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Between ‘Religious Denomination’ and ‘Social Diversity’: On the Future of Religious Education in Poland

Pomiędzy „religijną konfesyjnością” a „społeczną różnorodnością”. O przyszłości edukacji religijnej w Polsce

Abstract: In recent years, Polish society has observed an intensification of changes in socio-religious conditions. In a special way, they have become the ‘hallmark’ of young Poles, who already exist uniquely between ‘religious denomination’ and ‘social diversity’. The current form of Religious Education (school catechesis) is therefore becoming less and less compatible with the daily life of youth and will thus undoubtedly be difficult to maintain in the future in an unchanged form. In this context, this article – anchored in a critical analysis of the present – is an attempt to ‘explore’ the future of Religious Education in Polish schools. To begin with, the authors present the symptoms of ‘social exhaustion’ concerning school catechesis and then focus on presenting ‘dialogue’ as a religious-pedagogical path of the future. The last paragraph is devoted to conceptual

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dilemmas, which include not only tasks related to the future teaching of religion, but also present guidelines related to the search for a future model of Religious Education in Poland.

Keywords: Religious Education; change; Poland; pluralism; dialogue; school education.

Abstrakt: Na przestrzeni ostatnich lat obserwuje się w polskim społeczeństwie intensyfikację przemian zachodzących w obrębie uwarunkowań społeczno-religijnych. W sposób szczególny stały się one „znakiem rozpoznawczym” młodych Polaków, którzy już dziś, w pewien sposób, egzystują pomiędzy „religijną konfesyjnością” a „społeczną różnorodnością”. Obecna forma edukacji religijnej (katecheza szkolna) staje się zatem coraz mniej kompatybilna z codziennością młodych ludzi i tym samym w niezmiennionej formie będzie w przyszłości bez wątpienia trudna do utrzymania. W tym kontekście celem niniejszego artykułu jest – zakotwiczona w krytycznej analizie teraźniejszości – próba „wybiegnięcia” w przyszłość nauczania religii w polskich szkołach. W pierwszym kroku autorzy prezentują symptomy „wyczerpania” społecznego w odniesieniu do katechezy szkolnej, aby następnie skupić się na przedstawieniu „dialogu” jako ścieżki religijno-pedagogicznej przyszłości. Ostatni akapit poświęcony jest koncepcyjnym dylematom, które obejmują nie tylko zadania dotyczące nauczania religii w przyszłości, ale także prezentują wytyczne związane z poszukiwaniem przyszłościowego modelu edukacji religijnej w Polsce.

Słowa kluczowe: edukacja religijna; zmiana; Polska; pluralizm; dialog; edukacja szkolna.

1. Introduction

In Poland, 91,9% of the citizens declare belonging to the Catholic Church (KAI, 2021) and 86% of all children and adolescents participate in school religious lessons (ISKK SAC, 2021). Polish society is becoming more and more a ‘society on the bend’ (Marody et al., 2019). This fact is related to numerous and rapid changes, including the pluralisation of lifestyles and world views, the reorientation of the axiological and moral planes, the weakening of religiosity, the individualisation of faith, the loosening of believers’ ties with the Catholic Church, and a decline in trust in the Church as an institution (Mariański, 2013, 2018; Zaręba, 2018; Boguszewski & Bożewicz, 2019; Grabowska & Gwiazda, 2019; Rasińska, 2021). These changes actually affect the entire society, but in a special way, they are the ‘hallmark’ of the young generation, which already lives today somewhat between ‘religious denomination’ and ‘social diversity.’

Along with the 'sharpening' of the socio-cultural context outlined in contemporary Poland, the Church will not only lose its monopoly over truth, and political and social influence in the future (Mariański, 2017), but it will also entail a kind of 'revolution' in the currently implemented model of Religious Education in Polish schools. The lesson of religion, built around a catechetical-evangelistic premise (Polish Bishops' Conference, 2018, 2019) is increasingly facing media criticism (Głuszek-Szafraniec, 2017), and youth are increasingly likely to opt out of participating in these activities (Głowacki, 2019; Klimski, 2021; Chrostowski, 2020, 2021a, 2022b). Over the next decades, 'school catechesis,' the current form of Religious Education, will undoubtedly be difficult to maintain and will face a process of transformation. The direction changes in Religious Education in Poland will take is still debatable. However, it is not an unreasonable question, given that every year, an increasing number of experts point from different perspectives to the multifaceted need for change in this area (see e.g. Cackowska & Stańczyk, 2012, 2013; Zielińska & Zwierzdzyński, 2017; Klimski, 2021; Milerski, 2009, 2021; Wrońska, 2021; Bilicka, 2021; Horowski, 2022; Chrostowski, 2020, 2021b, 2021e, 2022a; Zellma, Buchta & Cichosz, 2021).

