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## SOCIOLOGICAL RESEARCH IN PASTORAL THEOLOGY. OBJECTIVES AND EXECUTION\*

**Abstract.** The interdisciplinarity of scientific discourse is a common phenomenon in modern times. What is more, it is postulated that analyses conducted as part of theological research should take into account the achievements of other fields of knowledge and use the research methods and techniques they have developed. This is primarily because theology, and especially pastoral theology, must refer to other sciences, especially sociology, to solve certain research problems. Using sociological methods and techniques primarily requires diagnosing the current pastoral situation. With these methods, first credible conclusions and then realistic postulates can be formulated. The formulated postulates have a real value as they are based on confronting and verifying models, content, methods and forms used. The goal of this article is to present the main paradigms in the field of theology that require sociological research and then detailed sociological methods and techniques used in pastoral research. A specialist, technical knowledge of sociological measurements and praxeological interpretation of empirical data will be presented concerning the latter issue. Many studies in the field of pastoral theology require detailed sociological knowledge to create a research tool, select a research sample, perform research, and interpret its results.

**Keywords:** pastoral theology; pastoral theology paradigms; research methods; research techniques; sociology of religion; interdisciplinarity

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Modern pastoral theology is characterised by great dynamism related to the rapidly shifting conditions of pastoral theology in numerous countries.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Bullivant, *Europejska młodzież i religia. Wyniki Europejskiego Sondażu Społecznego 2014-2016* (London: Benedict XVI Centre for Religion and Society, 2018), 3–11. Institute for

The subject of this discipline's research concerns the

existence and redemptive activity of the Church in its current conditionality, which the practical theology desires to capture, critically evaluate, and systematically express while taking into account current conditionality, in which the universal Church or particular Church materialises itself in the world.<sup>2</sup>

The broader approach of pastoral theology defines it as “critical, theological reflection on the practices of the Church as they interact with the practices of the world, with a view to ensuring and enabling faithful participation in God's redemptive practices in, to, and for the world.”<sup>3</sup> The analyses conducted in pastoral theology have their source in normative indications contained, first of all, in the Sacred Scriptures and the teaching of the Church.<sup>4</sup> However, in the context of modern cultural transformations, theoretical considerations are insufficient and therefore it is necessary to conduct sociological research<sup>5</sup> or refer to more extensive social studies to determine the conditionality of pastoral activity, as well as evaluate the effectiveness of created and performed pastoral strategies. This research then becomes a basis for conclusions that should be taken into account when creating new pastoral directives, principles, and models.<sup>6</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote about the strong relationship between theology and sociology and even equated these disciplines<sup>7</sup> in his doctoral thesis in 1927. As Wioletta Szymczak notices:

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Advanced Studies, *European Social Survey European Research Infrastructure ESS ERIC 2022* (London: ESS 2022), 1–129.

<sup>2</sup> Wiesław Przygoda, “Paradygmaty metodologiczne współczesnej teologii pastoralnej,” *Teologia Praktyczna* 10(2009): 31–44.

<sup>3</sup> John Swinton, and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM Press, 2016), 7.

<sup>4</sup> Mario Midali, *Teologia pastorale o pratica: camino storico di una riflessione fondante e scientifica* (Roma: Libreria Ateneo Salesiano, 1991). Ryszard Kamiński, “Normatywny i praktyczny wymiar refleksji teologicznopastoralnej,” *Roczniki Pastoralno-Katechetyczne* 3(2011): 321–332.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Ballard, “The Impact of Sociology on Practical Theology,” *British Journal of Theological Education* 3(1990): 18–30.

<sup>6</sup> Philip Hughes, “Theology and Social Sciences in Ministry Research,” *Journal of Contemporary Ministry* 3(2017): 37–57.

<sup>7</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “Sanctorum Communio: A Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church,” in *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, edited by Clifford J. Green, Joachim Von Soosten, Reinhard Kraus, Nancy Lukens, vol. 1 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998). Jeff Wheelon, “Theology and Sociology, Sociology as Theology,” *Journal of Sociology and Christianity* 6(2016): 6–23.

Concerning the interaction among these disciplines, two paths are indicated: pastoral theology needs research in the field of sociology, designed and implemented as autonomous research projects, or projects in the field of topics and methods that meet the questions and problems raised by pastoral theologians.<sup>8</sup>

In other words, pastoral theology chooses the development of the Church's theological principles and the concept of redemptive activity based on them as a fundamental objective due to its specificity. This task first of all requires performing a systematic reflection on God's Revelation and the Church's teachings. The analysis and evaluation of the effectiveness of specific forms currently used in pastoral ministry is also required. The conclusions based on empirical measurements have a great value, both scientific and praxeological. The development of directives, principles, postulations, or advice that is not only theoretically and monodisciplinary, but also includes interdisciplinarity that consists of a dialogue between theology and empirical sciences<sup>9</sup> constituting a common trend in modern scientific discourse must also be considered.

## 2. METHODOLOGICAL ASPECTS

Pastoral theology assumes the performance of sociological research and often utilises the following methodologic paradigms: the paradigm of three stages of pastoral analysis and the paradigm by Josef Cardijn. They fulfil all the research method criteria and allow adapting the achievements of sociological studies and other auxiliary sciences so as to carry out pastoral theology analyses. The subject of analysis in this article is the mentioned methodological paradigms of pastoral theology followed by sociological methods and techniques used within the research procedures.

