

## Article

# The Role of the Virtue of Religiosity in the Experience of Engagement

Tomasz Gwoździewicz 

Faculty of Theology, University of Silesia, 40-007 Katowice, Poland; tomasz.gwozdziewicz@us.edu.pl

**Abstract:** For believers, a decision to enter sacramental marriage is one of the most important steps in their lives. They prepare for it over the engagement period. This is a time of personal formation open to further improvement, in which religion plays an important role. Religiosity is the moral virtue by which man honours God. The bride and groom-to-be bring the experience of their own religiosity to the relationship, which allows for mutual enrichment and positive confrontation. The aim of this research is to show the influence of religiosity on the building of the engagement bond and its subsequent impact on the nuptial community. The paper is of a theoretical and empirical nature and belongs to the area of moral theology. This research includes the conclusions of empirical studies conducted in Poland. The method of source material analysis applied in this paper allows for a synthesis that shows the complexity of the phenomenon, with special attention paid to the aretology of the analysed issue. The synthesis offers concrete solutions for future brides and grooms, as well as those responsible for preparing for the sacrament of marriage. It reaffirms the need to form a mature religiosity during the engagement period. It encourages certain religious forms that serve to build a relationship with God and enable the bride and groom to better relate to each other. An important dimension of properly experienced religiosity is its formative character that enables one to make appropriate moral choices.

**Keywords:** engagement; religiousness; virtue



**Citation:** Gwoździewicz, Tomasz. 2023. The Role of the Virtue of Religiosity in the Experience of Engagement. *Religions* 14: 1314. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14101314>

Academic Editor: Urszula Dudziak

Received: 24 September 2023

Revised: 15 October 2023

Accepted: 17 October 2023

Published: 19 October 2023



**Copyright:** © 2023 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

## 1. Introduction

Pope Francis, when addressing young people, emphasizes that preparation for marriage should include the development of the best virtues (Francis 2019, no. 295). One of these is the virtue of religiosity, which allows for building a relationship with God and having a proper attitude towards other people.

Despite the possibility of preparing for the sacrament of marriage through various forms of pastoral assistance, many people enter married life without being aware of God's support. Engaged couples who begin preparation for marriage often approach their pastors just to meet the requirements of canonical law, without being aware that the sacrament of marriage implies the presence of God and His grace. This is the result of weak faith, as well as improper experience of religiosity. Therefore a deeper commitment to preparing for marriage is necessary. What is most important is the development of the virtue of religiosity, which enables a deepening of one's relationship with God, establishes friendship with Him, and draws from the source of Love in order to fulfil the tasks drawn from the sacrament of marriage in following the path of holiness (Głód 2008, p. 106)

This study is intended to show the virtue of religiosity during the period of engagement. First, the virtue of religiosity will be presented, which, in the Catholic theology, is an expression of justice towards God and other individuals. Next, the essence of engagement will be offered as a state of preparation for sacramental marriage. Later the author will describe the positive impact of the implementation of the virtue of religiosity during the period of engagement, as well as the most common flaws that result from the poor implementation of this process. The source material analysis method used in this

study, as well as the author's research, will contribute to a synthesis that will illustrate the complexity of the phenomenon. Special attention shall be given to the aretological aspect of the discussed issues. The theological perspective presented in this study addresses brides and bridegrooms-to-be who are preparing to receive the sacrament of marriage in the Catholic Church, although it is not entirely limited to this perspective.

## 2. The Virtue of Religiosity as an Expression of Justice to God and to Others

According to the definition of the specificity of man, he is a religious being (*homo religiosus*), meaning that he has a personal and individual attitude to laws and truths that stem from religion that he or she adopts (Makselon 1995, p. 255).

This attitude is known as 'religiosity', and is expressed by fulfilling specific acts through which a person turns to God, involving his entire personality, that is both soul and body. Thus, on the religious level, one can speak of internal and external acts that are performed by a person which are mutually dependent and are expressed by one another. From a Christian perspective, internal acts are more perfect than external ones and, at the same time, closer to God, who wants to be worshipped in spirit and truth (Wichrowicz 2002, p. 131).

Thus, taking into account the Catholic Church's teaching on acts of religiosity, it should be noted that the Catechism lists the acts without differentiating between internal and external ones. According to the catechism, religiosity is expressed by "adoring God, praying to him, offering him the worship that belongs to him, fulfilling the promises and vows made to him" (CCC/Catechism of the Catholic Church 2003, no. 2135). At the same time, acts of religiosity have both individual and communal dimensions (CCC/Catechism of the Catholic Church 2003, no. 2136).

Interpreting the rather general indications provided by the Catechism, Catholic moral theology offers precise methods through which man's religiousness is expressed. They are as follows: piety, as the first act of religiosity; prayer; sacrifice; adoration; almsgiving and all kinds of tributes or contributions; vows, both public and private; reception of the holy sacraments; and the observance of holy days by worshipping God in a community (Ćmiel 2008, p. 240).

