

## Article

# The Perception of Organisational Nepotism Depending on the Membership in Selected Christian Churches

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**Abstract:** Nepotism, just like any other form of favouritism in the workplace, is a phenomenon that is basically evaluated negatively. It adversely influences social and economic development and it has not been considered in relation to the membership of a given Christian denomination. This article reviews the literature on nepotism and takes into account the religious perspective on nepotism while the research part focuses on the analysis of nepotism taking into consideration both Catholic and Protestant perspectives. Thus, the article falls within the discussion initiated by Max Weber, who found that religious membership had an influence on economic development because business leaders, capital owners, and a highly qualified workforce and well-trained enterprise employees were, by and large, Protestants. The article is aimed at analyzing the effects of nepotism and evaluating this phenomenon from the perspective of the abovementioned Christian denominations. Qualitative and quantitative methods were included in the conducted research. As far as the qualitative method is concerned, an individual in-depth interview, conducted with two Catholic and two Protestant clerics, was applied. Within the second stage, i.e., the quantitative surveys, information received in the interviews was verified and the way of understanding and accepting the phenomenon of nepotism depending on the religious membership was learnt. This research demonstrated that Protestants regard the phenomenon of nepotism as negative more frequently than Catholics and the phenomenon is more common among Catholics than Protestants.

**Keywords:** nepotism; cronyism; Protestantism; Catholicism; organizational nepotism

## 1. Introduction

Organizational nepotism is one form of favoritism in the workplace. It has always been an integral part of human history and its essence may be examined by the representatives of various sciences, such as evolutionary biology, anthropology, theology, sociology, psychology, political science, law, and economics (Aldraehim et al. 2012). It constitutes a problem for logicians and linguists because controversies relating to it arise at the very level of defining the phenomenon itself. Nepotism influences human resource management and, thus, economic, social, and general development.

Analysis of the current economic situation of numerous European countries shows that political and economic differences and an ethical approach to entrepreneurship found in Europe may be explained by values presented by Protestantism and Catholicism. However, one should agree that membership and participation in the life of a given religious community is not the only determinant of ethical attitudes in social and economic life (Arruñada 2004). The same applies to the approach to nepotism.

The statement below on the practice and acceptance of nepotism within the membership of a Christian denomination seeks to fall within the discussion already initiated by Max Weber, who found that religious membership had an influence on economic development. Weber indicated the positive influence of Protestant ethics on economic development (Filipowa 2012). It needs to be emphasized that Weber did not mean all Protestants referring to the time of the Reformation, but rather, he meant a subsection of Protestants referring to Calvinism. Although Weber's views lay the foundations for research on the influence of religion on organizational behavior, they were and still are both accepted and criticized by various researchers. Werner Sombart, who argued with Max Weber, indicated the importance of the role of Jews in the development of capitalism (Barbalet 2006). Nowadays, attention is drawn to the on-going secularization process and the shrinking role of religious influence on ethical attitudes. Sociologists pay attention to the growing role of investment capital, technology, and demography (Nelson 2012). Work conducted by Becker and Woessmann (2009) demonstrates that it is not Protestant ethics that contributed to economic growth but the translation of the Bible into modern languages, which, consequently, led to the increase in the level of education. This resulted in providing a basis for economic growth in Protestant countries (Filipowa 2012).

Current publications dealing with the problem of the crossroads of religion and economy treat Protestantism as a part of Christianity dating back to the 16th century Reformation. Nowadays, it is justified not only by the values represented by these denominations but also by the success of the ecumenical movement, which has led to essential convergences and arrangements between Protestants themselves. There are still differences between them, but mutual arrangements have allowed the establishment of a certain ecclesial community.

The issue of nepotism is discussed in the paper, which aims at identifying the manifestations and effects of nepotism from the perspective of Catholicism and Protestantism (referring to Lutheranism and Calvinism). Organizational nepotism is rarely the subject of research in social and humanistic sciences. The literature on the subject includes research results comparing the attitude of Protestants and Catholics to work (e.g., Colvin and McCracken 2017; Arruñada 2010; Spenkuch 2017), public institutions (e.g., Colvin and McCracken 2017), income redistribution (e.g., McCarthy et al. 2016), pro-social behaviors (e.g., van Elk et al. 2017), state debt (e.g., Chadi and Krapf 2017), investment in human capital and education (e.g., Becker and Jared 2016; Spenkuch 2017), and corruption (e.g., Mutascu 2010), but there are no comparisons of their attitude to organizational nepotism. The novelty of the paper is identification of the impact of Catholic and Protestant denominations on organizational nepotism.

The main goal was achieved by analyzing the results of qualitative and quantitative research on the approach of Catholics and Protestants to nepotism. Qualitative research consisted of individual in-depth interviews, which were based on the recurrent research scenario. In turn, a quantitative survey was conducted in the form of an auditorium questionnaire. Conclusions from the quantitative study were formulated using standard statistical methods, such as descriptive statistics, measures of similarity, parametric tests for mean values and proportions, as well as the chi-squared test of independence. The issue of nepotism itself is explained in the first part of the paper, and, in the second part, the problem of nepotism is considered from the religious perspective. The results of qualitative and quantitative research on the approach of Catholics and Protestants to nepotism constitutes the third part. The article is summarized by outcomes, conclusions, and limitations resulting from the research carried out.

Given the obtained results and the limitations of the research, extended comparative and representative studies that will account for different religious contexts are needed.

## 2. The Term Nepotism and Organizational Effects of Nepotism—Literature Review

In the contemporary language, nepotism may mean favoring family members or friends, especially in terms of recruitment (Soanes and Hawker 2006). However, it might also mean the practice of unfairly granting high-ranking positions to the members of one's own family by persons holding power in a given organization (Sunnars 2005; Crowther 1998). It should be noticed that the family and friends are

mentioned in the first case while the second case refers to the family only, which is closer to the original meaning of the word nepotism. This term appeared in the English language in the middle of the 17th century. It derives from the Latin word *nepos*, which means a grandson or nephew. At the time, it was used to describe a situation whereby Popes and the Church dignitaries of high rank provided special support to their grandsons or other family members while assigning them high-ranking positions (Barnhart 1999).

As far as the methods used to favor individuals in the workplace are concerned, a distinction between nepotism and cronyism is generally drawn. The first term mentioned means favoring persons maintaining family ties with persons regarding recruitment. The term cronyism means the practice of the unfair employment of friends in high-ranking positions by persons holding power in a given organization. Cronyism most probably derives from the word *crony*, which means a very close friend or colleague (Crowther 1998). The roots of this term may be found in 17th century university slang. At the time, the term meant a “friend of long-standing”. Cronyism, which appeared in the English language in 1840, had a positive meaning. It described “the ability or desire to make friends”. It acquired a negative meaning in 1952 only, when American president Harry Truman’s administration was accused of appointing friends to the American government regardless of their qualifications. Thus, the term *crony* acquired its offensive meaning describing friendly relationships associated with political corruption and, possibly, giving consent to it (Keles et al. 2011). Unlike nepotism, the sources of the term *crony* may be found in Greek terms, such as *chrónios* (lasting) and *chrónos* (time) (Barnhart 1999, p. 233). According to Arasli and Tumer (2008), cronyism means “giving preference to politicians, particularly to cronies, namely, close friends, especially, as evidenced in the appointment of hangers-on office, without regard to their qualifications”. With the help of the term favoritism, the authors mentioned above describe “the provision of special privilege to friends, colleagues and acquaintances, in the areas of employment, career and personnel decisions” (Arasli and Tumer 2008).

Taking into account the complexity of human relations, it may be found that such phenomena as favoritism or cronyism are extremely difficult to control. Similarly to nepotism, cronyism and favoritism have a negative influence on the organization resulting from the choice of the form of employment and rules of employee selection.

The disparities found while defining the term nepotism make themselves felt in social sciences, especially those concerning management. Nevertheless, nepotism always refers to family relations. This term helps to describe a situation, in which a person holding power or having influence in a given organization exercises effective pressure on recruiting a member of his or her own family regardless of the relative’s individual competences (Riggio and Karan 2015; Sidani and Thornberry 2013). It ought to be noted that the authors mentioned above pay attention to the lack of competences while determining the phenomenon of nepotism. However, it turns out that the term nepotism is used to describe a situation, in which a member of one’s own family or current employees’ spouses and children are favored in recruitment without indicating the lack of competences. The phenomenon of nepotism is not limited to the recruitment process only. It also covers subsequent stages of a “professional career”. Moreover, the term refers to a situation, in which a decisive person grants preferences to family members of persons already employed. This concerns fostering, assigning work, or correcting remunerations (Abdalla et al. 1995; Fisher 2005; Padgett and Morris 2005; Çarikiçi et al. 2009). The differences in the definition are minor, but they force the authors of this statement to take a stand. The situation of supporting a member of one’s own family in recruitment in a given enterprise without taking into account the relative’s competences may be interpreted with the help of the term nepotism in this regard.