First, however, a distinction between social research and sociological research, and in their context, quantitative and qualitative research, should be made. Social research is primarily concerned with discovering the processes

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<sup>8</sup> Wioletta Szymczak, "Interdisciplinarity in Pastoral Theology. An Example of Socio-Theological Research," *Verbum Vitae* 38(2020): 506.

<sup>9</sup> Ibidem; Vivencio Ballano, "Catholic Social Teaching, Theology, and Sociology: Exploring the Common Ground," *Religions* 10(2019): 557.

taking place in societies.<sup>10</sup> It is a result of systematic observation and in-depth reasoning. Unlike empirical studies, social research is mainly based on observation and analysis, not on empirical measurements. Its primary tools are observation, in-depth description and interpreting social life phenomena. Therefore, it has an immeasurable and theoretical character, because theories explaining the nature and key factors influencing the life of societies are formed based on it. The research is directly related to the analysis of theoretical variables, which in social research are sets of values and features and the relationships between them.<sup>11</sup>

On the other hand, sociological research focuses primarily on the opinions or overall attitudes of individuals or human communities on various phenomena. The second major difference between social and sociological research is a much wider range of research methods. These methods primarily include an analysis of document content, observation, experiment, sociometry, interview, survey, and poll.<sup>12</sup>

Both social and sociological research can be divided into quantitative and qualitative. The former answers the questions “how often? how much? to what extent?” and their results can be presented in numbers, percentages, tables, using scales and indexes; the latter focuses on the implementation of qualitative research, so we primarily attempt to answer questions concerning “how and why?” i.e., to obtain answers regarding the in-depth causes of the phenomena, respondents’ attitudes, or opinions. Differences between quantitative and qualitative research also concern the size of the surveyed population, the method of analysing the collected material and the possibility of generalizing results in the population in the case of a representative research sample. “Research projects that combine quantitative and qualitative elements will be particularly valuable. This complementary use of different techniques is called methodological triangulation.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> John W. Creswell, “Revisiting Mixed Methods and Advancing Scientific Practices,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Multimethod and Mixed Methods Research Inquiry*, edited by Sharlene N. Hesse-Biber, Burke R. Johnson, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015): 57–71.

<sup>11</sup> Earl Babbie, *Badania społeczne w praktyce* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2005), 41.

<sup>12</sup> Szymon Czarnik, “Metody badań socjologicznych,” in *Metodologia nauk społecznych i humanistycznych*, edited by Marek Jakubiec, Piotr Urbańczyk (Kraków: Copernicus College, 2020), 6–13.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*.

### 3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The selection of the types and techniques of research depends primarily on the research problem. Every research author should first answer the following questions: should a sociological measurement be made and why? What information do we need to solve the problem? Next, the questions “who, when and how?” need to be investigated, and the presentation and interpretation methods for the results should be planned. Are there any practical implications from such interpretations? To this end, such a procedure requires not only theoretical knowledge of the subject under consideration but also a deep knowledge of research methodology, methods, and techniques.

The research made in the field of pastoral theology, which includes an element of sociological research, often uses the following methodological paradigms: the paradigm of three stages of theological and pastoral analysis and the Josef Cardijn paradigm. They meet all the criteria of the research method and allow adapting the achievements of sociological research and other auxiliary sciences for conducting analyses in the field of pastoral theology.

The subject of analysis in this article is the mentioned methodological paradigms of pastoral theology, followed by sociological methods and techniques used in research procedures. Examples of research based on pastoral theology that include sociological research are studies on the religiosity of entire populations or specific social groups, e.g., Polish emigrants, the youth, and working groups. Nowadays, the subject of such research is attitudes towards the Church, effectiveness of preparation for sacrament, frequency and motivation for participation in religion classes and many other topics directly related to the Church’s pastoral activity.

Due to the above-mentioned goal, the subject of analysis in this article will be selected paradigms of pastoral theology, i.e., the methodological framework in which research is conducted. These paradigms provide for a specific sequence of actions aimed at solving theological research problems. One of the research stages is the sociological stage, which diagnoses a specific pastoral reality and is the starting point for interpreting the results and formulating postulates aimed at its development.

This article presents detailed guidelines for preparing and conducting sociological research along with an analysis of the obtained results. Therefore, the subject of this part of the article will be issues such as operationalisation of research and construction of a research tool, research techniques, selection of a research sample, pilot studies, and empirical material analysis methods.

Knowledge of these issues seems to be essential for pastoralists who conduct empirical research. Thus, the main problem of this article can be expressed with the following question: What place do sociological measurements take in theological and pastoral research and how to perform it and interpret the results using professional sociological knowledge?

#### 4. PARADIGM OF THE THREE STAGES OF PASTORAL THEOLOGY ANALYSIS

The currently used paradigm is the paradigm of three stages of pastoral theology analysis. The origin of this methodological principle stems from the ecclesiological trend of pastoral theology present in the works of, among others, Karl Rahner,<sup>14</sup> Heinz Schuster,<sup>15</sup> and Ferdinand Klostermann.<sup>16</sup> Great merits in developing this method are attributed to Grazioso Ceriani,<sup>17</sup> who developed it in the form of a practical syllogism. He has determined that Revelation constitutes the greater premise while the data taken from sociological, psychological, or pedagogical research constitute the smaller premise. In turn, the postulates referring to the analysed pastoral activity<sup>18</sup> constitute the conclusion. This paradigm consists of conducting a research process in three stages: criteriological (also called ecclesiological or theological), sociological (also called cairiological), and praxeological (also known as strategic). The first stage focuses on a detailed analysis of indications concerning the examined reality contained in the Word of God and Church doc-

<sup>14</sup> Karl Rahner, *Sendung und Gnade: Beiträge zur Pastoraltheologie* (Innsbruck: Tyrolia-Verlag, 1966); Karl Rahner, *Pastoral theology* (London: Burns & Oates, 1966).

