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The Potential of Religious Education in Preventing Suicide among Children and Adolescents in Poland: Theoretical Analysis and Implications for Pre-suicidal Prevention

Potencjał edukacji religijnej w zapobieganiu samobójstwom
wśród dzieci i młodzieży w Polsce:
analiza teoretyczna i implikacje dla prewencji presuicydalnej

Abstract: The second leading cause of death in Poland is suicide committed by young people aged 7 to 18 years. It appears that not enough is being done in the Polish Catholic community to protect the young generation from self-destructive behaviour. The preventive powers of Christianity and Religious Education in this area remain largely unutilised. This article not only highlights the primary causes and various aspects of suicide among children and youth in Poland, but it also signals (on the level of theoretical considerations) the 'pro-life potential' that lies in Religious Education. The implications related to the teaching of religion are presented as a starting point for the systemic and planned religious-pedagogical and pastoral activities for suicide prevention, as well as mental and spiritual support of students at risk of suicide.

Keywords: suicide; suicide prevention; Religious Education; Poland.

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Abstrakt: Samobójstwa popełniane w Polsce przez młodych ludzi w wieku od 7 do 18 lat to druga najczęstsza przyczyna zgonów. Wydaje się, że w polskim katolickim społeczeństwie nie robi się wystarczająco dużo, aby chronić młode pokolenie przed zachowaniami autodestrukcyjnymi, a możliwości prewencyjne religii chrześcijańskiej i związanej z nią edukacji religijnej w tym zakresie pozostają niewykorzystane. W tym kontekście niniejszy artykuł nie tylko wskaże na różne aspekty i główne przyczyny zjawiska samobójstw wśród dzieci i młodzieży w Polsce, ale także zasygnalizuje (na poziomie rozważań teoretycznych) „potencjał pro-life”, jaki tkwi w edukacji religijnej. Na koniec zostaną przedstawione implikacje związane z nauczaniem religii, które mogą być punktem wyjścia do systematycznych i planowych działań religijno-pedagogicznych i duszpasterskich na rzecz prewencji presuicydalnej oraz wsparcia psychicznego i duchowego uczniów zagrożonych samobójstwem.

Słowa kluczowe: samobójstwo; prewencja presuicydalna; edukacja religijna; Polska.

1. Introduction

The data in the report on suicides among children and adolescents in Poland during the years 2012–2021 are alarming: on average, two students per every 28-person school class attempted suicide in Polish schools, and 1181 people up to the age of 18 took their own lives (Kicińska & Palma, 2022). Concurring with the aforesaid report, the World Health Organization also notes that for every suicide of a young person, there could be as many as 100–200 additional suicide attempts by other people (Goldsmith et al., 2002; Kicińska & Palma, 2022). If these figures are applied to the Polish scenario, in the last decade, between 118,100 and 236,200 students could have attempted suicide in Poland. The above compilation of data, although concise and cursory, shows not only the scale of the discussed problem in Poland but also the crisis of psychological and psychiatric care for children and adolescents, which is regularly reported by the Polish media (Glanc, 2022; Grzelak, 2021; Suchodolska, 2018). Additionally, the UNICEF report (2020) reveals that out of 38 surveyed countries of the European Union and OECD (i.e., the richest countries in the world) Poland is ranked 31st in the overall children's quality of life, and in the category of 'mental well-being' and 'physical health,' it was in a low 30th position.

In this context, a specific priority is needed to search for future-oriented and potentially effective educational activities in the Polish school system, aimed at increased care for the mental, physical and spiritual well-being of children and

youth, as well as suicide prevention. It seems that religion and closely related Religious Education have a special potential in this regard. As many international researchers point out, religion and Religious Education are a source of 'vital' resources, i.e., as part of the efforts to improve mental health (Estrada et al., 2019; Gonçalves et al., 2015), strengthening strategies for religious coping (Krägeloh et al., 2012; Pietkiewicz, 2010) and individual resilience (Arnhold, 2014; Burghart, 2019; Chrostowski, 2021a), promoting interpersonal ties, pro-community (Liagkis, 2016; Vermeer, 2010) and well-being (Abdel-Khalek, 2012; Aten et al., 2019; Chen et al., 2019), developing religious morality and a system of values (Manea, 2014; Rogers-Sirin et al., 2017; Sachs, 2010), reduction of risky health behaviours (Bożek et al., 2020; Isralowitz & Reznik, 2015), positive coping in stressful situations (Ano & Vasconcelles, 2005; Weber & Pargament, 2014) and combating suicidal thoughts (Bullock et al., 2012; Eskin, 2004; Hoffman & Marsiglia, 2014; Lester, 2017; Lester & Walker, 2017; Stack & Kposowa, 2011; Surmacz et al., 2021; Wu et al., 2015). These can help create effective pre-suicidal prevention.

