

Article

Religious and Moral Attitudes of Catholics from Generation Z

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Abstract: This paper discusses findings of studies concerning religious attitudes of Polish Catholics belonging to the so-called Generation Z, i.e., people born during the digital revolution. The authors present religious attitudes of Generation Z representatives against the background of other European states relating to religious practices and opinions concerning the acceptability of abortion, euthanasia, divorce, contraceptives and other conduct not consistent with the Catholic Church teachings. The findings prove that even though the Polish society, including those of Generation Z, is distinguishable from European countries with its high percentage of people engaging in religious practices, the observed trends and the dominance of attitudes contrary to the teachings of the Catholic Church indicate the possibility of maintaining a downward trend in the number of Catholics in Poland.

Keywords: religious attitudes; Catholicism; Generation Z; Poland

1. Introduction

The generation gap caused by different factors affecting contemporary societies at different stages of history can be seen in many aspects of social life. People born in a specific period face the same global or regional problems, which impact their way of thinking and functioning. However, their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren have their own experiences that may shape their value systems or ways of thinking. Important factors for contemporary generations may be the globalization processes, Digital Revolution or COVID-19. However, an experience may have different impacts on the representatives of generations brought up after World War II, their children and grandchildren and people born during the Digital Revolution. The latter is the generation that the authors of this paper are interested in. The problem of values shared by the representatives of the youngest generations has already been discussed in numerous publications, but it seems crucial to narrow this group down to Catholics who are obliged to follow specific principles and values.

The research perspective relating to the assessment of religious practices of the youngest generation of adult Poles adopted in this paper covers the group termed Generation Z in reference works (e.g., [Lissitsa et al. 2022](#); [Szromek et al. 2019](#)). Usually, eight generation groups are listed, which are communities of people born in a specific period sharing the same specific social and cultural conditions and, consequently, a similar perception of reality. This division also means that there are specific differences between generations or at least the properties characterizing members of a generation. Reference works mention three prewar generations, i.e., the Lost Generation (1883–1900), Greatest Generation (1901–1927), and Silent Generation (1928–1945) ([Arsenault 2004](#); [Dolot 2018](#)) and five post-war ones. The latter include Baby Boomers (1945–1964), Generation X (1965–1980) and Millennials, termed Generation Y, as well (1981–1994). The youngest generation, composed mostly of young adults, is Generation Z, born in 1995–2010. Some authors mention the generation born after 2010 (Generation Alpha), although its representatives are underage now.



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In this article, the religious observance of Catholic Gen Z members seems interesting. An important aspect describing this generation is the fact that its members were born during the Digital Revolution and advanced globalization processes. Hence, this is a generation strongly attached to communication tools developed using a digital approach, including but not limited to using social media, that are considered more important than face-to-face interactions (Szromek et al. 2019). There are also perceptible differences relating to their approach to careers and social life. An interesting research problem and the objective of this paper is to identify features and behaviours related to the religious beliefs of the representatives of this generation, which is mostly composed of adults who face the longest perspective of life. Because of the predominance of Roman Catholics in Poland, the studies were limited to Catholic university students.

2. Review of Selected Studies and Reports

The religious structure of the contemporary world proves that Christians are predominant. Although their number has increased three times during the last one hundred years, the dynamics of the religion's structural changes are the same as they were one century ago, meaning that every third human on Earth is a Christian (Liu 2011). This results from a simultaneous three-fold growth in the number of people on Earth. However, significant changes in the religious structures on specific continents can be seen, including but not limited to Europe. In 1910, 66.3% of Europeans were Christians, while one hundred years later, in 2010, the number fell to just 25.9%. The largest of all Christian denominations is the Catholic Church, to which 51.1% of all Christians belong (Liu 2011).

