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## **RELIGIOUS MINORITIES OF THE INTERNET: THE CASE OF LODZ, POLAND**

### **Introduction**

The Internet, in an unparalleled manner, has created a completely new window on the world. Of late it has become one of the most important media, which is daily being used by more and more people. As such the Internet not only opens the door to new knowledge and information, but it also offers the opportunity to make new acquaintances. Moreover, it creates a forum where people can voice their opinions on virtually any topic and even present their artwork to the public. By its very essence, the Internet represents a globally extended, unregulated and uncontrolled cultural environment. As such it offers an alternative means of communication (Hamelink 2003), mediating the rapid and extensive exchange of information and opinions. Among the first groups and institutions to realize the utility of the Internet in spreading the word so to speak, were various church groups and religious movements. It appears that neo-pagan and modernist religious movements were, and still are, particularly active in this regard (Dawson, Hennerby 1999, Krogh, Pillifant 2004). The nature and extent of the activities of specifically neo-pagan movements on the Internet, led some

observers to speculate that there might even be some kind of a kinship between neo-pagan religions and the Internet (O'Leary 1996). Viewed more objectively, however, Dawson (1998) states that "(...) the Internet is especially compatible with religions that feature a monistic worldview, tolerance for other faiths, a pragmatic attitude toward authority, organizational openness, an emphasis on experience and a pronounced individualism". It was therefore merely a matter of time before the importance of the Internet, as well as the threats connected to it, were to be deliberated by the representatives of the major religions. These include inter alia the Canadian Catholic Bishops' Convention which came to the conclusion that: "(...) the use of new media has given birth to new possibilities for the mission of the church as well as new pastoral problems... The possibilities of the information highway are almost limitless. For that very reason, there must be particular attention to what is required by the right to information, especially if public opinion is to be informed, enlightened and analytical" (Tracey 1995).

The introduction of the Internet and the subsequent extension of public space have by implication created new conditions in society for the practice of religious activities. It stands to reason that the future

of religion will to a large extent be determined by the hopes of worshippers on the one hand, and the dangers connected to the development of new Internet technologies on the other (Dawson, Hennebry 1999). Many scientists are indeed of the opinion that with common access to the Internet, religion will be faced with many new challenges and threats (Krogh, Pillifant 2004). The outcomes of these challenges and threats are uncertain and in turn call for empirical studies on the issue of religion on the Internet (Dawson 2000). It is against this backdrop that this study on religious minorities on the Internet in Łódź was undertaken.

### **Background**

The present religious and ethnic profiles of Łódź only took shape during the last 200 years or so, due to a number of specific events and political decisions. Amongst these is the secularization of church property. The latter took place in 1793 and it was only after this date that new religions and other ethnic groups were permitted to (permanently) take root in the city. Before that, except for a small percentage of Jewish people, Roman Catholics (overwhelmingly) formed the dominant group in the religious structure of the city. The latter changed fundamentally due to population increase in the period 1793 - 1914. In the particular period the number of inhabitants in Łódź increased more than hundredfold. Most markedly was the establishment and rapid growth of a local Protestant society. Not only did they soon outnumber the other religious groups, but they also gained economic supremacy, which they maintained until the end of World War II. However, their share in the

total population of the city gradually decreased since the mid-nineteenth century. The percentage of Jewish people also increased gradually, particularly after 1862, when the warrant of compulsory settlement only in ghetto (named *Rewir*) was abolished. In the meantime, after the failure of the January Uprising in 1863, the number of Orthodox Christians grew as well, mainly due to the establishment of a tsarist administration and the deployment of military units in the city. Nevertheless, the majority of Orthodox Christians left the city before the end of World War I. In 1918 Łódź was populated by the Protestants (Lutheran, Calvin, Baptist, Adventist, New Apostolic and Laymen's Home Missionary Movement), the Orthodox, the Mariavites, and Jews.

