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The COVID-19 Pandemic's Impact on Religiosity in Poland

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Received: 17 October 2020; Accepted: 28 November 2020; Published: 2 December 2020

Abstract: Background: Poland is one of Europe's most religious societies. Methods: The article presents the results of an online survey conducted in April 2020 during the period of the Polish government's strictest restrictions to date in response to the pandemic. A quota sample of 1001 adult Poles was surveyed. Results: Around one-fifth (21.3%) of people declared that they spent more time praying and engaging in other religious practices than previously. As many as 61.3% of people who previously practiced religion several times a week spent more time on these practices, and, more interestingly, religious observance also increased among people who had previously practiced only once every few years (15.9%) and those who had not previously practiced at all (7.4%). People who previously practiced sporadically or not at all, but who began to pray more during the pandemic, are found to be distinguished from others by a greater fear of losing their job. Spending more time on religious observance is shown to be related to, e.g., disregard for some government restrictions, possession of less knowledge about COVID-19, and a greater tendency to believe in conspiracy theories. Conclusions: Overall, religious practices increased during the Polish spring lockdown. Although these increases are unlikely to be long-lasting, changes in religiosity caused by COVID-19 appear to be a real phenomenon. As the pandemic continues, more research on different aspects of this phenomenon is needed.

Keywords: Poland; SARS-CoV-2; religion; religiosity; pandemic

1. Introduction

Religion's influence on social life is unquestioned in some societies. Because of its functions, religion has been an important subject of interest and research for sociologists ever since sociology emerged as a scientific discipline (Durkheim 1898; Weber [1963] 1993). Although they differ in their descriptions of the mechanisms by which religion functions in societies, classical sociological theorists such as Marx, Weber, and Durkheim generally attribute similar meanings to religion, it being treated, inter alia, as an element giving meaning to the surrounding world, legitimizing the existing social reality and integrating society (Weber [1963] 1993; Durkheim 1898; Marx and Engels [1957] 2012). According to Weber, among other things, religion helps the individual deal with various adversities, including giving meaning to suffering, accepting injustices, and overcoming everyday difficulties (Weber [1963] 1993). In addition, Durkheim, who treats religion as social by its very nature, states that it corresponds to the existing conditions of human life. In his opinion, by providing knowledge about the surrounding world, religion makes reality easier to cope with and gives sense to existence (Durkheim [1915] 2008). Marx also viewed religion as providing support in helping people to understand and accept their

surrounding reality, and as a type of remedy in difficult life situations, but, unlike Weber, he considered religion to be an irrational ideology creating false consciousness (Marx and Engels [1957] 2012).

Sociological concepts partly overlap with psychological interpretations of the functions of religion; among other things, psychologists see religion as a means of allowing the individual to gain strength in their fight against the untamed forces of nature and deal with life's difficulties (Freud 1930), and providing satisfying answers to questions about the meaning of the most difficult human experiences, including death, disease and suffering (Allport 1960).

People often turn to religion to deal with difficulties and unpredictable life events, this often being interpreted as showing that religion offers hope and support in the face of cataclysm, destabilization, and uncertainty. Research confirms that people often become more religious when they experience challenging life events, such as serious disease, the death of a close family member, divorce, a serious accident (Pargament 2001; Gene and Vasconcelles 2005), and the occurrence of natural disasters (Bentzen 2019).

In the light of the above theory and research, it is reasonable to speculate that in the current global public health crisis relating to the COVID-19 pandemic, religion should play a particularly important role in helping people to cope better with the threats they face. The SARS-CoV-2 virus that causes COVID-19 is extremely contagious and has spread throughout the world in a very short time (Johns Hopkins University 2020), becoming part of the everyday experience of people in numerous nations and adherents of various religions. The pandemic has caused people to seek the support of faith in coping with the threats they are experiencing; Google data show that in 95 countries searches for the word "prayer" have risen to the highest levels ever recorded (Bentzen 2020). This trend has also occurred in Poland (Google Trends 2020; Bentzen 2020). Research in the U.S. has shown that 23% of healthcare workers have engaged with faith-based religion/spirituality as a means of coping with COVID-19-related distress (Shechter et al. 2020), and an Italian study has shown that people reporting COVID-19 infections in their families have also reported greater religiosity, both in terms of attending Mass services (via the internet, radio, and television) and praying during the pandemic (Molteni et al. 2020). On the other hand, a study from the Netherlands comparing the frequency of praying between 2017 and 2020 has not identified any increase in religiosity (Reeskens et al. 2020). The present paper seeks to add to the aforementioned studies by considering the pandemic's impact on religiosity in Poland, it being important that research is carried out in a wide range of countries with different religious backgrounds so that initial reactions to the COVID-19 crisis can be compared across countries.

