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Religious beliefs and practices of Polish middle school students. A sociological study on the example of survey conducted in Kalisz

Introduction

Middle school students form an individual group or category of young people in their early period of personal growing up. Jan Śledzianowski writes “the middle school students are the children of contemporary Poland, the one formed after 1989. While it is true that the majority of them were born in 1986, the realities of living in communist regime of Polish People’s Republic could not survive in toddlers’ memory. They can be recalled only in memories of their parents, the adults (...). Those adolescents from the end of 20th century, the break of millennia, go through their own turning point in their individual way, passing from their childhood years in adolescence, which is the inherent law of natural development”¹. The middle school students are youngsters who have just started a difficult time of early adolescence, they are not “babies” any more, and they gradually become “adolescent individuals”. This stage of life of the middle school students is characterised by radical and rapid changes in almost each sphere of their individual and social life. Małgorzata Taraszkiewicz says that the identity of an individual as the basic personal feature and the rule of functioning as well as self-assessment criterion are still shaping at the early stage of growing up. According to the author, the period of adolescence is a time of intense self-recognition, searching for individual place in the society, the purpose, and sense of self-existence, as well as the individual function in life, but also planning of nearer and further future, which is clearer than in childhood days².

¹ J. Śledzianowski, *Aspiracje życiowe gimnazjalistów*, Kielce 2001, p. 5.

² M. Taraszkiewicz, *Młodzież o swojej przyszłości*, „Psychologia Wychowawcza”, 1985, vol. 5, p. 521-522.

In the early adolescence period, a young individual goes through a difficult process of biological, psychological, emotional, social, and moral transformations in the structure and functioning of the self. At this stage of development, these transformations are so accelerated that they are hardly understandable for young individuals themselves – for a girl or a boy. Therefore, a proper development of young people at this time requires multidimensional support of adults, especially parents, teachers and educators as the individuals occupying an important place in life of a young person, and growing to maturity. In this difficult time characterised by “rebellion and opposition” on one hand and “a need for acceptance and understanding” on the other, the important adult figures should treat these young people with lots of compassion, understanding, empathy and love, and at the same time, avoid or beware of authoritarian decision, moralising, incomprehensible sanctions or neutral and dismissive attitude towards needs of young people. Renata Łapińska says that if adults are willing to help the adolescents in combating various difficulties and everyday problems, they should keep in mind that “young people often demonstrate radical emotions. Their happiness is spontaneous, and sadness is close to despair. The excessive invigoration comes after sadness. Young people are easily switching from enthusiasm to sadness, from love and affection to hatred and contempt”³. As Elizabeth Hurlock correctly depicts it, a young man loses the sense of safety, becomes fearful more than in the earlier period of his self-development, but at the same time, he becomes more apprehensive and starts to “count” more on himself than on the support of adults, who are gradually losing the authority in his judgement⁴. According to B. C. Lievegaed, at the stage of growing up “the light, colourful, innocent world of early childhood is exchanged for a bare, grey world of the so-called naked facts”⁵. All these transformations take place in personalities of middle school students and are difficult for them to be understood, as well as mysterious, but at the same time they also surprise and intrigue them. Jan Śledzianowski says that middle school students find themselves on a so-called emotional “swing” put in motion by the stage of their individual development accelerated by the new life circumstances, such as a change of school and environment, separate exams and fear of being admitted to a “chosen” middle school, and then, after graduation, to a particular secondary school or just a different secondary school. Due to this, they require an effective support of adults – both in the family and at school⁶. This problem is clarified and made more evident by Maria Łopatkowa, who says that this kind of support for young people “should be an inherent feature of every mother, every father, the whole society, and all governments”. Undoubtedly, they need this support, because many among the middle school students would not be able to cope with the incoming difficulties and changes occurring in their bodies and minds by themselves.

³ R. Łapińska, *Psychologia wieku dorastania*, Warszawa 1966, p. 28.

⁴ E. Hurlock, *Rozwój dziecka*, vol. 1-2, Warszawa 1975, p. 65-72.

⁵ B. C. Lievegaed, *Fazy rozwoju dziecka*, E. Łyczewska (tr.), Toruń 1993, p. 73.

⁶ J. Śledzianowski, *Aspiracje życiowe gimnazjalistów*, op. cit., p. 5.

Ewa Wysocka says: "Young people and youth are the biological, social, and cultural phenomenon marked with civilisation and cultural variables changing in the system of education and socialisation"⁷. This interpretation facilitates defining and separating of the middle school students on the stage of early adolescence. The group of young people defined in this way "is a socio-demographic category of people at a transient stage of development between their childhood and adulthood, preparing to take the full responsibility for their life and the choices they make, as well as to take up their socio-economic independence"⁸. The teachers are of the opinion that, as opposed to children and adults, young people in their adolescence period – according to numerous researchers – is characterised by specific features: critical thinking, prospective attitude, willingness to critical assessment of existing values and moral rules offered them by the older generation, contesting attitude towards authorities, stubborn searching for self-identity, critical assessment of adults and their world, including their own parents and teachers, individualisation of their own interests and life aspirations compared to younger and older people, the desire for self-reliance and independence, pointing to misfortunes of social life in secular and religious structures, as well as with lack of experience, excitability, and critical opinions about the reality. This emotional instability and following of the authorities and searching for examples at the same time, are characteristic of nearly every young person at the age of "accelerated" growing up encompassing all spheres of life⁹.

Erik H. Erikson says that the adolescence period is preparing an individual for a mindful and reliable entry in adult social life and relevant social roles in each group of reference in which the individual will have to function. In his opinion, the specific crisis of identity and dispersion of roles is the basic feature of this period. This process can result either in integration of personality or identity of a young individual, or in a crisis of identity – a disintegration of self¹⁰. According to researchers, a young individual often overcomes this crisis by means of a mechanism of so-called "adolescent rebellion", namely negation, opposition and resistance towards the existing habits and system of values and notions, which finally lead to emphasising an individual's otherness and identity¹¹. Hanna Mamzer adds that a difficult and complicated process of constructing a young individual who attempts to establish a sense of continuity in time and become

⁷ E. Wysocka, *Doświadczenie kryzysu w wartościowaniu a religijność młodzieży szkół średnich*, in: *Kondycja religijna i moralna młodzieży polskiej – mity i rzeczywistość*, J. Baniak (ed.), Poznań 2005, p. 49.

⁸ Ibidem. Compare: W. Adamski, *Młodzież współczesna*, in: *Encyklopedia Pedagogiczna*, W. Pomykało (ed.), Warszawa 1993, p. 380.

⁹ See K. Wielecki, *Spoleczne czynniki tożsamości pokoleniowej młodzieży*, „*Studia Socjologiczne*”, 1990, no. 1-2, p. 1-2; J. Bagrowicz, *Edukacja religijna współczesnej młodzieży*, Toruń 2000; K. Szambelan, *Podstawy rozwoju psychicznego dzieci i młodzieży*, Warszawa 1979; M. Tyszkowa, *Samoocena uczniów w wieku dorastania i ich pozycja w grupie rówieśniczej*, „*Psychologia Wychowawcza*”, 1974, vol. 4, p. 4; M. Przetacznikowa, *Podstawy rozwoju psychicznego dzieci i młodzieży*, Warszawa 1978.