In the years 1918-1939, the Roman Catholics outnumbered other religious groups but as far as the economy was concerned, it was the Evangelics (industry) and Jews (trade) who dominated the scene. The city's cultural scene was likewise dominated by the Jews. In this period, new religions emerged in Łódź, viz. Polish Catholics and new Evangelical branches. Methodists, Jehova's Witnesses, The Pentecost Church and Adventists. World War II ended with the virtual extermination of the Jewish population and the escape of the majority of Protestants. After 1945 the Roman Catholics became the most numerous religious group in Łódź. After the war, the registration of many new Churches and religious movements took place. Unfortunately they were kept in check, and at times even persecuted, by the authorities. The eighties saw more religious freedom when some previously illegal religious movements were allowed to register their activities officially. After 1989 previously confiscated property could be reclaimed and thus full social life could be restored.

Numerous new churches, religious movements and sects subsequently appeared on the local scene. This period saw the registration of Free Christians, Mormons and even two Buddhist associations. Nowadays the number of people belonging to one or other religious minority in Łódź is estimated at between 20 - 25 thousand (Budziarek 1998, Dzieciuchowicz and others 2004).

### Analysis

During a field survey in Łódź conducted in the course of 2001 (Dzieciuchowicz and others 2004), the representatives of 21 Churches and religious movements were surveyed - Protestant (Evangelical-Augsburg Church - Kościół Ewangelicko-Augsburski, Evangelical-Reformed Church - Kościół Ewangelicko-Reformowany, Baptist Christians Church - Kościół Chrześcijan Baptystów, Seventh-day Adventist Church - Kościół Adwentystów Dnia Siódmego, Evangelical-Methodist Church - Kościół Ewangelicko-Metodystyczny, Pentecost Church - Kościół Zielonościwkowy, Christian Pentecost Assembly - Chrześcijańska Wspólnota Zielonościwkowa, Association of Jehova's Witnesses - Związek Wyznania Świadców Jehowy, Laymen's Home Missionary Movement - Świecki Ruch Misyjny „Epifania”, Church of Evangelical Christians - Kościół Ewangelicznych Chrześcijan, Sabbath Day Christian Church - Kościół Chrześcijan Dnia Sobotniego, Church of Free Christians - Kościół Wolnych Chrześcijan, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints - Kościół Jezusa Chrystusa Świętych Dni Ostatnich, New Apostolic Church in Poland - Kościół Nowoapostolski), Orthodox (Polish

Autocephalous Orthodox Church - Polski Autokefaliczny Kościół Prawosławny), Old Catholic (Old Catholic Mariavite Church - Starokatolicki Kościół Mariawitów, Catholic Mariavite Church - Kościół Katolicki Mariawitów, Polish Catholic Church - Kościół Polskokatolicki), Jewish (Association of Jewish Religious Communes - Żydowska Gmina Wyznaniowa) and Buddhist (Karma Kagyu Buddhist Association - Związek Buddyjski Karma Kagyu, Kwan Um School of Zen - Szkoła Zen Kwam Um w Polsce). In 2004 during an Internet study, contact with some other religions was established - Evangelical Faith Christians' Church - Kościół Chrześcijan Wiary Ewangelicznej, Fellowship of Christian Churches Wspólnota Kościołów Chrystusowych (before 2004 known as Church of Christ's Communes) and two communes of Church of God in Christ ("Victory" Christian Centre and "Bethel" Christian Centre).

Of the aforementioned religions, only nine have local websites for Łódź (Table 1). The aim of this article was to review and evaluate the contents of these websites.

The website of the Old Catholic Mariavite Church is very complex. Nonetheless the pages contain different links, some of them external, which enable the visitor to study specific issues more comprehensively. Visitors to the website can acquaint themselves with the principles of the Mariavite Church faith as such, its history in Poland as well as the activities of its French branch (*Historia Kościoła*). The development of the parish in Łódź is set out in detail and displayed as a calendar of events. The website contains numerous pictures. In addition, the website offers a history as well as an indication of the most important releases of Mariavites' own publishing house (*Nasza Parafia*). Visitors

