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## EVANGELIZATION THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA – OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS TO THE RELIGIOUS LIFE OF AN INDIVIDUAL AND COMMUNITY

### INTRODUCTION

Evangelization is the responsibility of the Church and of every member of this community. The evangelical call passed by St. Mark “Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature” (Mk 16:15)<sup>1</sup> means that the Words of God should be preached wherever there is a human being. Today, human being lives not only in the real world, but also in the digital – virtual world. Therefore, the evangelization in the virtual world is necessary – including evangelization done in social media, where people spend a significant part of their time.

The aim of this study is an attempt to indicate the necessity of the presence of the Gospel in the digital world, including social media, and at the same time an attempt to indicate that this evangelization through social media brings with it both opportunities and threats to the religious life of the individual and the entire community.

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<sup>1</sup>The New American Bible, [https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0839/\\_INDEX.HTM#fonte](https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0839/_INDEX.HTM#fonte) [accessed: 31.07.2022].

The study will present facts proving that modern human being is more and more present in the digital world. Then, the necessity of going with the Good News about Christ also to the digital world will be shown. In addition, there will be examples proving that evangelization in the digital world, especially in social media, carries both a great opportunity to reach people, but also certain threats.

The article will use the method of analyzing the content of the Internet related to the so-called e-evangelization. This analysis will allow to indicate both the advantages and opportunities which may be received by bringing the Gospel into the virtual world, as well as some disadvantages and risks related to this.

## 1. MODERN HUMAN BEING IN THE DIGITAL WORLD

There is a motto of Academia Electronica which says: “Human being is one and there are two worlds”. It is the virtual academic unit of the Institute of Philosophy of the Jagiellonian University, an institution created in 2007 by Professor M. Ostrowicki, where, among others, in 2015, a public defense of the doctoral dissertation was conducted, and in 2021 the first 30-hour course with the use of Oculus in the virtual world of AltspaceVR was done.<sup>2</sup> This means that one and the same person lives and functions simultaneously in two worlds – the real one and the virtual one, otherwise known as the digital world. And it is in this virtual world a person spends more and more of his or her life.

The number of participants in the virtual world, it means people using the Internet, is growing very quickly. The same is true about the number of active social media users. Reports entitled *Digital around the world*,<sup>3</sup> prepared annually jointly by *We Are Social* and *Hootsuite*, indicate that every year the number of users of the virtual world is growing. A comparison of data from reports from 2015 and four last years: 2019 2020, 2021 and 2022 shows that each year we have more Internet users in the world and more people who systematically and actively use social media.

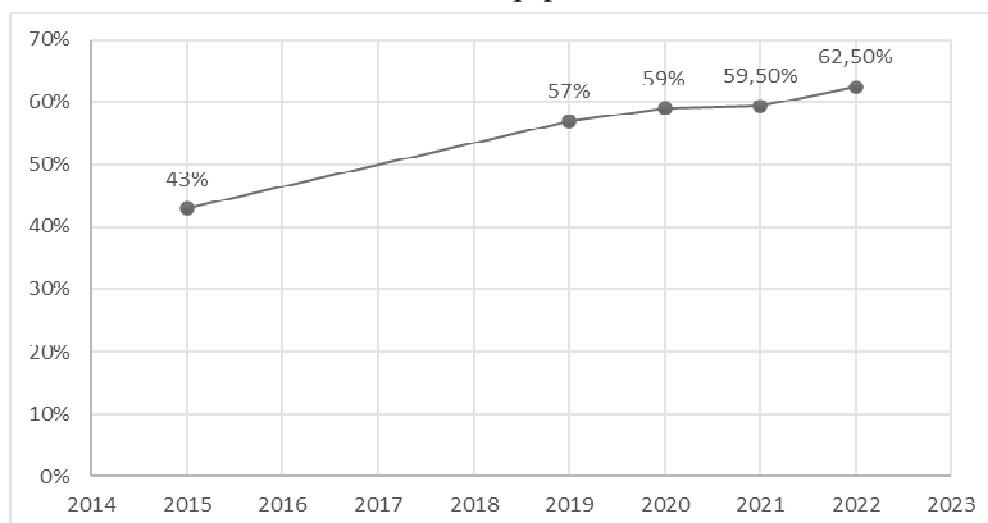
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<sup>2</sup> See Academia Electronica Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, <http://www.academia-electronica.net> [accessed: 29.07.2022].

