarely (less than 1 h) (Figure 2).

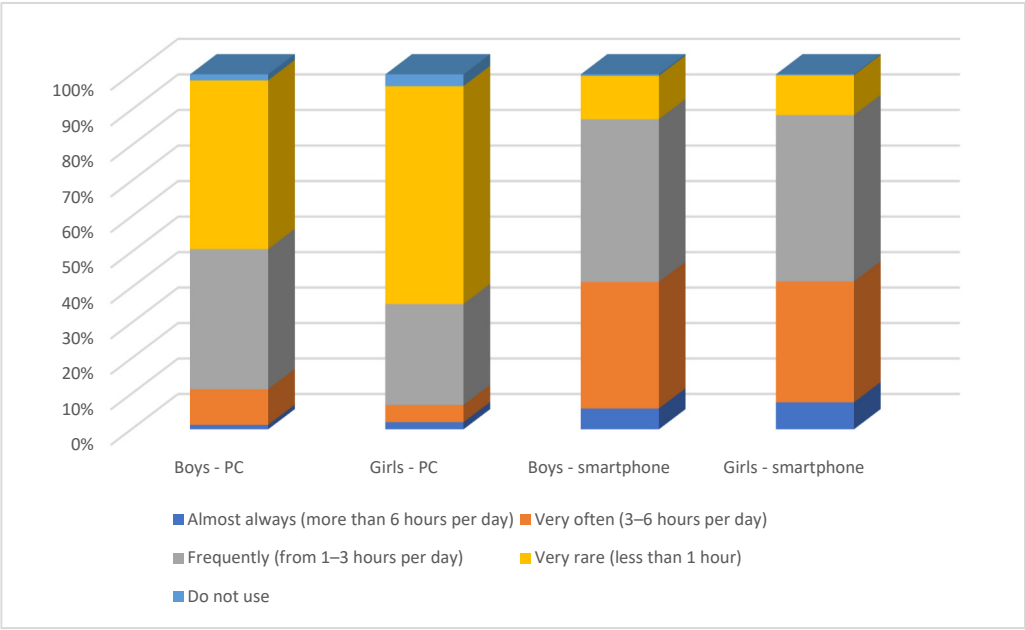

Figure 2. Exposure to internet via smartphone and PC by gender.

We were also interested in what young people do on the internet or how much time they spend using different social networks. Instagram is the most used (90%), followed by

Facebook (55%), Pinterest (46%) and TikTok (44%). For Facebook, Instagram and Pinterest, most of the young people who use them do so very rarely, less than 1 h per day (Instagram 36%, Facebook 30%, Pinterest 35%, and TikTok 11%). Only Instagram has a high number of users (27%) in the 'rarely' category, 1–2 h per day, and LinkedIn, Tinder and Tumblr are the least used (Figure 3).

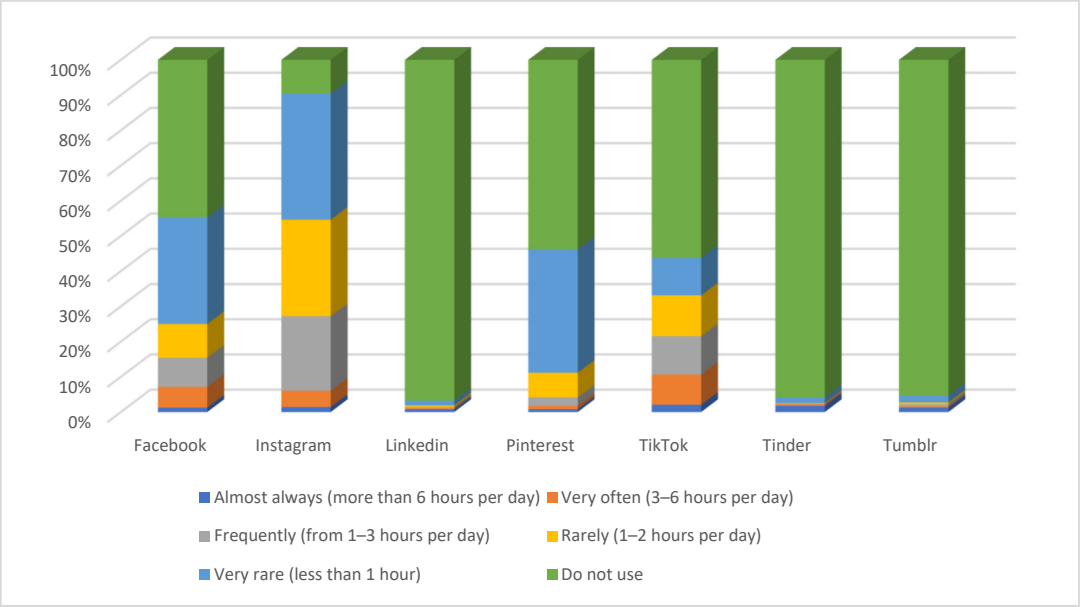

Figure 3. Exposure to social networks.

