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<https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14010055>

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John Paul II and the Family—The Role of Authority Figures in the Lives of Young Poles

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Abstract: The modern world, on the one hand, longs for authority figures, and on the other, often rejects them all. The present paper is a scientific reflection on the issue of authority in the context of the person and teachings of John Paul II and the family. Referring to scientific research, the text demonstrates the need for authority figures in society while also giving examples of how these role models are rejected. Over the years, there has also been a visible decline in the percentage of people declaring that John Paul II or the family are their supreme authority. The media and the increase in the number of ‘hip’ celebrities and influencers play an important role in this process. It is often they who take the place of traditional authority figures and values in the public sphere.

Keywords: authority; John Paul II; mock school-leaving exam



Citation: Stańdo, Jacek, Przemysław Żebrok, Żywilla Fechner, and Tomasz Kopiczko. 2023. John Paul II and the Family—The Role of Authority Figures in the Lives of Young Poles. *Religions* 14: 55. <https://doi.org/10.3390/re14010055>

Academic Editor: Hans Zollner

Received: 5 December 2022

Revised: 22 December 2022

Accepted: 23 December 2022

Published: 29 December 2022



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1. Introduction

We are currently witnessing rapid and profound socio-cultural changes that affect the general public, especially young people. Classic ideals have been largely undermined and moral norms lowered. The previously recognized values are being remodeled as there is a clearly visible civilization crisis. One of its signs is the rejection of authorities and the lack of trust in public institutions and their representatives. The impersonal mass media play a vital role here; mainly social media, to whose influence people yield indiscriminately. Despite the fact that popularity is not the measure of authority, it cannot be denied that new idols, stars, celebrities, influencers and TikTokers appear in place of the old models¹. They enjoy great popularity and respect among a significant part of society, influencing the public’s views and attitudes.

The changes that are taking place make us look for answers about the scale and direction of these transformations. Numerous scientific studies, conferences and symposia are organized.² This article is also considered as part of this line of research. The aim of the study is a general reflection on the role of authority in the lives of young Poles. Considering the fact that over the last several decades research has indicated the family and the person of John Paul II as unwavering leaders when it comes to authority figures, this study will adopt the same approach and look at the family and person of John Paul II with regard to the topic. Recent measurements show a downward trend in the authority of the Polish Pope. Therefore, the question arises: how did it happen that the hitherto unquestioned and unwavering position of the spiritual leader of the Church and the nation is being marginalized? Why are there more and more voices that say people do not have any authority figure? Is this decline or even collapse of authority a result of deliberate actions of particular groups, or is it a result of ongoing social changes? The goal of this paper is to try to answer these questions. This goal will be achieved in two major steps. Firstly, by undertaking theoretical consideration of the concept of authority; secondly, through the

presentation of the results of research conducted among young people in 2009 and 2022. Finally, the two parts will lead to the formulation of conclusions.

1.1. In Search of the Essence of Authority

The starting point for further considerations is to define what authority means, who can be called an authority figure, and what the differences are between a person who has authority and a person who is an authority figure.

The term “authority” is understood and interpreted in many ways. There is a wide variety of definitional and theoretical approaches to the issue. The word itself comes from Latin (*auctoritas*) and means leadership, responsibility, significance, influence, dignity as noted in the [Glosbe Dictionary \(2022\)](#) and by [Bańkowski \(2022\)](#). In common understanding, an authority figure is a person that evokes admiration, recognition, respect, and prestige as well as having power. An authority may refer to a group of people, an institution, a state, a political party, a church, as well as certain ideas or values. An online thesaurus offers the following synonyms of the word “authority”: oracle, dignity, arbiter, alpha and omega, professional, connoisseur, master, expert. *Wielki Słownik Języka Polskiego* [The Great Dictionary of the Polish Language] provides two definitions of the word—in the sense of a feature and a person. In the first sense, it is recognition and respect given to a person in a certain environment; in the other—a person or institution that enjoys authority, respect and recognition ([Żmigrodzki 2022](#)). The Supreme Authority should also be mentioned—God’s own. Pr. S. Wronka indicates three sources of Christ’s authority: wisdom, power, love ([Wronka 2021](#), p. 14).

Historically, this term was most often associated with such attributes as power, action, and knowledge. In the academic sense, the authority is a master, a guide to the world of science, an expert in a given field, a role model, a source of knowledge and wisdom. Being a moral authority, which does not have to be equated with being an expert in some field, is somewhat in opposition to the above ([Marek 2017](#), pp. 231–48).

Based on the literature on the subject, the following properties of a person considered to be an authority can be distinguished: above-average formal or social status; thorough general knowledge and great substantive competences; considerable life and professional experience; reliability at work and performing one’s duties; efficiency; above-average results achieved in their specialty; social attitude; ability and will to help; valued personality features; ability to live in society; intellectual qualities; socially acceptable moral profile; physical attractiveness ([Jarmoszko 2013](#), p. 26). According to J. [Kołąkowska \(2016\)](#), an authority is a person who is truthful, impartial, honest, open, knowledgeable on a given topic, experienced, involved in what he or she does, self-confident, self-aware, authentic, consistent, demanding, and ready to compromise.

