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## **Educational potential of cyberspace and the use of information and communication technology on the example of the Catholic Church in Poland. Outline of the problem**

Edukacyjny potencjał cyberprzestrzeni  
i wykorzystanie technik informacyjno-komunikacyjnych  
na przykładzie Kościoła katolickiego w Polsce. Zarys problemu

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**Abstrakt.** Internet służy ludzkości już od 28 lat. Stworzenie systemu informacyjnego World Wide Web dało realną podstawę do kształcenia w wirtualnej przestrzeni, również kształcenia religijnego. W Polsce oraz w polskojęzycznej sieci prym w tej materii wiedzie Kościół rzymsko-katolicki. Z tego powodu możemy obserwować dwa różne zjawiska z tym związane. Z jednej strony zauważalna jest postać religii w sieci, za pomocą której treści o tematyce religijnej są nadzorowane przez instytucje Stolicy Apostolskiej do tego powołane. W jej ramach ta ostatnia stara się wykorzystywać techniki informacyjno-komunikacyjne do prowadzenia swojej dydaktycznej działalności w internecie i szkole. Z drugiej natomiast strony zauważalne jest zjawisko sieci w religii, gdzie treści i nauki związane z doktryną religii katolickiej wykorzystywane są często w sposób niezgodny z normami moralnymi ustalonymi przez Watykan. W niniejszym artykule zostały przedstawione wyniki obserwacji, badań i analiz prowadzonych nad powyższymi zjawiskami na przestrzeni ostatnich lat.

**Słowa kluczowe:** edukacja religijna, techniki informacyjno-komunikacyjne, e-katecheza, religia w sieci, sieciowa religia.

## Introduction

When comparing the first part of the 21st century to other eras throughout human history, significant differences separate them. One such aspect is the frequent mutability of the social landscape (Haynes, Hough, Mailik, Pettiford, 2013, p. 108). The second is digitization of social life. One of the elements of human activity that faces them is education, including the religious one, which is represented on a large scale in Poland by the Roman Catholic church. According to the commonly accepted opinion, it is strongly based on tradition. But is the Roman Catholic Church really in favour of this approach? Or does it also benefit from the development of science (Kojkoł, Jedynak, 2009) and technology, weaving it into education and making it an effective tool of its proselytizing?

## Sources and methodology

The basic source of obtaining data for this article was content and phenomena present on the Internet at a level that did not require logging in<sup>1</sup>. The latter served as the subject of the study (Bryman, 2008, p. 629) of the educational activity of the Catholic Church, its pastors, catechists and followers both in Poland and the Polish-language network. Among the sites viewed here, were Catholic publishing houses, various church institutions, as well as catechetical services, forums, blogs, multi-books, channels or religious groups on specific portals. This was further supported by reports from numerous research centres, specifically results focusing on the study of media education and online religious education. The study also used compact publications related to the topic of online and offline religiosity, as well as the activities of the Catholic church in this matter.

The metahistorical method was included to analyse the specific historical contents obtained (Palka, 2010, p. 305). This made it possible to reconstruct cause-and-effect sequences of individual histories correlating with the subject of the study. Thanks to this, it was possible to make sense of certain facts that could be perceived as hidden and changing the content of given time periods and accompanying phenomena.

On the other hand, the presentation of research results and analysis of observations of phenomena present on the Internet, as well as the results of metahistorical analysis was used by analytical induction and ontogenetic analysis. The first one allowed the content to be interpreted in their logical-symbolic and formal-logical

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<sup>1</sup> Only the indexed part of the Internet was researched, which is defined as Common Web.

dimension (Znaniński, 2008, p. 25). The second was helpful in reading the meanings of specific content at the theoretical-objective level (Znaniński, 2008, p. 309).

## **Writings and law in the Roman Catholic Church regarding the development of media technique and technology**

Over the centuries, the Roman Catholic Church has often adapted its doctrine and action to trends occurring in science and accompanied to it technique. Just mention such figures as St. Anselm of Canterbury, St. Bonaventure or St. Thomas Aquinas. In their works, these thinkers tried to answer and even prove the existence of religion and phenomena associated with it based on evidence viewed as scientific (Brown, 1999, pp. 248–279)<sup>2</sup>. A few hundred years later, the Vatican recognized science as a work of God and thus gained a religious dimension – at least in the eyes of the faithful of this church and its hierarchs (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2009, paragraph 159).