Among chat services, Snapchat (72%), Viber (52%), and WhatsApp (33%) are the most used. As with social networks, the largest proportion of young people who use chat services do so for less than 1 h a day ('very rare') With the exception of Snapchat, 29% of young people use it for less than 1 h, 17% 'frequently' (up to 3 h per day), and 8% 'very often' (for 3–6 h a day). Viber is also used less than 1 h daily. Similar proportions are also found for WhatsApp, which is used for less than 1 h a day by 27% of young people. We also found that 29% of young people use a smartphone for less than 1 h a day, 17% used one often, and 8% used a smartphone for 3–6 h a day (Figure 4).

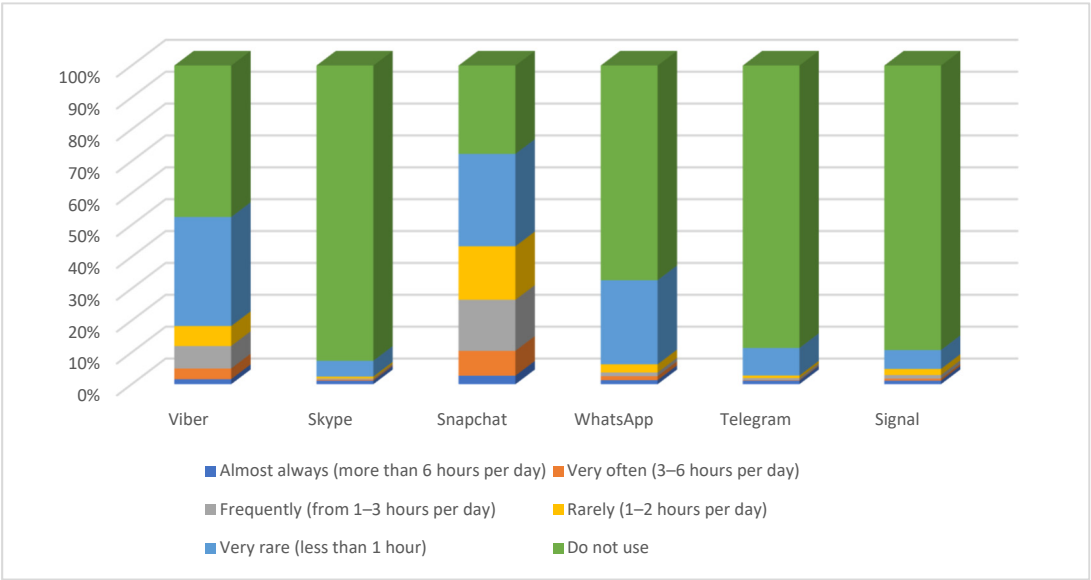

Figure 4. Exposure to chat services.

The context in which young people live is crucial in interpreting the results. "When the Internet is used as a way station on the route to enhancing existing relationships and forging new social connections, it is a useful tool for reducing loneliness. But when social technologies are used to escape the social world and withdraw from the "social pain" of interaction, feelings of loneliness are increased" (Nowland et al. 2017, p. 70).

In their study, Primack and colleagues found that social media has a greater negative impact on those who use it for more than two hours a day, than on those who use it for less than half an hour a day (Primack et al. 2017).

To summarise the use of the internet, the following can be highlighted: most young people use the internet on a daily basis via their smartphones, and spend most of their time on Instagram, Facebook, Pinterest, and TikTok, among social networks, and Snapchat, Viber, and Whats App, among chat services. Of these social networks, most users use them for less than an hour a day. There is a notable percentage of young people who are overexposed to the internet (6% of boys and 8% of girls). The lowest percentage of young people exposed to the internet (half an hour per day) is 12%.

3. Loneliness

Hikikomori is a syndrome that refers to a phenomenon whereby people choose to live completely isolated from the real world (Japanese: to stand alone, to isolate oneself). Japanese psychiatrist Tamaki Saito uses this word to describe a phenomenon in which people isolate themselves from social life, due to the excessive use of digital media (Amendola et al. 2018, pp. 52–53).

Certain social media events can foster feelings of exclusion, and idealised representations of peers' lives can also foster envy and the misconception that others are happier (Primack et al. 2017, pp. 6–7). Real face-to-face relationships are more challenging than online relationships. According to Globokar, on the internet, "relationships are less risky, easier to withdraw from, less painful; in real life, building genuine interpersonal relationships requires hard and demanding work, but these are the only fully human relationships. In real life, interpersonal verbal communication is always accompanied by a context of gestures, facial expressions, tone of voice and other forms of non-verbal communication, all of which are required to create a real relationship" (Globokar 2019, pp. 76–77).