In order to explain the nature of the phenomenon of nepotism, very particular classifications have been applied. Thus, Williams and Laker (2010) believe that four basic forms of nepotism may be distinguished as follows:

1. The recruitment of a member of one’s own family by the owner of a given enterprise. Such a phenomenon is evaluated negatively and referred to as family nepotism. The literature on this

topic pays attention to the lack of opportunities available to attract qualified managers from outside the family.

2. The recruitment of the spouse of a current employee. Such a phenomenon is referred to as paired employees. The literature on this topic discusses the legality of anti-nepotism actions implemented.

3. Political nepotism refers to a situation in which a relative is granted a political position. In this case, the literature mentions the political nature of nepotism because nepotistic practices influence a person's political behavior.

4. Organizational nepotism occurs when a person related to any enterprise employee or other person (other than the spouse) is employed.

From the ethical point of view, any form of favoring individuals in the workplace, including those connected by family ties, cannot be approved (Verbeke and Kano 2012). However, the literature on the topic emphasizes that research on this issue requires further studies (Jennings et al. 2018). Any ethical evaluation largely depends on whether nepotism is being considered by entrepreneurs or employees. Tangible benefits brought about by nepotism include confidence in the persons employed, kindness towards the enterprise, more rapid adaptation to the workplace, and loyalty. Moreover, there are numerous opinions that including family members in a given organization may lead to an increase in organizational efficiency. Research carried out on the issue of social capital from the perspective of nepotism demonstrates that social links gained beyond the organization, and, afterwards, used in the workplace, bring about tangible benefits to the organizations and persons working for them (Jones and Stout 2015; Sulkowski 2017).

However, it is most frequently indicated that serious injustices occur when individuals are favored over others in the workplace, i.e., persons applying for a job do not have equal opportunities in recruitment. Conflicts arise between employees and those employed in a nepotistic way. A conflict of interest occurs then. Lower job satisfaction among employees is not without significance; a negative social image of the organization is on the increase and it is becoming more and more difficult to manage the organization. Persons employed in compliance with the determined and transparent procedures have a negative attitude towards those favored. As a consequence, the lack of employees' confidence in the management staff and in one another grows. Motivation to work and professionally develop oneself is lowered in places where nepotism occurs.

The phenomenon of nepotism may be considered in terms of discrimination. This applies to the treatment of persons differently depending on their membership in a certain group. Such a phenomenon was described in 1957 by American economist Gery Backer, who made a distinction between discrimination "against somebody" and discrimination "in favor of a given person". As a form of discrimination, nepotism is currently described in very broad terms. It is regarded as the negative treatment of an unspecified group of persons applying for a job while favoring a certain group of persons belonging to our group (Fershtman et al. 2005).

Taking into account discrimination and the negative effects of nepotism, some organizations have implemented anti-nepotism schemes. These apply to such an extent that employing a member of one's own family results in a job loss in some organizations. In the middle of the 1980s, 40% of enterprises in the USA introduced broad bans on nepotistic practices. Further, 60% of enterprises even pursued an information policy concerning the negative effects and ethical dilemmas related to various forms of workplace favoritism (I-Pang 2015; Jones and Stout 2015).

A few forms of restrictions can be distinguished. The absolute ban on employing a family member as an ordinary worker anywhere in the organization, even in a different department or branch, is one of them. In compliance with lower restrictions, a family member cannot be employed in the same department or branch of a given enterprise. The principle of no supervision, in accordance with which the employee may not be entitled to decide about a family member, represents the narrowest use of the anti-nepotism policy (Fisher 2005).

On the other hand, the introduction of anti-nepotism principles also faces criticism. Once again, a specific example of discrimination is mentioned. Namely, the basic social category, i.e., the family,

is the rule, with the help of which a given person is discriminated against. The family membership itself, and not the acquired competences, excludes a person from applying for a given position. Moreover, the research conducted by Gutman (2012, cf. Padgett et al. 2015) demonstrates that anti-nepotism policy consequently leads to discrimination against women. Namely, women are eliminated from the labor market in locations where strict anti-nepotism rules have been implemented. Jones and Stout even claim that acts of anti-nepotism based on the principles of family membership are discriminatory, similarly to situations in which the issues of racial or sexual prejudice, religious preferences, and age are faced (Jones and Stout 2015).

Anti-nepotism principles result in the elimination of persons holding generally recognized competences. Such persons cannot be employed due to the fact that they are related to persons already employed. It often happens that employees meet at work, fall in love with one another, and get married. However, either one of the couple was earlier employed on the basis of the competences held only. The enterprise's anti-nepotism policy makes it necessary to move one of the spouses to another department or even change the workplace (Fisher 2005; Williams and Laker 2010).

Critics of the implementation of anti-nepotism principles indicate that nepotism is not a homogeneous phenomenon in its form. Thus, one can mention cross-generational nepotism and paired employees. The former refers to the employment of family members from two or even more generations. Such a phenomenon most frequently occurs in family businesses. Good relations between the members of the management staff constitute a positive effect of this phenomenon. The latter term, i.e., paired employees, refers to the relations between a husband and wife in a given workplace. Such situations are referred to as dual-career couples. By working together, spouses may balance their work and family situation in a better way, and the family becomes a significant actor at work (Padgett and Morris 2005). In cases where family members are forced to be employed in various places, i.e., dual-career couples, conflicts within the very same families occur more frequently.

Due to the endemic nature of nepotism in organizations and its negative effects, it is claimed in the literature that the introduction of the rules of candidate selection based on the qualitative qualifications and evaluation of any employed person is the key to solving the problem. A reliable employee evaluation should be made known to all employees. The leaders of organizations are responsible for implementing these principles (Riggio and Karan 2015).

There are even opinions, according to which, that if organizations apply best practices to employee recruitment, evaluation, and fostering, nepotism may have a positive influence on the organization and the employees themselves. The representatives of such views mention two types of nepotism, i.e., "good nepotism" and "bad nepotism". The latter consists in favoring a family member in recruitment even if the person does not have the required qualifications. By contrast, good nepotism consists of favoring a recruited person if he or she has the required qualifications. If all of the candidates undergo fairly evaluated procedures and individuals connected by social ties happen to be the best applicants, nobody should feel humiliated for this reason (Padgett et al. 2015).

However, it should be noted here that the proposals mentioned above do not correspond to research results. Namely, research conducted by Padgett et al. (2015) shows that people have negative attitudes towards nepotism and consistently stigmatize those who benefit from family connections in recruitment. Irrespective of the procedures undertaken, persons employed without family connections attribute lower competences to persons employed in a nepotistic way. Persons employed in compliance with clear rules have demonstrated a critical attitude towards the professional career of persons employed in compliance with nepotistic rules, give less support for their actions, and advocate granting lower salaries to them. One ought to remember that recruiting a person without the required competences causes harm to other employees. Persons without family connections are, to a smaller extent, in favor of persons from family circles if the latter have succeeded.

The phenomenon of nepotism is most common in small- and medium-sized family businesses. Broadly speaking, a family business is defined as an enterprise, in which the family is of dominant importance in terms of the ownership and management of the enterprise (Efferin and Hartona 2015).



Other definitions indicate that definitions should include the attitude of an owner who seeks to transfer the enterprise to his or her family successors (Hernández-Trasobares and Galve-Górriz 2017). Irrespective of the definition adopted, the owners of family businesses are guided by nepotistic rules mainly with respect to succession (Wang et al. 2019). Succession and nepotism are interrelated to such an extent that they occur regardless of whether an employed manager from beyond the family circles has competences and achieves satisfactory results (Liu et al. 2015). Furthermore, nepotistic attitudes can be found in family businesses owing to the fact that numerous family businesses do not have a clear strategy (Bozer et al. 2017).

Some researchers recommend departing from nepotistic practices in family businesses. This applies to a situation, in which there are no talented persons in the immediate family. Thus, it would be justifiable to employ an external specialist and avoid filling high-ranking positions with family members. By relying on personal relations with the owners of a family business, external managers may develop long-term relations with employees (Miller et al. 2015).

In the context of family businesses, some advantages of nepotism are mentioned. Namely, nepotism may constitute a positive recruitment strategy (I-Pang 2015). Family members, whose leader is successful, are more likely to trust him or her. Moreover, other employees demonstrate stronger commitment and loyalty to the enterprise (Dickson et al. 2012). Work culture in a family business fosters its development (Denison et al. 2004). According to Pfeffer (2005), nepotism leads to the establishment of communal organizations seeking to develop a sense of community in the workplace and demonstrates holistic concern for their employees. This stands in contrast to the limited and transactional approach adopted by numerous organizations in their relations with employees. Lee et al. (2003) indicate that nepotism does not manage the appointments of relatives in business, but rather, it is economically justified. The risk connected with involving external persons is lowered when the members of the immediate family are recruited. It turns out that the members of the immediate family are the best candidates to replace the incumbent manager. The owners of family businesses ought to identify the main trends among employees and use them while practicing nepotism (Steier 2005).

