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## **‘Plurality-Empathetic’ Christians: Rethinking Religious Education in Poland**

## **„Pluralistycznie-empatyczni” chrześcijanie: przemyślenia nad edukacją religijną w Polsce**

**Abstract:** Presently, Poland appears to be a vital stronghold of Catholicism in the international arena. It appears to be a homogeneous society, that remains to be hermetically sealed and not available for people from other countries with different cultural and religious background (e.g. fear of Muslim immigrants from the Middle East). However, it does not change the fact that the processes taking place in the deepest structures of the Polish society, not only has a strong secularisation tendency, but also indicates the fact that pluralism is not a new or marginal phenomenon but rather increasing annually. From this perspective, this paper will highlight not only a better and more effective operationalisation of the practical theology assumptions with regards to the socio-cultural and religious pluralism, but also it indicates the new ways of implementing interreligious education, within the formal religious education in Poland. The paper presents a conceptual sketch of the changes in the religious education in Poland, in that religious education should meet the children and young people’s needs. Furthermore, religious education should be deeply an-

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chored in their everyday life and shape the ‘pluralist-emphathetic’ young Christians and citizens who will support the religious dialogue and the functioning of the state, Europe and the world ‘without stakes’.

**Keywords:** religious education; interreligious education; interreligious dialogue; pluralism; school pastoral care.

**Abstrakt:** Polska na arenie międzynarodowej jawi się nadal jako żywotna twierdza katolicyzmu. Wydaje się, że jest to społeczeństwo homogeniczne, które pozostaje hermetyczne zamknięte i niedostępne dla osób z innych krajów, o odmiennym pochodzeniu kulturowym i religijnym (np. strach przed muzułmańskimi imigrantami z Bliskiego Wschodu). Nie zmienia to jednak faktu, że procesy zachodzące w najgłębszych strukturach polskiego społeczeństwa mają nie tylko silną tendencję do sekularyzacji, ale także wskazują na to, że pluralizm nie jest zjawiskiem nowym czy marginalnym, ponieważ z każdym rokiem przybiera na sile. Z tej perspektywy niniejszy artykuł zwraca uwagę na lepszą i skuteczniejszą operacyjizację założeń teologii w odniesieniu do pluralizmu społeczno-kulturowego i religijnego, a także wskazuje nowe sposoby wdrażania edukacji międzyreligijnej w ramach formalnej edukacji religijnej w Polsce. W artykule przedstawiono koncepcyjny zarys przemian, jakie powinny zajść w nauczaniu religii w Polsce w taki sposób, aby edukacja religijna odpowiadała na aktualne potrzeby dzieci i młodzieży. Ponadto edukacja religijna powinna być głęboko zakorzeniona w codziennym życiu uczniów i kształtać „pluralistycznie empatycznych” młodych chrześcijan i obywateli, którzy będą wspierać dialog religijny oraz funkcjonowanie państwa, Europy i świata „bez stosów”.

**Słowa kluczowe:** edukacja religijna; edukacja międzyreligijna; dialog międzyreligijny; pluralizm; duszpasterstwo szkolne.

## 1. Introduction

Religious pluralism is not a new phenomenon in the Polish socio-political context. In the sixteenth and seventeenth century, Poland was defined as ‘a state without stakes’, where not only Catholics, Orthodox, Jews, Armenians and Tatars lived alongside one another, but also those ones who were harassed in their homelands because of their faith (Tazbir, 1973, 2009). Currently the situation in Poland has changed, where the Polish society consists

of almost 90% of Catholics (Pew Research Centre, 2017) and has a sense of imaginary Muslim threat (Topidi, 2019). Islamophobia has been fueled and promoted by the politicians of Law and Justice party since 2015 (Mohr, 2019; Goździak & Marton, 2018; Posmykiewicz, 2017; Klaus, 2017; Ratajczak & Jędrzejczyk-Kuliniak, 2016). This phenomenon, translates not only into the growth of discrimination, prejudice, xenophobic and racist attitudes especially among Poles (CBOS, 2020; Topidi, 2019, Pew Research Centre, 2018; Piela & Łukjanowicz, 2017; Pasamonik, 2017), but it also indicates a negligible and weak level of interiorisation of Christian values (e.g. love of neighbour, religious acceptance, tolerance, justice and social solidarity, etc.) promoted within the framework of formal religious education in schools (Balsamska et al., 2012; Anczyk & Grzymała-Moszczyńska, 2016; Przybylska & Wajsprych, 2018; Pędziwiatr, 2018; Gawlicz et al., 2015; Różańska, 2015).

