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The Identity of *Fate* and the Identity of *Choice*: Between the Routine of Continuation and the Ordinariness of Rejection*

Abstract

Culture and religion still interrelate with one another. The presence of religious values in social life depends, above all, on the processes of constructing cultural identities in the course of socialization and education, which warrant the experience of the ontological realness of the social world. In the encyclical *Veritatis splendor*, John Paul II highlights *the issue of culture*, whose essence is “*the moral sense*, and which is in turn rooted and fulfilled in *the religious sense*.”¹ However, in the contemporary culture, there are strong tendencies to separate truth from freedom and faith from morality. As a result, “*the moral sense*” becomes dissociated from “*the religious sense*.”

In this article, I introduce the category of *fate* which emphasizes reproducibility, the inter-generational reproduction of patterns of religious stances and practices, confessional affiliations on the level of obviousness of the profiles of social personality, and the natural character of the structures of the social world in which Christianity is “like the air” we breathe, indispensable to preserve our existence.

In opposition to *the culture of fate* there is *the culture of choice*, described with the category of prefiguration which sets our imagination free from the obligatory character of the cultural and religious model of the past. The problem hinted at in the title

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¹ John Paul II, *Veritatis splendor*, pt. 98.

of this article, is illustrated by the results of sociological research, which demonstrates attitudes of selective acceptance/rejection of the Decalogue and which becomes “the inverse Decalogue”, as such fitting into the liquid reality. Its sign is *the imperative of choice* which contributes to the deconstruction of the axiological invariants which are the basis of Christian civilization.

Keywords

the Decalogue, identity, the issue of culture, religiousness, secularization, laicization, the inverse Decalogue.

1. The issue of culture

The globalization of culture goes hand in hand with the new and unfamiliar relations between societies, individuals, nations, countries, religions and cultures. They become “a global village”, “a global railway platform”, or, as Peter Berger aptly put it, “airport culture” with prevalent fleeting interpersonal relations devoid of emotional obligations. Here pop-culture is dominant and often plays the role of a former inn in a traditional village.² New social structures and processes are taking shape. The axiological unsteadiness implies the relativization of judgments and the volatility of values experienced by many members of society who have free access to information and events often presented as *fake news*, post-truths subordinate to mercantile, ideological or political interests. The sacred canopy of religious orthodoxy that ensures the dignity and integrity of the religious paradigm is fraying. Human mind becomes the temple of the modern human, the mind that easily and superficially absorbs manifold, often conflicting, religious doctrines and practices of worship from various traditions. Thus, the idea of the Church as the depositary and guardian of faith, is being marginalized, while her role as the subject of religious legitimation of the social world is made “liquid.”³ Religion transforms into personal beliefs, while mo-

² P. L. Berger, *Four faces of global culture*, “The National Interest”, Fall 1997 no. 49, p. 23(7).

³ W. Świątkiewicz, *Między sekularyzacją i deprywatyzacją. Socjologiczne refleksje wokół polskiej religijności w kontekście europejskim*, Katowice 2010, pp. 31–47.

ality turns into one's subjective conscience.⁴ In many works of contemporary sociologists of religion, in particular those who focus on Christianity and delve into the processes of secularization, laicization and deprivatization of religion, the process of *the shrinking of church religiosity*, is emphasized. This entails the transformation of the cultural and social contexts in which religion and its doctrine operate.

In the beginning of 1990s, in his diagnosis of the direction and crucial problems of social development, John Paul II explicitly stated the new cultural and anthropological threat, which found its expression in the cultural sources of human enslavement. He referred to his predecessors: Leo XIII who in his encyclical *Rerum novarum* wrote about *the workers' issue*, and Pius XI who discussed the social issue in the encyclical *Quadragesimo anno*. In *Veritatis splendor* John Paul II takes up *the issue of culture*. He writes: "Indeed, at the heart of the issue of culture we find the *moral sense*, which is in turn rooted and fulfilled in the *religious sense*."⁵

The issue of culture may be resolved by restoring the integrity of reason and faith, as well as faith and morality.⁶

Almost 30 years after the encyclical *Veritatis splendor* saw the light of the day in 1993, George Weigel, a distinguished expert on John Paul II's teaching, as well as the transformation of contemporary culture, emphasizes that JPII's words reveal the sources of the crisis and renewal of contemporary civilization: "We must realize that we live in the apostolic times, and not the Christianitas" that is based on the precepts of the Decalogue. He continues: "Christianitas, the Christian civilization in the West, has ceased to exist."⁷

In the early 1990s, having conducted research on the postmodern currents in the European thought, Zdzisław Krasnodębski concluded: "Christians in Europe have got used to being a cognitive and ethical minority."⁸ At the center of many problems and conflicts, there is the anthropological issue that is sweeping

⁴ T. Luckmann, *Komunikacja moralna w nowoczesnych społeczeństwach*, in: *Współczesne teorie socjologiczne*, vol. 2, Eds. A. Jasińska-Kania, L. M. Nijakowski, J. Szacki, M. Ziółkowski, Warszawa 2006, p. 942.