The Catholic Church forms the largest religious community in Poland (GUS 2018), and Poland constitutes one of the most religious societies in Europe (Pew Research Center 2018). The number of Poles identifying themselves as believers has exceeded 90% for over 20 years, and the number of people declaring that they practice their religion regularly (at least once per week) is currently nearly 50% (Bożewicz 2020a). While annual statistics concerning participation in Sunday Mass rituals conducted by the Church suggest a slightly lower number of religious practitioners (approximately 40%), this number has remained relatively stable since 2008, and is higher than in most other European countries (ISKK Institute for Catholic Church Statistics). So, despite some signs of secularization in Poland, and the fact that religion is becoming increasingly less institutionalized and more individualized in Polish society (Boguszewski 2017), religion still remains an important part of the average Pole's life.

When compared to other countries such as the USA, Brazil, Italy, France and Spain, to date Poland has seen relatively low COVID-19 incidence and mortality rates. In mid-July 2020 the number of cases in Poland was 1.050 per million inhabitants, and the total number of deaths amounted to 1.618 cases (Worldometer 2020).

The Polish government took decisive action to contain the pandemic in mid-March, when there were only 31 confirmed COVID-19 cases (TVN 24 2020). This quick reaction and the rapid introduction of strict restrictions probably explains the relatively low number of positive diagnoses in Poland. However, the restrictions have affected many spheres of Polish life, particularly when they were at their

most stringent. With respect to religious practices, these have included the cancellation of pilgrimages and religious meetings, the closing of religious educational institutions, and restrictions on the number of believers allowed to participate in Mass. To date, the timeline of the various restrictions introduced, and their easing, is as follows (Figure 1):

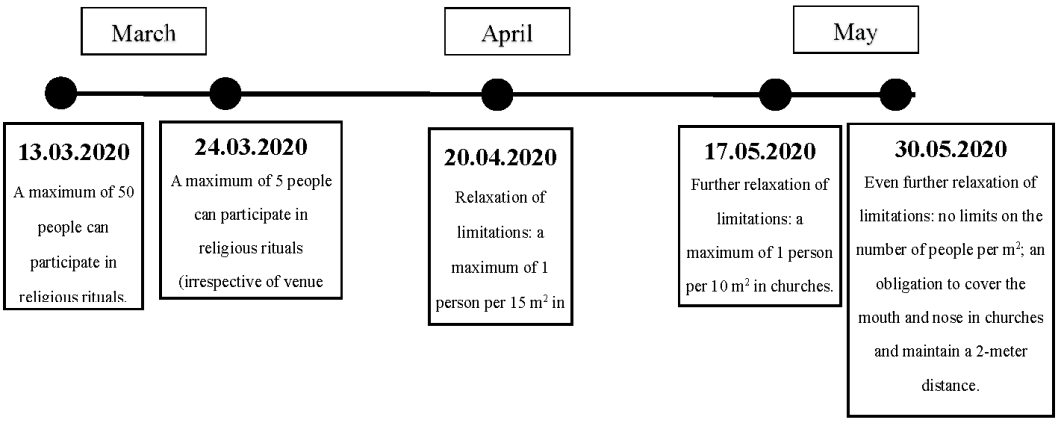

Figure 1. Timeline of the various restrictions introduced. Source: Based on Polish Ministry of Health (Ministerstwo Zdrowia 2020).

In a religious society such as that in Poland, many people would be expected to turn to God and (given restrictions on participation in Mass) individual religiosity to give them feelings of better control over a novel and threatening situation. This article aims to answer two main questions. (1) How did the Polish government's strictest COVID-19 pandemic-related restrictions that were in force between the 1st and 20th of April 2020 influence Poles' religious practices? (2) What are the characteristics of people who devoted more time to praying and other religious practices during this period?

Religiosity is a complex phenomenon that often requires a multidimensional approach when it is studied. For example, Glock and Stark (1965) drew attention to five dimensions of religion: intellectual (knowledge or cognitive aspects of religiosity), ideological (beliefs), ritualistic (religious practices), experiential (the feelings and emotions caused by religious experiences), and consequential (religiosity's consequences for an individual's daily functioning). Because the larger research project of which the present study was part treated religious practice as only one possible element differentiating attitudes towards the pandemic, our study focused only on the ritualistic dimension of religion, and religiosity is conceptualized in this simplified way in this article.

2. Materials and Methods

A structured questionnaire was administered by means of online surveying of a sample of 1001 adult Polish respondents. The survey was conducted between the 14th and 20th of April 2020. This was the period during which the government's strictest restrictions (to date) were in force. Participants were selected by stratified quota sampling of an internet panel administered by SW Research. Each participant was only able to complete the questionnaire once, and after this they were able to choose a small reward in a form they preferred from the SW Research rewards pool. While participants remained anonymous to the researchers, they were not anonymous to SW Research. The research panel's procedures ensured that participants provided consent for their data to be used in accordance with the EU's General Data Protection Regulation.