The issue of religious education, in the face of growing challenges related to the religious diversity of societies, has recently raised increasing interest among scientists in Poland (e.g. Michalski, 2004; Nowak, 2008; Miliński, 2009; Różańska, 2015, 2017; Moskal, 2019; Zduniak, 2019) and in the international arena (e.g.: Kujawa-Holbrook, 2014, 2015, 2016; Schweitzer et al., 2002; Jackson & O'Grady, 2017; Weiße, 2008; Skeie, 2009; Derjacques, 2014; Jackson, 2004, 2018, 2019; Klutz, 2016; Boschki, 2015; Kaupp, 2019; Bahabol, 2019; Pohl-Patalong, 2018; Gmoser & Weirer, 2019; Jäggle, 2019; Bauer, 2019; Kropac, 2019). Researchers are looking for new opportunities for religious education in multicultural societies. Furthermore, researchers indicate the need for shaping the religious identity of students, which remains open to another religion and culture. This is characterised by the attitude of dialogue, reflection and tolerance, which can deepen of one's faith, tradition and enhance interreligious dialogue (Różańska, 2015; Opiela, 2018). In this aspect, it is not only about a better and more effective operationalisation of the religious education in relation to religious pluralism, but it is also about the indication of the new ways of implementing ecumenical and interreligious dialogue within the formal teaching of religion in Polish schools.

The purpose of this paper is not a detailed evaluation of the current form and curriculums of religious education in Polish schools, which is well documented in the literature (e.g. Baniak, 2000; Jancewicz, 2020; Misiaszek, 2010; Jedynak, 2018; Zellma, 2017; Panuś, 2011; Zająć, 2015; Janiga, 2011; Kowalczyk, 2015; Zielińska & Zwierżdżyński, 2013; Mąkosa, 2015, 2016; Przybylska & Wajsprych, 2018; Zwierżdżyński, 2017) or a didactic and meth-

odological construction of the assumptions of religious education in Poland. The objective of this paper is to conceptualise an outline of the necessary changes in the religion education, which will meet the needs anchored in the daily life of children and young people. Furthermore, religious education should shape the ‘plurality-empathetic’ of young Christians and citizens, who will support the existence and functioning of the state, Europe and the world ‘without stakes’.

## **2. Starting point: The present cultural and religious state within the Polish society**

Currently, religious teachings are carried out in a completely different cultural and religious context, as compared to the religion lessons which were conducted thirty years ago (Jedynak, 2018; Czekalski, 2010). Bogusław Milerski suggested an over-confessional and integral openness to the pedagogical dialogue model of religious teachings, in the context of the growing influence of pluralism in the late 1990s (Milerski, 1998). However, this project was not implemented in the religious and pedagogical practices in Poland. In the past and at present, Poland has appeared (still?) to be a vital stronghold of Catholicism in the international arena (Hainz et al., 2014) and a homogeneous society (Gołata & Jonda, 2008; Coleman, 2006). However, in the deepest structures of the Polish society, the processes have not only been a strong tendency to secularise, but also indicate that pluralism is neither a new phenomenon in this country, nor a marginal phenomenon. Pluralism is increasing its momentum annually (Mariański, 2015b; 2015c; 2016). In that sense, it is worth pointing to two basic cultural and religious areas of the presence of pluralism in the individual and public space.

To begin with, ‘pluralism in various areas of human life is the clearest symptom of postmodern society’ (Mariański, 2015a, p. 584). Since the fall of communism in 1989, one can talk about accelerated secularisation processes in the religiousness of Polish people (Mariański, 2015c; Stala, 2015), which lead primarily to accumulation of ideological pluralism (Burdziej, 2005; Mariański, 1993, 1997, 2010, 2015b, 2015c, 2016; Rembierz, 2014, 2017; Kołodziejczyk, 2010). In the face of progressive pluralisation, everyone faces the possibility of making choices among various value systems, life forms and images of the world (Berger, 2004; Guzik & Marzęcki, 2018). The changes taking place in the Polish postmodern society are close to the patterns that are present in Western Europe (Guzik & Marzęcki, 2018). In