<sup>3</sup> DataReportal, <https://datareportal.com/about> [accessed: 29.04.2022].

In January 2015, the global population was 7.21 billion people, of which 3.01 billion people (42%) used the Internet.<sup>4</sup> After four years – in 2019, the number of people in the world increased to 7.67 billion, while the number of Internet users increased to 4.38 billion – 57%.<sup>5</sup> In the following years, further increases were observed – in 2020 the world had 7.75 billion population and the number of virtual world users increased to 4.54 billion – 59%,<sup>6</sup> in 2021 – the population was 7.78 billion and there were as many as 4.66 billion Internet users billion – 59.5%<sup>7</sup> and in January 2022 – out of the 7.91 billion population, as many as 4.95 billion used the Internet (62.5%).<sup>8</sup> The growth in the number of digital users is illustrated in the chart below.

Figure 1: Number of people worldwide using the Internet (percentage of the total world population).



Source: own study based on data from the Digital around the world reports from 2015, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022.

<sup>4</sup> Digital 2015: Global Overview Report, <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2015-global-digital-overview> [accessed: 29.04.2022].

<sup>5</sup> Digital 2019: Global Overview Report, <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2019-global-digital-overview> [accessed: 29.04.2022].

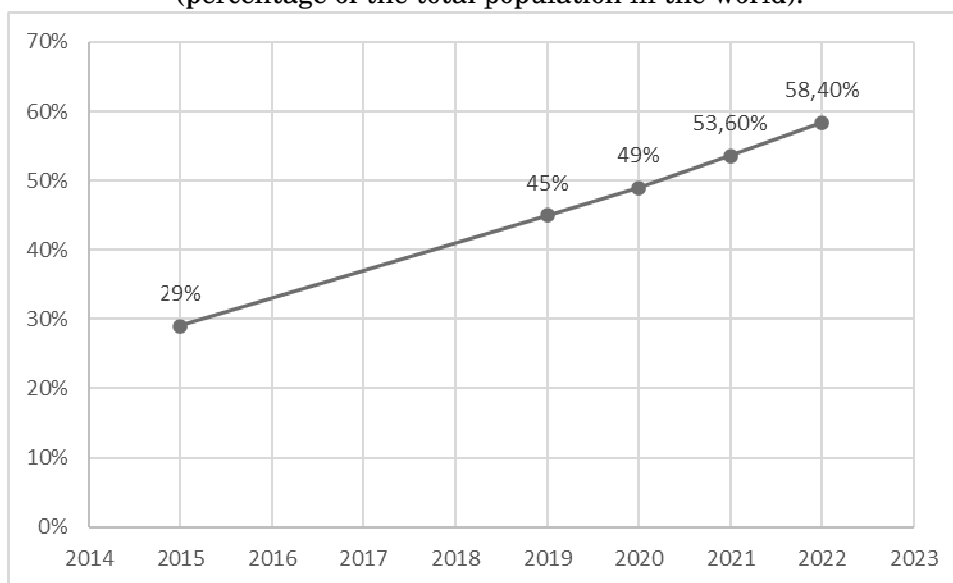
<sup>6</sup> Digital 2020: Global Overview Report, <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2020-global-digital-overview> [accessed: 29.04.2022].

<sup>7</sup> Digital 2021: Global Overview Report, <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2021-global-overview-report> [accessed: 29.04.2022].

<sup>8</sup> Digital 2022: Global Overview Report, <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2022-global-overview-report> [accessed: 29.04.2022].

We can notice a similar increase when we analyze the number of people who are active users of social media. In 2015, there were 2.08 billion active social media users worldwide – 29% of the total population.<sup>9</sup> In the following years, these numbers grew very rapidly. In 2019, as many as 3.48 billion people used social media on regular basis which was 45% of the total population,<sup>10</sup> in 2020 it was 3.80 billion users which was 49% of the population,<sup>11</sup> and in 2021, 4.20 billion people used social media which was 53.6% of the population.<sup>12</sup> In January 2022, there were 4.62 billion users of social media in the world, which means that 58.4% of the total population used social media.<sup>13</sup> The chart below shows the increase in the number of active social media users.

