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## **The liquid sacred in postmodern society**

In contemporary societies, referred to as postmodern, the religious landscape is changing. The great processes of social and cultural pluralism exist not only outside of Churches, but also within them. Between two polar opposites: “the disappearance of religion” and “the return of the sacred”, there is a broad spectrum from varied attitudes towards religion and the Church, to the individualised forms of religious life according to personal needs and interests. In postmodern societies, traditional Christian Churches act on the market of the supply of different offers of interpretation and religious lifestyles, competing with other donors and organisers, which are trying to take over the religious sphere. They are no longer entitled to manage the whole society. The religious crisis in modernity that sociologists are readily talking about, was caused both by secularism as well as by social and cultural pluralism. Religion has lost its status of cultural obviousness, in modern and postmodern societies it has to compete in the market of various offers of outlooks on life.

Contemporary social and cultural transformations surely have an effect on the place and role of the sacred in society. According to some sociologists, postmodernity opposes the sacred or even is contrary to it, while others claim that it does not eliminate the sacred, which is not threatened by various kinds of social and cultural transformations but it is merely changing its shapes. We can ask whether under the conditions of progressing secularisation of contemporary societies the sacred is slowly disappearing or even exists only in a rudimentary and fragmentary form, or quite the opposite, the sacred is not disappearing, it is altering its place in society, manifests itself in new forms in Churches as well as outside of Churches and religion (“the liquid sacred”). Rapid social and cultural transformations, characteristic of our times, cause new structures to emerge, new ideas and phenomena to appear as well as new trends (megatrends) to be formed, *inter alia* with reference to the sacred. It concerns what is dominating in postmodern societies.

The sacred, which is changing in postmodern societies and often separated from institutionalised religion, can be presented as the liquid sacred, in all societies being in the phase of liquid modernity, where everything can happen or alter. The metaphor of “liquidity” according to Z. Bauman accurately renders the essence of the current phase of the history of modernity in many respects<sup>1</sup>. Everything can be different from what it is and nothing is necessary as it is. Some sociologists think of society with a growing awareness of contingency. A growing number of options to choose from expands the space of contingency and uncertainty (contingent, multioption, fragmentarised societies)<sup>2</sup>.

In the context of society characterised by liquid modernity, Stanisław Obirek is speaking of liquid religiousness in the American society<sup>3</sup>, while Andrzej Wójtowicz – of the liquid Church<sup>4</sup>. Since the end of the 1970s, the return and revival of the sacred has been talked about, as well as the scattered sacred, the informal sacred, the modern sacred, the dismembered and fragmentarised sacred, the decentralization of the sacred, the wandering and all-pervasive sacred, the sacred outside of religion or even the secular, irreligious and godless sacred, the sacred as an apparent religiousness. The subject of the sacred is taken up in our times quite often by sociologists, to some extent even more often than by theologians<sup>5</sup>.

In this article we are trying to attempt to answer the question concerning the relationship between the sacred and culture in two realms: in a real postmodern society and in a virtual (digital) society. In the first part of this study we will familiarise ourselves with the very notion of the sacred. According to a hypothesis adopted by us under the conditions of progressing secularisation of postmodern societies, the sacred is not disappearing, but changing its forms, it appears in those spheres of social life, from which – as it seemed – it has definitely emigrated.

## The notion of the sacred in religious studies and sociology

The sacred (*sacrum*) is a notion conveying everything, which is sacred, which concerns gods and worship, as well as people and spheres connected with worship. It is a complex field and notion, opposed to the profane (*profanum*) and it denotes what is separated and limited, a closed space, place reserved only for the initiated. It is placed

<sup>1</sup> Z. Bauman, *Płynna nowoczesność*, Translated into Polish by Tomasz Kunz, Kraków, 2006 p. 7; English version: *Liquid modernity*, Polity Press, Cambridge 2000.

<sup>2</sup> K. Gabriel, *Gesellschaft und Religion unter den Bedingungen gesteigener Kontingenz*, in: *Zufall als Quelle von Unsicherheit*, P. Neuner (ed.), Freiburg im Breisgau 2014, p. 266.

<sup>3</sup> S. Obirek, *Religie w USA, czyli o płynnej religijności*, in: *Ameryka. Kultura*, T. Płudowski (ed.), Toruń 2008, pp. 237-253.

<sup>4</sup> A. Wójtowicz, *Płynny Kościół w płynnej nowoczesności*, in: *Religia i religijność w warunkach globalizacji*, M. Libiszowska-Żółtkowska (ed.), Kraków 2007, pp. 159-172.

<sup>5</sup> *Zniszczony fundament. Rozmowa z Kieranem Flanaganem. Rozmawiał Tomasz Rowiński*, Translated into Polish by Natalia Łajszczyk, „Christianitas”, 2015, no. 53-54, p. 164.

between the pure and the impure, order and disorder, respect and violation. The sacred belongs more to the category of emotions than imagination. It concerns the transcendence, in communication with the supernatural (unearthly) world, but there is also the immanent sacred, connected with secular values from the civic, moral and political sphere<sup>6</sup>.

Etymologically, the notion of the sacred (*sacrum*) derives from the Latin term *sacer* and is close to the word *sanctus*, which means "saint". Both those last terms derive from *sancire*, where the root *sak* denotes "assigning meaning", something which makes a given thing real<sup>7</sup>. However, it should be emphasized that both those words differ semantically and axiologically. With time *sanctus* acquired only positive connotations, while in Christianity it is used to describe *inter alia* the attribute of God. However, *sacer* has ambivalent meanings and denotes both "devoted", "devoted to gods", but also "cursed", "shameful", just like the Greek *hagios* means "pure", but also "tarnished". In Latin the term *sacrum* referred first of all to an excluded or designated space, belonging to gods and being a place of worship. However, what was located outside this space was regarded as the profane (*profanum*). The word *profanum* derives from *pro* – before and *fanum*, that is a temple and refers to everything that is before and beyond it, so which is not sacred<sup>8</sup>.

According to Norman Goodman, everything that is supernatural, every object or event can be surrounded by an aura of holiness. However, what is usual and everyday is secular, these are the elements of the normal and not the sanctified world<sup>9</sup>. The sacred is often defined in the religious context as everything concerning gods, worship, objects and people connected with worship. We describe the nature of all that stands between a human being and God, which constitutes a sphere of the emerging indirectness (mediation) with the word *sacrum*. The sacred is theophanic, it reveals God. The world is full of divine signs because God wanted to speak through these signs to people. The world is God's, but not divine<sup>10</sup>. Sometimes the sacred is defined only in terms of religion. For example, Mirosław Pawliszyn understands the sacred (*sacrum*) as a sphere of holiness living with the power of the One who founds it, that is God, who sustains its existence and so it is always such due to its patron. A human being is not the one to establish what is and what is not sacred<sup>11</sup>.

According to Maria Sroczyńska, the sacred in a very broad sense refers to what is superior in a given culture, belonging to an interpretative system, which puts reality in order as well as undergoes internalisation in the dimension of individual entities. In

<sup>6</sup> J. Maisonneuve, *Rytuały dawne i nowe*, Translated into Polish by Marta Mroczek, Gdańsk 1995, pp. 12-13.

<sup>7</sup> J. A. Kłoczowski, *Sacrum*, in: *Encyklopedia religii*, T. Gadacz, B. Milerski (eds.), vol. 9, Warszawa 2003, p. 22.