terms of religiousness, the studies emphasised that faith is becoming more and more individualised, axiologically relativised and selective (Zdaniewicz, 2013; Mariański, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c). Religiousness, in some sense, has withdrawn itself from the areas where it has always been present, and now appears in new places (Rogińska, 2014). While these changes take place at a moderate pace among the older generation of Poles, it succumbs much faster to young people (Grabowska & Gwiazda, 2019; Guzik & Marzęcki, 2018; Mariański, 2015c; Pawlik, 2018). The report 'Youth 2018' leaves no illusion in this context. Young people, not only distance themselves from the institution of the church, but also their level of religiousness is diminishing (Grabowska & Gwiazda, 2019). At this point, it is worth emphasising that the differences in the number of practicing Catholics among young people regularly range from 20% to 30%, which means that 70–80% of young Catholics are beyond the range of the Catholic Church pastoral and catechetical offers (Mariański, 2015c; Mąkosa, 2015). The belief in Church is more common in rural areas, however the larger the city, young Poles report they live their faith in their own way (Potocki, 2014). There are probably lots of diverse reasons for this phenomenon, but the most significant one, is that adolescents are a heterogeneous group (Guzik & Marzęcki, 2018). This situation also translates itself that the percentage of people participating in religious education at schools is decreasing yearly: the reduction from 93% in 2010 up to 70% in 2018 among students of higher grades of upper secondary schools (Głowacki, 2019).

Secondly, Polish Catholics constitute a significant majority on the ethnic and religious map of Poland, however they do not have a monopoly in this regard (Pasieka, 2015; Buchowski & Cholewińska, 2010, 2012). According to the 2018 report of the Central Statistical Office on religious denominations in Poland, there were 186 different religious groups. This included: 87,6% of the total population in Poland belongs to Catholic Church; 0,41% are members of the Orthodox Church, 0,36% are Jehovah's Witnesses, 0,18% are Lutherans, 0,09% are from Greek Catholic Church, 0,07% are from Pentecostal Church; 0,03% are from the Old Catholic Mariavite Church, 0,12% are members of more than 150 other churches, denominations and religious movements, 0,04% represent Buddhism, 0,013% represent Islam, 0,004% represent Judaism (GUS, 2019). Furthermore, there has been a growing number of foreigners applying for residence in Poland in recent years. In 2017, 202.000 foreigners submitted such applications, which means the legalisation of stay applications were submitted by 71% more people than in 2015. Ten thousand people from the European Union countries have registered

their stay in Poland. Approximately, 62% were submitted by citizens of the Ukraine (UdSC, 2017). In this framework, the growing cultural pluralism in large cities in Poland (e.g. Warsaw) is becoming a fact. This has a clear impact on the functioning of schools currently attended by children and young people representing virtually all civilisation circles (Błeszyńska, 2010).

Social processes, hopes, and tensions are taking places at the local and global environments and are also accumulating at schools (Czerepaniak-Walczak, 2015). Therefore, existing pluralism in Poland affects not only social life but also educational practices. It opens numerous opportunities, such as experience of diversity, individuality and freedom (Adamski, 2016). Pluralism also brings some objective threat, e.g. uncertainty, the problem with world-view and cultural orientation (Słotwińska, 2014). In this context, the task of religious education in Polish schools should focus on strengthening favourable opportunities resulting from pluralism. This will give a chance for a closer interpersonal, intercultural and inter-religious relations, as well as it will show the mutual complementarity, that exists between Christianity and other religion and world-views. Indeed, this complementarity is asymmetric in nature, but at the same time, it enables interreligious and world-view exchange, value sharing, dynamic interactions and mutual enrichment (Dupuis, 2003; Różańska, 2019). Polish religion education needs transformation. It argues that current religion curriculum is fixated on only one religion, called the school catechesis (Kropac, 2019). In this sense, the Christian theology should concentrate on the religious pluralism, which does not have the right to usurp the exclusive right to have absolute truth, nor to appropriate other religions (Różańska, 2019). It is about minimising homogeneity and dualistic divisions, which can be summed up in the concise opposition of ‘we’ and ‘they’ in favour of multifaceted and multi-layered religiousness (Różańska, 2019; Adamski, 2011).

