

POLAND

Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on religion

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1. General presentation:

- General data regarding the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on religion: restrictions, main events related to the topic, statistical data (if any) etc.
- The density and scale of public debates on religion in the context of the pandemic, main points of interest in the debate.
- The interest of researchers or state institutions to measure the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on religion reflected in publications, articles, studies, surveys, conferences, etc.

The Covid-19 pandemic in Poland began with the confirmation of the first infection (March 4, 2020) and resulted in the declaration of an epidemic emergency in Poland (March 13, 2020), and soon an epidemic (March 20, 2020). It was undoubtedly a time of crisis for state institutions, private life and the economy. The total number of infections from March 4, 2020, was 6,029,947, including people who recovered 5,335,761 and 116,470 deaths.

The global crisis caused by the pandemic also affected the sphere of religious life in various religious and denominational communities. The Catholic Church in the world and in Poland was thus affected by the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. Above all, its pastoral activity and liturgical life were paralysed. International organisations (WHO) appealed to state authorities, non-governmental organisations, churches and other religious associations for joint and responsible actions to protect human health and life¹. Pope Francis regarded the fact of the pandemic as a special test of the Christian faith and a challenge for humanity to act together and build fraternity (FT 7-8, 54).

The Catholic Church in Poland at the national level (Polish Bishops Conference) and in individual dioceses, in cooperation with state institutions, made sanitary decisions regarding the organisation of the religious life of Catholics in Poland.

¹ World Health Organization. Key planning recommendations for mass gatherings in the context of COVID-19. Interim guidance. <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/10665-332235>. [dostęp: 9.09.2020]; World Health Organization. Practical considerations and recommendations for religious leaders and faith-based communities in the context of COVID-19. Interim guidance. <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/practical-considerations-and-recommendations-for-religious-leaders-and-faith-based-communities-in-the-context-of-covid-19>.

All entities and institutions of the Catholic Church in Poland, as in other countries, have been affected by various types of restrictions, especially in liturgy and pastoral work². Many believers felt the terror of the Covid-19 epidemic personally as struggling patients. These circumstances led to an intensive search for information on the pandemic and the way to avoid infection, including during collective religious practices. The believers also expected interpretations taking into account the transcendent, eschatological and ecclesial perspectives, allowing a deeper understanding of the essence and significance of the pandemic, its limitations, restrictions and inconveniences. Expressions of the position by the Church on the pandemic and anti-pandemic limitations awaited - guided, of course, by different intentions - also the environment and the media far away from the Church. For these reasons, many Church institutions undertook various activities of communication, aimed at various recipients and using many channels, forms and methods. The basic channels of internal church communication (addressed primarily to clergymen) were diocesan circulars and mass media. During the pandemic, the Internet undoubtedly became the first medium of communication between the Church and the believers. The official websites of the Church's administrative units covered by the study had a privileged status for these communication activities (assumed to be a source of reliable and up-to-date information).

The communication of the Church with the believers and with the whole society was carried out, inter alia, by official documents at four levels: universal Church, Polish Bishops Conference, diocesan and parishes. These documents are of a multifaceted nature, ranging from the administrative and legal-canonical dimensions to the social, evangelising and pastoral level.

One of the first official speeches of representatives of the Catholic Church in Poland in which issues related to the conduct of religious life during the coronavirus epidemic were raised was the announcement of the President of the Polish Bishops' Conference of February 28, 2020. Even before confirming the detection of the first case of infection in Poland, Archbishop Stanisław Gądecki addressed the clergy and lay people with a plea regarding the impending threat. In addition to the general call to exercise greater caution and pay special attention to the principles of hygiene and the appeal for prayer and revival of faith in the power of the Eucharist, the document in question includes guidelines for bishops regarding the reception of Holy Communion by the believers³.

The author of the announcement pointed out to the bishops that in response to the emergence of the coronavirus threat, they should inform the believers in the dioceses entrusted to them, "about the possibility of receiving Holy Communion for this time, either in spirit or on hand". The communication also explains that spiritual communion "is an act of prayer, the aim of which is to achieve the union with Jesus that we receive in the sacrament of his body and blood, but outside the sacramental space. It consists of three elements: awakening faith in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, love for him and the desire that Jesus would spiritually enter our life." In addition, it was found that those who are afraid of becoming infected should not use the holy water in stoups during the time of danger.