<sup>8</sup> W. W. Fowler, *The Original Meaning of the Word Sacer*, "The Journal of Roman Studies", 1911, no. 1, p. 57-63.

<sup>9</sup> N. Goodman, *Wstęp do socjologii*, Translated into Polish by Jędrzej Polak, Janusz Ruszkowski, Urszula Zielińska, Poznań 1997, p. 215.

<sup>10</sup> J. J. Kłoczowski, *Sacrum*, in: *Religia. Encyklopedia PWN*, vol. 9, T. Gadacz, B. Milerski (eds.), Warszawa 2003, pp. 22-25.

<sup>11</sup> M. Pawliszyn, *Sacrum jako kategoria niemedialna*, in: *Sacrum w mediach*, M. Chmielewski, M. Jodkowski, D. Sonak, J. Woźniak (eds.), Lublin 2005, p. 14.

a narrower sense the sacred conveys a nonempirical reality, assumes the form of a specific system of beliefs and accompanying religious practices. In the narrowest sense the sacred refers to a subjective view of what is holy and to individualised choices taking varied, often eclectic forms of new spirituality. The sacred has its institutional and noninstitutional dimensions, it moves from one sphere of life to another<sup>12</sup>.

The notion of the sacred in large measure owes its popularity to the fact that it replaced the notion of God, while regarding the issue of authenticity or inauthenticity of religion as marginal. The term the sacred, with the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, earned its place in the research on religion and became an important element of discourse not only in religious studies; it also contributed to the introduction of new research viewpoints in the understanding of religion, itself undergoing transformations and searching for new forms of expression. In the postmodern trend of research on religion the sacred plays the role of a "litmus paper" or a detector of social and cultural transformations.

The category of the sacred can be understood in two ways: theistically and non-theistically. In the first case the sacred refers to God, gods or goddesses viewed personally, interfering in the human fate and the world created by them. In theological terms the sacred is connected with religion. It can be experienced both on an individual, as well as on group (social) level. Christianity pays attention to the transcendent dimension of the sacred (*sacrum*), it shows the ways of revealing and experiencing it. In the first centuries Christianity came cross not a laicised world, but one deeply permeated with sacred elements. There were "sacred groves", "sacred springs", "sacred stones". Christianity has caused a desacralisation of the world to some extent: trees became trees, groves and springs lost their sacred sense. To emphasise that the Christian *sacrum* differs from the pagan one, the word *sanctum* appeared. In the Polish language there is no difference between the terms *sacrum* and *sanctum*<sup>13</sup>.

In a nontheistic (nonreligious) sense, the term *sacrum* refers not so much to transcendence as to the sphere of attitudes of human beings to the world and the surrounding nature, to the way of experiencing and interpreting reality. Another meaning of *sacrum* refers to what appears as an experience of something unique, inimitable, noble, majestic, which can be experienced also by a person not having religious feelings (religiously unmusical). The nonreligious *sacrum* assumes the existence of some sort of transcendence, but not supernatural one, of divine nature. However, it is assumed that the world has a sense beyond everyday human existence. The sacred (*sacrum*) is a value for a human being, the highest value indeed. "The sacred gives meaning to all other values, but itself it does not need anything else – higher – to give it meaning and sense. The sacred is a mystery; we do not know its depth. We know only its manifestations: terror and enchantment. The sacred terrifies and enchants us. We are torn apart

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<sup>12</sup> M. Sroczyńska, S. H. Zareba, *Wstęp*, "Uniwersyteckie Czasopismo Socjologiczne", 2015, no. 4, p. 6.

<sup>13</sup> J. Tischner, *Nieszczęsny dar wolności*, Kraków 1993, pp. 58-59.

alternately by a threat and charm, which emanate from its mysterious depth when we are facing this value"<sup>14</sup>. The nontheistic sacred goes far beyond historic religions, beyond new forms of nonchurch religiousness and beyond new religious movements. The modern, liquid sacred cannot be reduced to a religious element.

In this study we define the sacred broadly, both in its religious and nonreligious form. We understand the sacred (*sacrum*) as P. L. Berger defined it, namely as "a quality of mysterious and awesome power, other than man yet related to him, which is believed to reside in certain objects of experience. This quality may be attributed to natural or artificial objects, to animals, or to men, or to the objectifications of human culture. There are sacred rocks, sacred tools, sacred cows. The chieftain may be sacred, as may be a particular custom or institution. (...). The sacred is apprehended as »sticking out« from the normal routines of everyday life, as something ordinary or potentially dangerous, though its dangers can be domesticated and its potency harnessed to the needs of everyday life"<sup>15</sup>. By contrast, secularism (*profanum*) can be defined as lack of the sacred status, that is all the phenomena which do not "stick out" as sacred, e.g. everyday habits<sup>16</sup>. *Sacrum* and *profanum* are comprehensible when they are mutually juxtaposed and one of them can be well grasped in opposition to the other.

In the broadest sense, the term sacred (*sacrum*) is defined as a whole of universes of meanings created by modern societies. "Taken to its extreme, whatever has the slightest association with mystery, or with the search for significance or reference to the transcendent, or with the absolute nature of certain values, is sacred. The unifying factor of this varied and unspecialized mosaic is that it fills the space relinquished by the institutionalized religions; for the process of differentiation and individualization, which has marked the advance of modernity, has deprived them of the monopoly they once enjoyed in responding to fundamental questions about existence. How are death and adversity be faced? How are the duties of an entity towards the group to be motivated, etc.?"<sup>17</sup>

The modern sacred is liquid, it moves from one domain of human life to other spheres, where values create meanings, where subjective experiences and emotions create different forms of sacredness. The sacred can no longer be reduced to religion, it breaks free from the diktat of religion, takes on various and new forms, is often defined by entities themselves, not by institutionalised religions. The diversity of the sacred, depending on the type of society it exists and develops in, proves that the sacred has

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<sup>14</sup> J. Tischner, *W krainie schorowanej wyobraźni*, Kraków 1997, p. 245.

<sup>15</sup> P. L. Berger, *Święty baldachim. Elementy socjologicznej teorii religii*, Translated into Polish by Włodzimierz Kurdziel, Kraków 1997, pp. 57-58; the English version: P. L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy. Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*, retrieved on 20 V 2017 from: [https://books.google.pl/books/about/The\\_Sacred\\_Canopy.htm?id=Aa\\_0\\_24WyoC&redir\\_esc=y](https://books.google.pl/books/about/The_Sacred_Canopy.htm?id=Aa_0_24WyoC&redir_esc=y)

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 58.

<sup>17</sup> D. Hervieu-Léger, *Religia jako pamięć*, Translated into Polish by Magdalena Bielawska, Kraków 1999, p. 72-73; the English version: D. Hervieu-Léger, *Religion as a Chain of Memory*; 23 V 2017 from: [www.books.google.pl/books/about/Religion\\_as\\_a\\_Chain\\_of\\_Memory.html?id=i\\_WAAAAMAAJ&redir\\_esc=y](http://www.books.google.pl/books/about/Religion_as_a_Chain_of_Memory.html?id=i_WAAAAMAAJ&redir_esc=y)

connections with social experience, with the social and cultural context. Also personality and conditioning are important.

