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POLAND AS A CASE STUDY FOR SOME ASPECTS OF RELIGION, MEDIATISATION, AND SECULARISATION

ABSTRACT. Ewa Stachowska, *Poland as a case study for some aspects of religion, mediatisation, and secularisation*, edited by Z. Drozdowicz and S. Sztajer, "Człowiek i Społeczeństwo" vol. XLI, Poznań 2016, pp. 91-105, Adam Mickiewicz University Press. ISSN 0239-3271.

The interactions between religion and the media are characterized by a great complexity, manifesting itself inter alia in the impact on the spheres of culture, education and religion, making these dimensions almost obliged to subordinate themselves to the influence of the media, as well as to use the media tools in their activity to fulfill the basic or constitutive aims. In this article one of the aspects of the relationship existing between religion and the media will be discussed, namely, the use of the Internet by the Catholic Church – mainly in Poland, though not only – to distribute religious content and ideas, originally contributing to the support of the pastoral ministry and evangelization. At the same time, the features of the recipients of these activities will be outlined, indicating – at least indirectly – the effectiveness and accuracy of both the inevitable and essential alliance between the sacrum and the media nowadays.

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General Remarks

Mass media and new technologies are rapidly becoming part and parcel of contemporary societies, ever increasingly touching individual and collective lives. Their impact is greatly felt in interpersonal relationships: daily lives are saturated and framed by the media and their cultural codes, with individual desires, aspirations, and ideas stimulated and shaped through their norms, narratives, and messages which provide patterns for forms and ways

of communication that enable various activities ranging from initiating and nurturing friendships, to curating one's image, to engaging in professional life, to leisure activities that include, among others, consuming aesthetics, goods, and entertainment. That said, however, the media have also grown as an essential part of the social system, which can be discussed dialectically: on the one hand, the media became a separate and relatively autonomous part of the social system, following, as it were, their own criteria and logic,[1] on the other, however, through their very nature and impact the media are spreading into politics, economy, culture, education, and religion, which surrender to its influence and begin shaping and framing their activities through the media that now increasingly shapes their goals and ends.[2] The media, in short, serve to mediate between the interactions, ideas and experiences of contemporary societies, while acting as an autonomous and supreme power, both affecting and shaping the identities and nature of contemporary populations and their societal processes.

The word used to describe this multidimensional impact of the media and new technologies is mediatisation,[3] a term which, according to W. Schultz, refers to social change initiated or caused by, or perhaps based on, the media, and *eo ipso* a process of social change in which the media plays a crucial role.[4] This impact may be, again following W. Schultz, identified as an extension, substitution, amalgamation, or accommodation,[5] where extension is taken to mean expansion, or possibly the creation, of new ways, opportunities, and circumstances, for human communication, heretofore traditionally subject to, for example, spatiotemporal constraints, and *eo ipso* now able to break through conventional barriers appearing until just recently in communication.[6] Substitution indicates many different ways in which the media saturate social and institutional activities, to the point of

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[1] Cf. D. Morgan, *Mediation or Mediatisation: The history of media in the study of religion*, "Culture and Religion: An Interdisciplinary Journal" vol. 12, 2/2011, pp. 138-139. See also S. Hjarvard, *The Mediatization of Society. A theory of the Media as Agents of Social and Cultural Change*, "Nordicom Review" vol. 29, 2/2008, pp. 105 and 113-115.

[2] Cf. ibidem.

[3] Historical context of mediatisation, and reasons for using this particular term and a separate theoretical approach was discussed by D. Morgan, among others. For a broader treatment, see D. Morgan, *Mediation or Mediatisation...*, pp. 137-152, or S. Hjarvard, *The Mediatization of Society...*, pp. 105-134.

[4] W. Schultz, *Reconstructing Mediatization as an Analytical Concept*, "European Journal of Communication" vol. 19, 1/2004, p. 88.

[5] Ibidem.

[6] Ibidem.

changing their very nature,[7] while also creating new forms of activities, engagement, and manifestations to enable growing participation as they replace traditional models of interaction.[8] Amalgamation, according to W. Schultz, shows that the boundary between the media and everyday activity is becoming increasingly blurred, with a growing dependence of both private and professional lives on the media, which effectively become an essential, if not fundamental, element of contemporary lives increasingly shaped by this mediatised experience.[9] Similarly, accommodation shows that various institutions are increasingly working through the media, necessarily conforming to their rules in order to become compatible with the social system of the present day.[10] We can therefore conceive of mediatisation as a complex and multidimensional impact of the media on contemporary societies, a process that is increasingly becoming, as it were, emblematic to this day and age.

