
DISABILITY IN THE TEACHING OF JOHN PAUL II AND THE POLISH ATTITUDE TOWARDS PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Marzenna Giedrojc*

*University of Szczecin Institute of Political Science and Security Studies, Krakowska 71-79,
Szczecin, 71-017, Poland*

(Received 23 July 2021, revised 17 November 2021)

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to try to answer the question: do we find in the attitude of Polish society towards the problems of people with disabilities a reference to the teaching of John Paul II in the spirit of Christian personalism, or a progressive laicization and individualism of faith? Poles' attitudes towards people with disabilities are influenced by their knowledge of disability, frequency of contact with these people and socio-demographic circumstances. We can see a weaker interest in religion and in the teachings of John Paul II, a distancing from the *nomos* of Christian doctrine, an inconsistent and surprising image of the Polish Catholic, a clear shift from a Catholic understanding of disability to a policy of integration with the non-disabled, and the realization of a socio-cultural model of disability. Polish society does not give testimony of personal, ecclesiastical and social life, according to what John Paul II taught. Criticism of the Catholic Church in Poland as an institution encourages criticism of John Paul II himself and his teaching. What is needed is a paradigm shift in the approach to disability from helping the 'ill disabled' to working to ensure that people with disabilities have equal rights and opportunities.

Keywords: Catholic Church, people, disabilities, exclusion, Poland

1. Introduction

Until the late 1970s, people with physical, sensory or mental impairments were regarded as being unable to perform a number of social roles and tasks. The non-disabled majority of the society believed that individuals with such impairments could not survive independently and required 'specialised' interventions and rehabilitation. The pontificate of John Paul II coincided with a period of change in the approach towards disability and the emergence of an inclusive policy. In his teaching, the Pope referred to the provisions of the Second Vatican Council and Christian personalism. In the Catholic Church,

*E-mail: marzenna.giedrojc@usz.edu.pl

there was a departure from treating people with disabilities only as recipients of mercy and help. In this article, I try to answer the question: do we find the influence of John Paul II's teaching in the change of attitude of the Polish society towards the challenges confronted by people with disabilities? In the analyses, I refer to the insights acquired from my own research on disability from 2019, other studies, and the selected literature pertaining to the theme in question. The last part will present my conclusions as the answer to the research question.

2. Theoretical context

The definition of disability has been evolving for centuries; it is not an unambiguous and universal concept across all scientific disciplines. In 1980, the World Health Organization (WHO) framed a definition of disability, which was subsequently updated many times. This definition distinguishes three fundamental elements that shape the situation of people with disabilities: damage occurring at the level of biological functioning of the organism, disability manifesting itself at the level of a person's activity and limitations related to the damage to the organism, and the 'handicapped' situation connected with a limited possibility to participate in social life, realise oneself in family, professional, and social life as a result of social barriers [1]. Scientific discussion is characterised by a dispute over the definition of disability based on social, cultural, geographical and historical factors. It is a polemic, for example, between J. Harris [2, 3], with M. Oliver [4, 5], C. Barnes [6, 7] and E. Barnes [8, 9], and with medical and social models of disability. The different theoretical models of disability, the elements that shape their basic assumptions in the sphere of research, analysis and scientific practise coexist with each other.

The starting point of the Pope's teaching for 26 years of his pontificate was the 'human person', his or her dignity, uniqueness and spiritual-material unity. The dignity of the human person is applied to every individual - including those with physical or mental disabilities. Already in his first encyclical 'Redemptor hominis', John Paul II placed man at the centre of the world created by God [Jan Paweł II, *Encyklika Redemptor hominis* 10, www.vatican.va, accessed on 20.05.2021]. "The human person is every time a subject in relation to God and neighbours, he is a unique and unrepeatable being. The relationship to God is a relationship of faith, and to one's neighbour is a social relationship. The nature of the human person is a unity of soul and body." [Jan Paweł II, *Encyklika Veritatis splendor*, 208-209, www.vatican.va, accessed on 20.05.2021; 10] In the spirit of the Second Vatican Council, John Paul II taught constantly speaking about the suffering, reminding the world of the dignity, value and rights of those whose voice is often not heard. "Human life, therefore, has a sacred and inviolable character, in which the inviolability of the Creator himself is reflected." [Jan Paweł II, *Encyklika Redemptor hominis*, 53, www.opoka.org.pl, accessed on 13.05.2021] In defence of the human right to life, the Pope wrote the encyclical 'Evangelium vitae'. In it, the starting point for