A unique challenge for the Catholic faith and its hierarchs was brought by the “epoch of great inventions” based on the natural sciences developed at that time. The appearance of new phenomena, tools and thoughts forced a change in organization (Kotarbiński, 1965, p. 74) of the functioning of the Catholic church. One of the inventions that appeared in the social space were tools for mass communication. This situation forced the Vatican to prepare and publish relevant documents<sup>3</sup> regulating Catholic doctrine in connection with the above.

The first document related to this issue was the encyclical of Leo XIII *Humanum Genus*. It was an important step in turning the Roman Catholic Church on institutions of mass communication<sup>4</sup> and social issues. The Holy Father indicated,

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<sup>2</sup> A similar situation may occur in the case of creativity of T. de Chardin. Currently, the Vatican has issued a warning regarding his works, but has not prohibited his publication and reading (cf. Stelmach, 2017) entering on the List of Forbidden Books.

<sup>3</sup> Among them are, the apostolic constitution, encyclicals, apostolic letters, bulls, *Motu proprio*, brewe, decrees, canon law and each to some extent (not official) homilies, messages, as well as letters and speeches of church hierarchy.

<sup>4</sup> It is important to point out that the functioning of mass media takes place in a social space in an organized form, under which lies the specific mission and goals of some social group or groups, which affecting all elements of a given educational environment (Znaniński, 2001, pp. 57–120). Therefore, the use of the concept of mass media is not accurate and exhaustive. For this reason, in order to emphasize the above specificity, it should be pointed out that one is dealing with an institution (Scott, Marshall, 2009, p. 358) expressing through the content of its activities specific values and attitudes associated with them, which are then internalised and externalised by individual entities being part a specific element of the educational environment.

among other, that competent, willing to work and pious people should be appointed as priests and he called also for the development of the Catholic press (Leo XIII, 1884).

The next circulars regulating the issues of media and the Catholic faith were the encyclicals *Divini Illius Magistri* and *Vigilanti Cura* by Pius XI. In them, the bishop of Rome referred to the means of mass communication as instruments of evangelization and learning in accordance with the doctrine of the Holy See not only as just trivial entertainment (Pius XI, 1929, 1936).

The voice of Pope Pius XII sounded similar in the encyclical *Mirana Prorsus*. However, the Holy Father indicated that the tools of mass communication should also be used in religious education. Primally to verify the content of faith in social life, so that these tools serve the good and truth recognized by the Roman Church, because otherwise new inventions may have a negative social impact. (Pius XII, 1957).

Pope Paul VI also expressed his opinion on the development of the institution of mass communication. In the encyclical *Cumminio et Progresio* he proclaimed that the above are God's gift. Therefore, if there is any evil in them, it results only from their improper use. In addition, the author of the above encyclical stressed that broadcasters and priests should not refrain the institution of indirect education (Znaniecki, 2001, pp. 115–120) as a one-way channel for broadcasting messages, because dialogue is the essence of communication and it should be sought. The Pope also pointed to the significant, often bad influence of advertising on social values and attitudes (Paul VI, 1971).

In turn, John Paul II in the encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* also raised the topic of the Internet (Pisarek, 2018, p. 51)<sup>5</sup>. In his opinion, thanks to last one, it is possible to bring the gospel to places previously forbidden. In addition, the Holy Father indicated that communication tools also have their own culture. For this reason the virtue of using them should be preserved, because the world of mass media, and even more so the virtual world cannot replace the presence of Jesus Christ, the sacraments and religious experiences. Many threats on cyber reality are waiting for man, including dehumanization, especially if man turns away from faith (John Paul II, 1990).

In the encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, Benedict XVI emphasized the need for sustainable development of the humanities and technology in the era of the latter's strong expansion. In addition, he pointed out that mass communication institu-

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<sup>5</sup> In the same year, the Holy See decided to start using the Internet as part of its institution (Pisarek, 2018, p. 51).

tions, including those using the internet, should be the source of both God's word and humanism (Benedict XVI, 2005).