The argument for tolerating nepotism in family businesses may stem from the success achieved by such enterprises on the competitive business market. Williams and Laker (2010) indicate that excessively general conclusions cannot be drawn with respect to nepotism in family businesses, but the specific cultural context needs to be taken into consideration. Nepotism may even bring about tangible benefits in places where organizations have a long tradition of applying nepotistic rules. For example, in Latin American countries, employees who are not family members have been satisfied with working in a family business guided by nepotistic rules and commitment to the organization. In the case of Australian family businesses, the conclusions are completely different. In Australia, nepotism has a negative influence on the perception of the enterprise by employees not connected with the family. Employees not related to the family believe that protocols for recruitment were too favorable for family members. They think that they are not trusted, and nepotism leads to their alienation. They have admitted that, despite their leadership qualities, their contribution to the operations of the enterprise has not been taken into account (Bozer et al. 2017).

It is worth noting that nepotism classified into reciprocal nepotism and entitlement nepotism occurs in the very family businesses in which the member of the immediate family is taken into consideration while filling managerial positions. Recruitment based on family ties without taking into consideration the condition of the family is referred to as entitlement nepotism. This type of nepotism can be permanent and supported on the basis of family or cultural traditions. When it is deeply rooted, it may be dysfunctional and harmful. Such nepotism may be illustrated by a succession situation, in which the oldest son is favored as the successor whilst at the same time other family members are discriminated against. Bloom and Van Reenen (2007) demonstrate that family businesses granting a position to the oldest son generally achieve the worse results.

Nepotism connected with family conditions and cultural norms supporting obligations towards family members and the enterprise is referred to as reciprocal nepotism. Reciprocal nepotism is

believed to reflect “the heart” of what “the family” thinks about its own enterprise in a positive sense. Enterprises guided by reciprocal nepotism in their operations emphasize that “tacit knowledge”, i.e., unmodified and impenetrable knowledge transferred by the family to its other members only, is necessary for the economy. Such knowledge is gathered in the organization through business operations including the production and marketing of goods and services. By contrast to codified or formal knowledge, “tacit knowledge” is inexpressible. It is connected with social interactions between employees in a specific working environment (Jaskiewicz et al. 2013).

Taking into account family businesses, one needs to remember that numerous family businesses practicing nepotism are not guided by nepotistic rules in a simplified way. Professional family businesses often include in their programs education for the generation who are intended to be the successors in a given enterprise (Stewart and Hitt 2012). Their owners are aware of negative effects brought about by any nepotistic practices.

### 3. The Concept of and Acceptance for Nepotism from the Perspective of the Christian Religions and Denominations—Literature Review

Nepotism is closely linked to the concept and celebration of family traditions. The lack of acceptance or the approval of nepotistic practices is, simultaneously, important for the functioning, condition, and image of each organization’s social existence, as well as for the very understanding of ethics in economic life. Basically, nepotism is negative for the development of human entrepreneurship (Filipowa 2012).

The analysis of the current economic situation in numerous European countries shows that the political and economic tensions found in Europe may be justified by values represented by broadly understood Protestantism and Catholicism. Even in the 21st century, there are still cultural differences between traditionally Catholic and Protestant societies. Traditionally Protestant countries are believed to be more highly developed economically. By contrast to Catholic countries, there is more respect for personal independence and autonomy and a higher level of development of democratic institutions in these countries (Nelson 2012).

Acceptance of the phenomenon of nepotism and its practice may depend on numerous factors. Religions and denominations existing within them constitute one of the factors, which is, however, not of key importance. Research shows that, even today, Catholic and Protestant Christian denominations emphasize different values involving potential economic consequences. Naturally, membership or participation in the life of a given religious community is not the only determinant of ethical attitudes. As far as the direct effects of the influence of faith and religion as regards instilling spiritual values in people, it is assumed that this impact is lower among Catholics than among Protestants (Arruñada 2004).

The deliberations on the acceptance and practice of given values depending on the membership in a given Christian denomination falls within the discussion initiated by Max Weber, who found that religious membership had an influence on economic development. Weber indicated the positive influence of Protestant ethics on economic development (Filipowa 2012). It can be learnt from the subsequent works of, e.g., British historian Hugh Trevor-Roper that Protestants both developed and built the economy in such 16th and 17th century Catholic countries as France or Austria. Besides, it does not concern Protestants as such, however, more extreme forms of Protestantism (like Calvinism) do. By expressing the opinion that Protestantism contributed to economic growth, Weber mainly meant Calvinism. However, Weber did not mean the development of these countries, in which Calvinism dominated, only. This also applied to Calvinists existing as one of the minority groups and living in the Catholic countries. Moreover, it concerned Calvinists living in such Lutheran countries as Denmark or Sweden. Weber’s views were and still are welcomed. However, it should not be forgotten that they are also criticized. It is believed that religious ideas do not have a determining influence on shaping the whole society and its economy. Sociologists emphasize that investment capital, technology, demography, health, and strength in searching for the “scientific” explanation

of the conduct of contemporary societies is of the greatest importance in this respect (Nelson 2012; Cantoni 2015). Some researchers point to the pre-reformation roots of the Protestant, suggesting that the rapid development of the regions was resulted from the functioning of the Catholic Order of Cistercians in these areas (Andersen et al. 2017).

Currently, the differences are not as significant as they were 100 years ago and the Protestant influence on the ethical dimension of human life is smaller (Treisman 2000, p. 428; Colvin and McCracken 2017). However, tangible differences between Protestantism and Catholicism are still visible; naturally, in favor of the former one (Arruñada 2004; Filipowa 2012; Sheremeta and Smith 2017; Spenkuch 2017). It should be highlighted here that the contemporary economic research on the matter does not distinguish denominations originating from the Protestant movement. Usually, Protestantism generally means Christians belonging to the numerous churches that have developed on the basis of the 16th century German and Swiss Reformation. This can be somewhat justified by the contemporary ecumenical movement. The pursuit for unity among the divided Christians originating from the Reformation had already started by the end of the 16th century (McNeill 1993). Currently, both in the contemporary Europe and globally, thanks to the ecumenical movement, numerous arrangements are being witnessed at the local and global level. The ecumenical movement, which led to the adoption and general acceptance of these arrangements, was initiated in the second half of the 19th century and mainly headed by various Protestants. The Lutheran World Federation, World Alliance of Reformed Churches, and World Methodist Council have been founded worldwide. In Europe, most churches originating from the Reformation, together with Christians belonging to the United Churches, approved the Leuenberg Agreement in 1973. Over 100 churches, together forming the Leuenberg Church Fellowship, are among its signatories (Meyer 2004; Lossky et al. 2002). The current name of the community is The Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (Lubinetzki 2010). The Leuenberg Agreement has led to the crystallization of the ecclesial community. Its model is referred to as the model of unity in reconciled diversity. Thus, it is also justifiable to mention Protestants in general while analyzing the condition of the economic life of contemporary European societies irrespective of whether their economic development and increasing wealth led to the decline in the significance of religion (Hasan 2017).

Protestant regions develop more quickly because Protestants pay more attention to the development, knowledge, and importance of human resources (Arruñada 2010; Hasan 2017; Boppert et al. 2010; Akçomak et al. 2016; Becker and Jared 2016). The lower commitment to the family results in a more objective evaluation of the situation and equal treatment, which enhances the professionalism of actions. Moreover, the phenomena of corruption and nepotism indicated earlier are meaningful in this respect because they are lower in the Protestant countries.

As far as nepotism is concerned, it should be indicated that the phenomenon of favoring close relatives has always accompanied the human being. Thus, it had existed long before it became to be referred to as nepotism (Çarikiçi et al. 2009). According to Bellow (2003a, 2003b), nepotism is a natural human trend, which has always been practiced throughout history. Therefore, one should try to understand nepotism and even use it in a positive sense in combination with recruitment rules.

The selection by membership in a given family is a natural phenomenon and has its roots in evolution. The link between ethical attitudes and human evolutionary heritage is not a new issue. It is assumed that Charles Darwin was the first thinker who associated studies on ethics with natural sciences and believed that human morality was connected with biology. He claimed that people were genetically predestined to be moral because morality ensured an advantage in the fight for the survival of our species. Irrespective of the above, it was felt for a long time that “evolutionarily determined morality” remained the basis of philosophical, sociological, and other non-biological discipline considerations. Over recent years, researchers have started to more frequently explain some ethical mechanisms by referring them to biology. Biologists can explain morality at numerous levels. As genetic behavior, moral conduct is alternately explained by kin selection and reciprocity. As a motive or intent with a psychological background, morality is explained by open learning systems



shaped by emotions and reasoning based on experience. As a social system, morality is explained by the mutual responsibility of individuals or a selective interaction based on social information. Processes taking place at each level provide the context, within which the other levels function (Allchin 2015).