Withdrawal from society and exclusion from active social life are typical of depressed people. When people spend time together, talking, exchanging opinions, sharing experiences, thoughts, and feelings, they engage with each other directly. We feel the emotions of our interlocutor from their voice, facial expressions, smell, etc. We cannot experience this in front of screens. Just as we can only learn to walk or talk from direct contact with other people, so we can learn empathy only from direct contact. Over-exposure to the internet reduces empathy in adolescents (Spitzer [2018] 2021, pp. 28–29).

Recent research confirms that excessive internet use contributes to loneliness (Reed et al. 2023; Orsolini et al. 2023; Islam et al. 2023; Shi and Wang 2022; Spitzer [2012] 2017, p. 24).

Our study does not show the impact of the internet on loneliness. Nevertheless, we are interested in the general feeling young people have about their level of loneliness: 2% of young people said they are always completely lonely, 23% of young people are often completely lonely, 61% of young people are rarely completely lonely, and 14% are never completely lonely (Figure 5).

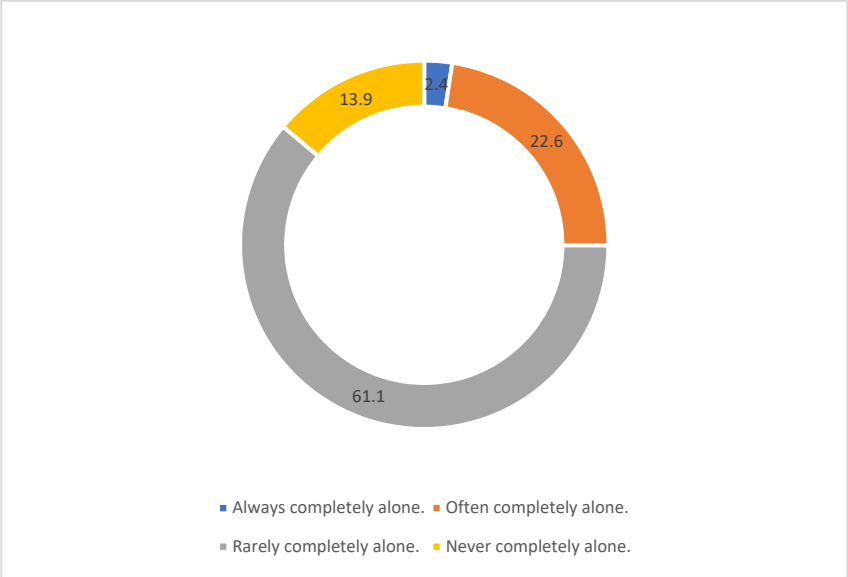

Figure 5. Loneliness.

In terms of gender, girls stand out. Among them, 27% are always and often completely lonely (22% for boys), while only 12% of girls (and 18% of boys) are never lonely (Figure 6).

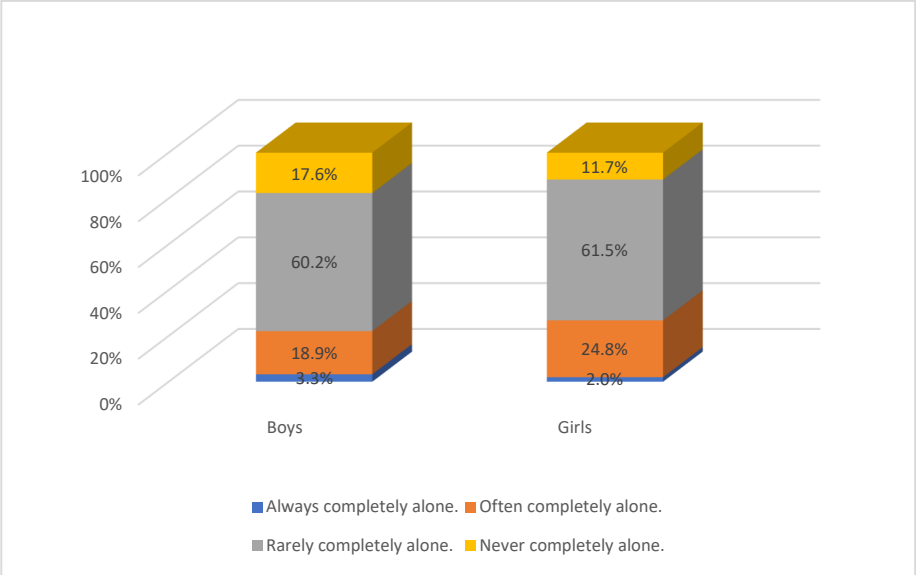

Figure 6. Loneliness by gender.