reflection on disability is the fundamental assumptions of Christian anthropology: “a person with a disability, even when his mind is hurt or his ability to perceive or understand is impaired, is a fully human subject with the sacred and inalienable rights belonging to every human being. A human being, whatever the conditions of his or her life and whatever his or her abilities, has a unique dignity and a particular value from the beginning of his or her existence until natural death. A disabled person, in spite of all the limitations and sufferings that he has to face, makes us look with respect and wisdom at the mystery of man.” [www.nauczaniejp2.pl/dokumenty, accessed on 20.05.2021]

Father Antoni Bartoszek, the editor of the entry ‘disability’ in the Great Encyclopaedia of the Teaching of John Paul II declared after JP II, concrete rights of people with disabilities: (i) right to life, (ii) right to a home, (iii) right to adequate medical care, (iv) right to education, professional training, and paid work [11]. On a theological level, the Pope related the problem of disability to Jesus Christ: “the deepest essence of humanity is hidden in Jesus Christ” [www.nauczaniejp2.pl/dokumenty, accessed on 20.05.2021].

On the initiative of the United Nations, 1981 was declared as the International Year of People with Disabilities. John Paul II declared in the Catholic Church 1981 as the Year of the Handicapped and he included the practice of the Church’s action towards the handicapped during his visit to the ‘Francis Charon’ Centre for the Handicapped in Quebec on 10 September 1984. “I come to the sick, the poor, the abandoned, the old and the most needy to say that I am with you, that you are members of the Body of Christ and when one member suffers, all the others suffer with him” [12]. This was alluded to in the important and eloquent Apostolic Letter on the Christian sense of human suffering. It can be read there that “the quality of a society and civilisation is measured by the respect it shows for the weakest of its members” [13]. The awareness of the value of the life of a disabled person formed the basis of the establishment of the World Day of the Sick by John Paul II in 1993. In his message to the participants of the international symposium on ‘Dignity and Rights of the Person with Mental Handicap’, he wrote: “Persons with disabilities, in whom the fragility of the human condition is made visible with all sharpness, are undoubtedly one of the manifestations of the drama of suffering. That is why in today’s world, controlled by hedonism and blinded by fleeting and illusory beauty, their difficulties are often seen as a scandal or provocation, and their problems as a nuisance to be got rid of or hastily dealt with.” [www.opoka.org.pl, accessed on 13.05.2021]

For John Paul II, the Church was a community that participates in social life, takes up the issue of people with disabilities in society and takes examples from Jesus. He considered the behaviour of believers towards people with disabilities as a testimony to the modern world. He did not agree that societies should treat a person with disabilities as the ‘other’ - inferior, unadaptable, useless, often seen but not needed. He firmly believed that the Christian vision of a disabled individual as a full-fledged human being does not coincide with the norms of contemporary civilisation, which are strongly permeated with thoughts

about humans. The teaching was a call to institutions accompanying people with disabilities to support their faith, because it was supposed to be a source of Christian hope on the way marked by the cross [www.opoka.org.pl, 4.12.1999, accessed on 24.05.2021]. John Paul II emphasised that “disabled people demand not pity, but the creation of opportunities for social integration, the creation of conditions for their activity, so that they can realise themselves to the best of their abilities in action” [14]. For the functioning of a disabled person and his/her environment, the Pope’s teaching of a Christian attitude addressed to bishops, priests, the faithful and all people should be helpful.

