Janusz MARIAŃSKI:
Religious Identities in Polish Society:
A Sociological Study
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Janusz Mariański published his book entitled *Religious Identities in Polish Society: A Sociological Study* in 2024 as the summary of his earlier research. Identity is a basic concept and key notion in sociology. Having an identity is one of the most universal of human needs. It manifests itself in the need to belong to groups and communities, to be accepted and to feel secure, with lasting social bonds and structures; these things mean stability. Identity is socially assigned and must also be socially confirmed. The problem of one's identity is written into a given community's annals and individual biographies.

Yet, one can point out that question of identity becomes a topic in certain circles, generations, and environments, in periods of cultural crises and religious breakthroughs. These are times when the ruthlessness of confrontation increases and one's sense of security decreases, when the awareness of identifying with one's community becomes an important criterion of social activities undertaken by a person and a source integrating one's personality. An identity is the expression of people orientations toward symbols and values that determine the specificity and distinctiveness of one's community and personality profile. The search for one's identity is a kind of protest against the anonymity of the life of mass society, which tends to blur the differences between people and social groups. It also arises from the desire to mark one's presence in social life subjectively and personally.

An identity is a task that every person and society is faced with, but it is also cloaked in formulas of everyday practices that actualise cultural and religious norms and expectations concerning an identity's profile: a normative and behavioral identity. An identity is created in a construction process that ensures the integrity of the basic code, allowing one to experience the continuity and relative durability of the personality traits of an individual or a community's culture. It allows a person to reconcile the opposition between continuation and duration and the different features resulting from the acquisition of new experiences in individual or collective life.

The question of continuity and change have always *fascinated sociologists*, as Janusz Mariański writes in his book. "A community has a more strongly (and therefore unproblematically) defined collective identity to the extent that it is subject to change more slowly and that it can reproduce more precisely the codified rules of the actions of its members."[1] Anthony Giddens claims that the expression of collective identities, which is the signature of the currently ongoing technological revolution, is accompanied by the expansion of the "I," which in the postmodern world is supposed to be active and self-reflective.[2] The dynamics of social development are determined by the processes of cultural integration, understood as a *consensus* based on the basic principle or principles, pluralistic unity of norms, values, symbols, and patterns of behavior. This situation is conducive to maintaining one's identity.

Identity is threatened by the cultural crisis and historically formed model of religiosity, loss of a personalistic perspective, or ideologization of social awareness initiated by opportunistically attractive political interests additionally facilitated by axiological instability. The category of *identity*, one of the basic dimensions of a personal and community social life, is currently one of the most frequently invoked sociological concepts. It is the subject of numerous sociological empirical studies and theoretical analyses presented in various contexts and aspects. The most important point concerns the community's and human person's identity. Identity is shaped by the fundamental principles of the relationship between culture and religion. The presence of religious values in social life practices primarily depends on the processes of upbringing and socialization that ensure experiencing the ontological reality of the social world.[3] "People treat as real everything that they were convinced was real during

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[1] Z. BOKSZAŃSKI: *Tożsamości zbiorowe*. Warszawa 2005, p. 52.
[2] A. GIDDENS: *Nowoczesność i tożsamość. „Ja" i społeczeństwo w epoce późnej nowoczesności*. Warszawa 2001.
[3] M. ŚWIĄTKIEWICZ-MOŚNY: *Konstruowanie nowych tożsamości w warunkach globalizacji*. Kraków 2015.

socialization. In turn, beliefs about reality are based on belief systems that shape 'popular ontologies'."[4]

From the Christian perspective, this dependence, in its deepest dimensions, is also rooted in man's autonomy and freedom, which also allows for the possibility of resigning from religious search for justifications for the obviousness and naturalness of the social world. Man can resign from searching for religious references concerning one's life. In his encyclical *Vertitatis splendor*, John Paul II proclaimed the existence of the *cultural issue* that essentially "we find the *moral sense*, which is in turn rooted and fulfilled in the *religious sense*."[5] In a contemporary society that is strongly marked by the tendency to sever truth from freedom and faith from morals, the result is that the "moral sense" is separated from the "religious sense." Thus, the experience of multiple crises and axiological turmoil often goes beyond an individual's ability to adapt, including entire communities.

In his book, Janusz Mariański presents an analysis of the rapid identity changes in contemporary culture through the lens of four dimensions: social differentiation, deinstitutionalization, axiological-normative pluralism, and structural individualism. Approaching the issue of identity in the context of Polish society's religiosity, the author places his analyses in the theoretical paradigm of a *society of choice*, in which religion and religiosity cease to be part of the natural, obvious, and unquestionable social world of everyday life practices and cultural heritage. These are subject to syncretic choices and individual conscious decisions, sometimes described as hybridization of the religious identity of the individual and, consequently, of entire communities.

Multiple empirical sociological studies carried out by Janusz Mariański show the extent of the secular phenomenon in social life and the scale of laicization processes in people's thinking, especially of the younger generation. This primarily refers to the area of daily life practices and marriage and family morality. Legitimizing the Christian doctrine by moral values and norms is undergoing relativization and marginalization; these are now deconstructed, questioned, and rejected.

Referring to the canon of Polish traditional sociological research concentrating on cultural models of religiousness that Józef Majka and Władysław Piwowarski worked out in the mid-20th century, in which the theoretical categories of the *nation's religiosity* and *daily life religiosity* were distinguished, Janusz Mariański notes the contemporary deep cracks

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[4] T. Parsons: "Motywacje wierzeń i zachowań religijnych." In: *Socjologia religii*. Ed. F. Adamski. Kraków 1984, p. 191.

[5] John Paul II: *Veritatis splendour*, no. 98.

in the model of the *nation religion* with its historical merits in shaping the religious and cultural identity of Polish society.