Table

## Survey sample - Lodz's religious minorities on the Internet

Name of religion	Abbrev. of name	Site name	URL site location
Starokatolicki Kościół Mariawitów ( <i>The Old Catholic Mariavite Church</i> )	S KM	Parafia Kościoła Starokatolickiego Mariawitów w Łodzi	<a href="http://www.mariawita.lodz.pl/">http://www.mariawita.lodz.pl/</a>
Kościół Ewangelicko-Augsburski ( <i>The Evangelical-Augsburg (Lutheran) Church</i> )	KEA	Parafia Ewangelicko-Augsburska w Łodzi	<a href="http://www.luteranie.pl/lodz/">http://www.luteranie.pl/lodz/</a>
Kościół Ewangelicko-Reformowany ( <i>The Evangelical Reformed Church</i> )	KER	Parafia ewangelicko-reformowana w Łodzi	<a href="http://www.reformowani.pl/lodz.php">http://www.reformowani.pl/lodz.php</a>
Kościół Adwentystów Dnia Siódmego ( <i>Seventh-day Adventist Church</i> )	KADS	Kościół Adwentystów Dnia Siódmego w Łodzi	<a href="http://www.kadslodz.chrystus.pl">http://www.kadslodz.chrystus.pl</a>
Kościół Boży w Chrystusie ( <i>Church of God in Christ</i> )	KBwCh	Centrum Chrześcijańskie Zwycięstwo	<a href="http://www.ccz.jezus.pl/">http://www.ccz.jezus.pl/</a>
Wspólnota Kościołów Chrystusowych ( <i>The Fellowship of Christian Churches</i> )	WKCh	Społeczność Ewangeliczna Wspólnoty Kościołów Chrystusowych w Łodzi	<a href="http://www.lodz.chs.pl/">http://www.lodz.chs.pl/</a>
Kościół Chrzęścijan Wiary Ewangelicznej ( <i>Evangelical Faith Christians' Church</i> )	KChWE	K.CH.W.E. Zwycięstwo w Łodzi	<a href="http://www.victorychurch.pl/">http://www.victorychurch.pl/</a>
Szkoła Zen Kwan Um ( <i>The Kwan Um School of Zen</i> )	ZKU	Łódzki Ośrodek Szkoły Zen Kwan Um	<a href="http://www.zen.pl/lodz/">http://www.zen.pl/lodz/</a>
Związek Buddyjski Karma Kagyu ( <i>Diamond Way Buddhism. The Karma Kaevu Buddhist Society</i> )	KK	Buddyzm Diamentowej Drogi - Ośrodek Madytacyjny w Łodzi	<a href="http://www.karma-kagyu.prv.pl/">http://www.karma-kagyu.prv.pl/</a>

Source: prepared by author.

to the website can also learn about the catechism centre, choir, parish orchestra (*Działalność*), cemetery (*Cmentarz*), Discussion Forum of the Mariavite Intelligentsia (*FDIM-Łódź*), and the

works of the Polish Ecumenical Council (*Ekumenia*). There is also a separate section of the website dedicated to the activities of the Mariavite youth, including meetings and summer and winter camps (*Młodzież*).

Another section of the website (*Nabożeństwa Informacje*), lists the dates of church services, radio and TV shows and information brochures which can be downloaded. The website includes the full address of the Church office and the cemetery (*Kontakt*). While surfing the website, full information on the Church's activities (religious and non-religious) in Łódź and Poland, including a variety of related subjects, can be found.

The most detailed issue on the Evangelical Augsburg parish's website is its history (*Historia*). Four sections on the particular matter have been presented, viz. the parish in Łódź, St. Mathew Parish, the Evangelics in Łódź and Evangelicism as such. The website also contains the dates of church services and planned concerts (*Aktualności*) and offers a dozen photographs of different buildings (*Galeria*). The website contains four links to church-related sites as well as the telephone numbers and addresses of the office and priests (*Kontakt*).

The web page of the Evangelical Reformed parish is part of the church's nationwide website. It is, however, based on a previously established website of the parish (still available on <http://www.geocities.com/Afhens/Parthenon/4032/lodz.html>). After reading about the latest news on the parish, the visitor to the website can click on *więcej* for contact information. You can also learn about the history of the parish in Łódź from the scrolled menu bar (*Historia. Kalendarium* and *Przyczynki do historii*).

On the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Łódź website information on who/what the Adventists are (*Kim jesteśmy*), can be found. There is also information on regular services and occasional meetings (*Nabożeństwa*) which take place in three churches (*Położenie zborów*). Moreover,

there are a couple of articles (*Artykuły*), a chronicle of events which, unfortunately only covers the period up to 2002 (*Kronika zdarzeń*), as well as links (*Linki*) to other Church and Adventism related websites. The "Informational Newsletter of the Seventh-day Adventists of Łódź Area" is an interesting feature. Unfortunately only one issue is available (1/2002).