Figure 2: Number of people – active users of social media in the world (percentage of the total population in the world).



Source: own study based on data from the *Digital around the world* reports from 2015, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022.

<sup>9</sup> See Digital 2015: Global Overview Report.

<sup>10</sup> See Digital 2019: Global Overview Report.

<sup>11</sup> See Digital 2020: Global Overview Report.

<sup>12</sup> See Digital 2021: Global Overview Report.

<sup>13</sup> See Digital 2022: Global Overview Report.

Statistical data show that in the virtual world, it means on the Internet, an average person spends almost 30 percent of his or her life. Research conducted by one of the virtual network providers, *NordVPN*, shows that on average a Pole lives 77.8 years, of which he or she spends on the Internet 23 years and 5 months and 6 days. This study also shows that during a week, a statistical Pole uses the Internet for over 50 hours, of which only 16 hours is work-related Internet use. Social media take over 7 hours a week for the average person living in Poland. This study shows a very similar situation in other countries of Europe and the world [Szutiak 2021].

Reports and statistics give a very clear picture of the situation. The number of Internet users in the world is growing every year – in years 2015-2022, there was an increase by 20.5%. Also, the number of people actively using social media has grown by 29.4% in the period from 2015 to 2022. At the same time, it should be noted that the average Pole spends as much as 30.15% of your weekly time in the virtual world, including 4.17% in social media. Therefore, research shows that this saying quoted at the beginning of this part – *human being is one and there are two worlds*, has quite a strong grounding in reality. It is clear that today people spend a large part of his or her life in the virtual world.

## 2. THE NECESSITY OF EVANGELIZATION IN THE VIRTUAL WORLD

The data presented above show how strong human presence is in the digital world. More than 30% of the weekly time of an average Pole is spent on the Internet, and more than 4% of the weekly time is the active use of social media. At the same time, CBOS research from 2020 indicated that the majority of believing Poles (86%) participate in religious practices (masses, services or religious meetings) only once a week.<sup>14</sup> The fact is that the media in Poland and elsewhere want to show, at all costs, that religiosity and faith are declining, and more and more people are leaving the Church and religious practices. For this purpose, we observe a fairly

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<sup>14</sup> See *Religijność Polaków w warunkach pandemii*, [https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2020/K\\_137\\_20.PDF](https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2020/K_137_20.PDF) [accessed: 29.07.2022].

strong manipulation of various data, so as to prove the correctness of the thesis about the disappearance of religiosity. Nevertheless, the truth is that modern human being, especially the young generation, spends much more time on the Internet and social media, and not on religious meditations in local churches or chapels.

It is clear that one of the most important function of the Church as well as people of the Church is to teach. There are some general leads how this must be done in the 1983 Code of Canon Law.<sup>15</sup> Basically, the Book III, titled “The teaching function of the Church” is giving the instruction on this matters. It must be said that the regulations of canon law do not say directly much about the teaching function of the Church in virtual law. The provisions of canon law refer in this regard to the instruction local bishop or conference of the bishops [Domaszk 2018, 72]. This is given in can. 722 of the Code of Canon Law, where we can read: “§ 1. In the exercise of preaching, moreover, all are to observe the norms issued by the diocesan bishop. § 2. In giving a radio or television talk on Christian doctrine, the precepts established by the conference of bishops are to be observed.”

In can. 747 § 1, we have indication that the Church has right and the duty to preach the Gospel “also using the means of social communication proper to it.” And the can. 769 added that “Christian doctrine is to be set forth in a way accommodated to the condition of the listeners and in a manner adapted to the needs of the times.” We should also point out here to the can. 771 § 1, which states that “Pastors of souls, especially bishops and pastors, are to be concerned that the word of God is also proclaimed to those of the faithful who because of the condition of their life do not have sufficient common and ordinary pastoral care or lack it completely.” In this regard, it is also necessary to refer to can. 822 which directly say about social communication instruments [Dyduch 2014, 32]. It is said that “§ 1. The pastors of the Church, using a right proper to the Church in fulfilling their function, are to endeavor to make use of the instruments of social communication. § 2. These same pastors are to take care to teach the faithful that they are bound by the duty of cooperating so that a human and Christian spirit enlivens the use of instruments of social communication. § 3. All the Christian faithful, especially those who in any

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<sup>15</sup> *Codex Iuris Canonici auctoritate Ioannis Pauli PP. II promulgatus* (25.01.1983), AAS 75 (1983), pars II, p. 1-317.

way have a role in the regulation or use of the same instruments, are to be concerned to offer assistance in pastoral action so that the Church exercises its function effectively through these instruments.” Therefore, in current world, where many people became a part of virtual reality, Church’s teaching should be done also by using the tools given by the Internet, including social media.

