

## Article

# Can Women and Religion (Catholic) Save Modern Leadership?

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**Abstract:** This article examines the theoretical potential of the gender leadership model of women motivated by the Catholic religion in the context of its ability to socially and politically activate and its effectiveness in terms of assumed goals. Numerous studies on gender indicate a certain effectiveness of gender politics (including gender equality and neutrality) in reducing the deficit of women in politics, but it turns out that in the long term it does not effectively solve the problem of the asymmetry of gender representation in the world of politics. The analysis of the decision-making processes of a selected group of Saints, Blessed and Venerable Servants of God, recognised by the Catholic Church as a model to follow, indicates that women with a strong internal religious motivation were more determined to act and enter the sphere of public activity (including politics) than those motivated only externally. They preferred a relational style of political leadership, but also practiced its goal-oriented form. These leaders mixed strategies, adjusting them to their own capabilities and the needs of their surroundings, making them more effective and efficient in achieving their goals despite the limitations resulting from external systemic conditionalities.

**Keywords:** Catholic religion; gender; leadership; politics; women

## 1. Introduction

Venerable Servants of God, Blessed and Sacred women have been and are often overlooked in political studies, especially those concerning political leadership and gender politics. However, at least a few areas should be identified that justify their leadership potential based on the existing theoretical framework. First of all, numerous studies on leadership and gender show that women can contribute many positive qualities to the building of effective leadership, such as empathy, openness, the ability to build relationships, and altruism (Calfano and Straka 2020). Moreover, their example of moral and ethical dedication, including patience and dedicated service to others, lays the foundation for today's highly valued model of servant leadership (Greenleaf 1970, p. 29). The models of Venerable Servants of God, Blessed and Holy women can inspire modern leaders to take more ethical action by providing many valuable clues about their own practised decision-making strategies (Del Castillo 2022). After all, they can also positively motivate personal development, which in turn is an important element of transformational leadership (Bass 2008, p. 938). Numerous scientific studies have shown that leaders who practice ethical leadership (Brown et al. 2005) and who are guided by moral principles in their decision-making processes inspire trust, create lasting teams, teach cooperation and creativity, and ensure people make greater commitments and take responsibility for each other (Molli 2022). Moreover, they make us aware that by developing internally, anyone can attain spiritual perfection, rising from the level of aesthetic (hedonistic) life to the spiritual level (Kierkegaard 1914, p. 10).

The research presented below analysing the attitudes of Venerable Servants of God, Blessed and Holy women may be a prelude to reflection on the level of universality of their lives and a contribution to further reflection on leadership motivated by the Catholic religion. Drawing on existing research and theories can help to provide a scientific basis for understanding their potential strategies in the context of utility in the modern world.



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## 2. Methodology and Theoretical Basis

Based on the assumption that in Christianity (but not only) religiosity is mostly the domain of women rather than men (Pew Research Center 2016), the starting point for the proposed considerations was the Catholic religion and its potentially positive impact on women's leadership behaviour. It turns out that religion can be a strong motivational factor for them (Bekkers and Wiepking 2011; Cassese and Holman 2016). However, due to the delineated nature of the research area, this article does not take into account the negative impact of religion on women's leadership. There are other studies on this subject (Neiheisel 2019; Brink and Mencher 1997; Setzler and Yanus 2017).

The following hypotheses are put forward in the work: 1. Catholic religion and strong spiritual commitment increase the level of women's activation. 2. Catholic religion determines the style of leadership that women practise. 3. The model of religiously motivated leadership is more effective than one without a spiritual dimension.

In order to optimise the results of the research, broad criteria were applied for the selection of figures, namely women from different cultures, with diverse social roles and different access to power, representing different states and environments. All these factors have an influence on leadership (Ayman and Korabik 2010). Other important conditionalities, such as age (Kotur and Anbazhagan 2014) and education, have also been taken into account, as they can also determine the tactics and behaviours used by leaders (Barbuto et al. 2007).

A group of 60 Saints, Blessed and Venerable Servants of God in the Catholic Church were analysed. Their selection was based on the criteria of their roles, and they were classified as political leaders (14 people), religious sisters (21) and lay people (25). These women came from diverse social backgrounds (with different levels of wealth and education) and states (secular and clerical), lived lives of different lengths (from 16 to 87 years), performed various professions (from housewives, teachers, nurses and scientists to political functions), represented different cultures (23 countries on five continents), and lived in distant times (from the 3rd to the 20th century AD). Although the biographies of some of the figures were controversial, all the women studied were connected by a very strong "religious faith" and the fact that they were included by the Catholic Church under the procedure of beatification or canonisation in the list of officially recognised Blessed, Holy and Venerable Servants of God of the Catholic Church.