The "Victory" Christian Centre is the name of one of the communes of the Church of God in Christ. A simple website provides information about the goals of the followers (*Strona główna*) and their programme (*Nowe projekty*). Moreover, it offers a schedule of services and meetings in the news section (*Aktualności*). Unfortunately, the sections about history, materials and cooperation (*Historia Kościoła. Materiały* and *Współpraca*) were still under construction when this article was being prepared.

The website of the Fellowship of Christian Churches is rather modest. It nonetheless presents an extensive and interesting history of the particular religion in Poland (*Wspólnota Kościołów Chrystusowych*). Visitors to the website can acquaint themselves with the eleven principles of the faith which form a preface to the Church's Charter (*Zasady Wiary*). It also contains the dates and places of services (*Nabożeństwa*). The "Evangelical Society in Łódź Newsletter - TRAKT" is an interesting feature carrying the texts of 25 articles (*Biuletyn "Trakt"*). The website also contains the addresses of all Polish branches of the Church (*Zbory WKCh*), as well as the links to their particular websites and a variety of other links (*Linki*) of interest to the visitor.

The official website of Evangelical Faith Christians' Church in Łódź contains the goals of the evangelical mission (*Wizja*) and a short history of the religion which

originated in the Ukraine (*O nas*). The information is very brief though. In addition to that, there are also a schedule of meetings, addresses, a map of the meeting hall's location (*Spotkania*), a dozen photographs (*Galeria*), four links to religious sites (*Linki*) and an invitation to a concert which is due to take place on the student campus (*Wydarzenia*).

The website of The Kwan Um School of Zen in Łódź is quite complex. The main menu contains 12 direct links to the subpages. The visitor can read a short introduction to the activities of the School in Poland (*Szkoła Zen Kwan Um*), the profiles of eight foreign and Polish masters and abbots (*Nauczyciele*), a schedule of meetings (*Plan praktyk*), information about planned courses (*Yong Maeng Jong Jin*), information on contacting the School (*Jak zacząć praktykę Zen?*), location of the centre in Łódź (*Jak nas znaleźć?*), kongan - a kind of question pertaining to a certain story for the current week (*Kong-an tygodnia*), addresses of the School, nationwide and worldwide (*WWW*), two galleries of photographs from previous meetings (*Zdjęcia*), fun with Zen (*Zen Wirtualny*), and news from the centre in Łódź (*Co nowego?*).

The website of Karma Kagyu Buddhist Association contains a short note about the roots of the Diamond Way Buddhism and the profiles of spiritual leaders (*Buddyzm*). One can also find the history and description of the Łódź centre (*Ośrodek*) and the dates of future meetings (*Informator*). The website (*Książki*) also contains a list of 11 recommended books, most of them by lama Ole Nydahala together with a short review, quotations and scanned covers. In addition, visitors to the website can view a number of photographs (*Galeria*) and

use the links to other Buddhism-related websites (*Linki*). The entire website has very attractive visual and coloristic outlines.

From the description of the websites of religious minorities in Łódź, it follows that their contents are generally brief and typical. The most frequent type of information presented on the relevant websites include: 1) dates of meetings and church services, 2) principles of faith and goals, 3) history of the religion or the centre in Łódź, 4) links to other websites, 5) photo galleries, and 6) contact information. Beyond this, hardly any additional information appear on some of the websites. An inventory of the features of the relevant websites are presented in Table 2. As can be seen, only three of the websites use more than 10 key words for finding the site with a browser. Only three websites are highly interactive, and only four websites provides full contact information (e-mail, phone, mail).

The aforementioned websites of Lodz's religious minorities aside, also found on the Internet, is the website of The Protestant Churches in Łódź Forum: GETSEMANE Prayer Centre (<http://www.getsemane.pl>). Representatives of some of Łódź'-Protestant churches partake in the Forum. Their particular goal is continuous prayer for Poland's and Europe's spiritual awakening. The website has an ecumenical profile and is full of diverse information.