As indicated in the introduction, it is the duty of the Church to proclaim the Gospel wherever there are people. The church also has a duty to recognize signs of the times. In the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et spes*, we read: “To carry out such a task, the Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel. Thus, in language intelligible to each generation, she can respond to the perennial questions which men ask about this present life and the life to come, and about the relationship of the one to the other. We must therefore recognize and understand the world in which we live, its explanations, its longings, and its often dramatic characteristics.”<sup>16</sup>

This learning and understanding of the world as well as adapting to the mentality of each generation also consists in recognizing all those places where a person exists in order to get there with the Gospel message. Paul VI, in his Apostolic Exhortation on Evangelization in the Modern World *Evangelii nuntiandi*, wrote: “The obvious importance of the content of evangelization must not overshadow the importance of the ways and means. This question of «how to evangelize» is permanently relevant, because the methods of evangelizing vary according to the different circumstances of time, place and culture, and because they thereby present a certain challenge to our capacity for discovery and adaptation.”<sup>17</sup> It is a very clear call to adapt the methods and tools of evangelization to the present day and to the needs of modern human being.

The functioning of a modern human being, both in the real world and in the virtual world, means that the Church, with its evangelical message, should be present in both realities. Since one and the same person func-

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<sup>16</sup> Sacrosanctum Concilium Oecumenicum Vaticanum II, Constitutio pastoralis de Ecclesia in mundo huius temporis *Gaudium et spes* (07.12.1965), AAS 58 (1966), p. 1025-1120, no. 4.

<sup>17</sup> Paulus PP. VI, Adhortatio apostolica de Evangelizatione in mundo huius temporis *Evangelii nuntiandi* (08.12.1975), AAS 68 (1976), p. 5-76, no. 40.

tions in two worlds or in two dimensions of the world, evangelization should also take place both in the real world and in the virtual world, which means that it should also be present in social media, where contemporary people spend a significant part of their time. It is worth quoting here the message of the XIII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops to the People of God: “Evangelization requires that we pay much attention to the world of social communication, especially the new media, in which many lives, questions and expectations converge. It is the place where consciences are often formed, where people spend their time and live their lives. It is a new opportunity for touching the human heart.”<sup>18</sup>

Pope Francis also, in his Message for the 48th World Day of Social Communications in 2014, encouraged courageous action in the electronic media space: “Let us boldly become citizens of the digital world. The Church needs to be concerned for, and present in, the world of communication, in order to dialogue with people today and to help them encounter Christ. She needs to be a Church at the side of others, capable of accompanying everyone along the way. The revolution taking place in communications media and in information technologies represents a great and thrilling challenge; may we respond to that challenge with fresh energy and imagination as we seek to share with others the beauty of God.”<sup>19</sup>

Christ’s evangelical call – Go into the whole world and teach all nations, as well as the above quotations from the Church documents give us a very clear message. Evangelization, which is, the proclamation of the Good News should take place wherever there is a human being. Today, people are also present in the digital world, and they are the active users of social media. Therefore, it is clear that the Gospel message should also be present there.

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<sup>18</sup> Synodus Episcoporum, *XIII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops* (2012), [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/synod/documents/rc\\_synod\\_doc\\_20121026\\_message-synod\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20121026_message-synod_en.html) [accessed: 29.07.2022], no. 10.

<sup>19</sup> Francis, Message of Pope Francis for the 48th World Communications Day. Communication at the service of an authentic culture of encounter (2014), [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/communications/documents/papa-francesco\\_20140124\\_messaggio-comunicazioni-sociali.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/communications/documents/papa-francesco_20140124_messaggio-comunicazioni-sociali.html) [accessed: 29.07.2022].