Since the members of the studied group were historical figures and a direct method of measuring their style of leadership could not be applied to them (Bass and Avolio 1995), a narrative theory was referred to using a modified Psychological Gender Inventory (PGI) (Korzeń 2006, p. 42) developed on the basis of Sandra L. Bem's theory of gender patterns (Bem 1974). Each of the methods, which take into account the life experiences and life stories of the Saints, Blessed and Venerable Servants of God analysed from the perspective of personality traits, can be one of the methods of leadership research (Shamir and Eilam 2005). The analysis of biographies is also an element of the processes of beatification and canonisation, and although it does not take the form of evidence, it can confirm the authenticity of heroic virtues (Miształ 1982, p. 268).

Specific shortcomings of the adopted research method meant that it was difficult to compare three parameters over time: firstly, there was not always proportional availability and reliability of sources (especially for people living in the distant past); secondly, there were changing cultural conditions (including social expectations about gender roles) and political conditions (development of feminist movements and women's rights). The final important note is the process of beatification and canonisation, which has undergone major changes over the years. In the first centuries of our era, the "acclamation of the People of God" was sufficient (Miształ 2011–2012, p. 51); however, in the 13th century the norms of a court process were used (Stankiewicz 1965, p. 69). A comprehensive and up-to-date codification of the confirmation of holiness was carried out by Pope John Paul II, and the final instructions (Sanctorum Mater 2007) were accepted by Pope Benedict XVI (Miształ 2011–2012, p. 56). Today, it is a multi-stage and complex process of an evidentiary nature, implemented by means of a legislative act whereby "the pope, by entering a person

in the catalogue of saints, sets him as an example to follow". The pope's decision is not subject to an appeal procedure (Misztal 2011–2012, p. 67).

The deficits of the applied research method were reduced through a documented and reliable selection of biographies and scientific studies of the analysed characters (Świdziński 2010; Benedict XVI 2012; Penrose 1995 and many others). These, in turn, were selected on the basis of a positive consideration of procedures of the Catholic Church in which the selected women were considered timeless role models. It was also assumed that the process of beatification or canonisation, despite the changes, was based on the highest authority of the Catholic Church and corresponded to the needs of its time.

The structure of the argument adopted in the article begins by outlining the current state of women's involvement in the socio-political sphere and the support they receive from the perspective of gender politics (including gender equality and gender neutrality). The second part of the analysis is an attempt to characterise the women's styles of leadership in the context of the specificity of their actions and in relation to strategies considered typically "male". Finally, recent considerations, which are theoretical in nature, refer to Søren Kierkegaard's philosophy and his modes of life: aesthetic, ethical and religious (spiritual) (Kierkegaard 1914); this provides the background and foundation for the construction of a theoretical framework of the model of religious leadership and its impact on the style and leadership strategies of women.

### 3. Women's Political Activity: Gender Equality and Gender Neutrality Theory

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights says that "all people are born free and equal in their dignity and rights" (UN 1948, Article 1) and that "Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms . . . without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion (. . .) or other status." (UN 1948, Article 2). Moreover, the Convention on Women's political rights makes it clear that "Women shall be entitled to hold public office and to exercise all public functions, established by national law, on equal terms with men, without any discrimination." (UN 1954, Article 3).

The right of each gender to participate in political life is therefore undeniable, but over the years, women have been largely excluded from political activity, which has become a "male occupation" (Lizotte 2018; Squires 1999, p. 1). The analysis of statistical data, which gives insight into the current political situation of women, indicates that in the world in 2022, 26.5% of women were in the chambers of lower parliaments or in single-chamber parliaments. For North and South America, this figure was 40.2% and for Europe it was 31%. The lowest levels of involvement of women in parliamentary work were found in the Middle East and North Africa, amounting to only 16.3% (IPU Parline 2023). Statistics on the participation of women in the work of national governments were much worse. Out of 42 analysed in 2023, in only 6 of them did women occupy most or half of the positions (Belgium, Spain, Finland, Liechtenstein, France and the Netherlands) (EIGE 2022a). The data on women's roles as the leader or deputy-leader of a political party developed in a similar way. In 38 of the 42 countries, these positions were held by men (EIGE 2022b).

Over time, the presence and position of women in politics have improved in all the areas mentioned earlier. For example, in the sphere of parliamentary work (in the years 1997–2021), there was a 14% increase in women's participation (The World Bank). In four additional countries (over the years 2011–2022) their position in governments also increased (EIGE 2022b), and in five others (in the period 2003–2022) an increase was seen in their participation in political parties (EIGE 2022a). However, the growth dynamics was relatively small, and the inequalities remained significant.

The situation of women in the labour market is no different. Women are still more affected by unemployment than men (World Economic Forum 2023, p. 35). Although women's higher education levels (41%) have increased compared to men (36%) globally (Statista 2019), they hold fewer leadership positions in all countries and industries. In 2023, the proportion of women in leadership roles globally was only 32.2%, and this decreased with increasing seniority (World Economic Forum 2023, p. 38). Although gender differences

continue to decrease, this is not spreading evenly across the globe. Saadia Zahidi, director of the World Economic Forum, points out that the overall participation of women in politics has stalled and even regressed in the area of the economy (World Economic Forum 2023, pp. 4–10).