¹⁰ E. H. Erikson, *Tożsamość a cel życia*, Poznań 2004, p. 85-90.

¹¹ See A. Oleszkowicz, *Bunt dorastania – jego mechanizmy i funkcje*, „*Psychologia Wychowawcza*”, 1996, vol. 5, p. 394-400.

independent of the situation and circumstances, to achieve a sense of internal consistency and otherness, has a vision of self and wants to take individual decision about their fate, rejecting "external" guidance is the essence of growing up¹². Anna Gałdowa points out that the development of identity encompasses emotions, values, imaginations about the self, its positive and negative assessments, attitude to the self and other people, towards culture and tradition, religion and morality¹³, as well as the explaining and interpreting of the social world where a developing individual lives. The proper process of growing up of an individual, of shaping the identity and integrity of personality gives the individual a sense of self-esteem and acceptance from the social environment of adults and peers, at the same time eliminating the possible crisis of identity.

The period of growing up causes transformation of every aspect of life of a young individual, which are also visible in his or her awareness and religious practices, as well as the attitude towards official authorities – both religious and secular. The religious awareness expressing itself in the attitude and behaviour, as well as in the attitude to religious institutions, is a problem, which I have been discussing in my own sociological studies on religious and ecclesial awareness of the middle school students since the beginning of the 21st century. I am particularly interested in the problem of interdependence among transformations of personalities of the middle school students and the main features of this stage of their personal development as an independent variable, and the level of their religiousness. This problem can be expressed in the form of the following question: What is specific about religiousness of the middle school students compared to religiousness of other youth categories? Do the problems occurring in personalities of the middle school students, resulting from changes in their structures, have any impact on their religious practices and beliefs? Can the middle school students find their own place in ecclesial structures and participate in their everyday life?

These questions allow us to formulate several empirical hypotheses, which will be verified based on research material corresponding to religious awareness and participation of the middle school students in religious practices. The main hypothesis assumes that religiousness of the middle school students depicts the features and levels, which are adequate to typical transformations in structure and functioning of their personalities. The second hypothesis assumes that the majority of the middle school students does not need to participate in the life of their own parish communities and does not place themselves in relations with priests, but on the contrary, isolates and avoids such contact.

I will verify these hypotheses in the further part of this article on the basis of results of my own sociological studies, which I have conducted within a selected group of the middle school students living in rural and urban areas. At the same time, I would like to stress that compared to other groups of Polish young people, religious awareness of the middle school students has rarely been considered in sociological studies. Considering

¹² H. Mamzer, *Tożsamość w podróży. Wielokulturowość a kształtowanie tożsamości jednostki*, Poznań 2003, p. 48-50.

¹³ *Tożsamość człowieka*, A. Gałdowa (ed.), Kraków 2000, p. 9-10.

this fact, I often will not be able to compare the results of my studies with analogical results of studies conducted by other authors. On the other hand, the studies over crises of adolescents, including crises at the early stage of adolescence, are the most numerous¹⁴.

I have conducted the research presented in this article as part of the issues of my own doctoral seminar held at the Faculty of Pedagogy and Fine Arts of the Adam Mickiewicz University in Kalisz, as well as within the framework of a graduate seminar held at the Institute of Management of the Higher Vocational State School in Kalisz, with considerable cooperation on the part of my seminarists and doctoral students between 2001 and 2004. The scope of my research includes students of four rural middle schools and four urban middle schools in Kalisz, selected using random purposive sampling. There were 955 persons in total who took part in this research, including 369 persons from rural middle schools (38.6%) and 586 persons from urban middle schools (61.4%). The study population includes 636 girls (66.6%) and 319 boys (33.4%). The examined students represent all three school classes: I – 289, II – 308, and III – 358, constituting the following percentages, respectively: 30.3%, 32.2% and 37.5% of the entire study population. The research has been completed using random survey conducted in school classes, which has been provided for in the method of diagnostic survey that I have employed at this stage of research. On the other hand, at the stage of analysis of sociological research results I have employed statistical methods of the religious phenomena index (for instance, religious practices) and the Kendall's Q correlation coefficient, used for researching rank correlation between variables. This coefficient can be used for 2x2 tables exclusively. A statistically significant dependence occurs when $Q = + < 0.200 - 0.999$ or $Q = - > 0.200 - 0.999$. In the range of -0.200 do $+0.200$ there is lack of significant statistical dependence¹⁵. In statistics, Kendall's Q correlation coefficient is also called Yule's coefficient of association. Its application in calculations is conditional upon prior creation of a two-element 2x2 table mentioned above¹⁶.

Declarations of beliefs and religious practices made by the examined students of middle schools

According to Sławomir H. Zaręba, "for the majority of young people today religious faith constitutes a significant element of their systems of values. The attitude towards faith and its constituents, which is positive in the majority of cases, is expressed through

¹⁴ E. Wysocka, *Doświadczenie kryzysu w wartościowaniu a religijność młodzieży szkół średnich*, op. cit., p. 49-69.

¹⁵ See H. M. Blalock, *Statystyka dla socjologów*, Warszawa 1975, p. 260; J. Lutyński, *Propozycja nowej miary siły zależności między dwiema zmiennymi dwupunktowymi*, in: *Metody statystyczne w socjologii*, K. Szaniawski (ed.), Warszawa 1968, p. 264.

¹⁶ See J. Pocięcha, *O zastosowaniu współczynnika zależności stochastycznej*, in: *Problemy statystyczne i demograficzne*, K. Zajac (ed.), Wrocław – Gdańsk 1974, p. 67.

the ways of manifesting and specifying these values in both social and private religious behaviour¹⁷. Declarations of faith and religious practices undoubtedly constitute a foundation for religious liveliness of individuals at every stage of their life. I have taken this issue into consideration in my research, asking the middle school students to evaluate the level of their own religious faith in accordance with the categories used in sociological research, which represent factual levels of religious awareness of Catholics.

Self-declarations of middle school students concerning their religious faith

How did the religious faith declaration factors of the examined middle school students, as well as the factors of change in these declarations of their beliefs, look like in the past period of four years? I would like to present the answers to this question given by the examined students in table 1, taking into consideration their sex and the type of middle school they attend.