Religious attitudes of the youngest adult Catholics seem to deviate from those of the older generations. This can be seen in numerous reports concerning the Catholic Church. According to Statistics Poland (Statistics Poland 2022), in 2021, 92.2% of the population of Poland was Roman Catholic Christians, but this percentage was adjusted based on the National Census of 2021 (Statistics Poland 2021). According to that census, 89.8% of people who responded to the question concerning religion declared they were Roman Catholics, which is 71.3% of the whole population of Poland. This makes it the predominant religion. The Catholic Church in Poland has 10,263 Catholic parishes and 29,638 priests (data as of 2021 (Statistics Poland 2021)). The changes in the percentage of people above 16 years of age points to a decreased percentage of Catholic Church members in the population of Poles: in 2000: 95.7%; in 2005: 95.6%; in 2010: 95.9%; in 2015: 94.3%; and in 2020: 92.6%. In 2018, the structure of the religious attitudes of Poles aged 16–24 comprised 4.8% firm believers, 70.2% believers, 12.5% undecided, 7.3% indifferent and 5.2% non-believers (Statistics Poland 2018). However, the subsequent five years brought about significant changes relating to the religious beliefs and involvement of young people, which is confirmed by the growing number of apostasies and the reduced numbers of secondary-school students declaring the willingness to attend religion classes that are discussed in public. Those phenomena seem to corroborate the thesis concerning the religious belief crisis of the young generation of Poles even though Polish society did not conform to the European secularization tendencies in late 20th century (PORC 2021a). This suggests that Polish society may undergo that process in a different way than France or Ireland.

It is worth reflecting, however, on what religious crisis is encountered by contemporary young people most often. Reference works mention numerous classifications of religious crises. Laskowska (2009) enumerates 10 types of religious crises, which makes it easier to understand the person undergoing the crisis. However, Stochmialek (2021) quoted another crisis classification suggested by J. Makselon, which fulfils the needs of the analyses better, suggesting their causes at the same time. He listed the following four types of religious crises, including:

- Type A crisis is intense and increases fast, as it pertains primarily to young people. This is usually a short-term state with reduced frequency of religious practices that stems from the processes of secularization and loss of faith in love and human honesty.

- Type B crisis is also characterized by reduced frequency of religious practices but is slow. Its symptoms include difficulties praying and participating in Sunday Mass, which is perceived as a manifestation of empty traditions. It results from deteriorated morality or traumatic experiences.
- Type C crisis is connected with reduced intensity of participating in religious practices and a weakened emotional relationship with God. This type of crisis is caused by traumatic life circumstances, the influence of a secularized environment and neglecting religious practices.
- Type D crisis comprises all the major components of a religious crisis, including doubts, reduced frequency of religious practices, a deteriorated relationship with God and an adverse attitude to the Church as an institution. This usually stems from the fascination with life and a new environment.

Reference works discuss the problems of young people's religious beliefs covering an extremely broad range. In 2020, [Zaręba and Choczyński \(2020\)](#) carried out similar studies among Polish students. Their studies revealed that one half of students (51.7%) participated in religious practices, although not always on a regular basis. Only every third respondent did so on a regular basis (30.1%). Two out of three respondents considered themselves a believing Christian.

Similar studies were carried out by [Sobotka \(2016\)](#) in 2016 on a small and non-representative sample of Pedagogy students. Her findings confirm that the percentage of students attending a Mass at least once a week is 34.1%, while every fifth of them (20%) does it once a month.

[Kopaniecka and Karakiewicz \(2022\)](#) in their studies identified the relationship between the religious attitude intensity and the personality and education of Christians in Poland. On the other hand, [Hutchinson et al. \(1998\)](#) surveyed 249 students of various religious backgrounds and demonstrated that the internal religiousness is a prognostic factor of the Catholics' proneness to obsessive-compulsive behaviours. Interestingly, this is not the case for non-religious persons and Protestants.

[Jonason et al. \(2022\)](#) surveyed 255 people in Poland in 2020. Their studies referred to the response to restrictions concerning abortion. They proved that the prohibition is advocated by religious believers (primarily Catholics) and those following moral values.

The fact that this is an incredibly important problem is demonstrated by the studies by [Hornung et al. \(2023\)](#), as well. Based on the studies of Muslims, they noticed that religious life is made easier by shaping social capital and social identity, which, in turn, fosters learning outcomes. In turn, [Kirchmaier et al. \(2018\)](#), using the data from the LISS panel (Longitudinal Internet studies for the Social Sciences) managed by CentERdata, comprising ca. 7000 people, studied the relationship between religion and behaviours and moral attitudes. They demonstrated that religious people are less prone to accept unethical business conduct and help others more often. Moreover, the decrease in the number of church members has a significant impact on the social fabric of the society. Religious people display different social behaviours than non-religious ones, as they rely on the state to a lesser degree when implementing social goals.