In our analyses, we find that most young people feel "rarely completely alone", regardless of how much time they spend using the internet. We only see differences between those who are the most exposed to the internet, and those who spend less than an hour with the internet. Among those exposed to the internet the most, 11% of students answered that they feel always completely lonely, while among those less exposed to the Internet, 25% answered that they feel never completely lonely. Among those who are 'often' and 'very often' exposed to the internet, the proportion of those who answered that they feel lonely very often, stands out (Figure 7).

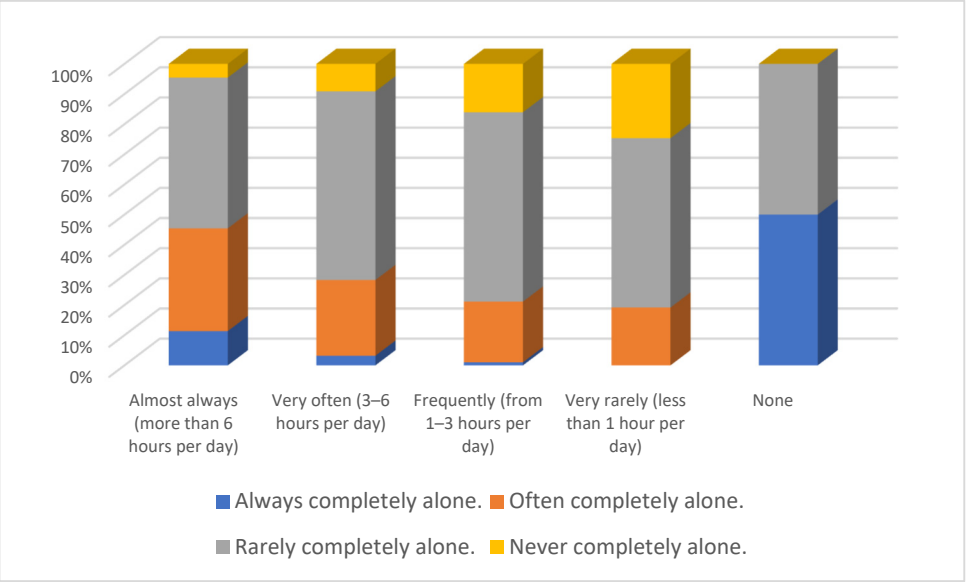

Figure 7. Proportion of lonely students by exposure to the internet on the phone.

In summary, most young people "admit" that they "rarely feel completely alone". The higher number of lonely people is found among girls. No significant correspondence was found between the duration of internet use and the feeling of loneliness.

4. Motivating Young People to Engage in Leisure Activities and Socialisation

Digital media makes it possible to communicate, connect, and stay connected. We can agree with Globokar that internet networking that does not build real relationships is of little value (Globokar 2019, p. 76). Therefore, encouraging students to engage in various activities in their free time, is one of the very important tasks of today's educators and parents.

We mentioned hikikomori syndrome. This disorder can develop in three stages. In the first stage, the student seeks reasons to avoid live contact with people (absent from school, dropping out of activities, disrupted sleep-wake rhythms). In the second stage, he also refuses invitations to socialise with friends, and spends most of the time in his room (losing sleep-wake rhythms). In the third stage, the student finds himself in complete isolation (at high risk of psychopathologies) (Amendola et al. 2018, p. 53).

Social networks are designed to connect, communicate, and share. Yet, despite all the connectivity, students feel isolated. Researcher Nowland argues that when the internet is used as a space to deepen existing relationships or make new social connections, it is a useful tool to reduce loneliness. However, when the internet is used to escape from the social world, feelings of loneliness increase (Nowland et al. 2017, p. 70).

Social activities, face-to-face relationships, and in-person friendships, offer more satisfaction to young people than social networks. Over-exposure to the internet, takes time away from personal hobbies (reading books, sports, theatre, etc.), necessary housework (helping to clean rooms, washing dishes, gardening, etc.), etc. Research confirms that smartphones reduce time for sporting activities (Kim et al. 2015; Lamberg and Muratori 2012).

Our survey assessed how much time young people spend on personal hobbies, leisure commitments, and volunteering activities. Personal hobbies stand out, with 90% of young people spending an hour or more on them each day. This is followed by leisure time commitments at home, and then weekly voluntary activities (Figure 8).