### 3. EVANGELISATION IN SOCIAL MEDIA – AN OPPORTUNITY

There is no need to convince anyone that evangelization should be done on the Internet and in social media. Therefore, it is worthy to focus first on all these positive aspects of evangelization through social media, where these new media offer a great opportunity to spread the Gospel to all of creation around the world.

First of all, the evangelization through social media is a great opportunity to reach with Jesus' message all those who are there but who, for various reasons, will not come to the parish.

We are talking about the whole crowd of young people, but also those in old age who gave up practicing Sunday mass or do not feel connected with any parish community. Gospel content presented on social media reaches them and often has a strong impact on them. They are often people who are looking for a way of their life. Sometimes, they are lost or not fully aware of the directions in which they should go. They are bombarded by a variety of media messages. If they are surrounded by harmful content, their choices can also be harmful. On the other hand, if evangelical content appears around them, their decisions have a chance to go in the right direction. Today "evil" is very loud and it pushes hard in reality. Therefore, it is important that in social media, the user can also find interesting content on the topics of faith or morality.

Today's Internet and social media are full of all kinds of influencers, followed by crowds of so-called followers. They are a kind of idols or kind of authorities for many people. For example, the press conference taking place on 4th April 2022, organized before FAME MMA martial arts event, where people known from YouTube or other social media perform in freak fights, was attended by full hall of participants and by over 300,000 people who watched the event live online. By the end of July, this event has been viewed on YouTube by over 2,200,000 users.<sup>20</sup> The conference on 20th July 2022, before the next gala of the same organization, till end of July was seen by over 1,578,000 users.<sup>21</sup> The press conference of another organization of this type – Prime Show MMA, organized on 30th June 2022, where one of the participants insulted Catholics as well as he was talking

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<sup>20</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X0JLCza0900&t=32s> [accessed: 31.07.2022].

<sup>21</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=maQW6G1j74s&t=21s> [accessed: 31.07.2022].

in a vulgar way about John Paul II, and where the other participant also in very vulgar way was defending religion and pope, also by using physical violence, has already been watched by over 310 000 users.<sup>22</sup> The content of this type of events is composed of mutual hatred, quarrels, rudeness, profanity, lack of upbringing, primitiveness, arrogance, insolence, lack of culture, maliciousness, indecency or promoting immoral behavior. Such examples could be multiplied because the Internet and social media are full of them. Therefore, it is worth for users to have a choice and access to completely different content – those where such values as: love, service to one's neighbor, good, solidarity, moral values, devotion or sacrifice are promoted. Therefore, entering the world of social media and the entire digital world with the message of the Gospel is necessary.

When talking about the opportunities offered by evangelization in the media, it is also worth mentioning all those who would like to go to the Church but cannot. We are talking about the elderly, the sick, or people who are committed to serving others. The possibility of participating in the Sunday mass in the media for a bedridden person or a person on duty in a hospital or other institution is an important aspect. Such people, for various reasons, cannot fully participate in religious practices in the real world and thanks to social media they have such an opportunity. Nowadays, many parishes and religious communities run their profiles on social media and broadcast live of liturgical celebrations and other events taking place in the parish. People unable to participate in reality may at least feel connected to the local community in this way. In conversations with people who, through no fault of their own, cannot go to the parish church for mass, there is a statement that participation in a mass broadcast on public television is not the same as a live report from liturgy celebrated in the parish church in their hometown. It is a way of being connected with her or his local church and her or his pastor.

Social media, it is also an opportunity to take part in various religious events taking place far from our place of residence. It is not possible to attend the Jasna Góra Appeal in Częstochowa every day, but a person can participate in it through live coverage done on the Internet.<sup>23</sup> It is not every day that you can take part in retreats or teachings conducted by Do-

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<sup>22</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uYM8MsOzK50> [accessed: 31.07.2022].