Moreover, the belief that the foundations of the “moral sense” and standards for ethical actions ought to be searched for in human evolution has started to gain supporters (Šamánková et al. 2018). The ability to develop innate moral attitudes and moral reasoning stems from genes. Furthermore, the cultural processes that contribute to the growing trend towards, and emergence of new moral codes influence moral behavior. All of this is subject to the laws of evolution, mutations, and various forms of selection. In other words, human morality is shaped by biological and cultural factors. Thus, human behavior is subject to the principles of the dual inheritance theory, in compliance with which human behavior is the product of two different and interacting evolutionary processes, i.e., genetic evolution and cultural changes (Cliquet and Avramov 2018).

In addition to this, the logic consisting in favoring relatives falls within the biological concepts explaining human morality. According to William Hamilton’s theory, genes are transferred to the next generation owing to ordinary reproduction arising from the physical fitness of the individual and his or her relatives, which is the result of the individual’s altruistic behavior. This way, it is possible to transfer altruistic behavioral traits with the help of the differential in the reproductive behavior of individuals. This theory was complemented by John Maynard Smith with the term kin selection, in compliance with which the reproductive success of an altruist does not result from the success of relatives only but also from the success of the very altruist. The above causes natural nepotism in relation to relatives, which results from evolution. On the basis of Hamilton’s kin selection theories, Robert Trivers prepared the model of altruism between non-kin. As a result of reciprocal altruism, predispositions to altruism are transferred (Cliquet and Avramov 2018). One can also see a certain mechanism shaped thanks to evolution, in which the moral system plays an important role stabilizing two factors influencing the reproductive success. These factors are competition between group members and cooperation enhancing group stability (Lahti and Weinstein 2005).

Some authors challenge only the evolutionary origin of morality. They believe that genes are of lower importance than it is generally thought, and moral attitudes are strongly influenced by external factors. Legal systems, which relieve people of their own moral evaluation and experiencing, which actions are moral and which are not, play an important role (Garvey 2018). The cost of perceiving a given moral norm and the associated benefit is also essential. In case of the high cost and small benefits, such norms expire over time (Azar 2004). Thus, it is essential to combine the natural human predisposition to nepotism with the binding legal system, benefits, and costs borne by individuals. On the one hand, the economic policy ought to take human moral nature into account (Hodgson 2013); on the other hand, however, the legal system should locate human morality in the relevant legal system. Simultaneously, moral norms ought to provide more benefits than losses to the society.

Thus, the logic of the theory of evolution fosters favoring relatives and persons belonging to a given community. In other words, organisms are genetically selected to be nepotic in the sense that favoring relatives at the expense of non-relatives and favoring close relatives at the expense of the distant ones is natural and stems from evolution. Family sentiments lead to racial and ethnic sentiments, resulting in ethnocentrism and racism, which causes ethnic nepotism, within the framework of which the members of a given ethnic group are favored (Vanhanen 1999). According to some biologists, supporting family members is a natural instinct found in human beings and some animals. The biological, also known as ecological, approach to social sciences allows for claiming that nepotism needs to be classified as a rational behavior. In other words, being guided by the principles of nepotism is a rational and chosen behavior and not an arbitrary, emotional, or instinctive behavior (Uygur and Çağatay 2015). In addition to this, family and cultural conditions ought to be taken into consideration for the purpose of explaining the phenomenon of nepotism (Jaskiewicz et al. 2013; Bertrand and Schoar 2006). Nepotism plays a determining role in societies, in which traditional family relations

and interdependencies are celebrated. Nepotism dominates in societies, where home mutualization is common and the awareness of mutual interests is interdependent.

The emphasis put on the family, human natural sphere, and cultural conditions leads to the observation that the phenomenon of nepotism is present in countries in which strong and traditional family ties and intergenerational solidarity are maintained. Higher acceptance of nepotism exists in places where market relations are not appropriately developed, and ethics based on values do not dominate (Bertrand and Schoar 2006; Çarikiçi et al. 2009). Furthermore, it is completely natural that enterprise owners support the members of the immediate family in transferring the enterprise. Such an attitude is the effect of the effort made by the owner for the purpose of the enterprise establishment and effective operations on the market (Liu et al. 2015).

Analyzing the phenomenon of nepotism, one should not forget about religion, which still constitutes an important element of the contemporary functioning of societies. According to the research conducted by Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion and Public Life in 2012, believers constituted 84% of the world population. According to the research performed by WIN Gallup, persons consciously calling themselves believers constituted 59% of the global population (Hasan 2017). Religion still penetrates contemporary human life irrespective of whether or not an individual is a practicing believer.

In general, religion has a positive influence on fostering ethical behavior (Ananthram and Christopher 2016; Koslowski 2001; Purzycki et al. 2018). Together with economics and ethics, it creates a triad, within the framework of which ethics compensates for the imperfections of economics and religion compensates for the imperfections of ethics (Koslowski 2001). A human ethical action may derive from religion.

Simultaneously, it should be remembered that religion may also have a negative influence on human ethical attitudes. This mainly applies to cultures based on strong leadership authorities, such as Catholicism or varied Islam. Thus, it is logical that they may be more favorable for the phenomenon of nepotism (Yeganeh 2014). In cultures in which an individual does not depend on a religious authority and the emphasis is put on an individual's responsibility, like in Protestantism, less support for nepotistic attitudes could be noticed. Nepotism may be described as one of the forms of corruption. In such a case, it would be higher in countries originating from the strong Catholic influence because a higher level of corruption is visible under such influence (Yeganeh 2014; Zakaria 2018; Treisman 2000). By contrast, the decline in the share of Christians originating from Protestantism in the life of the society leads to an increase in undesirable phenomena, like corruption (Mutascu 2010) and, thus, nepotism.

However, it turns out that the phenomenon of nepotism can also be found in Protestant communities. The congregation in the western part of the USA, in which the phenomenon of nepotism is clearly visible in the ecclesial environment, can serve as an example (Austin 2019) of the experimental conclusion.

In the strict sense of the word, nepotism is directly connected with the family. Irrespective of the ongoing discussions on the role and importance of the family in the contemporary world, it may be claimed that, from the Christian point of view, the family might be understood as the link between mutual relationships established by marriage or birth or adoption of children. However, the ways in which these relationships and the rights and obligations connected with various roles are established, differ significantly depending on culture, class, religion, and region. The formal perception of the religious marriage is the factor strengthening and distinguishing the view of various Christian denominations on the family. In the Catholic Church, marriage is one of the seven sacraments. In the traditions of the Protestant church, marriage is not a sacrament (Lossky et al. 2002). However, it ought to be indicated that getting married within the Protestant tradition is not regarded as a secular activity. It is the fulfilment of humanity and the fact of being a Christian. Marriage and family are gifts from God, i.e., an offer and proposal to live one's life in the perspective of freedom, service, and responsibility (Barth 2003; Bayer 2008; Guthrie 1994). This does not alter the fact that because Catholics bestow an almost mystical meaning to marriage and family, it makes Catholicism support personal family

and friendship relationships to a much greater extent. While being more concerned about personal relations, including parental ones, Catholics are less inclined towards solving problems at a more global level of whole societies. Such an approach may favor nepotism, on the other hand contributing to higher economic resilience to crisis, thanks to intrafamily transfers (cf. [Arruñada and Krapf 2019](#)). The values emphasized by Catholicism allow Catholics to more favorably perceive family businesses and networks of small enterprises, by contrast to anonymous trade and large corporations with their specific values and value control ([Arruñada 2004](#); [Arruñada 2010](#); [Yeganeh 2014](#); [Akbari et al. 2019](#); [Treisman 2000](#)).

A particular type of nepotism, referred to as religious nepotism, would occur if the members of a religious community or denomination supported other members of their own community and discredited the members of other communities or denominations. Thus, it is religious reasons rather than economic ones that would lead to favoring. Such situations could most frequently happen in societies in which a given religion dominates over the other ones ([Rao 2015](#)). However, this does not alter the fact that persons belonging to a smaller community may be guided by similar standards. In case of the dominance of a majority religion, the members of religious associations in the minority might support their peers.

Furthermore, acceptance of a given social phenomena may, in a way, arise from the theological vision of the relationship between the state and the church ([Arruñada 2010](#); [Treisman 2000](#)). A milder view on transparent interpersonal relations and ethical norms is set in a special way in theology, which relies on the emphasis on the human weakness and forgiveness highlighted in Catholicism. By contrast, Protestants perceive sin as an individual matter ([Treisman 2000](#)). Research confirms that, by emphasizing God's forgiveness, Catholics may, in a way, "encourage" the committing of a sin, i.e., tolerating unethical actions ([Zakaria 2018](#)). In this context, it should be pointed out that the practice of confession in the Catholic church has been undergoing a serious crisis and that several Catholics do not observe the annual individual confession requirement. The Protestants in principle confess directly to God, in silence, performing the confession of sins collectively, as a community. In the Catholic church, the act of confession is focused on a direct personal relationship. Such support of a less collectivistic relationship may lead to attitudes that seem to be more hospitable to nepotism (cf. [Arruñada 2009](#)). It ought to be noted that the increase in confidence among the members of the management staff pleads in favor of practicing nepotism. However, it should not be forgotten that the decreasing trust between people in general is one of the negative effects of nepotism. Therefore, it needs to be emphasized that greater trust in other people is visible in societies and countries in which Protestants play the dominant role than in societies dominated by Catholicism ([Filipowa 2012](#)).