Around 20 million adult Poles have access to the internet. The use of G*Power 3.1 (Faul et al. 2007) suggested a sample size of 968 people, assuming an alpha of 0.05 (one-tailed), a desired power of 0.80, an effect size of d = 0.2, and an allocation ratio of 0.25. In the interest of caution, data were gathered from a sample of 1001 people constituting a representative cross-section of Polish society in terms of gender (2 groups), age (5 groups), place of residence (in terms of population size; 4 groups),

province (16 groups), and educational level (2 groups: higher and other). The basic demographic characteristics of respondents can be found in Appendix A. Our study measured religiosity by declarative means, considering dimensions such as prayer, meditation, and other religious practices performed in traditional or virtual form. The questionnaire used and a full database containing the data collected is available on figshare (see Supplementary Materials). Ethical approval for the current type of study is not required in Poland.

SPSS v.26.0 was used for statistical analysis. Many different variables were analyzed, but two were considered to be the most important—first was people's declarations as to whether they devoted more time to prayer and other religious practices during the pandemic than they had previously. This was measured on a 5-point Likert scale. Second was people's declarations concerning their previous participation in religious rituals. This was measured on an ordinal scale as follows: several times a week, once a week, 1–2 times a month, several times a year, once every few years, not at all. Thus, in the present study the meaning of the term "religiosity" was simplified to mean participation in religious rituals. A large number of statistical techniques were used to analyze the data. Initially, frequency distribution and cross-tabulation analyses were performed. These were followed by analyses examining multidimensional relationships. Logistic regression was used to identify which variables were independently predictive of increased religiosity during the pandemic. After this, the sample was divided into four groups based on differences in the two key variables. As shown in Appendix B, these groups were as follows: G1 (n = 159)—people who devoted more time to prayer and other religious practices during the pandemic and who had previously participated in religious rituals several times a week, once a week, or 1–2 times a week; G2 (n = 53)—people who devoted more time to prayer and other religious practices during the pandemic and who had previously participated in religious rituals only several times a year, once every few years, or not at all; G3 (n = 296)—people who did not devote more time to prayer and other religious practices during the pandemic and who had previously participated in religious rituals several times a week, once a week, or 1–2 times a week; G4 (n = 493)—people who did not devote more time to prayer and other religious practices during the pandemic and who had previously participated in religious rituals only several times a year, once every few years, or not at all. Here, analyses contrasted members of groups G1 and G2 with members of other groups since the nature of these two groups was central to answering our second research question, cross-tabulation and Cramer's V analysis being used to identify which socio-demographic variables differentiated G1 members from other people and G2 members from other people (Cramer's V assesses inequalities across joint categories of different variables). Additionally, Pearson r correlations were obtained to ascertain correlates of increased religious involvement during the pandemic.

3. Results

The survey showed that 21.3% of respondents answered "definitely yes" or "probably yes" to the statement "I now devote more time than before to prayer and other religious practices". Most respondents (54.0%) answered "definitely no" or "probably no" to this question. The variable which differentiated most strongly between the people providing these two types of answers was religiosity, as measured by previous frequency of participation in religious practices. Almost two-thirds (61.3%) of people who said they had usually practiced more than once a week before the pandemic said they had increased their religious commitment during the pandemic, and, more interestingly, an increase in commitment was also observed among 15.9% of people previously participating in religious ceremonies only once every few years, and among 7.4% of those not previously practicing at all. A binomial logistic regression analysis showed that of the 11 predictor variables shown in Table 1, only greater prior involvement in religious practices was a significant independent predictor of whether or not respondents declared an increase in their individual religiosity during the pandemic (see Table 1). Gender, age, population size of place of residence and education, which are among the socio-demographic variables that usually determine the extent of Poles' religiosity (see Boguszewski 2018), were not significantly predictive of increased religious involvement, although,

overall, the model was significantly better than a constant-only model, $\chi^2 = 121.24$, df = 11, $p < 0.01$; Nagelkerke $R^2 = 0.204$.

Table 1. Summary of a logistic regression analysis predicting increased religious involvement during the period of the Polish government's strictest restrictions.

Predictor	B	SE B	*p*	Exp (B)
Gender (female/male)	0.177	0.183	0.334	1.194
Age group (increasing)	0.128	0.077	0.097	1.136
Population size of place of residence (increasing)	0.007	0.064	0.919	1.007
Education (increasing)	0.039	0.085	0.644	1.040
Number of adults living in household (increasing)	0.100	0.080	0.211	1.105
Number of children (under 18 years of age) living in household (increasing)	0.154	0.101	0.127	1.166
Self-assessment of health (increasing)	−0.143	0.132	0.282	1.153
Assessment of household financial situation (increasing)	0.214	0.134	0.109	0.807
Projection of household financial situation relating to the coronavirus pandemic (increasing)	0.207	0.133	0.121	0.813
Participation in religious practices when not socially isolating (increasing)	0.580	0.069	**<0.001**	0.560
Life satisfaction (increasing)	0.088	0.111	0.427	0.916
Constant	0.188	0.790	0.812	1.207

Criterion variable: declared increase in individual religiosity during the pandemic (0 = No, 1 = Yes).