Disparities in the practical aspect of these rights and the need to correct the existing asymmetry in the political representation of both sexes have led to the strengthening of feminist movements, including the gender equality theory (Levey 2005; Phillips 2004; Mansfield 2006). Its aim was to improve the participation and involvement of women and to increase their presence on the political scene (Meier 2005, p. 179). Gender equality has become one of the main objectives and priorities of action not only for many governments (Profeta 2017, p. 34; Paxton and Kunovich 2003; Thanikodi and Sugirtha 2007) but also organisations (UNDP 2022; EC 2020) sharing the belief that men and women should be treated equally in various dimensions of life. A number of social tools and legal and institutional mechanisms have been put in place to ensure equal opportunities for both sexes (Caul 2001; EC 2017).

However, the gender equality solutions proposed by gender politics, while they improved the results (Bush 2011; Paxton et al. 2007), were still insufficient, as indicated by both the conducted research (Profeta 2017, p. 34; World Economic Forum 2022, pp. 9–16) as well as the statistics presented above. The persistent deficit of women's participation in politics has led to the establishment of another approach, this time promoting the gender neutrality movement. It was founded on the idea that "making neither preferences nor assumptions about gender roles or gender norms is the essence of this policy" (Odrował-Coates 2015, p. 121). This did not mean depriving a person of their gender but allowed them to "switch between the roles and between gender specific behaviours" (Odrował-Coates 2015, pp. 123–24). This approach was meant to further strengthen gender equality theory so that "men and women participated in more or less equal numbers in every sphere of life" (Okin 1989, p. 171).

As the effects of gender equality and gender neutrality proved to be smaller and slower than expected, these approaches were met not only with approval but also with criticism. Accusations appeared suggesting they were based on a false conception of "human nature" (Mansfield 2006; Dodds 2012, p. 68; Collins 2015). Some researchers pointed out that a gender-neutral society is not possible, because a man's natural desire is to be "male" (Collins 2015, p. 4) and women "female". This conclusion seems to be shared by others who write that "it is not clear that equalising (. . .) between the sexes is sufficient for genuine equality between men and women, given the range of factors shaping gender and selfhood that occur of the political or public sphere" (Dodds 2012, p. 69). According to Susan Dodds, this approach generates additional doubts about the identity of men and women, including biological, metaphysical and moral differences between them, and also in terms of the mutual complementarity of their characteristics and virtues (Dodds 2012, p. 68).

In turn, Ashton Collins argued that gender justice cannot mean equality, but "would promote equality of opportunity without also requiring equality of outcome" (Collins 2015, p. 3). In her opinion, gender justice is different from gender neutrality, among other things, in that "first, sex differentiated behaviors between men and women can be both biologically and socially determined; second, certain forms of gendered socialisation are appropriate, as long as opportunities are equal and third, it would be wrong to use State force to achieve balanced outcomes" (Collins 2015, p. 4).

#### 4. Gender, Gender Role Theory and Leadership Styles

As noted earlier, gender equality and gender neutrality actions, although increasing the presence of women in politics, still remain ineffective tools. Another issue requiring reflection is the gender disparity in the areas of activity of women and men (Eagly et al. 2003, p. 569). Women tend to occupy high positions in the field of health or education (so-called female ministries), avoid finance and defence, and are reluctant to aspire to political positions considered typically male (Paxton et al. 2007, pp. 265–67).

This also brings with it further consequences for leadership. It can lead to the domination of one style over another, preventing mutual complementarity. It may also result in the masculinisation or feminisation of particular areas of socio-political activity.

For example, Mary-Kate Lizotte in her studies proved that women less often than men advocate for the use of force in internal and international politics, support arms control more, oppose the death penalty, more often demand increased spending on social care and school, and more willingly support the homeless (Lizotte 2018). Moreover, they show greater interest and concern for environmental policy and have more scientific knowledge in this area (McCrigh 2010). Other studies have shown that these areas of women's preferred activity are also consistent with the nature of their draft laws (Braton and Haynie 1999).

Other literature has shown that men are more likely to take risky actions, while women try to avoid them (Byrnes et al. 1999; Odachowska and Ścigała 2014, p. 62). It has been observed that "women do not seek behaviour that creates strong sensations (. . .) realising that such behaviour requires high immunity and lower sensitivity, do not take action that would expose them to such significant emotional costs" (Odachowska and Ścigała 2014, p. 64). These results were confirmed by other researchers who noticed that women reach higher levels of anxiety, are more altruistic and conciliatory, are less assertive and less dominant controlling, but are more open to experience (Costa et al. 2001; Schwartz and Rubel 2005). They definitely prefer to cultivate positive feelings, including peace and friendship, while men focus on competition and hedonism, and their reaction to stress becomes a strategy for strength (Schwartz and Rubel 2005).