In turn, Pope Francis, in the message titled "48<sup>th</sup> World Communications Day" described Internet as a God's gift and opportunity, opportunity for dialogue and mutual knowledge. He stated that this means of communication provides an opportunity to meet at every corner of the earth. Thus, the Holy Father pointed to the fact that the lack of access to this type of media threatens exclusion and stigmatization, which may be the reason for the separation of neighbours and the birth of evil. For this reason, he recognized the significant role of the church in evangelization, also in virtual space (Francis, 2014).

Apart from individual popes, a vote on the above matter was also taken by the meeting of church hierarchs during the Second Vatican Council. At that time, the *Inter Mirifica* decree was announced in which 92% of those gathered recognized the importance of mass media in interpersonal communication (Pisarek, 2018, p. 21). However, it was pointed out that moderation and a sense of discipline should be used when using such tools, especially for children and adolescents. According to the Council, should be carefully read and understand what is conveyed through the above communication channel, and thus the obligation in this matter lies with journalists, writers, producers and directors. For this reason, both secular citizens and priests should prepare to use such tools, where the latter also has the mission of education in the spirit of the Catholic faith (Pontifical Council for Social Communications, 1963).

On the other hand, Pontifical Council for Social Communications<sup>6</sup> expressed a critical tone in this matter in the instruction entitled *Aetatis Novae* published during the meeting in the Holy See in 1992. The document noted the fact of ma-

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<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that before the appearance of this office, the first institution of this type was the Pontifical Commission for Education and Religious Film, established in 1948 by Pius XII. Its main role was to take care of the moral condition of the film industry and oversee its development. Then in 1952, the same pope changed the name and role of another office of this type, which became the Pontifical Commission for Cinematography. The change was associated with the creation of radio and television, which forced the church authorities to create a new institution. In 1959, Pope John XXIII in *Boni Pastoris* expanded the competence of the above institution and established it as a permanent office in the Apostolic capital, maintaining under the name of the Pontifical Commission for Motion Pictures, Radio and Television. Then in 1964, on the initiative of Pope Paul VI, the Pontifical Council for Social Communications was established, whose purpose was to supervise the development and work of the press, radio, film and television, and later also the Internet (Pisarek, 2018, p. 24). In 2016, Pope Francis, in place of the above institution, appointed the Secretariat for Holy See's Communications and later from 2018 the Dicastery of Communications of the Holy See, which took over the supervision all means of mass communication in the Vatican.

nipulation taking place in the sphere of media activity. According to the gathered, this action is even worse because it has a global dimension. For this reason – it was emphasized – that the church should have the right and moral obligation to have its own means of communication (Pisarek, 2008, p. 33).

Canonical law is another important tool regulating the relationship of the church, including education, in relation to new tools of social communication (1983). It regulates the principles on which religious education should be conducted in a Catholic church. In canon 779 reads: “Cathedral formation is to be given by employing all those aids, educational resources and means of communication which seem to more effective in securing that the faithful, according to their character capability, age and circumstances of life, may be more fully steeped in catholic teaching and prepared to put it into practice” (Code of Canon Law, 2007)<sup>7</sup>.

Therefore – it should be emphasised – that communication tools are by their very nature nothing bad. Then their character depends on who uses them and for what purpose. However, in this case, church hierarchs are trying to adapt society’s trends and new inventions to the dogma they have ennobled, the moral norms established over the years, and the organization that has been functioning until now. Education is also to be adapted in this respect. Another challenge faced by the Apostolic capital and its church the IT industry. From the legal-administrative point of view, the first was prepared, but it is worth looking at whether it really is so in practice.

### **Information and communication techniques in religious teaching of the Roman Catholic Church in Poland**

A breakthrough period for teaching using information and communication technologies was the creation of the Internet in 1969 (Siemienicka, 2002, pp. 203–204). However, T. Berners-Lee’s launch of the World Wide Web internet information system and web browsers (Pisarek, 2018, p. 51) has significantly spread this type of education. The Roman Catholic Church did not remain passive in this matter either and as a result, two branches in virtual education developed: e-catechesis and e-catechetical resources. Within the former, religion teachers are trained to be able to use new media in their work (Pisarek, 2018, p. 135). In turn, the latter col-

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<sup>7</sup> In addition to the canon related above some others also treat about using specific tools in religious education. These include: Cann. 761, Cann. 822 & 1, Cann. 822 & 2, Cann. 822 & 3. In addition, the law of the church indicates the mutual support of Catholic universities in diversifying didactic tools consistent with the interpretation of technology development (Cann. 820).

lect all kinds of information that can be used in digital religious education. To conduct e-catechesis, such tools are used: e-learning, non-verbal communicators, chats, records in mp3 and mp4 format, vlogs, blogs, religious portals, social networks, multi-books, virtual disks and within them evaluation surveys, quizzes, network and computer games. However, e-resources include e-libraries, e-textbooks, digital repositories, applications, CDs or DVDs and cloud environments.