There are many opposing opinions concerning the concept of authority. For example, W. Stróżewski believes that to be an authority means to be recognized as an authority. To be recognized—means to be someone whose opinions and actions are of consequence to somebody else. J. Bartyzel, on the other hand, points to the necessity of the existence of an authority without their recognition, too. Such natural authorities exist by themselves, as does the authority of the father (parent), which is irrelevant to the child’s recognition of it as such. In this line of reasoning, recognition is merely a consequence of the existence of natural authority ([Sakowicz 2015](#)). Yet another aspect is pointed out by M. [Dudzikowa \(2007\)](#). In her understanding, adopting a specific attitude towards the issue of authority is often conditioned by emotional considerations.

According to M. [Drożdż \(2016\)](#), two terms can be used to express the existence and value of authority: “to have authority” and “to be an authority”. The difference between these terms reflects the classic difference between the spheres of “having” and “being”. In the area of morality, it is not so much important that someone has authority, but rather that he is one. In this context it is worth recalling one of the main messages of John Paul II, who repeatedly taught that for man it is more important “to be” than “to have”; what matters more is who you are, not how much you possess ([Wojtyła 1983](#)).

In the literature review of the topic, it is worth focusing on the thoughts of J. Bocheński, who is not only an undisputed moral authority, but also a valued and recognized scholar in the field of logic and philosophy. He developed the concept of authority, creating a broad and insightful framework for researching this phenomenon. In one of his tenets, J. Bocheński (1992) included both an outline of the theory of authority and practical guidelines for action: “Do not believe anyone until you find out that they know what they are talking about and that they are truthful”. On these grounds, a general characteristic of authority can be formulated: someone is an authority for me exactly when I recognize, in principle, everything communicated by this person within a certain field.

Analyzing the concept of authority, Father Innocent states that it is neither a thing nor a quality, but belongs to the category of relations. In his opinion, it is a trimodal relationship between someone who has authority (the subject of authority), someone else for whom the former is the authority (the object of authority), and the domain in which this authority makes his voice heard (Kobiela 2020). Therefore, authority is not a person or a trait of that person, but a relationship between two people. R. Bierstedt is of a similar opinion, as he believes that authority is a relationship, not an ability (Bierstedt 1964).

According to J. Bocheński, there are two kinds of authority: one of them reflects declarative sentences, the other one—directives. He calls the first one “the authority of the knowledgeable” (epistemic), and the other one “the authority of the superior” (deontic). The two types of authority are not mutually exclusive, and, in principle, deontic authority should result from epistemic authority. For if the superior is ignorant in a given field, he cannot exercise power well (Horowski 2009).

H. Arendt places authority in the past as a factor embedding us in history and ensuring, along with tradition and religion, social cohesion. Meanwhile, modernity is characterized by the decline of all these three elements, the last of which to fall into crisis is authority. In her opinion, a person endowed with authority is one whose words we believe and whose commands we obey without their having to exert extra-linguistic pressure on us, but also without arguing for the correctness of that person’s words (Arendt 2011, p. 110).

Among the foreign authors dealing with the issues of authority, it is also worth mentioning such researchers as F. Adelman, R. Bendix, E. Durkheim, P. Blau, L. Pye, R. Michels, T. Parsons. In Poland, these are primarily the above-mentioned J. Bocheński as well as J. Sztumski, A. Mikołajko, S. Ossowski, W. Stróżewski, J. Goćkowski, S. Majdański and others.

It seems that taking the stance of a victim and dedication to the cause of others can be a measure of authority. This includes, for example, defending the aggrieved, helping the homeless, sick and hungry, emphasizing the dignity and value of every human being. Such figures are Mother Teresa, Brother Albert, and John Paul II. In the case of Father Maksymilian Kolbe³ it was the highest sacrifice.

In the light of the above definitions, certain generalizations can be made. It is impossible to be an authority for oneself, only in relation to someone else. Authority lies in interpersonal relations, consisting in recognizing the competences of the other person, respecting and accepting their beliefs, views and moral attitudes. This relationship takes place between two persons, one of whom is the superior and the other subordinate. Without such recognition and willingness to yield, authority cannot exist. Nobody is born an authority but a person becomes one in the process of building a relationship with another human being. Real authority is a value for others and is closely related to morality (Jacko 2007).