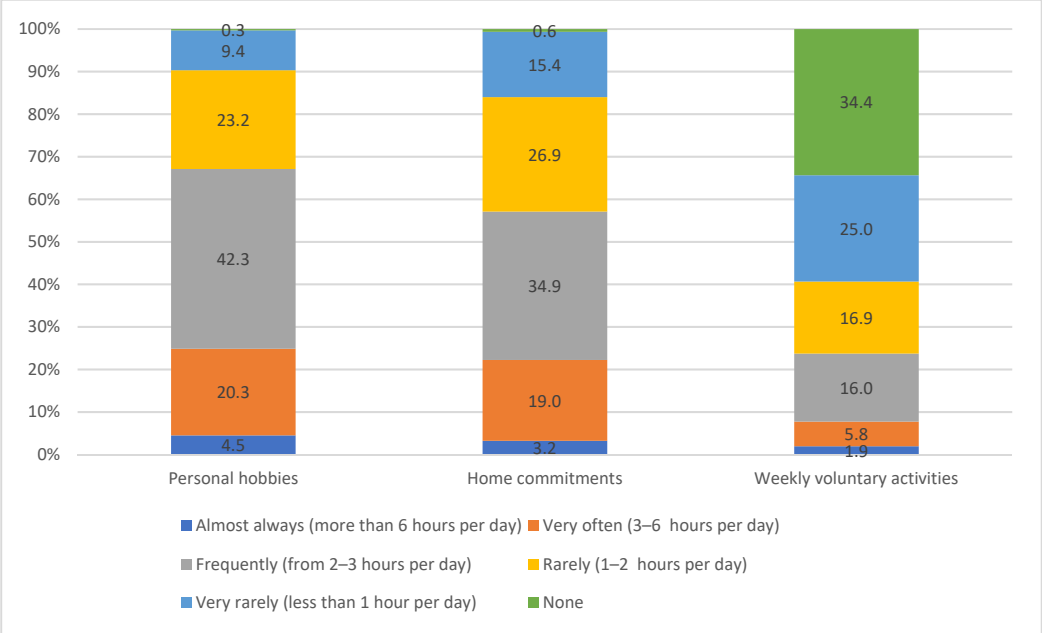

Figure 8. Student leisure activities.

Other research shows that young people's interest in culture is declining (Mesojedec et al. 2014; Črnič 2018; Grilc et al. 2016, p. 55). A survey of young people aged 15 to 20, shows that young people's interest in cultural activities declined on average between 2000 and 2020. The ratings, on a 6-point scale (1—never; 6—every day), are as follows: decreasing attendance at cultural institutions—cinema, theatre, concerts (2000—2.9; 2010—2.5; 2020—2.3); very poor attendance at museums and theatres (2020—2.1); lower participation of young people in cultural creation (2000—2.9; 2010—2.4; 2020—2.7); and lower activity in writing—diary, poems, letters, interest in reading (2000—2.3; 2010—1.5; 2020—1.8) (Lahe and Cupar 2021, p. 247).

Tanja Oblak Črnič, professor of communication studies, notes that one third of young people are very socially active, and two thirds are passive. Passive young people do not practice anything in the field of cultural and media consumption. These are young people who have lower school performance and parents with secondary education. Socially and culturally active young people consume events and content while also actively participating. In addition, they have experience of traditional cultural institutions. These young people achieve the highest grades in school and have educated parents (Črnič 2018, pp. 53–54).

In our research, however, we see that young people are active in those activities where they have the greatest extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. Personal hobbies are somewhere in the middle between young people's personal interest and external obligation (expectations and wishes of parents or teachers). Compulsory activities are set by the student's parents or educators. This is an extrinsic motivation. Involvement in voluntary activities, on the other hand, requires the greatest intrinsic motivation (someone is a member of a football club because they enjoy football). In terms of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, we see that young people are most involved where both are present, and least involved where it is purely about their intrinsic motivation.

In our survey, 54% of young people do not volunteer even 1 h a week. However, 88% of young people spend an hour or more on the internet on their phone, and 41% on the internet on their computer, on a daily basis.

What is the reason for such low engagement of young people in voluntary activities? We find (in our survey) that young people are active where they are "forced to do something". This means that, in addition to personal motivation and talents, there needs to be an external incentive. Hull, who saw the link between behaviour, drive, instinct, and incentive, already spoke of incentive. He drew up the following equation about the role of

incentives in behaviour: behaviour = drive × habit ×/+ incentive (Hull 1951). The two signs ("×" and "+") are in the equation because it is not quite certain whether the influence of incentives is more often additive, or multiplicative.

The incentive value of a goal, gratification, or reward, has a strong motivational power, similar to that of drive and habit (Grum et al. 2009, p. 138). Therefore, teachers and educators should have a very good knowledge of young people on the one hand, and on the other hand, of the techniques of encouraging young people. Students would become more socially engaged. However, we should not forget that there are many distractors.