3. Materials and Methods

The concept of research resulting from the needs indicated in the literature review indicates the need to observe the religious practices and moral principles of the youngest adult Poles. It seems particularly justified to formulate research hypotheses that seem to be in a mutual relationship.

First, an important research issue is to identify the structure and frequency of religious practices undertaken by representatives of Generation Z, especially participation in the sacraments. In terms of research assumptions, this aspect was limited to the frequency of participation in religious services. Additionally, it seems interesting to determine whether the level of religious practice measured by the percentage of people regularly participating

in religious services in accordance with the teachings of the Catholic Church differs from that observed in European societies in general.

The second issue is the structure of the declared moral principles regarding the admissibility of abortion, euthanasia, divorce, sexual intercourse before marriage and in vitro fertilization. Similarly, in this case, no partial hypotheses were formulated, but the issue was defined collectively, pointing to the moral values for which the teachings of the Catholic Church are defined by the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC). The third aspect concerns the mutual relationship of the two above phenomena to the declarative assessment of the depth of faith. Therefore, by analysing the previously cited reports and literature, the following hypotheses can be formulated (Figure 1):

H1: *A minority of Generation Z members declaring affiliation with the Catholic Church participate in religious services in a manner consistent with the teachings of the Catholic Church.*

H2: *A minority of Generation Z members belonging to the Catholic Church profess moral values related to the admissibility of abortion, euthanasia, divorce, sexual intercourse before marriage and in vitro fertilization in a manner consistent with the teachings of the Catholic Church.*

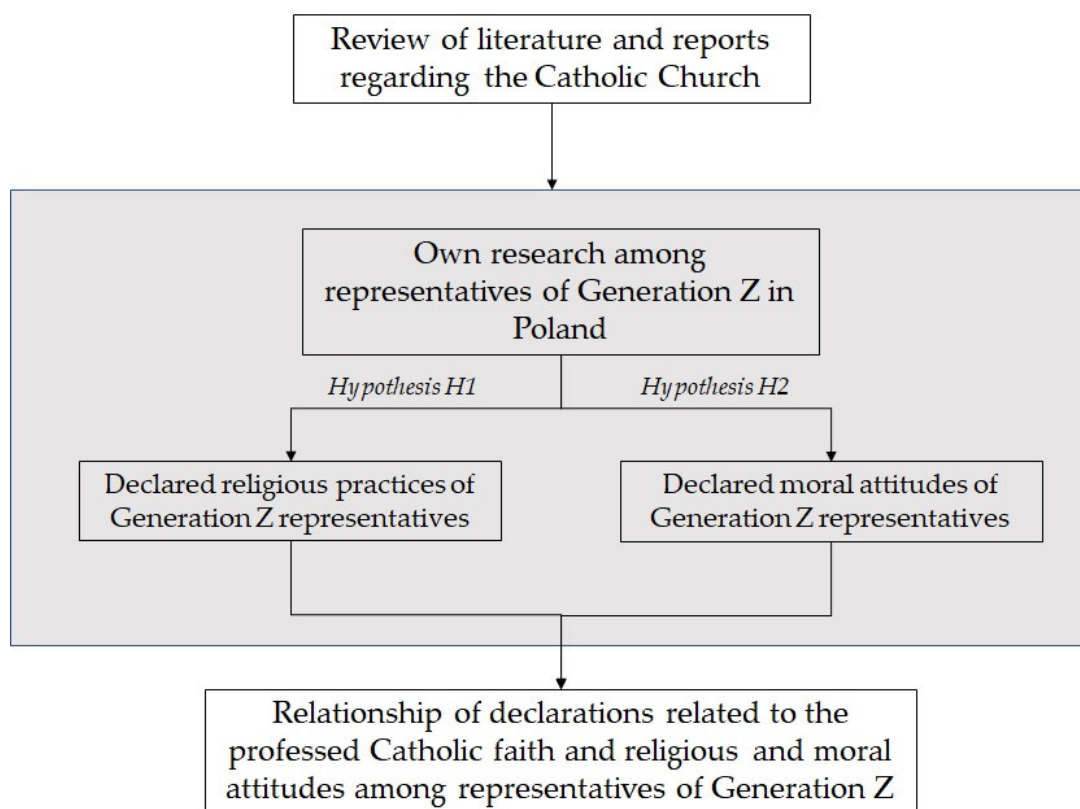


Figure 1. The concept of the research process.