In connection with e-catechesis, the following Catholic colleges and training institutions in Poland specialize in distance teaching, i.e. the Pontifical Faculty of Theology in Warsaw, the Association of Pedagogues NATAN in Lublin, the Faculty of Theology of the University of Silesia in Katowice and Centrum Arrupe in Warsaw<sup>8</sup>. On the other hand, at lower teaching levels, the use of ICT techniques (Siemieniecki, 2007) is much less advertised, especially from a didactic point of view. An image of this phenomenon is presented in the research according to which 20.7% of religious teachers did not have access to multimedia materials, 21.6% had the opportunity to use an interactive whiteboard or projector, 15.3% could use a computer with access to a computer network, and 25% has occasion to use computer (Mąkosa, 2014, p. 28). Another larger scale measurement among teachers of various subjects indicated the incomplete use of new media in religious education. Although teachers assess the internet access in schools as good or very good, it is always not complete. For this reason, 52% of respondents used their own resource in this matter (NCK, 2017, p. 61) and this means that there was not enough infrastructure to teach using multimedia tools, which forced the need to conduct classes using the traditional lecturing, what 74% surveyed teachers pointed out (NCK, 2017, p. 18). For this reason, only 44% of respondents declared the use of digital tools in teaching several times a week, while 32% did it every day and every second teacher once a week (NCK, 2017, p. 18). Therefore, the use of information and communication technologies in religion classes, based on research presented so far, was at best feeble. To a large extent, this was due to the lack of adequate infrastructure, which resulted in the lack of opportunities to educate the appropriate teaching staff, including catechists where teachers use the new tools to teach. For this reason, catechists must focus on other teaching tools, wanting to meet the parity of modernity set by the church hierarchy.

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<sup>8</sup> This teaching method has been known since 1965. However, it was first used in 1981 in California, USA (Wagner, 2011, p. 60).

One such tool are websites, including catechetical services. They provide a range of didactic and substantive aids in teaching religion<sup>9</sup>. In addition, Catholic portals are also used<sup>10</sup>. These, unlike the above, are much more extensive, have a larger content offer and are not limited to specific topics. They also have a much more stable structure and guarantee greater security. Depending on the administrators, it is possible to find their news, most often about the local parish, all sorts of help, both regarding faith and that related to everyday life. Certain portals offer, e.g. confession, prayer, chat discussions. In addition, radio, breweries or for example documents or important books from the point of view of faith are available.

Catholic internet services are another tools<sup>11</sup>. These, unlike portals, do not have an interactive form. Similarly, to the website, we can find here help related to the content of faith, i.e. the content of the Holy Bible, liturgy, information about the sacraments, prayer and spirituality. In addition, you can find here news that pertains to the local environment but going further than websites do.

Blogs are another instrument used also in education<sup>12</sup>. Like the above, these accessories are similarly popular and found on the internet. In addition, they