As mentioned previously, four groups were formed based on people's answers to questions concerning religiosity (see Appendix B), and analysis focused on two of these groups toward the end of answering our second research question. The first group (G1) consisted of people answering "definitely yes" and "probably yes" when asked to respond to the statement "I now devote more time than before to prayer and other religious practices", and who also declared that before the pandemic they attended Mass, and other services or religious meetings, several times a week, once a week, or 1–2 times a month. This group accounted for 16% of respondents (n = 159). The second group (G2) were people who responded similarly to the question about devoting more time to prayer and other religious practices, but who previously practiced only several times a year, once every few years or not at all. These people constituted 5% of respondents (n = 53).

Demographic variables (such as gender, age, place of residence, education, and self-assessed health) did not significantly differentiate G1 from other people (including members of G2). This was also true for the G2 group (where the contrasted group included members of G1 and all other respondents). However, a feature that did distinguish people in G1 from other Poles (including those in G2) was life satisfaction. Members of G1 were significantly more likely to declare that they were satisfied with their lives (86.8%) than other people (73.2%); Cramer's V = 0.105, $p < 0.05$, N = 1001 (see Figure 2).

A particularly salient characteristic of members of G2 was that as many as 69.8% of them responded "definitely yes" and "probably yes" to a statement regarding fear of dismissal from their job, while for other respondents (including members of G1) this percentage was only 48.8%. This difference was statistically significant; N = 1001, Cramer's V = 0.125, $p < 0.001$ (see Figure 3).

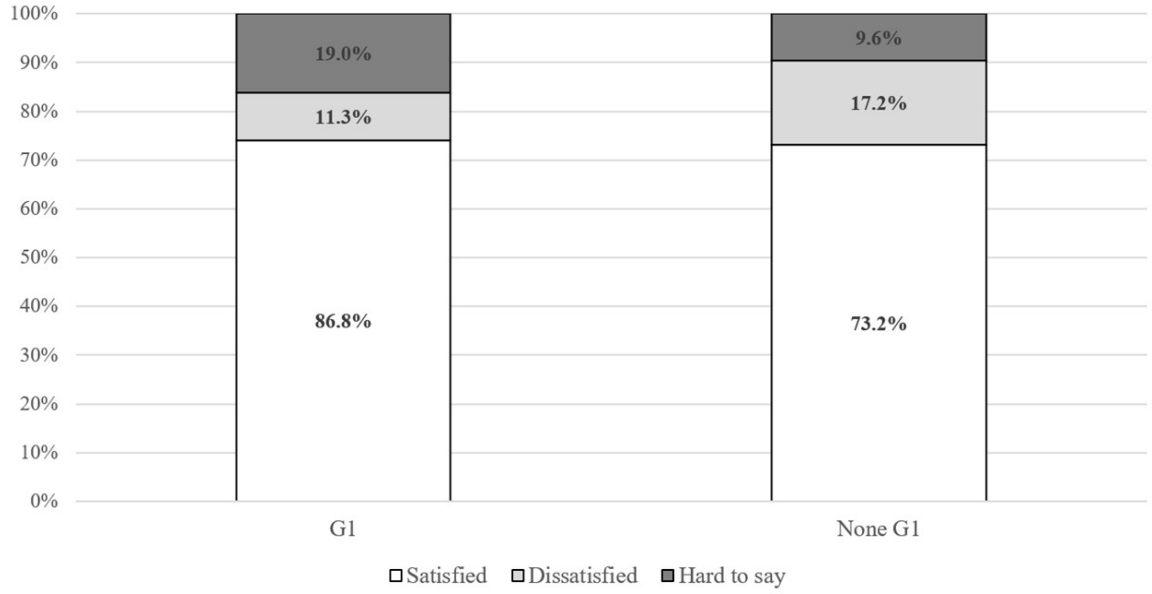

Figure 2. Distributions of responses to the question "In general, are you satisfied with your life?", contrasting members of G1 with all other respondents (G1, n = 159; Non-G1, n = 842).