Therefore, at this point, a question must be raised about the concretisation of the new model of religious education in Poland, and a conceptual outline of the necessary changes, so that religious education is not focused on indoctrination detached from the students’ lives. Instead, it constitutes a platform for building a solid, open empathetic approach to one’s own religion and other people’s religion or world-views (Różańska, 2019). Religious education should become a place for spreading dialogue, acceptance and integration, because ‘the future is not monochrome; if we are courageous, we can contemplate it in all the variety and diversity of what each individual person has to offer’ (Francis, 2020, no. 100).

### **3. Conceptual outline: a new model of religious education in Poland**

Pluralism is not a problem, but the context of contemporary school and church activities (Jäggle, 2018). The denominational model of religious education of an informational and educational character is an interesting possibility of religious education, which remains open to other people with all their subjectivity and diversity (Chrostowski, 2020). In Poland, this model should be anchored on the personal-existential pedagogical concept of J. Tarnowski (e.g. Tarnowski, 1982, 1984, 1991, 1992, 2005, 2007, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c; Chrobak, 2013, 2018; Buczek, 2017; Łyszkowska, 2012). His concept is adopted from personalism, the principle of the inalienable dignity and freedom of every human. This is based on existential philosophy, that emphasises that each person must be understood through the prism of aspirations, fears, successes and catastrophes in his personal context of life (Tarnowski, 2003).

In the face of the growing challenges of the socio-cultural and religious pluralism, the core of religious education should be a dialogue, which in J. Tarnowski's pedagogical thought is understood as a way of communication between subjects aimed not only at understanding what each of them thinks and lives by, but also creating a close relationship (Tarnowski, 1982; 1992). Therefore, dialogue is not an ordinary conversation, but in a way, is a platform for cooperation between people involved in the process (Placha, 2020; Mizerek, 2018; Nowak, 2010). The categories of a dialogue and its meanings are the key elements of the described vision of religious education in Poland. For that reason, they place a specific person in the centre of all theoretical and practical efforts within the school system, the religious education and upbringing (Chrobak, 2013, 2018; Buczek, 2014, 2017).

It is worth to point out, that religious education was built conceptually around the principle of dialogue that has the following main features (Tarnowski, 1993; Sarnat-Ciastko, 2019): permanence (a person learns all his/her life, and therefore religious education also lasts all his/her life); transgressiveness (openness to crossing oneself and one's own borders); inter- and intra-activity (simultaneous interaction of various entities); indeterminacy (lack of any asymmetry of mutual relations). The above characteristics of the religious education, to some extent, force to reorganise religious and pedagogical activity, in such a way that is not based on the principle of interaction of a subject or an object. Nonetheless, it is an interaction of two or more subjects and

ensures respect for each person in all its diversity, resulting from individual form of life, knowledge and religion etc. (Chrostowski, 2020; Zarzecki, 2012; Kostkiewicz, 2016; Chrobak, 2013).

It is also necessary to base the core curriculum and individual teaching units of religious education on J. Tarnowski's 'pedagogical credo', which consists of five religious and pedagogical formulas (Tarnowski, 2003; Chrobak, 2013, 2018; Chrostowski, 2020; Sarnat-Ciastko, 2019):

1. Starting point: empathising with students regarding their emotions, worries, hopes, problems, rather than behaving like an adult person.

2. The student: students are not the subject of educational processes, therefore they should be treated like partners on their way to Christian maturity, where everyone can err. Students should be also treated like persons with the right to participate in decision making.

3. Relationship: mutual understanding and creating the atmosphere of friendship without expecting gratitude or appreciation.

4. Educational process: the teacher cannot expect immediate results, but he should hope for better future. The core curriculum and teaching programmes must be properly constructed to correspond to pluralistic reality of student lives and to provoke their interest. Accordingly, the principle of mutual education is important – everyone can learn something new from the other person and vice versa.

5. Aim: Assist students in discovering their personal vocation by gradual approaching human and Christian maturity and help students find their place in social life.

