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Internet and religion

Abstract: This article includes deliberations on a few significant issues concerning the relationship between the Internet and religion. According to these deliberations, every fourth respondent among secondary school students (25.6%) searched for some forms of religious activity within the last six months before the sociological research, especially from among deeply devout persons and regular churchgoers. The overwhelming majority of the surveyed was not interested in this new activity. The young people from secondary schools used the Internet to search for religious content to a limited extent. The researched secondary school students slightly more often informed about looking for religious content on YouTube, on parish, diocese or congregation websites, as well as Internet forums or chats, while the least often on pilgrimage office sites or religious community and organization portals. About every fifth of the respondents attending secondary school attached the same importance (as multiple index indicates) to religious activity in the virtual world as in the real world (from 31.0% to 7.0%). The highest index referred to Internet retreats and sermons, prayers online, virtual parish communities as well as Holy Masses and church services on the web.

Keywords: Internet, secondary school children, religion.

Modern media have a significant impact on improving our lives, especially those of young people. They become an important element of shaping their personal and social identity, their attitudes and everyday behaviour. They have great bonding power and great potential to connect people, regardless of their geographical distance. These means of social communication enable the exchange of information, ideals, values, norms and behavioural patterns. Science and technology have transformed

our living environments, our way of communicating, but also, in a sense, our way of thinking and acting. Under the influence of new digital technologies, basic social communication and interpersonal relations models are changing. The Internet is a widespread, complex and constantly evolving reality. Especially for young people, the network is extremely natural.

New technologies are a real good for humanity. Sometimes falsified, the information in the network society reaches any type of audience, including children, by means of mobile devices that are increasingly efficient and handy. Access to the network is an elementary requirement for school youth in today's world. Words and images can be sent to the remotest and most isolated corners of the world. The Internet allows for an unrestricted expansion of the network and in many ways enriches social life. Increasingly, Internet users are finding themselves in the virtual world of cyberspace, and some of them, overwhelmed by a virtual obsession, are beginning to isolate themselves and break real social ties. This process seems difficult to stop, and even, to some extent, is irreversible¹.

Opinions on the impact of the Internet on human relations can be divided into two categories. "On the one hand, we are confronted with the view that the online world offers new opportunities to establish relationships that facilitate or complement direct relationships. For people travelling or working abroad, the internet allows them to regularly contact friends and family within the country. It makes it easier to bear distance and separation. The Internet also enables the establishment of new types of relationships, for example »anonymous« network users meet on discussion forums and discuss topics of interest to them. Such virtual contacts sometimes turn into full-blown bonds of friendship and even result in a meeting. Many network users join active online communities that are qualitatively different from the groups operating in the physical world. Researchers convinced of the positive impact of the Internet on human relations claim that it broadens and enriches social networks"².

There is no shortage of critical opinions. "It turns out that as people spend more and more time communicating online and organizing their daily activities through the web, they spend less and less time nurturing direct relationships. Some sociologists fear that the development of the Internet will deepen the isolation of individuals and atomise the society. In their opinion, one of the effects of the wide availability of the Internet at home is that people spend less and less »quality time« with their families and friends. The Internet has invaded the realm of private life and blurred

¹ A. Betlej, *Socjologia internetu*, in: *100 lat socjologii w Katolickim Uniwersytecie Lubelskim Jana Pawła II. Idee – teorie – badania*, V. Szymczak (ed.), Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL, Lublin 2018, pp. 359-371. A. Niermann, *Cyfrowe sieci społeczne – wymiar polityczny i społeczno/socjologiczna interpretacja*, "Keryks. Forum Pedagogicznoreligijne. Międzynarodowe – Międzykulturowe – Międzydyscyplinarne", 2011, vol. 10, pp. 259-271.

² A. Giddens [with Ph. W. Sutton] *Socjologia*, O. Siara, A. Szulżycka, P. Tomanek (trans.), Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warsaw 2012, p. 727.

the line between the professional and domestic life: many people work after hours at home – checking their mail or completing tasks that have started and are not finished at work. This leads to reduced contacts, neglect of relations with others, abandonment of traditional forms of entertainment, such as theatre or books, and a general weakening of social ties³.

Even if the Internet is a space in which social contacts gain density, it also isolates from the problems of the real world. Many young people live in the space they imagine and create. Young people of today, sometimes referred to as the digital generation, are aware of the enormous potential of new technologies for communication, communication and understanding between individuals and communities, making new acquaintances, searching for information and news, sharing opinions and views, creating new communities and networks. They allow to meet and learn about values and traditions of other people, nations and cultures⁴.

The Internet's influence of the attitudes and moral and religious behaviour of Internet users is wide⁵. It is worth noting that today's young people, who "are perfectly capable of finding themselves in virtual spaces and skilfully searching for and selecting information, but often do not know how to (and do not want to!) subject it to reflective analysis⁶". The Internet allows young people to build and create their own identity in many different ways. It is a source of information which is later used in social life and can provide a basis for strengthening personal and social identity of individuals. Unlike in the real world in the virtual world, the choice is unlimited, only the user decides which option to choose⁷.

³ Idem, p. 727. A. Błachnio, A. Przepiórka, T. Rowiński, *Dysfunkcjonalne korzystanie z internetu – przegląd badań*, „Psychologia Społeczna”, 2014, no 9, vol. 4 pp. 378-395.

⁴ P. Szarota, *Od Facebooka do post-przyjaźni. Współczesne przeobrażenia bliskich relacji*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warsaw 2018. A. Betlej, *Moralność w społeczeństwie sieci*, in: *Leksykon socjologii moralności. Podstawy – teorie – badania – perspektywy*, J. Mariański (ed.), Zakład Wydawniczy NOMOS, Kraków 2015, pp. 464-469.

⁵ Ł. Kaprańska, A. Maksymowicz, *Grzechy internautów. Jak internet wpływa na naszą moralność*, in: *Moralne dylematy Polaków w ponowoczesności. Wybrane problemy*, A. Maksymowicz (ed.), Zakład Wydawniczy NOMOS, Kraków 2009, pp. 99-108. B. Janda-Dębek, *Kłamstwo w sieci*, in: *E-kultura, e-nauka, e-społeczeństwo*, A. Maksymowicz (eds.), Oficyna Wydawnicza Arboretum, Wrocław 2008, pp. 251-260. M. Hędzielek, *Uzależnienie od internetu – zasięg, formy, zagrożenia*, in: *E-kultura, e-nauka, e-społeczeństwo*, A. Maksymowicz (eds.), Oficyna Wydawnicza Arboretum, Wrocław 2008, pp. 267-282.