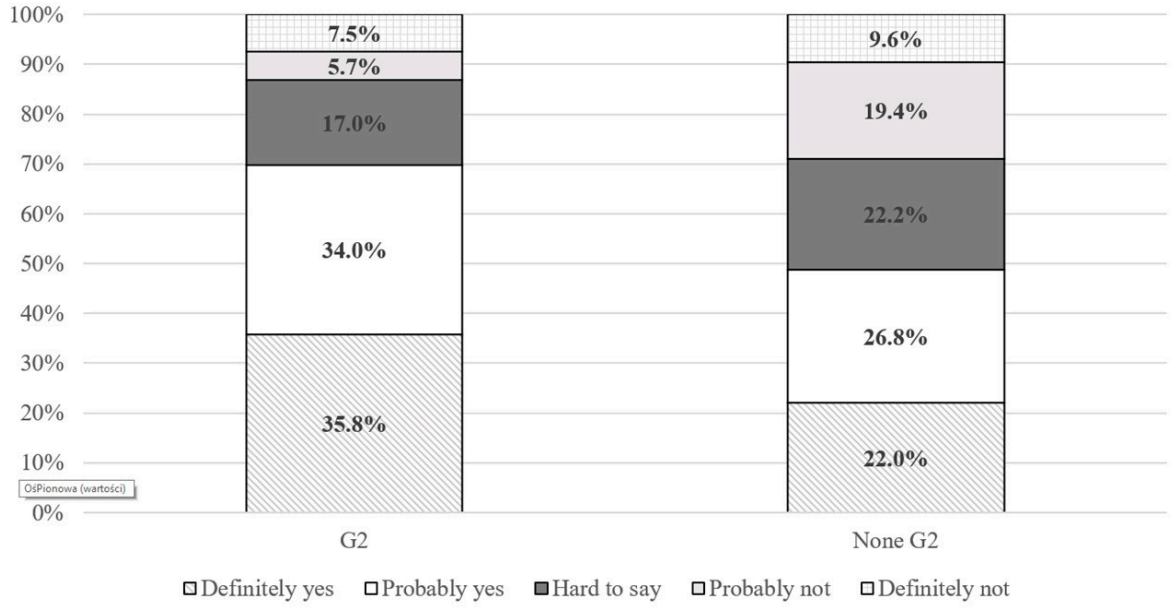

Figure 3. Distributions of responses to the statement "I am afraid of losing my job because of the situation", contrasting members of G2 with all other respondents (G2, n = 53; Non-G2, n = 948).

Self-reported changes in religious involvement during the pandemic were also significantly correlated with certain views, behaviors, and knowledge (see Table 2). These relationships were statistically significant even when prior involvement in religious practices was taken into account as a control variable. Compared with people not showing an increase in the time they devoted to prayer and other religious practices during the pandemic, those who did report such an increase were more likely to perceive the situation as a message from God to those who have turned their backs on him. Such respondents were of the opinion that the pandemic will strengthen solidarity within the country, and were optimistic about a quick recovery of the global economy (Table 2 shows correlations for these and other views).

Table 2. Correlates of increased religious involvement during the pandemic as measured by responses expressing agreement or disagreement with the statement "I now devote more time than before to prayer and other religious practices" (on a 5-point scale ranging from "definitely no" to "definitely yes").

	Pearson's r Correlation Coefficient	Partial Correlation Coefficient Taking into Account Involvement in Religious Practices before the Pandemic as a Control Variable
Views *		
God is using the current situation to try to speak to people who have turned their backs on him	0.515 **	0.406 **
The pandemic will strengthen solidarity in the country	0.265 **	0.206 **
The global economy will recover quickly after the pandemic has been fought	0.216 **	0.211 **
Thanks to the pandemic, people will understand what is really important in life	0.167 **	0.139 **
I believe that, for the good of the economy, decisions should not be taken to close borders and many businesses	0.127 **	0.136 **
Behaviors that violate government orders *		
I meet my friends and family outside my household quite regularly	0.332 **	0.292 **
At Easter, I adhered less strictly to the recommendations about not leaving home and not meeting other people	0.210 **	0.184 **
I try to go for a walk regularly or engage in other outdoor activities	0.113 **	0.133 **
Positive behaviors *		
I try to get involved in social campaigns to support those who particularly need help in the current situation	0.314 **	0.251 **
I have been wearing a mask for a long time when leaving the house [1]	0.197 **	0.187 **
I am now trying to take care of my immunity better by engaging in appropriate healthy behavior	0.167 **	0.167 **
Knowledge about the new coronavirus *		
Animals may carry coronavirus [2]	0.229 **	0.190 **
In order not to get infected with coronavirus, it is enough to wash your hands often and avoid large clusters of people [3]	0.155 **	0.135 **
Coronavirus is nothing more than a worse type of flu [4]	0.148 **	0.128 **
Conspiracy theory beliefs *		
The virus was deliberately released to reduce the problem of overpopulation in the world	0.136 **	0.130 **
The coronavirus is part of a political and economic war between the US and China	0.111 **	0.099 **

* Acceptance of all statements was measured on a 5-point scale ranging from "definitely no" to "definitely yes". ** $p < 0.01$; [1] Covering the mouth and nose was not obligatory in Poland until 16 April 2020, when data collection was halfway towards completion. [2] In the light of the scientific knowledge at the time the survey was conducted, we have assumed that this statement is not true given the WHO statement that "there is no evidence that animals can transmit the disease to humans and spread COVID-19" (WHO 2020a); [3] In the light of scientific knowledge at the time the survey was conducted, we have assumed that this statement is not true; such actions can provide some protection, but they are not completely protective (WHO 2020a). [4] In the light of scientific knowledge at time the survey was conducted we have assumed that this statement is not true, since the WHO has stated that "Both cause respiratory disease, yet there are important differences between the two viruses and how they spread." (WHO 2020b).

Furthermore, certain behaviors of people devoting more time to prayer and other religious practices during the pandemic than previously differed from those not increasing their religious commitment. The former group displayed a more libertarian approach to the restrictions imposed. On the other hand, they were also characterized by some positive and desirable behaviors during the pandemic (see Table 2).

Finally, people whose religious commitment increased were also more likely to possess incorrect knowledge about the new coronavirus, and more likely to believe in conspiracy theories relating to the pandemic (see Table 2).