1.2. Family: At the Root of Shaping Authority Figures

Each person lives in a specific environment that exerts a greater or lesser influence on him or her. Hence, human behavior can only be understood in the context of the social environment in which people currently live and in the context of the system of which they are part (Czabała 1997). Invariably for years, the dominant type of family in Poland has been the two-generation (nuclear) family, consisting of parents and children. Currently,

almost half of the respondents (49%) follow this model. The percentage of people living in a large, multi-generational family (22%) and in a marriage without children (11%) practically does not change. One in ten now lives alone (10%). The percentage of single parents is 1%, and the same number of respondents declared living in a homosexual relationship. The desire to have children is common among Poles. Only two in a hundred do not want to have any children (2%). The largest group is those who would like to have two children (47%), and just over a quarter of Poles (28%) declare a desire to have three. Much less often respondents want to have an only child (6%), four children (7%), or even more (4%) (Bożewicz 2019).

What is of fundamental importance for the creation of authority figures is what patterns of behavior a young person observes in their immediate environment. The main institutions of socialization include the family, school, media and peers, followed by role models. For the topic under consideration, the role of the family is one of the most important areas of research and analysis.

Parents play a very important role in the life of every child because they shape the world of values, attitudes, and actions. Parents' behavior determines the family atmosphere, which affects the child's development, constituting the foundation for its future. The primary task of parents is to provide their children with care and support in all areas of life. For proper development, it needs the presence of both parents, because each has different roles to fulfill. The presence of the father in the home is not only important and necessary but also irreplaceable. In the process of upbringing, the father provides the child with patterns of social and moral behavior. In turn, the role of the mother is based on boundless trust and love, which provide the child with a sense of bond and security. A good relationship between mother and child determines the child's proper emotional development.

The family, as the basic and natural educational environment, has the longest lasting impact on a person and leaves the most indelible traces, while the values preferred by parents significantly determine the decisions during adult life of their children. The shaping of one's personality largely depends on the family in which one is born, and what values are recognized and respected at home. Scientific studies emphasize the importance of the family not only for the proper functioning of individuals, but also for the general public. The family is widely recognized as the first and most important educational environment, constituting the cradle of society and the most effective tool of its humanization and personalization. The family home is the place where attitudes and role models are formed. It seems indisputable that the family is the most important transmitter of culture, faith and tradition.

It is the first environment in which a child develops social relationships. As the teaching of the Church reminds us: "A family in which different generations get together and help each other achieve fuller wisdom in life and reconcile the rights of individual people with the requirements of social life, is the foundation of society" (Second Vatican Ecumenical Council 1965, p. 52).

Parental authority has its origins in several different sources, the most important of which is the fact of transmitting life, as well as their social role and raising their children. Through their behavior and attitudes parents become role models for their children, though the influence may be positive or negative. It seems, however, that the relations between all family members remain the most important factor determining the authority of parents. Parents are usually a child's most significant others; role models that the child unknowingly identifies with. This process is associated with major formative influence and is beneficial in terms of upbringing; therefore, the properly understood authority of the parents is crucial. Of course, it is important that this authority does not translate into dominance that would reject or limit the child's autonomy (Chlewiński 1997, pp. 160–67).

Parents not only constitute role models to their children, but usually remain role models throughout their children's lives, despite various turmoils, such as the period of adolescent rebellion. According to psychologists, a sense of the authority of those senior

to the child appears in the first two years of the child's life. In the early years, parents are basically the only authority for a young person. The decisive factor for its maintenance is the relationship between all family members, as well as the cooperation of both parents in bringing up their children. Lack of parental cooperation, uncoordinated actions or disagreement significantly weaken the parents' authority, causing confusion for a child who not only does not know who to listen to, but does not even know how to act. In many families, apart from parents, grandparents play an important role in upbringing. They are undisputed authorities, transmitters of values and the most valuable components of culture. Grandparents are an important, integral and irreplaceable link in interpersonal relations in the family. Research shows that the bonds between grandparents and grandchildren are among the strongest and most intense. The attachment of grandchildren to grandparents is second only to that of the children to parents (Žebroková 2021, p. 130).

John Paul II devoted much attention to the family in his teaching. One could say that the hallmark of his pontificate was his teaching on marriage, family and love. He devoted almost 27 years of his ministry to concern for the family, its dignity and rights, which is why he was called "the pope of families". The Holy Father was well aware of the importance of the family for the future of the nation. He constantly emphasized that the Church is to serve the family and should never lose sight of its welfare. He devoted five years of catechesis to these issues during his Wednesday audiences, as well as the first synod. He raised this issue in encyclicals, exhortations, apostolic letters and in many statements, homilies and speeches. The most important papal documents include *Familiaris Consortio* (John Paul II 1981) and *Letter to Families* (John Paul II 1994). In the exhortation, he wrote that "citizens are born in the family and in it they find the first school of those social virtues that determine the life and development of society itself" (John Paul II 1981, p. 42).

