

*Papal Authority Transformed by Changes in Communication*

“Roma locuta causa finita.” Rome has spoken; the case is closed. This statement is still true today among many believing Catholics in Poland as synonymous with the papacy settling doctrinal, moral, and disciplinary issues. Our project is an attempt to try to reverse this sentence and, instead, ask the question of how Pope Francis’ activities open the way for a discussion on public opinion. We want to find out to what extent the form and contents of the Pope’s teachings are subject to changes under the influence of transformations that communication is presently undergoing. Here, we are naturally assuming that the pope, like every other significant social life actor, is subject to deep mediatization. As a result, media users, including a large number of believing Catholics, are changing their beliefs about papal authority in the Catholic Church.

Therefore, the main issues in this project concern the way in which papal authority is constructed in the digital environment, the way in which media users consume this construct, as well as the extent to which Francis’ ministry corresponds with the theological vision of exercising his office.

We want to understand how the deep mediatization of the papacy relates to the growing tensions between objectivist and existential Catholicism. Next, we want to understand the digital media space’s role in shaping the new face of the pope’s authority, both from the perspective of papal statements and according to media users who follow Francis.

In this project, we undertake to investigate this dispute axis from the perspective of communication and media studies and theology.

Accomplishing the project involves the acquisition, development, and analysis of diverse research materials that are included in the period of Pope Francis’ pontificate (starting from 2013) in the Polish-speaking mediasphere as well as in theology.

The project will be implemented as a result of using a diverse research methodology, which will consist of successive discourse analysis, a film language analysis, media diaries, interviews, and theological analysis.