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# SELF-DECLARATIONS OF RELIGIOUS FAITH AMONG BELIEVERS IN POLAND IN THE FACE OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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## Abstract

With the arrival of the covid-19 pandemic, questions were formulated about the religious meaning behind this phenomenon in an attempt to indicate its causes and draw pastoral and educational conclusions. Therefore, this paper attempts to solve the research problem regarding the impact of the pandemic on the declarations of believers in Poland about their religious faith. For this purpose, in June 2021, research was conducted on a sample of adult Poles, statistically representative in terms of four key socio-demographic variables: age, gender, class and place of residence in their voivodeship. The data analysis conducted for this paper was limited to a sample of 2,297 respondents who declared themselves believers and practice regularly or irregularly, or believers who do not practice their faith. The obtained results indicate that social isolation accompanying the pandemic and restrictions on organized religious worship did not significantly either weaken or strengthen the respondents' self-declarations about their faith. Nevertheless, there was a group declaring that their faith was strengthened, and only a small part of the respondents stated that their faith had weakened. The research also confirmed the diversity of respondents in terms of religious beliefs and the related declared changes concerning their faith depending on gender, age, place of residence and education. In conclusion, the authors point to the need to continue observing and analysing the changes that have taken place in Polish society, as well as to recognize the long-term consequences of social isolation during the pandemic with its possible impact on the functioning of individuals, families and various social groups. A special subject of interest and concern for psychologists, educators and other researchers of the phenomenon of religiosity are children, adolescents and young adults, since these age categories bear the greatest emotional burden caused by sanitary restrictions.

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## 1. Introduction

Has the coronavirus pandemic turned out to be a sign of the times, waking up modern people from hedonistic lethargy and forcing them to ask questions about higher values? Did it make people reflect deeply on their existences and re-evaluate their declarations on religious faith? It would be inappropriate to talk about the benefits of a disease that has turned the daily lives of most of us upside down, causing millions of deaths worldwide and tremendous psychological pain [1]. Nevertheless, the emergence of the covid-19 pandemic has introduced problems into the comfortably functioning public space of societies that were previously pushed to the margins of collective consciousness [2, 3].

For modern people, especially Western people who live in a safe and comfortable place, it is rather strange to think about important matters, especially the final ones. This was mentioned by the German journalist Peter Hahne [4], who, diagnosing the condition of the contemporary pleasure society, states that it not only ignores misfortunes and failures, but also all forms of suffering, disability and weakness. "If you can't keep up, you're in the way and have to leave", he wrote. Such a society's program, pushing all difficult matters to the margins, suddenly confronted them face-to-face with reality. Public discourse began to include issues related to increased concern for the well-being of the most vulnerable members of society [5, 6], appreciating the value of life [7], questions about the meaning of suffering [8], or anxiety about ultimate matters [9].

From the religious perspective, plagues and epidemics have been perceived for centuries as God's punishments, but also an expression of God's providence that is difficult to judge. That is why Christian Churches, in order to redeem sins and ask for God's mercy, sometimes called for joint fasting and prayer, together with carrying of relics in street processions, often accompanied by flagellants [10]. Currently, in a pandemic situation, people are also trying to answer questions about the meaning behind this phenomenon by pointing to God's punishment for sins committed by people [11, 12]. There are indirect interpretations that combine opposing positions that covid-19 is not only a form of punishment, but also a manifestation of God's love. God is using the pandemic "to shape human character for a better future" [13].

This is met with polemics within the Catholic Church, according to which the pandemic should not be treated as a punishment sent to humanity by God [14]. Therefore, instead of talking about punishment, it is better to talk about the signs of the times, as pointed out by the Czech clergyman and philosopher Tomáš Halík: "The signs of the times call for conversion, understood as transformation. This is more than just an improvement. It is about changing one's self-perception, the world and God, as well as implementing the consequences of these changes." [15] In this approach, a pastoral and educational view stemming from the fact of the pandemic is visible and acceptable to modern people. Similarly, Carl-Mario Sultana proposes a

theoretical framework for transforming the pandemic event into a Christian religious experience that would have a positive impact on the lives of believers through reflection useful in catechesis and pastoral work [16]. In the same spirit, in their pastoral letters to the faithful, Poland's bishops wrote about how to react to the situation, how to use it and how it can help the development of one's spiritual life [14].