Table 1. Self-declarations of religious faith of the examined middle school students

Respondents Level of faith	Women		Men		Rural middle school		Urban middle school		Total	
	Qty	%	Qty	%	Qty	%	Qty	%	Qty	%
Deep faith	118	18.6	53	16.6	80	21.7	91	15.5	171	17.9
Normal faith	406	63.8	172	54.0	213	57.8	365	62.3	578	60.5
Religiously doubtful	48	7.6	37	11.6	32	8.7	53	9.0	85	8.9
Religiously indifferent	34	5.3	22	6.9	19	5.1	37	6.3	56	5.9
Unbeliever	18	2.8	19	5.9	14	3.7	23	4.0	37	3.9
No data available	12	1.9	16	5.0	11	3.0	17	2.9	28	2.9
Total	636	100.0	319	100.0	369	100.0	586	100.0	955	100.0

Over 3/4 of the examined middle school students state that they are persons who believe in God according to the principles of the Roman Catholic religion and 17.9% of persons in this group declare their faith to be "deep", whereas the rest (60.5%) are "normal" believers, that is not showing any special involvement in all injunctions and norms of both religion and the Church. The remaining percentage of respondents (18.7%) reports various difficulties in their religious faith and nearly 4% among them describe themselves as "unbelievers". Within this group (having troubles with their faith), the highest percentage is constituted by persons who hesitate with the acceptance of the principles of Catholic faith (8.9%), but the number of religiously indifferent persons is

¹⁷ S. H. Zareba, *Dynamika świadomości religijno-moralnej młodzieży w warunkach przemian ustrojowych w Polsce (1988-1998)*, Warszawa 2003, p. 123.

lower (5.9%). Girls are more religious than boys, both at the highest level of faith (by 2.0%) and at the basic level (by 9.8%). In total, the “fixed” level of religious faith is declared by 82.4% of girls and 70.6% of boys, as well as by 79.5% of rural middle school students and 77.8% of urban middle school students. In total, problems with religious faith are experienced by 15.7% of girls and 24.4% of boys, as well as by 17.5% of rural middle school students and 19.3% of urban middle school students¹⁸.

In my research, I have also been interested in the self-assessment of one’s own religious faith among the middle school students, offering them a selection of three categories of this level: high (5-8 points), average (4) and low (1-3). The scale of this assessment is presented in collective table 2.

Table 2. Self-assessment of religious faith made by middle school students

Respondents Level of faith	Women		Men		Rural middle school		Urban middle school		Total	
	Qty	%	Qty	%	Qty	%	Qty	%	Qty	%
High (H)	323	50.8	123	38.6	190	51.5	256	43.7	446	46.7
Average (A)	156	24.4	95	29.8	93	25.2	158	27.0	251	26.3
Low (L)	143	22.5	84	26.3	75	20.3	152	25.9	227	23.8
No data available	14	2.2	17	5.3	11	3.0	34	3.4	31	3.2
Total	636	100.0	319	100.0	369	100.0	586	100.0	955	100.0

The examined middle school students refer quite critically to the quality of their religious faith or assess quite critically the level of changes that have taken place in their faith according to the adopted scale. Nearly 1/2 of the examined students declare “high” level of their faith in God (by 12.2%), as well as the students of rural middle schools over their peers from urban middle schools (by 7.8%). At the same time, as much as 50.1% of the examined middle school students evaluate the level of their faith critically, locating it either at the “average” level (26.3%) or at the “low” level (23.8%). We can observe this discontent both in 47% of girls and in 56.1% of boys, as well as in 45.5% of rural middle school students and in 52.9% of urban middle school students.

The respondents’ attitude towards their own religious faith is also visible in the difference between the “high” level and the “low” level (H: L). Seen from a cumulative perspective, this difference amounts to 1.96, whereas combined with variables it looks even more different: in correlation with the sex of respondents it constitutes 2.25 for girls

¹⁸ See: E. Wysocka, *Doświadczenie kryzysu w wartościowaniu a religijność młodzieży szkół średnich*, op. cit., p. 54. (High school students researched by the author declared the following levels of their faith: deep faith – 18.8%, believers – 62.4%, hesitating – 10.4%, religiously indifferent – 5.9%, unbelievers – 2.5%. Cf. A. Górny, *Znaczący inni. Socjalizacja religijna i moralna młodzieży. Szkic socjologiczny na przykładzie województwa śląskiego*, in: *Kondycja religijna i moralna młodzieży polskiej – mity i rzeczywistość*, J. Baniak (ed.), Poznań 2005, p. 269, table 1. (The author presents information that his young respondents declare the following levels of their faith in God: deep faith – 14.7%, normal faith – 76.8%, indifferent – 7.4%, unbelievers – 0.9%, irreligionist – 0.1%).

and 1.46 for boys, as well as 2.53 for rural middle school students and 1.68 for urban middle school students. An average assessment of satisfaction from one's own religiosity among girls is higher than the general assessment among the entire examined population by 0.29, whereas in the case of boys it is lower by 0.5. Rural school students assess their religious faith more optimistically than all students examined together (by 0.57), whereas the assessment of urban school students is worse by 0.28¹⁹

Religious practices fulfilled by middle school students

In the assessment of sociologists of religion, religious practices are counted among the most basic constituents of traditional religiosity and are still quite frequently fulfilled by Catholics, both adults and youngsters, and in Poland they still constitute the essential feature of folk and ecclesiastical religiosity²⁰. Religiosity researchers increasingly often take into consideration religious practices of young people from various categories in their plans and concepts, although the most numerous studies concern school and academic youngsters. Many sociologists are interested in both the structure and the dynamics of religiosity of young people, presenting them from various points of view and in many contexts. They see the "future" of religious structures of the Catholic Church in the religious life of young people²¹. The fact that young people take part in religious practices, especially in the mandatory ones, means that they belong to both the Church and the parochial community and that a bond has been forged between them and these institutions. The very parish, on the other hand, "finds" its own religious identity in these practices²². There is a significant dependence between religious identity of individuals and religious identity of the parish.

In the further analysis of research results, I would like to focus on the participation of middle school students in four religious practices: Sunday Mass, confession, communion and individual prayer. The factors of these practices are shown in subsequent collective tables.

¹⁹ Cf. E. Wysocka, *Doświadczenie kryzysu w wartościowaniu a religijność młodzieży szkół średnich*, op. cit., p. 54, table 1. (The author's respondents assessed their own faith according to the following scale: low level – 21.29%, average level – 24.75%, and high level – 51.96%, whereas the proportion between extreme levels (H : L) in this case amounts to 2.53); see: J. Mariański, *Religijność młodzieży polskiej wobec wyzwań re-ewangelizacji Europy*, in: *Młodzież a ewangelizacja w perspektywie wyzwań XXI wieku*, W. Nowak (ed.), Olsztyn 2000, p. 14-15.

²⁰ See J. Baniak, *Praktyki religijne katolików XX wieku – analiza socjologiczna*, "Studia Gnesnensia", 2002, vol. 16, p. 277-318; W. Piwowski, *Przemiany globalnych postaw wobec religii – na przykładzie Puław*, in: *Religijność ludowa – ciągłość i zmiana*, W. Piwowski (ed.), Wrocław 1983, p. 5-12.

²¹ See S. H. Zaręba, *Dynamika świadomości religijno-moralnej młodzieży w warunkach przemian ustrojowych w Polsce (1988-1998)*, op. cit.