Some bishops followed in the footsteps of the President of the EESC, formulating appeals and messages to the believers entrusted to their care in the following days, or commissioning their

² P. Mazurkiewicz, Religious Freedom in the Time of the Pandemic, „Religions” 2021, 12, s. 103, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12020103> [dostęp: 26.06.2021]; L. Sulkowski, G. Ignatowski, Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Organization of Religious Behaviour in Different Christian Denominations in Poland, „Religions” 2020, 11, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11050254>.

³ Stanisław, 36.

associates to carry out this task. The content of these speeches was usually summons to prayer. In some cases, there were also calls for responsibility in the behaviour and mutual support, and a letter from the Minister of Health (undated) was provided, with basic information on the coronavirus and recommended precautions. It should be noted, however, that not all bishops' documents fully coincide with the one presented earlier by the President of the Polish Bishops' Conference. One of the messages (addressed exclusively to the clergy) states "there are no reasons for the time being to deviate from the basic form of administering Holy Communion: to the mouth and, where possible, also in the kneeling position".

The President of the Polish Bishops' Conference also issued a special announcement in connection with the announcement of an epidemic threat in Poland. The content of this speech (published already on March 13, 2020, i.e. on the day of the announcement by the Minister of Health of the regulation related to this issue) consisted only of requests, appeals and encouragement. The author of the announcement first asked the diocesan bishops to issue decisions to ensure compliance with the limit of 50 participants in religious ceremonies established by the state authorities.

Separately, he addressed the clergy, members of institutes of consecrated life and the believers with another appeal for prayer, asking the members of the first two groups to pray the rosary in church every day at 8.30 p.m., and the believers - for spiritual communion with them. The reactions of diocesan bishops to the ministerial decision of March 13, 2020, to limit the number of people participating in acts of religious worship and to the related appeal of the President of the Polish Bishops' Conference, as in previous days, were not completely uniform, although they had many common features.

Particularly noteworthy is the way in which they discussed the bishop's documents reference to the limit of 50 people participating in acts of religious worship, introduced by the Minister of Health. It was common to accept this restriction with understanding and even approval. The hierarchs unanimously asked for its observance and encouraged the use of the dispensations given. They also appealed for the fulfilment of the obligation to obey the introduced restrictions as the implementation of the commandment of love of neighbour and for explaining it to others. When writing about the limit established in the regulation, contrary to its provisions, it was often treated as referring only to the interior of temples. Relatively rarely, it was noticed that the regulations in force meant that a total of "a maximum of 50 people (inside and outside the church) could attend the services." It is characteristic that not all bishops were content with requests, recommendations or appeals. Some of them canonised the restrictions in force on the state forum (that is, they decided that they would also apply in the legal and canonical order). More than once, specific provisions were added regarding the manner of fulfilling the obligations in question, recommending placing on the entrance door to the temple "clear information about this", counting people entering the church, and even establishing a person or group of people "who will not let the believers in and will inform about the binding state bans"; similarly - although depending on the "circumstances of the parish functioning".

Looking at the content of the discussed documents, it should be noted that individual bishops were meticulous about the issues raised in the guidelines of the Presidium of the Polish Episcopate of March 21, 2020, devoting a lot of space to them in the documents they signed (or issued on their behalf). However, although the influence of these guidelines has always been clearly visible, the Bishop's decisions and recommendations were not completely uniform.

Concentrating on issues of particular importance, it should, first of all, be stated that the bishops had no doubts about the need to extend the previously given dispensations from the