This article does not purport to provide unequivocal answers to the above bothering questions or to create a new and readily implementable concept of Religious Education in Poland. On the contrary, anchored in a critical analysis of the present, it is an attempt to 'look' into the future of teaching religion in Polish schools. In this sense, the article first presents symptoms of 'social exhaustion' of school catechesis, and focuses on 'dialogue' as a path of the religious-pedagogical future. The last paragraph is devoted to conceptual dilemmas that include not only tasks related to teaching religion in the future, but also the present guidelines related to the future-oriented model of Religious Education in Poland.

2. School catechesis in Poland: symptoms of 'social exhaustion'

Religious Education has two groups of conditions, i.e. legal and social (Tomasik, 2017, pp. 75–76). The authors of this article consciously refrained from a detailed analysis of the legal side of teaching religion in Polish schools – both of state and Church provenance – because it is well documented in the literature

(Zonik, 2012; Więcek, 2013; Tymieniecka, 2015; Krzywkowska, 2017; Kasiński, 2019; Goliszek, 2020). However, it is important in this context to emphasise that for over 30 years, 'school catechesis,' which, based on the concordat, constitutes the implementation of the political agreement between the Catholic Church and the Polish state, has been an uninterrupted form of Religious Education in Poland (Wrońska, 2021; Kasiński, 2019). At the center of such activities are the transmission of faith and theological-moral Catholic tradition (Polish Bishops' Conference, 2001, 2018, 2019; Chrostowski, 2022d, p. 45). The basic doctrinal texts for the school lessons of religion are the Holy Scripture and the Catechism of the Catholic Church (Łabendowicz, 2010, p. 96, 2019, p. 81). In addition, the main point of reference for educational processes in religious lessons in Polish schools is the task defined by the General Directory for Catechesis (Congregation for the Clergy, 1997, no. 86–87)¹: 'promoting knowledge of the faith, moral formation, liturgical education, education for community life, teaching to pray, and missionary initiation' (more on this topic: Chrostowski, 2021e, pp. 47–49, 2022a, pp. 43–45). Lessons in their current form are therefore an activity of a religious nature, which aims to develop and educate in the faith, and is also understood as a complement to catechesis in the parish (Chrostowski, 2022a, pp. 43–45; Klimski, 2021, p. 44; Misiaszek i Potocki, 1995, pp. 99–101). Based on the above assumptions, the current model of religious lessons in a public school (as opposed to parish catechesis, which is addressed only to believers) fits into the context of the school system, as in these classes, after submitting an appropriate formal declaration, all pupils (believers, seekers and non-believers) can participate together (Tomasik, 2014, 2017; Iwaniuk, 2004; Mąkosa, 2012; Chrostowski, 2021e, 2022a).

The above reflection is in a way an 'overture' to a broader understanding of the second group of conditions of Religious Education in Poland, i.e. social conditions (Tomasik, 2017, p. 75), among which the following multifaceted aspects deserve special attention:

- a) *Transformations in religiosity and individualisation of faith*: In post-modern societies, religiosity adopts a selective and individual character, which makes it to some extent also unfinished and inconsistent

¹ In 2020, a new Directory on Catechesis was published by the Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelization (2020), which (currently) has not been incorporated adequately in relation to school religious lessons and educating religious teachers in Poland.