All of these acts are intended to worship God both directly, when the acts are directed at the individual Persons of the Trinity, and indirectly, through creation (saints and blessings). In addition to the vertical dimension realized in the relationship to God, acts of religiosity have a horizontal dimension concerning the proper attitude towards other individuals, for "religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to care for orphans and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unstained by the world" (James 1:27). Properly experienced religiosity presupposes, apart from an encounter with God, a relationship with neighbours that is expressed by helping the other, having concern for those in need, and performing acts of mercy.

In Catholic terms, the attitude of religiosity is a virtue that stems from a theological virtue of justice. The third section of The Catechism of the Catholic Church devoted to moral issues states that "justice is the moral virtue that consists in the constant and firm will to give their due to God and neighbor. Justice toward God is called the virtue of religion" (CCC/Catechism of the Catholic Church 2003, no. 1807).

Religiosity is, therefore, a moral virtue, not a theological one; that is, its direct object is not God as man's ultimate goal, but the created reality that is a means to the ultimate end, which, in the Christian understanding, is God and the relationship with Him. The relational character of the virtue of religiosity is emphasized by Piotr Roszak and Tomasz Gutowski, who stress the fact that the Thomasian understanding of religiosity goes beyond the duty deriving from justice, but leans towards a purposive understanding of the relationship with God, thanks to which every action and choice gains meaning in relation to God as the ultimate goal (Roszak and Gutowski 2021, p. 96).

This created reality is composed of various acts of internal and external worship, through which man honours God. St. Thomas Aquinas distinguishes between God, to

whom the virtue of religiosity is directed, and the acts through which God is worshipped. Religiosity belongs to the latter domain (Thomas [Aquinas 1971](#), p. 179).

While realizing the virtue of religiosity, one should be aware that this virtue evolves and changes with a person, his or her personality, and existential orientation. Regarding religious development, an important role is played by intellectual, emotional, and volitional processes, as well as religious experience or participation in worship. Religious maturity is achieved in the process of adolescence, while such factors as environment and upbringing affect the development of religiosity, positively or negatively. Positive family experience and regular participation in divine worship are opportunities to acquire positive religious experience that fosters the deepening of religious experience. Having negative community experience, a poor family example, an environment hostile to religion, and withdrawal from religious practices may be causes of the crisis of religiosity that can occur at different stages of life ([Kraśniński 2002](#), pp. 142–14).

### 3. Engagement as a Stage in Preparation for Marriage

Preparation for marriage is a gradual and continuous process composed of three characteristic phases: pre-preparation, close preparation, and direct preparation. Pre-preparation begins in childhood and is accomplished through proper pedagogy that shows human life in the marriage and family community. Close preparation begins at an appropriate age and is realized through religious formation, especially at the level of catechesis. It is meant to lead to a deeper understanding of the sacraments, the relationship between man and woman, and responsible parenthood. The next step is direct preparation, which is exercised during the months and weeks preceding a wedding and is carried out by a pre-nuptial exam as required by canon law. Moreover, direct preparation covers the content that deepens the understanding of married life in the community of the Church (John [Paul 1981](#), no. 66).

An important moment on the road of preparation for marriage is the engagement stage, which should be experienced in a spiritual way. The stage starts with an official engagement or declaration of intention to marry made before a competent pastor. Although engagement has no legal consequences, it binds the bride and groom-to-be in their conscience and opens the way to sacramental marriage ([CIC/Code of Canon Law 1998](#), no. 1062; [Pyźlak 2013](#)).

It is important to distinguish between a marriage proposal and an engagement. A proposal is the moment of final decision and declaration. The act is usually followed by an engagement. Depending on tradition, engagement has different levels of formality ([Grzybowski 2006](#), p. 269).

Engagement has a long tradition dating back to the beginning of the institution of the Church. The Church adopted this custom for pastoral reasons in order to emphasize its deep spiritual and community-forming sense. Nowadays, reviving the tradition of ceremonial engagement that emphasizes these two dimensions seems desirable. Engagement is meant to become a family event, which is not an empty ritual, but, above all, a religious act. The religious nature of this act emphasizes its community dimension. If possible, engagement should take place in the family circle. This will help to build good relationships between the families of the bride and groom-to-be and allow one to see the value of the “domestic Church” that the family is meant to become. A significant element of the engagement that emphasizes its spiritual nature is the blessing of the engagement ring (or rings), which, under canon law, may be performed by lay people (usually parents). An engagement ring makes a statement that, from now on, a man and a woman consider themselves an engaged couple ([Polish Episcopal Conference 1998](#)).

This is because brides and grooms-to-be very often prepare themselves for the moment of engagement for a long time. However, they pay attention mainly to the external experience, while the consequences of this event are not duly acknowledged. Research emphasizes that, nowadays, the ritual of engagement has become an empty gesture that does not entail specific changes. Engagement is not treated as a rite of passage that changes

the identity of those who go through it, for it is not always the case that what follows expresses the proper meaning of this rite (Ukleja 2018).