Within the scientific and cognitive context, the aim of this article is not only to outline the various aspects of suicide and its main causes (also of a religious nature) among children and young people in Poland but also to demonstrate the different levels of the theoretical considerations for pro-life potential in Religious Education in the Polish education system. Lastly, the implications for school practices will also be presented, which may be the starting point for planned religious-pedagogical and pastoral activities for pre-suicidal prevention and mental-spiritual support of students at risk of suicide. The author does not mean to detail the construct conceptual changes in the Polish model of Religious Education, but just to point out the unutilised possibilities that may initiate a systemic, multifaceted change in favour of the humanisation of the Polish school and care for the student in the spirit of the Christian faith.

2. Recognising the problem: the multifaceted nature of the phenomenon of suicide and its main causes

During the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, or more precisely in the years 2020 and 2021, more girls than boys in Poland took their own lives by suicide – 51 girls and 41 boys in 2020, and 76 girls and 66 boys in 2021. Consequently, the number of suicide attempts was also much higher among girls than boys: 538

girls and 305 boys in 2020, and 1086 girls and 410 boys in 2021. In 2021, 1496 children and youth under the age of eighteen attempted suicide, of which 127 ended in death. Compared to 2020, this is an increase of 77% in suicide attempts and 19% in suicide deaths (Kicińska & Palma, 2022).

The increase in the number of suicides committed by children and young people in Poland has grown in recent years, appearing to be a significant social problem (Jankowska, 2019). This is a subject of a multifaceted and in-depth academic debate in legal terms (Burdziak, 2019; Gądzik, 2019), (religious-) pedagogical (Baranowska, 2014; Skoczylas, 2003; Wasilewska-Ostrowska, 2015), cultural and historical (Chwin, 2021; Michalska-Suchanek, 2011; Witkowska, 2021), as well as psychological and psychiatric (Gmitrowicz & Krawczyk, 2014; Makara-Studzińska, 2017), sociological (Adamczyk, 2021; Wróblewski, 2016) and theological-ethical terms (Birnbacher, 1988; Czabański, 2017; Kluz, 2017). The rich interdisciplinary literature in this field testifies to the search for various causes of the suicidal act and is rightly analysed in the context of the complex interactions of an individually acting person, as well as concerning external or sociocultural conditions (Wolski, 2019).

One of the most frequently described causes of suicide and suicide attempts among Polish children and adolescents – besides mental illness and depression¹ – is the dysfunction and instability of the family, which has also been aggravated by the situation related to the COVID-19 pandemic (Polish Police Headquarters, 2022). As Adamczyk (2021) notes, the “Blue Line” (*Emergency Centre for Domestic Violence Victims*) ambulance received 534 phone calls from children or adolescents in 2019, including 28% (147) physical violence, and 38% (180) reported psychological violence. A total of 369 interventions were undertaken in cases of domestic violence, and 59.2% of these cases concerned a child as the victim. After the COVID-19 outbreak, aid workers have therefore seen a significant increase in the demand for assistance from children and young people. In particular, the number of telephone conversations concerning mental health and interventions in situations that put the health and life of the child at risk has increased (Szredzińska & Włodarczyk, 2021). Moreover, today’s children and young people are also tired of the situation related to COVID-19,

¹ Bąbik and Olejniczak (2014) emphasise that about 50–98% of young people who attempt suicide have mental disorders, the most common of which are depressive (60–80%) and behavioural disorders (50–80%).

in which the need to cope with loneliness has intensified. An increase has been observed not only in burnout rates among young people due to rising expectations of them, but also fear of the future and uncertainty of the morrow (Chrostowski, 2021a; Długosz, 2020).

As mentioned, the most common motives for suicide attempts include depression, which affects behaviour and emotions, the desire to arouse guilt in others, hopelessness and the impression of inability to get out of a given situation, failure (often exaggerated), real or imagined loss, and isolation and a sense of mismatch with society (Bąbik & Olejniczak, 2014; Gmitrowicz, 2005). Further, negative school experiences can generate the likelihood of taking one's own life. Children and adolescents who experience didactic failures, occupy a low sociometric position in the classroom, are overburdened with school duties, suffer from school phobia, or have unsatisfactory interpersonal relationships with teachers and peers, are more likely to manifest suicidal tendencies (Baranowska, 2014). Occasionally, religious motives for suicide are indicated; this includes some manifestations of suicidal terrorism, suicides committed within sects, as well as self-immolation (Gądzik, 2019).