⁵ John Paul II, *Veritatis splendor*, (6 August 1993), pt. 98.

⁶ H. Juros, "Kwestia kulturowa" w encyklice *Veritatis splendor*, in: *Nie łącać się prawdy. Encyklika Veritatis splendor*, edited by P. Morciniec, Opole 1994, p. 95.

⁷ <https://www.gosc.pl/doc/6864235.Weigel-Analiza-nauczania-Jana-Pawla-II-wskazuje-zrodla-kryzysu> (17.05.2021).

⁸ Z. Krasnodębski, *Postmodernistyczne rozterki kultury*, Warszawa 1996, p. 180.

through the modern world, especially the West. It is also present in Polish society, sometimes in extremely radical (as to our habits) manifestations and forms.

2. Post-figurative culture and pre-figurative culture

The categories of *fate* and *choice* are part of the sociological reflection on the changes of contemporary culture and cultural patterns of contemporary religiosity. The category of *fate* stresses reproducibility, the inter-generational reproduction of patterns of religious stances and practices, confessional affiliations on the level of obviousness of the profiles of social personality, and the natural character of the structures of the social world in which Christianity is “like the air” we breathe, indispensable to preserve our existence. Religion legitimizes, gives meaning and significance to our life and the whole social order. Here individual lives fit into the cultural and religious rules of social life on various levels of intellectual reflectiveness and emotional engagement (e.g. the so-called folk Catholicism or devotional piety). The culture of *fate* is the culture of post-figuration, in which the cultural and religious identity is the consequence of pursuing the experience, life projects and values of the generations that pass away.⁹ In the post-figurative culture “the past of the adults is the future of each new generation; their lives provide the ground plan. The children’s future is shaped in such a way that what has come after childhood for their forbearers, is what they, too, will experience after they are grown.”¹⁰ In the post-figurative society, an individual experiences religion as an objective reality.

In opposition to *fate*, there is *choice* considered to be the sign of the cultural changes in contemporary times. After Margaret Mead, we can describe these changes as the category of pre-figurative culture, which rejects both the present and the past and sets our imagination free from the obligatory character of the cultural and religious model of the past. Here religion is subject to selective subjectivization, while its post-figurative certainty is delegitimized and transforms into the experience of doubt, the fruit of the dominant cultural pluralism and axiological unsteadiness. The dynamics of changes driven by technological rules

⁹ The terms ‘pre-figurative culture’ and ‘post-figurative culture’ are taken from Margaret Mead’s *Culture and Commitment: A Study of the Generation Gap*.

¹⁰ M. Mead, *Culture and Commitment: A Study of the Generation Gap*, Natural History Press/Doubleday 1970, p. 1.

of our virtual communication make diversity, relativity and constant change, common currency. The proponents of the new culture declare change to be the only lasting value. A choice that is subject to the rules of permanent change becomes a natural and obvious life principle that raises no doubt. To describe this phenomenon, Peter Berger introduces the concept of the imperative of choice.¹¹

On the basis of many sociological studies, we may conclude that in the late modernity which is replete with the neo-Marxist or neoliberal axiology, the need for a transcendent justification of the moral order fades. People discover that the sphere of moral values may be individualized and made relative to a situational context, that it may be autonomous from the structures of the Church or religious norms.¹²

The culture of *fate* and *choice* as regards the role, meaning and functions of religious values and practices or church affiliations and Christian way of life is – in the perspective proposed here – stretched between the routine of continuation and the ordinariness of rejection (abandonment). They constitute our cultural and religious identity. It is over sixty years ago that Karl Rahner stated, “Christianity ceases to be a habit and becomes one’s choice.”¹³

3. Identity

Identity is a task faced by every human being and every community. It manifests itself in models of everyday life, in which various cultural norms and expectations as regards identity profiles (normative identity and behavioral identity), find expression.¹⁴ One’s identity grows in the process of construction, which ensures the inviolability of the basic code that makes it possible to experience the continuity and relative permanence of the personal traits of a person, or the culture of a given community. Identity helps one reconcile the opposition

¹¹ J. Mariański, *Peter Ludwig Berger (1929–2017) przejście od teorii sekularyzacji do desekularyzacji*, Lublin 2021.