⁶ W. Wrzesień, *Kilka uwag o pokoleniowej sytuacji współczesnej polskiej młodzieży*, „Przeгляд Prawniczy, Ekonomiczny i Socjologiczny”, 2016, no 78, vol. 1, pp. 229-241. R. Lis, *Internet narzędziem kształtowania tożsamości jednostki*, in: *Wokół tożsamości. Teorie, wymiary, ekspresje*, A. Maksymowicz, I. Borowik, K. Leszczyńska, Zakład Wydawniczy NOMOS, Kraków 2007, pp. 327-342. E. Sielicka, *Internet jako środowisko wsparcia młodzieży w sytuacjach żałoby*, „Pedagogika Społeczna”, 2018, no 17, vol. 1, pp. 153-174.

⁷ From a survey carried out in 2017 among high school graduates of the Archdiocese of Łódź, only 21.2% of the respondents declared that they were looking for important values on the Internet, 81.2% did so in the family, 74.4%, among friends, 25.3% at school, 22.2% in religion, 20.2% - in the peer group, 6.7% in the media (radio, press, television). K. Kaźmierska, *Młodzież archidiecezji łódzkiej. Szkic do portretu*, Archidiecezjalne Wydawnictwo Łódzkie, Łódź 2018, p. 64.

The Catholic Church and the Internet

The multi-faceted influence of the Internet is also revealed in the religious sphere. Individuals satisfy their spiritual needs for *the sacrum*, establish various contacts of a religious nature, communicate various information, strengthen or dismantle their religious outlook, seek advice on religious matters or community experience. The opportunities offered by the Internet are used by Christian churches, denominations, new religious movements and sects to achieve their goals, such as consolidating positive attitudes towards religion and the Church, and to attract new members. Catholic internet portals are already an important space for religious meeting and dialogue, they support the processes of bondage, provide religious and spiritual advice⁸.

In Poland, websites with religious content are developing intensively. The following portals stand out thanks to the number of users: Opoka, Deon, Faith, Adonai and the largest of its kind: Mateusz. The portals related to the Catholic media include ekai.pl (Catholic Information Agency), niedziela.pl (the Catholic *Niedziela* weekly) and www.radiomaryja.pl. There are popular websites edited by the dioceses of Krakow and Tarnów and by religious congregations (Franciscans, Jesuits, Dominicans). Between 2009 and 2013, the reach of websites with Catholic religious content remained at 2.1-2.3 million users⁹. The three most popular websites in November 2010 were: opoka.org.pl, onet.tvreligia and wiara.pl. The power of religious websites to influence or rather attract religious is therefore somewhat limited. The use of new technologies in the evangelisation work has its limitations¹⁰. However, the Church wants to contribute to the virtual world having a "human face".

According to the SAC Institute of Catholic Church Statistics, 55.1% of parishes in Poland have websites, 38.7% do not have their own website and 6.2% were in the process of preparation. Parishes most often run their own websites in the dioceses of Katowice (86.0%), Warsaw (80.7%), Bielsko-Żywiec (80.0%) and Gdańsk (78.4%), the rarest in the dioceses of Radom (34.7%), Kielce (37.2%), Siedlce (39.1%), Drohiczyn (39.2%), Łomża (39.8%), Łowicz (36.4%) and Warmia (39.9%). Between 2010 and 2018, the ratio of parishes with websites and websites increased from 44% to 55%. In 2016, 16.5% of all Polish parishes had their own profile on social networking sites, with the most in the diocese of Płock (28.2%) and Warsaw-Praga

⁸ A. Górny, *Internet – instrument wsparcia czy czynnik destabilizacji funkcjonowania Kościoła katolickiego w Polsce?*, in: *Tradycja i innowacja w polu refleksji socjologii religii*, S.H. Zaręba, I. Borowik (eds.), KONTRAST, Warsaw 2016, p. 279.

⁹ J. Kloch, *Kościół w Polsce wobec EB 2.0*, Wydawnictwo JEDNOŚĆ, Kielce 2013, p. 135 and 141-478.

¹⁰ E. Stachowska, *Religia i media w warunkach polskich*, in: *Pomiędzy sekularyzacją i religijnym ożywieniem. Podobieństwa i różnice w przemianach religijnych w Polsce i w Niemczech*, E. Firlit, M. Hainz, M. Libszowska-Żółtkowska, G. Pickel, D. Pollack. (eds.), Akademia IGNATIANUM w Krakowie, Wydawnictwo WAM, Kraków 2012, pp. 362-364.

dioceses (28.2%), and the least in the diocese of Kielce (6.4%) and Przemyśl (7.7%)¹¹.

In the Lublin Archdiocese, at the end of 2008, out of 264 parishes, 84 had their own websites (31.8% of the total parishes in the archdiocese). According to the SAC Institute of Catholic Church Statistics in 2018, 49.1% of parishes in the Lublin Archdiocese had a website, 37.9% did not have one and 12.9% were in the process of preparing their own website; in 2016, 12.9% of all parishes in the Lublin Archdiocese had their own profile on social networking sites¹². In an accessible way, the Lublin Archdiocese parishes are involved in the network society.

In general, we can say that parish websites are developing very dynamically. They are treated as part of the parish ministry, supporting the basic principles of the ordinary pastoral activity. Parish websites, although they do not replace direct human contact (direct interpersonal communication), offer many new opportunities and cooperation with the faithful. In the contemporary parish communities, new networks and new social ties are constantly being created. In addition to territorial parishes, virtual parishes already exist *in statu nascendi*. The changes in the parish's functioning that are introduced by new media technologies, especially the Internet, are difficult to describe, especially in terms of their impact on its further functioning. New specialised networks, new communities and virtual community movements will be created. The Internet is a good opportunity to involve the laity in the life of the parish and the Church, and it can also be used for evangelisational purposes¹³.

Interactive communication on the Internet brings new perspectives for religious practices. Sociologists' assessments of these new forms of religious engagement vary. Maria Libiszowska-Żółtkowska notes that the virtualising religious practices force out their communal nature. The practices and religious needs of the faithful are met by the Internet, radio and television¹⁴. Wojciech Świątkiewicz, on the other hand, claims that the religious practices' virtualisation on the Internet does not have to suppress their community nature, and may even foster various forms of community life. "In the Internet galaxy, religious practices are involved in a new way in shaping the religious culture of local and global society, redefining their public and private, individual and community, ecclesiastical and non-church

¹¹ SAC Institute of Catholic Church Statistics, *Annuario Statisticum Ecclesiae in Polonia AD 2018*. Warsaw 2018, pp. 49-52.

¹² Idem, p. 49-52.

¹³ K. Klausa, *Media w nowoczesnej parafii. Sugestie pastoralne stare i nowe*, Edycja Świętego Pawła, Częstochowa 2003, pp. 145-148. K. Filipek, *Religijność w społeczeństwie sieciowym*, in: *Religia a gospodarka*, vol. II, S. Partycki (ed.), Wydawnictwo KUL, Lublin 2005, pp. 277-281. B. Chętnicki, *Internet – medium ewangelizacji*, in: *Religia a gospodarka*, vol. II, S. Partycki (ed.), Wydawnictwo KUL, Lublin 2005, pp. 282-285.

