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The Role of Catholicism in Shaping a Culture of Sustainable Consumption

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Abstract: The paper presents the potential of religions, in particular Christianity, in shaping a culture of sustainable consumption (a culture of moderation). It focuses on the contribution of the Catholic tradition, which is, to some extent, complemented by statements representing other Christian denominations. Based on an analysis of relevant sources, it identifies risks arising from the prevalence of a consumer culture, which results in the primacy of “having” over “being” and reduces man to a *Homo consumens*. Moreover, the widespread culture of consumerism is associated with a so-called throwaway culture dominated by a disposable mentality making use of things and people. It also points to one of the key elements of consumer culture (a culture of overuse) in the form of so-called neophilia, resulting in the weakening of interpersonal relationships, the atomization of societies, and depletion of the Earth’s resources, combined with reckless wastefulness. An analysis of consumer culture leads to the identification of elements that underpin a culture of moderation, being an antidote to dangers arising from the prevalence of consumer culture. The most important elements shaping a model of culture that is man- and environment-friendly include a new model of progress, a mentality of communion, and a new lifestyle. It is a model of progress, which is not limited merely to economics, but takes into account the need for integral human development and appreciates the spiritual and cultural sphere of life. In order to build a culture of moderation, a communion mentality is needed to restore interpersonal relationships and make man aware of his relation to the whole community of life. Another important element of a culture of moderation is a new lifestyle which takes into account all human needs, respects the potential of the natural environment, and is characterized by intra-generational and inter-generational responsibility. There is much to suggest that Christianity has the potential to make a significant contribution to reducing the culture of overuse and promoting a culture of moderation. The influence of Catholic thought on shaping a culture of sustainable consumption is illustrated by the introduction of restrictions on Sunday shopping in Poland in 2018. This case study shows the importance of religious arguments in introducing legal changes and their impact on promoting a culture of moderation.

Keywords: consumer culture; a culture of sustainable consumption; *Homo consumens*; being and having; throwaway culture; disposable mentality; culture of communion; utility culture; lifestyle; wastefulness



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1. Introduction

Consumption is a phenomenon inherent in the nature of every living being, and it is therefore universal and inevitable. In order to live and pass on life to future generations, all living organisms must satisfy their needs—that is, to consume. As pointed out by Jakob von Uexküll, man’s approach to consumption is unique, however. He makes his case by pointing to the difference between man and all other living beings in their perception of the world around them. He explains this difference by introducing a distinction between *Umgebung* (surroundings) and *Umwelt* (environment) (von Uexküll 1909). While, for all living beings, the surroundings are merely a collection of objects around them, the environment is a space transformed and adapted by these beings to foster their life and

development. Man's uniqueness lies in the fact that he transforms *the entire* surroundings available to him into his living environment, while other living beings do so only to a *very limited extent* (Lepko 2016).

As a result, we are witnessing man's continuous expansion; as technical possibilities increase, man keeps broadening the scope of his activity, no longer limiting it to the Earth alone, but increasingly reaching out into space as well. Jakob von Uexküll's concept seems to offer a good explanation of reasons behind the rapidly growing human consumption, and leads to the conclusion is that this trend should be reduced in a way that is proper to man, i.e., by building a desirable model of culture.

To assist the reader in understanding this paper, it will be helpful to first define the two core terms it refers to: the culture of moderation and sustainable consumption. The term "culture of moderation" is used interchangeably with the term "culture of sustainable consumption". A culture of moderation is seen as standing in opposition to the culture of consumerism. Its characteristic features include a new model of progress, a mentality of communion, and a new lifestyle. The model of progress that is essential to the culture of moderation is one that goes beyond the economic dimension, and takes into account the cultural and spiritual dimension of human life. Another key element of the culture of moderation is the mentality of communion, which transcends the barriers of human selfishness and greed, restores family and social bonds, and provides the basis for intra-generational equity that is not limited to man alone, but encompasses the entire community of life. Yet another important manifestation of the culture of moderation is a new lifestyle which is based on a proper understanding of the position and role of man in the world, as well as his unique talents: the capacity for reflection, responsibility, and solidarity. All these qualities are necessary for man to develop an asceticism in the consumption of material goods, and pay more attention to the acquisition of cultural and spiritual ones, thus promoting a culture of moderation.

The term "sustainable consumption", on the other hand, is understood in this paper as a way of using the planet's natural resources to minimize the negative environmental consequences while meeting the present and future needs of mankind. On the one hand, it is therefore a question of making efficient use of the available resources; minimizing waste and pollution; using renewable resources in a way that ensures their continued renewability; extending the lifecycle of manufactured goods. On the other hand, it is about meeting the needs of mankind in a way that respects intra-generational and inter-generational equity (United Nations 1992, chp. 4).

Reference to culture seems particularly important considering that leading studies on consumption show that changes in the approach to consumption go hand in hand with cultural changes. This is well illustrated by the works of Zygmunt Bauman, who, distinguishing between two phases of modernity, identifies two different approaches to consumption. Importantly, he speaks not about consumption as such, but about consumerism. Consumption turns into consumerism when it ceases to be a means to satisfying man's needs, becomes an end in itself, and dominates all human activity (Bauman 2009). The prevalence of this attitude is one of the major factors that contribute to deepening the environmental crisis. The processes of globalization and the progressive westernization of the world entail the promotion of consumerism in the farthest reaches of the planet, thus further compounding environmental problems. This has been reflected in the so-called 2030 Agenda adopted by the UN, particularly the 12th Sustainable Development Goal—Responsible Consumption and Production. It seems, therefore, that in seeking allies to develop a culture of moderation which could become an antidote to the increasingly prevalent culture of consumerism, it is necessary to refer to the Catholic doctrine, which may offer significant support to efforts aimed at changing consumption habits and thus contribute to improving the condition of our planet.