### **The sacred in postmodern society**

In transition from the traditional society – through modern – to postmodern, the social, moral and religious situation changes. One of the qualities of a new type of society is the lack of a comprehensive vision of life with a well-ordered hierarchy of values, the lack of fundamental points of reference for everyday life. Social bonds, which are the underlying reason for solidarity joining traditional societies, undergo the processes of fragmentarisation and disintegration. The institutional diversification of society follows, while various aspects of social life, previously joined together, are now receding. In the conditions of the fragmentarisation of society, many points of reference appear, which are often contradictory. When the objective truth is questioned and various opinions are promoted, a contemporary human being finds it difficult to distinguish truth from falsehood, good from evil and find “strong values” constituting points of reference in the choice of one from among various options.

Postmodern people, called the collectors of experiences and seekers of adventures by Zygmunt Bauman, whether they “want it or not, they are doomed to constant *selection*, while the art of selection is based mainly on avoiding one threat: missing the chance, no longer because you could not notice it in time, or because you could not summon up enough enthusiasm to pursue it or because they lacked physical or spiritual strength to catch it”<sup>18</sup>. An entity – through the decisions made – must set the aim of his or her life path, ways of travelling it and the speed of moving through the individual sections of the route. A contemporary human being faces the necessity of constantly choosing from a wide variety of offers. Independent entities owe as if everything to themselves and little – in their belief – to others and society. The entities set their own goals and select the right criteria of personal choices. However, they are often not prepared for making numerous choices.

In society characterised by a high level of structural and functional diversification, a multitude of overlapping and mutually crossing social roles and systems is noticeable, especially particular values and hierarchies of values. The awareness of multiple choice can hinder or stimulate the sphere of human actions. In highly diversified and fragmentarised society the rule “either or”, limiting the choices of an entity no longer applies, but the diversity of possibilities to choose individual ways and styles of life (multiple choice society, society of options). Walbert Bühmann defines this process as

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<sup>18</sup> Z. Bauman, *Ponowoczesność jako źródło cierpienia*, Warszawa 2000, p. 307.

the transition from attachment to tradition to the freedom of conscience<sup>19</sup>, in the conditions of enhancing everyday life prospects to a degree that is unimaginable in traditional societies<sup>20</sup>.

In postmodern societies secularisation processes remain, wherein the sacred is separated from the profane, religious life from everyday life, but at the same time the sacred becomes more active, liquid, dynamic, etc. It appears in certain spheres of life and people's activity, from which – as it seemed – it has definitely and completely emigrated, become absent. The sacred freed from institutional bonds is something liquid, wandering, all-pervasive, moving from one place to another, appearing in places so far as if inaccessible to it. We can ask whether the liquid sacred, freeing itself from religion, still preserves the qualities of sacredness?

The process of "liquidity" concerns also religiousness, which gains liquid shapes (religiousness partially organised, reduced, unofficial, anonymous, dispersed, implicit, diffusive, unstable, hidden, wandering, ambivalent, blurred, inconsistent, wavering, "without dogmas"). Together with the processes of secularisation, that is the loss of social significance of institutionalised religions, the processes of pluralisation and individualisation of religiousness are gaining significance. Liquid religiousness and the liquid sacred blur the line between what is holy and what is secular, while the „disenchanted“ world becomes „enchanted“ anew, although in a different way. Sociologists study the sacred only when it is socially specified, has its references to the social context, is a social fact.

In postmodern societies the sacred undergoes far-reaching transformations. It appears beyond Churches and often without the faith in God. "The notion of the sacred is changing, and first and foremost, the attitude of the young generation towards the sacred. An authentic attitude towards the sacred includes two parallel phenomena: *fascinosum* and *tremendum*. To many contemporaries *tremendum* in their attitude towards the sacred does not exist and even if, it is in a rudimentary form. *Fascinosum* definitely predominates. If it is absent, if many present-day young people are not fascinated by the supernatural world, they abandon it. Another indication of the crisis of the sacred among the young generation is as if a role reversal. Formerly, the sacred itself used to dictate terms to people, that is it selected the place of its revelation and activity, the people dedicated to its cause, it dictated life goals and norms. Human beings used to be fully dependent on the sacred, they considered their lives as the service of the sacred. Many contemporary people, acknowledging the sacred, gain control over it.

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<sup>19</sup> W. Bühmann, *Modele chrześcijaństwa w trzecim tysiącleciu*, in: *Chrześcijaństwo jutra. Materiały II Międzynarodowego Kongresu Teologii Fundamentalnej Lublin*, (Materials from the II International Congress of Fundamental Theology, Lublin), 18-21 September 2001, M. Rusecki, K. Kaucha, Z. Krzyszowski, I. S. Ledwoń, J. Mastej (eds.), Lublin 2001, p. 525.

<sup>20</sup> H. Mielicka-Pawłowska, *Wyobrażenie sacrum w kulturze tradycyjnej i współczesnej*, "Uniwersyteckie Czasopismo Socjologiczne", 2015, no. 4, pp. 7-20; A. Kasperek, *Dobrowolna prostota jako przykład implicit religion*, "Uniwersyteckie Czasopismo Socjologiczne", 2015, no. 4, pp. 45-55.

They approach the issue in a utilitarian way. They do not give of themselves to the sacred, but they expect a lot from it, at least extraordinary experiences, raptures, significant moments of purification. If they do not get it, they part with the former sacred and look for another one or remain indifferent towards the sacred"<sup>21</sup>.

Sociologists, who frequently determine the separation of what is religious from what is secular, quite often equate the religious sphere with the area of the sacred and find the shrinking of the sacred in the contemporary world. Other researchers point to a certain migration of the sacred in the contemporary culture and society. L. Dyczewski emphasizes that in the secularization processes in Europe the sacred felt insecure in the public sphere of a modern city because the aggressive secularity drives it out of some city spaces. However, the exiled sacred returns, in other places and forms<sup>22</sup>.

Religious identity is not what is given, but what is assigned. Entities independently formulate their own identities, outlooks on life, system of moral values. Social pluralism as well as its social and psychological dynamics are making it more and more difficult for entities to remain certain as to their outlooks on life, without engaging in the constant process of fight with themselves and the outer world. Religiousness stops being a part of the cultural heritage and the choice of religion becomes a conscious decision of an entity<sup>23</sup>. In the conditions of postmodernity religious identities are very diverse. "Modernity has destroyed traditional systems of belief, but has not forsaken belief. Believing finds expression in an individualized, subjective and diffuse form, and resolves into a multiplicity of combinations and orderings of meaning which are elaborated independently of control by institutions of believing, by religious institutions. This independence is, however, relative inasmuch as it is restricted by economic, social and cultural determinations which weigh heavily on the symbolic activity of individuals no less than on their material and social lives"<sup>24</sup>.

New religious identities are different from the former ones. They are less rationalised, more individualised, connected with emotions open to unusualness. "There is also the danger of hybridisation of the religious identity, a peculiar religious syncretism. Many people believe that you can be a Catholic and go to Orthodox church, since they sing beautifully there, you can burn incense sticks at home in front of Buddha's statuette, from Hinduism you can adopt faith in reincarnation and visit temples of various religions. Many young people choose something for themselves from different

<sup>21</sup> L. Dyczewski, *Spoleczno-kulturowy kontekst religijności*, in: *Kościół w życiu publicznym. Teologia polska i europejska wobec nowych wyzwań*, vol. I (Wykłady i wprowadzenia do dyskusji grupowych), K. Gózdź, K. Klauza, C. Rychlicki, H. Słotwińska, P. Szczur (eds.), Lublin 2004, pp. 226-227.