In a religious environment, mediatisation emerges as a process whereby the media dominate not only religious institutions, but also religious meanings, symbols, and practices.[11] In other words, the media are increasingly present in promoting and shaping not only religious institutions, but also the conceptual and symbolic universe of religion. Not only does the media distribute religious information, thus shaping how it is perceived in the general public, but also it has grown into a religious experience itself, seizing control, at least in theory, over the scope and nature of religious content. Indeed, embracing the media often means that religious messages are coded as pop culture or entertainment, which further proliferates the pop cultural collage curated and spread by various media operatives. The alliance between religion and the media therefore implies that the latter intercepts meanings and symbols of the *sacrum* for its own ends, promoting and framing it as a consumable event and entertainment, through commercial models and products. However effective it may be in spreading religious content, it nevertheless seems that the traditional *sacrum* somehow evaporates in the process, bringing growing secularisation rather than religious revival.

S. Hjarvard notes, however, that the mediatisation of religion is circumstantial rather than universal, and as such it occurs solely in western

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[7] Ibidem, p. 88.

[8] Cf. ibidem, pp. 88-89

[9] Cf. ibidem, p. 89.

[10] Cf. ibidem.

[11] S. Hjarvard, *The Mediatization of Religion. A Theory of the Media as an Agent of Religious Change*, http://oldintranet.oikosneterope.eu/Archives/Meetings/Annual_Conferences/Sigtuna_2006/Download/The%20mediatization%20of%20religion.pdf [access: 20.12.2015], p. 3.

societies where the media rose to become independent institutions.[12] The impact of the media on religion therefore means that, first, the media dominate the production and distribution of religious content, experience, and information[13]; second, they shape the religious message as if it were a pop cultural product[14]; third, they take over the socio-cultural functions of institutionalised religions to provide moral orientation, spiritual guidance, ritual passage, and a sense of community and belonging.[15]

We have already noted that these are highly complex interactions. For this reason this paper singles out and considers only one aspect of this relationship, namely, how the web is used by the Catholic Church, most notably in Poland, to spread religious content and ideas, thus helping, at least in theory, to reach out and support their priestly mission and evangelical teaching. At the same time, we will profile those at the receiving end of these initiatives, which will offer some insight, at least indirectly, into how efficient and suitable this both inescapable and necessary alliance between the *sacrum* and the media really is.

Preaching Online

The scope in which digital technologies, including the web, are used for evangelical work has been partially researched in the project Priests' ICT Use in their Religious Experience, or PICTURE, conducted between October 2009 and 28 February 2010 by NewMinE lab, University of Lugano, in collaboration with School of Church Communications, Pontifical University of the Holy Cross in Rome.[16] Rather than explore how common these digital technologies are in ecclesiastical communities, the project aimed to, first, provide insight into how the media and digital technologies are used in the evangelical work pursued by Catholic priests; second, examine the

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[12] Ibidem, p. 3. Cf. also S. Hjarvard, *The Mediatisation of Religion: Theorising religion, media and social change,* "Culture and Religion: An Interdisciplinary Journal" 2011, vol. 12, no. 2, p. 124.

[13] Ibidem.

[14] Cf. ibidem.

[15] Ibidem.

[16] www.pictureproject.info [access: 22.10.2015]. Supported by the Congregation for the Clergy, the project surveyed priests with access to digital technologies from 117 countries, or ePriests. Reports are available for continents, as well as the following countries: Argentina, Canada, Spain, Germany, Italy, Mexico, Poland, Portugal, Switzerland. Forthcoming reports include Brazil, Columbia, France, Peru, and USA.

nature and scope of these activities; and third, examine what are the priests' attitudes toward these new media.[17] The study found that 97% of ePriests in Poland use the Internet daily, with as much as 2.8% going online weekly, and 0.2% doing it once per month.[18] This can be compared with the worldwide report which found that, globally, 94.7% of the respondents engage in daily online activity, 4.6% do it weekly, while 0.7% monthly.[19] For ePriests in Europe the results were as follows: 96.4% engaged in daily online activity, 3.2% did so weekly, with 0.5% doing it monthly.[20] These data clearly show that ePriests use the Internet in a regular and systematic way. Surfing the web is popular with ePriests around the world, and one may examine it by dividing it broadly into three categories: first, the relevance of these tools for the spiritual growth of ePriests; second, the role these play in helping them pursue their priestly mission; and third, how useful are they for spreading the Christian message.