<sup>15</sup> Karl Rahner, Heinz Schuster, *Pastoral theology: the pastoral mission of the church* (New York: N.Y. Paulist Press, 1965).

<sup>16</sup> Ferdinand Klostermann, *Die pastoralen Dienste heute, Priester und Laien im pastoralen Dienst. Situation und Bewältigung* (Linz-Passau: Veritas-Verlag, 1980).

<sup>17</sup> Grazioso Ceriani, *Introduzione alla teologia pastorale* (Roma: Pontificio Instituto Pastorale, 1961).

<sup>18</sup> Stanisław Pamuła, "Ceriani Grazioso," in *Leksykon teologii pastoralnej*, edited by Ryszard Kmaiński, Wiesław Przygoda, Marek Fiałkowski (Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL, 2006), 124–125; Władysław Piwowarski, "Eklezjologiczna koncepcja teologii pastoralnej," in *Franciszek Blachnicki. Teologia pastoralna ogólna. Pisma pastoralne*, edited by Marek Marczewski, Kazimierz Misiaszek, Roman Murawski (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Salezjańskie, 2013), 300–309; Ryszard Kamiński, *Przynależność do parafii katolickiej. Studium pastoralne* (Lublin: RW KUL, 1987); Wiesław Przygoda, "Paradygmaty metodologiczne współczesnej teologii pastoralnej," *Teologia Praktyczna* 10(2009): 36.

uments. The purpose of this research stage is to develop normative bases for the examined pastoral activity, which then constitute a reference point and the evaluation criteria. Among the detailed research methods, this stage uses “mainly deductive methods, in particular the positive method, comparative method, reduction method, exegesis method, text interpretation method, analogy method, etc.”<sup>19</sup>

The second research stage originates from the clear instructions of Vatican Council II:

To carry out such a task, the Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel. Thus, in language intelligible to each generation, she can respond to the perennial questions which men ask about this present life and the life to come, and about the relationship of the one to the other. We must therefore recognize and understand the world in which we live, its explanations, its longings, and its often dramatic characteristics.<sup>20</sup>

This stage is also referred to as cairological or sociological and consists of conducting empirical research and analysing this research. This research stage requires using tools and scientific methods such as sociology, pedagogy, psychology, anthropology, or ethnology.<sup>21</sup> Sociology plays a particular role in pastoral theology research. It allows obtaining reliable and representative results. However, it should be remembered that the analysis of these results has a sociological-theological nature and refers to instructions formulated during the first, normative research stage.

The third stage, known as the praxeological one, consists of formulating conclusions, practical indications, and postulations for the future regarding the examined reality resulting from the previous two stages.<sup>22</sup> At this stage, it is vital to verify the research hypothesis and create formulations aiming at making the examined pastoral reality as concurrent as possible with normative instructions coming from Revelation and Church teachings, which were subjected to analysis in the first research stage.

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<sup>19</sup> Przygoda, “Paradygmaty metodologiczne współczesnej teologii pastoralnej,” 31–44.

<sup>20</sup> Vatican II, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World Gaudium et spes* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1965), no. 4.

<sup>21</sup> Ryszard Kamiński, “Metody teologii pastoralnej,” in *Teologia pastoralna*, edited by Ryszard Kamiński (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Alta 2, 2000), 24–26.

<sup>22</sup> Przygoda, “Paradygmaty metodologiczne współczesnej teologii pastoralnej,” 37.

All of the three stages of the pastoral theology analysis paradigm are closely tied to each other, which in turn creates a coherent research procedure. First, a reflection on Revelation and Church teaching, which constitute reference points, is done to verify these assumptions through empirical research. This will present the actual state of pastoral activity, present conclusions, and praxeological postulations.<sup>23</sup>

##### 5. THE PARADIGM OF JOSEF CARDIJN

The next methodological paradigm often used in pastoral theology is the triad by Cardinal Josef Cardijn:<sup>24</sup> see, judge, act. In other words, this method is based on three steps: diagnosis – reflection – action.<sup>25</sup> This method was approved by Pope John XXIII in the *Mater et magistra* encyclical<sup>26</sup> and then by the Vatican Council II. In the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et spes*, the Council fathers, in the context of reading the signs of the times, stated: “In pastoral care, sufficient use must be made not only of theological principles, but also of the findings of the secular sciences, especially of psychology and sociology, so that the faithful may be brought to a more adequate and mature life of faith.”<sup>27</sup>

This paradigm assumes starting the research procedure by diagnosing the pastoral situation and analysing a certain pastoral phenomenon. Next, this situation is evaluated in the light of theological criteria derived from Revelation and Church teaching. The last research stage presents conclusions and pastoral postulations, whose purpose is to increase the effectiveness of pastoral activities regarding the analysed phenomenon.<sup>28</sup> Because this method assumes the analysis of a phenomenon or a group of phenomena related to

<sup>23</sup> Ryszard Kamiński, “Metoda teologii pastoralnej,” *Roczniki Teologiczno-Kanoniczne* 6(1990): 93.

<sup>24</sup> Joseph Cardijn, *Was ist Christliche Arbeiter-Jugend C.A.J.-J.O.C.?* (Ludwigshafen am Rhein: HRSG vom Gebietssekretariat, 1947).