Thus, the recognition of the religious character of this event seems necessary. This is what Pope Francis means when he says that “at times, the couple does not grasp the theological and spiritual import of the words of consent, which illuminate the meaning of all the signs that follow. It needs to be stressed that these words cannot be reduced to the present; they involve a totality that includes the future: “until death do us part”. The content of the words of consent makes it clear that freedom and fidelity are not opposed to one another; rather, they are mutually supportive, both in interpersonal and social relationships” (Francis 2016, no. 214).

Both the engagement ceremony and the entire period of engagement should be experienced by believers in a spiritual way. This is a condition for a similar experience in marriage. Elaine Quilici emphasizes that “the time of engagement can only be defined with respect to the time of marriage. The former precedes the latter. The time of engagement prepared the time of marriage. However, the said times do not intertwine. Thus, in order to recognize the spiritual meaning of engagement, we must discover the spiritual meaning of marriage” (Quilici 2009).

Thus, the engagement of believers is meant to have a spiritual character that enables one to experience God through prayer and a deeper understanding of the sacraments and truths of faith. Moreover, it is a time for being with each other and getting to know each other, especially with respect to one’s religious life. The period of engagement goes beyond an individualistic view of the world and creates a vision, which we refer to as a personalistic one. In the personalistic school, a person never exists for himself or herself, but lives in relation to others. This relationship gives birth to a community in which the well-being of each other counts. It is the other person who matters. “To be” is far more important than “to possess”. This logic of gift initiated in the period of engagement allows this kind of thinking to be transferred into the nuptial relationship and create the “communio” of the nuptial community in which the other person is the highest good (Quilici and La Balme 2003).

The creation of ‘communio’ today faces a number of difficulties that are linked to the negative understanding and promotion of individualism. This involves breaking ties and running away from the social and even family communities. This attitude makes it difficult to discover one’s own identity, which is learned through narration and communication with others. Entering into fiancéhood in such a state does not allow for the proper development of the fiancé community and then the marriage community. To counteract this, the positive dimension of individualization should be recognized. It will allow one to see one’s own value, uniqueness, or potential that one brings to the marital community and then to develop it in that community. Individuality does not disappear in the communion of persons, but perfects itself and can become a gift for others (Tykarski 2019, pp. 591–92).

An important part of the spiritual experience of the time of engagement is a proper experience of the virtue of chastity. The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World urges the betrothed “to nourish and develop their wedlock by pure conjugal love [...]” (Second Vatican Council 1965b, no. 49).

Maintaining chastity during engagement is the path to true happiness in marriage, for sexual purity allows for the full acceptance of the dignity of a human person. Today, when permissiveness in the field of sexuality grows, Christian engagement should be a sign of properly experienced purity. Despite dilemmas that emerge in this area, the betrothed are called to live in chastity by exercising abstinence and to cherish the gift of sacrificial love that should be present in their relationship (Pyżlak 2022).

Premarital chastity is more than abstinence from sexual intercourse. Its implementation points to the true meaning of sexuality, which is subordinated to building unity. Purity has nothing to do with limitations. On the contrary, it is focused on liberation. It enables a person to see the other not only as an object of desire, but as an individual perceived by God in his or her fullness (West 2018, pp. 54–55).

Therefore, if it is important to nurture the spiritual element in a properly experienced period of engagement, in the course of further consideration, we should emphasize the role of religiosity in which spirituality is expressed and deepened.

#### 4. Positive Impact of the Realization of the Virtue of Religiosity on Engagement

The mature religiosity of the betrothed is a factor that has a positive impact on the quality of future marriage, as well as on experiencing the engagement. Research shows that links between the religiosity and dimensions of the life of the betrothed are few, yet one can find a positive impact of religiosity on an engaged couple and their subsequent marriage in such areas as nuptial satisfaction, commitments, and conflict prevention.

In the social dimension, nupturients' religiosity can be an interfering factor, while in the personal dimension, it may have a stabilizing function for many areas of life and motivate further development, which is highly important for future spouses (Bukalski 2016, pp. 257–59).

The virtue of religiosity experienced and exercised during engagement has many dimensions. Some of its acts allow for concrete implementation. For those preparing to enter into sacramental marriage, it is important to worship God in the first place.

Undoubtedly, this is how faith can be deepened. John Paul II states that “the very preparation for Christian marriage is itself a journey of faith. It is a special opportunity for the engaged to rediscover and deepen the faith received in Baptism and nourished by their Christian upbringing. In this way they come to recognize and freely accept their vocation to follow Christ and to serve the Kingdom of God in the married state” (John Paul 1981, no. 51).