The starting point of this study is the thesis that religions significantly influence the shape of cultures and, consequently, religious doctrines affect the attitudes of their followers. The author takes the view that the religious studies approach to culture helps

capture the environmental potential of Catholicism, which the author identifies with. This potential may be used to overcome the environmental crisis, representing an urgent challenge for humankind today. One important factor aggravating this crisis is the prevailing model of consumption. Hence the author's belief that Catholicism contributes to a pro-environmental model of consumption. An adequate illustration is provided by a case study of changes in legal regulations in Poland concerning trade restrictions on Sundays and public holidays. Three years after the amendments of 2018, it is now possible to make a preliminary assessment of their consequences. The author proposes the following research hypotheses:

Hypotheses 1 (H1). *The teaching of the Catholic Church on consumption supports the development of a culture of moderation.*

Hypotheses 2 (H2). *The Catholic tradition seeks to overcome the prevailing model of consumer culture, particularly its manifestations such as neophilia, wastefulness and disposable mentality.*

Hypotheses 3 (H3). *The Catholic tradition supports a model of sustainable consumption, particularly its manifestations such as a new model of progress, a new lifestyle and a culture of communion.*

In addition to showing the potential of religion to shape a culture of sustainable consumption (a culture of moderation), the goal of this study is to identify the role of Catholicism in overcoming the culture of consumerism (a culture of overuse) and its manifestations (neophilia, wastefulness, a throwaway culture) and promoting a culture of sustainable consumption and its manifestations (a new model of progress, a culture of communion, a new lifestyle).

2. The Potential of Religion in Building a Sustainable World

The presence of religion in the struggle to overcome the environmental crisis is self-evident today. Indeed, it seems impossible, or most difficult at the very least, to build a sustainable world without the contribution of religion (Tucker 2011; Gardner 2006). It comes as no surprise, therefore, that when analyzing the negative effects of consumerism, the problem is also considered from a religious perspective.

The participation of religion in the environmental debate dates back to the 1960s. The ecological awakening of religion is largely linked to the publication of an article entitled *Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis* by Lynn White (1967). The article sparked off a debate on the role of Christianity in bringing about the environmental crisis. The debate continues to this day and has resulted in an in-depth, interdisciplinary analysis, which shows both the impact of different religions on causing the environmental crisis, and their contribution to overcoming it.

Much credit for reviving this debate is owed to Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, who held a series of ten conferences devoted to this topic at Harvard University from 1995 to 1998. These conferences brought together about 600 speakers, representing various scientific disciplines and religious traditions, and proved so interesting that they led to the establishment of the Forum on Religion and Ecology. The Forum still exists today, inspiring scientific research and actively supporting various initiatives related to the involvement of religion in environmental issues (Grim and Tucker 2014).

The ecological potential of religion has also been noted by scientists involved in the fight against the environmental crisis. Back in January 1990, 34 prominent scientists from around the world sent an *Open Letter to the Religious Community* asking religious leaders and followers of all religions to commit to caring for the condition of our planet. In 1992, the Union of Concerned Scientists made a poignant appeal to the public, entitled *World Scientists' Warnings to Humanity*, urging everyone to engage in fighting the environmental crisis. The addressees explicitly include the world's religious leaders (Tucker 2011).

The international scientific debate on the relationship between religion and ecology has also inspired practical efforts to protect our planet. Many ecological organizations of religious provenance have been established, in which followers of various religious

traditions have undertaken concrete environmental projects for spiritual motives. The emergence of these organizations and their participation in efforts to combat the environmental crisis have been acknowledged by activists representing the world's largest ecological organizations. One could hardly imagine climate summits (Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, COP) or other international bodies debating on the condition of our planet without representatives of NGOs being accompanied by "religious" environmentalists (Allison 2007). Recent research shows that, while the number of religious organizations accredited to participate in COPs accounts for as little as 3%, as many as 80% of those faith-based groups are Christian (Krantz 2021).

The *State of the World 2003* report published by the Worldwatch Institute, in which an entire chapter entitled "Engaging Religion in the Quest of the Sustainable World" is devoted to this topic, confirms the great potential of religion in addressing the so-called environmental issue. The author lists at least five strong assets to the effort to build a sustainable world: (1) the capacity to shape cosmologies (worldviews); (2) moral authority; (3) a large base of adherents; (4) significant material resources; (5) community-building capacity (Gardner 2003).

The ecological potential of religion is also confirmed by studies of religiosity, which clearly show that religious beliefs affect the daily choices of their followers. The impact of these beliefs depends on many factors and varies. However, a worldwide study conducted between 2006 and 2008 across 143 countries confirms that, on average, more than 80% of the human population takes into account the norms of their religions when making decisions (Crabtree and Pelham 2009). Even considering the fact that this research was carried out more than a decade ago and that secularization processes affect various regions of the world, it is nevertheless likely that the impact of religious beliefs on decisions taken by their adherents is still significant. This impact should not decrease particularly in the context of commitment to the environment. The respondents answered a question about the importance of religion in their daily lives.