One may examine the first category by, for example, looking into how often ePriests pray online and use the web to study, which might suggest, at least in an indirect way, how much ePriests care for and are concerned about their spiritual health, considering that they would seek the support of digital technologies to brush up on this part of their priestly vocation. PICTURE found that in Poland as much as 20.3% of ePriests engage in online prayer on a daily basis, including in particular Liturgy of the Hours, 28% do it once per week, 17.5% once per month, 18% a few times a year, while 16.1% never pray online.[21] Worldwide, this form of prayer is slightly less popular: 17.5% of the ePriests pray online daily, 18.4% do it once per week, 11.1% once per month, 17.4% a few times a year, while 35.7% never engage in online prayer.[22] A very similar trend can be seen with ePriests in Europe, where

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[17] Cf. ibidem.

[18] NewMinE Lab (USI), School of Church Communications (PUSC), *Picture – Priests' ICT Use in their Religious Experience, Poland Report, VIII 2010*, www.picture-project.info/more-about-picture [access: 22.10.2015].

[19] NewMinE Lab (USI), School of Church Communications (PUSC), *Picture – Priests' ICT Use in their Religious Experience, World Report, V 2010*, www.pictureproject. info/more-about-picture [access: 22.10.2015].

[20] NewMinE Lab (USI), School of Church Communications (PUSC), *Picture – Priests' ICT Use in their Religious Experience, Europe Report, V 2010*, www.picturepro-ject.info/more-about-picture [access: 22.10.2015].

[21] NewMinE Lab (USI), School of Church Communications (PUSC), *Picture – Priests' ICT Use in their Religious Experience, Poland Report*, p. 2.

[22] NewMinE Lab (USI), School of Church Communications (PUSC), *Picture – Priests' ICT Use in their Religious Experience, World Report*, p. 2.

17.5% pray online on a daily basis, 18.8% do it once per week, 11.3% once per month, 17.8% a few times a year, while 35.7% never engage in online prayer.[23] Using the Internet as a resource that helps ePriests study may be another indicator of how they nurture their spiritual growth. In Poland, 19.6% of the respondents study online every single day, with 39.4% doing it once per week, 20.5% once per month, 13.4% a few times a year, while 7.1% never uses the web for this particular purpose.[24] Worldwide, 26% of those surveyed access the web daily with educational purposes in mind, 34.1% do it once per week, 17% once per month, 13.5% a few times a year, while 9.4% never use the web to study.[25] As regards ePriests in Europe, 21.5% of those surveyed study online on a daily basis, 33.8% do it once per week, 19.1% once per month, 15.2% a few times a year, while 10.4% of the respondents never use the Internet as an educational tool.[26] These data show that Polish ePriests are slightly more welcoming of digital technologies when it comes to nurturing their spirituality, which includes in particular using electronic devices for prayer at least once a week. The study also found that the number of ePriests in Poland praying online on a daily and weekly basis is higher than the numbers suggested for worldwide or European surveys. There is a similar pattern when we look at how the web is explored for educational purposes: although it is true that the ePriests in Poland are slightly below the worldwide or European average in terms of using electronic resources for studying, in Poland there is a smaller number of priests who never use the Internet for educational purposes when compared to both the rest of the world and Europe.

Another area where ePriests use the media and digital technologies is their priestly mission, which includes in particular the preparation of homilies and offering spiritual advice. In Poland, 5.2% of the respondents search the Internet for homily materials on a daily basis, 38.6% do it once per week, 28.4% once per month, 19.9% a few times a year, while 7.9% never use the Internet for this purposes.[27] Worldwide, 14.7% of the ordained

[23] NewMinE Lab (USI), School of Church Communications (PUSC), *Picture – Priests' ICT Use in their Religious Experience*, Europe Report, p. 2.

