English Summary

The subject of the thesis is the impact of changing religious patterns on socializing mechanisms and social ties in the Polish society. By “changing of religious patterns” I do not mean only well-documented secularization tendencies (which are evident in quantitative data, showing the drop in the level of regular religious practices in some groups of the Polish society, especially youth), but other processes as well, such as qualitative changes in religious socialization mechanisms and new types of religious mobilization and new types of religious communities.

On theoretical level, I have tried to gather evidence for the argument that the relationship between religion and modernization is not static and one-sided but rather dynamic, multi-faceted and multi-dimensional. I have argued that, on the one hand, the progress of modernity draws on the crisis of old churches and institutional religion. The more religious institutions try to stick to traditional methods of building loyalty (execution of church authority, discipline of morals etc.), the less young people in Poland (for whom democracy is the only way of life they now) are willing to keep such kind of loyalty.

But on the other hand, religion can also be surprisingly revived under late modern conditions due to the internal contradictions of modernity itself. The example of the latter phenomenon (late modernity as space for religious revival) may be the paradox of diverse individualization effects. Individualization is a process of gradual loosening of social and family bonds which means that more and more individuals have to take all the risks of professional and private life on their own. Many of them find it hard to deal with all kinds of risk all alone so they tend to seek consolation and re-assurance in religious millieus. This is only one among many paradoxes of the relationship of religion and late modernity which is much more complex than it is usually assumed in typical secularization theories.

As for the empirical part of my thesis project, I have chosen three separate research areas to gather empirical evidence to support my theoretical arguments. The first research area was a number of Catholic parishes in the province of Poland. I have completed three case-studies of small Catholic parishes in Bytow, Krasnystaw and Korytowo. The second research area was a number of faith-based organizations and associations for youth. The third research area was individual religiosity of emerging adults in Poland. I have studied their individual religiosity using the method of individual in-depth interviews.

My choice to study religion on three different levels: institutional, organizational and individual has been inspired by the concept of secularization theory of Karl Dobbelaere (namely, his multidimensional conceptualization of secularization). Dobbelaere proposed to trace the changing religious patterns on three levels of social life: macro level (politics, law, and economy), meso level (social organizations, networks, NGOs) and micro level (level of families and individual behaviour). Secularization processes on these three levels should be analytically and empirically separated. For example, secularization may be not advanced on institutional
level (then we will still observe relatively high numbers of people regularly attending Sunday services), but at the same time it can be quite advanced on individual level (e.g. people quit habits of personal prayer, or their religiosity is not manifested on the level of their daily behavior).

Following the concept of multi-dimensional secularization, I have decided to study how the secular tendencies intertwine with new tendencies within religious field on the level of parishes, religious organizations and associations and individuals. To study these three areas, I have chosen qualitative methods such as case studies, individual in-depth interviews and content analysis.

The main results of my empirical study of local parishes in provincial areas of Poland indicate that the difference between rural and urban parishes, especially in terms of the level of religious practices and sense of belonging, have been gradually diminishing in last decades. People tend to treat their parish as a kind of “religious services” provider, similarly to other service providers such as cinemas, shopping malls etc. Their loyalty is not any more unconditional but more and more dependent on the extent to which their needs are met in their local church. So it seems that the borders between religion and other fields of social life (such as entertainment, medicine, socializing) are blurred.

Another important result discussed in the chapter on parishes was the phenomenon of innovative ways of mobilizing and using religious resources to solve the problems in the local community (social, existential or economic problems). In case of Poland, where the institutions of welfare state are less developed than in Western countries, religious institutions are very often a source of valuable resources which can be used to help the poor: volunteer networks, charity grassroots organizations, a habit of sharing one’s money for the poor, a habit of Christmas gifts and so forth. In the parishes that I have been researching I have found many cases of such informal welfare services in Catholic milieus. The conclusion from these findings is the following: secularization in the context of local parish life in Poland is not a kind of inevitable process, because both the “demand” side of religion (e.g. the faithful people) and the “supply” side of religion (the Church institution) can change in such a way that religion is able to preserve its vitality under modern conditions.