In light of the above, the basis of suicidal decisions is always several co-occurring factors. Table 1 below shows the main categories of risk factors for suicide among children and adolescents in Poland (Kielan & Olejniczak, 2018):

Notably, most suicide attempts among children and adolescents are impulsive and often conducted without premeditation. Children and young people often do not want to die, but only to change their difficult life situation. Most likely for this reason, young people associate the word 'suicide' not with destruction and the ruthless end of life, but rather with relief from pain and escape, often with the opportunity to draw attention to themselves in the hope of finding support and love (Baranowska, 2014).

People, on the other hand, who really have such an intention, very often seek help or even 'call' for that help, for someone to notice their problem (Wasilewska-Ostrowska, 2015). Suicide is a process (Ringel, 1953) that usually consists of the following three phases (Szymańska, 2016, p. 16): 1. Suicidal thoughts – fantasising and contemplating one's own death (imagining a funeral and the reaction of the environment, fantasies about the impact of one's death on the fate of other people); 2. Suicidal intentions and tendencies – making a decision and the related search for information about various (effective) ways

Table 1. Categories of risk factors for suicide in children and adolescents

Categories of risk factors for suicide	Risk factors belonging to individual categories
1. Demographic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender: male-majority (from 2020 female-majority) • Place of residence: Village
2. Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family situation: neglect/rejection of the child, conflicts between parents, divorce • School situation: school changes, learning difficulties, conflicts with teachers and peers • Difficult financial situation • Crime
3. Psychological	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personality traits, changing mood, aggression, impulsivity, anxiety • Trauma • Lack of life skills • Behavioural addictions
4. Disease	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental: depression, manic-depressive psychosis, schizophrenia, disorders • Borderline personalities, alcoholism, drug addiction • Somatic: AIDS, neurological diseases, Huntington's chorea, multiple sclerosis and cancer
5. Biological	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neurochemical

Source: Kielan & Olejniczak, 2018: 14 (updated based on data from the report of Kicińska & Palma, 2022).

of taking one's own life, as well as testing them (sometimes there are several suicide attempts that no one knows about, even those from the immediate environment), 3. Actual committing of suicide.

The analysis of the main risk factors for suicide attempts of children and adolescents confirms not only how multifaceted and complex the suicidal behaviour of this group of people is, but also how dangerous (Baranowska, 2014). In light of the above, increased suicide prevention behaviour among children and adolescents appears to be necessary. This is especially important given the fact that today, children and teenagers are increasingly lost and lonely, and the basic task of the school and teachers (and parents) is to prepare the child for adulthood, to convey the values and norms prevailing in the world, as well as to help them discover their personal potential. Young people should not only be helped to seek the meaning and purpose of life but also taught that everyday difficulties and suffering are inherent in human existence (Wasilewska-Ostrowska, 2015).

3. The 'pro-life potential' of religious education: promoting individual and social resources

In Poland, as much as 88 percent of all students participate in religion lessons for two hours a week in all types of schools (Chrostowski, 2022; Instytut Statystyki Kościoła Katolickiego SAC, 2020). If one considers only the statistics cited, it is difficult not to agree with the statement that Religious Education has an important role in shaping the attitudes and worldviews of the young generation of Poles (Chrostowski, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c, 2022b). With that understanding, the curriculum for teaching religion in Poland (Polish Bishops' Conference, 2010a, 2010b, 2018, 2019) is deeply rooted in the Christian faith, which is also significantly strengthened by the fact that Religious Education in Poland has the character of 'school catechesis' (Polish Bishops' Conference, 2001a). This implies that these lessons should fulfil and initiate the informative and educational function of religion (Polish Bishops' Conference, 2001b, no. 37–53). Besides, the main tasks of school catechesis include promoting knowledge of the faith, liturgical education, moral formation, teaching to pray, education for community life and missionary initiation (Congregation for the Clergy, 1997, no. 86–87).

