

# A Parson in the Era of Transformations

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Pregledni članak

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**Summary:** *This paper is devoted to the issues concerning the leadership of a parson over his parish in the era of transformations which are taking place in Central and Eastern Europe. These transformations are multiple and complex. The author of the paper focuses on the socio-cultural and religious transformations which constitute the essential background for the parson's ministry. These transformations result in the fact that the previous model of leadership in the parish community is not sufficient or adequate to the contemporary challenges. On the basis of the theory of organization and leadership, the attempt was made to indicate the directions of the parson's work which are to result in the transformation of a parish so that it could become more of an evangelizing community. On the basis of the teachings of the Church and this theory, the author indicated the features of a parson which are particularly vital in the leadership in a parish. The attention was also drawn to some ways of the priest's formation which can help parsons to effectively pursue their mission.*

## **A parson in the era of transformations.**

Political transformations which were taking place in Central and Eastern Europe at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century provoked various changes in economical, religious and cultural life. The transition from socialism to democracy coincided with the transformation of the industrial communities into postindustrial communities, which further influenced the lives of the citizens of the former socialist democratic republics. Various transformations have influenced not only particular countries and their organization but also particular citizens. The new reality which they are

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facing influences their religious attitude, which evolves or is eliminated from the life of each individual or the community in a way that is different than it used to be. These changes are reflected in the lives of the parish communities and are a challenge for the parsons as their leaders. In this context it has become indispensable to improve the former forms of leadership of the parish in a way which is modern and which suits contemporary expectations.

### **1. Social, cultural and religious conditions of the parson's pastoral ministry.**

Since 1989 the Catholic Church in Central and Eastern Europe has been acting in a new social and cultural reality which exerts influence on its life and mission. The societies in the countries in this part of Europe are being transformed from socialism to democracy and the free market. These transformations are created under the influence of the processes of globalization and the influence of the Western Europe. They influence the human conscience and are reflected in the relationships of the communities. A new society is created, pluralistic and characterized by multiplicity, diversity and competition. The Church in Poland doesn't have the influence on the whole of the society as it once had. Today it has an effect only over a part of the society. The Polish pastoral theologian R. Kamiński writes that: »the pluralistic society does not favour the Christian mission but it confirms its own values, norms and lifestyles which are neutral or hostile to the Christian doctrine. Religion, when emigrating from some areas of the social life, loses its public meaning. This situation results in the loss of a variety of functions which used to be pursued by the Church and in focusing only on the religious functions of the Church«<sup>1</sup> The author also thinks that »the possibility to make different choices, the relativity of values and norms, moral individualism and belonging to many social groups exert a great influence on the mentality and personality of people nowadays. A greater variety of different traditions and role models as well as the faster pace of the cultural changes are being reflected in the formation of a man. When people are influenced by various opinions and ideologies, which are often contradictory, the new conscience and new needs which are connected with the new patterns of thinking and acting are created in them«.<sup>2</sup>

Political and economic transformations result in the formation of new phenomena which are not always positive. One such phenomenon, which did not exist in

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<sup>1</sup> R. Kamiński. *Działalność zbawcza Kościoła w teorii i praktyce pastoralnej*. Lublin: Publishing of the Catholic University of Lublin 2007 p. 47.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid; see R. Kamiński. *Wyzwanie duszpasterskie okresu przejścia od totalitaryzmu do demokracji*. »Roczniki Teologiczne« 44:1997 z. 6 p. 96

the socialist society, is unemployment. It affects a significant part of young people of working age. This exerts influence on the state economy as well as on people, especially on those who suffer from it.<sup>3</sup> Unemployment is also perceived as an advantage, e.g. as a factor which enhances competition between those applying for a job, because it incites the improvement of qualifications and the level of education. The role of unemployment is also indicated in the structural transformations of the state economy, which also require moving the employees into different places thereby stimulating the adjustment of professional qualifications to the new demands. The positive role of unemployment is also indicated in the anti-inflationary policy of the state which means the weakening of the position of workers and trade unions in the wages negotiations with the employers. It is also noticed that one of the results of unemployment is the improvement of work efficiency because the fear of unemployment mobilizes the workers to a greater effort and discipline<sup>4</sup>. The »advantages of unemployment« mentioned above are a matter for discussion. However, among the results of unemployment, the disadvantages constitute the majority. The most common disadvantages are the economic ones e.g. the loss of productive abilities which results from part-time employment and which causes the decline in the gross domestic product and the financial burden for the state i. e. the direct costs that cover the service for the unemployed and the indirect ones connected with the losses of the state's income. It should be noticed, however, that the social results of unemployment are not less important and seem to be more significant from the long-term perspective. Among these, the most common one is the influence of unemployment on the psychological and physical condition of the people who suffer from it. This also includes the weakening of the relationships of the unemployed »the dysfunction of the family, the increase in the social pathologies and the work emigration«<sup>5</sup>

Contemporary transformations affect many communities among which the family is the most unfortunate one from the point of view of the pastoral care. The

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<sup>3</sup> In November 2013, the unemployment rate in Poland was 13.2% of the working population, the largest in the Warmia-Mazury (21.1%), the smallest was in the Wielkopolska Region (9.5%). The work offices sought 229.8 thousand jobs for the people 82.7% of whom were job seekers again. People under the age 24 years old accounted for 27.2% of the newly registered, and graduates for 9.4% of the total number of the newly registered. In this group, 35.5% were the people who have graduated from a university and were not yet 27 years old. [http://www.egospodarka.pl/103491, Unemployment-in-Poland-Nov-2013 1,39,1. html](http://www.egospodarka.pl/103491,Unemployment-in-Poland-Nov-2013%201,39,1.html).