obligation to attend Holy Mass on Sundays and other ordained holidays. As a rule, this time it was clearly decided to grant dispensation to "all the believers" residing in a given diocese, or it was decided to "extend" the dispensation previously granted to all the believers of a given diocese and persons residing in its territory. On the other hand, in some cases, the fifth group was now added to the four groups included in the majority of previously issued dispensations (the elderly, people with symptoms of infection, children and schoolchildren with their immediate guardians, and people fearing the infection) a fifth group was now added: "people, [...] who will not be able to participate in the Eucharist due to state restrictions". However, it also happened that by extending the dispensation from the obligation to participate in the Sunday Mass, it still (explicitly or implicitly) covered only the four previously considered groups, although this did not correspond to the limitation of the number of participants in religious ceremonies to 5 people and led to dilemmas of conscience for many people. In the context of the information about the dispensation, as a rule, exhortations and recommendations were made to use the available transmissions of holy Masses and other services, as well as calls for increased prayer. On the other hand, sometimes - continuing the practice adopted two weeks earlier - formal obligations were added to various incentives and recommendations (such as the obligation to "experience the Sunday Liturgy in pity" with "spiritual Holy Communion" in the case of properly disposed persons) or "reminded" that people using from the dispensation, "they are bound to pray properly and to do works of charity".

With regard to the five-person limit of participants in religious ceremonies, introduced by the ordinance of the Minister of Health of March 24, 2020, there was a general call for compliance with it, noting that it does not include "ministers". Therefore, as a rule, it was suggested that "apart from priests and a few necessary ministers, these should be the first people ordering the mass intention", and it was recommended that "appropriate information should be placed on the church door [...], at the same time communicating it to the believers via the Internet".

2. Legal aspect:

- Was there already legislation in place to regulate religious life in the event of a pandemic / natural disaster?
- Main legal texts, drawn up to fight the pandemic, which have affected religious life. Are legislative changes related to religious life temporary or permanent? What restrictions have most affected religious life?
- Regulations concerning specific areas of religious life, including hospitals (chaplancies and rights of ministers of religion) and funerals.
- What religious rights are claimed to have been violated and by whom (state, religious groups), and who issued such claim? What challenges or appeals have been made and by whom? Decisions of the courts, if any, on this issue; possible religious discrimination.

Art. 233 of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland does not provide the possibility of limiting religious freedom during any of the states of emergency (martial law, a state of emergency or a state of natural disaster). Limitation of the freedoms and rights of persons and citizens in times of martial law and states of emergency shall not limit the freedoms and rights specified in Article 53 (conscience and religion). Therefore, the solution proposed by the

Human Rights Defender in the letter of 27 March 2020, consisting in introducing a state of natural disaster, which would be appropriate for the risk caused by an infectious disease, was insufficient. Similarly, at the time of introducing a state of epidemic threat or state of the epidemic, only such limitations of the indicated freedom are permissible that can be introduced during the normal functioning of the state, i.e. those that must meet the conditions provided for in Art. 53 paragraph 5 and art. 31 sec. 3 of the Polish Constitution. Thus, as noted in the doctrine, the introduction of a state of natural disaster does not allow for effective combating of the epidemic in terms of the possibility of introducing restrictions on religious freedom. In this respect, the postulate of the need to change the relevant constitutional provisions is also visible, so that they effectively enable combating the epidemic threat and guarantee hierarchical compliance of norms, because the regulations in force do not provide for the possibility of limiting the freedom to manifest religion even in the event of a threat caused by an infectious disease.

Special legal conditions, determining the scope of the possibility of exercising the freedom of religion in the period of the so-called first wave of the Covid-19 epidemic in Poland resulted mainly from subsequent regulations issued first by the Minister of Health, and then by the Council of Ministers. The provisions of the Act of 5 December 2008 on preventing and combating infections and infectious diseases in humans were indicated as their basis. The first act of this type was the Regulation of the Minister of Health of March 13, 2020, on the declaration of an epidemic threat in the territory of the Republic of Poland. The restrictions introduced at that time included, among others, restriction on "the exercise of public worship in public places, including buildings and other places of worship". It consisted in "the necessity to ensure that, during the performance of religious worship, in a given area or in a given facility [...] jointly, both inside and outside the premises, not more than 50 people".

The restrictions introduced with the declaration of the epidemic threat were also maintained in the first period after the declaration of the epidemic (which happened pursuant to the Regulation of the Minister of Health of March 20, 2020). However, their tightening occurred with the amendment of the last of the aforementioned normative acts, which was made on March 24, 2020, on a radical reduction in the permissible number of participants in religious ceremonies. From the date of entry into force of the amendment, the number of people participating in acts of religious worship, both inside and outside the premises designated for this purpose, could not exceed five, not counting people who worshipped or employed by a funeral parlour in the event of a funeral. At the same time, any other gatherings organised as part of the activities of churches and other religious associations were forbidden. In addition, a general prohibition of movement was established, and among the few exceptions to this prohibition, movement for the purpose of "exercising or participating in religious worship, including religious activities or rites" was included.