Despite the assumption of the current model of Religious Education in Poland being given a multifaceted, constructive and justified discussion (Anczyk & Grzymała-Moszczyńska, 2018; Chrostowski, 2020, 2021c, 2022b; Horowski, 2022; Wrońska, 2023; Zellma et al., 2021) the potential that religious lessons have (also in their current form in Poland) concerning the promotion of individual and social resources that can prevent suicide, cannot be overlooked. Religious Education is conducive to inter alia:

a) the construction of the meaning of life and a positive perspective for the future in the face of everyday difficulties

The Catechetical Directory of the Catholic Church in Poland (Polish Bishops' Conference, 2001b) emphasises that school catechesis should provide answers on the meaning of life in the light of faith. Christianity helps young people in this sense to understand that every human life has great value and that God makes a 'covenant of love' (Jn 3:36) with all people. Religion also opens new horizons for children and young people and helps them understand that the

fundamental goal of human life is eternal life. Hence, it gives them an immense and hopeful perspective for the future, helps them to see more deeply the meaning of temporal actions, sufferings, and difficulties and helps to build a human community (Skoczylas, 2003).

b) strengthening integration, a sense of brotherhood and community

As part of Religious Education, students are encouraged to cooperate and integrate with others, and to participate actively in the life of the religious and social community (Polish Bishops' Conference, 2010a, 2010b, 2018, 2019). Belonging to and participating in religious groups and ecclesial movements, which operate based on the principle of fraternity, creates the opportunity to receive the emotional support needed in a person's life, especially for those who experience suicidal thoughts (Wolski, 2019). Youth-driven religious communities offer children and young people the chance to encounter the spiritual dimension of the Church, its internal structure, and therefore one that is understandable to them. Further, the religious values that religious communities transmit protect young people from emptiness and alienation (Benowska, 2002–2003).

c) cultivating the memory of the good and bad components of tradition

Religion and Religious Education are the carriers of traditions that link the present with the past, providing young people with positive examples of the lives of saints, and warn against destructive attitudes. This religiously cherished memory of the good and bad components of tradition not only enhances the process of identification with the Christian religion and the system of religious and ethical-moral values it represents but also strengthens the cohesion of society as a whole (Czabański, 2017).

d) enhancing identification processes with the religious system of religious and ethical-moral values

The curriculum of Religious Education in Poland emphasises religious and ethical-moral concepts like faith, love, human dignity, the sanctity of human life, decalogue justice, solidarity, self-control, courage, etc. (Polish Bishops' Conference, 2010b, 2010b, 2018, 2019). The educational function of religion

in this respect is based on the implementation of a system of commands and prohibitions, ethical and moral canons and the formation of personality as per religious doctrine. In a scenario where the value system is organised around religious values, the student's behaviour, thoughts and feelings will reflect the importance of these values and will manifest themselves in his/her attitude (Surzykiewicz, 2015; Wnuk & Marcinkowski, 2012).

e) effective integration of the individual into social discipline

Religion is the first and basic 'school' of social discipline that fosters socialisation and develops in young people a sense of responsibility for their actions, a sense of duty and one's own limitations (Czabański, 2017). In this sense, the lesson of religion prepares students for subjective, responsible and competent participation in culture and society. Subsequently, Religious Education equips young people with competencies that allow them to make a real and socially acceptable distinction between good and evil, making them self-disciplined (Chrostowski, 2021d).

With the above considerations on the 'pro-life potential' of Religious Education in Poland, it leads to the conclusion that schools, as places where a large population of children and adolescents take part in religious legations, should rediscover the potential and important role that these classes play in the promotion of mental health (Estrada et al., 2019). In addition, the benefits of Religious Education in the field of pre-suicidal prevention should be maximised as much as possible.

4. Implications for pre-suicidal prevention: towards a system of long-distance prevention and mental-spiritual support in the process of religious education

Although the Roman Catholic Church condemns the phenomenon of suicide (Catholic Church, 1992, no. 2280–2283), it also tries to understand the suffering of people torn by existential doubts and suicidal thoughts. It is precisely the understanding and sensitivity towards the other person and his or her life situation that should form the basis of all religious-pedagogical activities aimed at preventing suicide and deeper social integration. This problem cannot under

any circumstances be perceived as trivial. However, without the intensified social and educational activity and charisma of those responsible for education and the ‘people of the Church,’ the process of social disintegration – especially in the (post-)pandemic reality – may deepen and cause a dynamic increase in suicide deaths among children and adolescents (Czabański, 2017).