<sup>4</sup> See B. Mierzwiński. *Kościół wobec bezrobocia*. Ząbki: Apostolicum 2004 pp. 88-89.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid p. 91; see A. Wuwer. *Bezrobocie jako wyzwanie dla Kościoła*. W: Komisja Duszpasterstwa Ogólnego Konferencji Episkopatu Polski. *Przywracajmy nadzieję ubogim. Program duszpasterski na rok 2005/2006*. Ed. P. Kurzela, A. Liskowacka. Katowice: Wydział Duszpasterstwa Ogólnego Kurii Metropolitalnej 2005 pp. 141-160.

community of the family, according to Z. Zarembski, is »like a lens which collects the results of these transformations – both positive and negative«<sup>6</sup> Among these results, the negative ones are a greater challenge for the parish pastoral care. The traditional model of a family and marriage, which results from the Christian tradition, is being questioned in various ways. »Marriage as a relationship of a man and a woman is particularly questioned. The community of marriage is not perceived properly and its sacramental character is being rejected. The alternative forms of the family life such as the cohabitation of singles, single-parent families, patchwork families, and families with two working parents, lesbian and gay relationships, open marriages and multiple relationships are becoming more and more common. The aims of the community of marriage are determined in an improper way nowadays and the qualities of marriage are being rejected [...] Furthermore, the lack of respect for the human life and the separation of sexuality from procreation are posing a serious threat [...] the right of the parents to bring up their children in a moral and religious way is also being questioned. The number of children whose parents are not married is also worrisome because it leads to the deinstitutionalization of the family [...] old and sick people are perceived as a burden for the society and their families.<sup>7</sup> The expansion of the *gender* ideology, which is difficult to define clearly but which has been more and more often propagated in the public opinion, is a challenge for the pastoral care. It is deeply rooted in the international political structures and becomes more popular also in the Polish structures. It aims at depreciating the meaning of marriage and the family through depreciating of the male and female and their roles in the marital- family- and social communities.<sup>8</sup> Young people are a group of a greater importance for the pastoral care as they are mostly influenced by the contemporary transformations. The characteristic discrepancy between the high indicator of the declaration of faith and the everyday life in the contemporary Polish society and in the societies in some other countries of Central and Eastern Europe is particularly noticeable among young people. The characteristic direction of the transformations in the religious life of young people, although it does not only concern them, is the selectivity in the choices of the recognized truths of faith and the rules of the Christian morality; while recognizing the existence of the God-Person, they treat the dogmas of the faith and the moral norms in a very selective way. Young people, similarly to many adults, accept the rules of the

<sup>6</sup> Z. Zarembski. *Troska Kościoła w Polsce o małżeństwo i rodzinę po Soborze Watykańskim II. Studium teologicznopastoralne*. Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika 2013- 14.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid pp14-15

<sup>8</sup> P. Bortkiewicz. *Ideologia »gender« – istota i konsekwencje dla duszpasterstwa*. W: Komisja Duszpasterstwa Konferencji Episkopatu Polski. *Wierzę w Syna Bożego. Program duszpasterski na rok 2013/2014*. Ed. Sz. Stulkowski. Poznań: Wydawnictwo Święty Wojciech 2013 pp. 276-293.

secular society. The values they prefer are oriented at shaping the individual style of life. Young people tend to treat the traditional values indifferently and replace them with the modern values such as the personal freedom, creativity and success etc.<sup>9</sup> The media play a significant role in this process, especially the electronic media which are not only the conveyors of information and the preachers of ideas, but have become a replacement for human relationships and thus the tools of relationships and indirect impacts.<sup>10</sup>

The social and religious transformations of the post-socialist societies are reflected in the Catholic parishes. According to the Polish sociologist of religion J. Mariański, »Catholic parishes, as well as the whole societies, are subjected to the continuous processes of social modernization and the transformations in the parish reflect, to a certain extent, the transformations in the whole society.