To conclude the hitherto deliberations on nepotism, it ought to be claimed that religion still plays an important role in the evaluation of and view on this phenomenon. Moreover, from the perspective of Christian denominations, nepotism should meet with lower acceptance among Protestants than among Catholics.

#### 4. Research Methodology

The research on the literature confirms that, according to numerous authors, the practiced religion still influences the fostering of individual ethical behavior ([Ananthram and Christopher 2016](#); [Koslowski 2001](#)). There is also a group of authors who derive ethical and moral behavior completely from human evolutionary heritage. Many of these authors believe that the foundations of the "moral sense" and standards for ethical actions can be found even in the animal world and religion does not have an influence on strengthening individual human ethical behavior. Similarly, nepotism may be perceived as a phenomenon rooted in the evolutionary heritage of the human race and constituting a consequence of "genetic egoism" ([Goatly 2006](#); [Shermer 2004](#); [Allchin 2015](#)).

Thus, taking into consideration the religious perspective, it may be believed that nepotism, which consists in favoring persons in the workplace, should not be recognized by religious persons because it is unethical behavior. Simultaneously, according to numerous researchers, traditional

religions (e.g., Catholicism), which strengthen hierarchy and are based on the power of an authority, may provoke nepotism (Yeganeh 2014). In contrast to Protestantism, Catholicism puts much more emphasis on the personal family and friendship relationships (Arruñada 2004, 2010; Yeganeh 2014; Akbari et al. 2019; Treisman 2000), which also provokes nepotism. Although there is research evaluating the influence of the practiced religion on economic development (over 100 years ago Max Weber wrote *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, in which he claimed that Protestantism contributed economic development more significantly than Catholicism) and on the elimination of an unethical behavior (e.g., corruption) (Yeganeh 2014; Zakaria 2018; Treisman 2000), there is still a shortage of research comparing the approach towards nepotism depending on the membership in a given Christian denomination, with particular attention being paid to Catholicism and Protestantism.

In connection with the above, a comparative analysis of the dominant view of Catholics and Protestants on nepotism was chosen as the main objective of the research.

The following specific objectives were formulated for the purposes of the research:

- The determination of the understanding of the phenomenon of nepotism by persons taking spiritual care of the members of their ecclesial communities.
- The determination of the understanding of the phenomenon of nepotism by persons depending on the membership in ecclesial communities.
- The determination of the perception of the frequency of the phenomenon of nepotism by persons depending on the membership in ecclesial communities.
- The determination of whether acceptance for the phenomenon of organizational nepotism is connected with the membership in a given religious community.

On the basis of the research objectives indicated above, the following research hypotheses were formulated. The first two of them apply to the very understanding of nepotism. By definition, nepotism occurs when there are family ties between the beneficiary of nepotism and the person practicing nepotism. Simultaneously, the emphasis put by Catholics on the indissolubility of marriage and giving marriage a mystical dimension may lead to the failure to perceive the problem of nepotism, which, consequently, may be characterized by the lack of categorizing nepotic situations as nepotism. Therefore, the first three hypotheses are as follows:

**Hypothesis 1 (H1).** *Nepotism is more frequently recognized as a negative phenomenon by Protestants than Catholics.*

**Hypothesis 2 (H2).** *Protestants more often indicate nepotic situations as nepotism.*

The determination of the scale of the phenomenon of nepotism is equally important. The research conducted hitherto indicates that nepotism is a common phenomenon in Central Europe (Sroka and Vveinhardt 2018; Onoshchenko and Williams 2014; Williams and Onoshchenko 2014). Simultaneously, it seems that, in Protestant communities, owing to the stronger commitment to development, knowledge, and capital (Arruñada 2010; Hasan 2017), this phenomenon should occur less frequently.

**Hypothesis 3 (H3).** *Catholics face nepotic situations more often than Protestants.*

In order to verify the above research hypotheses, the research included both qualitative and quantitative methods. As far as the qualitative method is concerned, the individual in-depth interview was applied. The interview was aimed at identifying the manifestations and effects of nepotism from the perspective of the membership in various Christian denominations. The interviews were conducted within the period from May 2019 to June 2019. The choice of the qualitative survey made it possible to reach specific cases and enabled the understanding of the specificity of the examined issue (Toften and Hammervoll 2010).

The individual in-depth interviews were based on the recurrent research scenario, which provided an opportunity to ask respondents additional questions, owing to which it was possible to make the research problem more detailed. Before conducting the survey, the interview scenario was consulted with external experts on the phenomenon of nepotism and the representatives of ecclesial communities. One of the experts came from an academic environment and the other two were active members of Christian communities. The interviews were conducted in person and, afterwards, they were arranged and underwent a qualitative analysis.

The selection of respondents was intentional. Four clerics providing pastoral care in their religious communities participated in the survey. Two of them represented the Catholic Church. The remaining two came from Protestant communities, i.e., the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland and the Evangelical Reformed Church in the Republic of Poland. Thus, the opinions of the followers of Catholicism and two Protestant denominations belonging to the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe were taken into consideration in this survey.

The qualitative survey aimed at recognizing the understanding of the phenomenon of nepotism by clerics and determining whether acceptance or disapproval of organizational nepotism is connected with religion. Furthermore, the clerics were asked about the way religious membership and the issue of nepotism are interrelated. The survey showed that the representatives of the churches do not deal with the problem of organizational nepotism on a daily basis. One of the Protestant clerics straightforwardly stated that he was aware of this problem. He added: "I have never analyzed this phenomenon". The Catholic clerics have experienced a similar situation. One of them twice, and the other even three times postponed the date of the interview, claiming that they had to be well prepared for it. Such a situation undoubtedly arises from the fact that the very problem of nepotism is not often discussed in the Polish literature dealing with human resource management, particularly in the theological literature. Furthermore, this issue is not classified among the significant problems the clerics need to deal with in their everyday activities and they themselves are not connected by parental ties (in the case of Catholics) or do not conduct any typical business activity.

A quantitative survey in the form of an auditorium questionnaire was conducted during the second stage of the research. The survey was aimed at verifying the information received during the interviews with the clerics and becoming familiar with the phenomenon of nepotism from the point of view of the followers of a given ecclesial denomination. The survey was carried out on a group of 443 Catholics and Protestants within the period from July to September 2019. In the case of Catholics, those surveyed were the members of an urban and rural parish. However, it needs to be pointed out that, as far as the second case is concerned, no specific rural environment may be referred to. The parish participating in the survey is located next to a large city and many of its members (but not all of them) work in an urban environment on a daily basis. The clerics themselves helped with the collection of questionnaires and conducting the survey.

It was not very difficult to reach the followers of the selected Protestant congregations. Basically, the clerics from their own and friendly ecclesial communities assisted with carrying out the survey. The survey was conducted both in the centers located in large cities and in small towns. Generally, the followers of three communities of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession and two communities of the Evangelical Reformed Church participated in the survey. One of the churches of the Evangelical Reformed Church is located in the countryside. Just like in the case of Catholics, most believers belonging to the mentioned church work in cities and the countryside is their place of residence only.

On the basis of the quantitative survey, statistical methods, including statistical inference methods, were applied to verify the formulated research hypotheses. Attention ought to be paid to the not fully statistically representative sample selection based on the criterion of availability (these are, basically, the representatives of two Catholic and five Protestant communities). In future, it would be advisable to survey nepotism by using a representative sample.