<sup>25</sup> Josef Muller, *Pastoraltheologie. Ein Handbuch für Studium und Seelsorge* (Graz–Wien–Köln: Styria-Verlag, 1993), 94; Vivencio Ballano, “The Social Sciences, Pastoral Theology, and Pastoral Work: Understanding the Underutilization of Sociology in Catholic Pastoral Ministry,” *Open Theology* 6(2020): 531–546.

<sup>26</sup> John XXIII, *Mater et magistra* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1961), no. 236.

<sup>27</sup> Vatican II, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World Gaudium et spes* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1965), no. 4.

<sup>28</sup> Bronisław Mierzwiński, “Teologia pastoralna czy teologia praktyczna. Spór o nazwę czy o koncepcję?” *Ateneum kapłańskie* 144(2005): 230–231.



the pastoral activity of the Church in the first research stage, the conducted diagnosis required empirical research, in particular sociological, the starting point for further research stages<sup>29</sup> making it credible and enhanced. For this reason, the people conducting the research should know the methods and techniques of sociological research. Sociological knowledge allows us to not only correctly perform the research, but also to properly interpret the results, which will be used to prepare a strategy for pastoral activities. However, it should be remembered that interpreting the research results should be both sociological and theological. A sociologist is satisfied with verifying the falsification of hypotheses, while for a

pastoral theologian this constitutes an entry point for theological interpretation of results acquired in empirical research. This interpretation related to unchanging pastoral principles gives foundations to draw conclusions and formulate postulations concerning the improvement of various forms of redemptive activity in the future.<sup>30</sup>

## 6. OPERATIONALISATION AND CONSTRUCTION OF RESEARCH TOOLS

The methodological paradigms presented above and commonly applied in pastoral theology assume that performing sociological research is one of the research procedure stages. The research should be performed correctly by applying sociological methods regardless of the adopted paradigm and the research stage of the sociological research. The key issues here are the structure of the research tool, determining the measurement technique, selecting a research sample, performing pilot studies and main research, and then a sociological-theological analysis of the results.

Operationalisation in the scope of empirical measurements should be preceded by determining the main research issue, which is a theological issue, and specifying it in the form of a set of detailed questions. These questions then determine how to formulate the research hypotheses as well as the subsequent operationalisation of measurement tools. The main hypothesis arises from the essential research issue, while detailed issues of the hypothesis give a detailed verification through data analysis acquired from the empirical

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<sup>29</sup> Muller, *Pastoraltheologie. Ein Handbuch für Studium und Seelsorge*, 94.

<sup>30</sup> Przygoda, "Paradygmaty metodologiczne współczesnej teologii pastoralnej," 42.

measurements. Verifying the research hypotheses is an empirical effect of the conducted research.<sup>31</sup> According to methodological objectives, the correctly posed research hypotheses should directly refer to the main issue and possess theoretical support in theological normative instructions. They must also fulfil the sociological conditions of verifiability and testability. This means that the theoretical language should be translated into the empirical language.<sup>32</sup> In other words, a proper research hypothesis should be characterized by such features as novelty, generality, conceptual clarity, internal consistency, verifiability, and non-obviousness. This stage is characterized by the fact that the construction of heuristic diagrams, indicating dependencies among features and variables that constitute a foundation of building a research tool, is also a vital part. They are used to present the nature of an examined issue and indicate a dependency between its specific aspects. These diagrams show and organize key variables and the relationships between them in a graphical form. A heuristic diagram presented in graphic form also enables clarifying the undertaken issue, as well as objectively identifying the disputable issues.

For the research tool and for analysing the results, it is necessary to consider independent and dependent variables. An independent variable is a variable subject to manipulation and therefore subjected to intended actions through which its values, direction, and force change. Therefore, it is a factor that causes changes in other factors (variables). In turn, a dependent variable is a variable that can be measured and cannot be manipulated. Thus, it is a factor subject to clear influences on the part of independent variables.<sup>33</sup> In the case of pastoral theology, examples of research in which it is necessary to consider dependent and independent variables are measurements of religiousness components of particular social groups. This research can indicate how much the acknowledged values, norms, and moral behaviour (dependent variables) depend on faith, knowledge, religious practices, or engagement in the life of a religious community (independent variables).

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<sup>31</sup> Janusz Sztumski, *Wstęp do metod i technik badań społecznych* (Katowice: Wydawnictwo naukowe Śląsk, 1999), 41.

<sup>32</sup> Grzegorz Babiński, "Etapy procesu badawczego," in *Wybrane zagadnienia z metodologii socjologicznych badań empirycznych*, edited by Marian Malikowski, Marian Niezgoda (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego 1980), 19–63.

<sup>33</sup> Mieczysław Łobocki, *Metody badań pedagogicznych* (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1982), 74.

## 7. RESEARCH TECHNIQUES

It is possible to differentiate many research methods and techniques used to acquire empirical data in pastoral theology research. However, concerning pastoral theology paradigms, methods such as an open interview, a questionnaire interview, and a survey seem to be the most appropriate. An interview, or a set of questions asked to respondents, is one of the basic research methods in social studies such as sociology. It consists of acquiring data through a direct conversation. It can be uncategorised (open) or categorised (questionnaire). An open interview adopts the form of a non-structured conversation between the leader and respondent. Its goals are precisely defined, but the progress depends on the answers and approach of the respondent. Questions are open, but are made more specific during the progress of research and originally should invite the respondent to formulate longer, multi-threaded statements. In turn, the questionnaire interview method consists of the researcher using a detailed list of questions along with the order of their articulation. Theoretical assumptions of the interview indicate that it should not start with closed questions and its moderation should give the respondent a feeling of natural and satisfying conversation. Sociological studies often use a survey questionnaire, a technique of collecting information in which the respondent fills out a questionnaire, generally with high standardisation degree, in the presence or, more often, without the presence of an interviewer.<sup>34</sup>