The above information shows that religions have considerable ecological potential, which may significantly support efforts to improve the condition of our planet. This potential may be employed in a number of ways. Religious argumentation has an individual dimension to it, as, in the end, it is the individual follower of a particular religion who makes choices that have pro- or anti-environmental consequences. In this sense, religions can shift environmental action from the global level to the most local level where it concerns individual persons and families. This potential may also be used to focus attention on a particular topic, e.g., overcoming a culture of consumerism. This study attempts to employ the ecological potential of Christianity in overcoming the culture of consumerism (a culture of overuse) and introducing a culture of sustainable consumption (a culture of moderation).

Considering that Catholicism is the largest Christian denomination (1.2 billion out of the 2.4 billion Christians), which accounts for about 1/6 of the human population, and has organizational structures in nearly all countries around the world, it can be assumed that recourse to religious arguments may have a significant impact on the formation of a culture of sustainable consumption and thus correct the consumption habits of a major portion of humanity (Johnson et al. 2015).

Thanks to the institution of papacy, not only does it have organizational structures in place together with effective ways of communicating directly with its followers (papal pilgrimages and messages, encyclicals, synods, etc.), but is also a subject of international law. In international relations, the Holy See acts as the Vatican State established by the Lateran Treaties and the Concordat with the State of Italy of 11 February 1929 (Sitarz 2014). This allows the Holy See to establish diplomatic relations with individual states and to participate in the activities of international organizations. While the Vatican City is not a member of the UN, it has the status of permanent observer, which allows it to participate in the works of the UN and gives it the right to present opinions on the UN forum on behalf of all Catholics (Byrnes 2017). Another example of the potential influence of the Catholic

Church at the international level is its cooperation with the European Union through the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union (COMECE). It regularly monitors all EU initiatives and has a wide range of experts able to respond quickly to any controversial projects (COMECE 2020). The above are just some of the examples illustrating the ability of the Catholic Church to influence the public opinion globally. In addition, Catholicism also has a number of structures at the regional, state, and local level. This affords it with much opportunity to influence its followers.

The above clearly suggests that the Catholic Church may become an important ally in the fight against the culture of consumerism and in promoting a culture of sustainable consumption (Boguszewski et al. 2020). This challenge is common to all the major Christian denominations. On the one hand, this is due to spiritual reasons which motivate Christians to be concerned about their spiritual development, asceticism, restraint in the accumulation of temporal goods, and giving alms to the poor. On the other hand, there are numerous examples of commitment not only by religious leaders but also by Christian organizations and individual Christians to caring for the condition of our planet. It therefore appears that recourse to religious arguments and the Christian heritage may significantly support the development of a culture of moderation.

3. The Role of Catholicism in Limiting the Consumption of Material Goods

The culture of consumerism is now increasingly accepted not only in developed countries, but in developing ones as well. This phenomenon appears to be closely linked both to globalization and to the still prevailing model of economic development based on constantly increasing production and exploitation of our planet's resources (Leźnicki 2021; Hull 2019). The manufacturers of goods are interested in maintaining this state of affairs and therefore support all initiatives to increase interest in certain goods. As a result, what we are witnessing today involves not just satisfying man's basic needs, but artificial creation of new needs, if not whims, and upholding the belief that the acquisition of certain goods makes man more valuable, gives him a sense of belonging to an elite, or even constitutes an antidote to stress and disappointments in life. All of this leads to the spread of a culture of consumerism, supported by mass culture and social media. This culture is particularly dangerous to the younger generation, who are not yet able to carefully consider the advisability of buying certain goods and are prone to being "educated" in consumerism through the promotion of certain cultural patterns and fashions prevalent among children and young people.

This situation is further compounded by the fact that the pervasive consumer mentality leads to the homogenization of culture and impoverishment of the cultural riches of humanity. As a consequence, certain administrative, legal, and technical solutions are sometimes imposed as the only reasonable ones without taking into account the complexity of local circumstances (Francis 2015, No. 144). It appears that religions, including Christianity, are able to face up to these difficulties. By identifying the challenges inherent in a culture of consumerism, they propose solutions that are in tune with the culture prevailing in particular local communities, and are able to help these communities develop their own solutions. There is much to suggest that religions are interested in changing the current state of affairs not only because of the environmentally disastrous consequences of degenerate consumption, but also because of the emergence of an inappropriate model of living that equates happiness and success in life with what can be acquired, reducing man to *Homo consumens*, focused only on the material dimension of life (Dziura and Wolanin-Jarosz 2014).

Succumbing to the temptation of consumerism also entails numerous social risks: unfair distribution of goods and disparities between different social groups and entire nations; erroneous models of economic development and scientific and technical progress; destruction of the natural environment; the crisis of families, and many other risks. A consumerist lifestyle also often leads to abandoning faith, which results in a sense of material self-sufficiency that is projected onto the whole of human existence. Due to space considerations, only selected manifestations of the culture of consumerism will be

presented in this paper which are—or so it appears—and should be remedied by reference to religious norms.

An important manifestation of the culture of consumerism is the increasingly prevailing *neophilia*. The term is used in different contexts. From animal behavior, through man's culinary preferences and trends in choosing university subjects, to attitudes concerning consumer habits (Griffin et al. 2017; Edge 2018; Chakrabarti 2007; Lorenz 1973). This study will focus on understanding neophilia as proposed by Konrad Lorenz.