1.3. Crisis of Authority Figures

In the not-so-distant past, several or several dozen years ago, naming authority figures was not particularly problematic. Most people could point out an authority figure without hesitation; often even though they would not be able to define the concept itself. Authority figures were poets, writers, church hierarchs, and in the local community a doctor, priest and teacher. Parents and grandparents were considered authority figures in the immediate vicinity. Among other figures, the saints and the blessed were most often mentioned: Pope John Paul II, Primate Stefan Wyszyński, Pr. Jerzy Popiełuszko, and less often Mother Teresa of Calcutta, Saint Faustina and Father Pio (Boguszewski 2018).

It is a widely known topic and a fact that authority figures undergo crises. They have been here as long as humans have, but they always seem to be unique, different (Majdański 2001–2002, p. 223). As John Paul II taught, in the modern world "there are disturbing symptoms of the degradation of some basic values: a misunderstanding in theory and practice of the independence of spouses in their mutual relation; a great confusion in comprehending the authority of parents and children" (John Paul II 1981, p. 6). According to H. Arendt, the decline of authority is tantamount to the destruction of the foundations of the world, which from then on begins to drift, change and transform from one form to another with increasing rapidity. The crisis of authority appears as an erosion of the foundations of the social order (Arendt 2011, p. 110).

There is an increasing body of opinion that there are authority figures today, but contrary to this popular belief, a study conducted in 2009 by the Public Opinion Research Center showed that having role models in life is important for most Poles (74%). Only one in five respondents (21%) has a different opinion on this matter (Feliksiak 2008).

The interviewers also asked the respondents whom they considered to be authority figures. The question was open-ended, so the respondents did not receive a list of possible answers. The respondents most often (52%) pointed to their parents. Every sixth respondent from among those who declared having authority figures (17%) indicated the figure of John Paul II. Next, the respondents mentioned grandparents (6%), spouses (6%), teachers, professors and educators (5%). Very few respondents declared that their role model was a

public person or a historical figure (with the exception of John Paul II), extended family members, acquaintances and friends, superiors, siblings or children. Research proves the fundamental role of the family as the source of authority figures in life. It also reveals a certain generational relationship—people belonging to the older generation (parents, grandparents) are more often considered a role model than people who are of similar age to the respondent (acquaintances, friends, siblings) (Feliksiak 2008).

Apart from upbringing in the family, the main area of shaping attitudes, views and values is the media. In the world of the dominance of publishers, mainly social media, they play a leading role in establishing authority figures. In addition to positive content, the media is a space for communicating negative role models and ideas. Adolescents uncritically accept the authority of people who are little older than themselves, who have no life experience, but have achieved media success. These are therefore the so-called unauthorized authorities who can indicate how to get ahead but are not able to answer the question of how to live so as to make good use of your time, fulfill yourself in life and achieve happiness. Therefore, in M. Dudzikowa’s opinion, only those authority figures who are repeatedly verified should enjoy our trust and confidence (Horowski 2009).

1.4. The Authority of John Paul II

According to research published in 2018, the Holy Father John Paul II has remained the greatest authority for many Poles in recent decades. According to the Public Opinion Research Center, in 2010 John Paul II was an important moral authority for 94% of respondents; 72% declared “strongly agree” and 22% “somewhat agree”. Eighteen years later, such declarations were made by 92% of respondents, including 65% strongly, and 27% “somewhat”. Despite the passage of years, the difference can be considered insignificant. Although the result of the research on the authority of the Polish pope declined by a few percent, for the vast majority of adults he remains a person who continues to set social and moral norms⁴.

Detailed summaries of the research results in individual years are presented in Figure 1.

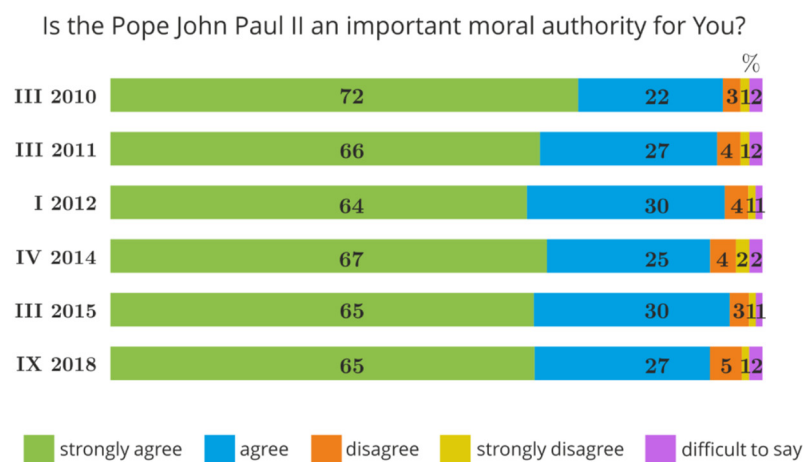


Figure 1. Summary of results of CBOS survey.