The variables included in the verified research hypotheses, i.e., the evaluation and scale of nepotism, are of a multidimensional nature arising from the complexity of the analyzed phenomenon. The survey results contain the interpretation of qualitative and quasi-qualitative variables. The operationalization of such variables in the survey consists in the simultaneous consideration of the responses to a number of questions included in the questionnaire forming one variable. Synthetic statistical measures, like the mean scale values, i.e., the mean values of responses given within the specific scale to questions concerning a given phenomenon. For example, the evaluation of the phenomenon of nepotism for the purpose of verifying the hypothesis on the frequency of recognizing nepotism as a negative phenomenon is determined on the basis of an evaluation of a series of nepotic situations on a scale from 1 to 3, where 1 means that a given situation is evaluated as unacceptable or inappropriate, 2 as neutral, and 3 as appropriate or desirable (a five-point scale was originally applied in the questionnaire; here, it was simplified by combining responses that had a similar meaning). The evaluation of the phenomenon of nepotism is the mean of the scale values, i.e., the responses to the 13 questions given by those surveyed (separately with respect to Catholics and Protestants). The lower its value, the more frequent the recognition of nepotism as a negative phenomenon. The mean itself is not supposed to be interpreted and may be used to compare the evaluations made by Catholics and Protestants. In turn, the scale of nepotism, aimed at verifying the hypotheses on the common nature of this phenomenon in the Catholic and Protestant communities, was determined on the basis of the mean of the scale values constituting the responses to questions concerning the frequency of phenomena, such as: Recruiting a person related to the owner of the enterprise, a person responsible for human resources or any other employee, fostering a relative in promotions, paying a higher remuneration to a relative, treating this person better, or making a milder evaluation of a relative. Responses falling within the scale from 0 to 4, where 0 means that such a phenomenon has never occurred, 1—occasionally, 2—rarely, 3—often, and 4—very often (a five-point scale from 1 to 5, where 1 meant never, was originally applied in the questionnaire) were taken into consideration. Thus, the synthetic measure of the scale of the phenomenon of nepotism in the surveyed person's evaluation may be between 0 and 4, where 0 means that the person surveyed has never faced any manifestation of nepotism mentioned in the questionnaire and 4 means that the person has very often experienced all of the mentioned manifestations of nepotism. A similar method was applied to measure the frequency of recognizing nepotic situations as nepotism and the synthetic measures were calculated on the basis of the degree, to which the surveyed person agreed with the statement included in the questionnaire. The responses were encoded on a scale from 1 to 4, where 1 means that the surveyed person definitely disagrees with the statement, 2—somewhat disagrees, 3—somewhat agrees, and 4—definitely agrees. Thus, the lower the value of the scale mean, the milder the evaluation of nepotism. The form of the research hypotheses makes it possible to verify them using standard statistical inference methods. In those cases where there was verification of the hypotheses by comparing the scale and evaluation of nepotism among Catholics and Protestants, the parametric tests for mean values (based on mean scale values) were applied. In order to specify the conclusions, chi-squared tests of independence and tests for equality of proportions, i.e., fractions of Protestants and Catholics characterized by a certain view on nepotism, were used. Although the analyzed sample is theoretically large enough for statistical inference using significance tests for proportions or tests based on cross tables, in practice, it is difficult to reject the null hypothesis of equal proportions—opposite to the research hypothesis. The solution to this problem should be a significant increase in the sample size.

## 5. Results

The qualitative survey demonstrated various understandings of the phenomenon of nepotism. All of the respondents, both Catholics and Protestants, indicated that the term nepotism had to derive from the Latin word *nepos*. The responses concerning the understanding of the phenomenon itself varied. Namely, three surveyed clerics were able to describe the quite commonly understood nature of the phenomenon. They indicated that it meant favoring family members while filling positions due to their

competences. However, one of the respondents did not associate the phenomenon of nepotism with competences. In his opinion, nepotism consisted in supporting family members not only in recruitment. It applied to social life as a whole, and not to the professional sphere only. The varied responses may be fully understood. Nepotism, as shown in the literature, is not unequivocally understood even by specialists dealing with this issue.

The responses concerning the acceptance of nepotism and the association of acceptance with the practiced faith were the most interesting answers in the present survey. The respondents, both Catholics and Protestants, did not associate nepotism with their own denomination at first. They indicated that the phenomenon was natural and arose from the very fact of belonging to the family. One of the Protestants stated straightforwardly: “Charity begins at home”. The care for family members was emphasized as an inalienable family right. A Catholic cleric indicated that acceptance for nepotism arose not only from strong family ties. It was the result of the current unemployment rate and lack of confidence in other people. It was the consequence of the aggressive competition in the field of labor contributing to the lowering of employee behavior standards. It might also be the result of employers’ unfairness and their perception of the lack of reliability among employees while performing the conferred tasks. Protestants indicated that the equality of all people in the eyes of God and towards each other was emphasized in any form of church organization, which was supposed to, but did not have to be important in professional relations. On the other hand, Protestants emphasized that the minority size of the group to which they belonged might influence the level of acceptance of attitudes referred to as nepotistic among its members. Namely, being surrounded by a larger religious community, which was not always friendly, led to the creation of deep solidarity. This might result in nepotistic attitudes in the professional relations among the followers of Protestantism. In such a case, some form of religious nepotism mentioned in the first part would take place.

The Catholic clerics indicated that it was not easy to unequivocally evaluate the degree to which nepotism and acceptance of this phenomenon might be connected with religion and membership in one of the Christian denominations. One of them stated: “There are numerous movements of religious and social nature, which, by highlighting the role and importance of the family in the social space, may contribute to the growth in the incidence of fostering persons from the immediate family”. The other emphasized that he personally knew cases when persons deeply connected with religious movements within the Catholic Church tried to foster their close and distant relatives in the professional sphere. They believed that common ideological attitudes, the hierarchy of values, and religious commitment constituted the determinant that enabled raising, in a way, the values of a person as an employee. Thus, it was possible to expect better performance at work, stronger commitment, and clear subordination. Furthermore, Catholics thought that the specific vision of the family might, to some extent, influence the acceptance of organizational nepotism. One of the Catholic clerics assessed this influence as positive. This arose from the fact that the vision of the family perceived in the light of values “humanized the working space and relations between employees”. Once again, this time a Protestant emphasized that, basically, he did not go deeply into the subject of the religious “location of nepotism”. As far as the Protestants are concerned, they highlighted that the work ethos was strongly rooted in their religious tradition. In their opinion, this would be the most important argument for the positive perception of the phenomenon of nepotism. As previously stated, while discussing the association of nepotism with their own denomination, they indicated their small presence in Poland. This situation has led to the “visibility of strong group solidarity”.

Each of the four respondents unequivocally claimed that nepotism might have negative effects when the membership in a family was the only factor determining the recruitment of a given person and competences were not taken into consideration. They knew very well the real situations of the parish members connected with employing persons in compliance with nepotistic principles. On the basis of their own experience, they concluded that emotional ties with family members might give rise to conflicts and hinder the making of difficult decisions connected with job demands and the

termination of the concluded agreements. The fact that nepotism had resulted in a decreased level of trust between the employees themselves was less important to Protestants.

The data above reveals that the phenomenon of nepotism is not an essential problem dealt with by the leaders of religious communities. However, they perceived the possible influence of the religious membership on the acceptance of nepotism. They indicated the drawbacks and not the advantages of the phenomenon.

The above conclusions are supplemented by the results of the quantitative survey. As it was mentioned in the research methodology description, 443 persons took part in this part of study. The sample was characterized by the following structure:

- The share of Catholics and Protestants in the sample was similar, with a slight majority of Catholics (52%);
- Women constituted almost 60% of those surveyed;
- Persons aged between 30 and 49 constituted more than half of the sample, persons below 30 constituted 18% of the sample, and persons aged 50 or more constituted 26% of the sample;
- Persons with higher education constituted 60% of the sample and persons with education lower than secondary constituted only 6% of the sample;
- Persons working for private enterprises or enterprise owners constituted 33% of those surveyed, persons working for administration or state-owned enterprises constituted 27% of the sample, corporate employees constituted 12% of those surveyed, and pensioners constituted 10% of the sample; and
- Most of the persons professionally active in the sample worked in small- or medium-sized enterprises (about 32%, respectively), 24% worked in big enterprises, and only 12% worked in micro-enterprises.

The structures of Catholic and Protestant communities were similar in terms of the analyzed demographic and socio-economic features, i.e., sex, age, education, professional status, and size of the entity constituting the workplace. In cases where all of these features were present, the Renkonen similarity index (cf. e.g., [Wolda 1981](#)) exceeded the value of 0.7.

The provided structure indices were calculated on the basis of valid responses and the lack of a response, in case of the majority of questions constituted not more than 7.5% (only in cases of questions about sex, the share of invalid responses amounted to 15%).

The verification of Hypothesis 1 on the frequency of recognition of nepotic situations as negative phenomena was based on the evaluation of specific nepotic situations as unacceptable, inappropriate, neutral, appropriate, or desirable (the evaluations were ultimately classified into three groups, cf. Table 1). It can be clearly seen that most of the persons surveyed negatively evaluated the listed nepotic situations (9 out of the 13 analyzed nepotic situations were negatively evaluated by over two-thirds of the sample). This is consistent with other studies of organizational nepotism, where it was also assessed as a phenomenon negatively affecting the functioning of the organization and interpersonal relations ([Padgett and Morris 2005](#); [Abdalla et al. 1995](#); [Arasli et al. 2006](#); [Vveinhardt and Petrauskaitė 2013](#)). Behaviors characterized by nepotism seem to be accepted with respect to family businesses only. It can be clearly seen from the examined sample classified into sub-samples by religion that the percentage of persons negatively evaluating nepotic situations is higher among Protestants, but these differences are not, in most cases, statistically significant. Simultaneously, the proportions of persons positively evaluating nepotic situations are significantly higher among Catholics than among Protestants (these differences are statistically significant in the case of 8 out of the 13 situations analyzed). This is consistent with the comparative studies of Bozer, Levin, and Santor, where citizens of typically Catholic Latin American countries showed satisfaction with working in a family business guided by nepotic principles while citizens of multicultural Australia did not ([Bozer et al. 2017](#)). The performed chi-squared tests of independence indicate that in eight of the nepotic situations, the evaluation is not independent of religion.