Analyzing examples of the most disastrous behaviors of civilized humanity, Lorenz points to a dangerous phenomenon which consists in the constant urge to satisfy one's hunger for pleasure. In pursuing it, man is forced to constantly look for new stimuli, because the old ones, as they are repeated, cease to perform their task. A representative of the culture of consumerism keeps losing interest in things and strives to replace them with new ones (Lorenz 1973). A good example of this phenomenon is the constant pursuit of the latest models of electronic gadgets. New devices replace old ones not because they are no longer functional. They are replaced because their users have become bored with them, and because owning the latest models provides them with the comfort of belonging to the elite and increases their self-esteem and sense of being special.

Lorenz points out that this phenomenon does not only apply to material goods. This model of functioning is increasingly affecting pets, and even other people (Lorenz 1973). Hence the overcrowded animal shelters, short-lived friendships and marriages, and a severe deficit in deep human relationships. Man formed by the culture of consumerism does not put any effort in establishing lasting relationships as this would entail making commitments, investing time and becoming involved, and may lead to disappointment or frustration. It is much less burdensome and easier to establish one-time relationships through various online platforms which bring together people interested in certain activities or pastimes. As a result, man succumbing to the temptation of a consumer culture simplifies his life, while at the same time making it shallow and superficial, which ultimately results in loneliness and a sense of meaninglessness.

Another manifestation of the culture of consumerism that is associated with neophilia is what Pope Francis has described as a throwaway culture and a disposable mentality that it engenders. The throwaway culture promotes a utilitarian treatment of objects and people, so that when they are no longer needed, they are treated as waste. A representative of the culture of consumerism does not consider the way ecosystems (the economy of nature) works as an example of the functioning of human economy. What constitutes a closed life cycle in nature is not cyclical in the case of human beings. Man light-heartedly reaches for ever new resources to achieve his goals (Francis 2015). A mentality of recycling, giving things a "second life" by reselling or donating them, and the circular model of economics are, unfortunately, still but slogans and represent only a small margin of global economics.

The throwaway culture also goes hand in hand with the so-called disposable mentality. Due to the ease of obtaining disposable items, the simplest solutions are often chosen: disposable plastic bags, cups, cutlery, bottles, napkins, etc. (Bloniarz et al. 2018) The environmental consequences of such choices are not considered. Most of today's children have never even seen cloth handkerchiefs or mended clothes. These civilization changes illustrate the shift in modern man's way of thinking: an attitude of making one's life easier here and now without considering the long-term consequences of today's actions (Bauman 2018). All of this reaffirms the conviction accompanying consumer culture that everything and everyone may be replaced, that everything has a price and may be bought, and that everything is negotiable (Camosy 2019). Consequently, it appears pointless to wash a cloth handkerchief, repair damaged clothes or broken devices, make friends, put effort into getting to know one's neighbors, or even fight for one's marriage. The disposable mentality deprives objects and people of their exceptionality and uniqueness, so that after being "used" they are treated as waste.

The third and final manifestation of the culture of consumerism presented in this paper is wastefulness. The mentality of reckless and light-hearted use of resources has become a

hallmark of modern consumerism. This mentality is the result of easy access to more and more products and the ability to replace them. Wastefulness is a direct consequence of a throwaway culture and disposable mentality. Today we are witnessing selfish exploitation of the planet's non-renewable resources, which belong to all of its inhabitants, including those who will come to live on it in the future (Costag et al. 2018). Today's generations carelessly use resources that can never be renewed. One of the most distinctive features of the culture of consumerism seems to be a lack of inter-generational responsibility and solidarity. Seduced by the temptation to acquire and possess, a victim of consumerist culture is not only self-centered and refuses to share resources with future generations, but does not even want to share them with those representatives of his own generation who, for various reasons, have failed to achieve economic success. It thus appears that another characteristic feature of consumerist culture is the lack of intra-generational responsibility and solidarity (Francis 2015, No. 162).

The contribution of Catholicism to building a culture of moderation includes its criticism of consumer culture on the one hand, and its encouragement urging Catholics and all people of good will not to reduce their lives to the material dimension on the other. The following are examples of speeches by Christian leaders who encourage their fellow believers to reject certain manifestations of a culture of consumerism. Academic literature abounds in examples of studies presenting the Catholic social teaching on the dangers of consumerism (Himes 2007). They all encourage the faithful to maintain a reasonable balance between "having" and "being". This balance is a condition for genuine human development. From the Catholic perspective, consumerism manifests a compulsive desire to fill spiritual emptiness, and is sometimes even referred to as idolatry (Azevedo 2019).

Addressing the issue of consumerism, Pope John Paul II states that the pursuit of decent living conditions is not reprehensible, but points to certain dangers inherent to it, in particular the rejection of an appropriate concept of man in which the material and instinctive dimension of human life is subordinated to the inner and spiritual dimension (John 1991). In his address to young people during the 20th World Youth Day in Cologne, he made a dramatic appeal: "My dear young people, do not yield to *false illusions* and *passing fads* which so frequently leave behind a tragic spiritual vacuum! Reject the *seduction* of wealth, consumerism and the subtle violence sometimes used by the mass media" (John 2005, No. 5).

In their warnings against succumbing to the culture of consumerism, successive Popes point out that, despite the ever-increasing global wealth, "the scandal of glaring inequalities" still exists (Benedict 2009, No. 22). Pope Francis also speaks in a similar vein, sadly concluding that "we have not yet managed to adopt a circular model of production capable of preserving resources for present and future generations, while limiting as much as possible the use of non-renewable resources, moderating their consumption, maximizing their efficient use, reusing and recycling them. A serious consideration of this issue would be one way of counteracting the throwaway culture which affects the entire planet, but it must be said that only limited progress has been made in this regard" (Francis 2015, No. 22).