(Chrostowski, 2021a, p. 23). In this sense, the Catholicism of Polish youth should be understood as 'truncated, segmental and occasional Catholicism' (Zaręba, 2008, p. 505). In the transformation of religiosity among Polish youth – as the eminent Polish sociologist of religion J. Mariański notes – there is, above all, a process of resignation from the 'ecclesiastical' image of God and an experience of faith different from some permanent abandonment of transcendence (Mariański, 2019, p. 34). Further, statistics show a 20% decrease in declarations of faith in God and a 50% decrease in religious practices in young people over the last 25 years, which phenomenon is not only new but also manifests the disruption of the intergenerational transmission of faith (Rasińska, 2021, p. 119).² To clarify the above statement, it should be emphasised that the proportion of youth not participating in religious practices has nearly doubled – from 19% in 1992 to 35% in 2018 and that the number of young Poles declaring themselves as non-believers has quadrupled – from 4% in 1994 to 17% in 2018 (Rasińska, 2021, pp. 119–120). These changes are primarily related to folk religiosity being displaced by subjective and privatised religiosity in Polish society, which leads not only to transformations within the axiological and moral orientations, but also to the pluralisation of attitudes (Chrostowski, 2022b; Mariański, 2018; Zaręba, 2018).

- b) *Transformations within the axiological/moral orientation and pluralisation of attitudes:* Separation of religion from morality is gaining more and more supporters among young Poles (Jedynak, 2019, p. 92). Further, adherence to religious principles is the lowest priority in the list of life goals of Polish youth and amounts to only 5% of the indications among youth finishing education at the secondary school level (in 1998, it was 10% of indications). The most important values in the life of youth

² Compare this with parallel developments in Germany: since 2002, belief in God has become less and less important among young Catholics. While in 2002, 51% declared belief in God to be important to them, the percentage fell to 39% in 2019. Parallely, the number of those for whom belief in God is unimportant has increased from 30% in 2002 to 41% in 2019. Protestant youth have always been more reserved than Catholic youth on this issue, but this reserve has increased since 2010. While belief in God was important to 38% of Protestant youth in 2002, it was so only to 24% in 2019. Expectedly, the number of those who consider belief in God unimportant has increased from 40% in 2002 to 50% in 2019 (Shell, 2019, pp. 152–154).

have for many years been friendship, family and professional career (Grabowska & Gwiazda, 2019, p. 68; Boguszewski & Bożewicz, 2019, p. 36).³ The processes of revitalisation and pluralisation are primarily the moral awareness of young Catholics in Poland, concerning marriage and the family. This is due to young people not only having ambivalent views in this regard but also considering themselves more to be creators than addressees of ethical and moral norms (Kielian & Witos, 2016, p. 48; Dziedzic, 2017, p. 74–76; Mąkosa, 2018, pp. 92–93). For example, surveys of the attitudes of students in the last years of secondary schools concerning sexual contact indicate that around 64% of them accept premarital sex; 73% accept sex as an expression of affection outside marriage; 59% are against the understanding of sex in marriage mainly as part of its procreative function; 45% also agreed that homosexuality is normal and should be tolerated (CBOS, 2014, p. 94, pp. 133–135).

- c) *Decrease in the percentage of students attending religion classes:* Another indicator of youth's attitude to religion is their participation in religious lessons organised at school, which are not obligatory; however, the grade obtained is included for calculating the average grade in all subjects (CBOS, 2014). The percentage of the total number of children and youth in all types of schools participating in religious lessons decreased significantly from 95.8% in the 1990/91 school year (Jedynak, 2018, p. 217), i.e. when religion returned to Polish schools after the fall of communism (ibid., p. 210), to 86% in the 2019/20 school year (ISKK SAC, 2021, p. 32). A negative trend is particularly noticeable among students in secondary schools, with a decrease from 89% to 70% between 2013 and 2018. The greatest loss of popularity of these classes was recorded among students of general secondary schools (a decrease from 86% to 68%) and vocational schools (a decrease from 83% to 57%) (Głowacki,

³ Here, too, parallels with Germany are notable. For most young people in the reference year 2019, it was very important to have good friends (97%) and a good family life (90%). At the same time, however, almost as many want to be independent of other people (83%) and enjoy life to the full (80%). Respect for law and order is highly weighted (87%), as are diligence and ambition (81%). If we look at the development of value orientation over the past decade, it is striking that the value orientations of young people have changed only slightly. The central role of a good family life and enjoyment of life remains unchanged during the last few years (Shell, 2019, pp. 105–106).