The attitude of Poles to ‘their Pope’ has been very emotional. Equally important was the influence of John Paul II on the religious life of Polish society. He was an object of national pride, a guarantor of the vitality of Polish Catholicism, a role model and the highest religious authority. Hence, the recipients of the Pope’s teachings were Catholic believers as well as others open to his words. In the 2015 Report of the Center for Social Opinion Research (CBOS), declaring faith while abandoning religious practices went hand in hand with a decrease in the percentage of people who believed and followed the instructions of the Church (from 66% to 39%) and an increase in the number of people who believed in their own way. Poles’ religiousness was described as ‘ecclesiastical’ (‘I am a believer and follow the instructions of the Church’) or as ‘private’ (‘I am a believer in my own way’). The bond with the Church was felt more strongly by those living in rural areas, and the larger the locality, the higher the percentage of declarations of faith lived out in their own way. The waning importance of faith was revealed when asked what shaped respondents’ views of the world and life? A privileged position was given to: own reflections (81% of ‘large’ responses in 2005 and 83% in 2010). Parents were second (77% in 2005 and 80% in 2010), John Paul II was third (80% and 73%), religious principles - faith (64% and 55%) in fourth place [*Changes in the basic indicators of religiousness of Poles after the death of John Paul II*, Research Communication CBOS, 26/2015, 2-12].

For the vast majority of Poles John Paul II, immediately after his death, remained a special and outstanding figure, almost all of them appreciated his services to the world and the homeland. It was believed that he had a great power of influence and a great impact on the religiousness of his countrymen. Since 2006, CBOS has conducted a systematic study to diagnose the relationship between the Poles and the Pope, religion and the Catholic Church. They show that 72% of respondents declared knowledge of the content of the Pope’s teaching, and even more, 78% assured that they take into account his moral recommendations in their daily lives, 67% of respondents said that the Pope had a real impact on their personal lives. People who actively participate in religious practices, those with right-wing views, women, older people (over 65 years old), residents of rural areas and small towns admitted to have an emotional link with him more often. Students were the least likely to indicate a transformation of their lives under the influence of the Pope. One in four young people did not identify at all with the content of the teachings given by the Holy Father. The so-

called JP II generation, that is, people aged 25-34, declared greater interest in the Pope's teaching. It should be noted that the *differentia specifica* of Poles' religiousness is, to some extent, the high rates of participation in religious practices [15]. A repeat survey taken two years after the Pope's death showed that the percentage of believers who did not follow the Church's instructions had increased (from 32% to 39%). This study confirmed the earlier observed regularity - young people less often than representatives of other age categories admit that they are guided in life by the teachings of John Paul II. They less often mention him, and their spiritual ties to the Polish Pope, to religion and to the Church are weaker. After the death of John Paul II, the percentage of people declaring a subjective, 'privatized', 'non-church' faith has increased. From a report prepared in 2010, in the five years since the Pope's death, the percentage of respondents declaring familiarity with his teachings has declined (from 79% to 56%), but at the same time 65% of those surveyed said they tried to put the content of those teachings into practice and almost as many respondents (62%) said they had actually changed their behaviour under the influence of the Holy Father's message [16].

The Centre for the Thought of John Paul II in Warsaw published the results of the project which monitored the impact of the person and teaching of the Holy Father on the Polish society. In Krzysztof Koseła's study of Poles' religiousness, when asked in 2007 about the easier and harder to accept elements of John Paul II's teaching, adult Polish residents showed that the Polish pope did not convince his compatriots in everything. He did not convince them of the Church's position on life/death issues, contraception, what the 6th commandment of the Decalogue entails. The view that the popularity of the person of John Paul II in Poland is not matched by the implementation of his teaching can be considered legitimate: "He is applauded by stadiums overflowing with young people, but those same young people do not embrace his moral principles at all" [K. Koseła, *Research report: Wartości Polaków a dziedzictwo Jana Pawła II*, 43, www.centrumjp2.pl, accessed on 22.05.2021]. The clear and incisive teaching of the Pole Pope has sometimes troubled many, and he has been seen as a sign of defiance [K. Koseła, *Research report: Wartości Polaków a dziedzictwo Jana Pawła II*, 43, www.centrumjp2.pl, accessed on 22.05.2021]. A report of the Centre for the Thought of John Paul II in Warsaw confirms that Poles recognize John Paul II as an authority on moral issues and family science, still love him, read him less often, and even less often recognize his arguments for unconditional respect for life from conception to natural death. As many as 68% considered their views to be autonomous, independent of social pressure or the influence of John Paul II [www.centrumjp2.pl, accessed on 23.05.2021].

