Janusz Mariański¹

Maria Libiszowska-Żótkowska, *Homo religiosus. Szkice socjologii religii* [Homo religiosus. An Outline of Sociology of Religion], Zakład Wydawniczy NOMOS, Kraków 2021, pp. 295.

In her many years of scientific activity, Professor Maria Libiszowska-Żótkowska skillfully took up current and important problems belonging to three sociological sub-disciplines: sociology of religion, sociology of new religious movements and sociology of medicine. Her work was marked by sociological imagination, research competence and ethical sensitivity. She is the author or co-author of a dozen or so books, over three hundred articles and chapters in collective works and many popular science publications. Her books that have entered the canon of Polish sociology include: *Postawy inteligencji wobec religii* [Attitudes of the intelligentsia towards religion] (Warsaw 1991); *Szkice socjologii medycyny* [Sketches of medical sociology] (Lublin 1998); *Wiara uczonych. Esej socjologiczny mocno osadzony w empirii* [The Faith of scientists. A sociological essay firmly rooted in empiricism] (Krakow 2000); *Nowe ruchy religijne w zwierniadle socjologii* [New religious movements in the face of sociology] (Warsaw 2001); *Konwertyci nowych ruchów religijnych* [Converts to new religious movements] (Lublin 2003); *Leksykon socjologii religii. Zjawiska – badania – teorie* [A Sociology of religion lexicon. Phenomena – research – theories] (Warsaw 2004); *Tożsamości religijne w społeczeństwie polskim. Socjologiczne studium przypadków* [Religious

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identities in Polish society. Sociological case studies] (Warsaw 2009); *Religijność i duchowość: dawne i nowe formy* [Religiousness and Spirituality: Old and New Forms] (Kraków 2010).

The above publications are characterized by a high substantive level that is very well embedded in Polish and foreign sociological literature. The sociological problems raised by Libiszowska-Żółtkowska relate to the most important issues in the field of sociology of religion, especially the sociology of new religious movements. It examines religion as a social phenomenon in many dimensions. In a general perspective, it is determined by the size of the declared global index of faith and the scale of social references to the Church's authority. At the individual and group levels, religion is defined in the context of the values determining the quality of everyday life. Religion not only explains things in the world, but also contributes to creating social order; it contributes to the synthesis of moral values and norms creating models of a meaningful life.

From a sociological point of view, religion is a belief system resulting from the dualistic distinction between the empirical and transcendent reality, which, although it is not itself subject to rational verification, explains everything that is not understood by the senses and what is otherwise impossible to explain in an acceptable way; the symbols and forms of cultic behavior corresponding to these beliefs; a set of moral values and norms referring to the authority of God and the Church; defining the personal model of a religious man and uniting believers into a community that is a church organization."² The structural components of the definition of religion are: religious doctrine (a belief system, a set of truths of the faith), cult (behavior, religious practices), ethical doctrine (a set of moral values and norms) and organization (as an office and as a community of believers).³

² M. Libiszowska-Żółtkowska, *Religia w trosce o zdrowie. Wybrane zagadnienia z pogranicza socjologii medycyny i socjologii religii*, [in:] *Szkice z socjologii medycyny* [Religion that cares for health. Selected issues on the border of medical sociology and sociology of religion], in: *Sketches in medical sociology*, eds. M. Libiszowska-Żółtkowska, M. Ogryzko-Wiewiórowska, W. Piątkowski, Wydawnictwo UMCS, Lublin 1998, p. 43.

³ M. Libiszowska-Żółtkowska, *Wiara uczonych. Esej socjologiczny mocno osadzony w empirii* [Scholarly Faith. A sociological essay firmly rooted in empiricism], Zakład Wydawniczy NOMOS, Kraków 2000, p. 9 i 17.

In many texts, Professor Maria Libiszowska-Żółtkowska profoundly and reflectively deals with the subject of the socially important problem of the religiousness of contemporary Poles. It is primarily embedded in the basic and recent literature. The sociological discourse is conducted on the one hand from the point of view of the secularization paradigm. According to many sociologists, this determines the place of religion in the modern world (especially in Western Europe). Yet, on the other hand, it is seen from the perspective of the privatization (individualization) theory of faith and the selectivity of values and norms (theories of pluralism) and the theory of desecularization (various forms of religious revival). Sociological studies of Catholic religiosity concern the parameters of faith, practices and morality (defined as the parameter of consistency), as well as attitudes towards the Church as a religious and social institution.

The texts included in the publication are grouped into three parts with six articles in each of them. They refer to many research fields and interpretations related to the issues of broadly understood religion, the Church and new religious movements. These constitute a common whole due to the clamp that binds them together, meaning a sociological approach, neutral in terms of axiology and worldview, based on objective sociological analyzes.

In her diagnoses and interpretations of contemporary Polish Catholicism, Libiszowska-Żółtkowska appears to be a competent person, an unquestionable expert on socio-religious issues, both in terms of theory and empiricism. In the nineties of the last century, she developed several important syntheses concerning the religiosity of Polish society and formulated many important and sound theoretical hypotheses. She is very well versed in the latest theoretical and methodological discussions in the field of the sociology of religion, especially the sociology of new religious movements.