<sup>22</sup> L. Dyczewski, *Wygwane sacrum powraca*, in: *Miasto i sacrum*, M. Kowalewski, A. Małgorzata Królikowska (eds.), Kraków 2011, pp. 257-260.

<sup>23</sup> P. L. Berger, *Religia i nowoczesność. Rozmowa z amerykańskim socjologiem religii Peterem Bergerem*, "Europa. Miesięcznik Idei", 2012, no. 5, p. 24.

<sup>24</sup> D. Hervieu-Léger, *Religia jako pamięć*, Translated into Polish by Magdalena Bielawska, Kraków 1999, p. 109; D. Hervieu-Léger, *Religion as a Chain of Memory*, The English version 25 V 2017 from: [www.books.google.pl/books/about/Religion\\_as\\_a\\_Chain\\_of\\_Memory.html?id=\\_\\_WAAAAMAAJ&redir\\_esc=y](http://www.books.google.pl/books/about/Religion_as_a_Chain_of_Memory.html?id=__WAAAAMAAJ&redir_esc=y)



religions and not according to a specific rule or as a result of thoughtful reflections, but on the basis of what fulfils their personal needs at a given time"<sup>25</sup>. These syncretic tendencies are based on the fact that people combine very diverse views on religion and the sacred together.

In postmodern societies the sacred appears more and more often in nonreligious shapes and forms as well as in those forms of social life, from which it has emigrated to a certain extent. It attires the robes of varied spirituality, loosely connected with religion or not connected with it whatsoever. Those sociologists, who depart from the theory of secularisation, gladly point out the transformation of religion into spirituality. New forms of spirituality are blurring the lines when it comes to religion as if in two ways. On the one hand, they appear through the religious semantics, pictures, symbols in society, e.g. in economy, sport or even in politics. On the other hand, these elements, sometimes called popular religion, enter traditional religions and they change their shapes.

In the broadest sense, spirituality finds its place not only in forms of traditional religiousness and Church practices, but also beyond them, as a form of nonreligious spirituality. Transformations in the structure of religion, referred to as deprivatisation, allow for the emergence of a popular religion, as a German sociologist H. Knoblauch defines it. Due to the market and the media, religion is becoming a part of popular culture, sometimes it is referred to as new spirituality. Even if it is based on individualism, it is becoming a social phenomenon due to mass communication and forms of culture, especially in the conditions of globalisation<sup>26</sup>.

Hubert Knoblauch expresses his scepticism towards the total secularisation thesis. According to him, religion is not dying, neither is it experiencing any significant renaissance. It is merely changing its shapes, surfacing in new forms. New forms of religiousness outside of Churches and spiritual non-religiousness, which are called a popular religion by him (*populäre Religion*), complement former, traditional manifestations of religiousness. Forms of religiousness and spirituality formatted anew are blurring the line between what is religious and what is not. Religion does not protect itself only in private sphere. Religiousness, which is transforming itself, is expressed in what is inner and is connected with an experience, sensation. Popular religiousness manifests itself *inter alia* in the fact that esoteric and occult practices are becoming widespread, in meditation techniques, in the belief in reincarnation, in the faith in angels, etc. Religious elements appear in films, in popular music, in sports events, in mega-shows and in many other aspects of popular culture. Popular religion does not have to be an antithesis of traditional religion. According to Hubert Knoblauch, Pope

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<sup>25</sup> L. Dyczewski, *Tożsamość religijna*, in: *Tożsamość religijna w nowoczesności*, L. Dyczewski, K. Jurek (eds.), Lublin 2015, p. 26.

<sup>26</sup> H. Knoblauch, *Religion und Soziologie*, in: *Religion in der modernen Lebenswelt. Erscheinungsformen und Perspektiven*, B. Weyel, W. Gräb (eds.), Göttingen 2006, pp. 294-295.

Francis accurately detects the changes, which occur in the contemporary religious and nonreligious world as well as highlights the "people", namely what is popular<sup>27</sup>.

Religious content goes beyond the limited circle of Church and religious institutions through popular culture as well as it spreads to broader, secular areas of life. Even if the effect of new forms of religiousness and spirituality goes far beyond traditional religions, their results are felt also within them. The phenomenon of the so-called popular religion causes a "clear appreciation of the sphere of (extraordinary) experiences and a stronger emphasis on subjectivity. This kind of processes constitute a factor strengthening and at the same time weakening religion: indeed, it increases its scope, but is also becoming more and more marginalised. The offer of the meaning of life is changeable, while its value and attachment to religion depend on the mood of undecided and unstable entities. This phenomenon is disquieting to clerks and custodians of the mysterious units of the truth and pardon, while *small and medium enterprises* on the market of ideas have a more positive attitude because this situation brings them profits"<sup>28</sup>. Popular religion manifests itself *inter alia* during popular culture events, such as e.g. during the World Youth Day (the so-called religious events). Popular religion may be identified with the modern liquid, elusive, transitional sacred, to a certain extent without clear characteristics.

In the modern world we can observe a shift from faith in objective and real forms of transcendence to exceptionally varied forms of immanentisation of religion, which has become the subject of inner concern. This new model of Christian life refers to forms of religiousness existing outside of institutionalised Churches ("faith without affiliation"). Religiousness is not something hereditary, ascribed or presupposed, but is incrementally becoming a matter of choice. Contemporary people are more and more often looking for the sacred on various paths of spirituality, as something personal, intimate, which refers to the power hidden within themselves. God is more often understood as immanent than transcendent reality. In extreme cases it leads to limiting yourself to the borders of your own immanence, without any reference to Transcendence.

New forms of spirituality beyond institutional religions, sometimes defined as the nonreligious sacred, spread in large measure through means of social communication. Companies and organizations are established as well as websites and programmes in the media, which meet the expectations of the "spiritual demand" of modern people. In bookshops the department called "Esoterics" is much bigger than theology and religious studies. For example, one of the British commercial stations introduced to their programme a TV series entitled "the spiritual supermarket", in which they offered viewers a wide range of experiences: from therapy, through meditation to mysticism.

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<sup>27</sup> Es geht heute zentral um Veränderungen der religiösen Wissenbeschaffung durch die Individuen. Ein Gespräch mit Hubert Knoblauch. „Lebendige Seelsorge“, 2013, no. 3 (64), pp. 171-176.

<sup>28</sup> B. Schnettler, *Doświadczenie transcendencji a popularna religia*, in: *Pomiędzy sekularyzacją i religijnym ożywieniem. Podobieństwa i różnice w przemianach religijnych w Polsce i w Niemczech*, E. Firlit, M. Hainz, M. Libiszowska-Żółtkowska, G. Pickel, D. Pollack (eds.), Kraków 2012, pp. 459-460.

This content, taken from different religions, constituted a peculiar conglomeration, consisting of various elements, mixed entirely randomly, according to the rule of marketing effectiveness. Spiritually understood as such (the sacred) was completely separate from traditional religions and forms of spirituality promoted by them<sup>29</sup>.

Since the 1960s we have observed a growing phenomenon of searching for spirituality outside of religion. The notion of spirituality is understood in many different ways. "When someone talks about their spiritual interests, they can mean practicing meditation or enjoying solitary walks. They can value art or love music. More than anything else spiritual interests mean the faith in the infinite value of human love. A growing number of people regards admitting such interests as admirable. They want to give voice to invisible aspects of life, which lie outside of the measurable world of science, convinced that if they do it, they will experience a greater sense of wellbeing"<sup>30</sup>.