4. Discussion

Despite the limited possibilities of physical participation in congregational worship during the period of the strictest governmental restrictions, the presently presented data showed that every fifth Pole (21.3%) devoted more time to prayer and other religious practices than they did before the restrictions. In our study, we wanted to characterize this group. Our logistic regression analysis indicated that the only variable that significantly differentiated these people from people whose religiosity did not increase was prior involvement in religious practices. This observation is in line with the assumptions of various classical concepts relating to psychology and the sociology of religion discussed in the introduction to this article (Weber [1963] 1993; Durkheim [1915] 2008; Allport 1960), which state that, particularly in difficult times, faith is an important source of support for people who are above average in their religiosity, and therefore their commitment is likely to be intensified in times of uncertainty and danger.

Further analysis showed that people who had previously practiced religion regularly and also declared more religious involvement during the pandemic were more satisfied with their lives (86.8%) than other people (73.2%). Here, links between religion and both greater life satisfaction and well-being have frequently been documented (Lim and Putnam 2010; Chen and VanderWeele 2018; Willits and Crider 1988; Koenig et al. 1988; Levin et al. 1996; Sharma and Singh 2019; Ellison and Fan 2008).

In addition, people who had previously only involved themselves in religious practices to a slight extent or had not been involved at all, but who devoted more time than before to prayer during the pandemic, were characterized by a greater fear of losing their jobs (69.8%) than other respondents (48.8%). This is perhaps unsurprising, since ties between economic uncertainty and increased religiosity have been described in the literature. For example, a study by Storm (2017) showed religious people as feeling more economically secure irrespective of their income. The greater inclination towards religion in this group could therefore be explained by these people's desire to assuage their financial fears.

It is worth noting that Polish bishops granted a dispensation concerning the obligation to participate in Sunday Mass for the period of the government's restrictions, and encouraged people to follow the order to "stay at home". In many parishes, online broadcasts were launched very quickly and spontaneously, which allowed the faithful to listen to "their" priest in "their" church. This seems to have been reasonably effective given that national polling statistics showed that the majority of Poles (68%) practiced their religiosity in some way during the spring lockdown: 60% watched Mass on TV (mainly the elderly), and 21% took part in Mass on the internet (rather younger). Nevertheless, 40% of Poles felt negatively affected by the lack of congregational prayer (Bożewicz 2020b).

The Public Opinion Research Center (Bożewicz 2020b) survey showed that every ninth Pole attended church for individual prayer or Mass during the period of the government's restrictions, and that 9% of Poles admitted to physically participating in a Mass even when the legal limit was five people. Media reports in Poland (Fakt24 2020; Grochot 2020) and other countries (Independent 2020; Wildman et al. 2020) indicate that the violation of governmental restrictions on meetings for the purpose of practicing religious worship is quite widespread. This shows how important participation in such gatherings is to many people, despite the prevailing dangers. Hill et al. (2020, p. 2) have forwarded the thesis that "more religious populations may be especially resistant to public health recommendations during the coronavirus pandemic (e.g., social distancing and staying at home) because they hold more negative views of science and scientists". The research of Hill et al., which was based on first-party U.S. geo-behavioral data, showed that stay-at-home orders have less impact on people's mobility in more religious states (Hill et al. 2020). This observation is supported by the present results, which show that Poles whose religiosity increased during the pandemic have complied with some government restrictions less comprehensively than other people. Our study shows a correlation

between increased religiosity during the pandemic and endorsement of the statements "I meet my friends and family outside my household quite regularly" (this was forbidden at the time of the survey) and "At Easter, I adhered less strictly to the recommendations about not leaving home and not meeting other people". These observations may be taken to indicate that people who pray more are less fearful of the pandemic than others, and this is consistent with other research findings showing that religious people are characterized by low anxiety (Fidianingsih et al. 2018). However, our study also identified some contradictions to such a portrayal, with people declaring that they had devoted more time to religious commitments during the pandemic also indicating that they had tried to take care of their immunity better than other respondents, and that they had worn masks more often than others (even when there was no obligation to do so). Thus, in some respects, increased religiosity was also associated with greater caution. These results seem contradictory to the aforementioned observations showing less adherence to the government's restrictions. This contradiction is difficult to explain and suggests that further research is needed to gain a deeper understanding of why religious people have chosen to follow some restrictions but ignore others. Another desirable behavior exhibited by these people was a greater tendency to want to help others during the pandemic. While engaging in activities for the benefit of other people is generally often the domain of highly religious people (Bożewicz 2020c), the lower anxiety and greater inclination to leave the house and meet people from outside their households during the pandemic displayed by such people are likely to have significantly augmented these people's helping behaviors.

In our study, increased religiosity was positively correlated with misconceptions about the coronavirus. For example, people devoting more time to prayer and other religious practices than previously were more likely than other people to agree with the statement "In order not to get infected with coronavirus, it is enough to wash your hands often and avoid large clusters of people". This may indicate a reluctance or inability in such people to seek scientific knowledge about the pandemic, which would support the previously mentioned thesis of Hill et al. (2020). These authors' thesis is strengthened further by our observation that increased religiosity was also positively correlated with the endorsement of conspiracy theories about the origin of the new coronavirus. This is consistent with research showing that religiosity is correlated positively with trust in informal sources of information (such as spiritual leaders, family and friends, and religious organizations' websites) which may contradict scientific data (Olagoke et al. 2020).