[24] NewMinE Lab (USI), School of Church Communications (PUSC), *Picture – Priests' ICT Use in their Religious Experience*, Poland Report, p. 3.

[25] NewMinE Lab (USI), School of Church Communications (PUSC), *Picture – Priests' ICT Use in their Religious Experience*, World Report, p. 3.

[26] NewMinE Lab (USI), School of Church Communications (PUSC), *Picture – Priests' ICT Use in their Religious Experience*, Europe Report, p. 3.

[27] NewMinE Lab (USI), School of Church Communications (PUSC), *Picture – Priests' ICT Use in their Religious Experience*, Poland Report, p. 2.

users explore the web daily to look for homily materials, 46.7% do it once per week, 15.6% once per month, 14.2% a few times a year, while 8.7% never engage in this kind activity.[28] In Europe, 9.1% of the ePriests search the web daily for inspiration for their homilies, 44.7% do it once per week, 18.3% once per month, 17% a few times a year, while 10.9% never search the web with this particular purpose in mind.[29] Examining how often ePriests search the Internet for offering spiritual advice can provide additional insight into how technological advancements help continue the priestly mission. In Poland, 21.7% of the ePriests consider electronic devices to be useful for carrying on with their priestly mission, 43.5% consider them to be quite enough, while 34.8% believe it to be not the case.[30] Worldwide, 26.7% of the ePriests consider the Internet to be useful for offering religious guidance, 34.7% consider it to be quite enough, while 38.6% view it in a negative way.[31] In Europe, 21.5% of the ordained users have a positive view of the medium as a useful tool for this particular purpose, 33.3% consider it to be quite enough, while 45.2% believe that the Internet is of no use in this particular area.[32] When considering the relevance of the new media for pursuing these particular aspects of their priestly mission, ePriests appear to suggest that these are more helpful in preparing homilies than offering spiritual guidance. Although, compared to both the rest of the world and Europe, in Poland there are smaller numbers of priests who never explore the Internet to search for homily materials, which would suggest that they are more inclined to seek inspiration online, it must be noted that ePriests in Poland are less likely to search the web at least on a weekly basis. A similar trend can be found in the perceived relevance of the web for providing spiritual guidance: whereas priests in Poland are here most likely to embrace the Internet, they nevertheless consider it not to be particularly helpful in fulfilling this part of their priestly mission.

Finally, we will examine how useful are digital technologies for spreading the Christian message. Here, as much as 45.9% of Polish ePriests con-

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[28] NewMinE Lab (USI), School of Church Communications (PUSC), *Picture – Priests' ICT Use in their Religious Experience, World Report*, p. 2.

[29] NewMinE Lab (USI), School of Church Communications (PUSC), *Picture – Priests' ICT Use in their Religious Experience, Europe Report*, p. 2

[30] NewMinE Lab (USI), School of Church Communications (PUSC), *Picture – Priests' ICT Use in their Religious Experience, Poland Report*, p. 2.

[31] NewMinE Lab (USI), School of Church Communications (PUSC), *Picture – Priests' ICT Use in their Religious Experience, World Report*, p. 2.

[32] NewMinE Lab (USI), School of Church Communications (PUSC), *Picture – Priests' ICT Use in their Religious Experience, Europe Report*, p. 2.

sider the web to be a helpful resource in their preaching, 37.8% of those surveyed believe it is quite enough, while 16.3% consider it to be of no practical use.[33] This may be compared with the worldwide results, where 52.5% of the respondents think of the Internet as a useful tool, 30% believes it is quite enough, while 17.5% thinks otherwise.[34] In Europe, 49.9% of the respondents consider the Internet to be useful in spreading the religious message, 30.8% believed it to be quite enough, with 19.2% thinking differently.[35] At the same time, digital technologies are clearly found to be highly useful for the enculturation of faith. In Poland, respectively 26.1% and 45% of the ePriests "strongly agree" or "agree" with this opinion, 27.7% of those surveyed somewhat agree, with just as little as 1.1% begging to disagree.[36] The relevance of digital technologies for the enculturation of faith is similarly viewed by ePriests both in the larger world and in Europe. Worldwide, 37.1% of the respondents strongly agree with this view, 35.8% agree, 24.5% somewhat agree, while 2.7% disagree.[37] In Europe, the respective answers were 30.1%, 39.2%, 27.6%, and 3.1%.[38]