On the last day of March 2020, the Council of Ministers took over the task of determining the restrictions, orders and bans in connection with the outbreak of the epidemic. To the regulation issued by it of March 31, 2020, the following were transferred, inter alia, all the provisions that refer to the exercise of religious worship in the ministerial decree discussed above. The Council of Ministers successively issued new ordinances, the subject of which were restrictions, orders and bans imposed in connection with the outbreak of the epidemic. In the regulation of April 10, 2020, the applicable restrictions were supplemented with, inter alia, the obligation to cover the mouth and nose while away from the place of residence or permanent residence, further specifying it in the amending regulation of April 15, 2020, for people staying in public buildings intended in particular for the purposes of religious worship.

However, among those excluded from this obligation were, inter alia, people performing "professional, business or paid activities" in buildings intended for the purposes of religious worship and clergy performing "religious worship, including religious activities or rites, during its performance".

Referring to the limitations of the permissible number of participants in religious assemblies, the discussed regulation assumed that from April 20, 2020, there will be a return to the previously applicable limit of 50 people (according to the regulation of March 31, 2020, this limit was to be restored as early as 12 April). It is significant, however, that in relation to some retail outlets, already in the period until April 19, 2020, the number of people who could stay there at the same time was dependent on the number of checkout counters.

However, the provisions on the number of participants in acts of religious worship, which were to be applied from April 20, 2020, were changed in connection with the issuing by the Council of Ministers of the ordinance of April 19, 2020. For the first time the permissible number of people present at a religious ceremony was made dependent on the size of the building. However, no reference was made to the number of participants outside of it. It was assumed that for every 15 m² of space there can be one participant, not counting the worshippers. The restriction on religious worship in cemeteries was defined separately. It was decided that there can be no more than 50 participants during one funeral (this number does not include worshippers and people performing professional activities related to the burial). An exception to the obligation to cover the mouth and nose due to the performance of religious worship, originally relating only to clergymen, also covers other persons who worship "in the absence of a clergyman".

The entry into force of the Regulation of the Council of Ministers of May 2, 2020, has not resulted in more significant changes in the regulations relating to restrictions on the exercise of religious worship. Performing or participating in worship may amount to five (except for worshippers) even if the building area is less than 75 m². The rules for determining the permissible number of people participating in religious worship were again issued in the next ordinance of May 16, 2020. It assumed that when specifying the permissible amount of liturgy participants (not counting worshippers), the building area should be divided by 10, while 5 people can participate in the worship even when the area is less than 50 m². On the other hand, the obligation to cover the mouth and nose in places of religious worship was maintained, along with related exceptions (any reference to the clergy was removed from the provision establishing the exception for religious worshippers). The previously established limit of participants in funeral ceremonies also remained unchanged.

Most of the above-mentioned restrictions were liberalised with the entry into force of the regulation of May 29, 2020. Only the obligation to cover the mouth and nose (with related exceptions) in sacred buildings and cemeteries, as well as during assemblies organised as part of the activities of churches and other religious associations (with the proviso that in the case of outdoor assemblies, the obligation to this can be replaced by keeping an appropriate distance between the participants). No changes in the discussed scope were brought about by the regulation of June 19, 2020, which was in force until the end of the analysed period.

In the period of March 13 - June 30, 2020, matters related to the exercise of religious worship were regulated by nine successive ordinances, which were amended every few days. In as many as eight of them, the provisions relating to the analysed issues were changed (such changes were also a consequence of two amendments to the regulations in question). This means that on average every ten days the regulations were changed, which in some way related to the conditions of the Church's mission and had to be taken into account not only in

the conducted activity, but also in intra-church communication. This placed the institutional Church in a difficult situation, requiring the development of an effective procedure for analysing the normative acts issued successively by state authorities and establishing channels and methods of communicating about their consequences in a way that takes into account the fact that the pastors who perform their ministry in parishes are usually not prepared to analyse the acts on their own. Normative, the provisions of which, moreover, often left room for justified doubts. A special context was also created by the fact that, since the introduction of the first restrictions on the exercise of religious worship, the admissibility of their establishment (as well as the admissibility of introducing certain other restrictions) in the acts of the executive power was questioned by serious authorities. The Human Rights Defender systematically raised allegations that the restrictions introduced under this procedure were inconsistent with the Constitution of the Republic of Poland of April 2, 1997, appearing several times with formal letters to the Prime Minister.