Spirituality, interpreted in this way, often defined as the sacred, is frequently placed outside of religion. It is interpreted as a private matter and opposed to organised religion. Entities themselves are responsible for their spiritual progress and they decide on their own how to take care of it. Also nonbelievers and people not participating in organized religious life make the right choices and ponder over superior values. In a situation when institutionalised religions lose not only their religious monopoly, but also social significance, the presence of various forms of the sacred and abundance of new forms of spirituality are clearly growing in the modern world.

Changes in the religious awareness in the modern world repeatedly lead to the weakening of religiousness, but not to the disappearance of religion. They are often the indication of adjusting it to the changing social and cultural context. In the conditions of postmodern society, the religious and nonreligious sacred are becoming a matter of personal preference and choice. Even sticking to church (orthodox) religiousness is an individual choice. New spirituality encompassing all aspects of life, constituting an expression of postmodern culture, first of all has an individual nature and falls outside the structure of an institutionalised religion. New spirituality is characterised by a deep sense of connection with the world and is an inexhaustible source of faith and will power. It is heading towards the transformation of religion itself and society<sup>31</sup>. Sometimes the view that spirituality integrates people, while institutionalised religions divide people, is promoted. Liquid religiousness and the liquid sacred are present especially in the virtual world.

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<sup>29</sup> K. Niedałtowski, *Duchowość ponowoczesna: wyzwania i aberracje*, in: *Godność czy sukces? Kulturowe dylematy współczesności*, 25-28 September 2008, J. Mariański, S. Zięba (eds.), Lublin 2008, p. 168.

<sup>30</sup> C. Jamison, *Odnaleźć schronienie. Monastyczna droga w codziennym życiu*, Translated into Polish by Andrzej Wojtasik, Kraków 2008, p. 157. Translated into English from the Polish version.

<sup>31</sup> Also numerous Christian ideas and beliefs exist – in a barely recognisable form – in the sphere of secular thought. F.-X. Kaufmann, *Czy chrześcijaństwo przetrwa?*, Translated into Polish by Urszula Poprawska, Kraków 2004, p. 105.

## The sacred in virtual society

Since the end of the 1970s, the sacred has begun to occupy new areas, the most distant and at the same time the closest, formerly nonexistent spheres of the virtual world, including the Internet, with its boundless possibilities of informing and connecting people. The changing semantic scope of the term *the sacred* in postmodernity corresponds to continual progress of civilization, also with regard to new technologies. Because of an unusually dynamic development of digital technologies, the sacred has been observed to clearly enter the digital sphere.

The appearance of the sacred in the virtual space arouses interest of scholars from many scientific subdisciplines and it is the subject of more and more frequent research, first of all within religious studies, media studies, cultural studies and sociology of religion<sup>32</sup>. In this new field of study also terms with similar meaning nonexistent so far have appeared, such as: religion online, online religion, cyber religion, digital religion, Internet religion, religion in cyberspace or on the Internet, e-religion, religion 2.0 or the digital sacred<sup>33</sup>.

The appearance of the digital sacred as a phenomenon goes back to the 1980s, when discussion forums and e-mail communication were first used to share personal experiences connected with religion and spirituality. In the mid 1990s, when first Internet browsers appeared, Churches, denominations and religious organisations began to create their own websites, initially as a form of experiment allowing to transfer experiences and religious practices to the Internet. Such experiences made Internet users aware of the fact that it is not the Internet which creates religion, but people, whose encounter with the sacred falls outside the monitor screen.

The researchers who studied the sacred in this period, called the first wave of digital research, focused on the possibilities, which the Internet gives both to new religions as well as to practices online, also in a more general scope – in what way the computers transformed religion and culture. They focused on new and special aspects of the virtual world, where it was thought that computers and the Internet could do almost anything<sup>34</sup>. The invention of the Internet seems to be our answer to the need for mutual relations, communication and knowledge, which are inherent in all human beings. The Internet, perceived as such, is – may be – to a lesser extent a novelty of our times, but to a higher degree the expression of our yearning for life in a community and the need to acquire knowledge. Hence the Internet “is becoming an integral part of everyday life, in a fluid way: a *new existential context*”<sup>35</sup>.

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<sup>32</sup> *Implications of the Sacred in (Post)Modern Media*, J. Sumiala-Seppänen, K. Lundby, R. Salokangas (eds.), Göteborg 2006, p. 47; S.Hjarvard, *The Mediatization of Culture and Society*. Routledge, New York 2013, p. 4.

<sup>33</sup> M. T. Ciolek, *Online Religion*, in: *The Internet Encyclopedia*, H. Bidgoli (eds.), vol. 2, NJ 2004, pp. 798-811.

<sup>34</sup> M. T. Højsgaard, M. Warburg, *Introduction: waves of research*, in: *Religion and Cyberspace*, M. T. Højsgaard, M. Warburg (eds.), London – New York 2005, p. 8.

<sup>35</sup> A. Spadaro, *Cybertheology. Thinking Christianity in the Era of the Internet*, New York 2014, p. 2.

In the second wave of study, dating back to 2000, the researchers concentrated on “a more realistic attitude”, claiming that not only technology, but also people generate all new forms of religious expression in cyberspace. The research has opened a wider and more critical perspective of sociological, philosophical and political identities of online communities. It was focused on how religious groups online negotiate and create common meanings, common identity or theology, move and transform traditional religious practices online, use religious communities online to create their own religious identity or create religious communities online not existing outside the net<sup>36</sup>. Due to the multifaceted approach to research on the connection between religion and the Internet, a peculiar *bricolage* of scientists came into existence, who represented distinct scientific disciplines.

Just then, i.e. around 2005, the third wave of research appeared, within which researchers created theories, methods and tools to analyse data and assess conclusions in the light of wider theoretical scope; it allowed to determine the connections between religiousness online and offline (on the Internet and outside of the Internet). New research topics were found, e.g. in what way is the Internet a challenge to church authorities and in what way does the Internet legitimize the power of new religious leaders as well as provides new possibilities, such as becoming known on the Internet to hitherto prevailing religious leaders. The research within the third wave is characterised by emphasising the role of interactivity on the Internet as well as the interdisciplinary nature of the approach to research.

These three waves can be defined as follows: descriptive of specific categories (the first wave), critical (the second wave) and theoretical (the third wave); they have become a tool used by researchers to describe the progress and development of scientific research on the sacred on the Internet. This progress shows us in what way research questions and methods have matured both in the field of studies in religion online, as well as in a wider perspective as an element of research focused on the Internet<sup>37</sup>. According to some authors, the fourth wave of research on the sacred on the Internet is beginning to emerge, based on further improvement and development of methodological approach as well as on creating a typology for categorization and interpretation.

The current wave of study also allows for long-term research concerning the manifestation of the sacred in different religions on the web. The Internet appears as a technology enabling a journey towards the sacred, which is present in the digital sphere of the Internet. The Internet appears as a sacred sphere. The virtual sacred does not have to be supernatural. “The fans of computer tours experience them *for real* and *spiritually*, which they confirm in sociological surveys themselves. (...). The researchers

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<sup>36</sup> H. Campbell, *Religion and the Internet*, “Communication Research Trends”, 2006, no. 1 (25), p. 13.