Looking at the picture emerging from these data, media and digital technologies appear to have a considerable potential for evangelization, which can be, and to some degree already is, used to spread religious beliefs and evangelical content. They are thus clearly considered to be valuable tools for instilling and spreading Christian values, supporting and shaping, at least in an indirect way, the modern enculturation of faith. Moreover, ePriests seem to appreciate how digital technologies help them fulfil their priestly mission. This is how digital technologies are viewed by 41.6% of the ePriests in Poland, with 48.4% judging them to be quite enough, with just one in ten begging to disagree.[39] Looking from a global perspective, 41.6%

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[33] NewMinE Lab (USI), School of Church Communications (PUSC), *Picture – Priests' ICT Use in their Religious Experience*, *Poland Report*, p. 3.

[34] NewMinE Lab (USI), School of Church Communications (PUSC), *Picture – Priests' ICT Use in their Religious Experience*, *World Report*, p. 3.

[35] NewMinE Lab (USI), School of Church Communications (PUSC), *Picture – Priests' ICT Use in their Religious Experience*, *Europe Report*, p. 3.

[36] NewMinE Lab (USI), School of Church Communications (PUSC), *Picture – Priests' ICT Use in their Religious Experience*, *Poland Report*, p. 3.

[37] NewMinE Lab (USI), School of Church Communications (PUSC), *Picture – Priests' ICT Use in their Religious Experience*, *World Report*, p. 3.

[38] NewMinE Lab (USI), School of Church Communications (PUSC), *Picture – Priests' ICT Use in their Religious Experience*, *Europe Report*, p. 3.

[39] NewMinE Lab (USI), School of Church Communications (PUSC), *Picture – Priests' ICT Use in their Religious Experience*, *Poland Report*, p. 4.

of those surveyed consider digital technologies to have a positive impact on fulfilling their priestly obligations, 46.3% believe them to be quite enough, while 12.2% think that there is no such impact.[40] In Europe, 34.8% of those surveyed found digital technologies to have a positive impact on their work, 51% considered it to be quite enough, and 14.1% disagreed.[41] This said, it seems that the potential impact of digital technologies on priestly mission and evangelisation is not being fully realized. Considering that those surveyed are very much online every single day, one cannot help but conclude that going online for inspiration for homilies, study, or prayer, seems not to be a significant or crucial part of their online life. One may argue that this comes as a result of strong competences and the proper professional training of ePriests, who may not feel the need to resort to digital technologies to carry on with their evangelical work; but it may also be to the contrary – modern digital tools may appear less than satisfactory for ePriests, who instead turn to more conventional forms of spiritual practice and traditional sources of knowledge. Judging by the significant numbers of opinions questioning the usefulness of digital technologies for offering spiritual guidance, to name one example, it seems that there are limits to digital formulae in reaching out to and staying connected with the faithful. It may be so that the human need to seek help and support in tending to doubts and dilemmas calls for a more sensitive and subtle approach, achievable only through personal engagement, not a mediated one, which would partially explain why ePriests are reluctant to embrace the web while having this particular purpose in mind. Whilst with unbound connectivity ushered in by the Internet and digital technologies there emerged an environment for spreading religious beliefs and answering to vocation through a universal, if simplified, format that also enables a quick response to spiritual needs and challenges, it seems that this digital formula appeals primarily to younger generations who are native to the web and treat it as their natural environment where they seek information, engage in personal interactions, indulge in entertainment, and, perhaps, embark on spiritual journeys. It remains to be seen to what degree ePriests, but also the Catholic Church in general, will be able to properly respond to these spiritual needs, and attract and accommodate those willing to engage. For the time being, priestly engagement on social media, still the mainstream of digital reality, seems to be rather modest. While they do

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[40] NewMinE Lab (USI), School of Church Communications (PUSC), *Picture – Priests' ICT Use in their Religious Experience, World Report*, p. 3.