A parish has been playing an important role not only within the Catholic Church as an institution of religious life but also in the organization of the local social life, and is often seen as an important part of the social reality. The decline or the decrease of the social and religious meaning of a parish can be called the organizational secularization or the social change on the organizational and structural level (the release of the society from the parish), while the high level of approval for the beliefs, rituals and morality promoted by the parish can be seen as a manifestation of the normative integration.«<sup>11</sup>

The most important person in a parish is a parson. His role changes according to the changes which transform the parish. The pastoralist A. Żądło distinguishes five models of the parish pastoral care. The cultic model of the pastoral care recognizes the most important role of the liturgy in the life of a parish and the dominating role of the parson, who is the administrator and the leader in the worship. In the authoritarian model of the pastoral care, the parson also dominates in the life of the parish as the only manager of the parish service. The model of the substitute pastoral care which does the secular tasks used to be pursued in the socialist times when the parish was the centre of non-religious services that operated as an institution alter-

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<sup>9</sup> R. Kamiński. *Działalność zbawcza Kościoła w teorii i praktyce pastoralnej* p. 57; see S. H. Zaręba. *Religijność młodzieży w środowisku zurbanizowanym. Socjologiczne studium teoretyczno-empiryczne*. Warszawa-Rzeszów: Pobitno Oficyna 2012 pp. 483-489.

<sup>10</sup> See Bp H. Tomasiak. *Wychowanie młodych do wiary*. W: Komisja Duszpasterstwa Ogólnego Konferencji Episkopatu Polski. *Głosić Ewangelię nadziei. Program duszpasterski na rok 2004/2005*. Ed. P. Kurzela, A. Liskowacka. Katowice: Wydział Duszpasterstwa Ogólnego Kurii Metropolitalnej 2004 pp. 105-131.

<sup>11</sup> J. Mariański. *Katolicyzm polski: ciągłość i zmiana. Studium socjologiczne*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo WAM 2011 pp. 181-182.

native to the state, acting contrary to the official social rules. In this model, the parson was not only a religious leader but also a social and, not that rarely, a political authority. Another model is the model based on the cooperation with the pastoral council. In this model, the parson does not fulfill his mission in a monarchical way but he undertakes pastoral activity and pursues his mission in cooperation with the laity. The last model is evangelic and it promotes pastoral care. In this model, the parish community is the manager of the parish. The parson is not the only manager although he organizes and coordinates the activities of the community.<sup>12</sup> The two last models of the parish pastoral care deserve special attention because they are consistent with the Second Vatican Council. It is the community aspect which has been emphasized (in the model in which the parson cooperates with the parish council) and the missionary aspect (in the evangelistic and promotional model) of the Church and the parish.

In compliance with the teaching of Pope Francis, the evangelistic and promotional model of the parish pastoral care should be highly appreciated these days, as they result from the pastoral mission of the Church. Although the parish and the pastoral care, which is pursued in the parish, undergo constant changes, they are not properly prepared for the contemporary challenges. »We must [ ... ] admit that the call to revise and renew our parishes has not been fully effective yet, parishes are not yet closer to people and they do not fully constitute the living community of people or the full participation, nor are they fully directed at the mission«.<sup>13</sup> In Poland the model of the parish pastoral care with the pastoral council has not been easy to introduce. The dominating models in many parishes are the cultic or authoritarian models. Believers tend to treat the parish as a service office<sup>14</sup>.

## 2. The directions of the parson's activity.

According to the Code of the Canon Law »a parish is a defined community of believers which is created as constant in the particular Church, which is led by a parson who is a pastoral care priest under the power of the diocesan bishop<sup>15</sup>. The Law of the Church, according to the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council,

<sup>12</sup> A. Żądło. *Modele organizacji duszpasterstwa parafialnego*. W: Komisja Duszpasterska Episkopatu Polski. *Nowa ewangelizacja u progu Trzeciego Tysiąclecia. Program duszpasterski na rok 2000/2001*. Ed. E. Szczotok, E. Kempy, A. Liskowacka. Katowice: Wydział Duszpasterski Kurii Metropolitalnej 2000 pp. 175-204.

<sup>13</sup> Papież Franciszek. Adhortacja apostołska *Evangelii Gaudium* nr 28.

<sup>14</sup> See T. Wielebski. *Diecezjalne i parafialne struktury komunijne w Polsce*. »Teologia Praktyczna« 13:2012 pp. 59-69.

<sup>15</sup> CIC can. 515 § 1.

emphasizes the community aspect of a parish. A parish is a community of believers; the institutional aspect of a parish, although important, is subordinate to this part of the God's people. Being a community means that a parish is more than the sum of people who create it.

The community has two important features: unity and diversity, it constitutes a kind of a body. In reality it is a part of the great Mystical Body of Christ Who is the Church. Although the parish is animated by the Holy Spirit Who is present in the whole Church, each parish has its own identity and individual character.