Therefore, a survey can be treated as a specific and written form of an interview that belongs to categorised research strictly determined by a set of principles and rules.<sup>35</sup> When conducting surveys, the interviewer should first and foremost take care to keep an appropriate form and content of questions included in a questionnaire. Their structure seems to be a key issue here. Questions should be singular, specific, and comprehensible for the respondent, as well as not suggest an answer, should define vital terms, be free of double negatives, and addressed to the appropriate group of people. It is essential to use questions that first of all test the research hypotheses. The correct order of questions is also important, since methodology shows that they must create a coherent and logical whole. Questions must also be ordered according to their difficulty with respect to gradation from easiest to most

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<sup>34</sup> Tadeusz Pilch, *Zasady badań pedagogicznych* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Żak, 1995), 42.

<sup>35</sup> Sztumski, *Wstęp do metod i technik badań społecznych*, 130–133.

difficult questions. General questions are formulated first while increasingly more detailed questions are asked later.<sup>36</sup>

The increasingly more often used alternative to traditional questionnaires are measurements using electronic survey forms. This technique, called the CAWI (*Computer-Assisted Web Interview*) technique, is a method used for both qualitative and quantitative research. For this purpose, the research tool in the form of a survey questionnaire is placed in one of the Internet environments. Next, a link to the survey is generated, which is then sent to respondents. This technique is characterised by numerous advantages, i.e., the shorter time required to conduct the research, access to multiple respondents, eliminating the risk of respondents making a mistake, complete anonymity of respondents, no need to encode results, and the ability to quickly view research results. Apart from the listed benefits, the CAWI technique also has drawbacks. The most significant one, from the methodological point of view, is the representative nature of research. The main accusation against the CAWI technique concerns the lack of Internet access, which can impact the research to not fully reflect attitudes, opinions, and social behaviours. As P. Jabłkowski points out, in a situation when the researcher does not possess a “complete list of statistical units included in a population, then a certain portion of units remains unrepresented due to incomplete coverage and zero chances for sample selection, which in turn might distort measurement results.”<sup>37</sup>

One cannot deny that the percentage of people with access to the Internet is gradually and dynamically increasing. Young people are a particular population group whose method of functioning and habits perfectly interact with the CAWI method. The reservations listed above have a strong justification in the remaining age groups, especially in the case of elderly people. Although the weakness of sample selection frames is most visible in the case of survey research conducted using telephone interview (CATI) or web survey (CAWI) techniques, they can also pose an obstacle for other survey types (PAPI, CAPI).<sup>38</sup> The second relevant drawback is the danger of providing superficial responses, which is related to the fact that an online survey might cause a weaker engagement of respondents concerning the possibility of re-

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<sup>36</sup> Jerzy Apanowicz, *Metodologiczne elementy procesu poznania naukowego w teorii organizacji i zarządzania* (Gdynia: Wydawnictwo Bernardinum 2000), 128.

<sup>37</sup> Piotr Jabłkowski, *Reprezentatywność badań reprezentatywnych. Analiza wybranych problemów metodologicznych oraz praktycznych w paradygmacie całkowitego błędu pomiaru*, 57–58.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*.

spondents receiving parallelly different stimuli. The great pace of providing answers also raises serious questions. The issues listed above can impact the quality of the acquired data, including their completeness. Research has revealed that, on average, the online survey method gives an 11% lower answer credibility index due to the mentioned factors.<sup>39</sup> The key method of eliminating the indicated technique drawbacks is a properly conducted research sample selection and utilisation of methods that improve the quality of acquired answers, such as detailed instruction, a clear questionnaire, or proper software that monitors provided answers.

Similarly, qualitative research is largely based on the use of various research techniques. First of all, observation, experiment, and individual and group interviews should be mentioned here. However, it should be emphasized that the first two techniques are much more often used in psychological and pedagogical research rather than in sociological research. An observation aims to conduct a deliberate observation of phenomena, processes, or human behaviour of a specific pattern. In turn, an individual in-depth interview, the so-called IDI, is based on a direct conversation between the respondent and the interviewer. However, the researcher's role is limited to pointing out individual issues that may arise from the subject of research when asking for a statement. Importantly, interview questions should be open-ended questions that require completion by the respondent. The interviewer's role is primarily to deepen the information received and to investigate the causes of significant phenomena, processes, and opinions. A group interview is referred to as a focus group interview, the so-called FGI, and consists of interviews according to a prepared scenario (containing topics for discussion/issues of interest to the researcher), involving a larger number of people (6-12). The course of the discussion is led by a moderator who encourages the participants to have a free discussion focused on a given topic, most often recorded by the researcher.

The above-mentioned research techniques, both quantitative and qualitative, do not exhaust the entire spectrum of research methods available to a modern researcher. However, the focus here is primarily on selected reactive methods while omitting the existing data analysis method as it is used much less frequently.

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<sup>39</sup> Lozar Manfreda, Michael Bosnjak, Jernej Berzelak, Hein Haas, and Vasja Vehovar, "Web Surveys versus Other Survey Modes: A Meta-Analysis Comparing Response Rates," *International Journal of Market Research* 1(2008): 15–16.