Worshipping God does not stem solely from faith, but is justified by natural law. The Council's “Declaration on Religious Freedom” confirms this truth, stating that the right to religious freedom has its foundation in the very dignity of the human person, as this dignity is known through the revealed word of God and by reason itself (Second Vatican Council 1965a, no. 2). It follows that the document is addressed not only to Catholics, but to non-believers as well. It focuses on the need to worship God as something present in the very nature of man. The easiest way to meet this need is through specific acts of religious worship (Ćmiel 2008, p. 242).

First, the sacraments are the essential form of Christian worship, and their task is to sanctify people. The sacraments were instituted by Christ the Lord and entrusted to the Church to be signs and means that express and strengthen the faith, render worship to God, and effect the sanctification of humanity (CIC/Code of Canon Law 1998, no. 840).

As Ursula Dudziak notes, the religiosity of a believer permeates his or her entire life and is expressed in the celebration of the sacraments, of which there are seven in Catholicism. Their purpose is as follows: baptism begins the journey with Christ; confirmation strengthens the baptized in daily life, especially the life of faith; penance and reconciliation strengthen a believer on his or her path of life; the Eucharist gives strength; the anointing of the sick provides health of soul and body; and the sacraments of priesthood and marriage help to build community. It is significant that marriage begins with the reception of the sacrament to show a believer that he or she will not be able to fulfil his or her vocation without God's help (Dudziak 2022, pp. 128–29).

Among the seven sacraments that the Catholic Church celebrates, it is the Eucharist that is exceptionally important on the path of engagement. Experiencing the Eucharist offers a variety of spiritual goods for the betrothed. In the first place, it is love expressed in full communion between spouses. The Eucharist is an unsurpassed model of such love, for it reveals the mysteries of the communion of the God of Love and constitutes a model for spousal love. Moreover, the Eucharist reveals the bond of unity that occurs in marriage through God, who unites them by the grace of the sacrament. Thirdly, experiencing the Eucharist lets the betrothed have a deeper understanding of the covenant that is present in God's relationship with man and should exist between future spouses. Finally, the Eucharist reveals the mystery of the gift. In this sacrament, God offers himself to man while



showing the logic of the gift, which should characterize spouses on their way to becoming a gift to each other (Krajczyński 2009).

Thus, anything that prevents the full participation of the betrothed in the Eucharist should be avoided and removed. Nowadays, a burning issue is the betrothed who live together before they get married or live in free unions, which, for them, makes the graces of the sacramental life unavailable. This applies especially to the sacraments of penance and reconciliation and the Eucharist (CCC/Catechism of the Catholic Church 2003, no. 2390).

Today, there is a growing acquiescence to such practices. The reasons for such a state of affairs are the consumerist lifestyle imposed by mass culture as well as permissiveness in the area of sexual morality. It is also related to the rejection of the Catholic concept of marriage and family (Pokrywka 2012, p. 106).

To prevent such phenomena, it is necessary to show the Catholic vision of marriage and family, as well as offer spiritual guidance, to those who have already chosen this form of relationship. One should also be made aware of the risks related to this form of relationship, especially the difficulties in maintaining a future marriage and the greater risk of divorce and separation (Axinn and Thornton 1992).

The betrothed emphasize the importance of the sacrament of the Eucharist by participating in other forms of Eucharistic devotion, such as the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, eucharistic blessing, and visitation of the Blessed Sacrament. In this respect, the adoration of Jesus present in the Eucharist is exceptional. It is extremely helpful in building community and liberating from egoism. This form of devotion shows the value of abiding by the other person, which is necessary in married life. It can be noted that, in families in which one of their members adores Jesus in the Eucharist for one hour per week, interpersonal relations improve. Moreover, one experiences an atmosphere of security, greater kindness, and peace (Celary 2005, p. 165).

Prayer is essential to implementing the virtue of religiosity in the period of engagement. Prayer is an authentic act of religious man, which is present not only in Christianity, although Christian prayer has its own characteristic features. Prayer, understood as a conversation with God, is a very complex act that is designed to ask for God's assistance, give thanks, or offer praises to the Lord (Ćmiel 2008, p. 271).

A survey conducted among the betrothed showed that 58.2% of the surveyed practiced a prayer of request, 50.9% practiced a prayer of thanksgiving, and a prayer of dialogue was practiced by 31.8% of the surveyed. It is in prayer that the betrothed seek support, seek help in difficulties, and thank God for the gifts they have received from Him. The frequency of prayer of the betrothed varied from 37.1% of the respondents who prayed daily to 17.4% who prayed a few times a week (Głód 2008, pp. 118–20).

For the betrothed, prayer is an important part of experiencing religiosity. Pope Francis points out that prayer is a convincing testimony that shows kindness and love. In both liturgical and private prayer, God comes to dwell among the betrothed and prepare them to receive His grace. The prayer of those preparing for marriage has a practical dimension because the betrothed who engage in prayers grow in love, which, in turn, helps them to prepare for their beautiful wedding celebration in a Christian way, instead of a worldly one. It is through prayer that a unique initiation of the betrothed to receive spiritual gifts and grow in openness to receive God's blessing takes place (Francis 2015).