During the pandemic, there were objections about the proportionality of the introduced restrictions. The objections raised against the laws restricting religious freedom in connection with the developing epidemic were not without foundation. Undoubtedly, this contributed to the formation of an attitude of dissatisfaction, distrust and even opposition to the decisions of the authorities in a part of the society. A little over a year after the outbreak of the pandemic, the thesis that introducing restrictions on the freedom to manifest religion in ordinances, is an action outside the scope of statutory authorisations and is inconsistent with the Polish Constitution.

The state authorities have introduced numerous limitations on individual human rights and freedoms, including limitations on the freedom to manifest religion. The Polish legislator laid down the principles for permissible limitations on this freedom in articles 31 (3) and 53 (5) of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland. In accordance with the constitutional provisions, such limitations may only be introduced by statutory acts and in situations when they are necessary in a democratic society for the protection of specially protected goods. They must be proportionate so as not to impair the very essence of the right being limited. The introduced limitations on participating in and performing religious worship raise doubts as to their legality and constitutionality. The epidemic threat justifies taking action by competent state authorities to ensure safety. However, state authorities should act on the basis and within the limits of the law. The constitutional provisions do not leave any room for discretion as regards the possibility of introducing limitations on human rights and freedoms, including the right to freedom of religion.

Restrictions on the possibility of participating and exercising religious worship raise doubts as to their legality and constitutionality. Such allegations were formulated in the letter of the Human Rights Defender addressed to the Prime Minister of March 27, 2020, in which he negatively referred to the properties of the procedure of the introduced restrictions. He stressed that “no executive authority, including the minister competent for health, has, in the light of Art. 53 paragraph 5 of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland, the regulatory capacity to define the limits of the freedom to manifest religion”. This position was repeated and extended by the Human Rights Defender in subsequent letters to the Prime Minister⁵³. In them he stressed that limitations of human rights and freedoms must be introduced with respect to the constitutional standards of their protection. Moreover, he pointed out that the constitution maker gave freedom of religion a special rank as one of the fundamental human rights.

Restrictions on the freedom to manifest religion cannot take the form of a prohibition, as it constitutes a restriction of the essence of the freedom guaranteed in Art. 53 of the Polish Constitution and is inadmissible pursuant to Art. 31 sec. 3 of the Polish Constitution. Consequently, Ombudsman recommended that limitations of fundamental rights and freedoms, including the freedom to manifest religion, should be regulated by the act, because this "will ensure compliance with the standards resulting from the Constitution of the Republic of Poland and will prevent executive authorities from abusing their powers."

The introduced restrictions should also fulfil the formal premise in the form of the requirement of a statutory form of introducing restrictions on the freedom of religion. The above-mentioned restrictions were introduced under the ordinances of the Minister of Health issued on the basis of the authorisation contained in Art. 46 sec. 2 and 4 of the above-mentioned Act of 5 December 2008 on the prevention and combating of infections and infectious diseases in humans and regulations of the Council of Ministers on the basis of the authorisation contained in the same Act in Art. 46a and art. 46b points 1-6 and 8-12, and not as required by the constitutional provision in the act. Therefore, one should agree with the position of the Human Rights Defender that in this respect, the executive authorities are not empowered to regulate restrictions on the freedom to manifest religion. This matter should be regulated by law.