Also, when analysing the coronavirus pandemic, there was a statement that the world would not be the same when it ended. Does this also apply to one's religious life? Will there be a spiritual and moral rebirth? Will the people affected by this experience become stronger believers? As the pandemic progressed, research results showed different trends in this respect in various countries and different religious communities [17-20]. In turn, Silvio Brachetta, already at the beginning of the pandemic, stated that no awakening would take place, as the history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, full of tragedy and suffering, proves [21].

In the above-outlined context of questions about important and the most important matters, this paper will attempt to analyse, interpret and evaluate the results of research aimed at learning from the self-declarations on the religious faith of believers in Poland in the face of the covid-19 pandemic. Religious faith was defined here as a specific personal attitude expressed, most generally, in the belief in the existence of God as an absolute truth. Consequently, a research problem was formulated, which took the form of the question: what impact did the covid-19 pandemic have on the religious faith declarations of believers in Poland?

## **2. Research methodology**

The survey questionnaire used during the study consisted of thirty-five closed questions in the main part and nine respondent-particular questions. Only closed questions (30) and semi-open questions (5) were used in the main part. Most questions were answered by respondents with a single reply using a 5- or 7-point Likert scale (21). The remaining questions were multi- or single-choice answers with shorter ordinal scales or dichotomous questions.

From the collected empirical material, data were extracted for this paper and used to answer the research problem posed. Namely, in addition to verifying the overall impact of the pandemic on the respondents' declarations of their level of faith, this impact was analyzed through the prism of respondents' gender, age, level of education, employment status, religious denomination and frequency of religious practice. The respondents' faith level declarations were also examined in the context of their responses to the following questions: (1) 'To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statement <The covid-19 pandemic has given new meaning to my religious commitment>?'; (2) 'How has the covid-19 pandemic affected your relationship with your parish/religious community?'; (3) 'Has your church/religious association met the challenges caused by the covid-

19 pandemic?'. In addition, statements regarding the level of faith among those surveyed were examined in light of their stated interpretations of the coronavirus pandemic and their religious beliefs.

Due to the exploratory nature of the present study, we decided to refrain from formulating research hypotheses and limited it to posing a research problem.

### **3. Research sample**

The research was conducted in June 2021 using an online survey posted on the panel for Internet users of Ariadna Research Company. The research sample is statistically representative for Poles aged eighteen and over in terms of four key socio-demographic variables: age, gender, class and place of residence (voivodeship). The data analysis conducted for this paper was limited to a sample of 2297 respondents who declared that they were believers who practiced either regularly or irregularly, or believers who did not practice their faith. These included 1,250 women (54.4%) and 1,047 men (45.6%) aged 18 to 88 ( $M = 45.48$ ,  $SD = 15.79$ ). 1,042 people (45.4%) completed secondary education, 946 people (41.2%) completed higher education, 255 people (11.1%) completed vocational education and 54 people (2.4%) completed primary education.