3. Research methodology

The empirical part of the article uses the results of a survey conducted by the author, in 2019, and the Foundation of the Centre for Social Opinion Research (CBOS). CBOS is a specialized centre with its own methodological

workshop, conducting representative surveys of Polish society, the methodology and results of which are systematically published.

In 2019, I surveyed individuals who agreed to voluntarily complete the survey questionnaire. I recruited respondents based on study inclusions and exclusions. Eligibility criteria were: consent to participate in the study, Polish citizenship and age of majority. Disqualifying criteria were: lack of consent to participate in the study, incapacitation, lack of Polish citizenship and age below 18 years. There were 1100 participants in the study, out of which 900 completed questionnaires were returned, and after verifying the correctness of completion, eligibility and physical condition of the questionnaires, I qualified 718 correctly and legibly completed questionnaires for the study. The original survey questionnaire prepared for the purpose of the study contained metric questions (gender, age, education, place of residence, knowledge of a person with disabilities) and questions to obtain research material on the perception of people with disabilities by Polish society. The survey began on February 3, 2019 and the final completed survey was returned on May 24, 2019. I then conducted a formal verification of the surveys, the qualified surveys were entered into the database (718) and by the end of 2019 they were statistically analysed. All statistical calculations were performed using the IBM SPSS Statistics 23 statistical analysis package using its χ^2 tests and Fisher's exact tests. The classical threshold of $\alpha = 0.05$ was considered the level of significance. However, probability scores of the test statistic at $0.05 < p < 0.1$ were interpreted as significant at the level of statistical trend. Some of the results were presented in the monograph 'Disability in Poland in the political and social dimension' published in 2020 [17]. For the present article, I have selected unpublished results of the response to the question: 'Can activity and sport impact areas of life for people with disabilities?'. The specifics of the research problems were difficult to study because they were considered private, intimate. I treat my own results presented in this article as only a partial picture of the situation of people with disabilities. Complementing the research and taking a broader look at this topic in Poland are the results obtained from surveys conducted by CBOS. The conclusions drawn about the impact of John Paul II's teaching were also influenced by the analysis of the research conducted on behalf of the Centre for the Thought of John Paul II. All of the aforementioned studies and the available literature provided the basis for the author's conclusions and judgments.

4. Survey results

From 2000 to 2017, CBOS has published three research communications 'Disabled Among Us'. The first one from 2000 shows that Poles' attitudes towards disabled people depended on personal contacts with such people, on the degree of familiarity with their life problems, and that attitudes towards disabled people were based mainly on popular beliefs and stereotypes rather than on their own experiences and knowledge. The noticeable increase in contact with people with disabilities was due to the gradual increase in their numbers in society and

their progressive integration into the rest of society. Only 17% of respondents didn't know people with disabilities, the majority (68%) said they knew such people at least by sight.