²² See N. Greinacher, *Soziologische des Selbstvolzug der Kirche*, in: *Handbuch der Pastoraltheologie*, vol. 1, Freiburg im Breisgau 1964, p. 439-440.

Participation of middle school students in the mandatory Sunday Mass

How do the factors of respondents' participation in the mandatory Sunday Mass look like in view of their own declarations? Their declarations are shown in table 3.

The highest percentage of the examined middle school students regularly participate in Sunday Mass, that is they go to church every Sunday on a regular basis (52.3%). On the other hand, 23.5% of them participate on a non-regular basis, that is either several times a month (15.2%) or just once a month (8.3%). Moreover, 6.7% of them participate sporadically, under pressure of various factors and reasons. In total, 82.5% of the entire examined population of middle school students participate in Sunday Mass, including 52.3% who do so on a regular basis each Sunday of the period taken into consideration.

Table 3. Participation of middle school students in the mandatory Sunday Mass

Respondents Participation in the Mass	Women		Men		Rural middle school		Urban middle school		Total	
	Qty	%	Qty	%	Qty	%	Qty	%	Qty	%
Every Sunday	338	53.2	162	50.8	216	58.4	284	48.5	500	52.3
Several times a month	116	18.3	29	9.1	60	16.3	85	14.5	145	15.2
Once a month	52	8.2	27	8.5	23	6.3	56	9.5	79	8.3
Sporadically (1-2)	34	5.3	30	9.4	23	6.3	41	7.0	64	6.7
I do not remember	27	4.2	19	5.9	14	3.8	32	5.5	46	4.8
I do not participate	58	9.1	49	15.3	28	7.6	79	13.5	107	11.2
No data available	11	1.7	3	1.0	5	1.3	9	1.5	14	1.5
Total	636	100.0	319	100.0	369	100.0	586	100.0	955	100.0

Boys and girls from rural middle schools participate in Sunday Mass in higher numbers than their peers from urban middle schools, both on a regular and non-regular basis. At the same time, we can notice that one in ten respondents does not participate in this religious duty at all. Factors of this absence are different if one takes into consideration independent variables: the percentage of girls omitting Sunday Mass is lower (9.1%) than the respective percentage of boys (15.3%). It is similar in the case of rural middle school students (7.6%) compared to urban middle school students (13.5%).

In an additional question, I have requested respondents to depict their possible participation in the Mass on working days during the week. Participation in everyday Mass is not a basic religious duty for Catholics. However, if it takes place, it attests to their deeper devotion and closer relation with the parish. Their participation in everyday Mass is shown in collective table 4. In the analysis, I have taken into consideration persons who participate in Sunday Mass as well. Persons who neglect Sunday Mass do not participate in masses held on working days either.

Inasmuch as the total of 82.5% of respondents participate in the mandatory Sunday Mass at changing frequency, including 52.3% of them who participate every Sunday,

their participation in masses held on working days is merely “vestigial” if it is declared in total, preserving variable frequency: 18% of the entire examined population. Established social features do not introduce significant changes between the factors that express the participation of middle school students in daily Mass. Girls attend the Mass at their parish church or at other church only in a slightly higher number (by 1.5%). The situation is similar in the case of participation of rural and urban middle school students; the former participate in a higher number (by 3.5%) than the latter.

Table 4. Participation of middle school students in masses held on working days

Respondents Masses held on working days	Women		Men		Rural middle school		Urban middle school		Total	
	Qty	%	Qty	%	Qty	%	Qty	%	Qty	%
Every day	50	9.1	19	7.6	35	10.7	34	7.2	69	8.6
2-3 times a week	27	4.9	7	2.8	23	7.0	11	2.3	34	4.2
Once a week	32	5.8	10	4.0	23	7.0	23	4.0	42	5.2
I do not participate	425	77.1	204	81.3	234	71.6	395	83.1	629	78.5
No data available	17	3.1	11	4.3	12	3.7	16	3.4	28	3.5
Total	551	100.0	251	100.0	327	100.0	475	100.0	802	100.0

At the same time, the research has shown that as much as 78.5% of middle school students, including boys in higher number (by 4.2%) and urban middle school students (by 11.5%) did not participate in masses held on working days at all, giving various reasons for their own declarations. This factor seems shockingly high compared to the factor of lack of respondents' participation in Sunday Mass: total – 11.2%, including girls – 9.1% and boys – 15.3%, as well as rural middle school students – 7.6% and urban middle school students – 13.5%. This data authorise one to draw a conclusion that the predominant percentage of the examined middle school students, including the higher one in the case of boys, is marked by poor devotion, decidedly oriented towards “meeting the standard”, that is they limit their participation to Sunday Mass as the mandatory one. In addition, not all of them fulfil this duty on a regular basis, that is every Sunday. It can mean that religious issues do not play an important role in everyday life of the vast majority of the examined middle school students. An increasing number of them spend their free time more frequently on secular issues, since they do not even take into consideration a single hour a week (or a day) that they could assign for participation in a worship service – the Mass²³.

²³ See: W. Wesoly, *Formacja i świadomość misyjna katechizowanej młodzieży. Studium socjologiczno-pastoralne*, Olsztyn 2005, p. 122-123. (The research conducted by the author shows that among 1,045 of the questioned secondary school and university students nearly 52% went to Mass almost every Sunday and 21% of them did it on weekdays at various frequency).

Participation of middle school students in confession and Holy Communion

The Catholic Church obliges its members, on pain of heavy guilt, to participate in confession at least one a year, particularly on the occasion of Easter. This duty concerns all Catholics who have already taken their first confession and first Holy Communion²⁴. Young Catholics, including middle school youngsters, are aware of this duty as well. I have also taken this problem into consideration in my research, asking the respondents four questions: a) Are you aware that confession and Holy Communion during Easter are mandatory?; b) Do you fulfil this duty yourself?; c) Do you confess apart from the Easter duty (if so, how often does it take place)?; d) How often do you take Holy Communion having been at confession, excluding Easter? The respondents' answers to these questions are shown in cumulative table 5.