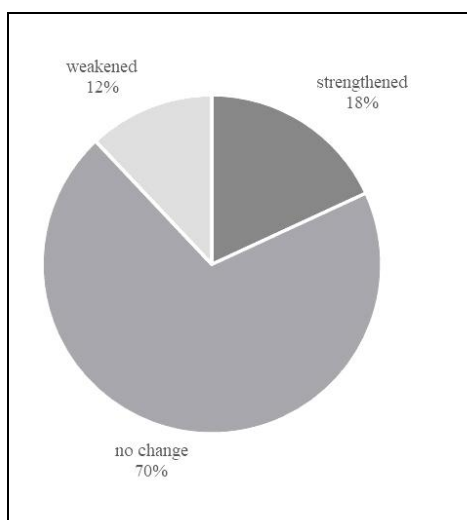
At the time of the research, 1,298 respondents (60.7%) were working people and 841 (39.3%) were not working, with detailed data on current employment and work during the pandemic as follows: 1,169 people (50.9%) chose the answer 'yes, I am currently working professionally and have been working professionally throughout the pandemic', 142 people (6.2%) chose 'yes, I am currently working professionally, but, during the pandemic, I periodically did not work professionally', and 82 people (3.6%) chose 'yes, I am currently working professionally but, during the pandemic, I did not work professionally at all'. On the other hand, 728 people (31.7%) stated 'no, I am currently not working professionally and, during the pandemic, I also did not work professionally', 76 people (3.3%) chose 'no, I am currently not working professionally but, during the pandemic, I was working periodically', while 100 people (4.4%) marked 'no, I am currently not working professionally but I was working professionally throughout the pandemic'.

2,142 people (93.3%) declared that they were Catholic, 46 people (2%) Orthodox, 21 (0.9%) Protestant, 29 people (1.3%) chose the answer 'other' and 59 people (2.6%) did not indicate their religion. 835 people (39%) described themselves as believers who practiced irregularly, 666 respondents (31.1%) were believers who practiced regularly, and 638 people (29.8%) were non-practicing believers.

#### 4. Results

To answer the research questions, statistical analyzes were performed using the IBM SPSS Statistics 25 software package. Frequency analysis,  $\chi^2$  tests, Fisher's exact tests, and Kruskal–Wallis tests were performed. The classical threshold  $\alpha = 0.05$  was considered as the level of significance. The classical threshold  $\alpha = 0.05$  was considered the level of significance.

In order to verify the beliefs about the impact of COVID-19 on the level of faith among the respondents, a frequency analysis was performed. Information based on this question was recorded for 2,139 people. As can be seen in Figure 1, answers indicating a declaration of one's faith strengthening (387 people) dominated in comparison to answers indicating one's faith had weakened (257 people). Meanwhile, 1,495 people perceived no significant change in themselves.



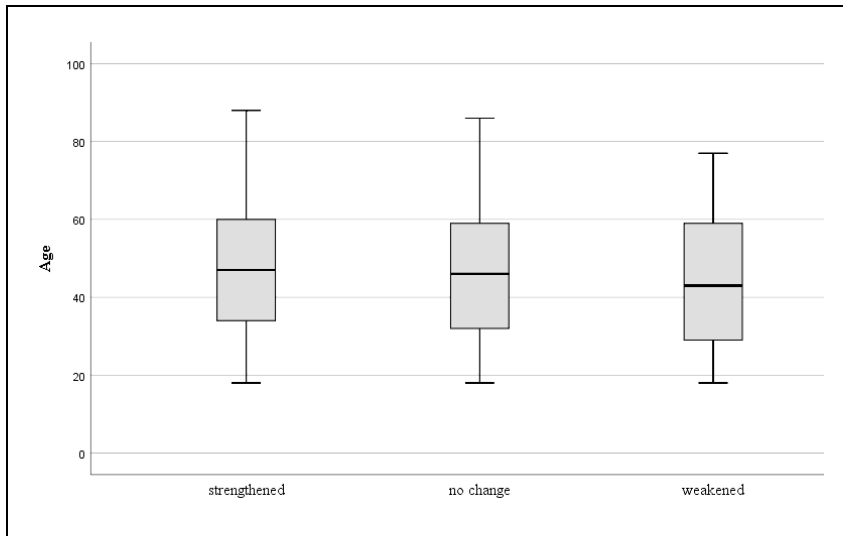
**Figure 1.** People convinced of the impact of the covid-19 pandemic on their faith.