<sup>23</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6gzjjjX7vNE> [accessed: 31.07.2022].

minican – Father Adam Szustak, who is adored and loved by the crowd of followers, but you can always visit his social media or YouTube channel and listen to the content he presents. The portal – *Langusta na palmie*, run by a Dominican father, has almost 840,000 subscribers and the materials contained therein, which have been created since 3rd December 2012, have 480,830,788 views.<sup>24</sup>

Members of the mission support association led by the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, with its headquarters in Poznań, may not be able to attend a meeting with missionaries from Madagascar or Canada on a daily basis. But thanks to the functioning of the portal named *misyjne.pl* and great commitment, also in social media, done by the creator of this portal – Father Marcin Wrzos, OMI<sup>25</sup> – people have the opportunity to contact missionaries via Facebook, participate in prayers during the day, and they have access to a lot of content from the missionary world.<sup>26</sup> The content posted on social media and live broadcasts allow for a much stronger sense of belonging and active participation in the missionary work of the Church. In this case, the commitment is much stronger than it used to be, when the possibility of contact was really limited to reading quarterly published journal, buying a mission calendar or meeting organized by the Mission Office in Poznań once or twice a year.

It is also worth noting that social media give the opportunity to participate in the life of the Church in situations of crisis taking place in the world. During the high waves of the Covid19 pandemic and the introduced restrictions, it was possible to participate in the life of the parish and the entire Church through social media. The war in Ukraine and the introduction of a curfew, for example in Kiev, meant that not everyone was able to reach the parish church and attend, for example in the Sunday mass. Therefore, live broadcast on FB conducted, among others, by Father Paweł

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<sup>24</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/user/Langustanapalmie/about> [accessed: 31.07.2022].

<sup>25</sup> Father, dr. habil. Marcin Wrzos, OMI – a media and missiology specialist on his Facebook profile (<https://www.facebook.com/marcin.wrzos.5>) provides information on the life of the Church, mission, and reports from prayers.

<sup>26</sup> The Christian website MISYJNE.PL is run by the Polish Province of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. The portal is available at: <https://misyjne.pl>, it also runs profiles on social media, including Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/MiscyjneDrogi> (also on Instagram and Twitter) and on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCCCjgjiAL9Dli-aIWkpxXGg/videos>

Wyszkowski from St. Nikolas Parish in Kiev,<sup>27</sup> allowed the faithful to participate in the mass, adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, community rosary or the Chaplet of Divine Mercy. Experiencing the crisis together was of great importance for these people – that is, they became stronger and received spiritual support.

Those examples show how many good things may be done while using the Internet and social media in the process of evangelization. Because many people stay in digital world, going there with Christ's message is a big chance.

#### 4. EVANGELIZATION IN SOCIAL MEDIA – THE THREAT

Nevertheless, it is also worth pointing out that social media and the evangelization mission carried out there are, apart from a huge opportunity and a lot of positives, also a threat to the religious life of an individual and a community.

First of all, it should be pointed out here that active participation in the life of the Church and practicing the faith are based on real and personal participation. Participation in the Holy Mass broadcast on FB from the parish church cannot replace the actual going to church and active participation in the Eucharist. Unfortunately, a tendency is beginning to emerge that the faithful begin to treat participation in mass or other liturgies on the Internet as equal to personal participation. It became common to see situations where a person had no problem going to a shopping mall on Saturday to do shopping, but did not go to church on Sunday, explaining that we have a pandemic and a high number of daily cases so, participation in the mass by broadcasting on Facebook or YouTube is justified. Various data appear in the media and not all of them are checked or correct. Many of this data is a way of proving that people are universally departing from the Church. Nevertheless, even careful analysis of them shows that some of the faithful moved their religious practices from the real to the virtual dimension. Aleteia website reports based on CBOS research show that the percentage of Poles attending church every Sunday de-

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<sup>27</sup> See <https://www.facebook.com/pavlo.vyshkovskiyi.3> [accessed: 29.01.2022].

creased from 46% before the pandemic to 37% after the pandemic.<sup>28</sup> It doesn't mean that everyone just stopped being Christians or Catholics, some of them just do not attend Sunday Mass in temples but participate in religious practices broadcast in the media.

Such situations cause that the community of believers and parish communities are exposed to the lack of real unity and bonds. The church, parish is first and foremost a community and communal living out of faith. It seems that building virtual communities is not enough. In this situation, many believers lose real connection with the community and with the sacramental life of the Church. Social media offer many opportunities, but it is impossible to receive Holy Communion or take part in the sacrament of penance through Facebook.

Another threat which may be brought by evangelization in social media is the correctness of the presented content. Traditionally published religious content, for example in books, was approved by nihil obstat or imprimatur. This meant that a given publication was checked for the correctness of its content and allowed for printing. Today, huge kilobytes of religious content presented on social media do not have such approval.