Both sexes also diverge in their types of political commitments. Men prefer collective and public actions (more often they are members of political parties and participate in political meetings or demonstrations), and women choose individual and private activities (boycotting, charity fund-raising and signing petitions) (Coffé and Bolzendahl 2010, p. 330). Hilde Coffé and Catherine Bolzendahl noted "that political engagement is not just a matter of more or less, but rather of men and women engaging differently" (Coffé and Bolzendahl 2010, p. 330). This commitment often draws on culturally and socially rooted stereotypes: "Feminine stereotypes characterise women as caring, sensitive, and weak and more likely to engage in supportive and compassionate behaviors (. . .). Masculine stereotypes characterise men as tough, aggressive, ambitious, and more likely to engage in behaviors that reflect power and authority" (Bauer 2019). This has its consequences in the style of politics, because the first one can be described as a *relationship-oriented leader* and the second one as a *task-oriented leader* (Aronson et al. 2010, p. 286).

Gender roles, therefore, affect the behaviour of women and men in different ways, also determining the leadership styles defined for them (Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt 2001, p. 785). Research has shown that women are closer to the transformational model (Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt 2001, pp. 781–97), characterised by Bernard M. Bass into three components: promoting values in the environment, the ability to give up individual interests for the benefit of the team or organisation and the ability to change the needs of supporters from a lower level of security and protection to a higher level in terms of performance and self-realisation (Bass 2008, p. 619).

Men, in turn, prefer a transactional leadership model understood as "the exchange of gratification on the political market" (Eagly et al. 2003, pp. 578–80; Bass 2008, p. 258) in order to maximise their own profits. It can have a short-lived and superficial character, without creating deeper bonds. The same transaction cannot be repeated, only a new contract can be concluded on new terms. A characteristic feature of the transactional model is quick decisions and calculation, forcing a leader to adapt flexibility. This model, however, lacks the attractiveness, creativity and charisma of transformational leadership (Bass 2008, p. 258).

It should be noted that the leadership style preference does not always remain stable. Research by John Barbuto, Susan M. Fritz, Gina S. Matkin and David B. Marx shows that men with secondary education choose a transformational leadership style much more than women with secondary education. Women, on the other hand, are more likely to use

harder forms of pressure as they approach the transactional style. However, this trend is changing with increasing levels of education for women and men (Barbuto et al. 2007, pp. 73–75). Of course, these results require further, in-depth research. The same academics note that an integral approach, combining diversified variables such as gender, education or employment, enjoys greater research credibility (Barbuto et al. 2007, p. 75), which should be subject to a coherent analysis.

In the face of such marked differences in decision-making processes and styles implemented by men and women in leadership, consideration began to be given to the effectiveness of each model. However, from research undertaken by, among others, Pamela Paxton, Sheri Kunovich and Melanie Hughes, it was shown that in leadership women and men were equally effective or ineffective, although they achieved goals in a different way (Paxton et al. 2007, p. 274; Eklund et al. 2017, p. 129; Eagly et al. 2003, p. 583).

### 5. Religion and Various Leadership Models

The position of women in society is influenced not only by political, institutional or cultural conditionalities, but also by religious ones. Religion is an indispensable element of any culture, and culture cannot exist without its elements (Mazurkiewicz 2022, p. 45). It can also play a very strong motivational role. Max Weber wrote about the influence of religion on leadership, emphasising the role of charisma as a gift of heaven, which can neither be learned nor acquired but only awakened in oneself (Weber 1922, p. 145) through a mystical union with God (Weber 1963, p. 169). This charismatic leadership manifests itself in heroism, good deeds and entrusting oneself to Providence, which inspires and gives the capacity to transcend oneself (Weber 1963, pp. 156, 195). The strength of motivation resulting from faith in God's help is evidenced by the example of migrant women who in Italy during the COVID-19 pandemic took on the role of charismatic leaders. They formed Catholic religious communities based on a mutual network of contacts and relationships, and despite the great threat, they provided spiritual, emotional and material assistance to the most needy, at the same time motivating the community to increase pro-civic activity (Molli 2022).

The strength of religious motivation (both positive and negative) is also evidenced by the results of research conducted by Brian Calfano and Alexis Straka. They showed that women are more likely to prefer religious arguments than political ones in their choices. While they can oppose the latter, the opinion of religious communities is an important point of reference for their decisions, although this phenomenon depends on the type of religious denomination. As the conducted analyses suggest, women motivated by the Catholic religion seem to be more resistant to a negative assessment of their activities in the political and even religious community, and do not give up their activities as easily as Protestant women (Calfano and Straka 2020). These differences may have a theological basis, because in Catholicism Mary is presented as a female role model, which Protestantism lacks. Also, the social norms preferred by Catholics and Protestants differ significantly from one another. Over the centuries, the Catholic Church, despite its hierarchical structure, has been more inclined to promote talented women than the Protestant Church, where the judgement of fathers and husbands, which women were subject to, was difficult to overcome (Vitale and de la Croix 2022).