2019, p. 163; Klimski, 2021, p. 36). Moreover, since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and the introduction of remote education, the downward trend in this area among secondary school students has clearly accelerated (Chrostowski, 2021a, p. 22). A particularly sharp decline in participation in religion lessons occurred in large urban centers, e.g. in Łódź (the third largest city in Poland), where in the school year 2020/2021, only about 25% of vocational school students and about 30% of general secondary school students were enrolled in religious lessons (Milerski, 2021, pp. 90–91). In addition, 60% of the surveyed students, according to statistical data from 2016, did not assess religion lessons positively; moreover, they claimed that school catechesis is not characterised by anything special (38%) or even declared dissatisfaction with these classes (22%) (Jedynak, 2019, p. 95; Chrostowski, 2021a, p. 23).

- d) *Devaluation of the social authority of the Catholic Church and perception of religion lessons as the most contentious classes in the Polish school:* In recent years, a process of diminishing the social authority of the Catholic Church in Poland has been observed (Mariański, 2017), which is, *inter alia*, the result of the abuse of minors by the clergy and insufficient prevention of pedophilia by Church hierarchs (Czapnik, 2015),⁴ the controversial activity of Radio Maryja (Tomala-Kaźmierczak, 2015), the agitation of some clergy for specific political parties (Pyrzyńska, 2017), the fight for moral postulates in legislation, e.g. a total ban on abortion (Calkin & Kaminska, 2020), etc. The above phenomena translate primarily into changes in the trust of Poles in the Church, which in 2010 amounted to about 50% and began to decrease from year to year, to reach 42% in 2020 (with as many as 47% of Poles declaring a complete lack of trust in the Church in 2020; KAI, 2021, p. 19). In addition, this trend has an impact on the discussion in various circles about the meaning and effects of the presence of religion in school, which concerned both ideological, legal-political and organisational issues (Potocki, 2007, pp. 145–154; Głuszec-Szafranec, 2017, pp. 272–275; Jedynak, 2019, pp. 81–89; Klimski, 2021, p. 34). As W. Klimski notes, religious lessons

⁴ In Germany, too, the uncovering of numerous cases of abuse and the initial lack of determination in dealing with them has led to a disastrous loss of authority, especially for the Catholic Church.

are currently the most contentious and controversial classes in Polish schools. For a certain section of society, they are a form of religious indoctrination and clericalisation of society, discrimination against other faiths, spreading intolerance and dividing students into believers and non-believers,⁵ while for others, they are a natural consequence of the dominance of Catholicism in Polish society and a place of systemic support for families in passing on Christian values to children (Klimski, 2021, p. 34).

It is noteworthy that the aforesaid current socio-religious conditions should be considered symptoms of ‘social exhaustion’ of school catechesis in Poland because they indicate primarily the weakening role of the Catholic Church (as well as Religious Education itself) in integrating Polish society (KAI, 2021, p. 17). In addition, they indicate the poor condition and specific defectiveness of the basic assumptions of Religious Education in Poland, among the main goals of which are catechisation and evangelisation activities which, today, do not yield the effects intended over thirty years ago (Klimski, 2021, p. 44). In this sense, the deepening of social dichotomies resulting from the processes of changes in secularisation and desecularisation (Mariański, 2013, p. 23) requires actions aimed primarily at changing not only the conceptual but also the structural and functional location of Religious Education within the institutions of the Church and the Polish education system (Klimski, 2021, p. 44). Further, at present, the Polish school has taken over the catechetical and evangelising function of the Church and should promote religious pluralism and religious tolerance much more (Głuszek-Szafraniec, 2017, p. 272–275; Klimski, 2021, p. 34; Chrostowski, 2020, p. 48, 2021b, p. 263–264). This is an important and high-priority task in the religious-pedagogical sense because, in times of globalisation, the syncretisation of the religious sphere is increasing among youth (Wysocka, 2019). In 2016, despite the general dominance of Catholics, as many as 32 Churches and religious associations organised religious lessons in Polish schools in cooperation with state bodies. Some examples are the Roman Catholic Church, the Greek Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church, the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession, the Mariavite Old

⁵ This view is also held by sections of the German population, quite wrongly, however, since (denominational) religious education has definitely shed its catechetical character since the mid-1970s and is strictly oriented to the educational framework of the school.

Catholic Church, the Pentecostal Church, the Baptist Union, Muslim League and Muslim Religion Association, the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Union of Jewish Religious Communities in Poland (Horowski, 2022).