Responses to the question of how Polish society treats the disabled were divided. Almost as many people thought that most people in Poland related well to disabled people (46%) as expressed the opposite opinion (47%). This study used the phrase invalid, not person with a disability. Society's attitude towards people with disabilities was rated slightly better than the rest by the oldest and youngest respondents and by rural residents. The respondents' religiousness (measured by the frequency of religious practices) and centrist and right-wing political views also fostered positive evaluations. In contrast, proximity to disabled people was associated with poorer ratings of attitudes toward disabled people. Most of the respondents (69%) said they would be willing to help people with disabilities living in the neighbourhood if the need arose. Compared to 1993, there has been a marked decrease in the number of people with the time and inclination to do so. Willingness to help was weakly but also statistically significantly related to proximity to contact with people with disabilities. Willingness to help people with disabilities also depended on the type of disability. Religiousness fostered a willingness to help, with the exception of the mentally ill and those with visible disfigurement or paralysis of the legs [CBOS, *Postawy wobec osób niepełnosprawnych. Komunikat z badań BS/85/2000*].

Fundamental changes in how people without disabilities interacted with people with disabilities occurred in the late 1990s and were associated with changes in social policy and the dissemination of pro-inclusion measures, encouraging people with disabilities to participate fully in all forms of social life, and society at large to open up to such people.

Another survey conducted by CBOS in 2007 showed that over a period of seven years there have been no significant differences in the general public's contact with people with disabilities or in the assessment of Poles' attitudes towards them. Most respondents felt that people with disabilities should be cared for primarily by their families, but should also receive support from health and social service professionals. There was a decline in indications that religious organizations should provide assistance (from 14% to 9%). The results showed that there were no significant differences between the surveys conducted over a period of seven years in the way the general.

In CBOS survey in 2017, more than half of the respondents believed that the majority of Polish society has a good attitude towards people with disabilities (60%), one in three was of the opposite opinion (35%), and only a few had no formed opinion on the subject (5%). Opinions on the subject depended on familiarity with people with disabilities and the distance separating respondents from them - the shorter the distance, the more critical the evaluations. In addition to the degree of familiarity with people with disabilities, other factors such as gender, place of residence, material situation, education, and worldview issues were also important in this context [CBOS, *Postawy wobec osób niepełnosprawnych, komunikat z badań BS/169/2007*].

In the conducted research, people with disabilities often appeared as a marginalized group, excluded, with handicaps in many situations. Their social exclusion meant little activity in non-family relationships and limited contact. A person with a disability, like any other person, has a need for life, thus demands the right to freedom, independence, development and respect for their distinctness. Reflection in relation to disabled and excluded people is a relation to another human being. Here have been, and continue to be, problems with allowing them in public spaces. Negative attitudes, prejudices and stereotypes perpetuate divisions between our own and 'outsiders'. The factors that determined changes in these social attitudes included the social policy of the state, prevailing social norms, beliefs, the level of culture, and above all, economic conditions.

Female respondents in the study indicated (59.9%) that a barrier to social integration for people with disabilities is the lack of support from society. Responding men were divided in opinion on this issue. Nearly half (43.5%) felt that such social support occurs. Among the 718 respondents, there were 35 women with a disability (4.9%) and 16 men with a disability (2.2%). The women surveyed had a person with a disability in their family (11.2%), a neighbour with a disability (13.9%), a friend (19.8%) another relationship with a disabled person (6.2%) and more than half (60.3%) did not know any person with a disability. The men surveyed had a person with a disability in their family (14.8%), a neighbour with a disability (9.3%), a friend (23.2%) another relationship with a disabled person (3.4%) and also more than half (54.4%) did not know any person with a disability. When analysing the age of the respondents and their relationship to people with disabilities, was noted one statistically significant effect. The proportion of people who have a friend with a disability increased with age. The size of the noted effect was low. Age of respondents was not a variable that significantly influenced perceptions of the integration process. For (46.5%) of 30-60 year olds, integration is a positive phenomenon. At the same time, for this age group (61.4%), integration is hindered by financial barriers. In terms of other variables, there was no difference even at the level of statistical trend.