Analyzes of religiosity relating to the study of the degree of coherence between the sphere of declarations and people's actual attitudes and behaviors reveal the scope of the consequences of faith and determine their type of religious orientation. These either concern the church model (normative approach) or the model of meaning that creates the faith in the individual world of values, norms and motivations (axiological approach). These two aspects: declarative and applicative in the sphere

of beliefs, religious practices and moral choices characterize her methodology of research on religiosity, both in analyzes on the national level and in relation to selected social environments (e.g. the intelligentsia or students). It rightly assumes that authentic religiosity is not determined by festive declarations or the socially leading role of the Church in society, but by its influence on the morality of individuals, social groups and the entire society. "Situational ethics and moral relativism in the context of crowded churches indicate the existence of a dissonance between the realized sphere of cultic obligations and the neglected sphere of moral obligations."⁴

The liberalization of civil liberties, also in the area of freedom of religion and the registration of religious associations, may in the future cause Poland to slowly become a society of various denominations. In sociological research, especially on national samples, these differences at present are not statistically significant and tangible. Nevertheless, "other believers" are on the offensive, becoming the objects of social interest, also thanks to the media. Despite the growth of registered religious communities, the number of their members is not statistically significant yet. In the foreseeable future, departures from Catholicism to other denominations will not be massive, despite the rich and replenished offer on the religious services market. The trajectories of the future are difficult to precisely define, all the more so since in the contemporary world, not only are strong secularization, pluralist and individualistic tendencies being revealed, but also the values opposing them, meaning counter-secularization, desecularization and evangelization.

Libiszowska-Żółtkowska does not share the view that in upcoming years there will be some radical changes in the religiosity of Polish society. Instead, she expects that we will be dealing with both the continuation of tradition and the processes of change consisting in the modernization of heritage or choosing an alternative form of religiosity. Changes in the religiosity of Poles will depend on the prestige of the Catholic Church as an institution, on the evaluation of its political com-

⁴ M. Libiszowska-Żółtkowska, *Postawy inteligencji wobec religii. Studium socjologiczne* [Attitudes of the Intelligentsia towards religion. A sociological study], Instytut Filozofii i Socjologii PAN, Warsaw 1991, p. 7.

mitment and the nature of social service.⁵ She seems to share the view that in Poland, religiosity is closely related to the Church (bond with the Church) and that the weakening of the Church will affect the processes of religious identification.⁶

In the different faceted socio-cultural contexts in various regions of the world and in specific countries, different types of religiosity are transforming. Religion as a form of "grand narrative" is subject to various changes that have a direct or indirect impact on the lives of individuals and societies. Individual religions and systems of meaning compete and rival each other in interpreting and explaining the world.

Based on the rich content of this part of the work, I will only draw attention to the type of religiosity in Polish society and the concept of spirituality. A three-point scale is commonly accepted regarding the population of believers: deeply believing, believing and doubting (doubting, ambivalent). Deep believers generally declare their compliance with religion both in terms of dogma and declared religious practices. Their religious worldview is coherent and intrinsically common.

Sociologists are finding inconsistency, internal division, selective acceptance of the truths of the faith and individual interpretations of the Church's rules and prohibitions among believers, (subjective, selective, exclusive, and individualized religiosity). In their moral choices, believers are not always guided by the Church's requirements. A significant percentage of Polish Catholics treat religion as a cultural duty, an element of family ties, or simply a festive and ceremonial lifestyle.

The third type of Catholics (doubters) are not described in detail. Libiszowska-Żółtkowska points to new ideological trends in Catholicism related to the need to live the faith personally and experience spiritual emotions. People with new orientations experience their fascination

⁵ M. Libiszowska-Żółtkowska, *Religijność Polaków na przełomie wieków – stan aktualny i perspektywy* [The religiosity of Poles at the turn of the century and the current state and prospects], „Przegląd Religioznawczy” 1993, no. 2, p. 94.

⁶ J. Mariański, L. Smyczek, *Marii Libiszowskiej-Żółtkowskiej badania nad katolicyzmem polskim*, [in:] *Między religią a religioznawstwem w teorii i badaniach Marii Libiszowskiej-Żółtkowskiej* [Maria Libiszowska-Żółtkowska, research on Polish Catholicism, in: Between religion and religious studies based on the theory and research of Maria Libiszowska-Żółtkowska], eds. J. Mariański, E. Stachowska, Wydawca: Polskie Towarzystwo Religioznawcze, Warsaw 2011, p. 165–203.

with Transcendence in solitary concentration, or look for other people with similar views in order to share their experiences in a community. New religious movements and ecclesial communities are emerging within the Catholic Church or on its periphery.⁷

Due to their dynamic activity, they already constitute an important segment of the religious landscape, and their existence and development should be an impulse to reflect on the Church's "offer." Yet, this does not always meet the area of religious needs that are offered by sects and new non-Catholic religious movements.