My research has shown that in local contexts parishioners are able to use religious resources (or religious capital) in many innovative ways, even though their individual religiosity is at the same time gradually diminishing. Thus I have found some kind of evidence for the theory of multidimensional secularization of Karl Dobbelaere, who claimed that organizational and individual levels of religiosity can undergo quite different and separate processes of change. The second area of my qualitative research was a milieu of Catholic organizations and associations, especially those of them, who focus on youth. I have done field-work research in ten selected organizations, using the methods of participatory observation, and individual in-depth interviews. In result of this part of my research, I have come up with a kind of typology of different kinds of organizational practices through which the loyalty of members is created. My main conclusion from this part of the research was that being a member of a Catholic community or association is often treated as a way to have special emotions and unique experiences which are not routine in comparison to daily life. The membership in such organizations is not consequential, though, with engagement in solving social problems or civic engagement. In other words, my qualitative research has shown a tendency that young members of Catholic groups and associations seem to seek unique experiences, personal expression, and dense social bonds with their peers, rather than recipes to make the world a better place. They prefer to create an
alternative (better and emotionally warmer) place within their community or group rather than 
try to use this group as a trampoline for some kind of radical social change.

The third and last area of my research was individual religiosity of young Poles. I have 
selected 20 young adults aged 20-35 to conduct individual in-depth interviews with them focused 
on their individual religiosity. These interviews were difficult from a methodological point of 
view because I had to encourage my respondents to talk about spiritual, existential topics, which 
are very rarely (or never) mentioned in the course of daily life. Overcoming these difficulties, I 
have obtained some interesting results, among which the most interesting were the insights about 
tergenerational tensions within families, concerning religious attitudes and practices. Whereas 
for almost all of the interviewed respondents the elements of Catholic culture where a substantial 
part of their family heritage, some of them – as emerging adults – decided to reject these 
elements, whereas others decided to keep the Catholic tradition, but often subtly changed or 
adapted to their modern life-style.

Not only qualitative, but also quantitative research shows, that the Catholic identity is not 
any more something which is taken for granted for emerging adults in Poland. As the results of 
European Value Study show, since the 90s, there has been a significant drop of the percentage of 
young people who follow the moral teachings of Catholic Church and who look upon the Church 
as the main source of their moral orientation and authority in solving the problems of daily life. 
These results of quantitative research can be confirmed in qualitative data as well. My own 
qualitative study has shown that religious identity is something on which young people want to 
decide autonomously. The effect of this is a growing pluralization of religious field in Poland – 
there are Catholics who declare to be “traditionalists”, liberal Catholics, there are ones who 
declare to be liberal Catholics and so forth.

To sum up, my research has shown that instead of one-dimensional secularization, what 
we observe among emerging adults in Poland is growing pluralization of their religious beliefs 
and attitudes. As it is well-documented in quantitative data, on individual level they are less and 
less prone to look upon the authority of Church when they seeking moral guidance in the course 
of daily life. On the other hand, they still tend to preserve religious memory and religious capital 
(e.g. inherited habits, cultural codes, ways of celebration in the family). This inherited religious 
capital helps them to navigate among many options offered by late-modern society and cope with 
some kinds of existential risk and uncertainty pertaining to living under late-modern conditions.

In the final chapter of my thesis, I have tried to sum up the analysis of the process of 
pluralization of religious field on three levels: the level of individual attitudes, organizational 
level and institutional (parish) level. On all these levels in the Polish society the clash of 
inherited religious habits and modern conditions produces many interesting results. For example, 
as I have been able to observe in the parishes of provincial Poland, people use religious resources 
to cope with the problems of the deficit of welfare institutions of Polish state. The parish itself 
becomes a local “welfare institution”, replacing the non-existent public services. Thus it seems 
that religion can play a major role in some areas of late modern society (welfare, dealing with 
existential risk), but at the same time – as the research on emerging adults show – it probably 
will not be any more an unquestioned source of normative order.

Religion as a powerful source of normative order is less and less present in contemporary 
Polish society, but it is still strongly present in the areas in which it is a source of existential 
certainty, cultural codes of celebration, or an instrument of dealing with risks and healing from 
various type of life crisis.