



(Re)vision of Religious Education of Children and Youth in Secularized Polish Society

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Abstract: Rapidly progressing multifaceted secularization processes in Polish society strongly influence the shape of religious education of children and adolescents in the school environment. They determine a number of dimensions of the social and mental activity of young people. Their effects are visible, especially in the attitudes of children and youth to God, the Church, religious lessons, moral norms, and religious practices. This situation raises new challenges for the religious education of the young. Reading this as a “sign of the times,” this article revises religious education in Polish schools. The need to reorganize the model of religious education lessons and to introduce changes in the curricular assumptions of religious education teaching, in student textbooks and methodological guides is pointed out. Pre-evangelization and educational activities, resignation from the mere transfer of religious knowledge, and the development of preconceived skills and attitudes are considered important. The author emphasizes the value of providing opportunities for the construction of knowledge and for the student’s own engagement during religious education lessons. In this context, much attention is paid to the role of the religious education teacher, who is to be first and foremost a companion on a journey, an educator and a witness of faith, open to new challenges, able to communicate effectively with students, creative, and tolerant. The right personality traits of the religious education teacher and their multiple competencies (including communicative and interpersonal ones) play a key role in religious education. They guarantee the effectiveness of communication within a group of religious lesson participants. They foster authentic interpersonal relationships and community-building, thus meeting the natural needs of young people. In practice, they require a paradigm shift in the formation of religious education teachers.

Keywords: religious education, children, youth, secularization, religious education teacher, pre-evangelization, revision of religious education, accompanying

In the situation of the galloping secularization of the young generation of Poles, the question arises about the sense of the typically denominational character of religious education in Polish schools that is oriented toward deepening one’s faith. The vast majority of participants in religious lessons – as sociological studies show – despite having been baptized in the Roman Catholic Church or having received the sacraments (e.g., Eucharist, Confirmation), do not identify themselves with the community of the Church and do not follow religious practices (Adamczyk 2020, 49–61; Boguszewski 2022, 134–48; Mariański 2022, 1–34; Zellma et al. 2022, 1142). Their level of religious knowledge is very low, and their interest in the topics of religious lessons is very weak (Buchta, Cichosz, and Zellma 2021, 650; Kielb, Pierzchała, and Gazda 2023, 7).

The general and specific catechetical goals, knowledge, skills, and attitudes assumed in the core curriculum and in the programs for teaching religion in school go beyond the current religious and moral condition of students in elementary school and in secondary school: high school, technical school, and vocational school (KEP 2018; KWK KEP 2018). They assume students' faith, their interest in the topics of religious lessons, and their involvement in the development of faith. They contain overly broad issues of theological science that are typical of didactic materialism (encyclopædism). They present students with a very large amount of information in the form of unquestioned truths, rules, and norms. Students' attitudes and views, according to the program's assumptions, are to be shaped through instruction, persuasion, and showing unquestionable role models. The current religious education programs in Polish schools do not take into account the galloping secularization of Polish society. They are not adapted to the mentality of students, their religiousness, religious attitudes, and practices, or their attitude toward the Church (Adamczyk 2020, 49–66; Baniak 2022; Boguszewski and Bożewicz 2019, 31–51; Kurzydło 2022, 129–44). Therefore, the curricular assumptions for teaching religion at school discourage students and weaken their own activity. Consequently, they also contribute to a lack of personal involvement in the search for Truth, critical and creative thinking, reflection, and faith development. All this often leads to the abandonment of students' participation in systematic religious education at school and the complete abandonment of religious practice (Gwiazda 2022, 149–57; Kurzydło 2022, 33–36; Wajs 2020, 111–25; Zakrzewski 2021, 43–55; Zubrzycka-Maciąg 2021, 71–86).

Thus, the issues identified in the title of this study are cognitively and socially legitimate. The analyses undertaken are aimed at seeking answers to the following questions: what can be done to adapt the model of religious education provided at school to the galloping secularization of the younger generation? What steps should be taken to modify the model of religious education programming at school, and create new student textbooks and methodological guides? What adjustments should be made in the activities of religious teachers, their communication with students, and the fostering of interpersonal relations within the group? Where to draw creative inspiration for planning and implementing religious education adapted to the mentality of secularized students?

Qualitative research methodology was used to realize the stated research objective. The applied method involved the analysis, synthesis, and comparison of catechetical documents of the Church and the literature on the subject. The study also analyzed the available data, materials, information, and opinions on religious education at school. On this basis, key aspects were identified regarding the search for a new model of religious education for children and adolescents, which are part of the broader context of the secularization of Polish society.