Table 5. Easter and incidental confession of middle school students

Respondents Participation in confession	Women		Men		Rural middle school		Urban middle school		Total	
	Qty	%	Qty	%	Qty	%	Qty	%	Qty	%
Awareness of the duty:										
Fully aware	227	35.7	81	25.4	138	37.4	170	29.0	308	32.2
Partially aware	154	24.2	78	24.5	98	26.6	134	22.9	232	24.3
Completely unaware	238	37.4	142	44.5	117	31.7	263	44.9	380	39.8
No answer	17	2.7	18	5.6	16	4.3	19	3.2	35	3.7
Fulfilment of the duty:										
Every year	238	37.4	92	28.8	141	38.2	189	32.2	330	34.6
Not every year	80	12.6	31	9.7	46	12.6	65	11.1	111	11.6
I do not remember	39	6.1	27	8.5	27	7.3	39	6.7	66	6.9
I have not fulfilled it for years	253	39.8	148	46.4	136	36.8	265	45.2	401	42.0
No data available	26	4.1	21	6.6	19	5.1	28	4.8	47	4.9
Confession in the course of the year, excluding Easter:										
Up to 3 times a year	139	21.8	69	21.6	74	20.0	134	22.8	208	21.8
From 4 to 8 times	207	32.5	81	25.4	121	32.8	167	28.5	288	30.2
Over 9 times	78	12.3	32	10.0	51	13.9	59	10.1	110	11.5
None (not a single time)	188	29.6	118	37.0	107	29.0	199	34.0	306	32.0
No data available	24	3.8	19	6.0	16	4.3	27	4.6	43	4.5
Total	636	100.0	319	100.0	369	100.0	586	100.0	955	100.0

At the beginning of the analysis, let us pay attention to the degree of awareness of the duty of Easter confession among the examined middle school students. In the empirical hypothesis, I have assumed that such awareness is possessed by the predominant percen-

²⁴ See J. Kasztelan, *Sprawowanie sakramentu pokuty*, Kraków 1992; S. Witek, *Teologia moralna*, vol. 1, Lublin 1974; M. Marcol, *Pokuta i sakrament pokuty*, Opole 1992; M. Pastuszko, *Sakrament pokuty i pojednania*, Kielce 1999.

tage of respondents, regardless of sex or middle school type. Unfortunately, this hypothesis has not proven right in the results of empirical research. Nearly 1/3 of respondents are fully aware of this duty and 1/4 of them are partially aware of it. By combining these two factors, one could risk a statement that 56.5% of the examined middle school students know about the duty of confession and Holy Communion, which rests with them as young Catholics, to an "optimum" degree. This awareness is more frequently observed among girls (59.9%) than among boys (49.9%), as well as in rural middle school students (64%) than in urban middle school students (51.9%).

The awareness of the duty of Easter confession directly impinges on the frequency of its fulfilment done by the examined middle school students. The data shows that over 2/5 of the examined persons, including a higher number of boys (by 6.6%), have not been at confession during Easter for several years, including those who have confessed for the last time on the day of their first confession and first Holy Communion. The remaining respondents (46.2%) fulfil the Easter duty, either on a regular basis every year (34.6%) or on a non-regular-basis (11.6%). This duty is fulfilled by the greater number of girls (50%) than boys (38.5%), as well as by rural middle school students (50.8%) compared to urban middle school students (43.3%).

Engaged religiosity also manifests itself in the frequency at which Catholics participate in extra-Easter confession and Holy Communion. This is the participation that I have asked my respondents about. Their declarations show that 1/3 of them have not been at confession at all for several years. Moreover, they do not feel any need to do so at all. The rest of respondents confess at various frequencies, but only one in ten confesses more frequently than 10 times a year. Over 1/5 of them confess up to 3 times a year and 1/3 – 4 to 8 times a year, respectively. This frequency is higher in the case of girls and rural youngsters than in the case of boys and urban youngsters.

Numerous research projects have shown that Polish Catholics, including small percentages of young ones, seldom take Holy Communion on Sundays and holidays, not to mention working days. This situation looks somewhat better in the case of the percentage of persons taking Communion during Easter, thus approximating in some measure the percentage of persons confessing at that time. However, some research projects show that certain percentage of Catholics omits confession then for various reasons, though taking Communion, and thus exposing themselves to the conflict of conscience²⁵. Other situations of this type include family religious celebrations, related to the first Holy Communion of children, for instance, when some parents or godparents take Communion without being at confession first ("for the good of the child")²⁶, or baptism of a child, which is another occasion when "unaware" Catholics – parents and other members of the family – behave in an analogous way²⁷.

²⁵ J. Baniak, *Praktyki religijne katolików XX wieku – analiza socjologiczna*, op. cit., p. 292-294.

²⁶ J. Baniak, *Zachowania katolików Kalisza dotyczące chrztu dzieci*, "Studia Gnesnensia", 2005, vol. 19, p. 157-188.

²⁷ Ibidem, p. 353-375.

In my research, I am also interested in the participation of middle school students in Holy Communion, both in the form of the Easter duty and of a mere constituent of their religious zeal. In connection with the above, I have posed two questions: Do you always precede your own Easter Holy Communion with Holy Confession, or do you take Communion then without being at confession first? Do you take Holy Communion after prior sporadic confession (if so, how many times do you do it)? The answers to these questions, given by middle school students, are shown in cumulative table 8.

If we compared factors of Easter confession with factors of Easter Communion among the examined middle school students, we would notice quite easily that a slightly higher percentage of them take Communion (59.6%) than are at confession (53.1%). This situation can be observed in the case of both girls (confession – 56.1%, Communion – 61.7%) and boys (47% and 55.2%, respectively), as well as among rural school students (58.1% and 62.9%, respectively) and urban school students (50% and 57.5%, respectively). The percentages of students taking Easter Communion on a regular basis every year are also higher than those of the ones confessing on this occasion at the same frequency in each of the examined groups of respondents – girls (by 4.7%), boys (by 8.5%), rural students (by 7.4%) and urban students (by 7%). At the same time, the percentage of persons giving up Easter Communion (35.5%) in proportion to the percentage of persons not being at confession on this occasion (42%) has decreased both in the entire examined population (by 6.5%) and in particular groups – girls (by 5.6%), boys (by 8.2%), rural middle school students (by 4.8%) and urban middle school students (7.5%).

How to explain this odd phenomenon? It might turn out to be risky to state that the level of devotion among a certain percentage of the examined rural and urban middle school students has increased. The difference between these factors is quite considerable; therefore, it cannot be disregarded in the analysis of religiosity of respondents. A certain explanation for this phenomenon can be found in the answers given by respondents to the question as to whether they are at confession first, before taking Easter Communion. Analysing these statements, we can notice that 13.8% of the examined students, including 11.5% of girls and 18.% of boys, as well as 12.7% of rural middle school students and 14.5% of urban middle school students take Holy Communion without prior being at confession during Easter “from time to time”. Moreover, 8.7% of the examined students (including 7.5%, 11%, 10.3% and 7.7%, respectively) state that they “currently do not remember whether their Easter Communion has been preceded by confession”. Perhaps those respondents (13.8%) have remained “in a state of grace” throughout a whole year (or maybe longer), that is they have not committed any cardinal sin and have not felt the need to confess before Easter, so they have taken Holy Communion directly during this period.

If this was true, this would attest to their deep devotion. Perhaps they do have no “sense” of it or they lack appropriate theological and ethical knowledge about the types of sin and the ways in which one’s conscience is “burdened” with them, and that state of their moral awareness has allowed them to take Holy Communion without prior being at confession. Perhaps they have decided to take Communion without confession

for yet different reasons, such as for fear of the opinion of their parents and catechists, or maybe even their peers? Maybe they follow in their own parents' or other relatives' footsteps, who disregard the essence and role of confession, taking Holy Communion without it and setting a wrong example for the youngsters.