¹⁴ M. Libiszowska-Żółtkowska, *Typy religijności w społeczeństwie polskim w początkach XXI w. – trwałość i zmiana*, in: *Katolicyzm polski w warunkach Unii Europejskiej: szanse i zagrożenia, obawy i nadzieje*, J. Baniak (ed.), Redakcja Wydawnictw UAM – Wydział Teologiczny, Poznań 2004, p. 94.

dimensions"¹⁵. According to him, there is no turning back from the presence of religion and the Church in the Internet. *Face to face* interactions, however, are more important in the parish community than electronic messaging interactions.

The Church on the web is evidence of its modernization, but perhaps also sometimes a manifestation of trivialising the religion and faith. It is difficult to imagine the existence of a virtual parish with all its pastoral functions, but religious portals, forums gathering believers, private websites of priests appear at an extraordinary pace. The digitisation of our daily lives does not bypass the Church. Estimates say that religion, along with pornography (quite an unhappy neighbourhood), dominates the Internet. Entering the word "religion" in the search engine gets more than 23 million results, the words "Church" and "God" yielding half the amount¹⁶. However, it is difficult to consider the current level of use of new technologies in the Church in our country, as well as the involvement of clergy in the pastoral care of the network, as satisfactory.

The intensity and scale of activities carried out by Churches and religious associations in cyberspace is constantly increasing. Katarzyna Marciniak lists the following websites: official websites of particular Churches, including: diocesan, parish, monastic, sanctuary, information services; publishing sites (e.g. scientific, popular, devout); problem sites (e.g. hagiographic); pilgrimage sites; school and university sites; blogs (Internet diaries, diaries written by clergy). The author describes, among others, the official websites of individual Churches, religious sites, the Opoka, Kościół, Wiara, Katolik or Mateusz portals and the activities of Internet retreats, Internet confession, liturgical life on the Internet, individual or collective Internet pilgrimages, Internet religious songs, blogs written by priests and even the Cemetery: the Catholic Portal of Our Lady of Victory¹⁷.

Every year, more and more Catholic internet portals appear. Andrzej Górny discusses these new places of meeting and dialogue, defining them in a metaphorical way: the new agora—the virtual pulpit; the new agora—the discussion room; the catechetical space—prayer and catechesis; the beginning of the virtual Church. With regard to the Internet portal, which is becoming a new space for catechesis and prayer, he writes: "Thanks to the possibilities offered by the Network, it is easier to carry out catechesis on many aspects of religious life, with a particular emphasis on the formation of reflective attitudes towards prayer. The portal thus becomes

¹⁵ W. Świątkiewicz, *Między sekularyzacją i deprywatyzacją. Socjologiczne refleksje wokół polskiej religijności w kontekście europejskim*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, Katowice 2010, pp. 126-127.

¹⁶ K. Rożej, *Bóg w sieci*, „Przegląd Powszechny”, 2009, vol. 2, p. 44.

¹⁷ K. Marciniak, *E-religijność. Nowe wyzwanie, nowe możliwości*, in: *E-kultura, e-nauka, e-społeczeństwo*. B. Płonka-Syroka, M. Staszczak (eds.), Oficyna Wydawnicza Arboretum, Wrocław 2008, pp. 170-182. A. Olczyk, *Internet w ewangelizacji misyjnej Kościoła*, in: *Mojemu Kościołowi wszystko! Księga jubileuszowa ku czci ks. arcybiskupa Stanisława Nowaka metropolity częstochowskiego z okazji 25. rocznicy sakry biskupiej i posługi pasterskiej w Kościele częstochowskim*, S. Jasionek (ed.), Częstochowskie Wydawnictwo Archidiecezjalne REGINA POLONIAE, Częstochowa 2009, pp. 473-485.

a space of spiritual formation that allows for a meeting between clergy and laity, centred around prayer. In this way, undoubtedly, the religious portals' integrating function of is also realised. The bond that arises from prayer and catechesis seems to be a strong bond that connects clergy and laity into the church community"¹⁸.

The Internet is an inexhaustible source of information and advice on religious life. The so-called religious market is constantly expanding, with content that is hostile to religions and churches as well as one that favours them. In the virtual space there are many Christian Churches, denominations and new religious movements that compete with each other on the basis of the competition model. For the Catholic Church, an Internet portal becomes an important space of contact with the faithful, it can also be a space of spiritual formation. The intensity and scale of activities carried out by the Catholic Church in cyberspace is constantly increasing.

For example, Andrzej Górny discusses some ways of using the Internet to support the Church's activities: a) The Internet is becoming a useful tool used for teaching and evangelisation. On portals such as Opoka.pl, Mateusz.pl, Katolik.pl, Kazanie.pl, you can find a lot of religious content, including those concerning the functioning of the Church, dogmatic and moral principles, containing teachings for the faithful; b) Many Catholic portals offer the opportunity to discuss in two basic forms: in a chat and a forum. The use of the chat allows for synchronous communication, the discussion on the forum is asynchronous. Both chat activity and posting on the forum allows for a multidimensional dialogue; c) Catechesis conducted in a variety of forms and support for prayer; d) Organising Advent and Lentenary spiritual retreats; e) Dialogue undertaken in relation to the most difficult, private or even intimate matters. The faithful ask questions and share their problems with the clergy, hoping for support and help¹⁹.

In the summary of his deliberations he writes: "The influence of the Internet on the role and place of the Catholic Church in Poland is a result of divergent tendencies and it is extremely difficult to form a clear-cut conclusion of a conclusive nature. Universal access to the resources of the global network can certainly contribute to the reducing number of Catholics who identify with the institutional church. On the other hand, the opportunities offered by the Internet are also used to strengthen the authority and position of institutions in the social space"²⁰.

¹⁸ A. Górny, *Religijne portale internetowe – nowe przestrzenie wspólnotowego dialogu*, in: *Laikat i duchowieństwo w Kościele katolickim w Polsce. Problem dialogu i współistnienia*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Wydziału Nauk Społecznych Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu, Poznań 2010, p. 197.

¹⁹ A. Górny, *Internet – instrument wsparcia czy czynnik destabilizacji funkcjonowania Kościoła katolickiego w Polsce?*, in: *Tradycja i innowacja w polu refleksji socjologii religii*, S. H. Zaręba, I. Borowik (ed.), KONTRAST, Warsaw 2016, pp. 286-290.

²⁰ Idem, p. 291. M. Podgórski, *Spoleczność wirtualna na forum dyskusyjnym „katolik.pl”*, in: *Wielka sieć. E-seje z socjologii Internetu*, J. Kurczewski (ed.), Wydawnictwo TRIO, Warsaw 2006, pp. 143-177.