There was no statistically significant difference in the proportion of women and men and in the study groups,  $\chi^2(2) = 3.12$ ,  $p = 0.210$  (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Correlation between respondent gender and the impact of the covid-19 pandemic on faith.

Gender	Impact of the covid-19 pandemic on faith (n, %)		
	strengthened	no change	weakened
Women	199	822	150
	51.4%	55%	58.4%
Men	188	673	107
	48.6%	45%	41.6%

However, there was a statistically significant result from the Kruskal-Wallis test examining whether the age of the surveyed differed among the study groups,  $H(2) = 10.17$ ,  $p = 0.006$ . Thus, *post hoc* analyses were performed using the Dunn-Sidak test with the Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons. There was one statistically significant difference. As illustrated in Figure 2, those who indicated that the pandemic strengthened their faith were older compared to those who indicated that the situation weakened their faith ( $p = 0.004$ ). In contrast, the differences between the two groups and those assessing that the pandemic had not affected their faith were not statistically significant.



**Figure 2.** Correlation between respondent age and the impact of the covid-19 pandemic on their faith.

**Table 2.** Correlation between respondent level of education and the impact of the covid-19 pandemic on faith.

Level of education	Impact of the covid-19 pandemic on faith (n, %)		
	strengthened	no change	weakened
Elementary or middle school	8	27	7
	2.1%	1.8%	2.7%
Basic vocational	63	140	24
	16.3%	9.4%	9.3%
Secondary education	163	687	127
	42.1%	46%	49.4%
Higher education	153	641	99
	39.5%	42.9%	38.5%

There was also a statistically significant result from the Kruskal-Wallis test when examining whether the educational level of the subjects differed between the groups,  $H(2) = 6.15$ ,  $p = 0.046$ . *Post-hoc* analyses showed one statistically significant difference: those who declared that their faith had been strengthened were characterized by a lower level of education than those who declared that their faith had not changed ( $p = 0.020$ ). Other differences were not statistically significant (Table 2).

**Table 3.** Correlation between respondent employment status and the impact of the covid-19 pandemic on faith.

Employment status	Impact of the covid-19 pandemic on faith (n, %)		
	strengthened	no change	weakened
I work now	236	909	153
	61%	60.8%	59.5%
I don't work now	151	586	104
	39%	39.2%	40.5%
Yes, I am currently working professionally and have been working professionally throughout the pandemic	183	782	124
	47.3%	52.3%	48.2%
Yes, I am currently working professionally, but during the pandemic, I periodically did not work professionally	29	84	19
	7.5%	5.6%	7.4%
Yes, I am currently working professionally, but during the pandemic, I did not work professionally at all	24	43	10
	6.2%	2.9%	3.9%
No, I am currently not working professionally and during the pandemic, I also did not work professionally	116	491	78
	30%	32.8%	30.4%
No, I am currently not working professionally, but during the pandemic, I was working periodically	17	44	12
	4.4%	2.9%	4.7%
No, I am currently not working professionally, but I was working professionally throughout the pandemic	18	51	14
	4.7%	3.4%	5.4%

The aspect of respondents' current employment alone was not significantly associated with a change in belief in their level of self-reported faith as a result of the covid-19 pandemic:  $\chi^2(2) = 0.17$ ,  $p = 0.920$ . However, when the six groups were compared considering current employment status

alongside their status during the pandemic, a statistically significant result was noted:  $\chi^2(2) = 21.26, p = 0.019$ . Yet, the strength of the effect as measured by Cramer’s V coefficient was very low:  $V = 0.07$ . The distribution of the results is presented in Table 3. The most pronounced differences were found among those who worked both during the pandemic and currently (the largest group among those declaring no change in their level of faith) and those who are currently working but did not work during the pandemic (the largest number among those in the group with strengthened faith).