Next, it was analysed whether the education of the subjects varied the frequency of being a person with a disability or relationships with people with disabilities. There were noted five statistically significant effects. The largest number of people with disabilities was noted in the group of people with vocational education (14.3%). In contrast, it was noted the highest proportion of people who had a neighbour with a disability (20%), a friend (33%), and had another relationship with a disabled person (9.7%) among those with a high school education and the lowest among those with a primary education (5.4%). The size of all noted effects was low. In terms of having a person with a disability in the family, it was found no difference even at the level of statistical trend. Depending on their level of education, people with disabilities had different opinions about the legal solutions for people with disabilities in Poland. Those with primary education (88.0%), vocational education (83.5%) secondary

education (84.3%) and higher education (76.9%) did not see them as a barrier to social inclusion. In Poland there is still a link between the legal solutions and the medical model of disability. Hence the high declarations in the responses of those with medical specialties (80.2%).

While analysing the legal regulations in force in Poland, it was noticed that people with disabilities have often only a theoretical possibility to exercise their rights, because the system defect is the inability to actually exercise them.

According to the respondents, being active for people with disabilities is helpful in:

1. Their activities of daily living (81.8%). Both women (82.3%) and men (80.6%) believe so. The age of the respondents and thus their frequency of contact with the incapacitated person influenced the given answers. The oldest people, over the age of 60, had the lowest statements (78.1%), while respondents aged 30-60 were the most confident (84.7%). Those with vocational education (85.7%) had the highest values and those with primary education had the lowest (71.1%). Place of residence did not differentiate responses to this question.
2. Their intimate lives (53.8%). Both women (55.1%) and men (51.1%) believe the same. The age of the respondents is a significant factor affecting their views in this matter. The younger the respondent, the higher their positive statement. Age 18-30 is the highest (58.4%), age 30-60 decreases by 10% (48.5%) and this level of declaration remains for age 60+ (49.7%). In addition, the respondents' education was reflected in the results obtained to this question. Those with higher education (62.3%) had a positive belief that the fitness and activity of a person with disabilities affects their intimate life. Those with a secondary school education (60%) held the opposite view. Considering the respondents' place of residence, it does not affect the perception of the impact of disabled activity on their intimate life. All responses range from (53.2%) in urban to (54.9%) in rural areas.
3. Their functioning in the community (69.4%). Both women (71.7%) and men (65.8%) believe so. The age of the respondents was important, as those who were young and those who were over 60 years old were more convinced (72.6% and 74.2%), while those who were 30-60 years old had lower values by more than 10% (59.9%) in the given answers. Values relating from primary education (58.7%) through secondary education (69.2%) to higher education (74.3%) show that the more educated the respondent, the more positive was their belief in the impact of activity on the social life of the disabled person. Respondents' place of residence was an important factor that determined their response. Those living in urban areas had clearly positive statements in this regard (73.2%) compared to those living in rural areas (61.4%).

It seems that the increasing activity of people with disabilities, social visibility while publicizing their life situation could be perceived as a good relation or an improvement in attitude towards them.

Negative responses were dominated by the belief that activity by people with disabilities does not affect:

1. Their education (60.6%) and this opinion was held by women (58.4%) as well as men (65%). The age of the respondents was not a factor differentiating the results. The education of the respondents was a significant factor in answering this question. Those with vocational education (84.6%) did not see the impact of the fitness and activity of the disabled on their education. The opposite opinion was held by more than half of those with primary education (52.2%), because they believed that education is also influenced by the activity of the person with a disability. Clear statements are obtained in this question when analysing the place of residence of the respondents. Those living in rural areas (77.3%) have a negative opinion about the impact of a disabled person's activity on their education. In addition, just over half of respondents living in the city thought the same (52.6%).
2. Enjoying cultural life (53.1%). Women were in the minority (49.7%), while men thought so in (59.9%). With age, the number of respondents saying that the activity of people with disabilities does not affect their use of access to cultural goods increased. The education level of the respondents also influenced the answers given when answering this question. Those with higher education (60.3%) believed that active and fit people with disabilities can better enjoy cultural life, while those with primary education believed so only by a small percentage (22%). Respondents living in rural and urban areas had different opinions on the problem. It is likely that the responses were influenced by experiences of accessibility to cultural life. People living in rural areas were of the opinion that it is not the activity of the person with disability that determines this (73.4%), while people living in cities were of the opposite opinion (56.7%).
3. Acquiring new skills that impact future work life (66.7%). Both women (66.1%) and men (67.9%) believe so. Also, I obtained similar results for the studied age groups. Among the 18-30 year old and the 60+ year old, the results were almost identical (65.9% and 65.8%) and not much different in the 30-60 year olds (68.8%). All respondents with a vocational education (100%) believed that being active and fit did not affect the disabled person's acquisition of skills affecting their future work lives. In contrast, those with a higher education thought it was important (36%). Those living in rural areas (87.6%), perhaps from their own experience, definitely did not see the impact of the disabled person's activity on their later life skills. Among respondents living in the city, only slightly more than half held this view (56.7%).