The point here is not to support any kind of censorship, but to make the user convinced that the content reaching them is consistent with the Gospel message or with the teaching of the Church's Magisterium. Today, when we go to Facebook and contact the religious content published there, we do not have such certainty anymore. In fact, it is not possible to control the correctness of the presented content. It is particularly dangerous, because the religious awareness of the faithful or their knowledge of faith or morality is not always complete and correct. An example of this is when on the Internet people were asked how a person understands the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. A very large group of people who considered themselves believers and the members of the Catholic Church replied that the point was that Mary conceived Jesus without a man – which means in immaculate way. Examples of limited religious knowledge and awareness could be multiplied, but the only point is that it is possible that the faithful will receive content that does not fully correspond to the true teaching

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<sup>28</sup> See *Gwałtowne tąpnięcie w religijności Polaków. Ilu z nich nie wróciło do kościołów po pandemii?*, <https://pl.aleteia.org/2022/07/01/gwaltowne-tapnicie-w-religijnosci-polakow-ilu-z-nich-nie-wrocilo-do-koosciolow-po-pandemii/> [accessed: 29.07.2022].

of the Church and begin to accept it unknowingly. Following this content can be harmful.

For example, there have been attempts on the Internet to explain for example by Catholic clergy, the topic of practicing yoga by Christians [Sowiński and Stróż 2022].<sup>29</sup> Among the various materials, you can also find those where it is indicated that yoga is only a type of stretching exercise, which can have a positive effect on the health of the practitioner, causing relaxation and tranquility. It is known, however, that yoga is not only performed techniques, but also meditation, philosophy and the whole worldview related to Hindu philosophy, where there is no personal topic of God. Saying that yoga as a system is not good, but as a set of exercises – it is ok, may cause some to start practices which will harm them.

The enormity of religious content in social media and the presence of many people in it, including, next to lay people, also clergy, shows one more problem. Sometimes one can get the impression that people who go on with evangelizing mission to social media such as Facebook, Instagram or Tik Tok try to compete for users – followers, at all costs. This rivalry manifests itself, inter alia, in various, sometimes inaccurate forms of presenting religious content. It is clear that the content should be tailored to the audience, but on the other hand, it should be communicated in a dignified manner. A priest fooling on Tik Tok, who changes into various outfits, but never appears in a cassock, shirt with a collar or a habit – this is not always a worthy way of presenting the content of the Gospel. Heavily serious messages may deter some users, especially those of the younger generation. But a complete lack of seriousness is not always a good way to evangelize. Young people often feel that the whole message is nothing serious. An example may be the answer of 15-year-old Ewa, who was asked what she was watching on the phone at the moment. She replied – “what a nonsense, but even funny.” It turned out that the material she watched was a priest who was dancing and fooling around on Tik Tok, trying to talk about the Sunday Gospel. The Gospel message is meant to bring joy into our lives, but it is not funny [Łysek 2022].

There is another danger associated with this competition for the user. Sometimes there is a problem that people who publish religious content primarily promote themselves or their own point of view and not the Gos-

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<sup>29</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EwB69PFryhg> [accessed: 29.07.20220].

pel, Jesus and his Church. Evangelization through social media is primarily aimed at reaching people with joyful news. It is Christ to be the hero of this message, not one or another YouTuber. Presenting religious content in an interesting way can increase popularity, which becomes a temptation for a person running a YT channel or a FB profile. These people start to focus on ranges and become heroes. In time, they preach themselves, not the Gospels. Father Adam Szustak, known for his activity in social media and adored by the young generation gave the interview to youtuber Karol Paciorek. The part of this interview has almost 100,000 views only on Twitter.<sup>30</sup> And on Mr. Paciorek's YouTube profile – Imponderabilia, it is the most watched material with over 1,800,000 displays.<sup>31</sup> During this interview, Father Adam speaks about very important matters but also, in very critical way he is speaking about bishops and makes very critical comments, using the vulgar words on the statement of Archbishop Gądecki. In many moments of this interview, Father Szustak was presenting his understanding of faith. Taking in very bad way about Polish episcopate and about so-called “Polish Church” can be confusing to the viewers. Although the Dominican after the conversation with the archbishop apologized, the material is still available on YouTube and advertised with the title Adam Szustak OP, honestly about religion, episcopate, JP2 and salvation. For many young people, he is an authority, and since the authority does not respect the hierarchs of the Church and sometimes Church itself, the crowd of his followers does not have to.