Fisher’s exact test showed a statistically significant difference in the proportions of each religion in the comparison groups:  $p = 0.043$ . The proportions of Roman Catholics and those indicating a “no religion” response was highest in the group of people convinced that their level of faith had been weakened by the pandemic, and for the other confessions, it was the group of respondents convinced that their level of faith had been strengthened. However, the strength of the observed effect was weak:  $V = 0.06$ . The results are summarized in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Correlation between respondent religion and the impact of the covid-19 pandemic on faith.3.

Religion	Impact of the covid-19 pandemic on faith (n, %)		
	strengthened	no change	weakened
Roman Catholic	355	1403	243
	91.7%	93.8%	94.6%
Orthodox	13	29	4
	3.4%	1.9%	1.6%
Protestant	7	8	2
	1.8%	0.5%	0.8%
Other	8	20	1
	2.1%	1.3%	0.4%
No religion	4	35	7
	1%	2.3%	2.7%

**Table 5.** Correlation between respondent self-declaration of the intensity of religious practices and the impact of the covid-19 pandemic on faith.

Self-declaration of the intensity of religious practices	Impact of the covid-19 pandemic on faith (n, %)		
	strengthened	no change	weakened
I practice regularly	229	406	31
	59.2%	27.2%	12.1%
I practice irregularly	130	589	116
	33.6%	39.4%	45.1%
I do not practice	28	500	110
	7.2%	33.4%	42.8%



The proportion of people with different self-reported frequencies of religious practice was also examined. A statistically significant result was noted:  $H(2) = 220.59, p < 0.001$ . *Post-hoc* analyses were therefore performed. All differences were found to be statistically significant. The level of religious practice among those who reported that their faith was strengthened by covid-19 was higher compared to those in the ‘no change’ and ‘weakened’ groups:  $p < 0.001$ . These groups also differed statistically significantly:  $p < 0.001$ . The results are summarized in Table 5.

The level of agreeing with the following statements was also checked: (1) ‘To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statement <The covid-19 pandemic has given new meaning to my religious commitment>?’; (2) ‘How has the covid-19 pandemic affected your relationship with your parish/religious community?’; (3) ‘Has your Church/religious association met the challenges caused by the covid-19 pandemic?’. The Kruskal-Wallis test was performed due to the strong inequality among the compared groups. As can be seen in Table 6, all results were statistically significant. Therefore, *post hoc* analyses were performed.

**Table 6.** Correlation between respondent level of acceptance of statements and the impact of the covid-19 pandemic on faith.

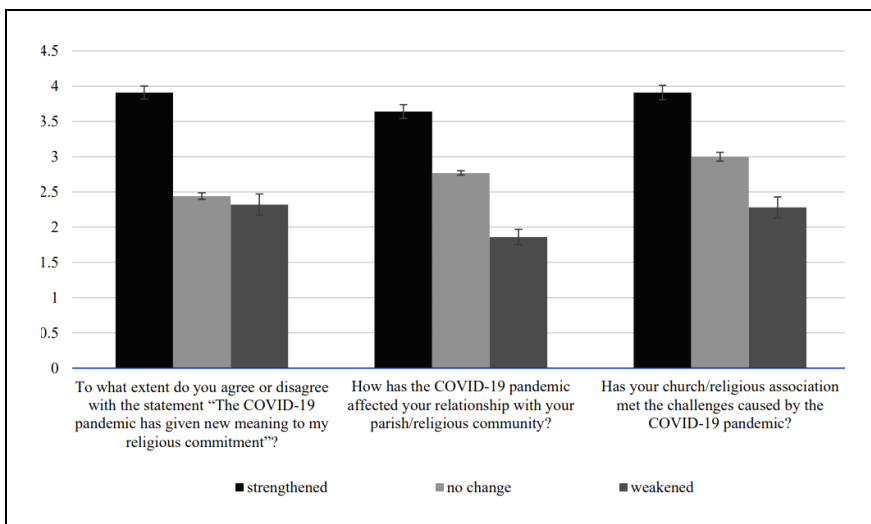
Level of acceptance of statements	strengthened (n = 382)		no change (n = 1447)		weakened (n = 245)		H	p
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statement, ‘The covid-19 pandemic has given new meaning to my religious commitment’?	3.91	0.92	2.44	0.91	2.32	1.2	513.36	< 0.001
How has the covid-19 pandemic affected your relationship with your parish/religious community?	3.64	0.98	2.77	0.62	1.86	0.88	610.65	< 0.001
Has your Church/religious association met the challenges caused by the covid-19 pandemic?	3.91	1.01	3	1.12	2.28	1.14	289.98	< 0.001