A Catholic parish, similar to any group of people, has its particular needs. The British researcher of the organization and management issues J. Adair calls them the needs of the group. He mentions three particular needs of a group: the need to do a task together, the need to maintain the unity of the group (the need to be together) and the needs of particular individuals in a group<sup>16</sup>. The theory of J. Adair is possible to pursue with regard to a parish and a parson as its leader because it emphasizes the reality which he calls »the identity of a group«. This definition is similar to the definition which concerns the parish. Thus the pastoral function of the parson can be perceived as a kind of leadership and, therefore, considered according to the rules which concern the leaders of groups. According to the British researcher, the needs of the group designate the directions of the leader's activity which means that the parson's ministry, as of the pastoral leader of the parish community, should take three directions. It should aim at achieving the common goals of the parish, building the parish community and fulfilling the needs of the parishioners. A parish is a part of a diocese, and, thereby, a part of the universal Church because it pursues the aims of the whole Church, of the particular Church and its own. The basic aim of the Church is to lead people to salvation, meant both in the temporal and the eschatological aspect, and to build the Kingdom of God on earth. The parish participates in pursuing the tasks in a special way because it is the basic place where each believer can meet the supernatural reality.<sup>17</sup> It is within the parish where a man is joined to the community of the God's people in the Sacrament of Baptism and through his development and growing in faith. The parish community accompanies him in his final earthly journey and prays for him after his death. The aim of the parish parson is to lead the believers to salvation with the means left by Jesus Christ which are: His Word, the Sacraments and the mutual love.

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<sup>16</sup> J. Adair. *Kształtowanie liderów: siedem zasad rozwijania zdolności przywódczych* [How to Grow Leaders: The Seven Key Principles of Effective Leadership Development]. Warszawa: Oficyna Wolters Kluwer 2013 p. 36.

<sup>17</sup> Jan Paweł II. Adhortacja apostolska *Christifideles laici* nr 26.

In the era of transformations the parson faces various difficulties in pursuing his mission of leading the believers to salvation. However, the parson's preaching is perceived with a misunderstanding and resistance, even among his parishioners. In the pluralistic society a priest is not the only prophet who is trying to be convincing in his teaching. Among other trends in the worldview market there are numerous guides, teachers and the guru who are often much more convincing for the listeners and who are equipped with more powerful social media, especially those who can use the television, the radio or the Internet. When people come to church, they often have their own ready opinions on certain subjects and the parson's teaching is confronted with their opinions. Moreover, the public opinion and even the legislation of some countries are not conducive to the preaching of the Gospel. This particularly concerns the views which regard homosexuality, the ethics of the marriage and family life, abortion, euthanasia, etc. The necessity to transmit the full and not distorted deposit of faith makes it necessary for the parson to object to the opinions of others, even the majority, and not to give in to the external pressures in the name of the »political correctness«. The Church, and also the parson, must remain faithful to the truth.

The most important means of salvation given by Christ to His people are the Sacraments. Celebrating and receiving them is determined by the rules of the liturgy. Contemporarily, receiving God's grace, which flows from the Sacraments, encounters various difficulties. In some countries some of the Sacraments are practically abandoned, especially the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation. Depriving believers of confession not only deprives them of God's grace, which is necessary for salvation, but also of the formation aspect of this Sacrament. This means the proper formation of the conscience. Celebrating of some Sacraments is perceived in a distorted way, e.g. the Sacrament of Baptism which, in some countries, requires only the intention of the parents and protectors; the Sacrament of Confirmation which is perceived by some as the celebration of leaving the Church in the presence of the bishop; receiving the Holy Communion without being in the state of grace; treating the Sacrament of the Sick as the last rites; the lack of the need to receive the Sacrament of Marriage – these are only a few problems connected with celebrating and receiving the Sacraments in a parish. A parson cannot resign from these »sources of God's grace« or celebrate them not accordingly to the books of liturgy. They are a very important means of help for the faithful on their way to salvation. Parsons in many countries face the necessity to renew the formation of the faithful in their receiving the Sacraments.

In the countries of Central and Eastern Europe in the era of socialism, the service of the Church was limited in various ways. The most far-reaching limitations regarded the charity and the social service. Nowadays this service is being rebuilt in many



fields, also in the parishes. In Poland there is a tendency for every parson to create and lead the parish Caritas group which aims at pursuing the Christian ministry of love. Unfortunately, in many parishes there are no such groups, and among the existing ones not all of them fulfill the statutory duties<sup>18</sup>. This results in the postulate that the Caritas groups should be created in every parish and that they should be led in such a way so as to meet the expectations of the parishioners, which corresponds to the teaching of the Church.

The failure in pursuing any of these basic functions by a parson leads to the distortion and weakening of the religiousness of the parishioners and to the loss of identity of the parish and, as a consequence, of the whole Church. The example of such a situation are the protestant communities which are mainly focused on the social aims such as the care for the equality of the rights of women, the rights of animals or clean air, and, therefore, have lost their ability to be the intermediary of salvation. They have lost their Christian identity and have become some kind of »Kampftruppen« which pursue only the meaningless aims of the Church.

Another important aim of the parson's ministry in the era of transformation is building the community spirit of the parish. The parish is a community in the supernatural sense, as the community of faith, cult and love. The community of the parish in the supernatural sense is built on the way of pursuing the basic functions of the Church in the parish, and, thereby, it becomes the community of faith, hope and love. In the natural sense these are the bonds between the members of the parish which create the community.