At this point, it is worth considering the origin of this phenomenon. It seems that a prerequisite of authority is authenticity and living in truth. Authority figures are usually people in whose lives there is no rift between words and actions. Undoubtedly, John Paul II was such a figure. In a sense, M. Karkowska also relates to this, saying that the most relevant and the oldest of all concepts of authority is the Master. She writes that “the Master exerts influence with his personality, its quality, the force of attraction of emotions, internal magnetism, charisma. The contact with it is therefore of a metaphysical nature. The Master is also a personal role model, someone we wish to emulate by referring to his way

of thinking and acting. Meeting, a relationship with the Master leads to the development of autonomy, changes the perception of oneself and others through self-awareness-modifying messages and actions and their effects" (Karkowska 2021).

Both during the ministry and after his death, a certain social phenomenon, known as the "JP2 generation", developed around the person of the Holy Father. This generation includes all those for whom the Pope was a role model, authority, and guide. Most often, they are whole families who cherish a similar system of values and beliefs, and actively participate in events with his participation. This community cannot be limited to a specific cultural or age group, because the movement has brought together a very wide range of people of various backgrounds and statuses, of various ages (John Paul II 2005, pp. 198–205).

John Paul II had a very good rapport with young people in particular, which could be seen during numerous events, such as the World Youth Day⁵, of which he was the initiator. The cyclical event he initiated attracted millions of people from all over the world each year. It is precisely the care for the young that remains a special feature of the pontificate of the Polish Pope. He often emphasized that they were the future and hope of the Church. He admonished the young generation against living in isolation from family and tradition, at the same time prompting deeper reflections on the essence of life. He showed the way to saintliness, leading towards Christ and personal identity. He effectively enticed people away from the sexual revolution, from the fascination with neo-Marxism and the liberal world model. Currently, we are dealing with a massive attack on most representatives of the Catholic Church, especially on people such as St. Pope John Paul II. The so far undisputed authority has become the object of not only jokes, but even hatred. It can be said that there is some kind of fashion nowadays to insult the Pope. One example of this trend is the "Vatican" computer virus which causes memes related to John Paul II to appear on the desktop. Neologisms arise, such as "odjaniepawlic" [do something strange; an expression of surprise], "dewoptylizacja" [departing from the values held by John Paul II] or numerical abbreviation "2137" referring to the pope's time of death. A frequently appearing motif is the famous papal cream cake [kremówka], which is the root of "kremówkizacja". Under the name "Polish Championship in pope defamation", an event was created on Facebook to insult the saint. Despite the fact that the Ordo Iuris Institute, together with the John Paul II Memory Association and the Institute for Religious Activities, launched a program to defend the good name of St. John Paul II, attacks continue (Zimnica-Kuzioła 2010, pp. 256–77).

There are constant reports in the media about the alleged responsibility that the Pope bears for various manifestations of evil in the Church. The facts are completely different. There is no evidence that John Paul II was inactive or indifferent. It was the Polish Pope who changed church procedures so that all cases of pedophilia among clergy were considered by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Despite the fact that there is no evidence of the Pope's cover-up of pedophile cases among priests (quite the contrary), the attacks never cease. The media coverage focuses on scandals in the Catholic Church, which is calculated to depreciate priests, including church hierarchs. These actions seem to have a clear objective. The point is for the young generation to turn their backs on the Holy Father, because he still has something important to tell them. He is a role model, and the young, even if they cannot live like their role model, endow him with authority (Skrzypczak 2022).

The Pope was inviolable for years; nothing bad was said about him. This changed after his death as slow but systematic attacks began. This was due to, among others, the development of the Internet, the growing popularity of social media, their accessibility and the possibility of creating websites. The year 2010 can be considered as the beginning of this phenomenon⁶ when the first provocative pictures with the pope in the lead role were created. First, memes appeared on Facebook and YouTube, gaining immense popularity across the web over time. The leader of the Catholic Church was usually presented in a negative, mocking, or iconoclastic context. Attaching the face to obscene photographs or placing it in such contexts are the most common ways of defamation of John Paul II. The most shocking are rape, pedophilia, genocide, theft, and a wanton lifestyle. It goes without

saying what the reach is of this type of content and how it affects young people. There is also no doubt that all these attacks determine the perception of the Pope among young people who are often susceptible to manipulation.

The scale, as well as the durability of the popularity of creating memes with the pope, unusual for the Internet phenomenon, inspired the release of several publications. Two book titles can be mentioned here: “Karol. Papież, który stał się memem. Kontrkult papieski, czyli postać Jana Pawła II w kulturze internetu” (“Karol. The pope who became a meme. Papal counter-cult, or the figure of John Paul II in the internet culture”—own translation) by Ł. Korzeniowski. The second is “A co tu się odjaniepawliło? Postać papieża Jana Pawła II jako obiekt netlorowej wytwórczości w polskim internecie” (“What the hell happened here? The figure of John Paul II as the object of netlore creativity in the Polish internet”—own translation) by M. Kamińska. W. Wybranowski also took up the topic in his article “Internauci na YouTube obrażają Jana Pawła II” (“Internet users on YouTube insult John Paul II”—own translation). In addition, many installations were created for modern art exhibitions, e.g., Tortologia [Cakeology] by K. Konopka or Papieże ogrodowe [Garden popes] by P. Fuss [Charzyński \(2021\)](#). There are also journalists who defend the saint. In his book “Atak na Jana Pawła II” (“Attack of John Paul II”), T. Terlikowski undermines the false accusations against the Pope, while exposing the intentions of representatives of some influential groups within the Church.