The practice of recognising the validity of the norms of secular law in the canonical forum is obviously known to the Church (see in particular can. 197, can. 1290 and can. 1714 of the Code of Canon Law). However, one should also be aware that it should be implemented taking into account the principle of autonomy and independence relating to the relations between the State and the Church, which is adopted not only in the teaching of the Church, but also on the basis of the Polish Constitution (Art. 25 (3)) and in the Concordat between the Holy See and the Republic of Poland of July 28, 1993 (Article 1), and in the Act of May 17, 1989, on the State's Relationship to the Catholic Church in the Republic of Poland (Art. 2). It has its obvious consequences with regard to the mutual relation between canon law and state law, which are independent from each other and, by definition, cover matters that belong to the respective scope of activity of both communities. In this situation, it would rather be considered more appropriate that the regulations issued by state legislative bodies in connection with the epidemic are binding on the state forum, and the Church - as an entity governed by state law in matters falling within the competence of this law - simply submits to them (with the observance of the law to be opposed whenever these regulations interfere with the Church's own affairs or when they are contrary to God's law). At the same time, the adoption of this principle as binding in relations between the State and the Church means that they should refrain from regulating with their own norms matters falling within the "scope of their own" of the other party to these relations, and that they are mutually obliged to respect the legal orders thus created.

The Catholic Church did not make any complaints about the pandemic restriction, but criticised it as excessive and discriminatory. After abolishing the state of the pandemic, the Catholic Church pointed out that criticism of the Polish regulations concerning limitations of the religious freedom was justified.

3. Sociological aspect:

- How was collective religious life affected during the pandemic? - church attendance, pilgrimages, major religious holidays, etc.? Importance and modalities of digital use (videoconferencing, etc.).
- How has the pandemic influenced people's religiosity? - secularisation or secularisation; changes in religious behaviour regarding funerals, commemorations, marriage, baptism, etc. Some religious practices (ritual gestures, dietary practices, etc.) had to be modified because of the pandemic. Have the changes brought about by the pandemic situation lasted or have they been temporary?
- How can the relation between religious groups and the state during Covid-19 pandemic be described? - collaboration, confrontation, neutrality? Did religious groups facilitate or hinder the adherence to public health measures to prevent the spread of the virus?

There is no doubt that the pandemic and the coronavirus have changed the world, made profound revaluations and influenced the entirety of religious life in the world and in Poland. The famous sociological research⁴ also shows that we are dealing here with certain changes, albeit of a fairly limited scope. Perhaps this is due to the fact that the respondents were dominated by people with above-average religious commitment. In many cases, research participants even more often than before the pandemic engaged in certain religious practices, especially private ones. They felt strongly that there was no possibility of communal prayer due to the restrictions on attending services directly. Even when the most restrictive rules were in force (Spring 2020: Easter Triduum), they tried to take part in the services, if not in person, then via Internet broadcasts. These are the dominant attitudes, although other attitudes involving a weakening of religious life have also been reported. The research presented here allows only rough estimates. In the case of private practices, such as personal prayer or reading the Holy Scriptures, a decrease in religious activity affects a dozen or so percent of the respondents, while in the case of public practices, such as participation in religious rituals and church services, this decrease affects about a quarter of the respondents. As already mentioned, these are estimates, but they clearly show the general trend of a decline in religiosity correlated with the pandemic.

The interdisciplinary analysis of the Church's communication with the internal environment during the first wave of the pandemic in Poland shows that in the content layer, the emphasis was definitely placed on the transfer of information on the limitations of religious practices and compliance with sanitary regulations.

On the other hand, less space was devoted to, for example, proposals for ways and forms of pastoral activity in new, pandemic conditions. Hence, in the period of the first wave of the pandemic, from a pastoral point of view, we notice a new, surprising phenomenon. Religious practices that have hitherto been ordered or at least recommended (e.g. the use of the sacraments) in pandemic legal and social circumstances have been restricted, sometimes banned. A special expression of this was the commonly used dispensation practice in relation to certain religious practices of public worship. Unique in the entire history of the Church were

⁴ Komunikacja Kościoła katolickiego w Polsce w okresie pandemii Covid-19. Raport z badań interdyscyplinarnych, eds. Mirosław Chmielewski, Małgorzata Nowak, Piotr Stanisław, Justyna Szulich-Kałuża, Dariusz Wadowski, Kraków 2022.

the difficulties in the implementation of the religious worship during the Holy Week of Lent 2020.