Table 6. Easter and incidental Communion of middle school students

Respondents Participation in Holy Communion	Women		Men		Rural middle school		Urban middle school		Total	
	Qty	%	Qty	%	Qty	%	Qty	%	Qty	%
Fulfilment of Easter duty:										
Every year	268	42.1	108	33.9	165	44.8	211	36.0	376	39.4
Not every year	86	13.5	41	12.8	40	10.8	87	14.8	127	13.3
I do not remember	39	6.1	27	8.5	27	7.3	39	6.7	66	6.9
I have not taken Communion for years	217	34.2	122	38.2	118	32.0	221	37.7	339	35.5
No data available	26	4.1	21	6.6	19	5.1	28	4.8	47	4.9
Confession before Easter Communion:										
Always before	483	76.0	202	63.3	262	71.0	423	72.2	685	71.7
Sometimes without confession	73	11.5	59	18.5	47	12.7	85	14.5	132	13.8
I do not remember	48	7.5	35	11.0	38	10.3	45	7.7	83	8.7
No data available	32	5.0	23	7.2	22	6.0	33	5.6	55	5.8
Communion after confession in the course of the year:										
Up to 3 times	189	29.7	108	33.9	124	33.6	173	29.5	297	31.1
From 4 to 8 times	168	26.4	79	24.8	74	20.0	173	24.7	247	25.9
Over 9 times	78	12.3	33	10.3	48	13.0	63	10.8	111	11.6
During every Mass	124	19.5	51	16.0	77	20.9	98	16.7	175	18.3
Never	77	12.1	48	15.0	46	12.4	79	13.5	125	13.1
Total	636	100.0	319	100.0	369	100.0	586	100.0	955	100.0

On the other hand, it should be emphasised that the predominant percentage of the examined middle school students (71.7%) in the Easter period confess first and only then they take Holy Communion. This conduct is more frequently observed in the case of girls (by 12.3%) than boys, as well as in the case of urban middle school students (by 1.2%) than rural middle school students²⁸

Individual prayer of middle school students

Numerous public opinion polls show that present-day Catholics and Christians have "lost" the need for prayer and they pray less often and in decreasing percentages

²⁸ See: W. Wesoly, *Formacja i świadomość...*, Olsztyn 2005, p. 125, table 19. (The author indicates that the young people he examined took Communion after confession according to the following frequencies: 1-3 times (34.2%); 4-8 times (29.6%); 9 times and more (11%); during every Mass (20.4%); never (4%).

among various social groups, thus revealing the weakening of religious sensitivity, as well as weakening and decline of their own religious faith. There are many reasons underlying this phenomenon. However, secularisation of everyday life and striving for success, as well as the fact that people count too much on themselves recently, are indicated as main reasons for the secularisation of the religious sphere amount people. At present, researchers notice a similar situation in the case of a considerable percentage of Polish youngsters, especially those who attend schools and universities, preferring a secular lifestyle²⁹.

I am also interested in the issue of individual prayer in my research concerning religiosity of middle school students, asking them two questions: a) Do they see the point in prayer as part of their own everyday life?; b) How often have they prayed during the week preceding the research? Their answers to these questions are shown in collective table 7.

Table 7. Individual prayer being said by middle school students

Respondents Individual prayer	Women		Men		Rural middle school		Urban middle school		Total	
	Qty	%	Qty	%	Qty	%	Qty	%	Qty	%
Meaning and need for prayer in human life:										
Always	275	43.2	109	34.2	205	55.5	179	30.5	384	40.2
From time to time (seldom)	225	35.4	103	32.3	77	20.9	251	42.8	328	34.3
There is no point in it	108	17.0	82	25.7	66	17.9	124	21.2	190	20.0
No data available	28	4.4	25	7.8	21	5.7	32	5.5	53	5.5
Meaning and need for prayer in the life of middle school students:										
Always	237	37.3	92	28.9	158	42.8	171	29.2	329	34.4
From time to time (seldom)	231	36.3	114	35.7	118	32.0	227	38.7	345	36.1
There is no point in it	137	21.5	87	27.3	70	19.0	154	26.3	224	23.5
No data available	31	4.9	26	8.1	23	6.2	34	5.8	57	6.0
Frequency of saying prayer during the last week:										
Every day (constantly)	140	22.0	58	18.2	93	25.2	105	17.9	198	20.7
From 1 to 4 times	122	19.2	72	22.6	54	14.5	140	23.9	194	20.3
From 5 to 7 times	146	16.7	41	12.9	58	15.7	89	15.2	147	15.4
8 times and more	83	13.0	36	11.2	61	16.5	58	9.9	119	12.5
I do not pray at all	148	23.3	88	27.6	77	20.8	159	27.1	236	24.7
No data available	37	5.8	24	7.5	26	7.0	35	6.0	61	6.4
Total	636	100.0	319	100.0	369	100.0	586	100.0	955	100.0

²⁹ See F. W. Wawro, *Postawy religijne młodzieży szkół średnich*, in: *Z badań nad religijnością polską. Studia i materiały*, W. Piwowarski, W. Zdaniewicz (ed.), Warszawa – Poznań 1986, p. 215-218; R. Curyłowski, *Postawy młodzieży ponad-gimnazjalnej wobec religii*, in: *Kondycja religijna i moralna młodzieży polskiej – mity i rzeczywistość*, J. Baniak (ed.), Poznań 2005, p. 31-48; M. Dębski, *Przejawy „niewidzialnej religii” w religijności młodzieży akademickiej*, in: *Kondycja religijna i moralna młodzieży polskiej – mity i rzeczywistość*, J. Baniak (ed.), Poznań 2005, p. 127-148.

Opinions of the examined middle school students concerning the meaning and need for prayer in human life, as well as in their private life, are quite diverse and distant, so to speak, from the expectations of catechists and parochial clergy. In the opinion of a considerable percentage of respondents, individual prayer “may turn out to be useful”, or it is also that other people “need” it more, especially the elderly, than the students themselves, considering themselves young. Perhaps middle school students perceive life more from a perspective of secular meanings and values and less in the light of religious values. A female student from second class of an urban middle school refers to prayer in the following manner: “It is my grandmother or my seriously ill aunt who need prayer because they think it would better their life or bring back their lost health. I know this will not happen. I do not need such a prayer, so I do not pray on my own because I do not feel the need for praying to anyone – neither God, nor Our Lady or Saint Joseph” (K. I. 16).

The research has shown that only 1/5 of respondents, including a higher number of boys than girls (by 8.7%) state that there is no point in praying and that prayer is needless in human life. The remaining respondents express a different view, accepting in full (40.2%) or conditionally (34.2%) the meaning and need for prayer in the life of every human. Thus, 74.5% of the examined persons in total see such a need for praying, including 78.6% of girls and 66.5% of boys, as well as 76.4% of rural middle school students and 73.3% of urban middle school students.