Sociologists talk about the new religiousness and spirituality, about virtual spirituality, about cyber-religiousness in new electronic media, referring to the means of expression and motives taken from popular culture. "Religious and spiritual content published in electronic media becomes widely available both for those who are interested in it out of sheer curiosity, e.g. looking for unusual experiences and experiences, and for those who are looking for orientation in the world and guidelines to facilitate their life choices. They are an attractive offer for people looking for a community based on similarities of views and lifestyles, but also for people who have been driven by difficulties or life crises to seek spirituality. Electronic media, creating the possibility of contact and dialogue, enable spiritual search, although they are not capable of directing it. They facilitate the emergence of new social structures, even though they cannot induce or force people to join them. By opening up to the individual the »market« of religious and spiritual offers, they leave it to the individual to determine the meaning of spirituality in his own life and the ways of living it"²¹.

The Internet is becoming a space where one can clearly observe a growing interest in religion and spirituality. Virtual space gives individuals new, exceptionally wide opportunities for religious life, including belonging to virtual religious communities and churches²². Thanks to web pages one can get to know people who are similar to each other, who follow the same or similar religions, guided by similar principles of life. Religious portals offer not only a huge amount of information, but also the opportunity to make contact with other people with similar or different views, interested in discussion or exchange of opinions on broadly understood religious topics.

The Internet serves to create virtual communities that influence attitudes and bonds between people, which for many become as important as those in the real world. Many of the materials published on the Internet are about controversial issues, which are at the centre of current discourses and polemics. The virtual space is also used by new religious movements and sects, propagating their ideologies and trying to attract new supporters and members. The Internet provides opportunities and opportunities to move between different world and religious systems²³. The Internet is changing the ways information is spreading and communicating

²¹ A. Zduniak, *Duchowość w epoce mediów elektronicznych*, in: *Media i religia. Nowy kontekst komunikacji*, R. Sierocki, M. Sokołowski, A. Zduniak (ed.), Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2016, p. 71.

²² P. Siuda, *Cyberreligia – powstanie religijnych społeczności wirtualnych*, in: *com.unikowanie w zmieniającym się społeczeństwie*, M. Niezgoda, M. Świątkiewicz-Mośny, A. Wagner (ed.), Zakład Wydawniczy NOMOS, Kraków 2010, pp. 284-293.

²³ A. Górny, *Religia w wirtualnej przestrzeni. Internetowe obszary sacrum*, in: *Ideologie codzienności*, I. Kamińska-Szmaj, T. Piekota, M. Poprawa (ed.), Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, Wrocław 2009, pp. 207-214; W.J. Bober, *Powinność w świecie cyfrowym. Etyka komputerowa w świetle współczesnej filozofii moralnej*, Wydawnictwa Akademickie i Profesjonalne, Warsaw 2008; R. Tadeusiewicz, *Spoleczność internetowa*, Akademicka Oficyna Wydawnicza, Warsaw 2002.

within new religious movements. It enables the public dissemination of both positive and negative information about religious movements, it can support and undermine the leadership structures and culture of a given religious group. The Internet has become an important factor in shaping the general environment of cult movements and specific new religions²⁴.

Youth and religious content on the Internet

In the CBOS survey in 2016, 99% of young people in general education, technical and basic vocational schools reported that they have access to the Internet at home, almost all of them use the network wirelessly, connecting to it via such mobile devices as a smartphone, tablet or laptop (97%). It is common to use a household computer (99%) and a smartphone (94%) and, less frequently, a tablet (97%). Students spend an average of four hours a day online, an hour more than in 2013. Boys stay online on average a little longer than girls (by twenty minutes). Less time than others is spent on the Internet during the day by respondents living in villages and in major agglomerations²⁵. The use of the Internet by academic youth is also common²⁶.

The Internet is one of the most favourite forms of youth activity related to their interests. Through its activity it contributes to shaping the virtual society. This does not apply to the interest of young people in religious issues. In a survey conducted in 2017 among high school graduates of the Archdiocese of Łódź, the following answers were given to the question of what the Internet is for the Archdiocese of Łódź: a source of knowledge about all areas of life (78.8%), a source of information about current socio-political issues (56.6%), a source of knowledge on the issues of religion and faith (8.6%), the main way of communicating with friends (80.5%), the most important way of spending free time (16.4%). For the tenth researched at most, the Internet is a source of knowledge about religion and faith²⁷.

We try to point out some of the issues related to virtual religious space in this paper in the context of a nationwide sociological research carried out at the turn of April and May 2017. It was carried out by a research consortium of the Department of Religious Sociology at the Institute of Sociology of the UKSW together with the Institute of Statistics of the Catholic Church SAC in second grades of general secondary schools, technicians and basic vocational schools. This nationwide sociological research

²⁴ E. Barker, *New Religious Movements*, T. Kunz (transl.), ZW NOMOS, Krakow 2012, pp. 52-53.

²⁵ M. Feliksiak, *Zainteresowania i aktywności*, in: *Młodzież 2016, Raport z badania sfinansowanego przez Krajowe Biuro ds. Przeciwdziałania Narkomanii*, CBOS, Warsaw 2016, pp. 166-190.

²⁶ B. Trzop, *Formy spędzania czasu wolnego i uczestnictwo w kulturze*, in: *Młodzież w czasach nieufności. Studenci zielonogórscy o sobie i innych*, M. Zielińska, D. Szaban (ed.), published by Fundacja Obserwatorium Społeczne Inter Alia, Zielona Góra 2016, pp. 134-163.

²⁷ K. Kaźmierska, *Młodzież archidiecezji łódzkiej..*, op. cit., pp. 126-127.

was carried out by means of the so-called distributed questionnaire, i.e. by handing over questionnaires to students present on a given day at school. A full study of the results of these studies was published in print in an extensive publication in 2018²⁸.

In 2017, a total of 1339 people took part in the sociological research, which accounted for 83.4% of the assumed research sample. In the entire surveyed population of secondary school students, 56.4% of the respondents were women, 42.3% were men (1.3%: no answer); by school type: general secondary school: 54.1%, technical secondary school: 24.6%, basic vocational schools: 21.3%; by place of residence: village: 45.9%, city up to 50 thousand inhabitants: 19.4%, city from 50 thousand to 100 thousand inhabitants: 13.4%, city from 100 thousand to 250 thousand inhabitants: 9.0%, city from 250 thousand to 500 thousand inhabitants: 5.5%, city over 500 thousand inhabitants: 5.5% (no answer: 1.3%).