Some of the restrictive provisions in relation to churches and other religious associations were formulated more rigorously than in relation to other entities of social life. For this reason, in the critical opinion of the believers there is a conviction that the church authorities too easily obeyed all pandemic state recommendations.

The Catholic Church in Poland, from the beginning of the Covid-19 epidemic in 2020, has undertaken communication activities, primarily of an informative nature. This applies to both institutions at the level of the Polish Bishops' Conference and local Churches - dioceses and parishes. The interdisciplinary analysis of the source texts specified in the research assumptions and their social reception show that such a communicative attitude of the Church resulted in the multiplicity of published documents, there is generally good transmission in communication at individual institutional levels.

The pastoral attitude of priests, caring for their parishioners, which was expressed in passing on information, maintaining close relationships, availability, commitment, and readiness to help, was also positively assessed in the public perception. The active attitude of the Church to the transmission of information resulted in a positive reception in the internal and external environment. It stimulated the faithful of the Church to actively obtain information on the regulations concerning religious life during the pandemic.

Local solutions often differed from the national ones in the details of religious practices and sanitary behaviour. The natural consequence of such a fact was cognitive dissonance and information confusion.

On March 10, the President of the Polish Bishops' Conference addressed the second message regarding the coronavirus epidemic. In addition to the call to prayer (especially with the use of the Holy God, Holy Strong), the document under discussion includes recommendations and guidelines concerning, above all, participation in the Holy Mass. The message can be treated as a kind of development of the thesis put forward at the beginning that "it is unimaginable that we do not pray in our churches". Therefore, in connection with the recommendations of the Chief Sanitary Inspector regarding the avoidance of larger gatherings, the President of the Polish Bishops' Conference called on pastors to increase the number of Sunday Masses, so that the number of the believers participating in the liturgy could be reduced. Moreover, he reminded that the elderly and those with diseases can follow the course of the Holy Mass from their homes using the available transmissions, and that the sign of peace during the Holy Mass does not have to be conveyed by shaking hands. However, the situation was developing very dynamically, and therefore, two days after the above-mentioned announcement of the President of the Polish Bishops' Conference, the Permanent Council of the Polish Bishops' Conference decided to make a speech related to the spread of the epidemic. On March 12, it issued ordinance No. 1/2020, which deserves special attention not only because of the title, but also because it was announced the day before the introduction of the state of epidemic threat in Poland.

As the first sentence of this document shows, its subject is the decision "to introduce preventive precautionary measures in the event of a coronavirus threat." In the following points of the ordinance, referring to the next period (until March 29, 2020):

- 1) it has been recommended to the diocesan bishops to grant the believers under their jurisdiction a dispensation from the obligation to participate in the Sunday Mass,
- 2) rules for participation in the liturgy have been formulated,

- 3) the believers were encouraged to visit temples more willingly during the day (by also formulating related recommendations for clergy),
- 4) other information about religious life was provided.

Among the recommended included in the recommended dispensation were the elderly, people with symptoms of infection, school children and adolescents with their immediate guardians, and people fearing infection. At the same time, the believers were asked to explain that the use of the dispensation "means that the absence from the Sunday Mass at the indicated time is not a sin" and they called for perseverance in prayer and the use of the Holy Mass broadcasts available on the radio, television and the Internet.

While formulating the rules for participating in the liturgy, firstly, the attention of ministers of Holy Communion was made to the fact that before the liturgy they should wash their hands thoroughly and follow the rules of hygiene. On the other hand, the believers were encouraged to take Holy Communion on hand, explaining that it was provided for by the liturgical regulations in force. In several subsequent recommendations regarding participation in the liturgy, the term "should" was used, thus recommending that the sign of peace be conveyed by nodding (without shaking hands), worshiping the Cross by kneeling down or bowing deeply (without direct contact), refraining from worshiping relics by kissing or touching them, and applying protective films to the confessionals. The last of the principles discussed was formulated as follows: "We give up filling church stoups with holy water."

In connection with the encouragement to visit the churches outside of liturgical hours, pastors were instructed to make it possible for the believers, leaving the churches open during the day. They also called on them to provide additional opportunities for confession and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, and to visit the sick and elderly parishioners with sacramental service with the participation of extraordinary ministers of holy communion and adherence to the rules of hygiene.