The World Council of Churches also appeals to the faithful not to succumb to the temptation of consumerism. The Council warns that globalization may lead mankind into "«a dangerous place» dominated by values of consumerism, and where scientific and technological advances have no «moral orientation» (. . .) As powerful nations and corporations take advantage of their opportunities at the expense of the poor and powerless, only a church «transformed by the ecumenical vision» can intervene as the herald of God's globalization" (WCC 2002). When speaking about eco-justice and ecological debt, the Central Committee of the WCC points to the need for a drastic transformation in order to re-ordering of economic paradigms from consumerist, exploitive models to models that are respectful of localized economies, indigenous cultures and spiritualities, the earth's reproductive limits, as well as the right of other life forms to blossom (WCC 2009).

In an address entitled “The Role of the Churches in Today’s Europe”, the head of the Orthodox Church, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, stated that the Church “criticizes all anti-personalistic powers, which undermine social cohesion and solidarity, transform the human being into a consumerist, to the detriment of his fellowmen and nature, and of the lives of future generations. The most serious contemporary threat of solidarity is economism, the deification of market and profit. We reject «economic reductionism, » the reduction of the human being to *Homo economicus*, the identification of «being»” with «having»” (Bartholomew 2019).

Christian leaders also condemn the throwaway culture, which results in a crisis of family and social ties. In this context, Pope Francis points out that the social problems caused by a consumerism bereft of ethics can only be answered by strengthening community ties, because a simple sum of individual efforts will not solve social problems (Francis 2015, No. 162, 219). The Pope also signals the problem of wastefulness, which results in the depletion of resources on the one hand, and the production of huge amounts of waste on the other (Francis 2015, No. 22). Consequently, some hail him as a supporter and promoter of the Zero Waste movement (Zerowasteurope.eu 2015).

The above statements clearly confirm that regardless of the type of Christian denomination, there is a unanimous condemnation of consumerist culture, which entails the danger of destroying both the natural and the human environment. Man focused on the constant acquisition of material goods neglects the integrity of his own development, which should also take into account the cultural and spiritual dimension.

4. The Role of Catholicism in Promoting a New Model of Progress, a Culture of Communion and a New Lifestyle

Catholicism’s rejection of consumerist culture is not a negation of prosperous and comfortable life. “It is not wrong to want to live better; what is wrong is a style of life which is presumed to be better when it is directed towards «having» rather than «being», and which wants to have more, not in order to be more but in order to spend life in enjoyment as an end in itself” (John 1991, No. 36). Catholic thought therefore points to the need to uphold the primacy of “being” over “having”. Satisfying one’s needs to “have” more should always entail a desire to “be” more. The possession of goods helps perfect man only if it contributes to the enrichment of his “being”, that is, to the realization of his human vocation by adopting an authentic hierarchy of values (John 1987, No. 28). This happens when the possession of material goods serves to meet man’s true needs, that is, enables him to develop harmoniously, holistically, and integrally. True development is not about accumulating wealth and freely using goods and services, but about valuing the cultural and spiritual dimension of man (John 1987, No. 9).

Heads of the Eastern Orthodox Church gathered at the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church in 2016 speak in a similar vein. In the outcome document, they point to the great challenges humanity faces today due to the increasingly prevalent individualism, the pursuit of happiness equated with the acquisition of material goods, and the rejection of a comprehensive concept of development. Participants in the Council conclude that the spread of individualism is, among other things, a consequence of blurring national and religious differences and the widening gap between the rich and the poor. This leads to the atomization of societies. The response of Council Fathers to these threats is to encourage upholding national identities and developing local traditions. Instead of globalization, they suggest that the modern world should unite along the organizational lines of the Orthodox Church, which respects the distinctness of the local Churches and their fundamental equality (HGCO 2016a). Moreover, the Council Fathers state that, in Christian tradition, it is not enough to atone for evil, but it is necessary to radically change mentalities and attitudes. They also encourage the rediscovery of asceticism as an antidote to consumerism, the idolatry of one’s own desires and the urge to possess (HGCO 2016b).

Building a culture of moderation entails the introduction of a new model of progress that will replace the old idea of progress focused on continuously increasing production and generating more and more profit. For progress reduced only to the economic dimension

turns against those it was supposed to serve. A test for authentic progress is whether it is carried out according to human nature, whether it is not limited to the acquisition of material goods, and whether it protects cultural identity, personal, social, and political rights (John 1987, Nos. 28, 32–33). The authentic development of our civilization should maintain a balance between the development of technology and the development of morality and ethics. Understood in such terms, it will help man become “truly better, that is to say more mature spiritually, more aware of the dignity of his humanity, more responsible, more open to others, especially the neediest and the weakest, and readier to give and to aid all” (John 1979, No. 15). Pope Francis stresses that such perspectives of authentic development are not specifically Christian, and that this issue is addressed in a similar way by other religious traditions which blame today’s utilitarian culture for disrupting man’s inner harmony (Francis 2015, No. 222).

Pope Francis also points out that inter-generational responsibility, which goes beyond the immediate here and now, should be an important element of the new model of development (Francis 2015, Nos. 159, 162). The Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church speaks in a similar vein about progress. The new model of progress must take into account the sphere of spiritual values and man’s call to salvation (HGCOG 2016b, Nos. 15, 9). Understood in such terms, progress seems to correspond to the approach proposed by Hans Jonas who says that genuine development must not be limited only to the horizontal (quantitative) dimension, but must also include the vertical (qualitative) one (Jonas 1985).