Most of the religions in Łódź do not have their own dedicated website. Information on them can only be found on the nationwide website of the specific religion. In most of the cases, only the address and telephone numbers are provided without any reference to the history and current activities of their local

Table 2

## Inventory of Łódź's religious minorities on the Internet

Group	Site characteristics				Communications		
	Keywords	Design	Interactiveness	Special features	e-mail	Phone	Mail
SKM	23	advanced	high (Java)	links, audio, free booklet, free books, regional links	✓	✓	✓
KEA	–	advanced	med-high	links		<i>i</i>	
KER	12	advanced	high (Java, Flash)	audio			✓
KADS	–	basic	medium	links, chat, free booklets, free info	✓	✓	
KBwCh	7	basic	med-low	counter	✓		✓
WKCh	–	average	medium	free booklet, links	✓	✓	
KChWE	4	average	high (Flash)	links	✓		
ZKU	20	basic	medium	links, free info			
KK	6	advanced	med-high	links			

Source: prepared by author according to the method of Dowson, Honnebry (1999).

branch centres in Łódź. The official website of the Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church (<http://www.orthodox.pl>) contains only contact information on the Łódź-Poznań Diocese and a short note on Szymon, the Archbishop of Łódź and Poznań in the administration section (*Administracja*). (The section is available only in Polish, although the entire website is also available in English). The website also outlines the structure of the administrative division of the Diocese. Clicking on (*Dekanat Łódzki*) the name and address of the Dean can be found, as well as information on five parishes (including the parish in Łódź). In the links (*Linki*) section links to the websites of Polish parishes and dioceses can be established. Regrettably, no official website containing a description of the interesting

and unique history of present-day Orthodox Christianity in Łódź is to be found. The Jewish Commune in Łódź is another religious group without any reference on the Internet. The official Jewish website (<http://www.jewish.org.pl>) contains links to the websites of four Jewish Communes, but unfortunately not the Łódź Commune.

To gain information on the Łódź parish of the Polish Catholic Church (<http://www.polskokatolicki.pl>) the searcher has to click (*Struktura*) on the main menu, and then Diecezja *warszawska*. This displays a table of all the parishes in the diocese, including the Parish of Saint Family in Łódź, the dates of services and the name of the rector.

The websites of some of the Protestant Churches contain rather varied information. The Baptist Christian Church's official website (<http://www.baptysci.pl>) gives only

brief information on Baptists in Łódź. This very neat and professional website in its *Adresy i zbory* section provides information solely on the location of the Central Region's office in Łódź (with the name of the dean), as well as the location of the local church. It is a pity in a sense, since the contribution of this community in the development of Łódź is very significant (Budziarek 1998).

Clicking on *Zbory* and then Łódź on the Polish Evangelical-Methodist Church's official website (<http://www.metodysci.pl>), displays basic information on the Evangelical-Methodist Parish of God's Providence in Łódź. The address, telephone numbers, dates of services and meetings, names of the pastor and warden are reflected. In-between two photographs the only information provided states: "The Parish was established over 50 years ago. Apart from its religious activities it is also involved in the works of the Łódź Division of Polish Ecumenical Council and runs a common room for children".

The website of Pentecost Church in Poland (<http://www.kz.pl>) gives very brief information on the two communes in Łódź as such. After choosing *Adresy zborów* from the menu and then the name of the region from the map (*Centralny*), the searcher can only find the address and the dates of services. The Assembly's community in Łódź earlier had their own website, but unfortunately it was terminated and does not function anymore.

The Church of Evangelical Christians is represented in Łódź by three communes. General information on the individual communes is available on the official website of the Church in general (<http://www.kech.pl>). After selecting *Adresy zborów* from the menu, and

clicking on *Łódź* on the map, the following information will be found: address, telephone numbers, e-mail address of two of the communes, the names of the pastors and dates of services.