In the last point, it was informed about the postponement of the planned confirmation ceremonies, the suspension of high school pilgrimages to Jasna Góra and school retreats organised by parishes (therefore the mass media and priests were asked to prepare an appropriate offer of retreats available on the Internet). On the other hand, "the matters of retreats for adults and the organisation of other meetings" were left to the "prudent discernment of parish priests". The whole thing was closed with an invitation to solidarity with the needy and to prayer.

The decisions made by individual diocesan bishops were the response to the above-mentioned ordinance of the Permanent Council of the Polish Bishops' Conference. The documents related to these decisions were published either on the day of issuing the ordinance by the Permanent Council, or on the next day (i.e. March 13, 2020). In addition to decrees, ordinances, ordinances and communications were used. In some cases, the content in response to the Permanent Council's ordinance was separated and, for example, a pastoral letter or an ordinance addressed to priests was added to the dispensation decree from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass.

As the content of the analysed documents shows, the ordinance of the Permanent Council of the EESC - contrary to its title, but in line with the logic of canon law - was not treated by the bishops as an act of governing power, containing provisions in force in individual dioceses by their own power. This is evidenced by the very terms used when referring to it in bishop's documents. They have often been referred to as a "communication", and its content has been referred to as "guidelines" or "recommendations". Different treatment of the document of

the Permanent Council of March 12, 2020 (as containing the provisions in force in a given diocese spontaneously) was one of the exceptions.

When preparing their own documents, individual bishops usually formulated them in a clear way expressing the conviction that in these types of cases they are the legislators in the dioceses entrusted to them (and this does not only apply to the dispensation, the granting of which - as was mentioned above - was in by order of the Permanent Council recommended). Also referring to the other recommendations and orders referred to in the ordinance of the Permanent Council, in individual bishops' documents (including those issued by members of the Permanent Council) you can find the following phrases: 1/2020 of the Permanent Council of the Polish Bishops' Conference of March 12 this year. (attached) are valid in the diocese [...] ", " I introduce all the recommendations of the Permanent Council as binding in the diocese [...] ", " following the recommendations of the Permanent Council of the Polish Bishops Conference (Ordinance No.) I hereby introduce in the Archdiocese [...] the following provisions,"" with reference to the communiqué of the Permanent Council ... for the entire Archdiocese ... I ordain the following ".

Few bishops informed about the possibility of receiving Holy Communion in a spiritual way. It is also worth noting that when addressing messages to the clergy, bishops usually used the form of encouragement and appeals. Relatively rarely, however, they formulated explicit obligations (e.g.: "I recommend to pastors: that churches remain open during the day, that priests take care of additional opportunities for confession and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, that - while maintaining proper hygiene rules - priests and extraordinary ministers visit the sick and senior parishioners with the sacramental service ."

Relatively often, however, the need for greater availability of priests was emphasised, who should "enable the believers to make a pre-Christmas confession in such a way that it does not gather an excessive number of believers at once" and should be ready to celebrate the sacrament of penance "at each individual request of the penitent". In turn, recommending that the stoups should not be filled with holy water, a solution was sometimes proposed that the priest blessed water brought by the believers, which could then be used in homes.

Only exceptionally at the diocesan level, in response to the order of the Permanent Council, decisions were made to more radically limit the community's religious life, for example, to suspend not only all prayer and formation meetings, but also the celebration of "all services in church, except for the daily Mass". Exceptionally, more specific decisions or recommendations were added that were not supported by an ordinance (such as, for example, allowing the celebration of the Holy Mass on weekdays of Lent according to the form "Mass for any need." However, appeals for fervent prayer were common.

Certainly, the pandemic has had many repercussions in the field of religiosity. However, it is difficult to say unequivocally whether it led to denuclearisation or to secularisation. The phenomenon of religiosity is more complex, and the pandemic is one of the factors contributing to the decline in religiosity. On the other hand, thanks to the pandemic, religious people began searching for God outside the institution of the traditional Churches.

The practice of contacting the believers via a website or in the form of videoconferences has become a permanent feature. One can still observe the willingness to return to traditional forms of religiosity among both the young and the older generation.

It needs to be stated that disinfectants are available in every place of worship.

4. References (publications, reports, surveys...)

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