**Table 1.** Evaluations of nepotistic situations depending on the surveyed persons' religion (P—Protestants, C—Catholics).

Nepotic Situation	Religion	Unacceptable or Inappropriate	Neutral	Appropriate or Desirable	Chi-Squared Test (Asymptotic Significance)
		Structural Indicators in %			
Recruitment of a relative in a managerial position by the HR Manager	P	71.2	26.4	2.4	0.293
	C	65.9	29.3	4.8	
Recruitment of a relative in an ordinary position by the HR Manager	P	57.8	37.4	4.9	0.054
	C	48.9	41.0	10.0	
Help of any enterprise employee with the recruitment of a relative by this enterprise	P	37.8	44.7	17.8	0.126
	C	28.4	50.7	21.0	
Recruitment of a relative in a managerial position by the owner of a family business	P	33.8	36.2	30.0	0.285
	C	36.8	39.9	23.2	
Recruitment of a relative in an ordinary position by the owner of a family business	P	22.6	40.4	37.0	0.156
	C	30.1	39.3	30.6	
Fostering a person related to the (direct or indirect) supervisor in promotions	P	73.4	22.7	3.9	0.026
	C	72.6	17.4	10.0	
Fostering the enterprise owner’s relative in promotions	P	75.8	22.7	1.4	0.001
	C	69.7	20.2	10.1	
Payment of a higher remuneration to a person related to the (direct or indirect) supervisor	P	76.8	19.8	3.4	0.002
	C	74.3	13.9	11.7	
Payment of a higher remuneration to a person related to the enterprise owner	P	75.8	21.7	2.4	0.001
	C	69.6	18.7	11.7	
Better treatment of a person related the (direct or indirect) supervisor	P	81.2	16.4	2.4	0.036
	C	73.5	19.1	7.4	
Better treatment of a person related to the enterprise owner	P	81.6	15.5	2.9	0.010
	C	73.5	16.5	10.0	
Milder evaluation of a person related to the (direct or indirect) supervisor	P	82.6	15.0	2.4	0.008
	C	75.2	15.2	9.6	
Milder evaluation of a person related to the enterprise owner	P	77.8	19.3	2.9	0.002
	C	70.9	17.4	11.7	

Notice: The structural indicators significantly differing from one another at the significance level of 0.05 and the Chi-squared test significance levels lower than 0.05 indicating the rejection of the hypothesis on the independence of the evaluation of a given nepotistic situation of religion have been highlighted in bold. Source: Own calculations.

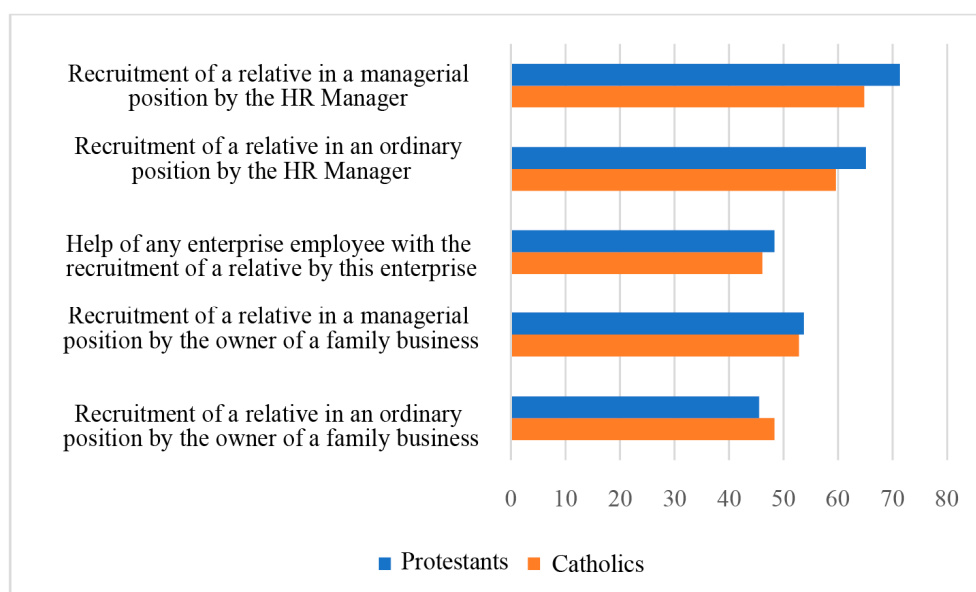
Finally, Hypothesis 1 was verified on the basis of the scale mean values for the evaluations of all nepotistic situations listed in the questionnaire (as mentioned earlier, the lower the mean, the more frequent the negative evaluation). The results of the test for the mean values in two independent samples (cf. Table 2) indicate that Protestants more frequently evaluate nepotistic situations as negative and, moreover, the evaluations of nepotism among Catholics are characterized by a higher diversity.

**Table 2.** Results of significance tests for the mean values and variances of the evaluations of nepotistic situations.

Sub-Sample	N	Mean (1;3)	Standard Deviation	The <i>p</i> -Value in a Test for Mean Values	The <i>p</i> -Value in a Test for Homogeneity of Variances
Protestants	208	1.4354	0.3388	0.012	<0.001
Catholics	230	1.5255	0.4840		

Source: Own calculations.

The evaluation of the frequency of recognition of nepotistic situations as nepotism was conducted in the questionnaire with the help of the following question: Does the mentioned phenomenon represent nepotism in your opinion? The surveyed persons determined the degree to which they associated a given phenomenon with nepotism, by agreeing or disagreeing with the statement that it was a manifestation of nepotism. In the groups of Protestants and Catholics participating in the survey, the percentage of persons agreeing with a given statement and, thus, recognizing a described phenomenon as nepotism, is higher among Protestants than among Catholics in four out of the five cases analyzed (cf. Figure 1). In total, 71.3% of the surveyed Protestants and only 64.8% of the surveyed Catholics agreed with the statement that the recruitment of a relative in a managerial position by the HR (Human Resources) manager is a manifestation of nepotism. The recruitment of a person related to the manager in an ordinary position is regarded as a phenomenon characterized by nepotism by 65.1% of the Protestants surveyed and only 59.6% of Catholics. As far as the remaining questions are concerned, the factions of respondents from the Protestant and Catholic communities are very similar. However, the differences between structural indicators are not statistically significant at the level of 0.05<sup>1</sup>.



**Figure 1.** The percentage of persons surveyed, who recognized nepotistic situations as nepotism.

The evaluation of the frequency of recognition of nepotistic situations as nepotism with the help of the scale mean values does not allow for the positive verification of Hypothesis 2 (cf. Table 3). The mean for Protestants is insignificantly higher than for Catholics and, furthermore, there are no grounds for the rejection of the statistical hypothesis on the equality of variances.

The common nature of nepotism was examined on the basis of the responses given to the following question: How often have you faced the following phenomena in your professional career? The analysis of the questionnaire results demonstrates that almost 40% of the persons surveyed have often or very often faced the recruitment of a person related to an enterprise employee in an ordinary position or preferential treatment or milder evaluation of a person related to the enterprise owner or supervisor. It is therefore a common phenomenon. A high frequency of occurrence of nepotistic phenomena in Poland was also observed in research conducted by [Sroka and Vveinhardt \(2018\)](#). It can be clearly seen that the percentage of persons facing nepotistic situations often or very often is significantly higher among

<sup>1</sup> No grounds for the rejection of the hypothesis on the equality of structural indicators arise from the fact the samples are relatively small to compare proportions (although the size is acceptable).



Catholics than among Protestants (the differences between the structural indicators are statistically significant for most nepotistic situations). Simultaneously, the proportion of persons facing nepotistic phenomena is occasionally or rarely significantly higher in Protestant environments than in Catholic ones. The independence tests indicate that as far as all of the nepotistic situations included in the survey are concerned, the common nature of the phenomenon of nepotism is not independent of religion (cf. Table 4).

**Table 3.** Results of significance tests for the mean values and variances of the frequency of recognition of nepotistic situations as nepotism.

Sub-Sample	N	Mean (1;4)	Standard Deviation	The <i>p</i> -Value in a Test for Mean Values	The <i>p</i> -Value in a Test for Homogeneity of Variances
Protestants	209	2.6268	0.6940	0.194	0.866
Catholics	230	2.5704	0.6691		

Source: Own calculations.