[41] NewMinE Lab (USI), School of Church Communications (PUSC), *Picture – Priests' ICT Use in their Religious Experience, Europe Report*, p. 3.

recognize the relevance of social media for modern communication, with this opinion supported by 76.9% of ePriests in Poland, 79.1% worldwide, and 74.9% in Europe, most of them do not engage with other priests through social media platforms,[42] and quite often do not use them at all.[43] Both the Internet and digital technologies can be potentially taken advantage of to support and facilitate the priestly mission, opening up opportunities for initiatives where digital technologies frame and determine activities that advance new evangelisation.

The Faithful Online

To make the picture of this modern alliance between religion and the media, such as the Internet, more complete, we will now profile users of religious websites. To this end, we will turn to the data provided in a 2015 survey conducted by the Public Opinion Research Centre (CBOS). According to this research, religious websites are visited by 14% of the web users,[44] most notably persons aged 55-64 years old (18%), and a slightly younger

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[42] In Poland, 46.8% of those surveyed are not connected with any priests on social media platforms. At the same time, 29.8% of the respondents stay connected with 1 to 10 other persons, 12.5% – 11 to 25 persons; 5.1% – 26 to 50 persons; 3.9% – 51 to 100 persons; 2.1% over 100 persons. This compares with worldwide figures: 41% no connection with priests, 29.8% – 1 to 10 other persons; 14.4% – 11 to 25; 8.2% – 26 to 50; 3.8% – 51 to 100; 2.8% – over 100. In Europe, the figures look as follows: 44.3% – no connection with priests; 27.6% – 1 to 10 other persons; 14.2% – 11 to 25; 7.7% – 26 to 50; 3.5% – 51 to 100; and 2.6% over 100. NewMinE Lab (USI), School of Church Communications (PUSC), *Picture – Priests' ICT Use in their Religious Experience, World Report*, 4. NewMinE Lab (USI), School of Church Communications (PUSC), *Picture – Priests' ICT Use in their Religious Experience, Europe Report*, p. 4. NewMinE Lab (USI), School of Church Communications (PUSC), *Picture – Priests' ICT Use in their Religious Experience, Poland Report*, p. 4.

[43] In Poland, 31.7% of the respondents are not on social media, 19.2% visit social media daily, and 18.7% once a week. Globally, 35.5% of the respondents are not on social media, 26.4% visit social media every single day, and 17.6% once a week. In Europe, 37.5% of the respondents are not on social media, 25.1% visit social media daily, and 17.7% once a week. NewMinE Lab (USI), School of Church Communications (PUSC), *Picture – Priests' ICT Use in their Religious Experience, World Report*, p. 4. NewMinE Lab (USI), School of Church Communications (PUSC), *Picture – Priests' ICT Use in their Religious Experience, Europe Report*, p. 4. NewMinE Lab (USI), School of Church Communications (PUSC), *Picture – Priests' ICT Use in their Religious Experience, Poland Report*, p. 4.

[44] The numbers looked similar in 2014. CBOS report, M. Kołodziejska (ed.), *Korzystanie z religijnych stron i portali internetowych*, 83/2014, p. 3.

group aged 45-54 years old (17%).[45] Further, these websites are visited more often by women (16%) than man (11%),[46] most likely with university degrees (18%).[47] Also, religious websites appear to be more popular with those living in rural communities and smaller towns with a population below 20,000: in 2015, as much as 15% of the respondents belonging to each of these groups declared visiting religious websites. Those living in larger cities and metropolitan areas are less inclined to show an interest in religious websites, including 13% of those living in cities with a population smaller than 100,000, 11% of those living in cities with a population smaller than 500,000, and 13% of those living in cities with a population over 500,000.[48] The fact that religious websites are more popular with rural communities may be attributable to a smaller number of events on the religious calendar when compared to urban areas, which may drive not only web searches for planned religious initiatives, but also stimulate interactions between persons sharing similar worldviews.

As most of those visiting religious websites engage in religious practices several times a week (66%), additional interest in these websites clearly follows from their prior religious involvement. Those engaging in religious practices not so often are less interested in online religious content, with as little as 11% of the users practicing religion 1-2 times a week, 14% practicing 1-2 times a month, 6% a few times a year, and 1% not engaging in religious practices at all.[49] A similar trend occurs when one examines the religious attitudes of the respondents: most often those visiting religious websites

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[45] CBOS report, *Korzystanie z religijnych stron i portali internetowych*, M. Kołodziejska (ed.), 80/2015, p. 2. Religious websites were least often visited by age group 65+, accounting for 6% of the entire religious traffic. In the remaining groups the numbers looked in the following way: 35-44 years old – 10%, 25-34 years old – 16%, 18-24 years old – 12%. Ibidem.