5. Conclusions

Important factors that determine changes in social attitudes towards people with disabilities in Poland are: state policy, social norms, the beliefs of the majority of the population, the level of culture and economic conditions.

Many new approaches have been incorporated into official social policy doctrine, but in practice this does not provide structural and normative change. Poland has not adopted a strategy to implement the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. In the last two years determined parents of children with disabilities have appeared in the Polish public space and their problems have become the focus of attention of society, government and political parties. There has been a politicization of disability, a paradigm shift in thinking about it. The strike in the Polish Parliament has shown that it is necessary to develop a desirable image, consistent with the goals of the Convention on the Protection of People with Disabilities, which presents these people as citizens who have the same needs and desires, who have the same rights and responsibilities. The attitude of a large part of Polish society towards people with disabilities is usually based on popular beliefs and stereotypes rather than on one's own experiences and knowledge. To counteract exclusion, actions should be taken simultaneously in the legal, systemic, cultural and social fields. In Poland, there are not groups of people with disabilities who are to be the subject of changes and adjustments, but there are the conditions in which they live that need to be modified and adapted to their. The need for integration understood in this way also becomes a challenge to the community of believers. People with disabilities cannot be seen as those through whom the need for Christian works of mercy can be done. In accordance with the teaching of John Paul II, a profound change in ecclesial thinking must be made that allows clergy and laity to see people with disabilities as full members of the Church. It is worth reflecting on the words of Damian Jankowski: "attitudes are not changed only by decrees, even if issued by the Pope himself. Above all, we need a profound shift in ecclesial thinking that allows clergy and laity to see people with disabilities as full members of the Church. After the Resurrection, Jesus did not hide the marks of his wounds. The high priest has, in a sense, become a disabled person." [18]

The acceptance of the values proclaimed by the Catholic Church in Poland is weakening. Different perspectives show that faith finds a place in the hierarchy of life values among Poles, but it is not a privileged place, and even it loses its importance. This is confirmed by research conducted by Fathers Sławomir H. Zaręba and Janusz Mariański [19, 20]. The declining importance of the Catholic Church as a community is evolving toward individualization of faith, selective forms of religious choice, a new spirituality and secularism. Among those declaring themselves to be Catholics, many declare considerable freedom of interpretation. They select certain theses of the Catholic faith and reject the others [21]. The picture that emerges from the research is that faith selectivity is more pronounced in urban than in rural areas, more noticeable within college students than within other categories of youth, more within the better educated and more within the less regularly practicing or not practicing at all [19-21]. Institutionalized religiousness is moving toward the individual and selective variety - attending Mass is no longer necessary, nor is embracing the entire canon of the Catholic faith. Father Robert Zapotoczny recalls that John