It should be remembered, however, that the results of research conducted as part of suicide prevention (e.g., Kimokeo, 2006; Portzky & Van Heeringen, 2006; Torok et al., 2019; Whitlock et al., 2014) indicate unequivocally that a) short programmes focusing on suicide or depression detached from the actual problems of the school and students are ineffective and may prove counterproductive; b) due to the extremely complex, multifactorial determinants of suicide, only the ‘social-ecological model of prevention’ can be effective, i.e., considering both the elimination and weakening of all modifiable risk factors – environmental, school, family, individual – as well as the strengthening of protective factors and long-term activities at several levels (Szymańska, 2016). In this context, Religious Education should take decisive steps to prevent and psychologically and spiritually support people at risk of suicide through the following tasks, *inter alia*:

1. Regarding pre-suicidal prevention, the Church in Poland should extend public and private schools to greater pastoral care, which would be related (e.g., within thematic units) to Religious Education and at the same time, would go far beyond religious lessons. It is about humanising the school environment and providing it a more people-friendly face in cooperation with other institutions and organisations, educational, pedagogical, psychological, medical, or religious. Such activities are possible as part of the extracurricular offer of ‘school pastoral care’ (Chałupniak, 2008; Chrostowski, 2020, 2021a, 2021e; Polak, 2007; Żuk, 2012; Czekalski, 2004), which could take on the character of a long-distance and planned process in Polish schools, and should also be open to the current and real needs of all people in the school environment, i.e., students and their parents, teachers and administrative staff—regardless of their religion, worldview, sexual orientation, etc. (Chrostowski, 2021b, 2021c, 2022b). In particular, actions in the following areas would be relevant:

- *professional counselling* is one of the dimensions of the broadly understood ‘*diakonia*’ and an important element of the school’s functioning. It is a form of assistance in the relationship between a qualified counsellor and a person seeking advice (a person at risk of suicide, their family,

teacher, or friends), applies to all school groups and provides extensive cooperation with experts in various fields (e.g., psychiatrists and social workers). Among them, there is a special place for cooperation with school social workers, school crisis team, school psychologist and pedagogue, as well as by helping in the implementation of preventive projects of the Education Development Center in Warsaw² (Chrostowski, 2021c, 2022b; Żuk, 2012). Additionally, counselling activities require training, especially for teaching staff, in the field of recognising the symptoms of suicide risk in peers (Czabański, 2017). The basis for the operation of counseling as part of the 'school pastoral care' in a Polish school must be to conduct conversations in an atmosphere of mutual respect and openness, without trying to evaluate (Chrostowski, 2021c, 2022b).

- *ethical-religious accompaniment* is nothing more than the accompaniment of children and young people in the challenges of everyday life by a school pastor (lay or clergy). From this perspective, Religious Education and the 'school pastoral care' cooperating with it should focus on the difficulties, fears, longings, needs and expectations of life, as well as the dreams of all people in the school environment. Moreover, such work with children and young people enables youth to gain courage and orientation in life and to transmit the hope that flows from the Christian faith. An important guidance in this area is the common celebration and prayer in moments of joy and mourning, respectively (Chrostowski, 2021c, 2022b).
- *creating a vibrant and friendly school culture* – such a school culture grows out of a pedagogical-anthropological, holistic understanding of the school (Chałas, 2019; Chrostowski, 2020; Nowak, 1997; Tarnowski, 1991), based on the principles of closeness to life and the world and mutual discovery and learning of life. In a unique way, Religious Education should lead to the inclusion of excluded people and to interreligious and intercultural dialogue in the school environment (Chrostowski, 2021b; Fic, 2018). The Church's commitment to a human-friendly and lively school culture should contribute to making the Polish school

² Education Development Center in Warsaw (Ośrodek Rozwoju Edukacji, ORE) is a public and nationwide institution run by the Ministry of National Education in Poland. The aim of the center is to carry out activities to improve the education system and quality of education as per the state education policy in the field of general and vocational education (ORE, 2022).

a more common 'home' for humanity, and thus a place where warmth, kindness, understanding, etc. are experienced. To achieve this, however, it is also necessary to listen to the opinions of all people belonging to the school environment (believers and non-believers) and to establish school religious-pastoral teams who, based on a school-pedagogical or school-theoretical approach and their own experiences, will try to shape offers regarding pre-suicidal prevention in a lively and innovative way (Chrostowski, 2021c, 2022b).

- *shaping openness and a helpful school community* – those responsible for Religious Education – in close cooperation with the school pastor – should endeavour to transform the school into a community where one can experience mutual acceptance, unconditional affirmation and recognition, as well as care for others, which is expressed in an unconditional readiness to help another person. These activities must be expressed in all integration initiatives, including various types of excursions, pilgrimages, days of reflection, retreats, etc. (Chrostowski, 2021b, 2022b).