The prayer the betrothed experience together has exceptional value. It lets them deepen their love, tame temptations, and strengthen their relationship. Prayer experienced together allows them to discover the intimacy of the relationship, for the introduction of the other person into one's most intimate sphere, which is the relationship with God, is evidence of great trust and honesty shared by the betrothed (Timmel and Timmel 1994).

The obligation to pray is related to another act of religiosity, which is a celebration of the Day of the Lord, which is Sunday. Every Catholic is obliged by Church law to celebrate this day in a special way since "Sunday, on which by apostolic tradition the paschal mystery is celebrated, must be observed in the universal Church as the primordial holy day of obligation" (CIC/Code of Canon Law 1998, no. 1246). Moreover, the faithful

are obliged to participate in the Mass. They are to abstain from those works and affairs that hinder the worship to be rendered to God, as well as the use of spiritual and physical rest (CIC/Code of Canon Law 1998, no. 1247).

The celebration of Sunday by the betrothed plays an extremely important role in the preparation for marriage. Apart from the fact that it is their duty as Catholics, attending the Sunday Eucharist allows them to develop and strengthen their faith. Also, it has a formative dimension that allows for a better understanding of the signs and symbols used in the Mass. This knowledge becomes useful during their wedding ceremony since, in the majority of cases, the sacrament of marriage is celebrated during the Eucharist. Understanding the signs and gestures of the liturgy, as well as appropriate postures during the Eucharist, is a part of liturgical formation, which helps to develop the ability to celebrate and is an important factor in creating every community, including the bridal one (Arbaszewski 2010, p. 129).

Celebrating Sunday together has another important dimension for the betrothed, namely that it allows them to spend their free time with each other. Nowadays, it is extremely difficult to find some time for oneself. Leisure time is becoming a mosaic-like space as the boundaries between leisure and work blur. There are new trends in the consumption of leisure time that make spending time together difficult (Mokras-Grabowska 2015, p. 20). The religious experience of Sunday is an opportunity for the betrothed to find time for themselves, build a relationship, and get to know each other in different circumstances of life.

People, when they get engaged, bring their own experience of religiosity into their relationship. On one hand, this is an extraordinary richness that makes better integration and work on building a family community possible. However, the process is sometimes reversed, and the holistic, as well as spiritual, growth of the betrothed becomes impossible. The phenomenon is caused by a lack of realization of the virtue of religiosity in preparation for marriage.

### 5. Lack of Realization of the Virtue of Religiosity in the Period of Engagement

A factor that blocks the integral development of the community of the betrothed, especially on the spiritual level, is a lack of realization of the virtue of religiosity. This phenomenon takes place due to defects that are opposed to religiosity. A traditional moral doctrine speaks of defects that arise from excess and insufficiency in the realization of this virtue. These are: godlessness understood as an attitude without God close to atheism, superstitions, and other attitudes that oppose religiosity, such as atheism, blasphemy, faithlessness, and cursing (Wichrowicz 1996, p. 143).

When it comes to the life of the betrothed, the first of the defects on the level of religiosity that hinders the proper experience of engagement is godlessness. It is manifested in the rejection of God in spite of one's baptism, abandoning God's principles, especially those concerning morality. Janusz Mariański points to the separation of faith from morality. He claims that this attitude is a result of the formation of modern and postmodern societies, in which distancing from institutional religiosity is quite frequent. This in turn entails a departure from morality associated with this type of religiosity (Mariański 2014, pp. 334–37).

It leads to a rejection of moral norms by young people who are about to decide to get married and start a family. According to Urszula Dudziak, the attitudes of young people are influenced by a pluralistic society, which leads to a re-evaluation of values, moving away from the obligation values present in religion and turning to self-development values that assume self-fulfilment. Young people, including the betrothed, give themselves a right to create moral norms at their own discretion, without due reference to the universal principles that stem from religion (Dudziak 2017, p. 234).

Such detachment is a sign of individualistic morality, which is far from properly understood religiosity, in which reference to God is expressed in the realization of specific moral principles given by God. John Paul II explains that “the religious impulse is the highest expression of the human person, because it is the highpoint of his rational nature.

It springs from the profound human aspiration for the truth and is the basis of the human being's free and personal search for the divine" (John Paul 1983).

Another expression of a defect in the betrothed's understanding of religiosity is disordered worship of the true God. This attitude covers distortions of true worship manifested in liturgical actions filled with worldly acts that have nothing to do with the official liturgy of the Church. Such an attitude stems either from an erroneous attitude of faith or from misinterpreting sacramental signs, symbols, or attitudes (Ćmiel 2008, p. 351).

According to Dariusz Kwiatkowski, it is caused by a lack of faith, religious ignorance, and the commercialization of life, which affect the experience of the liturgy of the sacrament of marriage, which is sometimes contaminated by non-Christian components. Moreover, it leads to a reduction of the sacrament solely to a ceremonial form, in which the most important items are a place of wedding, inappropriate decorations, non-religious songs and chants, and the presence of cameras and media that reduce the religious event to a secular event created on the basis of the sacrament (Kwiatkowski 2020, p. 36).