Religious education is presented in such a way that translates the emphasis from the top-down teachings to an educational personalism as part of the process of mutual getting to know each other, building relationships and helping to search for an independent life goal (Sarnat-Ciastko, 2019). In addition, it promotes to get to know the student as a person, with his individual 'here' and 'now' and allows the focus to be on the pedagogical and theological dialogue anchored in Christian personalism. On the one hand, this dialogue strengthens religious and denominational identity through explored content, and it opens horizons for interpersonal, interreligious and intercultural dialogue for students. It also allows you to put yourself in someone else's place and view the world from their perspective, taking into an account the contemporary, cultural and social changes. It is important to highlight the informative function of the religious education, focusing on the knowledge of the principles and the history of Christianity and their impact on the culture of Europe and one's own country. Furthermore, the social norms, the

Decalogue and the principles of active tolerance, acceptance, and cultural, social and religious integration are as equal important (Chrostowski, 2020; Gellner & Langenhorst, 2013).

This presented approach, shows that the school lesson of religion, although it remains confessional at the level of teaching content (Chrostowski, 2020; Pajer, 2007; Małkosa, 2011) does not, and cannot be understood as before as the school catechesis. This allows for cyclical catechetical activities during classes and Christian initiation (KEP, 2001a, 2018, 2019). For that reason, according to the *Directory for Catechesis* (2020) it leads us to lose identity through a completely different approach, rather than an actual pedagogical-religious activity, such as religious teaching and catechesis (Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelisation, 2020, no. 313). The proper place for active catechesis will always remain as a religious community, e.g. a parish (Chrostowski, 2020; Kiciński, 2018). The confessionalism of religion education will always have a multifaceted nature, due to the diversity of addressee's beliefs: believers, seekers, doubters and non-believers (Kielian, 2013). In this sense, the confessional religion education must become more open, accessible and attractive, as a place of dialogue and meeting for students with world-views different than Catholicism (Kropac, 2019). On the other hand, the confessionalism of religious education should, through the interiorisation of knowledge about their own and other religions, convey information and skills to better equip students with the necessary tools and build their alliances, despite their religious differences (Kujawa-Holbrook, 2015). In addition, the implementation of the proposed model of religious education in Polish schools, will enable more effective cooperation, on the level of ecumenical and interreligious aims, and the content of teaching between various religious communities. In this regard, it is important to note that there are twenty-seven types of religion education in the Polish education system (KAI, 2017). Thus, the cooperation in connection with the challenges of the present day, seems not only socially desirable, but also necessary.

The proposed model of religious education should be supplemented with a practical form of (inter)religious experience, 'laboratory of dialogue' (Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelisation, 2020, no. 53) and meetings between people of different cultures, religions and world-views, as part of the forgotten resource in Poland, school pastoral care. The school pastoral care should go far beyond the framework of religion education, and should contribute to the sensitisation of all people in the school environment – students, parents, teachers, administrative and technical staff, etc. (Chrostowski, 2020).

#### **4. The laboratory of dialogue and meeting: school pastoral care**

Religious education and religious upbringing in Poland are currently based on religion education (KEP, 2001a, 2018, 2019). School pastoral care continue to remain undiscovered, in the area of pedagogical, religious and pastoral activity in the Polish Church for the benefit of the school environment in all (Chrostowski, 2020; Zuk, 2012; Polak, 2017; Czekalski, 2004). It does not mean, however, that the issue of school pastoral care is not mentioned in various Church documents (KEP, 2001a, 2001b). The main difficulty that emerges from the analysis of these documents, is the fact that there is no clear distinction between school pastoral and catechetical care (Czekalski, 2004; Chrostowski, 2020).

The source of inspiration and impulses is the school pastoral care (German: *Schulpastoral*) which is part of the activities of the Catholic and Evangelical Church in the school system in Germany. Essentially, it can be said that both the Catholic and Evangelical concepts treat the school pastoral care in a similar way, as extracurricular Christian commitment to the humanisation of the school environment (SDB, 1996; EOS, 2008). School pastoral care is addressed to all people in the school environment i.e. believers and atheists, Christians and followers of other religions etc. (Kaupp, 2018).

School pastoral care is not a religious education (SDB, 1996; Roth 2013). Rather, it is primarily a set of voluntary, pastoral and recreational offers (Diözese Augsburg, 2006; Zuk, 2012), spiritual, psychological and pedagogical counselling that assist students who are in need (family problems, grief over student or teacher's death, job loss, etc.). The school pastoral care also allows a better cooperation between various churches and social institutions (Chrostowski, 2020; Seibt, 2008; Demmelhuber, Hartung & Wicker, 2011).