The Jehova's Witnesses, one of the first religious movements, has since its founding tried to utilise all the available media in advancing their mission. From the very outset, they published books and magazines and even operated their own radio broadcast station. The Association, however, appears to underestimate the power and importance of the Internet. They namely operate only one official website, which is translated into many languages. The Polish version (<http://www.watchtower.org/languages/polis>) contains answers to the questions which the Witnesses seek in general. The website, however, seems "dead" since it is not very informative. It lacks, for instance, information on current problems and the situation of the Association in Poland. The only Polish element on the website is the address of the Polish main office. It is of course connected to the fact that all media releases of the Association have to be "approved" in advance. As a result of that, all official publications are translated versions of American editions. Jehova's Witnesses in Poland are hence not at liberty to publish any materials, including on the Internet.

As far as the Mormons in Łódź are concerned, only the address and dates of services can be found on the official website of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in Poland (<http://www.morrnioni.r-gminy>) menu. The Church of God in Christ (<http://www.kbwch.pl>) has two communes in Łódź, viz. the "Victory" Christian Centre (with their own website as mentioned before) and the "Bethel" Christian Centre. Information on the latter commune can be found on the general website, viz. *KBWCH*



w Polsce / pokaż. This includes the local address (with e-mail), telephone numbers, name of the pastor and dates of church services. The website of the Laymen's Home Missionary Movement (<http://www.epifania.pl>) does not contain any information on their community in Łódź. The website of the Free Christians' Church (<http://www.kwch.gf.pl>) also lacks information on their centre in Łódź. The websites of Sabbath Day Christian Church (<http://www.kchds.pl>) and New Apostolic Church in Poland (<http://www.nak.org.pl>) do not contain any contact information on any of their Polish communes.

There are also religions which do not have any websites at all. These include the Catholic Mariavite Church and the Christian Pentecost Assembly (only some of the local communes boast their own websites).

### Conclusions

The review of the contents of the above-mentioned websites indicates that the religious minorities of Łódź do not make full use of the possibilities which widespread access to the Internet carries. They appear to be aware of its advantages but at the same time appear to utilize it in only a limited and conventional way in practice. All their websites dedicated to Łódź concentrate on presenting more or less detailed information on background, location, church services and so on. They clearly lack the elements which would enable potential users to make virtual contact, which is lately emerging as being of greater importance than physical, direct

contact. Virtual contact has for instance enabled new religious movements in the USA to recruit the largest number of new members lately (Dawson, Hennebry 1999). In Łódź, however, even the traditional Internet communicators do not seem to work well. Only the Calvin pastor replied to the author's e-mail. Other e-mails remained unanswered or else were replied to after a very long time. The author entered chat rooms on two different websites, but failed to find anyone willing to enter into discussions. Another, more advanced ways of communicating - text, verbal or visual, were not used on the websites included in the study.

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## **ŁÓDZKIE MNIEJSZOŚCI RELIGIJNE W INTERNECIE**

Internet jest wielkim współczesnym „oknem na świat”. Jest to obecnie jedno z ważniejszych mediów, z którego na co dzień korzysta coraz więcej ludzi. Poszukują oni w Internecie np. wiedzy i informacji, nowych znajomości, próbują umieszczać tu swoje poglądy i efekty własnej twórczości. Od początku istnienia Internet wykorzystywany był również przez różne kościoły i wyznania religijne. Rolę i znaczenie Internetu, a także zagrożenia z nim związane, zauważyli także przedstawiciele wielu wyznań, ale na przyszłość religii wpływ będą miały zarówno nadzieje jak i niebezpieczeństwa związane z rozwojem nowych technologii internetowych. Uważa się, że religia w dobie powszechności dostępu do Internetu wkracza w epokę wielu nowych wyzwań i zagrożeń.