3. Dialogue as a path of the religious-pedagogical future

While in the future, the religious lesson is to continue to be taught in a public school and be part of the education system, which is supported by numerous arguments of a theological and non-theological nature (Chrostowski, 2021c; Kropač, 2019, 2021b; Chałupniak, 2012; Panuś, 2009), it must be capable of broadly understood dialogue in the face of rapidly advancing socio-religious changes (Chrostowski, 2021d, p. 22–23; Cackowska & Stańczyk, 2012, p. 36; Milerski, 2002, p. 13). In this sense, dialogue is an indispensable and fundamental element of Religious Education, since it is a process in which at least two people use words to understand what each of them experience and thinks, and through which they achieve mutual rapprochement between their points of view and their own way of life (Bagrowicz, 2010, p. 219).

The school lesson of religion must achieve integration primarily in two dimensions of human life – in the vertical dimension, concerning the relationship with God, and in the horizontal dimension, concerning social relations (Horowski, 2022, p. 5). Hence, dialogue should be considered a 'pedagogical credo' (Sarnat-Ciastko, 2019, p. 105) when developing the core curriculum and teaching plans and planning individual units in the process of Religious Education in Poland (Chrostowski, 2020, p. 42). Their intensified operationalisation within the framework of Religious Education will not only present a new opening to believers, living and thinking differently, but will also contribute to a multifaceted and future-oriented conceptual and didactic reorientation of the teaching of this subject and thus to the search for new ways of encounter with God and a human person. The school lesson of religion must therefore move away from the current 'real monologue and utopia of dialogue at school' (Cackowska & Stańczyk, 2012, p. 36) towards not only a new educational framework for the processes of mutual interpenetration of different positions and worldviews but also cultivating openness between Christians of different faiths and representatives of different religions in the school environment (Różańska, 2017, p. 175). The dialogue in Religious Education must lead to the

rejection of all manifestations of exclusion (Humeniuk & Paszenda, 2017) and all aspirations for exclusivity and complete closure within their own views and beliefs (Hryniewicz, 1997, p. 167; Róžańska, 2017, p. 175).

Consequently, it is not enough for contemporary students, in the face of progressive socio-religious changes, to know and understand their own religion alone (although knowledge of their religion and its principles should always remain the starting point for learning the assumptions of other religions and worldviews, to avoid ‘talking about an undefined spirituality’; Horowski, 2022, p. 6). There is a need for much more programmatic dissemination of knowledge about other religions, strengthening competencies oriented towards treating others with equal respect and the ability to conduct interfaith and interreligious dialogue, as well as strengthening reflexivity, the ability to make conscious choices, shape religious and worldview sensitivity and promote universal values such as peace, the common good, love of the neighbour, tolerance, justice, solidarity, etc., all of which unite, not divide (Róžańska, 2017; Chrostowski, 2020, 2021b, 2021e, 2022a).

The overriding goals of Religious Education in the Polish school, and also specific challenges of our times, are cultural-social and religious-pedagogical educational activities aimed at turning the current ‘polyphony’ into ‘harmony’ which does not unify and eliminate differences but shows the mutual coexistence of many motifs while maintaining their separate and individual identities (Bauman, 2008; Skałbania & Babiarz, 2019). The paradigm of dialogue within the framework of Religious Education emphasises not only the subjectivity of individual students as per the ideas of personalistic pedagogy (Śliwerski, 1996; Adamski, 2014; Lorenc, 2015; Misik, 2021), but also their right to self-realisation and autonomy (also in matters of faith) and postulates the development of the ability to overcome their own, as well as cultural, religious and social limitations, and difficulties while using the potential and resources of the school environment (Skałbania & Babiarz, 2019, p. 19). Religious Education understood in this way must be (Głodkowska, 2010, pp. 42–43; Skałbania & Babiarz, 2019, p. 19) *person-centered* (the student is the subject of Religious Education), *professional* (all those who teach religion are professionals in this area), *comprehensive* (considers all spheres of human development and religious-ideological diversity), *strengthening* (provides strength to overcome the difficulties and limitations), *plastic* (constantly modified to the needs and possibilities of the student, as well as changing socio-religious conditions),

positive (seeks strength from religion for the individual and resources for the entire social environment), *inviting* (interesting enough that the student wants to participate in these classes), *optimistic* (inspires hope to overcome differences and difficulties, as well as to find future-oriented levels of dialogue), *uniting* (what is sought is what connects students of different faiths, religions, world views, etc., and not divides them), *deepening* (it is about deepening the knowledge of their religion by students and intensified religious socialisation, because only on this foundation can students accept the gift of another and offer him something authentic of themselves; *Fratelli Tutti*, No. 143).