According to Pew Research Center research, the female gender remains more religious than the male gender in all societies, cultures and religions, although these differences are most evident in Europe (Pew Research Center 2016): "Gender has been proven to be a substantial indicator of differences with respect to religiosity within Christianity. Females are always more frequently and intensively religious in comparison to males" (Flere 2007, p. 239). Religion also acts as a very strong motivating factor, and the associated ethical and moral dimension is an indispensable element of modern leadership (Avolio and Gardner 2005). Thanks to religion, a leader can develop internally, as well as mobilise and positively strengthen their followers (May et al. 2003).

The connection between religion and leadership was noticed by Storsletten and Jakobsen, who, referring to the philosophy of Søren Kierkegaard, built three theoretical models of leadership. They pointed out that depending on the degree of involvement in their own spiritual development, a leader may prefer aesthetic, ethical or religious activities (Storsletten and Jakobsen 2015). The first of these (Storsletten and Jakobsen 2015, pp. 337–49) is based on external capabilities (Kierkegaard 1914, pp. 38–39), looking for change, “avoiding all that binds and bonds, which forces us to persevere” (Kierkegaard 1914, p. 10). A leader understood in this way attaches importance to possession, power and other people: “is contiguous and subject to the occasion” (Storsletten and Jakobsen 2015, p. 338). Because he is guided mainly by his senses and does not sufficiently control himself or the situation, he remains distracted, unstable and strongly dependent on his own moods, circumstances or changing interests (Storsletten and Jakobsen 2015, p. 338). As a result, his behaviour and motivation are determined mainly by external factors, and he himself, not engaging ethically, remains a passive observer (Skirbekk and Gilje 2001, p. 340). An aesthetic leader is a cynic who considers life ethically empty, because different values have the same measure for them (Skirbekk and Gilje 2001, p. 342).

The aesthetic model of leadership manifests itself in the objective approach to man and his work, as a result of which the main goal is to maximise short-term profit, often at the expense of the safety and well-being of individuals or teams (Storsletten and Jakobsen 2015, p. 342). It is based primarily on concepts arising from moral erosion, based on strong individualism, selfishness and relativism (John Paul II 1993, 33, 48). They lead to the devaluation of human life, excessive materialism and consumptionism (Paul VI 1967, 18).

They disregard human dignity, reducing it to economic and material dimensions (John Paul II 1991, 12, 19, 26). Totalitarian and authoritarian leadership can be considered as a specific variation of the pattern understood in this way, based on the one hand on controlling, on the other hand on ignoring the needs of others, and above all on “relatively unimpeded conversion of whims of the dictator into governmental actions” (Greenstein 1986, p. 45).

Also, the transactional leadership model, with a willingness to exchange work for other “goods” such as votes or campaign donations, mainly involving relations in political parties and legislative bodies, may fit into the presented pattern (Burns 1979, p. 4). Elements of aesthetic leadership can also be found in a model based on *Realpolitik*, which breaks all moral ties, prefers relativism and pragmatism, and adheres to the principle that “the end justifies the means” (Brzezińska 2020, pp. 186–87). After all, democracies themselves are not completely immune to the aesthetic model of leadership, being susceptible to various post-humanitarian ideologies and concepts.

The second model of leadership, referred to as ethical, places greater demands on the development of man’s inner self, preferring “to enter into one’s self and deepen oneself” (Kierkegaard 1914, p. 10). In this model, leaders can oppose others and are faithful to their values but they focus primarily on themselves (Kierkegaard 1914, p. 20). For leaders with ethical values, goals, efficiency and profit dominate (Marek and Kostrzewa 2020, p. 46). Studies conducted by Avolio and Gardner have shown that the leader can be more effective by making a “fundamental difference (...) by helping people find meaning and connection at work through greater self-awareness; by restoring and building optimism, confidence and hope; by promoting transparent relationships and decision making that builds trust and commitment among followers; and by fostering inclusive structures and positive ethical climates” (Avolio and Gardner 2005, p. 331). At the same time, they pointed out that the most effective are those “who are deeply aware of how they think and behave and are perceived by others as being aware of their own and others’ values/moral perspectives, knowledge, and strengths; aware of the context in which they operate; and who are confident, hopeful, optimistic, resilient, and of high moral character” (Avolio and Gardner 2005, p. 321).

A leader who is engaged religiously tries to relate their life to Transcendence, accepting the occurring phenomena and events as given and assigned to them by God (Marek and

Kostrzewa 2020, p. 47). They are charismatic visionaries, ensuring that both they and their followers perceive their place in the world as a vocation for altruistic love and responsibility for each other (Fry 2003, p. 695). They are strongly motivated internally, as they recognise the efficiency and effectiveness of their work as the greatest reward, without expecting external gratification (Fry 2003, p. 698). Religious leadership assumes that the “eternal is the general background of life and being”, and therefore it can be used by “mere mortals”. It also gives rise to the conviction of the support of Providence, which in a special way predisposes him to perform certain tasks (Weber 1963, p. 162).