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<sup>9</sup> These include those devoted to conducting catechesis: [www.katecheza.episkopat.pl](http://www.katecheza.episkopat.pl), [www.katecheza.opoka.org.pl](http://www.katecheza.opoka.org.pl), [www.katechetyczny.diecezjapolocka.pl](http://www.katechetyczny.diecezjapolocka.pl), [www.katecheza.lublin.pl](http://www.katecheza.lublin.pl), [www.katacheza.pl](http://www.katacheza.pl), [www.kulkat.pl](http://www.kulkat.pl) etc. On these pages is possible to read the didactic guidelines for a specific school year, download materials for courses or workshops electronically, learn about development plans for teachers of religion, including specific degrees etc. Important church documents, catechesis scenarios, songs can also be downloaded from these pages. In addition, pages about the Bible are used too: [www.biblia.info.pl](http://www.biblia.info.pl), [www.pallottinum.pl](http://www.pallottinum.pl), [www.biblia.denon.pl](http://www.biblia.denon.pl), [www.twojabiblia.pl](http://www.twojabiblia.pl) etc. These websites are also used for religious education, e.g. by reading didascalies or footnotes explaining to the readers certain issues related to the topic of faith described in the Bible. In addition, there are many pages of Catholic publishing houses that offer various educational tools, i.e. books, textbooks, multi-books, board and computer games, prayer books, Bibles, e-books, materials for interactive boards, methodological guides in the form of e-books, posters, stickers, rosaries, maps (e.g. routes of distinguished people of the Church), pictures, instructors to receive specific sacraments, calendar items, coloring books – which can be used as teaching aids for catechists.

<sup>10</sup> There is a large offer of Catholic portals. These include: [www.katolik.net](http://www.katolik.net), [www.bosko.pl](http://www.bosko.pl), [www.katolicki.net](http://www.katolicki.net), [www.mateusz.pl](http://www.mateusz.pl), [www.opoka.pl](http://www.opoka.pl), [www.wierni.pl](http://www.wierni.pl), [www.wiara.pl](http://www.wiara.pl), [www.deon.pl](http://www.deon.pl) etc.

<sup>11</sup> As in the above cases, there are also many examples of these pastoral tools. Among many of them can be mention: [www.zaufaj.com](http://www.zaufaj.com), [www.2ryby.pl](http://www.2ryby.pl), [www.kerygma.pl](http://www.kerygma.pl), [www.natan.pl](http://www.natan.pl), [www.lutownica.dominikanie.pl](http://www.lutownica.dominikanie.pl), [www.jezus.pl](http://www.jezus.pl), [www.adonai.pl](http://www.adonai.pl) etc.

<sup>12</sup> Here are examples of some of the top-ranking blogs of priests: “Po drodze – blog ks. J. Sochy” ([https://kaplani.com.pl/pl/strefa\\_mysli/blogi/po\\_drodze\\_blog\\_ks\\_jacka\\_sochy](https://kaplani.com.pl/pl/strefa_mysli/blogi/po_drodze_blog_ks_jacka_sochy)), blog ks. Piotra (<https://www.sacerdos.pl/>), blog ks. K. Ciesielskiego, “Z bloga wzięte” (<https://zblogawziete.pl/>) etc.



allow to gain popularity. An example of this is the person of Fr. T. Isakowicz-Zalewski<sup>13</sup>. Through his blogs and non-religious activities, he has become a recognizable figure, and for certain environments even an authority.

Multi-books are the most popular. Catechists speak positively about them. In the study conducted in grades I and II of primary school, most of them, i.e. 73%, used this type of teaching tool and 50% positively assessed it (Czerski, 2013, pp. 42–43). It is a great help in teaching lessons, especially in primary education classes. Primally, because it helps relieve teachers from preparing classes in the sense of collecting material for lessons.

Virtual pilgrimages are another possibility of virtual participation in the religious sphere in connection with education (MacWilliams, 2002, pp. 315–335). This is another form of building a community related to dogma in addition to conducting scrict pastoral activities. In Poland, this type of activity is not popular, but many Catholic websites on the Internet offer their help to pilgrims during pilgrimages in this country<sup>14</sup>.

However, the most popular space used to disseminate the content of the Catholic faith, including in education, are Catholic social networking sites. While observing it, can be seen that the dominant activity in this type of virtual activity is the creation of a virtual community of the faithful of the Roman Catholic Church. Two types can be distinguished among them. One for building a community<sup>15</sup>. Second to associate couples, among people claiming to be faithful to the Roman Catholic church<sup>16</sup>. However, Catholic social networking sites are not only used for these purposes<sup>17</sup>. Publicly available platforms can also provide similar services, including YouTube, Facebook or Instagram etc. The last two can be operated after logging in. However, in the first one it is not needed to do it to view or at least read the content posted there. For this reason, it is possible to

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<sup>13</sup> In his blog and pastoral mission, unlike other pastors, Fr. T. Isakowicz-Zalewski devotes a lot of attention to the matter of the Eastern Borderlands, the Armenian Church and to the case of accidents in Volhynia in 1943.