Apart from the community aspect, the second noticeable aspect in a parish is the institutional aspect. It has been emphasized for a long time that, although the institutional aspect is necessary in the parish because it is connected with the organizational structure of the parish, which gives it constancy and stability, in the lives of many parishes it has the advantage over the community aspect. Therefore, various initiatives are taken which aim at transforming the institution of a parish into the community of a parish. »There is no direct way to transform the anonymous mass of the parishioners into a real religious community. This cannot be solved with just the order of the bishop or the parson. It requires the engagement of the majority of believers. The transformation of the parish into a real community can be done in the development of its community structure and in directing its service at the com-

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<sup>18</sup> See Z. Sobolewski. *Caritas: chcemy być »solą ziemi«*. W: Komisja Duszpasterstwa Konferencji Episkopatu Polski. *Być solą ziemi. Program duszpasterski na rok 2012/2013*. Ed. Sz. Stulkowski. Poznań: Wydawnictwo Święty Wojciech 2012 pp. 331-334.

munity.«<sup>19</sup> The mentioned community structures are the group of priests under the leadership of the parson, the parish pastoral council and the religious associations, movements and small groups.<sup>20</sup>

The significant role in the process of building the community of a parish is played by the pastoral style of the parson. It is indicated that the autocratic style, which used to be common in leading the parish, should be changed into the cooperative style. The implementation of this style will enable the change of the relationship between the parson and his parish priests, it will open the way to call and activate the service of the parish councils and will allow for the development of religious associations. Leading the parish in the cooperative style will help the parson respond to the needs of his parishioners.<sup>21</sup>

The parish pastoral council is the group supporting the parson in leading the parish. The members of the council not only support the parson with advice but they are also engaged in pursuing the parson's initiatives which they undertake. The pastoral council is also the parson's tool for the activation of all the parishioners and for engaging them in the community life.<sup>22</sup> Religious associations transform the groups of parishioners into small communities which, while developing, can transform the parish into the community of communities<sup>23</sup>. The parson can also introduce one of the modern projects of renewing the parish such as: »The modern picture of a parish«, »The parish as a community of communities« or use the method of »the evangelistic parish cells«. All these proposals are based on the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council and are conducive to the strengthening of the community of the parish and emphasize the activity of the laymen.<sup>24</sup>

The third important direction of the parson's ministry in the era of transformation is the care for the parishioners and satisfying their needs. The basic need of the majority of the parishioners, which is directly connected with the community aspect of the parish, is the extricating from anonymity. Contemporary parishes, especially the big, urban ones, consist of anonymous people who do not know one another and who are unknown to the parson. While the mutual anonymity of the parish-

<sup>19</sup> R. Kamiński. *Parafia miejscem realizacji duszpasterstwa*. W: *Teologia pastoralna* t. 2. Ed. R. Kamiński. Lublin: Atla 2 2002 p. 32.

<sup>20</sup> See J. Mariański. *Polski ksiądz wobec wyzwań przyszłości – wnioski z badań socjologicznych religijnej i moralnej kondycji społeczeństwa polskiego*. »Dobry Pasterz« 35:2010 pp. 36-29.

<sup>21</sup> See O. Šmidriak. *Perspektívy pastorácie na Slovensku*. Ružomberok: Verbum 2011 pp. 230-237.

<sup>22</sup> See D. Lipiec. *Rola Parafialnej Rady Duszpasterskiej w budowaniu wspólnoty parafialnej*. »Ateneum Kapłańskie« 159:2012 z. 3 pp. 246-256.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* *Apostolstwo świeckich w parafii*. »Roczniki Pastoralno-Katechetyczne« 1:2009 pp. 50-52.

<sup>24</sup> A. Żądło. *Współczesne propozycje odnowy parafii*. W: *Teologia pastoralna* t. 2 pp. 94-108.

ioners is difficult to overcome, getting to know the parishioners by the parson is an easier task. In Poland a parson can visit his parishioners on a pastoral visit, which usually takes place in the period of Christmas. According to the testimonies of the parish priests, in the traditional rural parishes the parish priest is welcome to almost 100% of the families, while in some parishes in big cities there are only 50% of the families who invite the parish priest. Parish priests seldom visit the parish families on other occasions. Therefore it is necessary to organize meetings, celebrations, and other ceremonies in the parish so that the parishioners could establish direct and close relationships with their parson, meet one another and become less and less anonymous. Getting to know one another helps the parishioners create the human dimension of the parish community.