Research conducted by Venessa Urch Druskat with a group of Catholic nuns showed that during the implementation of tasks they practised religious leadership, preferring the transformational model (Druskat 1994). Moreover, other studies have shown that pastoral leaders of the Catholic and Protestant Churches also practised transformational leadership as one that most allowed them to achieve their intended goals, but at the same time placed emphasis on personal development, leading followers and building cooperation (Fiebig and Christopher 2018, p. 507).

However, religious leadership requires constant internal development. It can also lead to an even higher, transcendent level of engagement (Kierkegaard 1914, p. 13) called spiritual (Fry 2003). It is achieved by moral maximisation (transition from the religious to the spiritual level) through “[b]ehaviors, actions, and decisions which result in the greatest enhancement of individual and collective human rights, freedoms, equity, and development” (Sikula and Costa 1994).

Religion, therefore, is an important variable of leadership and can strongly determine its model. However, “(…) different religions have different consequences in social and political life. It is not sufficient, therefore, to just recognise that religion is important. We need to know something about the importance of individual religions” (Mazurkiewicz 2019, p. 13).

## 6. Catholic Religion and Religion (Spiritual) Motivated Women Leadership’s Model

If we assume that the maximisation of moral values allows us to move from one model of leadership to another, then this attitude is also indicated by the teaching of the Catholic Church. It teaches that practising virtues consists of following God and showing care for others. Thus, man becomes a participant in God’s immanence, or God’s mysterium fascinans, somebody kind to all who can be relied on because of his goodness and faithfulness (Pikus 2011, p. 330). This style of leadership can also become a “program for life” (Pikus 2011, p. 323) and “the measure of holiness . . . how much from Christ is in our life, and how much, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we shape our lives in the likeness of His life” (Francis 2018, 21).

Contemporary research also seems to confirm that religion has an impact on women’s socio-political activity, while authentic religiosity can increase their level of social volunteering (Cassese and Holman 2016, p. 515). The elements of spiritual leadership, motivated by religion, can be found in the experiences and in the stories of the life of the Saints, the Blessed and the Venerable Servants of God, fulfilling according to the Catholic Church the requirements of a model to follow (John Paul II 1983). These women devoted most of their lives to building relationships with God through prayer and contemplation. They showed sensitivity to the needs of others, distributed meals (St. Margaret of Scotland and St. Elizabeth of Hungary) (Graham 1911, p. 80; Montalembert 1888, p. 172), tended to the wounds of the suffering (St. Radegund and St. Regina Protmann) (Penrose 1995, p. 173; Bruździński 2010, p. 465), or conducted educational activities (Bl. Natalia Tułasiewicz, Bl. Hanna Chrzanowska, Bl. Angelina Marsciano and St. Regina Protmann) (Judkowiak 2001, p. 363; Dziejic et al. 2020, pp. 73–74; Bruździński 2010, pp. 467–68). They were also able to sacrifice, giving their possessions or financing the development of education and schooling (St. Jadwiga, Servant of God Maria Rosario of the Visitation) (Świdziński 2010, p. 419), nursing homes and almshouses (St. Adelaide, St. Hedwig of Silesia and St. Margaret of

Scotland). They engaged in other matters and often saved lives (e.g., St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta and Bl. Mary MacKillop) (Matusznyi 2016, p. 47; Ellsberg 2005, pp. 305–6).

In agreement with what Bernard M. Bass wrote about transformational leadership, their attitude of life promoted values in their own environment. They had the ability to give up individual interests for the good of another person, and thanks to unusual charisma this often led to changes in life attitudes and internal conversions (Bass 2008, p. 619). They also showed extraordinary charisma and the ability to build a so-called critical mass (Childs and Krook 2008), attracting many followers, founding religious congregations (St. Regina Protmann, St. Urszula Ledóchowska and St. Mother Teresa of Calcutta) (Bruździński 2010, p. 467; Trojanowska 2012, p. 121; Cader 2016, p. 16) and leaving followers, including in the circle of their own family. It is worth mentioning here, for example, such figures as St. Monika and her son St. Augustine (Blunt 1917, p. 45); St. Jadwiga Śląska with her son the Servant of God Henry the Pious (Świdziński 2010, p. 390); St. Matilda (wife of German Emperor Henry I the Fowler) and her son St. Bruno I the Great (Archbishop of Cologne) (Świdziński 2010, pp. 93–94); St. Adelaide and her husband Henry II the Holy (Roman Emperor) (Świdziński 2010, p. 115); St. Amalberga of Maubeuge, mother of St. Emebert, St. Reinaldis and St. Guduli; and Bl. Joanna of Aza, mother of St. Dominika and Bl. Manes (Mamert), wife of Felix Guzmán, who died in the reputation of sanctity (Gómez-Chacón 2013, p. 89).