Departure from true religiosity manifests itself through the cultivation of various superstitions concerning the time of engagement by the betrothed. The list of such superstitions is quite long and depends on latitude, culture, and customs. In Poland, for example, there are superstitions that concern a wedding dress and a veil. According to the first superstition, a bridegroom should not see his bride wearing her wedding dress before a wedding ceremony. The bride should not do this since it is supposed to bring disagreement to her relationship. Another superstition has it that if a wedding dress gets torn while being put on, it should not be sewn together, but can only be fastened with safety pins, for this is the way to avoid unhappiness and tears in marriage. There are also superstitions concerning a bride's veil. One of them has it that a bride should not turn around on her way to the altar to check whether the veil is fitting well, for if she does, it means that she is dwelling on the past and her married life will be a disappointment (Wiacek et al. 2015).

Superstitions assume that mere contact with certain items may bring happiness or misfortune to someone. These items can be either of daily use or specially prepared for this purpose. Sometimes, specific events can be carriers of luck or misfortune. Not only are such practices offensive to mature religiosity, but they are also a sign of disbelief in God's providence (Ćmiel 2008, p. 355).

## 6. Materials and Results

Surveys on religiosity among the betrothed were conducted within three months, from June to August 2023. A questionnaire of 19 questions in Polish was used for the study. They have been published online on social media and were designed for users preparing for the sacrament of marriage. The survey was anonymous. Logging in was not required, and participants were not asked for their personal data.

There were 40 individuals who took part in the survey, including 75% women and 25% men. A total of 55% of them were rural residents; 20% lived in a city of less than 20,000 residents; and 25% were residents of a large city. The vast majority of the respondents were Roman Catholics (97.5%); the remaining 2.5% declared another religion; and none of the respondents declared affiliation with any Protestant denominations. As far as age was concerned, the respondents were diverse. The oldest respondent was 56 years old, while the youngest ones were 20. In the majority of cases, the respondents were under 30 (77.5%).

Among the surveyed betrothed, 65% declared that they were believers, 20% declared they were firm believers, 10% were uncertain in terms of faith but attached to religious tradition, and 5% were indifferent to faith. However, the way the betrothed perceive one another differed. A total of 25% of them perceived the other person as a firm believer; 45% saw his or her partner as a believer; 22.5% of the respondents saw their partner as religiously undecided but attached to religious tradition; and 7.5% perceived their partner as indifferent to religious issues. Thus, one can conclude that people who define themselves as believers are not perceived as such by their partners. It appears that the signs of faith are not clear enough to point to a relationship with God or the fact of practicing religiosity.



It may also mean that respondents assessed their faith on the basis of their conscience. This knowledge made them think they could not consider themselves firm believers, e.g., due to their sins. A total of 60% of the respondents declared themselves believers, while only 20% declared themselves firm believers. At the same time, 40% of those surveyed in the past year prayed daily, and 55% attended Mass every Sunday and Catholic holiday, which may indicate strong faith.

Moreover, it appears that a declaration of faith does not correlate with practicing it, especially with daily prayer. When asked about the frequency of prayer over the past year, only 40% of those surveyed declared daily prayer, while another 40% prayed from time to time. A total of 15% of those surveyed prayed very rarely, and 5% prayed in times of difficulty.

The practice of prayer, which is a clear sign of religiosity, was neglected by 60% of the betrothed, which may impact on neglecting other religious practices, especially participation in the Sunday Eucharist. Over the past year, only 55% of the betrothed attended the Eucharist every Sunday and holiday of obligation, while 30% of those surveyed attended the Eucharist “almost” every Sunday. A total of 2.5% of the respondents attended the Eucharist only on the occasion of a wedding or funeral, whereas 5% did not attend the Eucharist at all, and 7.5% attended Mass only on “major” holidays, i.e., Easter and Christmas.

From the point of view of the statistics, the mutual impact of the betrothed on religiosity is worth noting. For 67.5% of the respondents, religiosity had not changed over their time of engagement. For 15% of those surveyed, engagement had had a positive impact on religious observances, because they would participate in religious celebrations more often. However, it is worrying that, for 17.5% of the respondents, the period of engagement had a negative impact on religiosity because they participated in religious celebrations less frequently.

The reason may be that only 29.3% of the respondents encouraged their partners to participate in religious celebrations. Of those surveyed, 4.9% encouraged their partners to skip religious celebrations, especially the Sunday Eucharist. The majority of the respondents, which was 65.9%, had never discouraged their partners from practicing their religion.