<sup>37</sup> H. A. Campbell, *Community*, in: *Digital Religion. Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds*, H. A. Campbell (ed.), London – New York 2013, pp. 60-64.

on religious experiences on the computer come to the conclusion that we are witnessing a significant convergence of digital technology and spirituality<sup>38</sup>.

According to Heidi Campbell, we can name nine fundamental study areas in the research into the relationship between religiousness and the Internet<sup>39</sup>. These are as follows:

1. Cybernetic or virtual space as a new possibility of spiritual development;
2. Religion on the Internet as a separate subject of research – research into the influence of new digital technologies on the shape of religiousness;
3. Ethical and moral problems connected with using the Internet (e.g. the document “Ethics in Internet”, 2002, Pontifical Council for Social Communications);
4. Using the Internet for the purposes of propagating religious ideas by religious institutions (e.g. the document “The Church and Internet”, published by the Pontifical Council for Social Communications);
5. Religious and cultural conditionings of using the Internet as a part of great world religions;
6. Virtual religious communities appearing in the environment of the Internet – their nature and qualities differentiating them from “real” communities;
7. The influence of using online communication on shaping the personal identity of a user;
8. The structure of power and authority in religious communities in the digital space;
9. Ritual aspects of religiousness.

The Internet provides new ways of expressing interest in religious and spiritual matters. These are first and foremost: a constantly growing number of Internet websites, chats, discussion groups concerning issues connected with faith. Also cyber churches and cyber temples appear as well as online rituals, such as e-prayers or virtual pilgrimages, but also missionary activity online or religious communities online. The most popular individual forms of religious activity online include the search for information concerning religion, searching for or offering spiritual advice, sending requests for prayer.

Participating in rituals online can take place within online churches or temples, that is such virtual places where groups connected electronically reproduce some aspects of church life, e.g. pray commonly at the same time while “chatting on the web”. However, churches or temples online, in the form of a specific website, differ from real Churches, which just have their own website. Churches and temples online exist only on the Internet and do not have their counterparts in real time, that is offline (e.g. First Church of Cyberspace [www.godweb.org](http://www.godweb.org))<sup>40</sup>. These cyber churches or cyber temples

<sup>38</sup> M. Rogińska, *Sacrum ponowoczesne. Nauka i nowa duchowość w poszukiwaniu całości*, “Annales Universitatis Paedagogicae Cracoviensis. Studia Sociologica”, 2014, no. 6, p. 59.

<sup>39</sup> H. Campbell, *Religion and the Internet*, „Communication Research Trends”, 2006, no. 1, pp. 9-17.

<sup>40</sup> This Church enumerates such diverse figures as: Pope Benedict XVI, Michelangelo, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Ray Charles, Tom Cruise, John Lennon, Charles Darwin, George Lucas, Madonna, Britney Spears or R. R. Tolkien, among the “saints” and “sinners”, whose biographies are worth knowing.

conduct their activity in the form of sending religious deliberations or readings on a given day by email or archiving ceremonies, which take place in the real world in an audiovisual form. They also enable sharing their own spiritual thoughts by users or requests for prayer support.

Another new form of manifesting your religiousness online are cyber pilgrimages, which enable users not only to virtually visit the places of worship, but even to leave there your own mark without moving yourself. For example, while making a pilgrimage to the virtual Jerusalem ([www.virtualjerusalem.com](http://www.virtualjerusalem.com)), the visitors are able not only to observe the holiest place of Judaism – the Wailing Wall (Kotel) in real time, but they can also place their own prayer virtually, which is also virtually “put” in spaces between blocks of rock (“send a prayer to the Kotel”), or make an offering via the Internet, as we can read on the website – traditionally in the form of 18 dollars (“make a Donation for the Wall”)<sup>41</sup>.

The Internet is also perceived as a potential “missionary area” by many religious communities. E-vangelism is based not only on propagating the principles of faith of your own religion, but also on recruiting new followers by missionaries online, which may also be a space for proselytism. The role of the Internet in evangelization is emphasized not only by Protestant Churches, but also by the Catholic Church<sup>42</sup>.

Another example of using the Internet for religious purposes are religious communities online. They enable interactions between the involved persons, who are separated from each other in space, but share common beliefs regarding religion or spirituality. Some of them are created by Churches or denominations, others are formed at grass-roots level by the interested entities themselves, who share their opinions by email or on Internet forums dedicated to specific spiritual matters (faith, mysticism, etc.). According to Heidi Campbell, no matter what technology they use, religious communities online are created around such motives as: experience, interaction or remaining in relationships. Hence the people who choose a kind of community they want to belong to online, are guided by the type of experience they are seeking<sup>43</sup>.

A tool, which enables us to describe the evolution of religious practices online is the notion of digital religion. It is a kind of bridge joining and prolonging religious practices and spaces online with a religious context offline and *vice versa*. Joining new and traditional forms of religiousness means that digital religion is closely connected with qualities characteristic of digital culture, such as interactivity, convergence, content created by users, as well as traditional religions with their beliefs and rituals related to

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<sup>41</sup> S. E. Karesh, M. M. Hurvitz, *Chai*, in: *Encyclopedia of Judaism*, S. E. Karesh, M. M. Hurvitz (eds.), Inc. New York 2006, p. 83.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Documents of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications “The Church and Internet” and “Ethics in Internet”.

<sup>43</sup> H. Campbell, *Religion and the Internet*, “Communication Research Trends”, 2006, no. 1, pp. 1-24.

historically consolidated communities<sup>44</sup>. The notion of the digital religion does not refer only to religion as a phenomenon which exists on the Internet, but indicates in what way the digital media are shaping and are being shaped by religious practices. This term shows the current position of religion with reference to digital technologies, but also the specificity of culture it is deeply ingrained in<sup>45</sup>.

The topic of the sacred in the virtual space becomes part of research on the wider phenomenon of the postmodern sacred (*sacrum*). For example, an Australian researcher of the sacred in popular culture, Emily McAvan, uses the term "postmodern sacred" to describe the popular culture spirituality, which is a change from fictitious texts turned to spirituality, regarded as fundamental to popular culture in the past dozen or so years or are characteristic of postmodern culture<sup>46</sup>. Among such films there are: "The Matrix", "Harry Potter", "The Da Vinci Code", the adaptation of "The Lord of the Rings" or for example the TV series "The X-Files". The author adds that the postmodern sacred often makes use of the New Age language, which goes beyond traditional religions, replacing the notion of God with the term "the spirit" or "higher power". A characteristic example can be the phrase "May the Force be with you", known from the "Star Wars" saga created by George Lucas. The postmodern sacred is first of all a physical, bodily experience, just like popular culture itself – consisting of sounds and performance, for which the experience constitutes the key to contemporary spirituality and this individualisation of faith lies at the foot of the postmodern sacred<sup>47</sup>.

According to Emily McAvan, the sacred manifests itself in postmodernity through the mutual influence of two phenomena in popular culture: traditional religions and New Age spirituality. Popular culture makes its contribution to the constant formulation and reformulation of cultural values and beliefs. The author emphasises that if you are searching for the postmodern sacred, you will find it everywhere, because popular culture is full of the remains of the thousand year old religious traditions. One of the important areas, where the postmodern sacred manifests itself is science fiction, present first of all in literary and film genres, including horror and fantasy films. This connection between contemporary mythology and popular culture is defined by McAvan as "the fantastic postmodern sacred"<sup>48</sup>.