Can we speak of the fall of the authority of John Paul II? Such a claim does not appear to be valid. Among today’s youth, the authority of the Pope has not collapsed, because it never existed. The Pope died long before their birth, so he is often an abstract figure for them. They did not have the opportunity to meet him, as was the case with people who grew up faithful to the teachings of the Polish Pope.

Summarizing the teaching and attitude of John Paul II, it should be noted that he did not build his authority on theological or philosophical science, or on being a bishop or pope, but on the principle of service to God and man. The source of properly understood authority, as John Paul II showed with his life, is sacrifice for a person created in the image and likeness of God. It is primarily the concern for respecting their dignity and freedom ([Mannion 2008](#), pp. 1–9).

2. Results

2.1. Description of the Survey in 2009 and 2022

On 9 October 2009, for the first time in Poland and on such a large scale in Europe, a mock school-leaving [matura] exam in mathematics was administered online. About 3000 high school graduates from over 150 schools ([Figure 2](#)) sat down in front of computers connected to the Internet to have a go at the “queen of sciences”.



Figure 2. Map of schools taking part in e-matura.

The exam started at 9.00 and lasted 170 min. The e-matura project was held under the patronage of the Minister of National Education, Director of the Regional Examination Board in Łódź and the Marshal of the Łódź Province. IBM provided the Lodz University of Technology with the appropriate computer equipment to conduct the e-matura. While writing the e-matura, the students filled in the questionnaire. One of the open-ended questions (the opportunity to enter any text) concerned the choice of authority. In the diagnostic survey, 1231 responses were given, which accounted for over 50% of the return of the questionnaires.

2.2. Statistical Inference

Responses to the survey question were grouped into nine categories: mother, father, parents, family member, me, teacher, John Paul II, famous person, other. The questions in both surveys were the same. When analyzing the results of the survey, we carried out two studies. The first of these consisted in comparing the category of authority figure “John Paul II” and all other categories treated as a category: “an indicated authority figure other than John Paul II”. In the second step, we considered five categories. The first one includes the following responses: “mother”, “father”, “parents” and “family members”. We will call this category collectively “family”. The second category is “nobody”. The third category are “John Paul II” responses. The fourth category is the “teacher”. The fifth category is all the remaining responses collectively referred to as “other”. In both studies, we used a ratio test. It consists in comparing the percentage of responses in the population in relation to the size of the entire population. We assume a significance level of 0.05. We use the alternative directional hypothesis. That is, we test the following hypotheses and possibilities:

The first possibility:

H0. *The percentage of responses indicating the authority figure “A” is equal in both groups against the alternative hypothesis:*

H1. *The percentage of responses indicating the authority figure “A” in 2009 is lower than the percentage of responses indicating the authority figure “A” in 2022.*

The second possibility:

H2. *The percentage of responses indicating the authority figure “A” is equal in both populations against the alternative hypothesis:*

H3. *The percentage of responses indicating the authority figure “A” in 2009 is higher than the percentage of responses indicating the authority figure “A” in 2022.*

It is worth noting that in practical applications it makes sense to test one of the above possibilities. If the empirical percentage (i.e., determined on the basis of a sample) in 2009 was lower than in 2022, we use the “less” alternative. Otherwise, we use the “greater” alternative. The test statistic is based on the chi-square statistic. For testing, we use the RStudio environment and the R software. We use the `prop.test()` function with appropriate alternative hypotheses. In the first step, we perform two tests, in the second step, ten tests. The results are summarized in the relevant tables below. We assume statistical significance if the p -value is less than 0.05 when tested once. In case of repeated testing, we will apply a correction: p -value will be compared to the significance level of $0.05/\text{number of tests performed}$. This is the so-called Bonferroni correction, and the relevant details can be found in [Rupert \(1981\)](#), for example.

2.3. Numerical Results

Data from the electronic survey were collected in an EXCEL spreadsheet (only the Polish version is available). They were then aggregated using pivot tables. The summary data was read as vectors into the R script and the operations were performed, the results of which are below.

Test One. The respondents’ answers were divided into two categories. The first category was: indicating “John Paul II” as the authority figure, the second category: indicating all other responses as the authority figure. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of responders’ answers: two categories.