Christians who wish to become involved in school pastoral care, are treated as if they were guests at the school. Subsequently, people who carry out school pastoral care also become their hosts, as they have the right to direct their offer to people belonging to the school environment (Lob, 2012). Furthermore, it is impossible to ignore the issue that people are concerned with the school pastoral care imitating Jesus Christ, as a guest and a host. This makes the possibility to create a platform for a dialogue in a pluralistic school environment. In this regard, it is worth mentioning, that Verburg & Abdel-Rahman (2015), stated several biblical-theological arguments that constitute such an issue:

1. Jesus Christ often appreciated the hospitality of others, especially in the Gospel of Luke. Where he did not have his own home, where he could invite others, but he invited himself or was invited to participate in other people's lives and meals. Even the active school pastoral care does not invite people to their flats, but they receive hospitality in the classrooms, which are not owned by the church (Verburg & Abdel-Rahman, 2015).

2. Jesus Christ often does not take the role of a guest, he becomes the host. This can be read in Emmaus pericope (Luke 24:28–32): Jesus is invited as a guest by his disciples. However, he changed the role – from being the guest to be the host and he broke the bread that he offered them later. His transfer of roles is not done in order to be generous at the expense of others. Exercising the guest's right at someone's home is a confirmation of the promise of God's unconditional love, that also implies the claim to be the host. This is especially true when Jesus visited tax collectors (Luke 5:27–32, 19:1–10). School pastoral care is not a guest in the public school, but rather plays the role of a host, who makes an offer to people living and working in the school environment church (Verburg & Abdel-Rahman, 2015).

3. Jesus Christ is also a guest, a host and a gift to the guests. As per the Emmaus story, it can be also a gift in a form of a broken bread. In the other narratives, his teaching is a gift (Luke 7:36–50, 11:37–53, 14:14–24) that his hosts consider controversial. Hospitality is a part of Jesus' preaching and thus part of the inculcation of the Gospel and the evangelisation of culture (Francis, 2013b, no. 69; Verburg & Abdel-Rahman, 2015).

4. The biblical law of hospitality is not limited to the rules of housing and entertainment. The Torah develops the right of hospitality into the equality of the foreigners' rights, and the order of the Sabbath applies to a stranger who has the right to live in urban areas (Ex 20:10). In this sense, school pastoral care, exercising the right to positive religious freedom in public schools, must be open to all people, regardless of their religious beliefs. It also must strengthen the attitude of respect, tolerance and dialogue in everyday life (Verburg & Abdel-Rahman, 2015).

In the above stated approach, the culture of dialogue and meeting, when everyone has something good to offer and receive in return, is the only way to develop individuality, family, society and make progress during the nations' lives. This attitude of openness and availability without prejudice, can be described as 'social humility', that favours the dialogue. This frame of mind can develop a good understanding between cultures and religions, and build a mutual respect without unjustified demands, that are realised in the world respecting different faiths. Today people must be focused on

the dialogue and the meeting culture, otherwise everyone will lose (Francis, 2013a).

The Bible-based understanding of school pastoral care in a pluralistic school, gives the beginning of the new forms of pastoral ministry in Poland, where commitment to victims and involvement in the interreligious dialogue at school play a major role (Verburg & Abdel-Rahman, 2015).

Even though, there are lots of attempts of social inclusion in Polish schools (Skałbania & Babiarz, 2018; Chrzanowska, 2009a, 2009b; Krause, 2010; Szumski, 2009, 2010; Zacharuk, 2008, 2010), the exclusion can be experienced not only inside but outside the school. School pastoral care can help to change this situation by presenting the diaconate offers, which could include helping students face the challenges of life and/or support students with learning difficulties. It is also advisable to promote integration and solidarity outside the school, by social and economic projects. However, it is important to create the space at school where members of various religious communities will be able to present their views, and at the same time be recognised, accepted and valued. The values mentioned above, should be considered as a positive indication of hospitality (Verburg & Abdel-Rahman, 2015).