Although this issue is interesting, it is also very difficult to research because the construct resulting from the assessment of the level of faith is difficult to measure. Therefore, the research was limited to the direct opinions of the respondents, who are students at Polish universities. The research is therefore a diagnostic survey in which answers to basic issues are formulated using the structure of answers to questions asked in an anonymous survey. The studies carried out by the authors in 2021 at over a dozen Polish universities consisted of a diagnostic survey of 1134 students using CAWI (Computer Assisted Web Interviewing). The snowball method was used here to reach the respondents through their lecturers and social media. The survey comprised respondents belonging to many generations and religions, which is why the database was restricted to Gen Z Catholics for this

paper. Consequently, a database comprising responses of 732 Gen Z Catholics was obtained. The respondents were asked to fill in an anonymous online survey composed of 35 questions divided into 3 sections. The first part of the survey comprised questions diagnosing the respondents' attitudes to the key problems of their religious beliefs. In the second part, questions concerning religious practices were asked, and in the third part, the respondents answered questions concerning their demographic and social profiles. Because of the extensiveness of the study, this paper will discuss solely the aspects related to the topic. The other aspects will be discussed by the authors in subsequent publications.

Referring to ethical issues, it should be emphasized that the research questionnaire did not discuss sensitive issues, and the respondents answered only in a subjective way, independently assessing their faith. In all cases, these were adults that voluntarily agreed to participate in the research.

4. Results

According to the results of the surveys, it was determined that the selected sample was composed of 71.4% women and 28.6% men. Most respondents were unmarried (79.1%), and 1.6% were married. In this group, close to every fifth person (19.2%) declared being in an informal relationship. The place of origin structure was balanced, with 31% of respondents living in the village, 25.6% in a medium-sized town (20–100 thousand inhabitants), 31.1% in a large city (more than 100 thousand inhabitants) and 12.3% in small towns (up to 10 thousand inhabitants). The respondents were mostly students at the following universities: University of Economics in Katowice, University of Silesia, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw, Silesian University of Technology, Medical University of Silesia, Academy of Physical Education in Katowice and University of Szczecin. A total of 86.2% of respondents came from those universities, whereas the remaining 14.2% of respondents studied at other universities, with the share not exceeding 1% in the study.

The respondents assessed their belief in God using a 7-point verbal scale reduced to a 3-point one, combining some evaluative statements selected by respondents. In this way, it is known that 60.7% of the people in the studied group declared that they are religious believers (including 7.9% who are firm believers). Almost every third one identified themselves as a doubter, looking for faith and undecided (30.2%). Close to one tenth of respondents (9.1%) identified themselves as nonbelievers or indifferent.

However, the respondents were also asked about the direction of changes taking place in their religiousness. The majority of respondents (55.3%) declared that they are becoming less and less religious over time. Their number is close to four times higher than those declaring the growth of their beliefs (14.6%) when compared to the past. The others (30.2%) did not observe any change.

The respondents pointed to tradition and upbringing (36.7%) and their personal beliefs and experiences (32.6%) as the key sources of religious beliefs. The family example was selected by every fifth person (21.6%), whereas 3.4% of respondents indicated the religious community as the source of their religious beliefs (3.4%) and 5.7% mentioned other aspects. The respondents were also asked to evaluate their religiousness when compared to their parents' attitudes. Then, 23.7% and 17.7% of respondents believed that their religiousness was higher than that of their father and their mother, respectively, whereas 31.1% and 42.4% claimed that their religiousness is lower than that of their father and mother, respectively. According to 29.7% of respondents, their religiousness was the same as the that of their father, whereas 30.8% indicated that it is the same as that of their mother.