2. Polish schools lack interfaith places of silence, prayer and contemplation, as well as social gathering rooms such as school cafes, which would allow students to nurture community and organise social gatherings with colleagues and friends. The Polish Church should – in consultation with the school authorities – invest available financial resources (e.g., youth ministry funds) for the development of such places, as they would enable students at risk of suicide to have intimate conversations with their peers about their current difficulties and problems (Chrostowski, 2021c, 2022b). The need for action in this area is confirmed by research, which has shown that over 80 percent of children and adolescents talk about their problems primarily with their peers (Anthony, 1994), indicating that adolescents can be an important element in the pre-suicidal prevention system (Czabański, 2017).

3. The content of the curriculum of Religious Education, or the related offers of 'school pastoral care,' should focus primarily on showing the beauty of human life, the values and positivism of the Christian change of God, the world and humanity, and the explanation of the meaning of suffering and difficulties in the light of Christian hope. It is also important to reassure students that God cares for them (Mt 6:24–34). Further, it is necessary to equip students with competencies that will help them constructively cope with conflict resolution and stress reduction, conduct an open dialogue, understand emotional states

in themselves and others, and equip them with the knowledge and skills to find qualified and professional help (Baranowska, 2014; Czabański, 2017; Kluz, 2017). Importantly, religious and pedagogical work should avoid publicising cases of other suicides that may lead to an increase in the number of suicides by youth, which specialists refer to as the 'Werther effect' (Napieralska et al., 2010; Szymańska, 2016).

4. It should be mandatory for teachers and school management to be educated about the warning signs of pre-suicidal behaviours (also as part of academic studies for the teaching profession). Indeed, working with and caring for children and young people who experience crises can be challenging; however, it is essential to highlight the significance of teamwork and access to helpful resources upon the onset of a crisis. Foremost, school employees should be offered annual training and attend ongoing workshops in the field of cooperation and conflict resolution, along with continuous improvement processes of team and interpersonal competencies. This would enable school employees to be better equipped with the knowledge and necessary skills to address any difficult situations when working with students. Further, it will also allow considering potential difficulties of cooperation within the teaching council (Szwajca et al., 2019).

Ultimately, it should be acknowledged that it is not possible to create a single effective and useful scenario of a conversation between a religious teacher/school chaplain and a student at risk of suicide, given that there are no two identical people or two identical CVs, or the same causes of the crisis and sets of risk factors (Szymańska, 2016).

5. Conclusions

In sum, it is necessary to emphasise once again the essence of the problem being addressed: in Poland, suicides are the second cause of death among children and adolescents, following only various accidents (Kicińska & Palma, 2022). In light of hard statistical data, and especially at present, in the (post-)pandemic reality, decisive religious and pedagogical action is needed in the field of pre-suicidal prevention. Religious Education cannot, therefore, be impervious to the life difficulties and needs of a young adolescent (Czabański, 2000), as the above reflection clearly showed.

Schools, the Catholic Church, other religious communities, the Polish community and society have an enormous role to play to counter the problem of suicide. Only through their mutual and effective cooperation is there a possibility to reduce the number of suicides among young people. Hence, concrete and decisive actions are needed across ideological divisions, which will allow viewing and creatively using the strength and 'pro-life potential' of the Christian religion and related Religious Education. The most effective method of preventing the suicides of young people is not only a variety of means or professional help but friendship, tolerance, mutual respect, acceptance and spiritual support (Kluz, 2017).

Indeed, creating such an atmosphere at school is not easy, but it is not impossible either. Christianity, its spirituality and inspirations from the Bible may help create a system of therapeutic and preventive activities rooted in religious premises, vis-a-vis the growing number of suicides in Poland (Kluz, 2017; Wolski, 2019), but they also need to contribute to giving the school a more human, student-friendly face.

It seems that the future-oriented conceptual, didactic and methodological orientation of Religious Education in Poland and linking it with several pastoral activities in the school require not only in-depth discussions among the various stakeholders, but also an increased focus on the person of the student – especially those who are lonely, excluded, harmed, and left alone with several worries and problems. Educational plans and preparation for external exams are important, but they cannot obscure another person. Hence, Religious Education, as well as the school of tomorrow, must, starting from a pedagogical-anthropological, holistic understanding of educational activities, put the student at the centre of all its activities, in the physical, mental and spiritual sense. Moreover, schools and Religious Education must remain faithful to this priority.

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