5. The Internet as a Distraction from Work

Our concentration on work (learning) is affected by a variety of distractions: unpleasant ambient noise, people in the room, personal biological needs, and even the sound or light of smartphones and computers. Unlike all the others, we can turn off or remove these devices from our field of vision or space at any time.

Research shows that the physical proximity of smartphones affects our concentration. The mere presence of a smartphone reduces or limits cognitive abilities, even when the user manages to concentrate on a task (Roberto et al. 2015; Booker et al. 2015, pp. 173–79).

The new media operate without pause, constantly churning out a stream of information that does not allow our minds to stop and take stock. This flow is followed by mental capacities that are impaired and in a state of dependence and inertia (Larchet [2016] 2022, p. 188). Digital devices lead to superficial thinking and to stress. They cause unwanted side-effects, ranging from pure distraction, to child pornography and violence (Spitzer [2012] 2017, p. 87). The proliferation of information in short, disconnected, often overlapping bursts (the faster the better) has shaped a new way of thinking. This is the opposite of focused, continuous, linear thinking (Carr 2011, p. 119). People who frequently use multiple media at the same time show problems in controlling their minds. Multitaskers perform significantly worse than non-multitaskers. Even when it comes to task switching, which is common among multitaskers, multitaskers are significantly slower than non-multitaskers" (Spitzer [2012] 2017, p. 112).

Focus is the attachment and concentration of consciousness in a limited time on one of the mental operations: perceiving, thinking, remembering, reflecting, etc. Focus is the opposite of distraction and dispersion, change, disequilibrium, momentariness, and the simultaneous performance of several tasks at the same time (Larchet [2016] 2022, p. 194). The focus of the mind is on one of the mental operations: perceiving, thinking, remembering, reflecting, etc.

In our study, we wanted to know whether young people carry their smartphones in their line of sight, out of their line of sight, or not at all, while they are learning. The results show that only 14% of young people carry a smartphone outside the place of study (always or often), 52% of young people carry it out of sight, and 67% of young people carry it in sight (Figure 9).

The sound of the phone is also a distraction. We found that 66% of young people always or often have the sound on when studying, 80% when expecting a call or message, and 62% when not expecting a call or message (Figure 10). At work, 83% of girls and 74% of boys always or often have the sound on.

This data shows that young people are very attached to their smartphones. It is a strong desire to be always reachable and to have all the information from their "friends". However, this does not always have positive effects. Young people who are always connected to the internet (homo connecticus) find it difficult to dispose of time frames. This is already confirmed by the data on young people's inactivity in their free time and the constant presence of the phone. Larchet is convinced that the media environment encourages constant distraction: "The time available to them is no longer marked by duration in the form of a temporal sequence, but by a series of confused moments" (Larchet [2016] 2022, pp. 195–96).

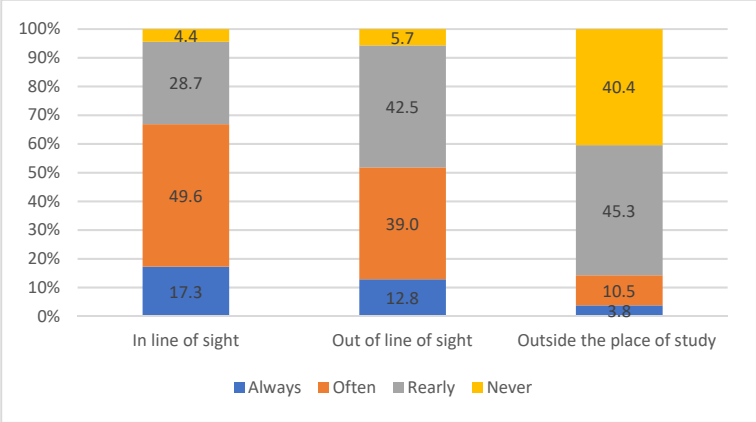

Figure 9. Phone range at work.