[46] CBOS report, M. Kołodziejska (ed.), *Korzystanie z religijnych stron i portali internetowych*, 80/2015, p. 1.

[47] For other groups the numbers look the following way: secondary education – 13%, vocational education – 11%, primary education/middle school – 2% (Ibidem, p. 2). Compared to 2014, there is a clear change in the group that most often visits religious websites: with 17% it was the primary education/middle school group, up by 14 per cent compared to 2015. In groups further up the educational path the results were as follows: vocational education – 9%, secondary education – 15%, higher education – 16%. Cf. CBOS report, M. Kołodziejska (ed.), *Korzystanie z religijnych stron i portali internetowych*, 83/2014.

[48] CBOS report, M. Kołodziejska (ed.), *Korzystanie z religijnych stron i portali internetowych*, 80/2015, p. 2.

[49] Ibidem, p. 3.

describe themselves as deeply religious (44%), or religious (13%), while 9% consider themselves not to be religious at all.[50]

Visiting religious websites is considered to be an addition to conventional forms of religious practices, a view reflected by as much as 48% of those accessing the websites. For 24% of those surveyed, visiting religious websites is not related to their religious practices outside the digital world, while 9% treat it as an alternative form to traditional forms of religious activity.[51] It thus appears that visiting religious websites supports the already existing involvement in religious practices, with online activity serving primarily for sourcing particular information. Among persons browsing religious content online, 32% were accessing websites that were not officially affiliated with religious institutions, these being social media platforms and websites curated by religious media. Institutional profiles such as parochial and diocesan websites were visited by 25% of those surveyed, with 8% of the users visiting both of these types of websites. As much as 29% of the respondents claimed they were trying to access such websites, although reportedly they had troubles identifying particular institutional addresses.[52]

The users of religious websites are primarily searching for details on the life of the Catholic Church (46%), looking for news in the local parochial community (40%), and exploring religious knowledge in general (33%). Other reasons include reading theological studies (23%), looking for source materials such as the Bible (17%), seeking spiritual guidance and support (12%), engaging in online discussions with other users of religious websites (6%), and, finally, other reasons (11%).[53] These data evidence that those

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[50] Ibidem. Compared to the previous year, one can see a 10% drop in the "deeply religious" category, down from 54%. At the same time there was an increase in the "not religious" category, up from 4% in 2014. Compare CBOS report, M. Kołodziejska (ed.), *Korzystanie z religijnych stron i portali internetowych*, 83/2014, p. 3.

[51] Cf. CBOS report, M. Kołodziejska (ed.), *Korzystanie z religijnych stron i portali internetowych*, 80/2015, p. 3.

[52] Cf. ibidem, p. 4. This compares with 2014 when the answers looked as follows: non-institutional websites – 33%, institutional websites – 17%, both non-institutional and institutional websites – 9%, unspecified addresses – 40%. Compare CBOS report, M. Kołodziejska (ed.), *Korzystanie z religijnych stron i portali internetowych*, 83/2014, p. 4.

[53] Compare CBOS report, M. Kołodziejska (ed.), *Korzystanie z religijnych stron i portali internetowych*, 80/2015, p. 5. The survey from the previous year showed these preferences looking the following way: news on the life of the Catholic Church – 40%; communal and parochial news – 43%; religious materials – 35%; information on religion(s) – 35%; source materials – 23%; spiritual guidance – 9%; discussions with other users of religious websites – 5%; other – 11%. Compare CBOS report, M. Kołodziejska (ed.), *Korzystanie z religijnych stron i portali internetowych*, 83/2014, p. 5.