The surveyed secondary school students admitted to Catholicism in 84.6%, 4.1%: to other religious faiths, 10.3% described themselves as non-confessional, 1.0% gave no answer. In the entire population, 7.5% of the respondents declared themselves as strong believers, 46.4% as believers, 23.3% as undecided in matters of faith, 13.2% as religiously indifferent, 8.8% as non-believers and 0.7%, unresponsive; 19.0% of the respondents described themselves as going to church every Sunday, 22.1% almost every Sunday, 14.0% about one or two times a month, 19.9% only on big holidays, 12.5% only for baptisms, weddings, funerals, etc., with 9.2% not attending Church (3.3%: no answer). The school students were asked questions: "Have you searched the Internet for religious content in the last 6 months?" In the entire population, 10.0% of the respondents gave a definitely affirmative answer, 15.6% said "rather yes", 15.4% said "neither yes nor no", 31.2%: rather not, 25.6%: definitely not and 2.2%, no answer. By combining the first and second answers, we arrive at a rate of 25.6% of those who are interested in the information on religious topics posted on the Internet. It is not a high indicator if we compare it with the indicators of those who use the Internet in general. More than half of the respondents declared the absence of any activities related to the exploration of the network for religious purposes (56.8%)²⁹.

Women as often as men declared reading religious content online (26.3% as compared to 24.7%); young people from general secondary schools (26.3%) and

²⁸ J. Mariański, *Kondycja religijna i moralna młodzieży szkół średnich w latach 1988-1998-2005-2017 (raport z ogólnopolskich badań socjologicznych)*, Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2018.

²⁹ Among Polish students in 2017, 11% of the respondents declared a strong ("definitely yes") search for religious content on the Internet, 19%: rather yes, 11%: neither yes nor no, 27%: rather not, 29%: definitely not and 3% no answer. M. Zarzecki, *Religia.pl – religijność młodzieży akademickiej w paradygmacie Web 2.0*, in: *Między konstrukcją i dekonstrukcją uniwersum znaczeń. Badania religijności młodzieży akademickiej w latach 1988-1998-2005-2017*, S. H. Zaręba, M. Zarzecki (ed.), Warszawskie Wydawnictwo Socjologiczne, Warszawa 2018, p. 264; M. Świątkiewicz-Mośny, *Sztrykowanie czy surfowanie? Rodzinne sposoby spędzania wolnego czasu*, in: *Rodzina w sercu Europy. Rybnik – Nitra – Hradec Králové-Szeged. Socjologiczne studium rodziny Współczesnej*, W. Świątkiewicz (ed.), Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, Katowice 2009, p. 143-144.

technical schools (27.0%) more often than from basic vocational schools (22.1%); young people living in rural areas: 26.6%, in cities up to 50 thousand: 26.5%, in cities from 50,000 to 100,000 inhabitants: 26.5%, in cities from 50,000 to 100,000 inhabitants: 22.4%, in cities from 100,000 to 250,000 inhabitants: 21.4%, in cities from 250,000 to 500,000. of inhabitants: 24.3%, in cities over 500 thousand inhabitants – 26.0%; deep believers: 60.4% and believers: 30.8%, more often than undecided but attached to religious traditions – 16.3%, religiously indifferent: 11.2% and non-believers – 14.4%; going to church every Sunday: 43.3% and almost every Sunday 32.1% more often than going to church about one or two times a month: 22.4%, going to church only on big holidays: 19.1%, going to church only at weddings, funerals, etc.: 11.2% and not going to church at all: 14.7%.

Demographic and social characteristics only slightly differentiated the frequency of using religious content online, Students from basic vocational schools and inhabitants of cities from 50 thousand to 250 thousand sought this contents the least often. Religious features, in turn, clearly influenced the use of religious content. As we move from deep believers to non-believers and from church-goers every Sunday to those who do not frequent it at all, the rates of people using religious content on the Internet have decreased systematically. The high rate of those using the network to search for religious content refers in particular to deep believers (difference in relation to non-believers – 46.0%) and to those attending church every Sunday (difference in relation to those not engaging in religious practices at all – 28.6%)³⁰.

The low level of search for religious content on the Internet contrasts with the widespread use of this means of information and communication, as evidenced by the results of sociological research. In April 2017, 67% of the surveyed Poles aged 18 and over reported that they use the Internet at least once a month (in 2002, 17%). Internet use is common among respondents aged 18-24 (100%) and almost common among people aged 25-34 (96%) and 35-44 (87%), and less common among older people aged 45-54: 70%, 55-64: 47% and 65 and more – 23%. The probability of using the Internet increases from 19% among people with primary education to 95% – with higher education and from 59% of respondents living in rural areas to 79% in cities with more than 500 thousand inhabitants³¹.

Religious activity of young people on the Internet

In his Message for the 2002 World Communications Day, *Internet: a new forum for preaching the Gospel*, Pope John Paul II emphasized that the essence of the Internet

³⁰ According to a study commissioned by the international portal Aleteia, among users registered on Facebook and Instagram, aged 18-25 years, the percentage of respondents looking for content related to faith in social media was small and amounted to 4.11% in Europe and 11.25% in Poland. Aleteia.pl [access: 11/09/2018].

³¹ M. Feliksiak, *Korzystanie z internetu*, „Komunikat z badań CBOS”, 2017, no. 49, p. 1-4.

is to provide an almost unlimited amount of information, appearing only for a moment. In a culture that feeds on transient phenomena, there is a danger that people will tend to attribute more importance to facts than values. The Internet offers a wide range of knowledge and information, but does not teach values. It is a pity humanity is suffering and human beings lose their transcendent dignity. A human who focuses on what is concrete, useful and easily accessible becomes incapable of undertaking a deeper reflection. Moreover, the internet is a forum where practically everything is allowed and almost nothing is permanent, promoting a relativistic way of thinking and often leading to removing personal responsibility and commitment. The civil authorities should ensure that this wonderful instrument, which has great potential for good, serves the common good and does not harm anyone³².

Pope Benedict XVI has repeatedly stressed the role of new digital media in pastoral work. In the Message on the 44th World Communications Day on 24 January, 2010, he encouraged pastors to preach the Gospel using, in addition to traditional means, a new generation of audiovisual media (photos, videos, animations, blogs, websites) that create previously unknown opportunities for dialogue and are useful in evangelisation and catechesis. The development of new technologies is a great wealth for all people together and for man as an individual being. They are a stimulus for meeting and dialogue. The new digital means also enable contact to be made with followers of all religions, non-believers and representatives of different cultures. Pastoral ministry in the digital world must also remember those who do not believe, are discouraged, but have a desire in their hearts for the Absolute and for the truth that will not last³³. The Catholic Church calls on its believers to bring their testimony of the faith to the digital world.

Those seeking religious content on the Internet have at their disposal a very broad spectrum of religious topics, both in the form of parish services, dioceses and religious congregations, as well as YouTube multimedia files, forums and chats on religious topics, pilgrimage offices' websites, etc. Respondents were presented with ten different areas or instances offering religious content. They judged them according to the following cafeteria: definitely yes, rather yes, rather not, definitely not, hard to say. Table 1 demonstrates the obtained empirical data on religious activities in the Internet.