## 8. SELECTION OF THE RESEARCH SAMPLE

A crucial condition for properly conducted empirical research is the selection of a representative research sample. It is a part of collectiveness, the subject of statistical research<sup>40</sup> focused on measuring a chosen trait or group of traits whose value can be estimated based on research and is later generalised based on the whole population. Due to organisational and economic difficulties, it is necessary to narrow the research field to a specific sample. A commonly used selection method in sociological research is a random sample. To make the sample selection methodologically correct and statistically representative, it should reflect the variety of the population and be sufficiently numerous. This is because each research group is characterised by traits appropriate for them, which in turn gives the possibility to generalise results on the whole population. The non-probability samples selected in a non-randomised way most often occur in qualitative research, where the sample is less numerous.

The essential foundation for determining the sample size is the decision on the value of acceptable measurement error. The error is related to a potential range of trust and distrust towards respondents, since answers provided by them constitute a base for inference. The objectivity of research must depend on the level of trust towards the respondents and the size of the sample. The sample will significantly minimise the risk of statistical error provided if it is correctly chosen. For the needs of pastoral analyses, the most appropriate and representative selection will be randomised, including the randomised-purposeful selection of that sample that takes into account the theological research issue.<sup>41</sup>

## 9. PILOT STUDIES

Originally, methodologically correct sociological research should be preceded by a pilot study, meaning initial research done before the relevant empirical measurement. This study has an experimental nature and is conducted on a small scale. The study's essential goal is to verify the questionnaire containing questions and acquire initial knowledge about the research envi-

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<sup>40</sup> Earl Babbie, *Badania Społeczne w Praktyce* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo naukowe PWN, 2005), 209–241.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibidem*.

ronment. It is also important to check the credibility of a chosen research method concerning the analysed issue, as well as collect, record, and initially analyse data. Using the pilot study, it is possible to check the adequacy of planned research on a theological research issue, the correctness of the instructions for respondents, and the precision of formulated questions.<sup>42</sup> A pilot study indeed provides only initial information on the hypotheses and data regarding the research environment and researched issue; however, this progress reveals relevant information selection that allows rejecting irrelevant issues and focuses attention on key data. Thanks to the initial research, it is also possible to determine the time needed to conduct research. This research provides information regarding the possible reactions of respondents to the research issue and method of performing measurements, as well as data on the cost of a single measurement, which can then be finally estimated. The intentional method of choosing respondents in a pilot study is methodologically correct and tightly related to the theological research issue. Even though the research sample at this stage is usually small, it is postulated that it should achieve statistical relevance and thus oscillate at the approximate level of 5-10% of the sample assumed for the main research.<sup>43</sup>

#### 10. MODELS OF ANALYSING EMPIRICAL DATA

A crucial stage of empirical research in pastoral theology is data interpretation in both sociological and theological ways. For this, August Laumer postulates putting the same accent on social and theological studies.<sup>44</sup> At this point, it is essential to use statistical analysis methods by which it is possible to consider variables and correlation factors. There are many methods of interpreting data used in wide and complex sociological studies. However, in the paradigms of pastoral theology that consider empirical measurements, it is not necessary to use all of them, since they rarely point to relevant traits and dependencies from the practical point of view. Thus, the most often used correlation factors refer to praxeological reasoning. These factors are the Chi-squared test, Pearson's C and Cramér's V coefficients, and data index-

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<sup>42</sup> Stefan Nowak, *Metodologia badań społecznych* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo naukowe PWN, 2007), 59–61.

<sup>43</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>44</sup> August Laumer, *Pastoraltheologie. Eine Einführung in ihre Grundlagen. Pastoral Theology. An Introduction to its Basics* (Regensburg: Pustet-Verlag, 2015), 153–154.

ing. These methods seem to be sufficient in pastoral theology research because they allow interpreting the acquired data in terms of the effectiveness of pastoral methods and forms. Auxiliary techniques in data presentation that allow observing the statistical relevance in a clear and comprehensible way are cross-tabulation, graphic diagrams, charts, and tables.

The Chi-squared test is the most often used non-parameter test. This test is used to verify research hypotheses. However, it requires a big sample chosen randomly from a general collectiveness.<sup>45</sup> Pearson's C correlation coefficient is also significant. The coefficient points to the measurement of the relation between X and Y qualitative traits. It adopts a numerical value ranging from 0-1 and indicates a correlation or the lack of it. The coefficient points to independent traits in the case of a value equal to 0. Meanwhile, a value equal to 1 indicates a functional dependency. However, the essential drawback of this coefficient is the lack of possibility to determine the direction of dependency. Cramér's V coefficient is also important. It allows indicating the level of dependency between two variables. Data indexing is also a helpful measure. Its purpose is to summarize indexes and collective variables and pass from a nominal to a quantitative level to enable a comparison between values of coefficients. Indexing also allows one to use statistical tests to compare the results in the case of multiple research samples. The indexes also allow for verifying research hypotheses and comparing collective variables in different groups marked with demo-social traits.

The empirical data analysis should be done using qualitative and quantitative analyses. The former analysis type concerns mainly sample description, a description of unit variables and their comparison, and a description of answers coming from multiple choice questions and open questions. The latter analysis refers to verifying the hypotheses, interpreting the research issues, and interpreting the collective indexes while comparing them. A relevant issue is the fact that the verification of research hypotheses and issues should be done using statistical methods.

It should be remembered, however, that the analysis of results of research conducted under pastoral theology cannot include a purely sociological analysis. It is essential to also conduct a theological analysis. The point is, first of all, that acquired research results should be analysed in reference to theological criteria determined at the normative stage of an adopted methodolog-

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<sup>45</sup> Maria Nawojczyk, *Przewodnik po statystyce dla socjologów* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo SPSS Polska, 2002), 212.



ical paradigm. Only a credible sociological-theological analysis will solve the research issue and formulate adequate conclusions and valuable postulations for the future.