**Table 4.** Frequency of nepotistic situations in the Protestant (P) and Catholic (C) communities.

Nepotic Situation			Never	Occasionally	Rarely	Often	Very Often	Chi-Squared Test (Asymptotic Significance)
			Structural indicators in %					
Recruitment of a <i>person related</i> to the enterprise owner or HR Manager in a managerial position	P		17.7	32.5	34.4	13.9	1.4	<0.001
	C		14.3	24.3	26.1	22.6	12.6	
Recruitment of a <i>person related</i> to the enterprise owner or HR Manager in an ordinary position	P		12.4	34	34	16.7	2.9	<0.001
	C		9.6	24.3	25.2	30.4	10.4	
Recruitment of a <i>person related</i> to any enterprise employee in an ordinary position	P		9.6	23.9	37.8	24.4	4.3	<0.001
	C		6.1	19.6	24.8	35.2	14.3	
Fostering a <i>person related</i> to the enterprise owner or to the (direct or indirect) supervisor in promotions	P		17.7	29.2	25.4	23.4	4.3	0.001
	C		19.6	17.8	22.2	26.1	14.3	
Payment of a higher remuneration to a <i>person related</i> to the enterprise owner or to the (direct or indirect) supervisor	P		25.8	21.5	29.7	16.7	6.2	<0.001
	C		21.3	22.6	14.2	30.4	11.3	
Better treatment of a <i>person related</i> to the enterprise owner or to the (direct or indirect) supervisor	P		19.1	19.1	32.1	23	6.7	0.001
	C		13.5	18.7	20	31.7	16.1	
Milder evaluation of a <i>person related</i> to the enterprise owner or to the (direct or indirect) supervisor	P		20.1	16.7	32.5	25.4	5.3	<0.001
	C		12.6	20	21.7	26.5	19.1	

Notice: The structural indicators significantly differing from one another at the significance level of 0.05 and the Chi-squared test significance levels lower than 0.05 indicating the rejection of the hypothesis on the independence of the evaluation of a given nepotistic situation of religion have been highlighted in bold. Source: Own calculations.

In order to evaluate the common nature of the phenomenon of nepotism through the simultaneous consideration of all of the nepotistic situations included in the questionnaire, the scale mean values of the responses given by the persons surveyed were determined on the scale (1; 4). The significance tests for mean values indicate that the mean frequency for Catholics is significantly higher than the mean for Protestants, which means that nepotism in the Catholic communities is a noticeably more frequent phenomenon than in the Protestant ones (cf. Table 5).

**Table 5.** Results of significance tests for the mean values and variances of the frequency of nepotistic situations.

Sub-Sample	N	Mean (1;4)	Standard Deviation	The <i>p</i> -Value in a Test for Mean Values
Protestants	209	1.7129	0.8508	<0.001
Catholics	230	2.1174	1.0416	

Source: Own calculations.

## 6. Discussion

The article contains a review of the literature and presents the results of a comparative analysis of the dominant view of Catholics and Protestants on nepotism. The understanding of the phenomenon of nepotism by persons providing pastoral care to the members of their ecclesial communities and by other persons depending on the membership in ecclesial communities was examined. The perception of the frequency of the phenomenon of nepotism by persons depending on the membership in ecclesial communities was analyzed. Simultaneously, the issue as to whether acceptance of the phenomenon of organizational nepotism is connected with the membership in a given religious community was also examined. Three hypotheses were formulated and verified with the help of the relevant statistical tests: Parametric tests for mean values, variances and proportions conducted on the independent samples, and non-parametric chi-squared tests of independence. Considering the obtained findings, it cannot be excluded that some of the Protestants' answers may have been driven by their greater propensity to dissimulation. As noticed by [Glaeser and Glendon \(1998, p. 442\)](#), 'in predestination societies, hypocrisy is more common'. Nevertheless, having performed both qualitative and quantitative surveys, the authors have drawn the following conclusions.

Having performed both qualitative and quantitative surveys, the authors draw the following conclusions. Nepotism is a phenomenon noticed but underestimated among the clerics of both Christian denominations. It is a common phenomenon in the region of Central Europe ([Sroka and Vveinhardt 2018](#); [Onoshchenko and Williams 2014](#); [Williams and Onoshchenko 2014](#)). Nevertheless, the persons surveyed have not indicated that it is an essential problem directly affecting their churches despite the numerous negative effects brought about by nepotism within an organization. They have tried to explain its existence by nature and searched for the positive aspects of its occurrence.

The results of the quantitative surveyed conducted confirm Hypothesis 1 that nepotism is more frequently recognized as a negative phenomenon by Protestants than by Catholics. Thus, the difference demonstrates that a gap between the perception of nepotic phenomena by Catholics and Protestants can be seen. The former, more committed to family values, perceive nepotic phenomena naturally arising from the logic of supporting relatives more favorably. This result coincides with the literature, according to which Catholics more often rely on family values ([Arruñada 2004, 2010](#); [Yeganeh 2014](#); [Akbari et al. 2019](#); [Treisman 2000](#)). On the other hand, Protestants advocate greater social control than Catholics ([Colvin and McCracken 2017](#)), which also indirectly affects a more critical assessment of nepotic phenomena. Simultaneously, in compliance with the research conducted, this gap, despite being statistically significant, is not large, which is confirmed by the observations that the Protestant influence on the ethical dimension of human life is disappearing ([Treisman 2000](#); [Colvin and McCracken 2017](#)).

The lack of the statistical confirmation of Hypothesis 2 confirms the fading differences arising from the Christian denominations. As far as the analyzed samples classified by religion are concerned, although Protestants more often indicated nepotic situations as nepotism, the differences between these two samples were not statistically significant. Although differences in the perception of nepotism between Catholics and Protestants had not been studied before, differences in the evaluation of other activities related to behavioral ethics, such as attitudes towards income redistribution ([McCarthy et al. 2016](#)) or attitudes towards pro-social behavior ([van Elk et al. 2017](#)), were the subject of research. No significant differences between denominations were found here either. This may stem from the trend towards secularization in society, as a result of which the importance of religion and its influence on ethical attitudes is declining.

Hypothesis 3 that Catholics have noticeably more often faced the phenomenon of nepotism than Protestants was statistically confirmed. This may stem from the milder evaluation of nepotism by Catholics and the higher acceptance of this phenomenon, which has resulted in the higher incidence of it. However, in order to confirm it unequivocally, it would be necessary to carry out detailed research associating the frequency of nepotism with the acceptance of it. Simultaneously, an analysis of the intensity of this phenomenon in Catholic and Protestant communities would be recommended. Owing to the specificity of Poland, where Protestants constitute only a small percentage of the society,

it is not possible to examine this phenomenon in Protestant communities. Despite the fact that they are Protestants, they work and live in Catholic communities, so their experience connected with the frequency of nepotism mainly concerns Catholic communities.

The main critical remark and limitation of the research is its small scale and lack of international comparative analysis. The sample taken only from Poland limit the possibilities to discuss the impact of culture on organizational nepotism. The perspectives for future research should take into account larger sized and more diversified samples

## 7. Conclusions

It seems recommendable to carry out similar studies in Latvia and Hungary, where the participation of Protestant communities is higher than in Poland, which would allow an investigation of the phenomenon of organizational nepotism in Protestant communities. At the same time, these countries are undergoing similar political, political, and economic changes, which is associated with a similar macroeconomic environment.

The study was limited to two Protestant churches: The Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland and the Evangelical Reformed Church in the Republic of Poland. These are the most significant Protestant churches in Poland. They belong to the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe. Similar studies can be carried out among the members of the Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church. This would give a picture of the experience of the Orthodox religious minority in a country dominated by Catholics. In the second stage, the study should be conducted in the countries of the region where Orthodoxy dominates (e.g., Romania and Bulgaria).

Although we are dealing with the process of secularization of society, we still have to reckon with religious factors affecting people's professional attitudes. The results of the research can be used to analyze the phenomenon of nepotism in Poland and the impact of religion on the acceptance of organizational nepotism. The research is also part of the discussions on the importance of the Protestant work ethos undertaken by Max Weber.

## 8. Materials and Methods

Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used in the research. As part of the qualitative method, an in-depth individual interview was used. The interviews were conducted within the period from May 2019 to June 2019. The individual in-depth interviews were based on the recurrent research scenario, which provided an opportunity to ask respondents additional questions, owing to which it was possible to refine the research issues. The interviews were conducted in person and, afterwards, they were arranged and underwent a qualitative analysis.

Four clerics providing pastoral care in their religious communities participated in the survey. Two of them represented the Catholic Church and two came from Protestant communities. Regarding the Protestant communities, they were represented by the pastors from the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland and the Evangelical Reformed Church in the Republic of Poland.

During the second stage of the research, a quantitative survey was conducted in the form of an auditorium questionnaire. The survey was carried out on a group of Catholics and Protestants within the period from July to September 2019. Research participants—members of the Catholic Church—belonged to an urban and rural parish. The clerics themselves helped with the collection of questionnaires and conducting the survey. Research participants—members of the Protestants churches—belonged both to communities from large cities and small towns. Essentially, followers of three communities of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession and two Evangelical Reformed Church communities participated in the research. In total, 443 subjects took part in the quantitative survey.

In the quantitative survey, synthetic statistical measures were used, like the scale mean values, i.e., the mean values within the specific scale of responses given to questions concerning a given phenomenon. In the case of verification of the hypotheses concerning the comparison of the scale and

evaluation of nepotism among Catholics and Protestants, parametric tests for mean values (based on scale mean values) were applied. In order for the conclusions to be specified, chi-squared tests of independence were used, as well as tests for equality of proportions, relating to the fractions of Protestants and Catholics characterized by a certain view on nepotism.

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