The postulated meetings are not supposed to be of indeterminate nature, but they should serve to fulfill certain needs of the parishioners. Meeting them causes the development of the complementing functions of the parish. »In the pluralistic world it is of even greater importance for each individual to be among other people who think and feel like them [...] The community supports and provides them with the sense of security, relieves fears, removes doubt. [...] The parish should become a place where an individual is strengthened in his belief that Christian choices make sense. A parish should be a place for those who need to heal their wounds«<sup>25</sup> What is more, in case of a crisis of the family or school, a parish should become a kind of a foster home which will be teaching children and young people the values of the Gospel. »The places for meetings, for strengthening friendship and for fun should be created in each parish where people can learn how to spend their free time or how to behave properly. The parish community should extend their activity on young people – from exclusively religious to the culture-creating. A parish should become the place to teach good practices.<sup>26</sup>

Pope Francis strongly opposes the »economics of exclusion« which causes social injustice and leads to the social marginalization of the »poor«.<sup>27</sup> Unfortunately, the development of capitalism in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe is not just connected with the success and prosperity of everybody. Its results also include the multitudes of victims: the unemployed, the poor, the lonely, the nameless and the hurt. They need to satisfy their spiritual and physical hunger. »Feeding [...] will be another important task for the parish community. [...] Seeking of the

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<sup>25</sup> A. Petrowa-Wasilewicz. *Parafia przyszłości – dom otwartych drzwi*. W: Komisja Duszpasterska Episkopatu Polski. *Nowa ewangelizacja u progu Trzeciego Tysiąclecia. Program duszpasterski na rok 2000/2001* pp. 173.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid

<sup>27</sup> Papież Franciszek. Adhortacja apostolska *Evangelii Gaudium* nr 53-54.

poor will be the chance to find those who are far away from the Church – non-believers, those who doubt, the hurt«<sup>28</sup> Satisfying hunger, especially the spiritual one, is connected with the fulfillment of a certain condition. »Parishes will have to become the home of the open door, where everybody will be able to come, not only those who seek God. If they encounter the sense of superiority or the pharisaical thanksgiving, and not the one of the publican, if they sense that those »pure« are afraid to lose their purity- they will leave«<sup>29</sup>.

### 3. The features and skills of a parson.

A parson in the era of transformations must possess various features and have skills which were not required in the past. The issue of the features and skills of the leaders has frequently been discussed in the sciences dealing with leadership. According to the approach to the leadership and its concept, researchers made various lists of the features of a leader.<sup>30</sup> Many attempts have been made to determine whether the features of a real leader are inborn or whether it is possible to learn them. The development of the sciences which concern leadership brought the conclusion that the effective leadership can be learnt, however, there are some inborn features which make this process easier, e.g. a strong personality and charisma. However, it has been noticed that possessing the conducive, inborn features does not guarantee that a person will become a good leader.<sup>31</sup>

The features and skills of the effective leaders presented in various tables can be divided into several groups. Among them there are such features of character which can be improved in the process of self-development e.g.: professional skills and knowledge, the organizational skills as well as the moral features and attitudes. These groups of features approximately correspond to the results of the formation of a priest in its four aspects. It can be stated then that undergoing seminary formation is the basis for being a parson because it shapes the human and spiritual sphere of the candidate for the priesthood, provides him with the necessary knowledge and shapes his pastoral and spiritual attitude.

In the present conditions of the parson's work, a parson faces specific requirements which did not use to be so important. The definition of a »shepherd to the com-

<sup>28</sup> Petrowa-Wasilewicz. *Parafia przyszłości – dom otwartych drzwi* p. 172.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid* p.174

<sup>30</sup> M. Kosterka, S. Kownacki, A. Szumski. *Zachowania organizacyjne: motywacja, przywództwo, kultura organizacyjna*. W: *Zarządzanie. Teoria i praktyka*. Ed. A. K. Koźmiński, W. Piotrowski. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN 2011 pp. 336-358.

<sup>31</sup> R. W. Griffin. *Podstawy zarządzania organizacjami [Management]*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN 2004 p. 560.

munity« is being expanded and transformed. In the human aspect, parishioners expect their parson to be their father. They want him to be open to them, to give them shelter and accept them, which is not the same as approving of all their deeds. Therefore, they expect him to be understanding and to give them another chance. Apart from the openness and understanding, a parson in the era of transformations is required to have a lot of patience, the ability to listen, empathy, and to devote his time to those who need it. On the other hand, in dealing with the world which is against Christianity, a parson who faces so many conflicts, should be assertive, resistant to stress and resolute.

In a situation where secular environments adopt the attitude of opposition to the Church and Christianity and one of the methods of fighting is discrediting the clergy, the moral and religious attitude of the parson is very important. He is in the forefront in the meeting of men and the Church, somehow in the spotlight. The quality of the contact with the parson is used to develop the opinion not only about him, but also about the whole community of believers. The fidelity to the Christian and priest's vocation is always important because of the personal holiness of the parson, but it becomes even more important in the contemporary times, considering the effectiveness of the pastoral service. In the secularized societies, which mostly cherish the material values and the high standard of living, a parson is judged also from this perspective. Any irregularities in the management of the goods of the parish give rise to various emotions among the parishioners. Poverty, chastity and obedience of a priest, striving for the personal holiness are of increasing importance in the parson's ministry nowadays.<sup>32</sup>

In the contemporary societies, lack of acceptance for the truths of faith and the moral rules of Christianity is in progress, while the religious values are rejected from public life. Religion is hardly ever treated as a part of everyday life nowadays and fewer Christians develop their personal bonds with God.<sup>33</sup> The ministry in the postmodern world requires a parson to be more of an expert on the supernatural things than he used to be. Pope Benedict XVI taught that »believers expect from priests just one thing, to be experts on God. A priest is not required to be an expert on economy, building or politics. He is expected to be an expert in the field of religious life«. <sup>34</sup> The Pope's teaching indicates the necessity to know theology in its contemporary condition as well as to have experience in the pastoral care, which

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<sup>32</sup> Kongregacja do spraw Duchowieństwa. Instrukcja *Kapłan, pasterz i przewodnik wspólnoty parafialnej* nr 12-16.