There were two statistically significant differences relating to the question ‘To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statement <The covid-19 pandemic has given new meaning to my religious commitment>?’ Those in the

‘strengthened’ group agreed more with this statement than those in the ‘no change’ and ‘weakened’ groups (both cases  $p < 0.001$ ). These groups were not statistically significantly different.

All differences were found to be statistically significant in terms of the questions ‘How has the covid-19 pandemic affected your relationship with your parish/religious community?’ and ‘Has your Church/religious association met the challenges caused by the covid-19 pandemic?’. The level of agreement with these statements among those who reported a belief that their faith was strengthened by covid-19 was higher compared to those in the ‘no change’ and ‘weakened’ groups,  $p < 0.001$ . These groups also significantly differed statistically:  $p < 0.001$ .

All results are presented graphically in Figure 3.



**Figure 3.** Correlation between respondent level of acceptance of statements and the impact of the covid-19 pandemic on faith.

It was also checked whether the proportion of people agreeing with the interpretations of the covid-19 pandemic in light of the respondents’ religious beliefs differed among the three compared groups. A series of  $\chi^2$  tests were performed, and as can be seen in Table 7, there were eight statistically significant results. *Post hoc* analyses were therefore performed using Dunn-Sidak tests.

For the catchphrases ‘Calling people to repentance by God’, ‘A chance given by God to reflect on one’s life’, ‘A chance for repentance, given by God to people’, ‘A test of faith’, ‘An expression of God’s love’ and ‘A sign of Satan’s work’, two statistically significant differences were recorded. The proportion of people agreeing with these statements was higher in the ‘strengthened’ group

compared to the ‘no change’ and ‘weakened’ groups ( $p < 0.001$  in both cases). The difference between the latter two groups was not statistically significant.

**Table 7.** Correlation between respondent interpretations and the impact of the covid-19 pandemic on faith.

Interpretations	Impact of the covid-19 pandemic on faith (n, %)			chi-square, p-value
	strengthened	no change	weakened	
God’s punishment for the sins of mankind	35	93	20	$\chi^2(2) = 4.14$
	9%	6.2%	7.8%	$p = 0.126$
Calling people to repentance by God	129	231	27	$\chi^2(2) = 77.68$
	33.3%	15.5%	10.5%	$p < 0.001$
A chance given by God to reflect on one’s life	141	313	41	$\chi^2(2) = 50$
	36.4%	20.9%	16.05	$p < 0.001$
A chance for repentance, given by God to people	75	107	13	$\chi^2(2) = 61.24$
	19.4%	7.2%	5.1%	$p < 0.001$
A test of faith	131	235	40	$\chi^2(2) = 67.93$
	33.9%	15.7%	15.6%	$p < 0.001$
An expression of God’s love	32	32	9	$\chi^2(2) = 35.03$
	8.3%	2.1%	3.5%	$p < 0.001$
Proof that God does not interfere in the world	33	114	26	$\chi^2(2) = 1.95$
	8.5%	7.6%	10.15	$p = 0.377$
Proof that there is no God	3	21	13	$\chi^2(2) = 19.76$
	0.8%	1.4%	5.1%	$p < 0.001$
The sign of the end of the world	30	64	22	$\chi^2(2) = 12.83$
	7.8%	4.3%	8.6%	$p = 0.002$
A sign of Satan’s work	32	51	7	$\chi^2(2) = 19.59$
	8.3%	3.4%	2.7%	$p < 0.001$

For the catchphrase ‘Proof that there is no God’, there were also two statistically significant differences. The proportion of people agreeing with the statement was higher in the ‘weakened’ group compared to the ‘strengthened’ and ‘no change’ groups (both  $p < 0.001$ ). The difference between the latter two groups was not statistically significant.