Another important element in building a culture of moderation is promoting a culture of communion, which is an antidote to the throwaway culture. We must not consent to today’s widespread mentality of using and throwing things away, which more and more often now applies to people as well (Sadowski 2017). Pope Francis points out that this phenomenon affects especially old people, the sick, children, and people with disabilities. One of the main reasons for such an attitude seems to be the fear of the rich of their duty of solidarity with the poor and the excluded. This attitude is the result of selfishness, a consequence of the crisis of interpersonal relationships, and the postmodern mentality of individualism, which focuses on instant gratification. A culture of communion is founded on the realization that all inhabitants of the Earth form one great community of life connected by the bonds of fraternity (Francis 2015, No. 162).

Christianity in all of its denominations is a community based on the brotherhood of Christ’s disciples and the sacrament of baptism. The Christian vision of the world, however, clearly shows that the human community is not limited to Christians: it includes all people as they are children of God, called into existence by their Creator. Moreover, as pointed out by Pope Francis, the culture of communion must not be limited to people, but should also include all living beings which, together with man, form one great community of life (Francis 2015, No. 11). Understood in such broad terms, community may not be limited only to the present, either. The culture of communion should embrace everyone and apply at all times, for it may not exclude generations to come in a few decades or a few hundred years from now (HGCOG 2016a, No. 8). Only such a community may become an antidote to the modern atomization witnessed in many societies, and man’s alienation from the natural world. A culture of communion also provides the impulse necessary to overcome attitudes of selfishness in favor of solidarity and relationships. It frees man from the perspective of looking for meaning in his possessions by experiencing the joy of being with others.

An important component of a culture of sustainable consumption is a new style of life. While the consumer lifestyle, unfortunately still prevalent in many societies today, is a consequence of a one-dimensional model of development focused on the material, and a mentality of individualism and greed, a new way of life should result from adopting a model of integral development, a culture of communion, and solidarity. It is becoming increasingly clear that in the long term the consumer lifestyle is untenable and leads to inevitable catastrophe (Francis 2015, No. 161). A new lifestyle must therefore radically reject the “distorted anthropocentrism” which focuses on achieving what is immediately

useful and cost-effective (Francis 2015, No. 122). The basis of a new lifestyle must therefore be an attitude of openness towards all—both humans and non-human beings, those living today and those who will join the community of life in the future. Pope Francis points out that a characteristic feature of the consumerist way of life is a “cult of superficiality”, which is a consequence of spiritual poverty on the one hand, and the ever-increasing demand for material goods on the other (Francis 2015, No. 204). A new lifestyle must therefore be characterized by a deepening of man’s spiritual dimension. For this, we must abandon everyday haste and excessive activism, so that the noise and information overload that fills human life may be replaced by moments of silence and reflection (Francis 2015, No. 225).

Bartholomew I, whose words are invoked in the Pope’s encyclical, speaks in a similar vein. With a view to building a new lifestyle, the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople points to the need to replace “consumption with sacrifice, greed with generosity, wastefulness with a spirit of sharing, an asceticism which entails learning to give, and not simply to give up. It is a way of loving, of moving gradually away from what I want to what God’s world needs. It is liberation from fear, greed and compulsion” (Francis 2015, No. 9). It seems that the view on the basis of a new lifestyle is largely shared by all Christians. This is well illustrated by the *Common Declaration on Environmental Ethics* announced by Pope John Paul II and Patriarch Bartholomew I. In the Declaration, they point out that we are witnessing today an urgent need for “repentance on our part and a renewed attempt to view ourselves, one another, and the world around us within the perspective of the divine design for creation. The problem is not simply economic and technological; it is moral and spiritual. A solution at the economic and technological level can be found only if we undergo, in the most radical way, an inner change of heart, which can lead to a change in lifestyle and of unsustainable patterns of consumption and production. A genuine conversion in Christ will enable us to change the way we think and act” (John and Bartholomew 2002). It seems that, only in opening up to non-material values and spiritual development, is there a hope for the spread of a new lifestyle which will promote the integral development of man while, at the same time, respecting the possibilities of the natural environment.

5. Case Study. Introduction of Trade Restrictions on Sundays and Public Holidays in Poland

The systemic changes that took place in Poland in 1989 became a catalyst for taking up economic activity, which gave hope for the acquisition of goods that had been unavailable to a vast majority of Poles so far. This situation contributed to a sharp increase in business activity of a large part of the Polish society, which often included Saturdays and even Sundays. One manifestation of this trend was the almost unlimited trading on Sundays and public holidays. Over time, the disastrous social consequences which ensued came to be noticed. Those employed in trade were forced to work on Sundays and could not spend time with their family. The situation was even more difficult in the case of families in which both spouses worked in trade. If they had offspring, they were forced to schedule their working time so that they could take turns taking care of the children, which practically limited the spouses’ time together to the night.

Obstacles to participation in religious practices and the accumulating social problems were noticed both by Polish religious leaders and the Independent Self-Governing Trade Union “Solidarity”. Their engagement in this field was inspired, among other things, by Pope John Paul II’s Apostolic Letter *Dies Domini* published on 31 May 1998, in which he emphasizes the need to limit Sunday activity to rest and draws attention to the disappearance of the spiritual dimension of this day. The Pope explicitly states that “when Sunday loses its fundamental meaning and becomes merely part of a ‘weekend,’ it can happen that people stay locked within a horizon so limited that they can no longer see ‘the heavens’. Hence, though ready to celebrate, they are really incapable of doing so” (John 1998, No. 4).