The distribution of individual religious practice frequency (prayer) was even, with a predominance of everyday prayer (28.5%), where 15.3% of respondents practice it several times a week, 14.3% of respondents pray at least once a week, and 9.5% at least once a month. Every fifth respondent (19.5%) declared that they prayed several times a year, whereas 12.8% of respondents do not pray at all.

Of the Catholic respondents, 91.7% declared Mass attendance, although the frequency differed. Most of them (36.7%) attended Mass every Sunday and holiday, 6.0% of respon-

dents attended more often than once a week, which results in 42.7% of the Gen Z Catholic respondents altogether. 12.8% of respondents declared that they attend Mass once a month, whereas 36.2% of respondents do so solely during holidays or on family occasions.

Holy Communion received at least once a month is declared by 28.5% of respondents, with most of them (15%) participating every Sunday. Every fourth (23.7%) respondent declared receiving the Holy Communion several times a year, and 16.4% of respondents participate solely during holidays. Of the Catholic respondents, 11.9% receive the Communion every few years, whereas every fifth surveyed Catholic (19.5%) does not receive it at all.

Attending confession at least once a year is declared by 55.1% of respondents, with 35.7% of them participating several times a year, whereas 9.3% participate every month. Close to one tenth (9.1%) of respondents attend confession once every few years.

Of the respondents, 62.3% declared that they do not read the Bible, whereas every fourth (24.3%) reads it several times a year. The others read the Bible at least once a month (13.4%).

The respondents provided responses concerning their attitudes relating to the acceptability of specific behaviours. This was connected with sexual relations before marriage, acceptability of divorce, using contraceptives, abortion and in vitro fertilization as well as euthanasia of terminally ill patients. The results of the survey using a four-point verbal scale are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of acceptability scores for specific behaviours.

Behaviour Acceptability Score	Non-Acceptable	Depending on the Circumstances	Acceptable	Hard to Say
Sexual relations before marriage	8.6%	13.1%	68.5%	9.8%
Divorce	10.6%	39.4%	44.9%	5.2%
Using contraceptives	5.5%	12.4%	77.4%	4.8%
Abortion	25.6%	42.9%	25.5%	5.9%
In vitro fertilization	13.3%	21.6%	55.0%	10.1%
Euthanasia of the ill	27.1%	35.0%	25.6%	12.1%

5. Discussion

The changes observable in Polish society seem to be similar to the ones taking place in previous generations, as well, although the intensity may be different. The trends discussed earlier relating to the decrease in the percentage of people who declared themselves as Catholics (in all age groups altogether) indicated a moderate falling tendency from 95.7% to 92.6% in 20 years (2000–2020). In the averaged long-term trend, this is a mean decrease of 0.31% a year. However, in 2021, it became much more extensive, decreasing by 0.4% in a year, reaching 92.2%. Based on long-term summaries of reports by the Public Opinion Research Center (PORC) ((PORC) 2022), it may be expected to be even lower in subsequent years following the COVID-19 pandemic.

The presented study results enable one to observe changing attitudes of young Gen Z Catholics when compared to other studies. They confirm as well that adverse religion-related changes are taking place in the youngest generation. The studies carried out by PORC in 2021 (2022) concerning the group of people born in 1997–2001 also confirm that 71% of them declared that they believed in God, although regular religious practices were undertaken by 23%. According to our studies, the percentage of respondents engaging in regular religious practices is higher among Gen Z Catholics. Of the respondents, 42.7% declared Mass attendance in accordance with the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC 1993) (2180–2182), i.e., at least once a week (at Sunday Mass). However, considering all the surveyed students (including those from other generations and declaring other religious beliefs), the percentage is 30.5%. This finding is corroborated by the PORC survey (CCC 1993) of 2022, where the percentage was 32% in all age groups jointly. This means that young Poles do not significantly deviate in this respect from all the citizens of Poland.