<sup>14</sup> Also commonly listed help preparing to accomodation, pilgrimage locators, pilgrimage maps or pilgrimage offices etc.

<sup>15</sup> There are not many such portals. These include for example: [www.wspolnotowy.pl](http://www.wspolnotowy.pl), [www.chrzescijanierazem.pl](http://www.chrzescijanierazem.pl)

<sup>16</sup> Dating sites are much more than portals. They include: [www.singlowanie.pl](http://www.singlowanie.pl), [www.zapisanisobie.pl](http://www.zapisanisobie.pl), [www.czysteserca.pl](http://www.czysteserca.pl), [www.mydwoje.pl](http://www.mydwoje.pl), etc.

<sup>17</sup> Among these channels, created by Catholic pastors, are those run in the form of vlogs “Langusta na palmie” (495,000 subscriptions / 236,707,434 views), in the form of internet television “dominikanie.pl” (111 subscriptions / 30 606 324 views) or music in the modern form “kanał ks. Jakuba Bartczaka” (95,000 subscriptions / 13,313,547 views).

increase the viewing of specific religious content channels, including Catholic ones. In this matter, content related to this topic is created. However, in the space of this social network there is a phenomenon indicating two tendencies. The first is the functioning of religion online, which is represented by the digital tools shown so far. The second is an online religion, which is a place of social activity that allows to create specific community based on a given dogma, gain power, earn money or spread heresy (cf. Helland, 2000, pp. 205–233).

In the Polish-language cyber space, an example of such activity is the channel of Fr. P. Natanek<sup>18</sup>. In his speeches on the Internet, he became famous as a provocateur, a model of deviation from the Roman Catholic faith and the creator of his own religious community in both virtual and physical space<sup>19</sup>. For his activities he was deprived of the canonical mission at the Pontifical University of John Paul II in Krakow (KAI, 2011) and then he was punished with suspense (KAI, 2011a). However, one should pay attention to the fact of the existence of a religious Catholic community, which based on certain ideas, creates a kind of strength that is an important tool in the fight of the Catholic church for its position in virtual space. Through such participation in such a group, strong social support can be found, despite the barriers related to the position in the social structure outside the network (Siuda, 2010, p. 99). In this case, there is a two-fold phenomenon. On the one hand escapism (Karpiński, 2007, pp. 92–93) and on the other with the organization. This is manifested by virtual religious communities, different from those existing in physical space (Piff, Warburg, 2005, pp. 86–101). One of the main differences is the ephemeral nature of the bonds of the former, although many more can be mentioned (Siuda, 2009, pp. 21–37). Referring to the organization, virtual groups – just like in the case of Fr. P. Natanek – may constitute the armed church arm. Although the latter has been rejected by his superiors and largely based his strength on popularity, in the network, but also outside of it, we can meet with

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<sup>18</sup> This priest's channel is called "PoloniaFidelis" (12,178 subscriptions / 13,223,218 views). Its example is the virtual diocese created by Bishop J. Gaillot, which he called Partenia: [https://www.partenia.org/english/partenia\\_eng.htm](https://www.partenia.org/english/partenia_eng.htm). Like the activities of Fr. P. Natanek it shows a distance from a real church and both priests have their physical seats, which the first one is in Partenia (in Africa) and second one is Grzechynia (in Poland).

<sup>19</sup> In his speeches, the clergyman argued against the content of the encyclical of Paul VI, *Cum minio et Progreso*, for not using a unilateral communication channel in the use of new media, as well as against the provisions of the Second Vatican Council announced in the *Inter Mirifica Vaticanum* regarding the sense of criminality in using the media. In addition, it was a violation of Canon Law in Cann. 823 & 1, and Cann. 1371.

Christian terrorist groups<sup>20</sup> (Carr, 2019). Such communities can be a real danger, not only for those interested, but as social practice shows, they can also be a threat at school or among peers<sup>21</sup>. One of these manifestations is the spread of mutual hostility, polarization and aggression in both virtual and physical space.