Secondary school students informed about the use of religious content on the Internet in the following way: religious information services (e.g. the website of the Catholic Information Agency): 5.8% of respondents; services of parishes, dioceses and religious congregations: 9.0%; forums and chats on religion: 8.9%; internet libraries on religious topics: 8.3%; religious content on YouTube: 12.9%; reading

³² John Paul II, *Godność. Antologia tekstów*, K. Gryz (ed.), Wydawnictwo św. Stanisława BM, Kraków 2011, pp. 217-218.

³³ *L'Osservatore Romano*, 2010, no. 3-4, pp. 6-7.

rooms on religion: 7.1%; galleries or sacred art exhibitions: 4.7%; services with religious music: 6.8%; sites of pilgrimage offices: 2.6%; religious portals of communities and organizations: 3.6%; others: 2.9%.

Tab. 1. Declarations by school students on the use of religious websites and web portals (data in %)

Types of activity	Definitely yes	I think so	Rather not	Definitely not	No opinion	Missing	Sub-total
Religious information services	2.5	3.3	9.1	13.2	3.9	68.0	100.0
Services of parishes, dioceses, religious congregations	3.5	5.5	5.7	11.4	2.8	71.2	100.0
Fora and chats on religion	4.1	4.8	6.4	10.9	3.2	70.6	100.0
Religious libraries	3.1	5.2	6.9	10.9	2.9	71.1	100.0
Religious content on YouTube	6.8	6.1	5.6	8.3	3.3	69.9	100.0
Reading rooms on religion	2.8	4.3	6.7	11.3	3.6	71.3	100.0
Religious art exhibitions or galleries	1.7	2.7	7.7	12.0	3.6	72.3	100.0
Websites with religious music	3.4	3.4	5.7	12.7	2.9	72.0	100.0
Pilgrimage offices' websites	1.0	1.6	6.4	16.1	2.7	72.1	100.0
Religious portals of communities and organisations	1.7	1.9	6.8	13.7	3.3	72.6	100.0
Other	2.2	0.7	2.2	5.8	0.7	88.3	100.0

Particular types of religious activity in the Internet pertained to from 2.6% to 12.9% of the respondents, so in all cases, they referred to a significant minority of the surveyed youth. Those looking for religious content on the Internet quite often participate in several virtual communities, with a minority only active in one. Although it is only possible to be a virtual religious follower, for the majority of people, the involvement in religious activities taking place in cyberspace is combined with participation in conventional religious practices and activities.

The services of parishes, dioceses and religious congregations are visited on the Internet by 8.9% of the surveyed women and 9.0% of the surveyed men; young people from high schools: 9.8%; young people from technical schools: 8.2%, young people from basic vocational schools: 7.8%; young people living in the countryside: 9.9%, in cities up to 50 thousand inhabitants: 10.8%, in cities from 50 thousand to 100 thousand inhabitants: 7.3%; in cities from 100 thousand to 250 thousand inhabitants: 5.0%, in cities from 250 thousand up to 500 thousand inhabitants: 4.1%, in cities with more than 500 thousand inhabitants: 9.6%; strong believers: 29.7%,

believers: 11.0%, undecided but attached to religious tradition: 5.7%, religiously indifferent: 2.2%, non-believers: 0.0%; attending Church every Sunday: 20.0%, almost every Sunday: 11.9%, one or two times a month: 9.6%, only on big holidays: 4.1%, only for weddings, funerals, etc.: 3.0%, not going to Church at all: 0.0%.

The religious content most frequently searched for by school youth was on YouTube: women: 13.3%, men: 12.3%; youth from general secondary schools: 13.0%, from technical secondary schools: 13.7%, from basic vocational schools: 12.0%; youth living in the countryside: 14.6%, in cities up to 50 thousand inhabitants: 12.4%, in cities from 50 thousand to 100 thousand inhabitants: 9.5%, in cities from 100 thousand to 250 thousand inhabitants: 9.9%, in cities from 250 thousand up to 500 thousand inhabitants: 13.6%, in cities with more than 500 thousand inhabitants: 12.3%; strong believers: 39.6%, believers: 15.5%, undecided but attached to religious tradition: 6.1%, religiously indifferent: 4.6%, non-believers: 6.6%; going to church every Sunday: 22.8%, almost every Sunday: 14.5%, one or two times a month: 12.9%, only on big holidays – 11.3%, only for weddings, funerals, etc.: 3.6%, not going to church at all: 5.7%.

The values of the correlation test do not show a statistical relationship between the declaration of searching for religious content on the Internet and the gender of the respondents, type of school and the size of the living accommodation. According to the percentages, women, young people from general secondary schools and technicians and those living in villages or towns up to 50 thousand inhabitants used this content only slightly more often. These results were very clearly differentiated by religious variables. As we moved from the category of strong believers to the category of non-believers and from regular to non-practitioners, the visitor rates of parish, diocesan and congregational services and religious content on YouTube have decreased. The latter content was sought after by some of the respondents describing themselves as non-believers or not attending Church at all³⁴.

The use of religious websites by schoolchildren seems to have a lower coverage and intensity than that of academic youth. For example, the use of Internet services of parishes, dioceses and religious congregations was declared in 2017 by 9.0% of respondents from secondary schools and 16.4% of respondents from academic youth; use of religious content on YouTube (12.9% and 15.7%, respectively³⁵). However, these differences are not significant, but rather indicate similarity of virtual behaviours of school and academic youth in the discussed area of issues.

Similar empirical results were obtained in 2017 among secondary school students in the Łódź Archdiocese. For 78.8% of the surveyed young people, the Internet is a source of knowledge about all areas of life, for 80.5%: the main

³⁴ S. Trojan, *Internet i tożsamość religijna na przykładzie Ukrnetu*, in: *Tożsamość i komunikacja*, J. Szulich-Kałuża, L. Dyczewski, R. Szwed (ed.), Wydawnictwo KUL, Lublin 2011, p. 245-248.

³⁵ *Między konstrukcją i dekonstrukcją uniwersum znaczeń...*, op. cit., p. 392-395.

way of communicating with friends, for 56.6%: a source of current information on social and political issues and for only 8.6% of the respondents: a source of knowledge about religion and faith³⁶.

Evaluation of various virtual religiousness forms

The new media development, especially of the Internet, has caused virtual religiousness and virtual spirituality to be increasingly spoken of. The use of the Internet influences various elements of religious life in the intellectual dimension, religious practices and general attitude towards religion, in the community dimension and religious and moral experiences, sociologists say. Certainly, the Internet has contributed to the emergence of new patterns of religious practice, as manifested by the e-communities. Access to diverse content, lack of time and space barrier, anonymity and individuality, create new conditions for young people to acquire knowledge and for its quality.

Some religious practices have also moved into the Web. These practices are increasingly carried out by young people through web portals, both for individual and collective worship manifestations. Various types of religious communities appear on the Web, which allow their members to fulfil themselves spiritually and socially. Some of these communities are a continuation of communities existing in reality, while others exist only virtually. The Internet also has a significant impact on the dimension of religious experience, it is often a place to seek answers to the most important existential questions. It serves the exchange of experiences between the faithful and bringing the idea of God closer to each other. Various forms of spiritual renewal are offered online, such as online retreats³⁷. Sometimes there is even talk of Internet spirituality³⁸.