Our research has investigated the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Poles' religiosity (as measured by increased devotion to prayer and other religious practices during the pandemic), and religiosity's correlations with views, behaviors, and knowledge associated with the pandemic. As already discussed, some of our findings were inconsistent, but this is often the case when research is based on human declarations. Some of our results have demonstrated the need for additional in-depth and multidimensional research. Based on theories describing the function of religion in people's reactions to crises, we assumed that the pandemic would increase the religious commitment of Poles, and our results supported this assumption. However, a shift toward religion and religiosity has not occurred in all countries (see Reeskens et al. 2020). Undoubtedly, the spring lockdown constituted a unique test of Poles' religiosity, Polish society being in an existentially chaotic situation during this initial phase of the pandemic, and the change in many Poles' religiosity being one way they adapted to the threatening situation they found themselves in. However, the increased religiosity observed by our research cannot be assumed to indicate a long-term change, the results of a Public Opinion Research Center survey carried out during the lifting of the lockdown and the restoration of full participation in religious ceremonies indicating that, at this time, 13% of Poles were spending less time on religious practices than they did during the spring lockdown (Bożewicz 2020d). In addition, while the COVID-19 pandemic may have intensified the need for religious coping mechanisms and increased many people's religiosity, the closure of religious institutions may result in a long-term shift from public to private prayer (Bentzen 2020), thus speeding change in the direction of what, as long ago as 1967, Luckmann (1967) termed invisible religion—individualized and non-institutional religious

practice. In cases where people's religiosity is based on tradition and participation in rituals rather than habit or obligation (as is particularly the case for many young people), a third phenomenon might also be expected when the pandemic no longer constitutes a threat: atheization and a breaking with religious practices.

In starting to draw to a close, we should address the current study's limitations. First, the use of an online survey meant that people who do not use the internet, which amounts to 30% of Poles (Feliksiak 2020), were excluded from the study. National research shows that above average religiosity is one among many of the features of Polish people who do not use the internet (Feliksiak 2020), and it is therefore reasonable to assume that the true scale of the increase in the religious involvement of Poles during the pandemic will be slightly higher than that depicted in the present study, given that the study showed people of a more religious persuasion to have been particularly inclined to intensify their religiosity during the lockdown.

Second, it should also be pointed out that, despite the fact that they are demographically reflective of a national population, people completing questionnaires as part of research panels may have certain features (e.g., certain psychological traits) which differentiate them from the general public, given that they are prepared to complete surveys on their own initiative, are likely to be skilled in doing this, and seek to obtain financial benefits for their efforts.

Third, it was necessary to limit the questionnaire's length because of the online surveying technique used. Our questionnaire covered various topics relating to the pandemic as part of a wider project of which the currently reported religiosity data are only a part, and therefore it was not possible to dig very deeply into religious matters. Thus, our study considered only one dimension of religiosity: ritualistic practices of a collective and individual nature. It would be worthwhile conducting future quantitative research focusing exclusively on religious issues relating to the pandemic, and taking into account the intellectual, ideological, experiential, and consequential dimensions of religiosity, thus allowing a multi-layered approach to the topic and more in-depth analysis. Ideally, such research should be supplemented with qualitative interviews. Nevertheless, although the number of religious variables considered was limited, we are able to draw some interesting conclusions, and the present work makes a valuable contribution to scientific knowledge. The research was conducted at a very special time during which the strictest Polish government restrictions to date were in force. This constituted a completely new situation for citizens which they had never expected to experience. Our research has shown how this situation influenced Polish people's religious commitment in terms of them devoting more time than before to prayer and other religious practices, despite the restrictions to access to places of religious worship.

Our study confirms the results of studies performed in certain other countries, showing that people who have tended to turn more towards God during lockdowns are also slightly more likely to break some government regulations and discredit their legitimacy. Although such people have fewer reservations about meeting people from outside their households, among other things, they are also more likely to offer their assistance to people who are in particular need of help during the pandemic. This said, our results also show that increased religiosity tends to be accompanied by both a greater belief in conspiracy theories, concerning the sources and causes of the pandemic, and the possession of less knowledge about scientific facts relating to the possibilities of spreading the new coronavirus.

5. Conclusions

This study has illustrated the great importance of research into how a public health emergency can influence religious behavior, and the possible effects of such behavior on people's behaviors in other spheres of life related to such an emergency (e.g., adherence to regulations and helping behavior). Our research has shown that Poles' religious commitment (operationalized as devoting more time than previously to prayer and other religious practices) changed under the influence of the pandemic (specifically, during the spring 2020 lockdown). We have identified the characteristics of people who turn to God during a public health crisis. Interestingly, the socio-demographic characteristics which

usually differentiate Poles in terms of their participation in religious rites were statistically insignificant correlates of increased religious practice during the time considered, and other characteristics were shown to be more important, including prior participation in religious practices, life satisfaction, and people's sense of economic security. Changes in religiosity brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic will not necessarily all be in the direction of increased participation in rituals—the pandemic may make it easier for some people to cease their religious practices. Further research covering a wider range of religious indicators is required to investigate any such changes. It would also be interesting to conduct comparative research involving both people in different countries and followers of different religions. Our article should be a starting point for research in all these areas.