According to the study, in 2015 only 14% of respondents were interested in religious content on related websites and web portals in Poland. Among them were people aged 55–64, coming from the countryside and with higher education. In contrast, 86% of respondents aged 65 and over, coming from small towns (from 19,999 to 100,000 inhabitants) with primary education, were not interested in religious content on the Internet. In turn, the most searched content on religious pages and portals in Poland was 46% information on church life and the least frequently searched 6% conversations and discussions with users of such sites. Information on religion was sought by 33% of respondents, 23% of religious considerations and articles and 12% of spiritual advice (CBOS, 2015). In another similar survey conducted in 2016, there was no changed upward trend due to the percentage interest in this type of sites. However, younger people started to reach for this type of website more often, and more people from larger cities (from 100,000–500,000 and more inhabitants) became more active. On the other hand, respondents from religious sites started to use it less often. People who used religious sites most frequently, i.e. 65%, had a lot of religious practitioners (up to several times a week). In turn, such websites were visited by selectively religious practitioners less frequently – 21% of respondents (CBOS, 2016).

## Conclusions

In connection with the above, there is little interest in cyberspace related to religious content related to the Catholic Church in Poland. Similarly, there is a noticeable deficit in the possibilities and skills of catechists to use communication and information techniques in religious education. Although there are a lot of tools in the virtual space, most teachers, including catechists declaring the use of

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<sup>20</sup> Examples of such groups are: Army of God: <https://www.armyofgod.com/>, Eastern Lightning: <https://en.easternlightning.org/>, Lord's Resistance Army: <https://enoughproject.org/conflicts/lra>. There is no information in public circulation to what extent these groups or others operate in Poland but acting also through the network may affect the attitudes of certain faithful of the Catholic Church, especially as they are a cybernomads (Dama, 2014, pp. 99–100).

<sup>21</sup> The functioning of fanatical groups of Catholics in the network is a phenomenon that is not mentioned much, and it occurs and can be the cause of evil in the space of the educational environment (Szymańska, 2017).

this type of teaching aids, but they do not do that in full-time<sup>22</sup>. They are influenced by, among others economic factors, as evidenced by the lack of infrastructure. There is a problem in this matter, because religions take place in schools to which the Catholic Church does not consist and therefore all costs, including access to new media are transferred to the public sphere (cf. *Konkordat między Stolicą Apostolską a Rzeczpospolitą Polska*, 1993 – especially. Art. 2–4). In this regard, catechists, either on their own or due to the possibilities of the school can acquire such skills in using this type of didactic tools. This, in turn, translates into a lack of interest in religious content available on the web, because it is not possible to interest them during their learning process. Therefore, the structure of religion online loses relative to the online religion. Where the latter can pose a real threat to the integrity of the school and peers, and thus create a danger in virtual space, which can be manifested in rejection, marginalization and the appearance of specific diagnostic units in students track through their Catholic peers. In this case, it seems doubtful that the 2002 Pontifical Council for Social Communications stated that education through new media is: “[...] more than just teaching about techniques, media education helps people from standards of good taste and truthful moral judgment, an aspect of conscience formation” (Pontifical Council For Social Communications, 2002). These words seem to be exaggerated, and the facts presented above shows in connection with digital education, a lack of interest on the part of the church and its hierarchs to educate teaching staff in this matter. This translates a decline in the authority of pastors in virtual space (cf. Siuda, 2010, p. 62). This is confirmed not only by the data, but also by statistics that show a year to year decrease in the Catholic Church faithful (Sitnicka, 2019).

In connection with the above, the question arises whether the Roman Church will agree to this state of affairs, the spread of religious extremism on and off the network, the lack of trained teaching staff who can use modern teaching tools, and thus able to teach in a consistent manner with the principles of faith to use the internet and its benefits? In connection with the above, will only the church stand for apparent actions, like those in history, intended to show only adaptation to new trends, without counteracting their bad effects? Will current teachers be replaced with robots at the right time?<sup>23</sup> The answer to this question will appear

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<sup>22</sup> For example, 5000 catechists are registered on the kulkat.pl website, but only 200 of them use the teaching materials available (Pisarek, 2018, p. 197).

<sup>23</sup> An example of such a solution is in Buddhism, where robots of monks teach, talk and answer questions related to this religion and philosophical system both in Japan (Himmer, 2019) and China (Tatlow, 2016).

over time, may it be happy for society and education in its virtual and religious dimension.

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