It seems interesting that just 60.7% of Gen Z Catholics consider themselves believers. Their distanced approach to participation in sacraments and religious practices is also easily observed. Although they are obliged to attend Holy Communion at least once a year (CCC 1993, 1382–1389), this religious practice is declared by 68.6% of them. The percentage of people attending confession at least once a year is even lower (55.1%), although Catholics are obliged to participate by the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC 1993, 1422–1470) and the Code of Canon Law (CCL 1983) (§2, 989).

Considering the obtained results, a positive aspect of the religious life of Gen Z representatives is the fact that most of them participate in sacraments and engage in various religious practices. Just 9.1% of the surveyed Catholics consider themselves nonbelievers or indifferent, and 8.3% do not attend any Mass at all. Additionally, 12.8% do not pray and 19.5% do not attend Holy Communion.

It should be claimed, however, that most people declaring participation in the sacraments and engaging in religious practices do so without following the guidelines of the Church. With respect to the frequency of sacraments received by the surveyed Gen Z Catholics, it may be claimed that they usually participate in or receive the sacraments more rarely than they are obliged to by their religion (CCC 1993). This refers both to Mass attendance and the sacrament of penance, as well as to the Holy Communion. Individual religious practices, e.g., prayer or reading the Bible, are usually rare, although these are also what Catholics are obliged to perform by the CCC (101–135) (CCC 1993).

According to the report called *Polska—Europa* presenting the results of the European Social Survey for 2002–2019 (Sztaniński et al. 2020), the Polish religiousness is significant, or even distinguishable, when compared to other European states. Stachowska (2019) quotes the comparison of selected European states' religiousness using the percentage of people aged 15–24 who declared participating in religious practices once a week or more often in the European states' populations in 2002 and 2016. For Poland, in 2002 this coefficient was 56.6%, whereas in 2016, it was 45.1%, which is confirmation of a downward trend. In the study by this paper's authors, it was 42.7%. However, for all the other states, this percentage was much lower than in Poland. In Italy, it was 27% (in 2002) and 13.3% (in 2016), and in Portugal, 15.6% and 14%; in such states as Spain, France, Belgium and Austria, it was below 10%. Against this background, the Polish religiousness, even that of Gen Z, looks really good, although the decreasing number of believers is a clear sign of a slow crisis, most probably of type D. There is a clearly noticeable downward trend in receiving the sacraments. It occurs at the same time as a growing trend of loud media declarations of apostasy, especially by artists and celebrities who have a strong influence on young people. It is therefore a form of crisis, comprising all the major components of a religious crisis (doubts, reduced frequency of religious practices, a deteriorated relationship with God and an adverse attitude toward the Church). In the case of believers from Poland and other European countries, this may be due to the rising standard of living. In societies characterized by prosperity, social bonds weaken, and individualistic orientations and consumer attitudes become more important. Religious practices take the form of consuming the service provided in churches (Orzeszyna 2013). Another reason may be the influence of various social ideologies, which more easily penetrate societies with satisfied basic needs.

At the same time, it seems that the slow downward trend relating to religious practices has an adverse influence on the moral attitudes of Catholics, although this interdependence is likely to be bilateral. Even though, according to the Catholic Church teachings, sexual relations before marriage are a sin (CCC 1993, 2350), the opinions displayed by most surveyed Catholics in this respect differed from the Church teachings. According to Table 1, as much as 68.5% of Gen Z Catholics accept sexual relations before marriage, and another 13.1% of them make them conditional on specific circumstances. Just 8.6% of respondents do not accept any sexual relations before marriage.

It is similar for the acceptance of divorce (in the sense of civil law), which is not possible in the Catholic Church because marriage is an indissoluble sacrament (CCC 1993, 2382). Every tenth respondent does not accept any possibility of divorce, but 84.3% of respondents

declare unconditional or conditional acceptance of divorce. The percentage of people declaring unconditional acceptability of divorce is lower (44.9%) than in the group of respondents who accept sexual relations before marriage unconditionally (68.5%). Even more respondents accept contraceptives (89.8%), with as much as 77.4% of them accepting their unconditional use, although their acceptability is also stipulated in the CCC (CCC 1993, 2366–2371). The conditional acceptability of such a protection is declared solely by 12.4%, and just 5.5% of respondents believe that this is not acceptable in any circumstances.