According to McAvan, the postmodern sacred includes irrational forms of beliefs in rationalism, thereby blurring the lines between them, without creating a metanarration of scientific rationalism, as Jean-François Lyotard would put it, but forms mutual relations

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<sup>44</sup> H. A. Campbell, *Introduction. The rise of the study of digital religion*, in: *Digital Religion. Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds*, H. A. Campbell (ed.), London – New York 2013, pp. 1-4.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 1.

<sup>46</sup> E. McAvan, *The Postmodern Sacred. Popular Culture Spirituality in the Science Fiction, Fantasy and Urban Fantasy Genres*, North Carolina, London 2012, p. 5.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 29-30.

<sup>48</sup> E. McAvan, *The Postmodern Sacred. Popular Culture Spirituality in the Science Fiction, Fantasy and Urban Fantasy Genres*, op. cit., pp. 5-6.



between scientificity and games of the pseudo-scientific language of New Age. One of the indications of the crisis of postmodernity is blurring the difference between what is real and what is not real. Referring to the theory of simulacra and simulation by Jean Baudrillard<sup>49</sup>, McAvan writes that due to the pervasive media and the ubiquity of the sign, the differentiation between what is real and what is unreal assumes the form of hyper-reality, that is a reality, which is more actual than reality itself. With reference to the postmodern sacred it means that the differentiation between the “real” religiousness (as it is traditionally practiced) and “fake” simulation is collapsing in popular culture texts. The simulation itself, due to computer generated imagery, is becoming as much real. What is more, these images are blurring the traditional understanding of the difference between the sacred and the profane, in the way that monsters and gods easily transform one into another<sup>50</sup>. In other words, the postmodern sacred, due to its substantial presence in popular culture, is becoming a simulacrum; the sacred is neither “real”, nor “fake”, but it is a “textual simulation of religious traditions”<sup>51</sup>.

Hence, the postmodern sacred is a hyper-reality in the sense that “its representations seem to be more real than religious tradition itself”<sup>52</sup>. The hyper-real religion, which refers to the simulacrum of religion, is created from a symbiosis with or is in symbiosis with popular culture and inspires its followers or consumers. According to Adam Possamai, the author of the text *Yoda Goes to Glastonbury: An Introduction to Hyper-Real Religions*, the most popular example of religious hyper-reality in the 21st century is “Jedism”, that is one of the alleged new religious movements referring to the Jedi character from “Star Wars” by George Lucas, or “Matrixism” connected with the film trilogy “The Matrix” by the Wachowski siblings<sup>53</sup>. The topic of the sacred in the context of digital culture has become the subject of research of many sociologists in recent years, one example being *Handbook of Hyper-real Religions*, edited by an Australian scholar of Belgian descent, Adam Possamai<sup>54</sup>.

The understanding of the essence of the sacred in the digital space is not possible without referring to the notion of mediatisation, which is the “process of increasing media importance and direct and indirect media influence in various spheres of social life”<sup>55</sup>. In the mediatisation theory, the media are not regarded only as a technical element, but they are treated in a much broader way, including the social, cultural, economic sphere and the sphere of personal relations on the web. Mediatisation formulates the

<sup>49</sup> J. Baudrillard, *Symulakry i symulacja*, Translated into Polish by Sławomir Królak, Warszawa 2005, p. 6.

<sup>50</sup> E. McAvan, *The Postmodern Sacred. Popular Culture Spirituality in the Science Fiction, Fantasy and Urban Fantasy Genres*, op. cit., pp. 70, 78.

<sup>51</sup> Ibidem, p. 24.

<sup>52</sup> Ibidem, p. 24.

<sup>53</sup> A. Possamai, *Yoda goes to Glastonbury: An Introduction to Hyper-real Religions*, in: *Handbook of Hyper-real Religions*, A. Possamai (ed.), Leiden 2012, p. 1.

<sup>54</sup> *Handbook of Hyper-real Religions*, A. Possamai (ed.), Leiden 2012.

<sup>55</sup> J. Strömbäck, F. Esser, *Mediatization of politics: transforming democracies and reshaping politics*, in: *Mediatization of Communication*, K. Lundby (ed.), Berlin – Boston 2014, p. 377.

connections between the media and communications as a cultural process, which can be fully understood only with reference to the main aspects of social life<sup>56</sup>.

The media culture influences shaping current outlooks on life as well as principal values; it defines what should be perceived as good or bad, positive or negative, moral or immoral. Media coverage, including media images, provide us with symbols and myths, which help us to shape common culture, shared by the majority of society<sup>57</sup>. The process of social and cultural change caused by the influence of the media on various aspects of life refers both to entities as well as social institutions. Mediatisation makes "our life and environment exceptionally dynamic, liquid and unpredictable"<sup>58</sup>.

The mediatisation of social life and the predominance of media culture also refer to the mediatisation of religion or in a wider sense – the sacred in their contemporary manifestations. The mediatisation of religion and the sacred is not a universal phenomenon, but it is characteristic of Western societies, in which the media have become not only important institutions, but also the daily environment of a human being. The contemporary sacred is in large measure mediated by secular autonomic media institutions and shaped according to their logic<sup>59</sup>. The mediatisation in question is an "invention" of the European modernity, where a certain new irreligious "institution" was established, that is the media system, which is able to transmit its irreligious views and interpretations of religion to whole populations in various ways. The emerging media system in a way has taken over the role hitherto played by organised, institutional religions, which were the bond between society and "the sacred canopy", as it was called by Peter L. Berger<sup>60</sup>.

A British sociologist of religion, Gordon Lynch, by analysing the notion of the mediatisation of the sacred even claims that in postmodern societies, which are characterised by a significant stratification and internal divisions, the media are the most important institutions of structural nature, which enables us to experience, recreate and defy various forms and expressions of the sacred. *Sacrum* is reconstructed with the use of the public media not only by its portrayal and direct celebration, but also by showing the cases of infringing or violating the sacred. The public media also act as the main social structure, which can make restitution possible, that is restoring the infringed specific forms of the sacred.

He adds that the public media, to a much greater extent than any other structured institution, invest certain issues with sacred significance, so that they become the main

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<sup>56</sup> L. M. Sa Martino, *The Mediatization of Religion. When Faith Rocks*, VT 2013, p. 14.

<sup>57</sup> D. Kellner, *Media Culture. Cultural Studies, Identity and Politics between the Modern and the Postmodern*, London – New York 1995, p. 1.

<sup>58</sup> A. Guzik, *Media – Matrix naszych czasów*, "Annales Universitatis Paedagogicae Cracoviensis. Studia Sociologica V", 2013, no. 5, p. 7.

<sup>59</sup> K. Knott, E. Poole, T. Taira, *Media Portrayals of Religion and the Secular Sacred. Representation and Change*, London – New York 2013, p. 185.

<sup>60</sup> P. Scannell, *Media and Religion*, "Media, Culture & Society", 2016, no. 1, p. 4; P. L. Berger, *Święty baldachim. Elementy socjologicznej teorii religii*, Translated into Polish by Włodzimierz Kurdziel, Kraków 1997.

topic of discussion. By that Lynch means certain contemporary problems, which have such a large influence on human life that they are called the sacred and are connected with issues which are the subject of animated discussions, for example: gender, human rights, child safety and concern, ecology or neoliberalism. Such a viewpoint results from his clear analytic differentiation between religion and the sacred, which according to Lynch, does not necessarily have ontological dimension in sociological terms, but is a historically conditioned social and cultural construct<sup>61</sup>.