Lessons in religion based on the above indications are not only in line with the assumptions of the New Directory for Catechesis (2020), which clearly promotes the culture of dialogue, but also fits into the pedagogical line of Pope Francis (Kozubek, 2020; Parzyszek, 2018; Rembierz, 2016). At this point, it is worth recalling the Pope's appeal, which should constitute the basis of all activities in the framework of Religious Education: "What is important is to create *processes* of encounter, processes that build a people that can accept differences. Let us arm our children with the weapons of dialogue! Let us teach them to fight the good fight of the culture of encounter!" (*Fratelli Tutti*, No. 217).

4. Conceptual dilemmas of a future-oriented Religious Education in Poland

In light of the above reflection, we need to focus here on the presentation of the most important conceptual dilemmas regarding the future of Religious Education in Poland, which, to a large extent, constitute convergent issues for Religious Education in Europe (Kropač, 2021a, pp. 188–190, 2019, pp. 337–339; Schreiner, 2019, p. 52–55). The whole consideration in this paragraph should be treated primarily as a contribution to a deeper and systemic search for future-oriented solutions for Religious Education in Poland, and not as a presentation of assumptions or a teaching model of a binding and comprehensive nature. This attempt to 'look' into the future has, as in the study by U. Kropač (2021b, pp. 188–190), a two-stage character. Firstly, it covers the outline of basic tasks, and secondly, it also offers guidelines that relate directly to the future-oriented model of Religious Education in Poland.

4.1. Forward-looking tasks of Religious Education

Neither now nor in the future can a neutral public school in Poland be allowed to exclude forms of individual confirmation of axiological beliefs, because disclosing them belongs to the essence of the educational-upbringing relationship (Milerski 2009, pp. 335–336). The school, as a public institution, is a special place of worldview responsibility not only in the political and legal sense but in the pedagogical sense too (Przybylska & Wajsprych, 2018, pp. 9). In this context, an important task is to systematically counteract both overt and hidden forms of indoctrination or manifestations of symbolic violence in the school environment, e.g. imposing a worldview on students as absolutely dominant and only right (Milerski 2009, pp. 335–336; Zieliński, 2019, p. 795). In this respect, it is also important to distance oneself from all forms of religious fundamentalism and to criticise the broadly understood relativism, which, too, eliminates early the existing differences and ambivalences between religions (Kropač, 2021a, pp. 188). Consequently, the main task and purpose of Religious Education in public schools must be to prepare students for critical orientation and to sensitise them to the ‘shadows’ of human life in a diverse, pluralistic society, or, as far as Christians are concerned, to develop in them a constant attitude of sensitivity to pluralism (Chrostowski, 2021b; Hejwosz-Gromkowska, 2020). Moreover, it is also necessary to precisely define the competencies students need to properly deal with their own religion, other religions, religiosity and spirituality, etc. in everyday life in their multiple manifestations (Kropač, 2021a, pp. 188). It should also be remembered that the very concept of religious competence, and the process of ‘religious literacy’, cannot take the form of purely abstract ideas and must be sufficiently defined to be credible in the discourse of learning theory (Kropač, 2021a, pp. 188; Przybylska & Wajsprych, 2018, pp. 9–10).