Year	JPII	Other
2009	222	1009
2022	27	1032

Analyzing the data, we find that there was a significant decrease in the percentage of survey participants who indicated JPII as an authority figure. In 2009, the percentage of people pointing to John Paul II as an authority figure was about 18%, and in 2022 it was about 2.5%, which means a sevenfold decrease. We test the null hypothesis:

H4: *The percentage of responses in 2009 and 2022 indicating John Paul II as the authority figure is the same against the alternative hypothesis:*

H5: *The percentage of responses in 2009 indicating John Paul II as the authority is higher than in 2022.*

Using the prop.test() function, we determined the *p*-value, which was 1.93928×10^{-32} .

Conclusion: The percentage of responses in 2009 indicating John Paul II as the authority is higher than in 2022.

Test two. Respondents’ answers were divided into 5 categories: family, JPII, lack of authority, teacher, and others, as shown in Table 2 and Figure 3.

Table 2. Summary of responders’ answers: five categories.

Year	JPII	Family	None	Teacher	Other
2009	222	462	151	94	292
2022	27	302	190	104	436

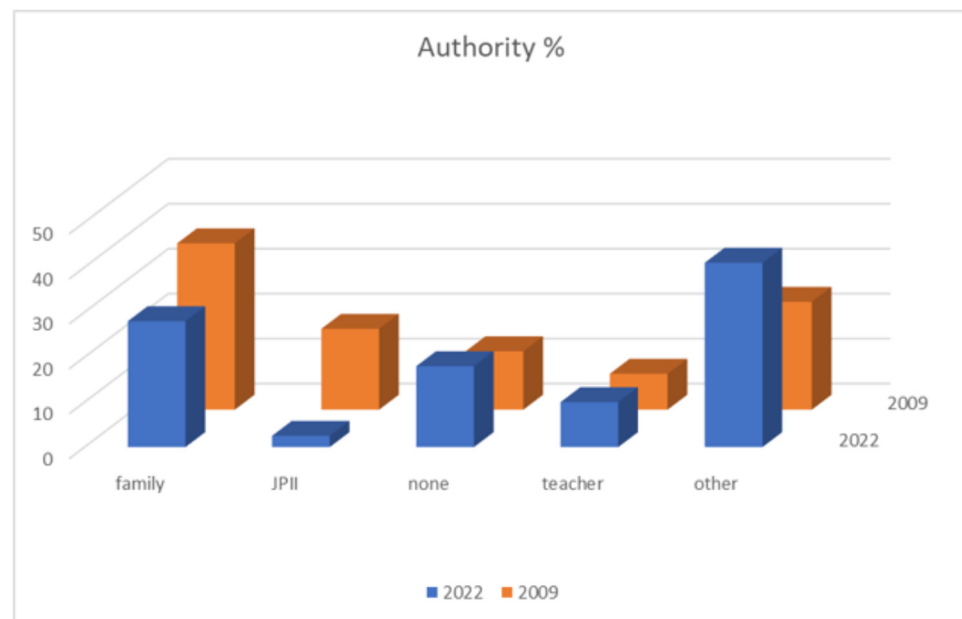


Figure 3. Summary of results in 2009 and 2022.

In Tables 3 and 4 we have listed p -values for tests with the alternative hypothesis less (the first possibility above) and with the alternative hypothesis greater (the second possibility below). The `prop.test()` function was used for calculating p -values.

Table 3. Summary of `prop.test`: Alternative less.

Year	JPII	Family	None	Teacher	Other
p -value	0.99999	0.00078	1	0.03754	2.89×10^{-19}

Table 4. Summary of `prop.test`: Alternative greater.

Year	JPII	Family	None	Teacher	Other
p -value	3.15×10^{-6}	0.99921	1.94×10^{-32}	0.96246	1

Applying the Bonferroni correction, that is, comparing the obtained p -value to the value of $0.05/10 = 0.005$, we reject the null hypothesis in favor of the alternative if the obtained p -value is less than 0.005.

By analyzing the data, we can draw the following conclusions:

- The percentage of survey participants indicating a family member as an authority figure was higher in 2009 than in 2022.
- The percentage of survey participants indicating a lack of authority was higher in 2022.
- There was a very significant decrease in the percentage of survey participants indicating JPII as an authority. In 2009, the percentage of respondents indicating JPII as an authority figure was about 18%, in 2022 about 2.5%.
- There are no grounds to claim that the percentage of participants in the study who identified teachers as authority figures increased or decreased between 2009 and 2022
- The percentage of survey participants indicating “other” as an authority figure increased in 2022 compared to 2009.

3. Conclusions

In his reflections J. Bocheński points out that “[t]he difference between science and everyday life lies in the fact that in science we tend to examine much more thoroughly what is an authority and what is not. But science, too, relies heavily on authority” (Bocheński 1992, p. 251).