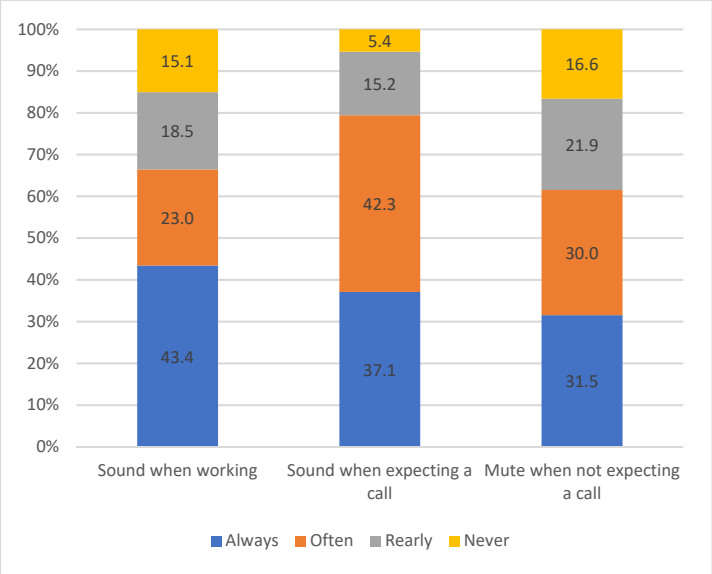

Figure 10. Phone sound at work.

The fast pace of life and overwork are therefore not only experienced by adults, but also by young people. Borut Škodlar, a professor at the Ljubljana Psychiatric Clinic, believes that calming exercises should also be practised in schools. "A child who is distracted, unfocused, needs to calm down first" (Bojc 2023).

If exposure to the internet (playing online games) is not regulated in time, addiction can result. Various studies clearly show the negative effects of internet addiction on physical and mental health. Internet addiction is associated with levels of anxiety, depression, and aggressive behavior in young people (Choi et al. 2018, p. 549).

Here, the role of religious teachers and educators is very challenging and important. Young people are not aware of the powerful influence the internet has on them.

6. Self-Perception of the Impact of the Internet on Interpersonal Relationships

Students are convinced that the internet does more good to them than harm, when it comes to socializing. They believe it does more harm to others than to themselves. Only 28% of young people 'admitted' that they personally think the internet is harmful (somewhat harmful, very harmful, or quite harmful) when it comes to socializing with their peers. However, when asked if the internet is harmful to others when it comes to making friends, 38% of young people answered "yes" (Figure 11).

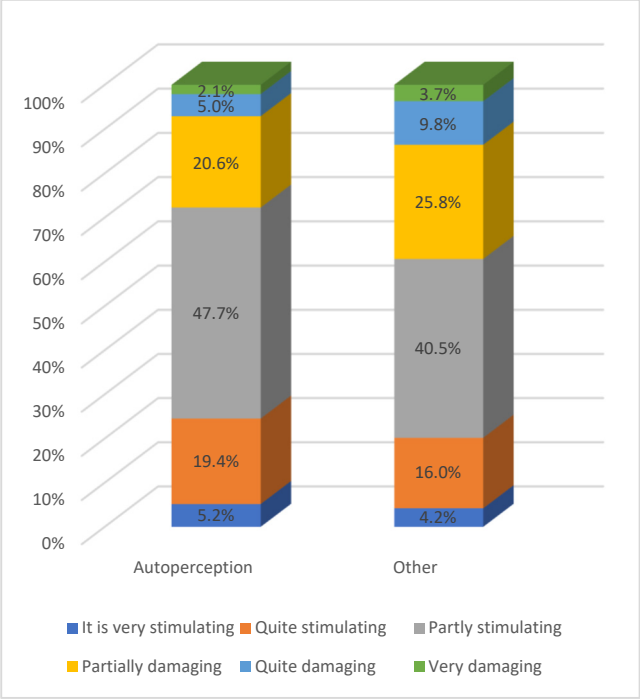

Figure 11. Self-perception versus perception of others.

Differences in self-perception are also evident between boys and girls: 31% of boys and 20% of girls answered that the internet is beneficial in making friends ('very' and 'quite'); 6% of boys and 8% of girls admitted that the internet is ('very' and 'quite') harmful in making friends with peers. Boys find the internet more stimulating, while girls find it more harmful (Figure 12).