Supplementary Materials: The full database containing the data collected is available on figshare https://figshare.com/articles/Poland_-_COVID-19/12547337.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, R.B., M.M., and M.P.; methodology, R.B., M.M.; formal analysis, R.B., M.B.; writing—original draft preparation R.B., M.M., and M.B.; writing—review and editing, R.B., M.M., M.B., and M.P.; project administration, M.P.; funding acquisition, M.P. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This work was supported by the Rector of Warsaw University of Life Sciences under Grant 504-02-900200-S00127-99 for Monika Podkowińska.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Appendix A

Table A1. Variables and religious involvement during the pandemic.

Profile Characteristic	Percentage Distribution of the Whole Sample (N = 1001)	I Now Devote More Time Than Before to Prayer and Other Religious Practices (N = 1001)				
		Definitely Yes (%)	Probably Yes (%)	Hard to Say (%)	Probably Not (%)	Definitely Not (%)
Gender						
Female	52.2	5.4	15.1	24.9	25.6	29.1
Male	47.8	7.7	14.2	24.9	24.5	28.7
Age						
18–29	31.0	8.4	10.0	23.9	27.1	30.6
30–39	27.1	5.9	15.1	23.6	26.2	29.2
40–49	18.5	7.6	16.2	23.2	25.4	27.6
50–59	13.7	4.4	20.4	30.7	20.4	24.1
60+	9.8	3.1	17.3	26.5	21.4	31.6
Education						
Primary, lower secondary, vocational	12.0	9.2	14.2	25.0	26.7	25.0
Secondary education	49.8	5.2	13.9	27.5	25.5	27.9
Higher education	38.3	7.3	15.9	21.4	24.0	31.3
Self-assessment of health						
Very good	28.3	8.5	11.3	21.2	24.7	34.3
Good	48.1	5.8	15.8	24.5	26.6	27.2
Moderate	23.7	5.1	16.3	30.6	21.4	26.5
Bad	28.3	7.3	17.1	26.8	26.8	22.0
Place of residence						
Village	34.3	9.3	14.3	29.2	26.2	21.0
City of up to 19,999	11.5	4.3	16.5	24.3	27.8	27.0
City of 20,000–199,999	20.1	4.5	17.9	20.9	25.9	30.8
City of 200,000–499,999	20.4	4.9	12.7	19.6	24.5	38.2
City of over 500,000	13.8	6.5	12.3	28.3	19.6	33.3
Life satisfaction						
Satisfied	75.3	7.0	15.8	24.0	25.9	27.3
Dissatisfied	16.3	6.7	13.5	26.4	18.4	35.0
Hard to say	8.4	1.2	7.1	29.8	31.0	31.0
Participation in religious rituals						
Several times a week	4.9	28.6	32.7	22.4	14.3	2.0
Once a week	29.0	8.6	26.9	31.0	25.9	7.6
1–2 times a month	11.6	7.8	14.7	38.8	28.4	10.3
Several times a year	22.2	2.7	7.2	27.5	38.3	24.3
Once every few years	8.2	3.7	12.2	9.8	14.6	59.8
Not at all	24.2	3.3	4.1	14.0	16.1	62.4

Table A1. *Cont.*

Profile Characteristic	Percentage Distribution of the Whole Sample (N = 1001)	I Now Devote More Time Than Before to Prayer and Other Religious Practices (N = 1001)				
		Definitely Yes (%)	Probably Yes (%)	Hard to Say (%)	Probably Not (%)	Definitely Not (%)
I am afraid of losing my job						
Definitely yes	22.8	10.5	16.2	14.9	25.4	32.9
Probably yes	27.2	5.5	18.4	25.4	25.7	25.0
Hard to say	21.9	5.0	12.3	35.2	26.0	21.5
Probably not	18.7	5.3	11.8	23.5	27.3	32.1
Definitely not	9.5	5.3	11.6	26.3	15.8	41.1

Appendix B

Table A2. Division of respondents into four groups on the basis of answers to the two religiosity questions.

	I Now Devote More Time Than Before to Prayer and Other Religious Practices				
	Definitely Yes	**Probably Yes**	**HARD TO SAY**	**Probably Not**	**Definitely Not**
How often do you usually attend masses, services or other religious meetings? (when not socially isolating)					
Several times a week **Once a week** **1–2 times a month**	**G1** 16% n = 159		**G3** 30% n = 296		
Several times a year **Once every few years** **Not at all**	**G2** 5% n = 53		**G4** 49% n = 493		

G1, G2, G3, G4—labels of groups used in the text.

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