Comments on the celebration of Sunday were also made by representatives of the Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches in Poland. On 20 January 2015, they issued an appeal stressing the spiritual nature of Sunday and the Christians’ duty

to celebrate the day in a manner proper to the tradition of their Church. Polish bishops representing the Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church, the Evangelical-Augsburg Church, the Evangelical-Methodist Church, the Evangelical-Reformed Church, and the Baptist Church jointly called for protection of the spiritual dimension of Sunday. They addressed both employees and employers, parliamentarians, the government, and all people of good will, pointing out that restoring proper Sunday celebrations would contribute to the well-being of families, citizens, and the state *Apel Kościołów w Polsce o poszanowanie i świętowanie niedzieli* (2015). This way, they provided support to the social initiative to restrict Sunday shopping.

One element of direct democracy present in the legal system of the Republic of Poland is the legislative initiative of citizens, which allows them to submit a bill directly to the Parliament. In order to exercise this right, a legislative initiative committee must be established, and at least 100,000 signatures for the draft bill must be collected. In order to comply with these requirements, a Legislative Initiative Committee for the Bill to Restrict Sunday Shopping was set up, including Trade Union Solidarity as well as other organizations. Thanks to the authority and organizational structures of Solidarity, efforts to implement legal restrictions and defend workers' rights were stepped up. More than 500,000 signatures were collected in a short period of time in support of the initiative. The bill together with letters of support was submitted on 2 September 2017 to the Speaker of the Polish Sejm, Marek Kuchciński. In the course of legislative works, the wording of the citizens' draft was modified, however, so that it substantially changed its original version and departed from the intentions of its initiators.

In this situation, the Presidium of the Polish Bishops Conference spoke up. On 31 October 2017, the bishops addressed the legislative authorities with a *Statement on the restriction of Sunday shopping*. "We urge those who are in a position to actually shape the law in our country to take into account, above all, the well-being of the citizens and the well-being of society. [. . .] Sunday rest is one of the inseparable elements of fair treatment for all and cannot be a luxury for the chosen. May justice and solidarity not perish from among us as we prepare to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the independent Poland. May the legal and definitive protection of a free Sunday become an integral part of this celebration by the entire nation, as a binder strengthening the national community" (PKEP 2017).

As a consequence of lobbying for the desired changes, on 10 January 2018 the Polish Sejm passed a law on restricting trade on Sundays and public holidays and on certain other days, thereby granting almost all of the demands laid down in the citizens' bill (Act 2018). The Act introduced legal restrictions gradually. In practice, this meant that, in 2018, there were 29 shopping Sundays and 23 Sundays with trade restrictions. In 2019, it was 15 and 37 Sundays, respectively. From 2020 on, trading is only allowed in Poland on two shopping Sundays before Christmas, one Sunday before Easter and four additional Sundays, the last Sundays of January, April, June, and August. The ban does not apply to the shop owner and their family members, however, so they may freely take a decision on whether or not to work on Sundays. This solution supports small family shops and provides them with equal opportunity in competition with large retail chains.

Arguments for amending regulations on Sunday and public holiday shopping in Poland included a number of considerations. On the one hand, social and health arguments were put forward, focusing on the difficult situation of persons employed in trade who were made, in various ways, to work on Sundays, which significantly complicated their family life and affected their interpersonal relationships. The arguments also highlighted the health and mental consequences of people being deprived of rest and unable to spend time with their loved ones. These aspects were largely referred to by trade unions. At the same time, religious arguments were raised as well, pointing to the marginalization of the spiritual dimension of Sunday and the progressive secularization. These arguments were mainly invoked by representatives of churches and religious organizations. Trade Union

Solidarity, which explicitly emphasizes its Catholic roots, also provided support to the religious argumentation.

With the joint commitment of partners from different backgrounds, a large group of Polish society were offered a chance for Sunday rest and family celebration. The new legislation did not significantly change the level of consumption of material goods, only the way they were acquired. Nevertheless, it has significantly changed the way people spend their free time on Sundays. Instead of joint trips to shopping malls, families have become increasingly engaged in other pastimes. A study by Havas Media Group-Intelligence Team conducted in 5 waves between February and June 2018 show that the new regulations have made as many as 20% of Poles significantly change their way of celebrating Sundays. Studies have revealed a markedly upward trend in the amount of time spent with family and outdoors, weather permitting (MPiT 2019, pp. 24–25).

The Ministry of Enterprise and Technology commissioned a study on the effects of these amendments one year after they came into force. The study report published in March 2019 shows that, from the economic perspective, the legal changes have contributed to an increase in income, particularly in sectors such as tourism, recreation, culture and HORECA. There is much to suggest that the restriction of Sunday shopping has had a positive impact on the Poles' quality of life, satisfaction with social relations, satisfaction with leisure time, and improvement in physical and mental health (MPiT 2019, p. 4). Although the public opinion is slightly inclined to return to the legislation previously in place, trade workers most emphatically approve of the new regulations. The ban on Sunday shopping is supported by as many as 90% of women and 92% of men working in trade. Respondents confirm better physical (61% of women and 64% of men) and mental well-being (67% of women and 72% of men), and 81% of respondents employed in trade said that, thanks to the new regulations, they spend more time with friends and family. In addition, 56% rest more, and 40% more often spend time engaging in active recreation (sports, trips, walks). Moreover, 28% of the women surveyed said they have more time for their interests and hobbies (MPiT 2019, pp. 27–28).