The women under study, living transcendent lives, most often used the relationship-oriented leadership model. At the same time, the analysis of their lives showed that, depending on circumstances and conditionalities, they were able to activate characteristics assigned to the PGI male sexual roles (Korzeń 2006, p. 42). They were able to be independent of their husbands or make political decisions equally with them (St. Pulcheria, St. Margaret of Scotland and St. Jadwiga Queen of Poland), and they were confident in themselves and their choices, e.g., conducting the process of Christianisation of their own country (St. Olga of Kiev) and even the continent (St. Clotilda) (Kurth 1912, p. 5). They were able to convince others of their own arguments and implement political (St. Ludmila) and church reforms, including convening synods and initiating changes in the field of Canon law (St. Margaret of Scotland) (Świdziński 2010, p. 303). They engaged in the external actions of their own country, which required courage and openness, e.g., through personal participation in armed combat (St. Jadwiga Queen of Poland and St. Joan of Arc) (Długosz 1965, p. 219; Benedict XVI 2011, p. 121), whether through migration or the establishment of centres of mercy outside the country (Bl. Guadalupe Ortiz de Landázuri and St. Ursula Ledóchowska) (Becciu 2019; Trojanowska 2012, p. 211). They often made quick and decisive human, organisational and financial decisions (God's servant Isabella I of Castile and St. Adelaide), introducing taxes or judicial law (St. Olga of Kiev).

Because the Saints, the Blessed and the Venerable Servants of God in the Catholic Church lived mainly in times marked by a patriarchy with rigid divisions into gender roles, they could not count in their activity on the support of gender politics, including gender equality or gender neutrality. In the vast majority (except for the queens, whose position was not stable and certain), they did not benefit from external top-down system regulations (e.g., electoral rights and gender parities), because they began to achieve them only in the 19th and 20th centuries (Council of Europe 2023). They acted on the basis of the existing reality and its conditionalities. Their strength was internal motivation, guided by love for God and their fellow man, which was the foundation of the Catholic religion: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your power. The second is: You shall love your neighbour as yourself" (The Gospel of St. Mark 12:30–31). Despite this, they were able to achieve their goals and engage socially and politically. They boldly went beyond the stereotypical female style of leadership, broke the thought patterns, changed political reality and reformed social structures. Their position contradicts research showing that while authentic religiosity can increase the level of women's social volunteering, it does not affect their activity in politics (Cassese and Holman 2016, p. 515). As pointed out by Erin Cassese and Mirya Holman, preferences as

to the type of involvement are religiously conditioned. They result, among others, from the rigidity and literal understanding of the religious message by women, accepting and perpetuating the traditional division of roles (Cassese and Holman 2016, p. 515). This process is particularly strongly manifested in Protestantism (Hoffmann and Bartkowski 2008), which may result from the principle of Sola Scriptura, which recognises the Holy Scriptures as the sole authority of Christian faith and practice. A different approach is practiced in Catholicism, which also accepts the role of tradition itself (Ciećko 2019, pp. 196–97).

Therefore, leadership models differ from each other, especially in the aesthetic and religious (spiritual) dimensions. They could be characterised according to the following scheme (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Women’s leadership vs. religiously motivated women’s leadership (Catholic perspective).

Category of Analysis	Women’s Leadership Model	Religiously Motivated Women’s Leadership Model
Type of leadership	Aesthetic model	Spiritual model
	Conditionalities	
Sphere of influence	Narrow: politics	Broad: spirituality permeating all dimensions of life, including politics
Motivation	External	Internal
Source for stimulation of engagement and correction of the leadership model	External: system regulations (gender equality and gender neutrality)	Internal: spiritual and religion faith
The role of a leader and the form of legitimacy of their power	Professional: operating within the established legal framework and the duties assigned to them	Moral authority, charismatic leader
Time of activity	Strictly defined (e.g., term of office)	Unspecified and independent of a term of office, voluntary service
Objective of action	Functionality and efficiency	Spiritual development as a condition for building a better world
Leadership capabilities within the selected model		
Relationships between relationship-oriented leader and task-oriented leader	Competition resulting from the domination of one model over another	Cooperation recognising the complementarity of both models as a tool for strengthening effectiveness
Readiness to combine leadership styles	Low, due to strong competition between styles; one leadership style preferred (mainly female), with the possibility of changing it to male (perpetuating stereotypes of gender roles)	High, female leadership style preferred, with a tendency to include elements of male leadership (breaking gender roles)
Charisma	Low, resulting from the variable nature of external motivation	High, flowing from an inner and stable conviction of a particular mission, also understood as a “gift of heaven” motivating to act and “transcend oneself”
Effectiveness	Low, focus on one style of leadership, limited spheres of engagement	High, ability to combine strategies, openness to various spheres of engagement

Source: own study.

A leader referring to the aesthetic model limits their area of influence to the narrow sphere of politics; they are guided by functionality and effectiveness in a specific time dimension (e.g., during a term of office). They operate within the current social and political norms and on the basis of a strictly defined range of competences. They do not need to have great charisma to penetrate the world of politics, because external regulations allow them to do so. They remain faithful to their strategy (e.g., relationship-oriented), but

at the same time close off others. As a result, at the beginning, they marginalise themselves and move into the sphere of strictly defined policy areas, such as security or health care.