For the catchphrase ‘The sign of the end of the world’, there were also two statistically significant differences. The proportion of people agreeing with this statement was higher in the ‘no change’ group compared to the ‘strengthened’ ( $p = 0.022$ ) and ‘weakened’ ( $p = 0.015$ ) groups. The difference between the latter two groups was not statistically significant.

## 5. Discussion

Faith, a dynamic phenomenon, can change under the influence of social changes or for personal reasons. In the subjective sense, faith is essentially a person's internal conscious act and a free-will decision. The covid-19 pandemic in Polish society turned out to be a time of more or less significant changes in people's abilities to participate in current religious practices. The present study confirms that the social isolation accompanying the covid-19 pandemic, as well as the legal and social restrictions on public worship at religious institutions, have generally neither weakened nor strengthened the respondents' self-declarations regarding their faith. The vast majority of respondents declared stability in their religious beliefs. Nevertheless, a group was recorded declaring a strengthening of their faith under the numerous pandemic restrictions. Only a small number of respondents were convinced that their faith had weakened.

Numerous studies [22-24] show that a person's religiosity correlates with sociodemographic variables. The present study confirmed the differentiation of respondents' religious beliefs and their related declared change in the area of faith according to gender, age, place of residence and education. Compared with each other, those declaring an increase in faith with those whose faith has weakened. We noted that gender does not differentiate the two groups. However, we noted the dependence of declarations of increased or weakened faith on respondent age. Thus, older people indicated that the pandemic strengthened their faith, while the group declaring a weakening of faith included somewhat younger respondents. This situation may be the result of differing existential perspectives. It can be assumed that the elderly generally justify themselves as having a more stable system of convictions and beliefs compared to younger people who are just beginning to form this system [25, 26].

Education in the present study proved to be another group-differentiating variable, albeit only slightly. Those who declared an increase in faith during the pandemic period possessed a lower level of education. In studies on adult religiosity, it is assumed that an educated adult's attitude toward the sacred sphere should generally be more conscious and founded on cognitive and intellectual dimensions [27, 28]. People with a lower level of education in their reception of the world of values and religious beliefs may be more likely to be guided by emotions and value social relationships that, during the pandemic period, became an important reference in perceiving one's faith and religiosity.

Employment that provides opportunities for financial gain is an important pillar for a person's sense of security [29, 30]. The fact of being employed or lack thereof during the difficult period of the pandemic made little difference among respondents. Nevertheless, the study confirmed some variability among the respondents. The most pronounced differences were noted among respondents who declared that they worked both during and after the pandemic. This declaration had the highest frequency in the group of respondents in whom there was no change in their conviction about their level of faith. Respondents

who declared that they were currently working, though they were not working during the pandemic, constitute the group of people with the highest proportion of declarations of their faith strengthening during the pandemic period. The respondents' need to turn to the sacred in a particular situation of existential uncertainty can explain this correlation. The unemployed group probably included those who were out of work during the pandemic and also those who were not working before it. The loss of a job may have been temporary and related to the restructuring of their place of employment, or it may have involved the loss of a job with no prospect of further employment. Religious involvement in such a case can perform the function of psychological support for a person in existential distress.

Religiosity is a structure composed of many elements. On the personal level, it includes a system of beliefs and convictions; on the social level, it is essentially expressed in membership in a particular religious community [31]. In the survey, people declaring themselves as Roman Catholics comprised the main group. Those belonging to other communities were a small group, and they were the ones who most often declared an increase in faith during the pandemic period. Catholics, the majority group, proportionally constituted the group declaring no change in the area of faith, including its weakening. This situation can be explained by the size of the community the respondents belonged to, their existing relationships with affiliated communities, as well as their community's activity [32].