On the Internet, different expectations towards the Church are raised, often its criticism. In the opinion of Internet users, a certain image of the Church is formed. The sociological analysis shows that "the Church is to be first and foremost a moral authority; her task is to defend the poor, the wronged and the rejected, to stand for social justice and solidarity, to condemn phenomena that contribute to divisions between people, discrimination and indifference to the fate of others. The demands made on the members of the Church, both the hierarchy and the faithful, of poverty, justice, humility and living according to the proclaimed principles are in fact evangelical demands (Sermon on the Mount). The main object of criticism of the Church

³⁶ K. Kaźmierska, *Młodzież archidiecezji łódzkiej...*, op. cit., p. 126.

³⁷ A. Kizewska, *Internet jako czynnik kształtujący przemiany życia religijnego młodych*, in: *Religia i Kościół w świadomości katolików świeckich w Polsce i w Niemczech. Kontynuacja czy zmiana nastawienia?*, J. Baniak (ed.), Wydawnictwo Naukowe Wydziału Nauk Społecznych Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu, Poznań 2013, p. 141-154.

³⁸ M. Wyrostkiewicz, *Internet i (nie)moralność*, Wydawca MW Press, Lublin 2015, p. 299-302.

is not, as it is often believed, those elements of her teaching which are contrary to modern cultural tendencies, but the elements of tradition, forms of communication and concrete behaviour of her representatives which are contrary to the Gospel principles³⁹.

The survey was aimed at secondary school students to assess their participation in religious practices on the Internet and in the non-virtual (real) reality, i.e. in the traditional way. The respondents assessed seven different religious practices carried out in the virtual and real world according to a scale from "definitely yes" to "definitely not". The empirical results obtained are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Evaluation of religious practices on the Internet and in the traditional way (data in %)

Types of religious practices	Definitely yes	Rather yes	Rather not	Definitely not	No opinion	Missing	Sub-total
E-ministry	4.9	11.1	17.2	28.5	17.9	20.5	100.0
E-Confession	3.8	5.5	16.9	44.7	10.8	18.3	100.0
Masses and services	7.4	13.7	16.4	28.2	15.5	18.8	100.0
Retreats and sermons	11.7	19.3	12.1	20.7	16.0	20.2	100.0
Online prayer	8.3	18.4	14.0	24.2	15.6	19.6	100.0
Virtual parish community	9.5	16.7	13.1	22.0	17.6	21.1	100.0
Online pilgrimages	3.5	3.5	19.9	41.2	11.2	20.6	100.0
Other	0.9	0.9	2.8	10.2	3.8	81.4	100.0

By combining the answers "definitely yes" and "rather yes" we obtain the following indicators of religious activity on the Internet and in the offline reality treated as equivalent: online retreats and sermons: 31.0%; online prayer (e.g. online rosary): 26.7%; virtual parish community: 26.2%; masses and online services – 21.1%; e-ministry: 16.0%; e-confession: 9.3%; online pilgrimages: 7.0%; others: 1.8%. Many more respondents presented the opposite view (respectively): 45.7%, 61.6%, 44.6%, 32.8%, 38.2%, 35.1%, 61.1%, 13.0%; they had no opinion on the discussed matter or did not give an answer (respectively): 38.4%, 29.1%, 34.3%, 36.2%, 35.2%, 38.7%, 31.8%, 85.2%.

Taking into account the seven types of religious practices carried out on the Internet and in off-line reality, their equality rate was 16.6%, the rate of distinctiveness: 48.6%, the rate of indecision or non-response: 34.9%. One could say that one in five respondents was willing to treat religious practices in the virtual and real life space equally. The disapproval of the identification of religious practices on the Internet and in the traditional way has been particularly relevant to practices with a higher level of intimacy, such as e-confession, online pilgrimages, e-ministry, masses

³⁹ A. Zduniak, *Obraz Kościoła w oczach internautów po wyborze nowego papieża*, in: *Religia i Kościół w świadomości katolików świeckich...*, op. cit., p. 165-166.

and services. Approval was most often given to internet retreats and sermons, online prayer and virtual parish community⁴⁰.

Pastoral ministry implemented on the Internet and in a traditional way treated equally 14.9% of the surveyed women and 17.5% of the surveyed men; youth from general secondary schools: 15.2%, from technical high schools: 17.1%, from basic vocational schools: 16.8%; youth living in rural areas: 18.2%, in cities up to 50 thousand inhabitants: 15.4%, in cities from 50 thousand to 100 thousand inhabitants: 11.1%, in cities from 100 thousand to 250 thousand inhabitants: 13.2%, in cities from 250 thousand up to 500 thousand inhabitants: 16.2%, in cities with more than 500 thousand inhabitants: 19.1%; strong believers: 23.7%, believers: 16.6%, undecided but attached to religious tradition: 14.5%, religiously indifferent: 15.8%, non-believers: 10.2%; going to church every Sunday: 21.7%, almost every Sunday: 19.6%, one or two times a month: 11.2%, only on big holidays: 16.4%, only for weddings, funerals, etc.: 12.5%, not attending Church at all: 9.8%.

Masses and masses on the Internet and in reality outside of the virtual reality were treated equally by 21.9% of the surveyed women and 20.0% of the surveyed men; youth from general secondary schools: 22.9%, from technical high schools: 19.2%, from basic vocational schools: 18.6%; youth living in the countryside: 22.8%, in cities up to 50 thousand inhabitants: 22.6%, in cities from 50 thousand to 100 thousand inhabitants: 17.8%, in cities from 100 thousand to 250 thousand inhabitants: 14.0%, in cities from 250 thousand up to 500 thousand inhabitants: 24.4%, in cities with more than 500 thousand inhabitants: 17.8%; deep believers: 25.8%, believers: 21.5%, undecided but attached to religious tradition: 23.4%, religiously indifferent – 18.7%, non-believers: 12.7%; going to Church every Sunday: 27.9%, almost every Sunday: 21.9%, one or two times a month: 21.9%, only on big holidays: 22.1%, only for weddings, funerals etc.: 16.7%, not attending Church at all: 10.6%.

The same importance was attributed to praying in a traditional way and praying online (e.g. an online rosary) by 28.4% of the surveyed women and 25.0% of the surveyed men; youth from general secondary schools: 30.1%, from technical high schools: 23.7%, from basic vocational schools: 21.4%; youth living in the countryside: 28.4%, in cities up to 50 thousand inhabitants: 28.5%, in cities from 50 thousand to 100 thousand inhabitants: 22.4%, in cities from 100 thousand to 250 thousand inhabitants: 19.9%, in cities from 250 thousand to 500 thousand inhabitants: 25.7%, in cities over 500 thousand inhabitants: 31.5%; strong believers: 38.6%, believers: 30.0%, undecided but attached to religious tradition: 25.7%, religiously indifferent: 20.9%, non-believers: 11.0%; going to church every Sunday: 36.2%, almost every Sunday: 35.2%, one or two times a month: 25.1%, only on big holidays: 24.7%, only for weddings, funerals, etc.: 17.3%, not attending church at all: 12.2%.