Leaders who use the second of the above-mentioned models work differently. They assume that spiritual values are an integral part of life and permeate all spheres of human activity. They are therefore not limited to politics but understand its action broadly. Because they are primarily a moral authority, independent of external regulations, they are not so strongly bound by time (term of office) and system norms. In practical terms, research shows that this model also benefits from the culturally accepted universal principles that it practices and the globally high level of satisfaction with the transformational leadership style (Caza et al. 2021).

Leaders of this model work by adapting to environmental conditionalities in a mixed way. They do not change in the scope of their preferred values, but thanks to charisma and strong internal motivation they can impose them on others, independently verify external conditionalities and adapt appropriate strategies for them (task-oriented or relations-oriented) (Pietras 2000, pp. 59–60). Therefore, they demonstrate a readiness to mix leadership styles. By recognising the different strategies as complementary to each other and non-competing, they can more effectively carry out tasks in many dimensions of socio-political life, not limited solely to the “male” or “female” dimension. This finding is supported by other independent studies, which showed that leaders who displayed both high masculine and high feminine characteristics scored higher on transformational leadership factors, which indicates that transformational leader behaviours require a gender balance (Barbuto et al. 2007, p. 72).

## 7. Discussion

This analysis does not cover all issues related to women’s leadership motivated by religion. It suggests certain processes and indicates possible dependencies between them. However, these results require further, in-depth and more precise research. Particular refinement is needed in the methodology of the conducted research, as well as within the theoretical models presented. Nevertheless, the reflection presented has brought valuable insights into understanding women’s leadership, in particular the influence of the religious factor on its style and character.

A completely different but equally interesting case may be the analysis of the strategies of men motivated by Catholic religion (spiritual dimension) and the analysis of their preferred leadership style. Studies on holy children and research on their decision-making processes also remain an extremely neglected sphere. History shows that they were often able to be heroic and charismatic leaders.

Observations on the leadership behaviour of both sexes (in the context of the spiritual dimension) within their relationship with other religions, including Protestantism, Orthodoxy or Islam, also seem interesting, although we must remember the limitations of the presented model when it comes to the selection of the group (in Protestantism and Islam there are no models of behaviour in the form of Saints).

## 8. Conclusions

The results of this research suggest that women strongly motivated by Catholic religion (preferring the spiritual dimension of leadership) are probably able to become more involved in socio-political activity, because they understand it primarily as an internal call to service to others: “Bear one another’s burdens” (Galatians 6:2). This approach remains consistent with their gender role and attitude toward the relational leadership model. Faith in God’s protection and Providence, built by prayer and contemplation and supported by the evangelical message “Do not be afraid (. . .) Put out into the deep water!” (The Gospel of St. Luke 5:1–11), can make them, despite external limitations, able to use their own potential by modifying it with male qualities (perseverance, independence and determination toward a goal, being uncompromising in the pursuit of it). It is therefore highly likely that they will mix strategies to maximise results.

These observations remain consistent with other independent studies. Nicholas Bauer, for example, showed that women can mix strategies during an election campaign, using male and female stereotypes depending on the circumstances, which increases their effectiveness in competition (Bauer 2019). Other studies confirm that the practice of transactional leadership itself remains ineffective or less effective, while mixing strategies and incorporating elements of transactional leadership into transformational leadership (and vice versa) significantly increases its effectiveness (Eagly et al. 2003, p. 583). Religion can thus naturally enhance the effect that gender politics introduces in the form of top-down, mechanical and systemic solutions. It is therefore not a question of the mechanical practice of certain rules and standards, but it is the fact of being a witness to faith: “(. . .) epistemological *sine qua non*” (Colosi 2017, p. 51).

The conducted analysis also indicates a different dimension of strategy mixing than effectiveness. Many other studies show that the attempt by women and men to change their style of leadership from “female” to “male” (or vice versa) is perceived negatively by voters as an inconsistency with their role in society. Each of the sexes, although to varying degrees, is punished for it (Kubu 2018; Eagly et al. 2003, pp. 572–73; Mohan et al. 2022). Therefore, in the model of leadership motivated by religion, mixing but not changing style seems to support the credibility of the people implementing it. Avolio and Gardner wrote about this, pointing out that authenticity is the basic structure “at the basis of all positive forms of leadership and its development” (Avolio and Gardner 2005, p. 316).

Moreover, it is worth noting that the principle of strategy mixing applied by women motivated by religion eliminates the phenomenon of gender rivalry, not excluding either gender or setting them in opposition to each other. Unlike gender politics, gender differences are recognised by the gender roles, diversifying styles, opportunities and needs of women and men. Strategy mixing uses the conditionalities of gender roles as a tool for the enrichment of leadership, without leading to discrimination against either gender. Thus, to answer the question posed in the title of the article, whether women and religion (Catholic) can save modern leadership, it should be stated that they can, but religion seems to be the so-called game changer, the key factor here. It modifies leadership and protects it from both the masculinisation and feminisation of politics. It builds on differences, rather than eliminating them.

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