The forced isolation of believers during the pandemic extended to essentially all religious communities holding meetings in public places of worship. Regardless of the formal restrictions associated with covid-19 propagation, the religious practices of respondents varied. The level of religious practices of those who reported a belief that their faith had strengthened during the coronavirus period was higher compared to those declaring no change in religiosity or a decline in it. The reason for this was not only external restrictions on religious worship, but also the personal commitment of the faithful. Moreover, despite formal restrictions on associating in larger groups, many believers were able to continue their faith practices online. Not everyone had access to and the opportunity to use this sphere. The positive correlation between the respondents' involvement in religious practices and their declaration of increased faith during this period may confirm the relationship between the sphere of values, motivation and religious involvement [33].

The search for sense and meaning in life is inherent to human nature [34, 35]. For religious people, the pandemic period may have become a special time to reflect on life in the context of their religiosity and community of reference. In our survey, those reporting a strengthening of their faith indicated far more clearly than those in the other two groups that the pandemic had given new meaning to their religious commitment. As for the question about the impact of the pandemic on the respondents' relationships with their parish or religious community, respondents displaying an overall declarative increase in faith also

scored higher averages concerning this issue. This fact can be explained by the respondents' stronger identification with their communities.

The respondents' opinions on the response of their faith communities to the pandemic are consistent with the other two opinions. The average responses of those in the group declaring no change in the area of faith and the group indicating a decrease in it received a lower average in the question: 'Has your church/religious association met the challenges caused by the covid-19 pandemic?' The pandemic likely opened up new opportunities for engagement for some respondents, while for others, it was likely a source of difficulty, contributing to a reduction or abandonment of religious practices and a loss of commitment. This correlates with a general understanding of the adequacy of a religious community's response to the pandemic.

Clear variation was noted in the religious respondents' interpretations of the possible sources of the pandemic. With the development of covid-19, several divergent explanations emerged in public discourse, and the media largely contributed to its proliferation. Religious communities also provided their faithful with various interpretations, among which we find religious, naturalistic or even conspiracy theories [36, 37]. The group declaring an increase in faith explained much of the pandemic period in religious language and linked it to the activity of God the creator, including the need to convert and change one's life ideals. Interestingly, and as expected, those declaring a weakening of their faith during the pandemic period received a higher percentage of indications in the statement that the pandemic proves that there is no God as compared to others. It is noteworthy that respondents in the 'strengthened' group attributed the cause of the pandemic in a comparable percentage of indications to both God, who thus punishes people for their sins, and the work of Satan, who is also active, and so the pandemic is also a sign of his influence on the world and humans.

## **6. Conclusions**

Many months have passed since the Polish authorities announced sanitary restrictions, including orders limiting access to traditional participation in religious practices, and subsequently lifted strict restrictions in this regard. Looking forward, we advise to continue to observe and analyse the changes that have taken place in Polish society, as well as recognize the long-term consequences of the social isolation of the pandemic period, with its possible impact on the functioning of individuals, families and various social groups. Of particular interest and concern to psychologists, educators and other researchers of the phenomenon of religiosity are children, adolescents and young adults as age categories bearing the greatest emotional burden caused by the situation of sanitary restrictions. Social isolation, the use of *online* communication, and limited natural interpersonal contact during the period of forced 'state closure' undoubtedly require further scientific reflection in order to understand the

mechanisms that govern life in the face of the need to counteract the spread of covid-19.

Having religious beliefs, whether conscious or not fully conscious, involves not only a willingness or inclination to think or feel in terms of faith, but also to act in a certain way [38]. Therefore, it would be good to analyse, in a separate paper, the impact of the covid-19 pandemic on believers fulfilling their religious practices, which is related to this study's subject of analysis. After all, religious beliefs and practices are two sides of the same coin, but this additional issue is beyond the limited scope of this paper.

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