⁴⁰ M. Zarzecki, *Religia.pl – religijność młodzieży akademickiej w paradygmacie Web 2.0*, in: *Między konstrukcją i dekonstrukcją uniwersum znaczeń...*, op. cit., p. 268-269.

Demographic and social features only slightly differentiated the opinions of the surveyed school students on the importance of religious practices performed virtually and realistically. In general, one could say that women slightly more often than men, young people from general secondary schools and technical secondary schools slightly more often than young people from basic vocational schools and young people living in the countryside gave the same importance to religious practices carried out in different living spaces as young people living in cities. The differences did not exceed 5%. Thus, one can rather speak of convergent views of young people from different demographic categories and from different social centres on the issues discussed.

The views of schoolchildren were more clearly differentiated by religious variables. As we moved from a category of deep believers to a category of non-believers, and from regular to non-practitioners, the rates of giving the same importance to religious practices on the internet and in real life have decreased. However, it should be noted that people less connected with religion more often than believers and practitioners refrained from answering or were undecided in the case in question.

The empirical results obtained from the sociological research carried out confirm – at least in part – the conclusion that the search for religious content on the web is more of a supportive than a competitive form in relation to non-virtual reality. "The relatively low level of acceptance for the exploration of religious content via the internet, which correlates with attitudes towards religious faith and religious practices, suggests a process of strengthening the existing religious commitment by using a new communication channel. The Internet, in the process of shaping religiousness, is only partly an alternative to the traditional agendas of religious socialization and, above all, it is placed on a level that supports, rather than replaces, the space for religious development in the individual and community sense⁴¹.

Final comments

Religion in the Internet, people's religious activity in the Internet, is a very extensive research topic. Religious life in parishes, families and individually is slowly moving to cyberspace. A new field of religious and spiritual activities is emerging. In cyberspace you can acquire religious knowledge, pray, participate in Lenten and Advent retreats, take part in religious rituals and rituals, make pilgrimages, experience religious and spiritual experiences. The field of religious activity in the Internet is expanding enormously, although so far there has been a lack of precise research on the frequency of use of religious websites, as well as on

⁴¹ Idem, p. 266.

the influence of the Internet on the development of the Internet's religiousness and spirituality of Internet users⁴².

The analyses in this article only cover a few important issues. It results from them that every fourth respondent among high school students (25.6%) searched for some form of religious activity in the last six months before the date of sociological research, especially among strong believers and those regularly taking part in religious worshipping. The vast majority of respondents were not interested in this new activity. Secondary school students made limited use of the Internet to search for religious messages⁴³.

The high school students surveyed reported a little more frequently on the use of religious content on YouTube, in the services of parishes, dioceses and religious congregations as well as forums or chats, and rarely on the websites of pilgrimage offices and portals of religious communities and organizations. About one in five respondents attending secondary schools assigned (according to the summary index) the same importance to religious activities in the virtual world and in the real world (from 31.0% to 7.0%). The highest rate referred to online retreats and sermons, online prayer, virtual parish community and masses and online services.

In the light of the empirical data collected, we can say little about whether Internet users are more interested in finding information relating to religions or rather in a variety of religious and spiritual experiences? What is the motivation for undertaking various religious activities in cyberspace? What makes young people visit religious portals? Doesn't excessive involvement in religion via the Internet reduce participation in real religious life? Are religious experiences in cyberspace the only ones in the lives of the subjects or do they only support conventional religious practices and activities? How does the encounter with the diversity of views and judgements of representatives of various religious movements or great official religions, but also with atheistic or even hostile religions, affect the current religious life of Internet users? Is there no return of religion to the public sphere via the Internet?

The questions could be multiplied. It seems that the position and importance of religion, which is already well established in cyberspace, will grow in the future. "The Internet brings with it new religious possibilities and new dimensions of religion. The key to understanding many may be to point out the differences and similarities

⁴² H.-F. Angel, *Computer und Internet im Religionsunterricht*, in: *Neues Handbuch religionspädagogischer Grundbegriffe*, Hrsg. von Gottfried Bitter, Rudolf Englert, Gabriele Miller, Karl Ernst Nipkow. Kösel-Verlag, München 2002, p. 544-547.

⁴³ It seems that schoolchildren watch religious programmes even less frequently than on the Internet in other means of social communication. For example, in 2012, the high school graduates from Poznań declared that they watch religious programmes on TV as follows: several times a week: 0.6%, once a week: 1.2%, once a month: 4.3%, several times a year – 23.2%, never: 70.7%; religious programmes on the radio: 0.8%, 2.4%, 1.6%, 11.8%, 83.5%, respectively; religious information in the press: 1.8%, 8.6%, 12.4%, 38.3%, 38.9%, respectively (sociological study by D. Kokociński).

between what is real and what is online. The future of religion on the internet will certainly depend on both – the presence, degree and nature of differences and similarities. If what we find in cyberspace is too similar to what we find in real life, it will no longer be possible to talk about transferring borders but about equating the real world with the virtual world. If what is too far away from what is real in the Internet, it will lose all features of religiousness. It should be borne in mind that although the Internet and the cyberspace it creates are innovative elements for religion, this innovation cannot be taken too far. It must always be within the limits set by the real world⁴⁴.

Sociologists have the important task of examining how religious activities on the web affect those outside the web and why the use of these sources is still limited in youth environments. The results obtained from research among schoolchildren seem to confirm a general conclusion from research on academic youth. "Poles, primarily the youth community, are transforming the existing religious pattern, finding innovative forms of expression for individual religious experiences. The phenomenon of alternative forms of religiousness does not lead to the complete rejection of a religious institution, but to find/think out its more individual additions. In conclusion, it should be stressed that the declarations make it possible to initially sketch a descriptive picture of e-religiousness. The high level of correlation between the categories of »strong believers« and »believers«, together with a high percentage of declarations of ritual practices and religious use of the network, indicates the functioning of the Internet in the collective consciousness as a channel of communication, but not a space of religious expression⁴⁵.

⁴⁴ P. Siuda, *Religia i internet. O przenoszeniu religijnych granic do cyberprzestrzeni*, Wydawnictwa Akademickie i Profesjonalne, Warszawa 2010, p. 243.

⁴⁵ M. Zarzecki, *Religia.pl – religijność młodzieży akademickiej w paradygmacie Web 2.0*, in: *Między konstrukcją i dekonstrukcją uniwersum znaczeń...*, op. cit., p. 270.