¹² See literature on the subject in: J. Mariański, *Pluralizm społeczno-kulturowy jako megatrend a religijność i moralność. Studium socjologiczne*, Lublin 2022.

¹³ K. Rahner, *Theologische Deutung der Position der Christen in der modernen Welt*, edited by K. Rahner, *Sendung und Gnade. Beiträge zur Pastoraltheologie*, Innsbruck–Wien–München 1959, p. 33.

¹⁴ M. Świątkiewicz-Mośny, *Konstruowanie nowych tożsamości w warunkach globalizacji*, Kraków 2015.

between the continuity and variability of one's traits, due to new experience, both in personal and social life. "The collective identity of a grouping is much more strongly (that is non-problematically) outlined as much as it is subject to change more slowly and as long as it is capable of reproducing codified rules of behavior of its members more accurately."¹⁵ Anthony Giddens claims that the expression of collective identities (which is the sign of the technological revolution) goes hand in hand with the expansion of "self, which in the postmodern world has to be active and reflexive."¹⁶

Preservation of one's identity is favored by a situation in which the dynamics of social development is determined by processes of cultural integration, understood as consensus of elementary principle or principles, pluralistic unity of norms, values, symbols and patterns of behavior. Identity is threatened by the crisis of culture, the loss of personalistic perspective or the ideologization of social consciousness, which is triggered by opportunistic political interests; it is also shaken by axiological unsteadiness.

4. The inverse Decalogue

The Christian identity draws on the Decalogue. It is in the Decalogue that we find normative rules that regulate interpersonal relationships as well as our relationship with God. It is the foundation of the Judeo-Christian civilization; it determines its specifics as well as its distinctiveness from other civilizations.¹⁷

The Decalogue determines "the founding values" of human community and as such, may be regarded as the first declaration of human rights.¹⁸ The Decalogue, together with the axiology of the Beatitudes,¹⁹ is the principal source of legitimization of the social *ordo* and Christian civilization. "The Decalogue

¹⁵ Z. Bokszański, *Tożsamości zbiorowe*, Warszawa 2005, p. 52.

¹⁶ A. Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity. Self and Society in Late Modern Age*, Stanford University Press, 1991.

¹⁷ J. Mariański, *Godność ludzka jako nowy paradygmat w socjologii moralności*, "Uniwersyteckie Czasopismo Akademickie" (2017), no. 21(4), pp. 9–20. On page 10 Mariański concludes i.a.: "Without referring to the dignity of the human person we shall not find a definitive justification for putting universal principles before particular interests."

¹⁸ V. Possenti, *Religia i życie publiczne. Chrześcijaństwo w dobie ponowoczesnej*, Warszawa 2005, p. 168.

¹⁹ Luke 6:20–21; Matthew 5:3–10.

contains a set of elementary commandments and proscriptions on the basis of which human personality, family coexistence and bonds that unite small groups have been shaped.”²⁰

For Christianity, the principles of the Decalogue as the principles of religious faith, are neither negotiable nor subject to structural transformations, as they are the fundamental set of moral rules.²¹ Indeed, they are invariable in all possible dimensions: historical, geographical, social, cultural and political. Thus, the Decalogue is about universal values. This function is not undermined by certain confessional differences in interpretation or detailed enumeration of the Ten Commandments.

By revealing the Tablets of the Law to Moses, God not only established the content, but also the structure of the commandments.²² This is perfectly illustrated by the two “stone tablets” inscribed with, commandments regarding the relationship between human and God on one, and those regulating the relations between people (in terms of general moral principles as well as those within a family) on the other. Choosing the Decalogue means choosing a Christian way of life. Accepting the Commandments and putting them into practice may be regarded as an elementary measure of the condition of Christianity as religion but also as the basic indicator of Christian civilization, regardless of divisions or the confessional specificity of Christian denominations.

At present, the values and moral norms legitimized by the Decalogue are being relativized and marginalized; they are being questioned and rejected. Significant secularization of the social life and laicization of the mentality of individuals (younger generations in particular), which reveals itself in the sphere of everyday life and the morality of conjugal and family life, are a sign of contemporary

²⁰ A. Pawelczyńska, *Głowa hydry. O przewrotności współczesnego zła*, Warszawa 2004, p. 91.

²¹ Jan Paweł II, *List apostołski Jana Pawła II do młodych z całego świata z okazji z okazji Międzynarodowego Roku Młodzieży z dnia 31 marca 1985 roku*, “L’Osservatore Romano” 6 (1985), no. 1, p. 6.

