



Mirosław Chmielewski, Małgorzata Nowak,
Piotr Stanisław, Justyna Szlich-Kałuża,
and Dariusz Wadowski,
*Komunikacja Kościoła katolickiego w Polsce
w okresie pandemii COVID-19. Raport z badań
interdyscyplinarnych* [Communication
of the Catholic Church in Poland during the
COVID-19 Pandemic. Interdisciplinary Research
Report]. Kraków: Wydawnictwo “scriptum,”
2022, pp. 326

The book consists of five chapters of an interdisciplinary nature. Each chapter is the responsibility of an author who is a specialist in a particular academic discipline, although the leading discipline in the research conducted is theological sciences, especially pastoral theology. The first three chapters are dedicated to the communication of the Catholic Church in Poland with the faithful and the external environment during the period of the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, specifically between March 13, 2020, the day of the announcement of the state of the epidemic threat, and June 30, 2020, the time when the first strict sanitary restrictions imposed in connection with the outbreak of the Sars-CoV-2 pandemic were lifted, from the point of view of law and canon law, and then in pragmalinguistic and media terms. The fourth chapter includes a sociological diagnosis dedicated to the public perception of the Catholic Church's communication in Poland during the pandemic. The fifth chapter comprises theological and pastoral conclusions and recommendations, although each chapter of the

book ends with conclusions and recommendations. Hence, there are often repetitions of earlier remarks in this chapter. The publication as a whole is a kind of chronicle of the events of the first months of 2020, after the outbreak of the Sars-CoV-19 pandemic, especially from the issued state legislation and the Church hierarchy at four levels, specifically: the universal Church, the Polish Bishops' Conference, dioceses and parishes (p. 11). The language used by state and Church authorities to communicate with citizens and the faithful of the Catholic Church is also examined.

The main purpose of the research was the analysis of the legal, socio-cultural, and theological dimensions of the communication of the Catholic Church in Poland, while the specific objectives discussed and evaluated the relationship between the content of information and announcements issued by the Church in Poland in connection with the regulations issued by the Holy See and the Polish authorities. The level of pastoral, administrative, and media communication of the Catholic Church in Poland with the faithful was also studied from the point of view of the type of language used, the content, the language of the messages, the sender and receiver of the message, the communication strategies adopted, and the conveyance of specialized concepts. An important role was played by the media discourse of the Catholic Church in terms of: content, forms, purpose and achieved effects; the way of social reception, its conditions and consequences of church messages, regarding the pandemic state, the rules of safety behavior in religious facilities and during religious services and ceremonies. The analyses and conclusions presented in the book are based on Josef Cardijn's concept of three steps: "see—judge—act." The first step of the research, that is, "see," the Church's communication was discussed from four perspectives: legal, pragmatic, media and sociological. In this key, conclusions and recommendations were formulated in chapters one to four. On the basis of the obtained interdisciplinary research results, the second part of the research stage, "judge and act" in the theological-pastoral perspective, was implemented. Using the method of critical analysis and inference, a synthetic evaluation of the Church's communication in terms of its three basic functions: prophetic, priestly, and royal. A characteristic feature of the implementation during the first wave of COVID-19 in both the prophetic and priestly (cultic) functions was the mediatization of preaching and the administration of the sacraments, especially the Eucharist. The pandemic state brought about new ways of participating in worship, liturgy, and the sacraments. During this period of pandemic, the Internet undeniably became the medium of first communicative contact in the relationship between the hierarchical Church and the faithful. Thus, it has put the Church in a position to seek new forms of pastoral care.

In the analyzed messages, the so-called directive-type speech acts were dominated by the communicative function of language. Informing in this regard was aimed primarily at contributing to the mission of salvation of the faithful.

However, in pastoral texts, as the authors of the study note, there are deficiencies in the area relating to the “here and now” communication of the Gospel message. In an overall assessment, given the extraordinary nature of the situation and the unprecedented pastoral challenges, the Church’s communication with the faithful during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic was unanimously considered good by the authors. It is argued that the Catholic Church, in the situation of the first wave of the epidemic threat, demonstrated its proactivity and decisiveness. Official announcements regulating religious behavior quickly emerged: including, dispensation from attending Sunday Mass, proposals for individual experience of the sacraments (receiving Holy Communion spiritually), the practice of receiving Holy Communion “on the hand,” which became common in churches in Poland, information on experiencing Lent and the Paschal Triduum, pastoral aids and guides for the use of online broadcasting were issued, private adoration of the Blessed Sacrament was encouraged, collective Corpus Christi processions were cancelled, meetings of pastoral formation groups were cancelled, the services of extraordinary special ministers were suspended, or the ceremonies of Confirmation and First Holy Communion were postponed.

The interdisciplinary study of the Church’s communication with the internal environment during the first wave of the pandemic in Poland indicates that in the content layer, the emphasis was definitely placed on the conveyance of information about restrictions on religious practice and the observance of sanitary regulations. Less attention, on the other hand, was given, for example, to proposals for ways and forms of pastoral activity in the new pandemic conditions. Religious practices that had so far been prescribed, or at least recommended (e.g., the use of the holy sacraments) in the pandemic legal and social circumstances were restricted, sometimes banned.

Restrictions introduced by the Polish government during the first wave of the pandemic concerning the number of participants in liturgies and services at places of worship were, from the legislative side, a restriction on the realization of citizens’ right to public religious worship. On the other hand, for the Church community, they were a serious impediment to the realization of its salvific mission, including through the change of the priestly (cultic) function, expressed in the celebration of the liturgy, sacraments, sacramentals, and the celebration of services. What belongs to the essence of the indicated forms of manifestation of faith is their communal celebration, while the introduced restrictions and, in some cases, the periodic abandonment of the public performance of the cultic function, has been quite a challenge to the spiritual and religious life of individual Catholics. There has been a noticeable trend towards the privatization of faith. Religious practices that had so far been mandated, or at least recommended (such as the use of the holy sacraments) due to the pandemic and sanitary, legal and social restrictions were limited and often banned.

The last part of the book, which consists of a comprehensive Appendix and Bibliography, should be evaluated positively. The Appendix is made up of a photo gallery of 32 photographs capturing scenes from the life of the Church during the pandemic, and a sample online survey form is also included. Next, we can familiarize ourselves with a very extensive bibliography, covering all Church and state documents published during the period, legal sources and pastoral texts.

Elżbieta Szczot

The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8360-4250>