There are known statements of some **priests** that it is not worth putting up with a sermon at the Sunday Mass, where 50 people will come, when it is better to spend time preparing material on YouTube, where it will reach several thousand recipients.

The above examples show that the evangelization and presence of the Church and its members in the virtual world and in social media can carry certain threats that are dangerous both for the members of the Church and for community life.

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<sup>30</sup> See <https://twitter.com/i/status/1396878987448791043> [accessed: 29.07.2022].

<sup>31</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=toAeoCG1T3I> [accessed: 31.07.2022].

## CONCLUSION

The modern world requires the Church to be also present in social media and proclaim the Gospel there. The Internet or the virtual world is a space where many people have found their place. Christ's call – go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospels to all creation also means that evangelization should take place on the Internet and with the use of social media. There are some direct as well as indirect indications in Code of Canon Law as well as in different documents of Church's teaching on this matter.

The presence of the Church on the Internet and evangelization via the Internet, including evangelization in social media, it is a great opportunity and a great hope to reach those who are present there. Through social media, it is possible to reach people who would never enter the Church by themselves and convey the Gospel message of Christ. Evangelization in social media is also an opportunity to practice religion by those who, for various reasons, often through no fault of their own, are unable to participate in religious life in the real world.

However, it should be remembered that the presence of the Gospel, the Church and religious content in social media may be dangerous. The content that gives the impression of being conveyed in the Gospel is not always fully correct and in line with the Gospel and the teaching of the Church. Sometimes the possibility of access to religious practices in the media means that a person ceases to participate in them in the real world and thus loses contact with the community of the Church. Finally, there is a risk that the form of presenting this content will not always be appropriate and dignified, and the so-called religious influencers will begin to proclaim themselves more than the Christ present in the Church.

Evangelization through new technologies, including the Internet and the social media present in it, is a great opportunity for the Church. However, it is necessary to define certain rules and norms that would make it possible to do it in a dignified and correct manner. Evangelism through the media must be taken seriously, but it is important that members of the Church community be aware that it is not a substitute for real participation in religious life.



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**Evangelization through social media  
– opportunities and threats to the religious life  
of an individual and community**

Summary

Evangelization is a task and mission commissioned by Christ to the Church as an institution, but it is also the task of every member of the community of believers. Christ calls us to go with the good news wherever there is a person. Today's human being lives in two worlds – the real one, but also in the digital one. Therefore, it is important that the process of evangelization takes place not only in a traditional way in the real world, but also that the Gospel is present in the digital world. The subject of this article is the issue of on-line evangelization, including the use of social media. The aim is to show that the presence of the Gospel in the digital world is necessary, but it carries many opportunities and threats.

**Keywords:** evangelization; the mission of the Church; social media; digital world; evangelization on the Internet; the Gospel

**Ewangelizacja poprzez social media – szanse i zagrożenia  
dla życia religijnego jednostki i wspólnoty**

Streszczenie

Ewangelizacja to zadanie i misja, które zostały zlecone przez Chrystusa Kościołowi jako instytucji, ale jest to także zadanie każdego członka wspólnoty wierzących. Chrystus wzywa, aby iść z dobrą nowiną wszędzie tam, gdzie jest człowiek. Współczesny człowiek żyje dziś w dwóch światach – tym realnym, ale również w tym cyfrowym. Dla-

tego ważne jest, aby proces ewangelizacji dokonywał się nie tylko w sposób tradycyjny w świecie realnym, ale również, aby ewangelia była obecna w świecie cyfrowym. Przedmiotem niniejszego artykułu jest ewangelizacja w Internecie, w tym przy użyciu mediów społecznościowych. Celem jest ukazanie, iż obecność Dobrej Nowiny w świecie cyfrowym jest konieczna, ale niesie to ze sobą wiele szans, jak i zagrożeń.

**Słowa kluczowe:** ewangelizacja; misja Kościoła; media społecznościowe; świat cyfrowy; ewangelizacja w Internecie; Dobra Nowina

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