Obecna sytuacja narodowościowa i wyznaniowa Łodzi, kształtowała się przez ostatnie 200 lat. Złożyło się na nią wiele specyficznych wydarzeń i decyzji podejmowanych na różnych szczeblach władzy. Obecnie w Łodzi obok przedstawicieli tradycyjnie w niej obecnych wyznań pojawiają się też wyznawcy wielu nowych kościołów, ruchów religijnych i sekt. W trakcie badań terenowych przeprowadzonych w Łodzi w 2001 r. (Dzieciuchowicz i inni 2004), udało się dotrzeć do przedstawicieli 21 kościołów i związków wyznaniowych. Były to grupy wyznawców protestantyzmu (Kościół Ewangelicko-Augsburski, Kościół Ewangelicko-Reformowany, Kościół Chrześcijan Baptystów, Kościół Adwentystów Dnia Siódmego, Kościół Ewangelicko-Metodystyczny, Kościół Zielonoświątkowy, Chrześcijańska Wspólnota Zielonoświątkowa, Związek Wyznania Świadków Jehowy, Świecki Ruch Misyjny „Epifania”, Kościół Ewangelicznych Chrześcijan, Kościół Chrześcijan Dnia Sobotniego, Kościół Wolnych Chrześcijan, Kościół Jezusa Chrystusa Świętych Dni Ostatnich, Kościół Nowoapostolski), prawosławia (Polski Autokefaliczny Kościół Prawosławny), starokatolicyzmu (Starokatolicki Kościół Mariawitów, Kościół Katolicki Mariawitów, Kościół Polskokatolicki), judaizmu (Żydowska Gmina Wyznaniowa) i buddyzmu (Związek Buddyjski Karma Kagyu, Szkoła Zen Kwam Urn w Polsce). Natomiast w 2004 r. w trakcie badań Internetu znaleziono kontakt do wyznawców kolejnych religii. Były to: Kościół Chrześcijan Wiary Ewangelicznej, Wspólnota Kościołów Chrystusowych (do 2004 r. pod nazwą Kościół Zborów Chrystusowych) oraz dwa zbory Kościoła Bożego w Chrystusie (Centrum Chrześcijańskie Zwycięstwo i Centrum Chrześcijańskie Betel).

Łódzcy wyznawcy tylko dziewięciu z tych wyznań posiadają własne strony w Internecie. Celem artykułu jest przegląd i ocena zawartości tych stron internetowych. Jak wynika z opisu stron łódzkich mniejszości religijnych, ich zawartość jest generalnie rzecz ujmując, skromna i typowa. Najczęściej można znaleźć takie pozycje jak: 1) terminy

spotkań, nabożeństw, 2) zasady wiary, cele, 3) historię wyznania lub łódzkiego ośrodka, 4) odnośniki do innych stron, 5) galerię zdjęć oraz 6) dane adresowe. Dodatkowe informacje sporadycznie występują tylko w niektórych serwisach. Poza tym tylko trzy strony używają więcej niż 10 słów kluczowych pomocnych przy wyszukiwaniu strony, także tylko trzy witryny charakteryzują się wysoką interaktywnością, a ze wszystkich zestawionych komunikatorów (e-mail, phone, mail) skorzystać można w przypadku czterech wyznań.

Większość łódzkich wyznań nie posiada swojej własnej strony w Internecie. Informacje o nich funkcjonują w sieci tylko w obrębie ogólnopolskiego serwisu danej religii. W większości przypadków znajdują się tam tylko ogólne informacje teleadresowe, bez komunikatów na temat historii i współczesności społeczności łódzkiej.

Na podstawie przeglądu zawartości religijnych stron internetowych można stwierdzić, że łódzkie mniejszości religijne nie w pełni wykorzystują możliwości jakie daje powszechny dostęp do sieci. Owszem wykazują one pewnego rodzaju „zaciekawienie” Internetem, ale praktycznie wykorzystują go tylko w sposób bardzo ograniczony i konwencjonalny. Wszystkie łódzkie witryny koncentrują się głównie na zaprezentowaniu, mniej lub bardziej obszernych informacji na swój temat. Brak jest natomiast elementów dzięki, którym możliwe byłoby nawiązanie wirtualnego kontaktu bez nieco zobowiązującego spotkania osobistego - a tak właśnie nowe ruchy religijne zdobywają najwięcej członków w Ameryce (Dawson, Hennebry 1999). A na łódzkich stronach niezbyt dobrze działają nawet tradycyjne sieciowe komunikatory. Na list pocztą e-mail odpowiedział tylko pastor kalwiński, pozostałe posty pozostały bez odpowiedzi albo odpowiedziano na nie po bardzo długim czasie. Autor kilkakrotnie wchodząc na zamontowane na dwóch różnych stronach chaty ani razu nie spotkał tam kogoś gotowego do rozmowy. Z innych, bardziej zaawansowanych: tekstowych, głosowych czy wizualnych sposobów obcowania, twórcy omawianych stron nie korzystają.