²² The hierarchical structure of the Decalogue is perfectly rendered in the Gospel of Mark: “One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?” “The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.” The second is this: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” (The Bible; New International Version, Mk 12:28–31).

culture.²³ As Pope Benedict XVI put it, “We live in an age in which the signs of secularism are glaringly obvious. God seems to have disappeared from the horizon of some people or to have become a reality that meets with indifference.”²⁴ Benedict XVI’s words perfectly render the reevaluation of the significance of the Decalogue, both in people’s minds as well as in their attitudes.

Numerous sociological studies have shown that adherence to the principles of the Decalogue is stronger among older people.²⁵

The attitudes towards the Decalogue illustrate the processes of social differentiation, which makes various fields of social life independent of each other in the axio-normative and behavioral order. In the light of contemporary sociological research, we may claim that the Decalogue is becoming one of multiple “items” of cultural pluralism and projects of life that are available on the market of spiritual goods and religious services. It is subject to relativization and the cultural transition from objective morality to a subjective one, from the morality of commandments and proscriptions to the morality of free choices justified by the principle of situational conformism.

Nowadays the Decalogue is being deconstructed, and the new order and structure of the commandments (whose hierarchy now depends on the extent to which they are accepted or rejected) exposes normative rules that refer to general morality of social life and, to a lesser degree, sexual morality. This is the *inverse* Decalogue as the first three commandments which form the axio-normative basis for the Decalogue fall behind – they are least accepted or even repudiated.²⁶

²³ J. Mariański, *Tożsamości religijne w społeczeństwie polskim*, Toruń 2017; *Tradycja i innowacja w polu refleksji socjologii religii*, eds. S. H. Zaręba, I. Borowik, Warszawa 2016; M.A. Sroczynska, *Rytuały młodzieżowe w świecie. Studium socjologiczne*, Kraków 2013.

²⁴ Benedict XVI, General audience on 11th May 2011; https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2011/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20110511.html (12.09.2022).

²⁵ J. Mariański, *Moralność katolików w procesie przemian*, in: *Religia – Kościół – Społeczeństwo. Wyniki porównawczych badań socjologicznych*, eds. W. Zdaniewicz, S. H. Zaręba, Warszawa 2006, p. 56; S.H. Zaręba, *Dynamika świadomości religijno-moralnej młodzieży w warunkach przemian ustrojowych w Polsce (1988–1998)*, Warszawa 2003; J. Baniak, *Religijność i moralność młodzieży polskiej w latach 1956–2018 na tle przemian cywilizacyjnych i społecznych. Studium socjologiczne*, Poznań 2022; O. Štefaňák, *Wartości moralne maturzystów słowackich*, Lublin 2013; O. Štefaňák, *Religiozita mládeže v procese premien*, Nitra 2019.

²⁶ W. Świątkiewicz, “Odwrócony dekalog”, *popękana kultura: socjologiczne refleksje wokół kultury i religijności*, “Roczniki Nauk Społecznych” (2020) 1, pp. 53–78.

The inverse Decalogue reveals the cracked foundations of Christian civilization and the experience of losing one's own cultural identity. Also, the weaknesses of the faith of Christians, confronted with the expansion of the radically secular philosophies in the West,²⁷ expressed in the formula: *etsi Deus non daretur*, "as if God did not exist."

The inverse Decalogue, which depreciates or even rejects the first three commandments, loses its religious value and becomes one of many civilization projects. As such, it goes hand in hand with "the loss of Europe's Christian memory and heritage." It is the expression of religious indifference and practical agnosticism. "European culture gives the impression of 'silent apostasy' on the part of people who have all that they need and who live as if God does not exist."²⁸

In literature that reconstructs various aspects of religious experience and faith, the notion of the 'Christian' God is replaced by the sacred as power and might of a different kind than natural forces,²⁹ a textual simulation of religious traditions.³⁰ It is man who, more than women, refuse to accept these Commandments and do not include them in their life projects, thus rejecting a blessing 'to a thousand generations' that God promised.³¹ The Decalogue loses its Divine Creator, and the questions whether religion is true or false are considered less relevant. This means leaving religious ethics behind, on the level of particular moral norms, and perhaps heading for situationally conditioned ethical imperatives. The Decalogue is replaced by "civil and ethical values."³²

²⁷ V. Possenti, *Religie światowe wobec pytania o prawdę. Wywiad z kardynałem Josephem Ratzingerem*. "Społeczeństwo" (2005), no. 4–5, pp. 719–726.