<sup>33</sup> J. Mariański. *Kościół katolicki w Polsce a życie społeczne*. Lublin: Kaudium 2005 pp. 59-62.

<sup>34</sup> Benedykt XVI. Przemówienie *Wierście w moc waszego kapłaństwa!* (Warszawa 25.05.2006). »L'Osservatore Romano« (the Polish edition) 27:2006 nr 6-7 pp. 16-17.

is necessary for a parson, especially for the pursuing of his duties in the spiritual leadership, for the ministry in the confession or for the individual pastoral care. Furthermore, being »an expert in the contact between God and a man« assumes that a parson is supposed to be skilled in psychology, sociology, medicine and other sciences – at least at a basic level – so that he would be able to understand the condition of a man, his needs and to show him the appropriate ways to meet God.

Being a priest requires possessing specific features which are convincing for the believers who will follow him. This does not necessarily mean that a parson is a formal authority, being a parson implies possessing it, but a personal authority, which is more desired in the pluralistic society. Among the features necessary for a leader who is to attract his parishioners there are: self-confidence, ambition directed at being successful, stubbornness, courage, the ability to dominate over others, creativity and innovativeness<sup>35</sup>, as well as consequence, humility and enthusiasm<sup>36</sup>. The last of these features was particularly highlighted by Pope Francis in his exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*: »I want to address the faithful Christians to invite them to the new stage of evangelization marked by joy [of meeting Christ- D.L.]«<sup>37</sup>. The necessity of creating the vision of the pastoral care has long been acknowledged in the Church.<sup>38</sup> This also concerns parsons who should have a vision of what their parish would be like. In the teaching on leadership, the issue of having visions and the realization of them is often discussed, especially during the debates on the transformational leadership which is »the leadership that goes beyond the everyday expectations, that conveys the sense of mission, stimulates the process of learning and inspires the new ways of thinking«.<sup>39</sup> This is a model of leadership adapted to the dynamic, changing reality. »The transformational leadership is a process in which the vision of the organization is formulated and conveyed by a charismatic person who successfully uses contacts in and outside the organization in order to acquire innovativeness, communication and flexibility at every level of the organization«<sup>40</sup>. A transformational leader is a person who creates a vision of the organization of the future, who motivates its members for the pursuit and institutionalizes the process of changes which are necessary to execute this vision. Whereas the vision should be

<sup>35</sup> M. Kostera, S. Kownacki, A. Szumski. *Zachowania organizacyjne: motywacja, przywództwo, kultura organizacyjna* p. 339.

<sup>36</sup> J. Adair. *Kształtowanie liderów: siedem zasad rozwijania zdolności przywódczych* pp. 52-53.

<sup>37</sup> Papież Franciszek. Adhortacja apostolska *Evangelii Gaudium* nr 1.

<sup>38</sup> A. Kalbarczyk. *Futurologia pastoralna. O potrzebie wizji w Kościele*. »Teologia Praktyczna« 7:2006 pp. 7-16.

<sup>39</sup> R. W. Griffin. *Podstawy zarządzania organizacjami* pp. 577-578.

<sup>40</sup> M. Kostera, S. Kownacki, A. Szumski. *Zachowania organizacyjne: motywacja, przywództwo, kultura organizacyjna* pp. 352.

clear, simple and easy to understand by the majority of the members of the organization; »realistic, credible and difficult to overturn by the emotionless cause-effect analysis; it should create the atmosphere of threat«; put a target not too close and not too distant; lead to the concentration of the organization on the essential skills« and to be communicative and often reminded of by the leader<sup>41</sup>.

It seems that a parson of the era of transformation should become a transformational leader who has a vision of his parish of the future and who is able to motivate his parishioners to pursue the vision. In seeking of the vision the parson is not left alone. A parish should be an independent entity in the Church and it is not a lonely island on the sea of paganism. The parson's ministry fits into the mission of the universal and particular Church, and his vision fits into the vision of Christ, the Pope and the bishop. As the strategic plans which concern the Church are ordered by Its Founder, the tactical plans are the creation of the episcopate under the guidance of the bishop of Rome, therefore the aim of a parson is to create the operational plans which result from the vision of the parish. The tactical plan, developed by the Pope, is to form the Church as a missionary community. Therefore, the aim of a parson is to work out a vision of the parish as a missionary community which pursues its mission in a particular, current reality. On the basis of the teaching on leadership one can claim that to pursue his vision a parson should strengthen the individual visions of his parishioners; explain to them that building a parish – a missionary community, is a process; that the mission of the parish is turned both outside and inside of the parish and communicate with the parishioners in order to achieve and maintain the support for his vision<sup>42</sup>.