## 11. CONCLUSION

In modern scientific discourse, analyses have a more interdisciplinary nature. This results from the fact that, since more research problems are sufficiently multidimensional and complex, it is difficult to solve them using the achievements of only one discipline.<sup>46</sup> Pope Francis postulated so in the 2017 Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis Gaudium* on Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties:

Today's discovery of the principle of interdisciplinarity is undoubtedly positive and promising: not so much in its form of "weak" mere multidisciplinary as an approach that fosters a better understanding of a subject of study from several points of view; but more in its form of "strong" transdisciplinarity, as the place and development of all knowledge within the space of Light and Life offered by the Wisdom that emanates from the Revelation of God.<sup>47</sup>

Similarly, Pope John Paul II directly points to the importance of theological and pastoral research with the use of sociology. In the exhortation *Familiaris consortio* he wrote:

The Church appreciates sociological and statistical research as long as it proves useful for grasping the historical context in which it is to develop pastoral activity and for better understanding of the truth; however, these studies cannot be regarded as an expression of the sense of faith.<sup>48</sup>

In a way, the popes are in favour of the trend taking place in the contemporary scientific discourse on interdisciplinary research.<sup>49</sup> As Grzegorz Strzelczyk notes, "theology cannot avoid the postulate of interdisciplinari-

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<sup>46</sup> Jarosław Merecki, "Interdyscyplinarność teologii," *Wrocławski Przegląd Teologiczny* 26(2018): 165–176.

<sup>47</sup> Francis, *Veritatis gaudium* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2017), no. 4.

<sup>48</sup> John Paul II, *Familiaris consortio* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1981), no. 5.

<sup>49</sup> Joe Moran, *Interdisciplinarity* (London–New York: Routledge, 2002).

ty.”<sup>50</sup> On the contrary, it should assume the challenge of meeting these trends while maintaining its identity based on Revelation. Such research is an opportunity for development because

the interdisciplinary perspective can help theologians design pastoral solutions. Interdisciplinary research can also be used as a tool that assesses pastoral activities by examining pastoral structures or practices, identifying issues related to new forms of communication and evangelization on the Internet, communicativeness of language, i.e., whether it is preaching or communication in the Church as a community and institution. This allows noticing the stereotypes functioning in the minds of the faithful or clergy but also opens up new areas of research questions.<sup>51</sup>

These remarks also refer to pastoral theology, which must refer to other sciences while solving issues of its own. For this reason, the commonly used methodological paradigms of pastoral theology assume the inclusion of empirical studies, such as sociology, pedagogy, or psychology. Sociology is considered to be particularly helpful among them.<sup>52</sup> Many research issues require diagnosing the modern pastoral situation. In turn, the conclusions and postulates drawn can be of great practical value, especially when they are based on empirical data or the results of extensive social research. They can also become the basis for theoretical assumptions of pastoral care that are sourced in theological norms, which is the main goal of pastoral theology.

On the other hand, some pastoral theologians warn that taking into account too much sociological research can lead to treating pastoral theology as an empirical science.<sup>53</sup> As they point out, basing everything on sociological methods and measurement techniques, as well as developed and often complicated statistical analyses, directs pastoral theology towards “pastoral sociology.”<sup>54</sup> There are even propositions to develop a discipline defined as pastoral sociology. As Vivencio O. Ballano states: “One emerging subfield of practical theology that can provide a holistic view of the pastoral concerns

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<sup>50</sup> Grzegorz Strzelczyk, “Potrzeba interdyscyplinarności w polskiej teologii. Uwagi metodologiczne,” *Teologia w Polsce* 2(2008): 261.

<sup>51</sup> Szymczak, “Interdisciplinarity in Pastoral Theology. An Example of Socio-Theological Research,” 503–527.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>53</sup> Raimund Ritter, *Religionssoziologie zur Seelsorge. Einführung in die Pastoralsoziologie* (Limburg: Lahn-Verlag, 1968), 7–8.

<sup>54</sup> Józef Majka, *Metodologia nauk teologicznych* (Wrocław: TUM, 1995), 349–350.

of priests in the ministry is pastoral sociology.”<sup>55</sup> This sub-discipline would rely on the “integration of social science methods, theory, and research findings with the theological language and self-understanding of church life and ministry.”<sup>56</sup> However, it should be remembered that pastoral theology is a theological discipline and its basic source is always Christian Revelation without refusing the rational foundations of these opinions. As T. Wielebski and M. J. Tutak postulated, special attention should be paid in this context to the autonomy of both disciplines.<sup>57</sup>

## 12. METHODS MEETING THE INTERDISCIPLINARY CRITERION

It seems that a concrete response to the postulate of the interdisciplinarity of pastoral theology is the paradigm based on the see-judge-act triad and the paradigm of three stages of theological and pastoral analysis. They take into account the sociological stage. They also allow the use of empirical data when drawing conclusions. W. Przygoda postulates that the methods of induction and deduction in the scientific process should also be taken into account in scientific proceedings based on these paradigms.<sup>58</sup> Importantly, when taking into account sociological methods, it is postulated to use and combine both quantitative and qualitative research in the research process. This process, called triangulation, seems to be particularly appropriate and desirable in pastoral theology, because quantitative measurements allow determining the scale of phenomena, changes, or opinions, whereas qualitative analyses indicate the causes of these phenomena. “Thanks to the triangulation of research techniques that consist in the use of several different methods of examining the analysed case, the obtained knowledge is multifaceted, comprehensive and verified.”<sup>59</sup>

However, it should be emphasized that scientific procedures, especially at

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<sup>55</sup> Ballano, “The Social Sciences, Pastoral Theology, and Pastoral Work: Understanding the Underutilization of Sociology in Catholic Pastoral Ministry,” 542.