²⁸ John Paul II, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation 'Ecclesia in Europa'*, Vatican, 30 June 2003, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_20030628_ecclesia-in-europa.html (13.09.2022).

²⁹ M. Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane. The Nature of Religion*, transl. by Willard R. Trask, Mariner Books, 1968.

³⁰ E. McAvan, *The Postmodern Sacred. Popular Culture Spirituality in the Science Fiction, Fantasy and Urban Fantasy Games*, McFarland & Company Inc. Publisher, London 2012, p. 24; Quoted after: J. Mariański, S. Wargacki, *Płynne sacrum w społeczeństwie ponowoczesnym*, "Uniwersyteckie Czasopismo Socjologiczne/Academic Journal of Sociology" (2016), no. 17(4), p. 20.

³¹ Exodus 20: 1–6. The Bible. New International Version, <https://biblehub.com/niv/exodus/20.htm> (13.09.2022).

³² Instead of religious education in schools, the Spanish government is to introduce compulsory lessons on 'Civil and Ethical Values.' Isabel Celaá, Minister of Education and Vocational Training, has announced that there will be no alternative subject for the classes

Sociological research shows that even systematic religious practice and declarations of deep faith do not translate into full acceptance of the first three commandments, while *the inverse Decalogue*, recognized in various degrees, is not necessarily treated as religiously justified. Interestingly, this is a premise for studying manifestations of church religiosity and non-religious church-belonging defined as *belonging without believing*.³³

The Decalogue dissolves into liquid religiosity and the liquid sacred. The sacred does not wither in the sphere of culture but takes on various new forms. The market of religions and spirituality, the market of the liquid sacred, is still affluent. The Christian churches stand a great chance, even though, until now, they have grabbed it poorly.³⁴

However, Christian Churches also seem to head for the liquid reality. The doctrinal, anthropological or institutional discrepancies and disputes do not help establish the Decalogue as the universal axiology in the face of the pluralism of contemporary culture. Moreover, the Churches feel that there is internal pressure to relativize the Decalogue. The model of *the friendly Church*, an inclusive institution that is ready to gratify various social needs, a zone of well-being for all, is broadly accepted by the faithful as well as her functionaries (searching for the identity of choice, they give way under the pressure of liquid norms of moral culture). This leads to sociological Christianity, a social project that is being absorbed by “the new spirituality.”³⁵

5. Conclusions

In Polish sociological literature, it was Janusz Mariański who, over 25 years ago, initiated systematic empirical studies on the attitudes towards the Decalogue. He drew attention to the manifestations of the social and moral anomie and specific relationality as regards the acceptance of the Decalogue by Polish society.³⁶

on religion, <https://www.gosc.pl/doc/4873026.Rzad-chce-zmienic-status-lekcji-religii-wstrzymac-pomoc-dla> (14.07.2018).

³³ Cf. G. Davie, *The Sociology of Religion*, London 2007.

³⁴ J. Mariański, S. Wargacki, *Płynne sacrum w społeczeństwie ponowoczesnym*, “Uniwersyteckie Czasopismo Socjologiczne” (2016), no. 17(4), pp. 22–23.

³⁵ J. Mariański, *Nowa religijność i duchowość – mit czy rzeczywistość? Studium socjologiczne*, Warszawa 2019.

³⁶ J. Mariański, *Młodzież między tradycją a ponowoczesnością*, Lublin 1995, pp. 129–130.

Contemporary human being, who experiences various elementary fears regarding his own existence and, at the same time is devoid of (of their own volition) religious sustenance, endeavors to search for the meaning of life on his own. His perspective is generally humanistic, or egoistic and hedonistic, or even cynical.³⁷

As a *postscript*, one can quote a thesis so often repeated by John Paul II which emphasizes the inextricable necessity of the relationship between culture and religion: “The synthesis of culture and faith is required not only by culture, but faith as well. [...] Faith which does not become culture, is faith not entirely accepted, not completely thought-out, not faithfully experienced.”³⁸

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³⁷ J. Mariański, *Pluralizm społeczno-kulturowy jako megatrend a religijność i moralność. Studium socjologiczne*, Lublin 2022, p. 121.

³⁸ Jan Paweł II, *Wolność, współdziałanie, uniwersalność, służba człowiekowi – warunkiem prawdziwego rozwoju kultury. (Przemówienie do naukowców i przedstawicieli świata uniwersyteckiego, Madryt, 3 listopada 1982)*, in: *Wiara i kultura. Dokumenty, przemówienia, homilie*, Wybór tekstów i opracowanie M. Radwan, T. Gorzkula, K. Cywińska, Rzym 1986, p. 189.

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