When asked about the impact of religiosity on moral choices, 75% of the surveyed respondents declared that they experienced their engagement in accordance with the teachings of the Church. A total of 20% of the respondents did not pay attention to the moral principles of the Catholic Church, or they were indifferent to them, while 5% of the respondents did not follow the principles of the Church and had no intentions to do so. These results are related to the willingness to baptize the children of the betrothed. Almost all respondents (92.7%) declared their willingness to baptize their children. The remaining ones chose the “I suppose” answer (4.9%), and only 2.4% of the respondents would have liked their children to decide whether they wish to be baptized when they grow up.

The respondents’ declaration that 75% of them followed the moral teachings of the Catholic Church may be surprising. It is quite inconsistent when we juxtapose this declaration with the betrothed’s choice to live together before marriage. Only 36.6% of the respondents declared firmly that they did not live together, while 31.7% lived together occasionally, and 31.7% of the respondents had lived together for several months and even several years.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the respondents treated Catholic morality selectively; that is, they chose particular moral principles and declared that they accepted them, thinking that they followed the teachings of the Church in its entirety. It well might be that the betrothed did not know the teachings of the Church well and were convinced that cohabitation was a problem for Catholic morality.

The difficulties of contemporary times should be taken into account while analysing the way the betrothed experience religiosity. Fundamental reasons include the situation within the Church (19.5%), political involvement of the Church (17.1%), attitudes of priests in the parish (9.8%), compulsion to religious observances (2.4%), and a bride

or a bridegroom-to-be (2.4%). A total of 48.8% of the respondents declared that nothing hindered their experience of religiosity.

## 7. Conclusions

The virtue of religiosity, which is expressed through the realization of concrete attitudes and actions rooted in a reference to God, becomes quite vital. In Catholicism, religiosity is a virtue, that is, a constant inclination to do good. It is an attitude that changes just as individuals change. It can be neglected or developed. The time of engagement should be a period for developing this virtue and deepening the relationship with God and one another.

Developed religiosity has a positive impact on the betrothed. Owing to this virtue, comprehensive and complementary development on a personal and community level is possible. As far as a personal level is concerned, religiosity carries out stabilizing functions for both religious and personal relations. In the community dimension, virtue has an impact on proper integration between the betrothed and other members of the family community.

Among the essential acts of the virtue of religiosity performed by the betrothed is worship of God expressed in reception of the sacraments, attendance at the Eucharist, prayer, and celebration of Sunday as the day of the Lord. Appropriate experience of these practices helps in the development of faith and relationships with God. It forms a conscience and helps build a family community.

The religiosity of the betrothed faces certain defects, too. The most common ones are: godlessness, disorganized worship of the true God, superstitions that affect the experience of engagement and future marriage, and weakened faith, leading to individualistic morality.

This research shows that the period of engagement calls for supporting the betrothed not only in their preparation for marriage in legal or organizational aspects, but also in the area of their religious knowledge and relationship with God. Apart from marriage preparation courses, the evangelization of the young becomes indispensable. Moreover, it is necessary to offer the betrothed pastoral measures that contribute to deepened catechesis and religiosity.

**Funding:** The research (publication) was funded by the University of Silesia in Katowice.

**Institutional Review Board Statement:** Not applicable.

**Informed Consent Statement:** Not applicable.

**Data Availability Statement:** The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author.

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

## References

- Aquinas, Thomas. 1971. *Suma Teologiczna*. Religijność. Londyn: Veritas, vol. 19.
- Arbaszewski, Piotr. 2010. Religious upbringing in the process of preparation for the sacrament of matrimony. *Roczniki Teologii Katolickiej* IX: 115–37. [CrossRef]
- Axinn, William, and Arland Thornton. 1992. The Relationship between Cohabitation and Divorce: Selectivity or Casual Influence? *Demography* 29: 357–74. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
- Bukalski, Sławomir. 2016. Religijność jako kryterium jakości narzeczeństwa i małżeństwa. *Studia Koszalińsko-Kołobrzeskie* 23: 257–59. [CrossRef]
- CCC/Catechism of the Catholic Church. 2003. Available online: [https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/\\_INDEX.HTM](https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM) (accessed on 5 July 2023).
- Celary, Ireneusz. 2005. Znaczenie Eucharystii dla formacji życia rodzinnego. *Teologia Praktyczna* 6: 157–68. [CrossRef]
- CIC/Code of Canon Law. 1998. *Latin-English Edition*. Washington, DC: Canon Law Society of America.
- Ćmiel, Henryk. 2008. *Teologia Moralna Szczegółowa*. Częstochowa: Paulinianum.
- Dudziak, Urszula. 2017. Moralne zdrowie rodziny. *Fides et Ratio* 4: 233–44.
- Dudziak, Urszula. 2022. Religiousness of spouses as a factor contributing to shaping a successful marriage. *Teologia i Moralność* 17: 119–44. [CrossRef]
- Francis. 2015. General Audience: Engagement. May 27. Available online: [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2015/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150527\\_udienza-generale.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2015/documents/papa-francesco_20150527_udienza-generale.html) (accessed on 1 August 2023).