Paul II, speaking to Poles about the family, upbringing and disability, emphasized those elements of general catechesis that were particularly important. Present in his teaching was a concrete life program for both individuals and society as a whole [22]. Poles praise the person of the Pope, solemnly celebrate anniversaries related to his life, we can talk about a special cult of John Paul II, but the teaching is losing its social impact. In the pages of the Catholic monthly magazine *Znak* in October 2018, there was a multidimensional discussion about the teaching and pontificate of John Paul II [23]. In considering the influence of the Polish Pope on his compatriots, the dominant statement is that the latter adored him, but in fact did not listen to his words, did not read his writings, and are not familiar with his thoughts and achievements. The cult of the Pope is often seen as a manifestation of shallow and superficial religiousness, expressed primarily in pious acts, but not transferred to ethics of daily life. It is not known for which group of Polish society the Pope is an authority, but for the vast majority of Poles John Paul II serves as a sign and object of identity identification. The progressive secularization of Polish society is parallel to abandoning the personalistic philosophy and teaching of John Paul II. Religious ethics ceases to serve an integrative function.

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank Dr. Agnieszka Turoń-Skrzypińska from the Pomeranian Medical University for conducting the study together with me and for the survey questionnaire provided.

References

- [1] ***, *International Classification of Impairments, Disabilities and Handicaps (ICIDH)*, WHO, Geneva, 2001, 3-6.
- [2] J. Harris, *Bioethics*, **7(2-3)** (1993) 178-187.
- [3] J. Harris, *J. Med. Ethics*, **26(2)** (2000) 95-100.
- [4] M. Oliver, *Defining impairment and disability: issues at stake*, in *Exploring the divide*, The Disability Press, Leeds, 1996, 29-54.
- [5] M. Oliver, *The politics of disablement*, Palgrave, London, 1990, 15-57.
- [6] C. Barnes, *Disabled people in Britain and discrimination: a case for anti-discrimination legislation*, Hurst/BCODP, London, 1991.
- [7] C. Barnes and G. Mercer, *Disability*, Polity, Oxford, 2003.
- [8] E. Barnes, *The minority body: a theory of disability*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2016.
- [9] E. Barnes, *Ethics*, **125(1)** (2014) 88-113.
- [10] Jan Paweł II, *L'osservatore Romano*, **6(264)** (2004) 20-21.
- [11] Jan Paweł II, *Bóg was miłuje, miłuje bezgranicznie. Przemówienie w czasie modlitwy Anioł Pański. Watykan, 29 III 1981*, in *Anioł Pański z Papieżem Janem Pawłem II*, S. Dziwisz, J. Kowalczyk & T. Rakoczy (eds.), vol. I, Liberia Editrice, Vatican, 1982, 113-115.
- [12] R. Zapotoczny, *Wrocławski Przegląd Teologiczny*, **22(1)** (2014) 103-125.

- [13] ***, *L'Osservatore Romano*, **3(15)** (1981) 21.
- [14] I. Strojek, *Łódzkie Studia Teologiczne*, **24(4)** (2015) 149-159.
- [15] E. Zimnica-Kuzioła, *Łódzkie Studia Teologiczne*, **22(1)** (2013) 229-235.
- [16] P. Gierach, *Teologia Polityczna*, **5** (2009-2010) 222-238.
- [17] M. Giedroń, *Niepełnosprawność w wymiarze politycznym i społecznym. Analiza wybranych zagadnień*, Difin, Warszawa, 2020.
- [18] D. Jankowski, *Więź*, **61(3)** (2018) 145-153.
- [19] S.H. Zaręba, *Dynamika świadomości religijno-moralnej młodzieży w warunkach przemian ustrojowych w Polsce (1988-1998)*, Zakład Wydawnictw Statystycznych, Warszawa, 2003, 167.
- [20] J. Mariański, *Religijność w procesie przemian. Szkice socjologiczne*, Instytut Wydawniczy PAX, Warszawa, 1991, 222.
- [21] J. Mariański, *Konteksty Społeczne*, **3(1)** (2015) 8-26.
- [22] R. Zapotoczny, *Wrocławski Przegląd Teologiczny*, **22(1)** (2014) 103-125.
- [23] D. Kosiński, *Znak*, **754(3)** (2018) 62-63.