This optimistic element becomes slightly weaker when we analyse the respondents' declarations concerning the need for prayer in their personal life. Redundancy of prayer is accentuated by 23.5% of the examined persons, that is 3.5% more compared to the need for prayer in the life of other people. At the same time, the percentage of persons claiming that there is always a point in saying prayers in their life has decreased to 34.4%, whereas the percentage of persons who conditionally accept the role of prayer has increased. We can observe such a situation in the case of both girls (less by 5.9%) and boys (less by 5.3%), as well as in the case of rural middle school students (less by 12.7%) and urban middle school students (less by 1.3%), who have always seen the need for prayer in their life.

Such a perception of the meaning of prayer influences the frequency at which the examined middle school students say it. Hence, they have prayed at various frequencies during the week preceding the research. Over 1/4 of them state that they have not prayed at all for years because they “do not feel such a need” or because “there is no point in praying”. Such an opinion has been expressed slightly more frequently by boys and urban middle school students. One in five respondents prays every day and the same percentage of them prays up to four times a week. Persons who pray every day do so even several times a day. However, some of them are in doubt as to whether they pray in the correct way and whether God would “hear” their prayers. Undoubtedly, in many cases the personal life of those young people lacks space and time for prayers and they do not attach special importance to its role in their own life. Religion and prayer have been supplanted by secular elements, which suit them better seen from many points of

view and are related to the crisis of their personal identity³⁰. On the other hand, religious respondents consider prayer as an important factor that bestows a meaning upon their life, connects them with the Church and their parish, teaches them to love God and entrust their own problems and concerns with Jesus³¹.

Index of religious practices of middle school students

An index is a specified measure of a given phenomenon, located within a given time; a measure that indicates the level of dynamics of that very phenomenon under established conditions. The index is built as a result of a purely statistical operation, which allows one to collect indispensable ratios and give them appropriate value. By creating the index of religious practices of the examined middle school students, I take into consideration four basis practices: Sunday Mass, confession, Holy Communion and individual prayer. I conventionally give these four religious practices a numerical value in order to determine in this way the level of intensity of them being fulfilled by the middle school students. An analysis of this phenomenon is shown in collective table 8. If we total all four religious practices taken into consideration, each of the respondents may obtain a maximum of 16 points, starting from zero. By dividing the points by four, we would be able to construct a typology of the respondents, in which respective four categories of them would also appear.

This typology is presented in table 9, taking into consideration the sex of respondents and the type of middle school the examined students attend. The ratios included there provide information on three important issues: a) the predominant percentage of middle school students (86.9%) fulfil all four religious practices taken into consideration; b) the manner in which these practices are fulfilled is significantly diverse because we can see three different groups among the practising middle school students – namely, practising regularly (41%), zealously practising (24.5%) and not regularly practising (21.4%); c) one in seven respondents (13.1%) has qualified to the group of persons who do not fulfil these practices or neglect them in a glaring manner, remaining on the verge of complete abandonment of practices. However, it is worth showing the percentage of persons who fulfil these religious practices zealously, for it is high among this study population, as well as taking into consideration the phenomenon of the crisis of identity among the examined persons, which has affected the majority of them and some have experienced it very fiercely. One in four examined persons fulfils these practices zealously³². The next

³⁰ See: W. Wesoły, *Formacja i świadomość misyjna katechizowanej młodzieży. Studium socjologiczno-pastoralne*, op. cit., p. 121. (The author presents information that the frequency of individual prayer of his respondents is as follows: 1-4 times a week (23.9%); 5-7 times (34.5%); 8 times and more (19.7%); I do not count it (12.5%); I do not pray at all (8.4%). Boys do not pray in a higher number (14.5%) than girls (4.9%).

³¹ J. Przybyłowski, *Znaczenie nowej ewangelizacji dla duszpasterstwa młodzieży. Studium pastoralne*, Lublin 2001.

³² See: W. Wesoły, *Formacja i świadomość misyjna katechizowanej młodzieży. Studium socjologiczno-pastoralne*, op. cit., p. 257, table 48. (The research conducted by the author shows that the level of fulfilment of the same

collective table (9) shows the ratios of religious practises of middle school students in a breakdown to their sex and the type of middle school they attend, maintaining the adopted four categories of them.

Table 8. Indexation of religious practices of the examined middle school students

Type of religious practice	Fulfilment period	Fulfilment frequency	Values in the index according to the points awarded
Mass	during one month	1 – 2 times	2
		3 – 5 times	3
		6 times and more	4
		None (no fulfilment)	0
		No data available	0
Holy Confession	during one year	1 – 3 times	2
		4 – 8 times	3
		9 times and more	4
		None (no fulfilment)	0
		No data available	0
Holy Communion	after confession	1 – 3 times	1
		4 – 8 times	2
		9 times and more	3
		Always to sin	4
		None (no fulfilment)	0
		No data available	0
Individual prayer	during one week	1 – 4 times	1
		5 – 7 times	2
		8 times and more	3
		Every day	4
		None (no fulfilment)	0
		No data available	0

Table 9. Typology of respondents according to the general ratio of practices

Respondents Level of practising	Women		Men		Rural middle school		Urban middle school		Total	
	Qty	%	Qty	%	Qty	%	Qty	%	Qty	%
Zealously	164	25.8	70	22.0	106	28.7	128	21.8	234	24.5
Regularly	289	45.4	103	32.3	177	48.0	215	36.8	392	41.0
Not regularly	120	18.9	84	26.3	48	13.0	156	26.6	206	21.4
Not practising	63	9.9	62	19.4	38	10.3	87	14.8	125	13.1
Total	636	100.0	319	100.0	369	100.0	586	100.0	955	100.0

practises among his young respondents was the following: zealously – 20.8%, regularly – 44.4%, not regularly – 27.7%, no practising – 7.1%.

The independent variables: sex and middle school type differentiate quite significantly the frequency at which the examined middle school students fulfil the four religious practices indicated here. The category of the zealously practising includes more girls (by 3.8%) than boys. Girls also constitute a higher group (by 13.1%) than boys in the category of the regularly practising. On the other hand, a higher number of boys practice on an irregular basis (by 7.4%) compared to girls and it is also them who have neglected or completely ceased to fulfil these religious practices (by 9.5%). If we pay attention once more to the category of persons who neglect the practices or do not fulfil them at all, we can easily notice that it concerns almost 1/5 of boys and nearly 1/10 of girls, and that these ratios are significant throughout the entire examined population of middle school students. This situation is similar if one takes into consideration the variable of the middle school type; then rural middle school students are characterised by higher ratios of the zealously practising and the regularly practising.