In a broader sense, it is also about the subject of Religious Education not being primarily religion practiced in the religious community and the family (Milerski, 2009; Różańska, 2017; Kropač, 2019, 2021b; Chrostowski, 2020, 2022d). Hence, another important task concerning Religious Education is its didactic and conceptual orientation based on the criterion of academic relevance, which means that students should ‘encounter’ religion within the framework of broadly understood academic reflection (Kropač, 2021a, p. 188; Schluss, 2015, pp. 156–157). And whether religious studies, theology or cultural studies is used as a reference discipline depends entirely on the adopted model

of Religious Education (Kropač, 2021a, p. 188). The criterion of academic relevance legitimises, above all, the way religion is spoken about at school, that is, i.e. similar to other school subjects, by referring to an education appropriate to the pupils' age (Schluss, 2015, p. 157). However, it should be remembered that even if Religious Education does not focus on the religion practiced, it cannot do without allowing students to learn about religious experience, because religion is not a theoretical and abstract worldview, but a concrete way of shaping life (Schreiner, 2019, p. 53; Kropač, 2021a, p. 189). This task may be aided by performative activities of a religious and pedagogical nature, which are part of the didactic repertoire of teaching religion, as they constitute a concept of Religious Education based on the transfer of knowledge by encouraging students to try out religious performances and to actively reflect on them (Kropač, 2021a, p. 189; for more information on this topic, see Chrostowski, 2022b; Klie & Leonhard, 2008; Dressler, Klie & Kumlehn, 2012). Religious lessons must be deeply rooted in experiences connected to students' biographies (Milerski, 2021; Chrostowski, 2022c), as well as more oriented towards their needs and demand for activating working methods conducive to active learning through action and experience (Zubrzycka-Maciąg, 2021).

Ultimately, a clear, forward-looking task concerning Religious Education is to develop educational activities in the face of not only the ever-growing number of students who do not identify or have any religious confession or religion (Milerski, 2021) but also problems, including attitudes towards people with non-heteronormative sexual orientation, loneliness, migration and multiculturalism (Horowski, 2022, p. 6), which are components of broadly understood social pluralism. While the religious lesson is to be part of general education (Stępkowski, 2018), both non-denominational students and atheists should learn to adopt an appropriate position on the common phenomenon of religion (Kropač, 2021a, p. 189). Students must also be provided the 'tools' to take a well-established stand against the many dilemmas that arise at the intersection of religion and morality and are directly related to participation in socio-political life (Horowski, 2022, p. 6; Chrostowski, 2022d, p. 53–56).

4.2. Guidelines for the future

Under no circumstances should the implementation of the above-mentioned tasks be expected to lead to a full and one-off solution to the issue of the 'right' model of Religious Education in Poland (Kropač, 2021a, p. 189). If religious lessons are not to be detached from the lives of modern students and are to continue to be part of the public education system and a neutral school, the curriculum framework of Religious Education will have to undergo changes of a conceptual, structural-functional, and didactic nature in the future (Chrostowski, 2021e, 2022a). Otherwise, sticking to the current ecclesiastical and catechetical form of these classes will result in religion lessons having only an exclusive character and bringing together only students with deep ecclesial religiosity (even if currently, the trajectory of participation in these classes does not have a revolutionary character) and, consequently, will have to be taught at the parish (Klimski, 2021, pp. 46–47). In addition, the optional nature of religion lessons, as also ethics, which is still prevalent in Poland⁶ and allows parents to opt-out of the participation of their children in one or another school lesson, is not optimal (Kostorz, 2018; Wrońska, 2021). In this regard, it should be emphasised that despite the existence of such a choice, issues related to, for example, religious and ideological pluralism, are rare in the curricula in Polish schools. When different religions are discussed in the classroom, they are presented in a historical context (Hejwosz-Gromkowska, 2020; Wrońska, 2021; Zielińska & Zwierzdzyński, 2017). The above observations justify at this point proposing guidelines for the future of Religious Education which aim to initiate a wide discussion in the years ahead (Kropač, 2021a, p. 189; Schröder, 2013a, p. 190). In addition, it should be noted again that the following guidelines are based on the previously discussed principle of dialogue as a path of the religious-pedagogical future:

- *Obligatory*: Religious Education should be a compulsory subject for all students (believers, non-believers and seekers).

⁶ The aim of the latest activities undertaken by the Ministry of Education in Poland is to strengthen the educational function of the school by providing all students with classes in ethics or religion of the chosen confession. Appropriate legislative and organisational changes in this area are planned, which are to be gradually implemented in the years 2023–2027 (Starzewski, 2022).