In Polish religiosity, rooted in a specific cultural, historical and social context, Libiszowska-Żółtkowska already distinguishes four specific trends: a) religiousness as ideologically propagated by Father Tadeusz Rydzyk, the director of Radio Maryja; b) an elite group of Catholic intellectuals, which follows the path outlined by Fr. Józef Tischner; c) participants in more than 100 active religious movements that prevent the erosion of religious life from within; d) Sunday Catholics presenting a type of traditional religiosity that is unreflective, not in-depth, and cultivated more out of habit than out of the needs of the heart (the largest population of Catholics).⁸

The sociological typology of attitudes towards religion reveals both their multiplicity and complexity. The described ideal types or models of religiosity do not usually appear in pure form, but in various combinations and configurations. The complex process of interference among them is being observed. The created typologies of religiosity may not fully coincide with the social reality, but they provide a synthetic approximation to the conditions existing in it. Some of these typologies are more useful, while others are less useful for explaining the socio-religious reality. They are both diagnostic and explanatory.

Maria Libiszowska-Żółtkowska is one of the leading Polish sociol-

⁷ M. Libiszowska-Żółtkowska, *Typy religijności w społeczeństwie polskim w początkach XXI w. – trwałość i zmiana*, [in:] *Katolicyzm polski w warunkach Unii Europejskiej: szanse i zagrożenia, obawy i nadzieje* [Types of religiosity in Polish society at the beginning of the 21st century. Stability and changes in Polish Catholicism under European Union conditions: opportunities and threats, fears and hopes], ed. J. Baniak, Redakcja Wydawnictw UAM – Wydział Teologiczny, Poznań 2004 s. 91–93.

⁸ Ibidem, p. 94.

ogists of religion dealing with the issues of spirituality, including new types of spirituality. She uses the term individual spirituality, a concept broader than religiosity. It is about an orientation to non-human powers, to the *sacrum*, but without confessional mediation (a stable community). We are dealing with the gradual process of departing from the pattern of Church (institutional) religiosity towards individual choices concerning the faith or religious practices.

The abandonment of traditional forms of manifesting the faith and Church rituals is not tantamount to departing from the sacred. Contemporary people do not so much depart from God, but rather seek him "on their own" by referring to the many other inspirations available to them ("God – yes, the Church – no"). Spirituality understood in this way is a manifestation of selective religiosity or extra-religious religiosity. The sociological research carried out among Warsaw students showed that spirituality understood in this way was manifested in the attitudes of students who have left the Church, yet God was still important in their lives.⁹

Maria Libiszowska-Żółtkowska is undoubtedly a classic in Polish sociology of new religious movements. Her works in this field have become a permanent feature of the classic achievements of Polish sociology of religion. She characterizes the phenomenon of new religious movements, their genesis, including doctrinal and cultic foundations. Concerning the sociological characteristics of new religious movements, she addresses the problem not only from the theoretical and semantic, but also from the practical side, meaning religion and health, mechanisms and motives for choosing a new faith, as well as the descriptions of selected religious groups. This research also poses empirically important questions as to why people look for religious beliefs other than those passed on to them in their childhood by their parents. She also tries to determine the level of social consent for religious minorities.

The author gives many precise and extremely important definitions

⁹ M. Libiszowska-Żółtkowska, *Od religijności rodzinnej do duchowości indywidualnej – z biografii studentów*, [in:] *Religijność i duchowość – dawne i nowe formy* [From family religiosity to individual spirituality in the biographies of students, in: Religiosity and spirituality: old and new forms], eds. M. Libiszowska-Żółtkowska, Stella Grotowska, Zakład Wydawniczy NOMOS, Kraków 2010, p. 169.

in terms of key concepts relating to new religious movements. She takes into consideration the axiological dilemmas experienced by researchers of this issue (with an attempt to provide optimal solutions) and refers her research proposals to earlier achievements known from foreign literature. A theoretical model of research on new religious movements is developed, which allows for a multifaceted and multilateral approach to the problem.

This approach reveals the mechanisms of developing and disseminating new religious and personality movements and the successful effects of membership in new communities. It shows how religious movements and communities function (recruitment, satisfying needs, organizing one's life within a group, recognized and realized values, and one's attitude towards society as a whole). Libiszowska-Żółtkowska has initiated two new sub-disciplines in Poland: the sociology of new religious movements and the sociology of conversion.¹⁰

¹⁰ J. Baniak, *Konwersja religijna i konwertyci polscy w badaniach religioznawczych i socjologicznych Pani Profesor Marii Libiszowskiej-Żółtkowskiej*, [in:] *Między religią a religioznawstwem w teorii i badaniach Marii Libiszowskiej-Żółtkowskiej* [Religious conversion and Polish converts in Prof. Maria Libiszowska-Żółtkowska's religious studies and sociology, in: *Between religion and religious studies in the theory and research of Maria Libiszowska-Żółtkowska*], eds. J. Mariański, E. Stachowska, Wydawca: Polskie Towarzystwo Religioznawcze, Warsaw 2011, pp. 135–163.