Sociologists also measure religious practices using a method of the so-called "continuum", which facilitates determination of the degree of intensity of a specific feature or the occurrence of a given phenomenon. It also helps one to determine the direction of its development. In my research, I express religious practices of middle school youngsters at two extremes (edges) of the said continuum, that is from very zealous fulfilment of religious practices to neglecting and not fulfilling them at all. For that purpose, I eventually express the previously established ratios of practices in a dichotomic manner: "the zealously and regularly practising" and "the irregularly practicing and the non-practising". Using the method of correlating³³ the phenomenon with the adopted variables, I calculate a quotient, which is the result of the proportion of "more" to "less" practising persons. This quotient allows one to provide an answer to the following question: Who among the respondents fulfils those religious practices "more" and who does it "less"? Correlation enables determining mutual relation between two variables³⁴ „whereas a change of value of one correlated variable induces a change of value of the other variable. Correlation between variables may give a threefold result: a) positive (when an increment of value of one variable causes an increment of value of the other variable); b) negative (when an increment of value of one variable causes a decrement of value of the other variable); c) apparent (when there is no dependence between the variables)³⁵. In other words, the correlation table shows the distribution of population numbers, together with their scales and interdependence between them³⁶.

The correlation of adopted religious practices of middle school students with several basic variables is shown in cumulative table 10.

Ratios shown in this correlation table provide information that the majority of the study population of middle school students is constituted by persons who practice "better",

³³ See *Słownik socjologiczny*, K. Olechnicki, P. Załęcki (ed.), Toruń 1998, p. 101-102.

³⁴ See H. M. Blalock, *Statystyka dla socjologów*, op. cit., p. 304-402.

³⁵ See N. Goodman, *Wstęp do socjologii*, Poznań 1997, p. 358.

³⁶ See Z. Rogoziński, *Z metodyki statystycznej badań społecznych*, Łódź 1955, p. 53.

along with the ones who zealously fulfil those practices. On the other hand, persons who practice “worse”, that is the “poorly” practising or the ones who do not practice “at all”, constitute a minority here. The established quotient 1.98 means here the “average” rate of fulfilment of practices done by the examined middle school students. Those of the respondents whose quotient is higher than the average rate of practising, fulfil those religious practices zealously. On the other hand, the respondents whose quotient is lower than the average value (1.98) fulfil religious practices on a non-regular basis or have already ceased to fulfil them.

In the case of this analysis, it is worth paying particular attention to the relations taking place between the variable of declared level of faith and the frequency at which the examined middle school students fulfil religious practices.

Table 10. Correlation between religious practices of middle school students and social variables

Independent variables	N=100%	Fulfilment of practices		Quotient: more-less
		“zealously”	“poorly / not at all”	
		in percentages		
Total	955	66.5	33.5	1.98
Sex:				
Girls	636	71.2	28.8	2.47
Boys	319	59.8	40.2	1.48
Age:				
14 – 15	508	69.7	30.3	2.30
16 – 17	447	62.4	37.6	1.65
Middle school type:				
Rural	369	72.7	27.3	2.66
Urban	586	67.6	32.4	1.53
Declaration of faith:				
Deep faith	171	80.7	19.3	4.18
Believer	578	71.7	28.3	2.53
Doubtful and indifferent	141	39.8	60.2	0.66
Unbeliever	37	10.6	89.4	0.11
Family type:				
Full (integrated)	765	68.5	31.5	2.17
Broken home (divorce)	132	58.4	41.6	1.40
Lone parent	58	62.2	37.8	1.64
Residence:				
Country	387	70.5	29.5	2.38
Small city	259	66.7	33.3	2.00
Large city	309	60.8	39.2	1.55

Persons who declare their “deep” faith (4.18) and persons whose faith is “normal” (2.53) are characterised by the highest ratio of fulfilment of religious practices. On the other hand, unbelievers (0.11), as well as indifferent and religiously doubtful persons (0.66) are below the average. Above the average, there are also practices of girls (2.47), students

at the age of 14-15 (2.30), rural middle school students (2.66), country dwellers (2.38) and small city dwellers (2.00), as well as children from integrated families (2.17). On the other hand, practices of some boys, students at the age of 16-17, urban middle school students, large city dwellers and children from broken homes brought up by sole parents are below the established quotient (1.98). It is precisely these features and circumstances that favour or do not favour the fulfilment of religious practices by the examined middle school students³⁷.

Conclusions

The research results presented in this thesis constitute merely a part of a broader sociological monograph. However, they allow one to draw several conclusions of general nature, as well as to verify the empirical hypotheses that I have assumed in the concept of this research.

Religiosity of the examined middle school students reveals features and levels adequate to typical changes taking place in both the structure and the functioning of their social identities. The research has confirmed that this assumption is right, showing actual features of religiosity and churchiness of middle school students, appropriate to the period of their life and changes in personality directly related to the crisis of their identity. Religiosity of those young people is "immature" as yet and it is also subject to continuous evolution in two directions: the positive one (then individuals at that age attempt to perceive religion as a significant factor in their personal life) or the negative one (when individuals assume an indifferent or negative attitude towards religion, abating or eliminating its role in their own everyday life). The criticism expressed by young people concerns first of all the religious and moral authorities that the Church imposes on them. Religiosity of this group of young people is unstable, their attitude is hesitant and the intellectual deepening of their religiosity is poor, in spite of the fact that the majority of them attend religion classes in middle schools. The religious knowledge of those young people is full of deficiencies and inaccuracies, shallow and superficial. They are unable to understand and explain many issues, such as the essence of the sacraments. They rather treat them as "border thresholds" towards the passage to another stage of one's biography and social meanings.

The predominant percentage of the examined middle school students from both rural and urban middle schools participates in the school education in religion. However, not all of them are happy with the fact that they "have" to take part in this "additional" school subject, for over 2/5 of them understands and treats religious education in this way.

³⁷ See: W. Wesoly, *Formacja i świadomość misyjna katechizowanej młodzieży. Studium socjologiczno-pastoralne*, op.cit., p. 259, table 49. (The research conducted by the author shows that religious practices of boys are below the average and practices of girls are above the average, whereas practices of persons declaring their deep faith are way above the average).

Only less than 1/5 of them sees school catechesis in this "subject" and over 3/5 believe that "there is no place for catechesis in a secular school because such a school lacks appropriate climate and religious atmosphere, which can be found in church or in a catechetical room". Those young people differentiate the religious knowledge they are given at school from the religious and spiritual formation which they can experience only in a church environment, especially in their parish and under the guidance of clergy.

The majority of the examined middle school students declare their own devotion to the principles of Catholic faith and almost 1/5 of them assess the level of their own religious faith as "high". There is also a high percentage of respondents (over 1/2) who go to mandatory Mass every Sunday. Their participation in Mass at working days, however, is not displayed in a similar way in the entirety of their religious life.

Seen from the general perspective, the level of religious awareness of the examined middle school students is unfortunately not very high and it relates quite closely to the stage of their personal development, that is to the stage of the crisis of identity. As I have already remarked, this crisis is an independent variable which significantly conditions the level of religious awareness among the examined middle school students, in terms of both their beliefs and religious practices, as well as of their attitude towards religious institutions.