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- *Responsibility*: Responsibility for Religious Education should be held equally by the state and religious communities within the framework of cooperation.
 - *Organisation of teaching*: Religion lessons should be taught in a public school and, as already mentioned, be attended by all students. Moreover, religious lessons should occur in dialogue with ethics and/or philosophy, aim at limiting the indoctrination in Polish schools and thus equip students with a set of basic skills and competencies necessary in a pluralist society.
 - *Orientation*: The teaching of religion should be more existential-positional and informative-critical. In this sense, the functional understanding of the public school by the Church in Poland should be renounced and the implementation of catechetical-evangelising tasks during lessons categorically abandoned.
 - *Teaching staff*: Religious Education should be delivered based on dialogue; therefore, the point of reference for teaching religion in Polish schools should be various science reference fields, i.e. Religious Studies, Theology, as well as Ethics and Philosophy. At the same time, the association of the teacher with the specific religion, or the lack of it, should be seen as an enrichment and a starting point for in-depth dialogue.
 - *Religious experience*: Religious experience should be based on the diverse and at the same time subjective experience of students, e.g. as part of a performative religious lesson. The teaching of religion should be supplemented by voluntary offers within the framework of school pastoral care (more on school pastoral care can be found in publications like Czekalski, 2004; Chałupniak, 2008; Zuk, 2012; Chrostowski, 2020, 2021e, 2022a).
 - *Pluralism*: The broadest possible option of religions and denominations or religious subgroups should be presented in the spectrum of Religious Education at schools, as well as non-religious perspectives, which, together, must strengthen their peaceful coexistence in society and find a space for solving ethical problems, for instance (Müller, 2012, p. 52).

Although the above suggestions regarding religious education in Poland remain guidelines for the future, they clearly indicate the need for a broad consensus in counteracting cultural and religious illiteracy. From this per-

spective – in the interests of the state, religious communities, and society – it is to support the search for common, acceptable solutions and concrete forms of their practical implementation as part of school religious lessons. Further, religious education imparted in a public school allows maintaining general supervision over the implementation of religious teaching (e.g. methodology of conducting classes, determining at least some of the goals and scope of curricular education, determining the level of education of teachers), which can hardly be said about education organised exclusively by religious communities (Milerski, 2009).

5. Conclusions

In light of the above, it should be noted that in the future, the didactics of religion in Poland (and throughout Europe) will increasingly focus on the ‘rivalry’ between the predicates arising from religious studies and from positional, mainly confessional, models of teaching religion. How they will be constructed will depend in each case on personal preferences, as also quite rapidly changing social preferences (Kropač, 2021a, pp. 189–190).

In this context, it must not be forgotten that Religious Education can claim to be present in public education if it is a form of general education (Stepkowski, 2018, p. 115; see too: Milerski, 2011; Bagrowicz i Horowski, 2012; Marek, 2014). The point is to make Religious Education in Poland such a school subject that will not be directed only towards the particular good of, for example, the Catholic Church (evangelisation and catechesis of students) or some other religious community. This is by no means a matter of ‘cutting off’ a young person from his/her religious roots, because, as already mentioned, knowledge of one’s religion is the foundation for knowing the other and offering him/her something authentic of oneself (*Fratelli Tutti*, No. 143). Rather, the idea is to place all students at the heart of the curricula and religious teaching processes in the school environment with their individual needs, in the whole palette of their colours, and thus with all the ‘lights’ and ‘shadows’ flowing from their personal experiences and biographies, also concerning religion and God (Chrostowski, 2021e, 2022c).

Consequently, being aware of the symptoms of ‘social exhaustion’ of school catechesis in Poland, it is necessary to operationalise the teaching of religion at

school such that these classes strengthen dialogue, as a path of a religious-pedagogical future, in various areas of socio-religious life. Future-oriented Religious Education must pursue a general pedagogical responsibility that considers the cultural, religious and worldview diversity of young people (Milerski, 2009; Chrostowski, 2021b) and equip students with religious and interreligious competencies in this area (Kropač, 2019).

Finally, it would be desirable to reduce the dispute regarding Religious Education in Poland (both media and academic – despite the existing differences and similarities) to the initiation of a joint effort seeking a future-oriented concept of religious education, which will connect and build bridges based on the programme assumptions. It should also be such a religious education that will ensure in the school room for teaching religion a place for every person in all his/her subjectivity, regardless of his/her worldview, skin colour, sexual orientation, religion, or lack of one.

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