Interreligious dialogue, that aims to understand others, is also a necessary precondition for peace in the world and in the school environment. Therefore, it is a duty of Christians and other religious communities. A religious, pluralistic school community is an important place for the dialogue of life. Teachers, different religions and school pastoral care can become ‘an engine’ for the interreligious dialogue in schools (Verburg & Abdel-Rahman, 2015). Here are the following requirements for this dialogue:

1. doctrinal humility: it is significant that all people can only express symbolically who or what they believe in and testify about it, so they do it often in a conditional and ambiguous manner (Stosch, 2012; Verburg & Abdel-Rahman, 2015);

2. connection with one’s own religious tradition: mystagogical activity within school pastoral care is very important because it offers the possibility of a denominational connection not only with the doctrinal surface but also with an authentic religious practice (Stosch, 2012);

3. attention and empathy: getting closer to a person belonging to another religion means getting closer to another religion without distancing yourself. It is important to know the stranger and his/her religious practices. It requires hospitality that is perceived positively, given the meaning of religious beliefs, can only be understood in the context of the people’s practice and their beliefs they hold. It also requires an encounter that is possible thanks

to hospitality and learning about different ways of coming to the truth. This attitude cannot be equated with accepting the truths of others, but rather with an attempt to understand and respect these truths. Mutual invitations from members of other religious communities are particularly desirable to initiate meetings. 'Dialogue of life', mutual openness and willingness to share the joy and suffering are prerequisites for theological and interreligious dialogue (Stosch, 2012; Verburg & Abdel-Rahman, 2015).

Laboratory of dialogue and meeting as part of the school pastoral care, is a significant help, not only in understanding the other in his otherness, but also in going beyond the well-known patterns connected with one's perception of the man, the world and God (Stosch, 2012). It is important to encourage young people, to develop sensitivity to other religions and acquire competences that will enable them to have a friendly dialogue and a clear assessment. The relevance of this task is demonstrated essentially by the fact that people of different religious faiths or world-views, meet not only in society but also at school, work and privately (Verburg & Abdel-Rahman, 2015). In this sense, all school pastoral care projects that bring people together, blur or abolish the borders, overcome prejudice and strengthen social sensitivity and solidarity, are extremely valuable. It does not matter if it's cooking together, working for the poor in Africa or interreligious prayer within the meaning of Taizé – all help build bridges between people (Lames, 2016).

## 5. Conclusions

The presented draft, of the proposed changes in the existing model of religious education in Poland, may be a starting point for further discussion regarding the profile of religious education and the school pastoral care. This requires a detailed, analytical and critical study and adaptation to Polish conditions (Chrostowski, 2020; Polak, 2007). To begin with, clear rules of differentiation and complementarity between religion lessons, school pastoral care and catechetical service in the parish should be created in the future. It is also important to create an appropriate legal, financial and personal framework, that would enable the efficient functioning of such broadly understood activities of Christians in Poland for the benefit of the school environment (Chrostowski, 2020; Zuk, 2012; Polak, 2007; Czekalski, 2004). In this aspect, it is important to maintain the 'subject relations' (as a counterpole to the concept of 'object relations') between the teacher and students within the school pastoral care. In addition, such relations should be considered already

at the stage of constructing methodological and didactic guidelines for religious education, e.g. as part of establishing a children's and youth advisory group for religious education and/or school pastoral care and expanding its group to representatives of other religions, denominations or non-believers (Chrostowski, 2020).

Both, the religion lesson that is focused on interpersonal, interreligious and intercultural dialogue and the school pastoral care are in fact opportunities to change the orientation of religious education and upbringing into a heterogeneous group in Poland. The individual students can make their individual contribution to the education process depending on students' various needs and abilities, views on existential or religious topics etc. (Zduniak, 2019). In times of increasing secularisation and pluralisation of society, the presence of the Church and religious education based on catechetical conditions, the Polish schools are becoming decreasingly obvious, more difficult to maintain and executed. For this reason, far-reaching and bold changes are necessary to support the involvement of Christians in a mutual interreligious cooperation, with respect for cultural and sociocultural and religious diversity. We live in times where people are often excluded because of their beliefs, religion and world-views. In this context, it is essential to support the humanisation of schools and social integration. The aim of religious education and upbringing must be first rooted in its own religious tradition. As students learn to read, interpret and respond (for example thought, the *lectio divina* method) to the scriptures they will come to know the teaching of Jesus, and will begin to see for themselves how Jesus welcomes strangers from other religious traditions into dialogue (i.e. the Samaritan woman, John 4:4–26) (Keator, 2018). In this sense, religion lessons must support the training and formation of Christians who are empathetic and open to social pluralism, but also ready to make their individual and community contribution to reduce and extinguish 'stakes' in any place on earth and any area of life.

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