The attitudes are a bit different when it comes to abortion, which is considered to be a grave evil according to the Catholic Church (CCC 1993, 2258 and 2270–2275). Every fourth respondent does not accept such an option. However, considering the fact that the survey was carried out among Catholics, it is highly surprising that the opponents of abortion are less numerous than those who accept it. Their number is 68.5%. Every fourth respondent (25.5%) admits that they accept abortion unconditionally, and 42.9% make it conditional on the circumstances. The numbers of in vitro fertilization (76.6%), although Catholics must not engage in it according to the CCC (CCC 1993, 2373–2379) and conditional and unconditional euthanasia (60.6%), which is a mortal sin, like abortion, (CCC 1993, 2276–2279) supporters are even higher.

It is highly interesting that the findings do not change much when the group of respondents is restricted to those who undertake religious practices according to the Church teachings. Among those who attend the Holy Mass at least once a week (on Sunday), as the Catholics are obliged to do by the CCC (2180–2182), as much as 64% accept sexual relations before marriage, 74% accept divorce, and 80% contraceptives. In such cases, regular Mass attendance reduces the percentage of supporters of attitudes inconsistent with the Church teachings by 10% on average compared to the total percentage of respondents. It is a bit different for abortion, as 45% of respondents accept unconditional or conditional abortion, and 48% oppose it. The acceptability of in vitro methods is declared by 59% of respondents, with 28% being opposed to them. This group includes 50% euthanasia opponents, but also 39% euthanasia advocates.

In the group of Gen Z Catholics who attend Sunday Mass differently than taught by the Church or do not attend it at all, the findings are significantly higher than those recorded for the preceding group. A total of 94.5% of them accept sexual relations before marriage, 91.9% accept divorce, and 96.7% accept contraceptives. In the group of people who do not attend the Sunday Mass on a regular basis or do not attend it at all, the percentage of supporters of attitudes inconsistent with the Church teachings is 10% higher on average compared to the total percentage of respondents. It is similar for abortion, as 85.7% of respondents accept unconditional or conditional abortion, and just 9% oppose it. The acceptability of in vitro methods is declared by 89.7% of respondents, with 2.6% opposed to them. This group includes 10.2% euthanasia opponents, but also 76.6% euthanasia advocates.

The findings may signify the religious belief crisis of Gen Z representatives, which, although not well visible in the context of religious practices, is related to moral attitudes. Objectivity, to which everyone who undertakes scientific reasoning is obliged, does not allow for the assessment of this phenomenon from the point of view of morality, which is why the authors do not attempt to assess even these declared attitudes. However, their relationship to the teachings of the Catholic Church, to which the respondents declared their affiliation, should be emphasized. One can, of course, discuss whether the declared ‘Catholicism’ of respondents results from being baptized or from consciously accepting the teachings of the church to which they belong, but this issue was not the subject of our research. We limited ourselves only to observing the declared attitudes.

In an attempt at explaining the religious belief crisis of young Catholics, Portal Miszyne.pl (2023) remarks that we could even speak of the breakdown of the intergenerational communication of religious beliefs, which used to be natural in Poland. In older generations, the family was the major place of religious belief communication. At present, it has remained so, but to a much more limited degree. According to the studies by the authors presented here, the family example is a source of religious beliefs for only every

fifth young Catholic (21.6%). Most (36.7%) Catholic respondents from Generation Z indicate tradition and upbringing as the source. The others indicate personal opinions and experience (32.5%) and the religious community influence (3.4%) as the source of their religious beliefs.

A strong factor differentiating the scope of opinions and values is the political affiliations of respondents. In Poland, it is connected with membership in the most popular political parties (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość and Koalicja Obywatelska, Konfederacja, Polska 2050, and Lewica), which have discrepant programmes. The survey by PORC of 2021 (PORC 2021b) demonstrated that 88% of respondents who were followers of Prawo i Sprawiedliwość had a favourable opinion on the Church, and 7% had an adverse opinion, whereas 75% of the followers of Koalicja Obywatelska and 85% of Lewica followers had adverse opinions regarding the Church. Of the Konfederacja followers surveyed, 32% have favourable opinions about the Church and 57% have adverse opinions, whereas those numbers are 21% and 69%, respectively, for Polska 2050.