It is difficult to unequivocally assess the impact of restrictions on Sunday shopping. The time of their implementation largely coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic. It is therefore difficult from today's perspective to clearly determine the extent to which the new regulations have contributed to an increase in the consumption of intangible goods. There is much to suggest that restrictions related to the pandemic have attenuated the positive effects of these changes. It appears, however, that Sunday shopping regulations introduced in Poland have contributed to building a culture of communion, strengthening interpersonal ties and changing lifestyles, and laying foundations for building a culture of reasonable balance in the consumption of tangible and intangible goods. Christian heritage in the Polish tradition seems to have played a major role in this regard.

6. Conclusions

It appears that Catholic heritage has significant potential to shape the right model of a culture of consumption. Catholicism, as well as other Christian denominations and other religions, have a rich tradition of forming the beliefs and attitudes of their followers, as well as some tried and tested methods in this regard. By identifying consumerism as one of the greatest challenges to man's integral development, all major Christian denominations, each in their own way, make the faithful sensitive to the danger of succumbing to the temptation of consumerism and encourage them to build a culture of sustainable consumption.

Religions do not have the tools to impose particular attitudes, but refer to religious arguments instead. In this way, they transfer their followers' decisions to adopt a particular attitude to the subtle level of human freedom, bringing the issue to the most local dimension—a person's freedom of choice. The effect of this influence in each individual case varies, depending on many factors, such as the strength of one's attachment to religion and its principles, the economic situation, political beliefs, aesthetic preferences and many other factors. The spiritual dimension of man's responsibility for his choices is

well illustrated by a passage from the ecological fatwa issued by Muslim clergy in Indonesia: “People can escape government regulation, but they cannot escape the word of God” (Wernitz 2014).

A key element in the Catholic way of promoting a culture of moderation is education. This is pointed out by John Paul II, who states explicitly: “*Thus a great deal of educational and cultural work is urgently needed, including the education of consumers in the responsible use of their power of choice, the formation of a strong sense of responsibility among producers and among people in the mass media in particular, as well as the necessary intervention by public authorities*” (John 1991, No. 36). It should also rely on spiritual resources and refer to religious arguments in order to complement typical methods of environmental education. Catholic education aimed at opposing the culture of consumerism and promoting a culture of sustainable consumption takes various forms, such as homilies given by clergy, catechesis, retreats, Bible study for groups and individuals.

While religiosity is but one of the elements influencing man’s beliefs and attitudes, it would be a shameful pity to neglect the potential of religion to promote a culture of moderation. In order to build a sustainable world, it is therefore necessary for international organizations, state administrations, and NGOs to support religions in their efforts. Only in building the broadest possible coalition for the formation of a culture of moderation is there a hope of creating conditions for the integral development of man, while respecting the possibilities of nature.

The Church’s efforts in this regard are significant and unique in that the Christian approach to this issue emphasizes the importance of the moral and ethical dimension of the phenomenon of consumerism, otherwise often reduced only to the economic and social dimension. Moreover, by referring to religious arguments, the Church influences not only consumers, but also representatives of large corporations, the mass media, and parliamentarians who may contribute in their own way to the promotion of the right model of culture in the context of consuming material, cultural, and spiritual goods.

It appears that, in order for the culture of moderation to become more widespread, an appropriate economic model needs to be introduced. The answer to this challenge was the emergence of environmental economy, followed by the economy of sustainable development. This economic model breaks with the primacy of prosperity measured by the amount of material possessions, and replaces it with the concept of “sufficient” development. It is characterized by a reference to ethics and principles of intra-generational and inter-generational equity, and perceives the consumer as a responsible participant in market processes (Rogall 2004).

In this context, it is also interesting to note the initiative of Pope Francis who inspired the development of a new economic concept called “The Economy of Francesco”. According to the Pope, we are facing the need to “change today’s economy and to give a soul to the economy of tomorrow”. Pope Francis points to the need to develop an economy in line with the ideals of St. Francis of Assisi, involving self-restraint in the accumulation of material goods, concern for the poor, restoration of interpersonal bonds, and love for all representatives of the earthly community of life. It is not without significance that the Pope refers to religious arguments here. He believes that “we need to correct models of growth incapable of guaranteeing respect for the environment, openness to life, concern for the family, social equality, the dignity of workers and the rights of future generations” (Francis 2019). The Pope addressed his appeal for commitment to this initiative to young economists and entrepreneurs from all over the world. On 19 November 2019, a meeting was held to launch this initiative, attended by more than two thousand participants from 120 countries. It is to be hoped that the initiative will succeed, and that the new economic concept will support the development of a culture of moderation.

This paper mentions only some elements of consumerist culture (neophilia, throw-away culture, disposable mentality, and thoughtless wastefulness) and a culture of sustainable consumption (a new model of progress, a mentality of communion, and a new lifestyle). Much indicates, however, that there are no major differences between Christian

denominations in how they encourage their followers not to succumb to the temptation of consumerism and to engage in the promotion of a culture of moderation that furthers the integral development of man at the cultural and spiritual level and has great ecological value. In conclusion, Christian thought is not only in line with, but is in fact conducive to the culture of sustainable consumption. It therefore appears that the study adequately substantiates the research hypotheses which form the starting point of this article. The case study provides a good illustration of the potential of Catholic tradition in shaping a culture of moderation.

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