<sup>56</sup> Bryan Froehle, “Catholic Pastoral Sociology in the United States since Vatican II. Making a Path by Walking,” *US Catholic Historian* 25(2007): 85–116.

<sup>57</sup> Tomasz Wielebski, and Mateusz J. Tutak, “Diagnoza i prognoza jako narzędzie dialogu teologii pastoralnej z socjologią na przykładzie świętowania niedzieli i starzenia się społeczeństwa w Polsce,” *Teologia Praktyczna* 11(2010): 29.

<sup>58</sup> Przygoda, “Paradygmaty metodologiczne współczesnej teologii pastoralnej,” 31–32.

<sup>59</sup> Szymczak, “Interdisciplinarity in Pastoral Theology. An Example of Socio-Theological Research,” 521.

the cariological stage, should include several properly conducted research stages. These include operationalization consisting of defining detailed questions and research hypotheses, constructing research tools, selecting an appropriate research technique corresponding to the subject of research and guaranteeing expected results, methodologically correctly selecting the research sample, the pilot studies stage that allows correcting research tools and programming basic measurements, and determining the appropriate model for the analysis of empirical data in relation to dependencies between features and variables. Graphic heuristic diagrams can help determine the dependencies. Crucial at this stage<sup>60</sup> is the statistical analysis based on coefficients specific to pastoral theology, because they indicate correlations and the strength of relationships between individual features or variables.

Next, as W. Piwowarski suggests, a theological interpretation of the obtained empirical data pointing to conditions of the pastoral situation of the Church is possible and desirable.<sup>61</sup> It seems good to emphasize the need for methodological correctness and the proper sequence of individual stages of the research procedure based on the teachings of the Church's Magisterium. However, this includes theological goals that also refer to basic knowledge in the field of sociology, which is auxiliary to theological and pastoral analyses.

Undoubtedly, it is necessary to possess empirical data for pastoral theology. "Some theologians have long recognized that they cannot operate effectively without anthropological knowledge and recourse to the social sciences."<sup>62</sup> An adequate answer to modern pastoral issues must be preceded substantially and methodologically with credible empirical research. Without a doubt, theology needs sociology to provide an answer to modern pastoral issues.<sup>63</sup> Therefore, pastoral theologians must be able to construct research tools, conduct research, and analyse results. This is a field of cooperation with representatives of other disciplines who have the right research techniques and tools.<sup>64</sup> However, pastoral theology at the same time cannot and should not be reduced to sociology or even to sociology of religion. Pastoral theology possesses its methodology and recognises contents coming from

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<sup>60</sup> Ibidem, 518.

<sup>61</sup> Władysław Piwowarski, "Eklezjologiczna koncepcja teologii pastoralnej," 121–122.

<sup>62</sup> Ballano, "The Social Sciences, Pastoral Theology, and Pastoral Work: Understanding the Underutilization of Sociology in Catholic Pastoral Ministry," 538.

<sup>63</sup> Ibidem, 542–543.

<sup>64</sup> Tomasz Wielebski, and Mateusz J. Tutak, "Meandry interdyscyplinarności teologii pastoralnej. Przyczynek do dyskusji," *Teologia Praktyczna* 17(2016): 39.

Christian Revelation, Sacred Scriptures, and Tradition as its main sources. Therefore, it should be remembered that sociological research constitutes only one research stage under wide pastoral theology paradigms. Both preparing for research and analysing the results should be done mainly based on theological criteria. Solving research issues and presenting postulates for the future should serve to improve pastoral practices and, in the final perspective, ensure man's salvation.

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## BADANIA SOCJOLOGICZNE W TEOLOGII PASTORALNEJ. CELE I REALIZACJA

### Streszczenie

W niniejszym artykule ukazano znaczenie badań socjologicznych w teologii pastoralnej oraz wskazano na główne uwarunkowania ich prawidłowego prowadzenia. W pierwszym rzędzie przedstawiono paradygmaty teologii pastoralnej, czyli ramy, w których prowadzone są badania w tej dyscyplinie. Studia te przewidują określoną sekwencję działań zmierzających do rozwiązania teologicznych problemów badawczych. Jednym z etapów badawczych jest etap socjologiczny, który służy ocenie określonej rzeczywistości duszpasterskiej i stanowi punkt wyjścia dla postulatów zmierzających do jej poprawy. Następnie dokonano prezentacji metodologicznych wskazań dotyczących przygotowania i przeprowadzenia badań socjologicznych oraz analizy uzyskanych

wyników. Przedmiotem analizy kolejnej części artykułu były zagadnienia takie, jak operacjonalizacja badań i konstrukcja narzędzia badawczego, techniki badawcze, dobór próby badawczej, badania pilotażowe oraz metody analizy materiału empirycznego. Znajomość metodologicznych etapów postępowania naukowego wykorzystującego metody socjologiczne wydaje się niezbędną dla pastoralistów i katechetyków prowadzących badania empiryczne.

**Słowa kluczowe:** teologia pastoralna; paradygmaty teologii pastoralnej; metody badawcze; techniki badawcze; socjologia religii; interdyscyplinarność