The presented results of the exploration should be approached with some caution; J Bocheński, quoted earlier, voices reservations about research on authority figures which is conducted by means of a survey and is based on the declarations of the surveyed people. Surveying does not provide knowledge about facts but supplies information on opinions about these facts. The declarations only approximate the views of the respondents, and do not show whose influence young people come under. There is a need for both further research and continuous rebuilding of authority and highlighting its importance in both personal and institutional dimensions. Due to his limitations, man will always be forced to rely on carefully selected and competent authorities in many areas. Undoubtedly, summing up, John Paul II’s service to humankind should also be appreciated. Without seeking favors and recognition, he became and still is an authority figure who indicates directions of thought and action in the modern world. It seems that the entire pontificate of John Paul II is perfectly characterized by the words of the Directory on Catechesis, which was published many years after his death. In this document we read: “due to his ministry, the catechist performs a certain function towards the people he accompanies in faith and is perceived by them as someone with authority. It is therefore necessary to perform this function in the spirit of the deepest respect for conscience and for the other person (. . .) As part of formation and through a sincere dialogue with the spiritual director, the catechist should be

assisted in finding the right way to invoke his authority solely as a service to his brothers”⁷.

John Paul II, as the visible head of the Church, was a catechist for 27 years of his pontificate, caring for the faith, morality, sacramental and prayer life of the entire community of Christ. His words and example give direction to many people’s lives. This pilgrim of hope and witness of love, although no longer alive, helps many to distinguish between good and evil.

In light of the cited studies, some generalizations can be made. It is undeniable that John Paul II is the most recognizable person not only in Poland but also around the world. Throughout the years of his pontificate, he was greatly venerated, and for the vast majority of society, he was an unquestionable authority. After his death, that began to change. From the moment he was declared a saint by the Catholic Church, more and more brutal attacks began to intensify. This is related to his teaching, which is perceived as conservative; for liberal circles, it constitutes an obstacle to changing the teaching of the Church, especially in the field of divorce, homosexual relationships, and the defense of life from conception to natural death. This criticism certainly translates into the perception of the Holy Father, especially among young people who have not had the opportunity to encounter his teaching and most often do not understand him. The older generation, who had the opportunity to have direct contact with the future saint, remains in the circle of the highest authority (Żebroń 2020).

Author Contributions: Conceptualization: J.S., P.Ż. and T.K.; methodology J.S. and Ż.F.; software J.S. and Ż.F.; validation: J.S., P.Ż., Ż.F. and T.K.; formal analysis: J.S.; investigation: J.S., P.Ż. and T.K.; resources: J.S.; data curation: J.S. and Ż.F.; writing—original draft preparation J.S., P.Ż., Ż.F. and T.K.; writing—review and editing: J.S., P.Ż., Ż.F. and T.K.; visualization: J.S. and Ż.F.; supervision: J.S., P.Ż. and T.K.; project administration: J.S. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: The data comes from projects (mock school-leaving (e-matura) in mathematics) carried out in 2009 and 2022 by the Lodz University of Technology the coordinator and originator was Jacek Stańdo. The data are available on request.

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

Notes

- ¹ Young TikToker Maria Jeleniewska, who was born on 10 May 2002, has 13 million followers.
- ² One example of such events was the conference “Man in relation to . . . Authority”, organized by the Faculty of Social Sciences, “Traditio” Science Club for John Paul II’s Personalistic Thought and Catholic Society “Civitas Christiana”. The event resulted in the publication “Pomiędzy szacunkiem a odpowiedzialnos´cią. Rola autorytetu w rozwoju osobowym człowieka” (Between respect and responsibility. The role of authority figure in the personal development of man) (Chrapusta et al. 2021).
- ³ Maximilian Maria Kolbe, b. January 8, 1894 in Zduńska Wola, d. August 14, 1941 in KL Auschwitz. Polish Franciscan, missionary, martyr, saint of the Catholic Church. Founder of the Knights of the Immaculate, the monthly “Rycerz Niepokalanej” and Radio Niepokalanów, and the largest monastery in the world in Niepokalanów (762 people in 1939). The first Polish martyr of the Second World War was brought to the altars during the beatification in 1971, and then canonized in 1982 by John Paul II. During the roll call in the Auschwitz camp on July 29, 1941, he voluntarily chose to starve to death in exchange for his convicted fellow prisoner Franciszek Gajowniczek, who was among the 10 prisoners sentenced to death for escaping from the camp of one of the prisoners.
- ⁴ Pamięć o Janie Pawle II ciągle żywa Komunikat z badań. Centrum Badań Opinii Społecznej, nr 135/2018.
- ⁵ World Youth Day (WYD)—meetings of young people held every few years in various cities around the world, initiated by John Paul II in 1986.
- ⁶ This year seems to be a breakthrough in crossing all the confines of decency due to the content appearing in the media after the Smolensk catastrophe.

⁷ Papieska Rada ds. Krzewienia Nowej Ewangelizacji, Dyrektorium o katechizacji, Kielce 2020, issue 142.

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