### **The formation of a parson**

As there is no simple way to transform a group of strangers who live in one parish into a community, there is no simple way to transform the former way of the pastoral care into one that would suit the contemporary expectations. For sure this process should begin as early as in the seminary education, at the stage of the formation for the priesthood. It should also include presbyters, both those preparing for the office of a parson and those who already are parsons.

In the teaching on leadership, more and more followers adopt the integral approach in the training of leaders. It is based on the assumption that becoming a leader is a long-lasting process correlated with the personal development of a man. It is also noted that »different features [of a man – D. L.], and various skills are not devel-

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid p.354

<sup>42</sup> Ibid

oping simultaneously, but each develops at its own pace«<sup>43</sup> In this approach the most important are the five areas of the leader's development which are called lines. These lines are: the cognitive line (IQ), emotional line (FQ), the interpersonal, moral and spiritual line<sup>44</sup>.

The advantage of the integrated approach in the training for leaders is noticing the need to maintain the continuity of its conduct, the need for some individual features of each leader and for defining its fields. The idea of the integrated approach reminds of the concept of the permanent formation of priests, outlined in the documents of the Church.<sup>45</sup> This formation is constant; it is full, systematic and personal. It includes four fields which are also called formations, such as: the human formation, the spiritual, intellectual and pastoral formation. It is the bishop who is responsible for the constant formation in a diocese, while each presbyter is responsible for his own formation. Linking of the care and competence of the diocesan bishop and the parson's own commitment constitutes a proper ground for the formation suitable for the contemporary expectations.

In practice, the constant formation of parsons faces various difficulties. It is not always constant and systematic. Systematic formation meetings are organized in many dioceses for young priests, especially those who are not yet in the tenth year of the priesthood. The priests with a higher seniority can participate in the annual retreat as a part of their spiritual formation and in the deanery congregations which consist in the elements of the spiritual and pastoral formation. The reunions of parsons, where they discuss contemporary issues, are very rare. The speakers are not always competent. To a certain extent parsons are to rely solely on their own as far as their formation is concerned.

In the scientific and popular publications the issues of the formation of presbyters, especially of their spiritual formation, are widely discussed.<sup>46</sup> There are numerous magazines devoted to the contemporary theological issues. However, the indications of the Second Vatican Council are still valid: »to make it easier for presbyters to devote themselves to studies and to be more effective in learning the methods

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<sup>43</sup> A. Teisseyre. *Lider pilnie poszukiwany. Podejście integralne – nowa definicja przywództwa i rozwoju lidera*. W: *Leadership coaching jako odpowiedź na wyzwania współczesnego świata*. Ed. L. D. Czarkowska. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Poltext 2013 p. 146.

<sup>44</sup> These lines are taken from the concept of developmental psychology in terms of H. Gardner, who perceive them as the so called multiple intelligences and pointed to the existence of twenty-four such intelligence. In studies on leadership highlights the five of them. *Ibid*

<sup>45</sup> Jan Paweł II. *Adhortacja apostolska Pastores dabo vobis* nr 70-81; Kongregacja do spraw Duchowieństwa. *Dyrektorium o posłudze i życiu kapłanów* nr 69-80.

<sup>46</sup> See . Abp S. Nowak. *Troska kapłana o rozwój życia duchowego*. »Dobry Pasterz« 34:2009 pp. 51-58.



of evangelization and apostolate, they should be carefully prepared, under the conditions of each territory, and equipped with appropriate aids, which are: the organized courses, congresses, the centers of pastoral care studies, libraries and the properly led studies for them. [...] These and other appropriate measures should be used to [...] support with a proper care the newly appointed parsons and those who are devoted to the new pastoral works.<sup>47</sup> It seems that the acknowledged means, which help in the formation of the priests, such as sociology and psychology, should be combined with the teachings on organization and management as these will constitute a very effective aid for parsons in the pursuit of their mission in the era of transformations.

## Conclusion

In his vision of the Church and the pastoral care Pope Francis points out the importance of the missionary activity and the transformation of the Church communities into missionary communities. In the contemporary social, cultural and religious context this aim is difficult to achieve because many communities, as well as parishes, are less and less dynamic. Many contemporary parishioners face difficulties in their faith and they need the support from priests and other lay believers.

Parsons, acting as shepherds, are expected to begin the process of transformation of the contemporary parishes into the parishes – missionary communities. However, parsons are also in need of support in the realization of their mission which is becoming more and more difficult a challenge. Parish pastoral care requires transformation based on the vision covering the whole Church and parsons should be equipped with the tools which are effective in the postmodern society. The formation of priests also requires transformation, especially the constant formation of parsons.

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<sup>47</sup> Sobór Watykański II. Dekret o posłudze i życiu prezbiterów *Presbyterorum ordinis* nr 19.