Such a social stratification in Poland may stem from the polarity of opinions pertaining to abortion, homosexual relations, the role of the Church in the state, etc. Benagiano and Mori (2007) describe three postulates defended by the Catholic Church as the natural and God's law, which constitute important discussion topics in the above-mentioned conflicts between political parties and, consequently, the dividing lines. They include protection of life in all its stages, from the moment of conception until natural death; recognition and promotion of the natural structure of the family, as a union between a man and a woman, based on marriage; and protection of the right of parents to educate their children. A response to the abortion regulation restrictions in Poland was described by Jonason et al. (2022) as well.

To conclude this discussion, it is worth mentioning a prophetic assessment of changes phrased by Bagrowicz (2000) (following Rynio (2002)) who foresaw the postmodernist wave covering the political sphere, the family, young people, culture, morality, religion and science in 2000. He also foresaw its effects in the form of extreme individualism not reckoning with any common good and materialism, as well as moral relativism, which results from a pre-assumed rejection of popular moral standards.

6. Conclusions

The presented findings provide a highly complex image of religious attitudes of young Catholics in Poland. Even though the number of people engaging in specific religious practices is significantly higher than in other European states, the predominance of attitudes contrary to the Catholic Church teachings among young Catholics displays the absence of any attachment to the said teachings, which is true even for Catholics participating in practices on a regular basis. This leads to an intensifying downward trend relating to the percentage of people identifying themselves as Roman Catholics, which is a sign of a slow religiousness crisis in Poland.

It can only be confirmed that the declared religious practices among Generation Z, although undertaken more often than in other European countries, are comparable in relation to the general Polish society. Hypothesis H1 was confirmed, because despite the high percentage of declarations related to belonging to the Catholic denomination, it turns out that only a minority of Catholics from Generation Z are people who regularly participate in religious services (42.7%). Similarly, in the case of moral principles regarding the admissibility of abortion, euthanasia, divorce, sexual intercourse before marriage and in vitro fertilization, only a minority declares to act in accordance with the teaching of the Catholic Church, and the majority is against it. This therefore confirms hypothesis H2. In this context, the mutual relationship of these conclusions is worth noting—while the declaration of defining oneself as a believer or a deeply religious person is very high in the society of Polish representatives of Generation Z (60.7%), neither the religious practices nor the moral attitudes in the majority of representatives of this generation are consistent with their religion.

Fast information transfer via social media, including but not limited to any information arousing many emotions, may contribute significantly to this trend's solidification, particularly when the content refers to extreme cases of breaching religious standards by both lay people and the clergy, which are considered extremely interesting. Polarity of the Polish society, consolidated by political parties with extremely opposing programmes, comprising, e.g., the problem of abortion and same-sex relationships, may increase the percentage of Catholics whose moral attitudes, at least the declared ones, will depart from the teachings of the Church in the years to come.

This paper was not aimed at determining the reasons for this situation but just at identifying the attitudes, which is why the causal relationships were not analysed here. However, it seems inevitable that the Church will be abandoned by some Generation Z religious believers in the years to come. This is demonstrated by the discrepancy between the relatively high percentage of people engaging in religious practices and their opinions and moral values relating to abortion, euthanasia, contraceptives, divorce, in vitro fertilization and sexual relations before marriage. Another reason may be the breakdown of the intergenerational communication of values and the cases when the clergy violate their religious commandments, which are not without effect. It seems reasonable to initiate studies to explain both the reasons for the observed dissonance and the phenomenon that Sunday Mass is attended by people with opinions conflicting with the ones of the Church.

The scientific research discussed in this article also has certain weaknesses and research limitations, because, as indicated above, our article does not diagnose the causes of this situation but only shows a picture of reality limited to one generation of Poles. Another limitation is the limitation of the research to university students, as students from all over Poland were the respondents and not all representatives of Generation Z. Therefore, the study does not include representatives of Generation Z who did not undertake higher education. Therefore, it is not justified to generalize about the entire generation, but only about those who are studying and therefore are the best educated.

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