- Francis. 2016. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*. Available online: [https://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20160319\\_amoris-laetitia\\_en.pdf](https://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia_en.pdf) (accessed on 14 July 2023).
- Francis. 2019. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christus Vivit*. Available online: [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20190325\\_christus-vivit.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20190325_christus-vivit.html) (accessed on 27 July 2023).
- Głód, Franciszek. 2008. Życie religijne narzeczonych po bezpośrednim przygotowaniu do małżeństwa. *Wrocławski Przegląd Teologiczny* 16: 105–30.
- Grzybowski, Jerzy. 2006. Nas dwoje. In *Przed Nami Małżeństwo*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo „M”.
- Krajczyński, Jan. 2009. Eucharystia a przygotowanie wiernych do życia w małżeństwie. *Ius Matrimoniale* 14: 7–37. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
- Kraśiński, Józef. 2002. *Homo Religiosus*. Sandomierz: Wydawnictwo Diecezjalne.
- Kwiątkowski, Dariusz. 2020. Sacrum i profanum w liturgii sakramentu małżeństwa w Kościele polskim. *Studia Gdańskie* 47: 25–37. [CrossRef]
- Makselon, Józef. 1995. Człowiek jako istota religijna. In *Psychologia Dla Teologów*. Edited by Józef Makselon. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PAT, pp. 255–82.
- Mariański, Janusz. 2014. *Kontrowersje wokół relacji religii i moralności. Tożsamość czy rozbieżność? Studium socjologiczne*. Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek.
- Mokras-Grabowska, Justyna. 2015. Czas wolny w dobie postmodernizmu. *Folia Turistica* 34: 11–30.
- Paul, John, II. 1981. *Apostolic Exhortation Familiaris Consortio*. London: Catholic Truth Society.
- Paul, John, II. 1983. Audycja generalna 19 października. *L'Osservatore Romano Wydanie Polskie* 10: 23–24.
- Pokrywka, Monika. 2012. Małżeństwo i kohabitacja jako alternatywne wzory życia rodzinnego wśród młodzieży maturalnej. *Innowacje Psychologiczne* 1: 103–15.
- Polish Episcopal Conference. 1998. Instrukcja Episkopatu Polski o przygotowaniu do zawarcia małżeństwa w Kościele Katolickim. *Akta Konferencji Episkopatu Polski* 1: 83–137.
- Pyżlak, Grzegorz. 2013. Przygotowanie do życia małżeńskiego i rodzinnego. In *Duszpasterstwo rodzin. Refleksja naukowa i działalność pastoralna*. Edited by Ryszard Kamiński, Grzegorz Pyżlak and Jacek Goleń. Lublin: Bonus Liber, pp. 341–71.
- Pyżlak, Grzegorz. 2022. Czystość w narzeczeństwie i życiu małżeńskim. *Teologia i Człowiek* 59: 97–114. [CrossRef]
- Quilici, Alaine. 2009. *Narzeczёнstwo*. Warszawa: Promic.
- Quilici, Alaine, and Denis La Balme. 2003. *Pourquoi se marier quand on vit ensemble?* Paris: Edifa-Mame.
- Roszak, Piotr, and Tomasz Gutowski. 2021. Pobożność jako cnota relacyjna. *Studia Gdańskie* 48: 93–103. [CrossRef]
- Second Vatican Council. 1965a. Declaration on Religious Freedom *Dignitatis Humanae*. Available online: [https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decl\\_19651207\\_dignitatis-humanae\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651207_dignitatis-humanae_en.html) (accessed on 3 August 2023).
- Second Vatican Council. 1965b. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*. Available online: [https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html) (accessed on 3 August 2023).
- Timmel, Philippe, and Catherine Timmel. 1994. *Pourquoi nous Fiancer?* Paris: Éditions des Béatitudes.
- Tykarski, Sławomir. 2019. La evolución del matrimonio moderno: De la comunidad a la individualización: Una reflexión teológica. *Cauriensia* 14: 581–92. [CrossRef]
- Ukleja, Agnieszka Anna. 2018. An Engagement Ritual: A Pastoral Proposal for the Emerging Phenomenon of Cohabitation in Poland Marriage. *Families & Spirituality* 24: 87–105. [CrossRef]
- West, Christopher. 2018. *Good News about Sex and Marriage*. Cincinnati: Servant.
- Wiacek, Elżbieta, Dziadowiec Joanna, and Kmita Celina. 2015. Małopolskie wesela: Konsumpcja znaków. In *Semiotyczna Mapa Małopolski*. Edited by Elżbieta Wiacek. Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka, pp. 355–410.
- Wichrowicz, Cyprian Jan. 1996. Cnota religijności w Katechizmie Kościoła Katolickiego. *Studia Theologica Varsaviensia* 34: 135–49.
- Wichrowicz, Cyprian Jan. 2002. *Zarys teologii moralnej w ujęciu tomistycznym*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo “M”.

**Disclaimer/Publisher’s Note:** The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.