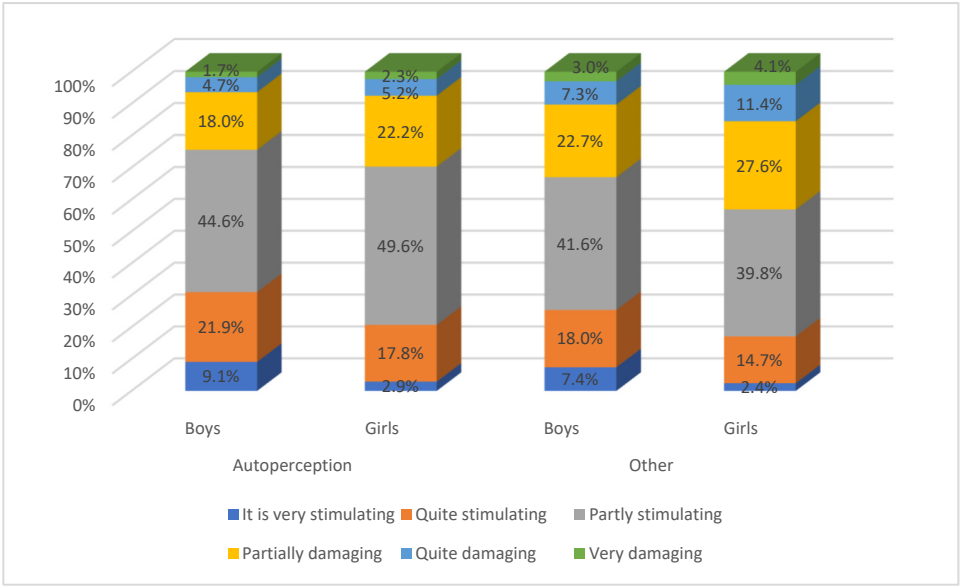

Figure 12. Perception of the impact of the internet by gender.

7. Conclusions

The results of our investigation confirm the first hypothesis and reject the second. The first hypothesis is confirmed: young people are highly exposed to social networking and chat services (more than one hour per day), and young people are very tolerant of light and noise distractions from their phones while studying. In fact, we find that young people are

connected to the internet most of the time through their phones, which are always within reach, even when they are studying. Almost all of them are connected to the internet for an hour every day. Most young people use Instagram and Snapchat.

The second hypothesis, which assumed that young people in Catholic grammar schools do not feel lonely and are very actively involved in leisure activities, was rejected. The results of our survey show that very few (less than half of the young people) volunteer for 1 h per week (fire brigade, parish youth work, Caritas, etc.), although 84% of young people do at least 1 h of voluntary housework per day. Almost all young people pursue private hobbies for at least one hour per day. We found that 23% of young people often feel lonely (2% feel completely lonely). One third of young people are aware of the harmful effects of the internet on socialising, and more than one third have difficulties socialising.

Not only young people, but also teachers and educators, are under the strong influence of distractions. They are so powerful that they can get in the way of our achieving the desirable goals of education. That is why teachers and educators should first work on themselves, in order to be able to pass on good practices to young people (Jeglič 2022, p. 734; Nežič Glavica 2019). Just as we have found that young people need encouragement, so too do teachers and educators. The European projects should devote more attention and material support to this area.

Confessional religious instruction is a great challenge today. Good catechesis necessarily involves personal experience. "Only a catechesis that proceeds from religious information to personal guidance and to the experience of God will be capable of offering meaning. The transmission of the faith is based on authentic experiences, which must not be confused with experiments: experience transforms life and provides keys for its interpretation, while the experiment is reproduced only in an identical manner" (Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization 2020, p. 131).

Losé Luis Moral, a pastoral theologian at the Salesian Pontifical University, argues that young people have difficulty understanding what we call faith, and that they do not reject faith, but our ideas about faith (Moral 2007, p. 120). Moral stresses that three aspects are important in the evangelisation of young people: "(1) The logical and profound intertwining of the Christian experience with the experience of young people in the context of the 'communication age'. (2) Taking into account the decisive importance and weight of culture in religious education. (3) Identifying the main reason for the progressive alienation of young people from the Church" (Moral 2007, p. 121).

The task of the modern religious teacher is also one of continuous formation and personal spiritual growth. In addition to a good knowledge of the content, the teacher must know his students and the environment in which they live (including social networks, chat services and other websites that young people visit). We cannot ignore the fact that young people are lonely, have difficulties in participating in leisure activities, and difficulties in socialising. Religious education, with its many topics, can help address these problems among young people.

In the future, it will be necessary to carry out a complete overhaul of both religious education textbooks and additional training for religious education teachers. In the digital age, not only the way we communicate has changed, but also the human being himself. The old concepts for communicating knowledge and faith are no longer sufficient to answer the modern young person's questions about meaning, and we do not yet have new ones.

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Institutional Review Board Statement: The study was not submitted to the Ethics Committee for the following reasons: The questionnaire does not contain any depth or psychological questions. The topics are exposure to the Internet, use of social networks during learning and leisure time, social engagement, and perception of the impact of the Internet.

Informed Consent Statement: After a personal consultation, one member of the Ethics Committee told me that this type of question does not need the Ethics Committee review. Voluntary participation in the survey was ensured. The survey was conducted in complete anonymity. All data is protected.

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

Note

[1] A survey was carried out as part of this project. The questionnaire does not contain any depth or psychological questions. The topics are: exposure to the internet, use of social networks during learning and leisure time, social engagement, and perception of the impact of the internet. Voluntary participation in the survey was ensured. The survey was conducted in complete anonymity. All data is protected.

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