These cracks are expressed in attitudes of being far from Church institutions, in the pluralization of religious beliefs and the appearance of a so-called new spirituality phenomenon inscribed in religious semantics, pictures and symbols found in various *profane* sectors of social life (economy, sports, politics). It is incorporating popular religion into the heritage of traditional Churches, aiming to change their doctrinal shapes and social functions. "The Catholic Church has been made to feel (institutionally and otherwise) on the defensive. Various social and political forces attempt to remove it from public life, and we face a strong wave of secularism, the effects of which are difficult to predict" (p. 323).

Janusz Mariański's opinions comprise a kind of summary of his impressive, long-term creative activity, whose fruits are tens of academic books and hundreds of articles in the area of religious sociology and moral sociology. The biographical note included in the book points to the author's many works, whose citations were used in this reviewed publication. This bibliography alone is 62-pages-long, which indicates the author's obvious competence in the field of the issues he deals with and proves the extensiveness of bibliographic searches, truly *Benedictine diligence* aimed at a reliable and comprehensive collection of literature, both theoretical and empirical, so that every thesis presented in the book and every conclusion has its documentation.

The book is very extensive, just like previous books by this scholar, both those in the field of the sociology of religion and those dealing with sociological or socio-pedagogical issues of morality. Mariański's readers are accustomed to the breadth of the issues discussed, rich in detail in the presented empirical data, masterfully incorporated into the literature on the subject. He presents an original theoretical model for explaining the phenomena and processes taking place in the cultural landscape of Polish religiosity.

The book is comprised of eight chapters, including an introduction and conclusions. It systematically presents the most important conclusions and results of the analysis of the theory of religious sociology, with many cited results of empirical studies carried out in the book. The book's well thought-out structure reflects its substantive coherence. The chapters have readably formulated titles, their internal structures are elaborate and complex, and their content strictly corresponds to the issues announced by the titles and subtitles. Every chapter provides a conclusion, making it easier for readers to quickly identify a given issue in the introduced results of studies and the procedures the author undertook in his conclusions to justify the set research assumptions.

The subjects of detailed sociological analysis are the following: denominational and religious self-identifications in Polish society, faith and religious beliefs, religion and morality in the consciousness of Poles — interdependence and autonomy, marital and family morality, religious practices in Polish society in decline, the Catholic Church as a social and religious institution in the consciousness of Poles, and the Catholic parish in Poland in the process of transformation.

What may attract Readers' attention is the book's communicative language, which abounds in sociological terminology specific to the sociology of religion, original theses, and conclusions, yet its style is far from obfuscating and hermetic, let alone pretentious. Janusz Mariański's book can also be treated as a kind of sociological textbook necessary to study the cultural changes in Polish religiosity, its various endogenous and exogenous conditions, allowing for a better understanding of the phenomenon of the lasting identity of Polish religiosity in the European context.

The leading trend of the narrative about the changes in the religious and cultural identity of Polish society is well illustrated by the following fragment of the book: "In Poland — in addition to secularisation processes — there are robust counter-secularisation processes at work due to the influence of the Catholic Church and other religious communities. It is impossible to study religiosity and ecclesiality in Poland, as well as the condition of the Polish family, without taking into account the evangelisation thesis. It refers to the manifold activities of the Catholic Church (and other Christian communities) aimed at communicating religious faith and religious morals to individuals, families and society as a whole. In the most general terms, one would mention catechetical formation in schools and parishes, pastoral formation in parishes and in the various Catholic movements and associations, family formation (pastoral care for families), training through the Church's means of social communication and many others. They counterbalance the strong 'creeping' secularisation and individualisation processes in Polish society. There is a continuous socialisation into mature faith and religious morality ('ecclesialisation') in Polish parishes, although its strength seems to wane. The weakened religious socialisation in the family, in particular, does not guarantee the permanence of bonds with the parish and the Church" (pp. 452–453).

The author's statement defining the social functions of sociology in terms of an "early warning system" is extremely accurate. Sociology allows us to see what others do not yet perceive. Despite the clear and focused process of religious identity transformation in Polish society, the author sociologically interprets not only the secularization and laicization, pluralistic and individualistic tendencies but also the opposing evangelization and anti-secularization forces. *Secularization cannot be buried in*

a Polish graveyard of prematurely dead theories, nor can we do so with *religious deprivatization.* Social trends do not occur inevitably, independent of people's ideas and actions, according to the logic of cultural determinism. Modernity is the result of the life practices of thinking people who are not devoid of religious sensitivity.

Modern societies do not have to be essentially secular, which does not mean that the traditional model of church religiosity is not subject to radical transformations. What will happen to us in the future also depends largely on us now. As we read in the book's conclusions: "There is no unidirectional evolution in religious and moral matters, as in human affairs in general, nor is there a single rule by which religious and moral processes proceed" (p. 477).

The book *Religious Identities in Polish Society: A Sociological Study,* similarly to Mariański's earlier works, will enjoy warm welcome by wide circles of readers, not only sociologists of religion, sociologists in general, and morality educators, but also those circles to which it is close in a cognitive sense, as well as practical issues of changes in the religious and cultural identity of Polish society.

Janusz Mariański's work undoubtedly has a personalistic dimension. It is founded on clearly defined axiological premises, and the methodology of the conducted research respects the principle of *Wertfreiheit*, well established in the sociological tradition and formulated by Max Weber.

This reliable, competent, and exhaustive diagnosis is founded on sociological theories, interpretations, and assessments of the studied phenomena, social processes, structures, and institutions. It considers human attitudes and patterns of behavior based on empirical data that allow us to read and reconstruct the premises of possible strategies determining the directions of transformation of religious and cultural identities in Polish society from the perspective of the next decades of the 21st century.

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