The ways of presenting the sacred by the media can both cause conflicts and social divisions as well as integrate society. Lynch notices that various contemporary forms and manifestations of the sacred are shaped by social actors, who owing to the public media can try to construct or shape the sacred in a way that would serve the particular, social, political or economic purposes<sup>62</sup>.

The mediatisation of religion is nothing other than a lively and current experience of the sacred with the use of the media; it can assume various forms and lead to different results, depending on the religious, social and media context and on the country where it appears. Due to the fact that the media are not a consistent phenomenon, their influence will vary, for example in Poland, in the USA, in Saudi Arabia, Brazil or India. On the one hand, the media are a source of information, knowledge and enlightenment, at the same time being the promoter of rationalism, but on the other hand they are an endless source of fantasy and emotional experiences. Hence, they have become a provider of extraordinary sensations, putting the world under a spell<sup>63</sup>.

With regard to religion, mediatisation is also the awareness of what is happening in the life of believers when they are not in a church, synagogue or mosque, while being in touch with religious content transmitted through the mass media. Mediatisation influences the change in practicing a religion in everyday life, including in its activity all the social spaces in existence. Thereby, it changes the dynamics of a "religious field", as Pierre Bourdieu calls it, which is the space of social communication and its relationship towards the remaining aspects of social life<sup>64</sup>.

The mediatisation of a broadly defined sacred is a multifactorial process of social and cultural transformation, which includes at least three aspects:

1. The media have become an important, if not the most significant source of information regarding religious matters. The mass media both create and spread religious experiences, while the interactive media, such as the Internet can act as a platform to express and share your own beliefs and religious experiences.

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<sup>61</sup> G. Lynch, *The Sacred in the Modern World. A Cultural Sociological Approach*, Oxford 2014, pp. 5, 15-18.

<sup>62</sup> Ibidem, p. 89-90; cf. S. Hjarvard, *The Mediatization of Society: A Theory of the Media as Agents of Social and Cultural Change*, „Nordicom Review”, 2008, no. 29, pp. 105-134.

<sup>63</sup> S. Hjarvard, *The Mediatization of Culture and Society*, New York 2013, p. 81, 93.

<sup>64</sup> L. M. Sa Martino, *The Mediatization of Religion. When Faith Rocks*, op. cit., p. 18; P. Bourdieu, *Genesis and Structure of the Religious Field*, „Comparative Social Research”, 1991, np. 13, pp. 1-44.

2. Information and experiences connected with the sacred are shaped according to the requirements of popular media genres. The existing religious symbols, practices and beliefs are becoming the material to form individual media narrations concerning the sacred.

3. Being a part of social and cultural environment, the media have taken over many social and cultural functions of institutionalised religions and they provide spiritual guidance, moral orientation, rituals as well as a sense of community and affiliation<sup>65</sup>.

One of the results of mediatisation is the widening and diversification of the communication space, which together with the development of new technologies includes also virtual reality or cyber-reality, being also the place of the presence of the sacred. A person surfing in cyberspace to a certain extent corresponds to the Weber's description of a postmodern human being living in an enchanted world. "Cyberspace will feel like Paradise; a space for collective restoration of the habit of perfection"<sup>66</sup>. Cyberspace is a place where our imagination exists, as well as it is a space for imagination. It is where our conscious images meet our dreams stuck in subconsciousness. Cyberspace is a landscape of "rational magic, of mystical reason"<sup>67</sup>. A British specialist in religious studies and researcher of popular culture, Christopher Partridge claims that in postmodern, dis-encharnted societies people feel a longing for the sacred, for the re-enchanting of the world, while cyberspace serves as a gate enabling them to go from the restrictions of materialism to the "digitized sacred space"<sup>68</sup>.

## Conclusion

The contemporary world does not exclude the sacred, it is characterised not only by spontaneous secularisation and secularism, but also by the "hunger for salvation and transcendence". The sacred remains in Catholic Churches and outside of them<sup>69</sup>. It assumes many forms, dependent on the culture and society, in which it emerges and finds fulfilment. The liquid sacred, changing to a certain extent, perfectly harmonises with the social context of postmodernity, defined by Zygmunt Bauman as the metaphor of liquidity. Even if the liquid sacred, similarly to new spirituality, is characterised by clear inaccuracy, yet they perfectly match the description of spiritual quests of a modern

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<sup>65</sup> S. Hjarvard, *The mediatisation of religion: Theorising religion, media and social change*, "Culture and Religion: An Interdisciplinary Journal", 2011, no. 2, p. 124.

<sup>66</sup> F. Clynes, *The Enchanting Heavens*, in: *Analecta Husserliana. The Yearbook of Phenomenological Research*, vol. CVII, A.-T. Tymieniecka, A. Grandpierre (eds.), Dordrecht 2011, p. 64

<sup>67</sup> M. Novak, *Liquid Architectures of Cyberspace*, in: *Cyberspace: First Steps*, M. Benedikt (ed.), Cambridge 1992, p. 226.

<sup>68</sup> C. Partridge, *The Re-Enchantment of the West*, vol. II: *Alternative Spiritualities, Sacralization, Popular Culture, and Occulture*, London 2005, p. 154.

<sup>69</sup> W. Piwowarski, *Socjologia religii*, Lublin 1996, pp. 183-184.

human being. It actually becomes the cultural sign of the times. The sociology of spirituality and sociology of the sacred to a certain degree are a part of the sociology of religion outside of its previous area.

According to the American sociologist Peter L. Berger, religion will survive because people express the need for attaching a certain ultimate significance to their own existence, especially in the face of evil, suffering and death. "This need seems to be indispensable – despite numerous attempts to eliminate it, it will not cease or appears in this or another form. Based on this assumption, we are not able to predict another shape in which religion will return to our life, but it will return in one form or another for sure. Completely non-religious, secular worldviews have one major flaw – they do not help people deal with the usual life crises. Let us take for instance a Marxist dedicated to the cause. If he falls fighting in the battle for the victory of the revolution, then his death has meaning. But if he dies in bed of lung cancer, ideology will not answer his question concerning the purpose of his death. The need to explain the sense of suffering, evil and finiteness is the factor, which drives the liveliness of various kinds of religious cults"<sup>70</sup>.

Liquid religiousness and the liquid sacred are less stable than socially and culturally inherited religiousness, because thoughtless acceptance of religion gradually transforms into the thoughtful lack of acceptance. Admittedly, you can believe with no absolute certainty, you can believe being full of doubt and indecision, you can hold strong moral views in the conditions of religious doubts, but such attitudes may be easily turned into religious indifference or even into nonreligious positions. Especially from the point of view of liquidity and unpredictability of contemporary societies, liquid religiousness and the liquid sacred can display the tendency to further disintegration and deregulation. The sacred is not disappearing, but it is taking on new various forms. The market of religion and spirituality, the market of the liquid sacred is still substantial. Christian Churches are offered a great chance, even if so far they have not been using it well enough.

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<sup>70</sup> P. L. Berger, *Religia i nowoczesność. Rozmowa z amerykańskim socjologiem religii Peterem Bergerem*, "Europa. Miesięcznik Idei", 2012, no. 5, p. 25.