exploring religious websites do so to follow the life of the Catholic Church in general, and parochial and diocesan communities in particular, which may suggest that their religious involvement proceeds along established patterns of religious practices. They explore the web mostly looking for particular details, their interests reflecting rather traditionalistic and institutionalised patterns of religious involvement, rather than individualised or subjective ways of religious experience. Moreover, there is a clear gender divide in searching for parochial and communal news online, with 44% of women compared to 34% of men showing an interest in these issues in 2015.[54] There is a similar pattern emerges in the preferences for discussing religious matters (women – 23%, men – 22%), looking for source materials (women – 20%, men – 12%) and religious news (women – 36%, men 29%), and, finally, seeking spiritual guidance (women – 15%, men – 7%).[55] Although in the 2015 survey it was men who were more likely to seek information on the life of the Catholic Church (men – 52%, women – 42%), as well as express a stronger need to confront their religious views and discuss religious matters (13% and 1%, respectively), the general picture emerging from the survey appears to confirm a socio-geographic landscape of Polish religiosity in which women are both more open to religious experience and more involved in the life of parochial communities.

Religious websites seem to be perceived primarily as a source of information about the life of the Catholic Church and parochial communities, and as such appear to support traditionalistic patterns of religious life, rather than engage new groups in religious experience or to stimulate a religious revival. The 2015 survey provides some clues that this may indeed be the case: the respondents who were not visiting religious websites most often cited no need to explore those websites, expressed regardless of their involvement in religious practices (39%). Other reasons given by the respondents included no interest in religious content (32%), lack of time (31%), indifference to and thus little inclination to explore those websites (10%), unawareness

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[54] Cf. CBOS report, M. Kołodziejska (ed.), *Korzystanie z religijnych stron i portali internetowych*, 80/2015, p. 5. In the previous year, 2014, the numbers in this category were slightly higher: men – 36%, women – 50%. Compare CBOS report, M. Kołodziejska (ed.), *Korzystanie z religijnych stron i portali internetowych*, 83/2014, p. 6.

[55] Cf. CBOS report, M. Kołodziejska (ed.), *Korzystanie z religijnych stron i portali internetowych*, 80/2015, p. 5. In 2014, these preferences looked in the following way: religious discussions (women – 37%, men – 32%), religious texts (women – 38%, men – 8%), information on religion (women – 36%, men – 33%), spiritual guidance (women – 14%, men – 3%). Compare CBOS report, M. Kołodziejska (ed.), *Korzystanie z religijnych stron i portali internetowych*, 83/2014, p. 5.

of those websites (8%), and other reasons (4%).[56] This can be compared to 2014 where these reasons looked as follows: no need to explore those websites regardless of involvement in religious practices (40%), no interest in religious content (35%), lack of time (33%), unawareness of those websites (18%), indifference to religion and thus little inclination to explore those websites (9%), and other reasons (5%). These data suggest that while people are now more aware of those websites, it does not make them more popular, *eo ipso* religious websites appear to target primarily groups with very particular interests, and although they claim to have a universal appeal, their content nevertheless appears to be inconsistent with the preferences of the faithful majority and other potential users. Although there is a considerable institutional potential for the impact of the "religious Internet" on evangelical teaching in Poland, it seems that it has become not much more than an online community board.

Instead of summary

Mediatisation approached as a process that makes religious institutions embrace media tools as a potential resource of the contemporary world, supporting, at least in theory, priestly missions and evangelisation seems to be rather vaguely written into strategies pursued by the Catholic Church. This appears to be what emerges from this selective presentation of the PICTURE survey: both globally and domestically priests seem to be open to and engaging with new media and digital technologies, but their initiatives and projects, at least in Poland, appear to be reaching out to those already religiously involved. They follow methods that seek to hold on to old believers rather than win over new ones. It remains to be seen whether this is because of poor institutional expertise in managing religious and spiritual experience in a challenging web environment with contemporary individualism, consumerism, pleasure-seeking, competitive lifestyles, oversaturation with news, images, messages, and entertainment, or whether it is because of the very nature of religious needs and explorations, which are perhaps impossible to frame in terms of online offers, online communication patterns and virtual relationships. Although, to be fair, it may be that the online activity of the Catholic Church and the faithful pictured in this paper is a real world hologram projected onto the virtual: as we increasingly live our daily lives

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[56] Cf. CBOS report, M. Kołodziejska (ed.), *Korzystanie z religijnych stron i portali internetowych*, 80/2015, p. 6.

online, it also means that religious institutions do the same, experiencing, as it were, a *déjà vu*, which in simplified terms means a religious quest against, this time digital, "chimera" of secularisation.