1. Reorganization of the Religious Education Model in Schools

Responding to the “signs of the times,” it seems crucial to abandon the current concept of religious education, which aims, among other things, at the transfer of religious knowledge from the religious teacher to the student or the development of preconceived skills and attitudes. The context outlined in the introduction gives rise to the need to provide religious education teachers with the opportunity to choose between the models of pre-evangelization, evangelization, new evangelization, and existentially oriented religious education. In the pre-evangelization model, the didactic and educational activities of the teacher revolve around accompanying students in discovering their spiritual desires and needs, sensitizing them to religious values, and demonstrating the credibility of Christianity and the Catholic Church (Mąkosa 2022, 566–68). In practice, this often serves as a preliminary stage preceding evangelization or new evangelization. What distinguishes evangelization from new evangelization in religious education is its audience. Evangelization is addressed to unbaptized and unbelieving students. It centers around proclaiming the Good News to them, encouraging them to accept the love of God, and acknowledging Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Gradually, the religious education teacher can also accompany non-believing students in the development of their faith and introduce them to the Christian life and the community of the Church (Kongregacja ds. Duchowieństwa 1998, nos. 47–48; PRKNE 2020, nos. 28–30; cf. Puchalski 2022, 141–43). Rapidly progressing processes of secularization in Poland result in religious education lessons being attended by baptized students who do not live according to the requirements of baptism, have lost their living and sincere faith, are distancing themselves from the Church, and have lost the ability to listen to and understand the Gospel (cf. Kongregacja ds. Duchowieństwa 1998, no. 58; PRKNE 2020, nos. 38–41). This situation calls for courageously and creatively accompanying baptized disciples in their renewed encounter with Christ, rediscovering God’s love, and responding to that love. It is no less important to accompany the disciples in their return to religious practice in the community of the Church (PRKNE 2020, no. 41; cf. Kopiczko 2022, 475–77; Tomasiak 2014, 103–29). Each of the evangelization activities described above raises the need for a witness to the faith, the use of new forms and methods, new language, and zeal and creativity in the proclamation of the Gospel. On the other hand, existentially oriented religious education emphasizes contemporary human problems and the search for answers to them in the light of the Gospel (Zellma 2011, 333–46). Religious education teachers can also decide to creatively combine these models in practice (cf. Czupryński 2014, 147–61; Mąkosa 2022, 566–68; Michalski 2013, 199–210; Milerski and Zieliński 2023, 288–300; Puchalski 2022, 141–43; Zellma, Czupryński, and Tryk 2018, 39–57; Zellma 2011, 333–46; Zwierzdzyński 2016, 203–14). This choice should be dictated by the needs and experiences of a particular group of students and their existential and religious situation (PRKNE 2020,

nos. 90–109, 197–200). Particular attention deserves to be given to accompanying students in the formation of attitudes of dialogue, positive tolerance, the ability to engage in reflection, and seeking and finding one's place in different social groups – in both virtual and actual reality. It requires organizing religious education lessons in such a way that students have the opportunity to test their own ideas, develop positive thinking skills, engage in self-presentation, experience positive emotions, and learn to cope with emotions in times of crisis. Additionally, students should be equipped with skills to deal constructively with conflicts, including peer conflicts, conflicts with parents or siblings, religious conflicts, and inner conflicts. These activities are part of the educational dimension of religious education lessons at school. They are an opportunity to create a positive image of such lessons or their importance in a secularized society (Zellma 2020, 195–210).

In religious education at school, the emphasis should be on accompanying children and young people in the process of asking difficult questions, searching for the meaning of life, and discovering and constructing knowledge (Zellma 2022, 5–22). This necessitates a departure from didactic teaching in religious education that involves the transmission of religious knowledge through texts from the student's textbook or the completion of pre-made, structured worksheets. This is because such a strategy for implementing religious education at school may discourage children and young people, possibly due to its excessively formal or rigid nature. It has a demotivating effect, and does not contribute to the student's personal encounter with Christ, the transformation of their heart, and the development of their faith, nor to their interest in the subject matter of the religious education lessons. It also does not serve the understanding of the content of the faith and the internalization of values. Consequently, those responsible for the programming of religious education at school, including the teacher, face the task of searching for ways to organize lessons in such a way that the student actively participates in the process of posing problems to be solved and solving them independently, negotiating meanings and constructing new knowledge rooted in the existing knowledge (Gogolik 2016, 43–49; Zellma 2008, 16–26).

Attempts to influence students' reasoning through guided conversation, talk, lecture, explanation, and persuasion have only superficial effects (Klus-Stańska 2018, 131–66). Moreover, it demotivates the participants of religious education lessons and inhibits the processes of curiosity and creative thinking. However, it should be more important to arouse cognitive conflict and to invite each student to ask questions, to present their perspective, and to speak freely. In doing so, it is worth paying attention to students' individual developmental needs and capabilities and to the development of soft skills, especially creativity (Zellma 2007, 21–30; cf. Milerski 2023, 187–210). It is also desirable to create situations in which participants in religious education lessons can demonstrate a sense of responsibility for what and how they learn and for the skills and attitudes they develop. This, in turn, requires individualizing

the religious education process at the level of each group of students in a school. In practice, the planning of lessons in this subject at school should consist of designing teaching and learning situations in which the starting point is the questions posed by the student, their personal experience and needs, and their multifaceted and multidirectional activity (Kurzydło 2023, 4–17). The student's adopted views, beliefs, opinions, ways of understanding reality, points of view, and accumulated experiences – according to research by proponents of constructivist education – are conducive to arousing interest and motivation to engage in education and to working through new knowledge on the basis of personal knowledge (Filipiak 2015, 15–39; Kara 2019, 19–26). The religious education teacher's explanations should therefore be preceded by discussion and negotiation of meanings and spontaneous exploration in small groups. Even if the students' proposals differ from the religious education curriculum (including the assumed goals of the religious education lessons, the truths of faith, the catechism, and the teaching of the Church), there is a greater likelihood of stimulating students to reflect, exchange ideas and share their own understanding of the world, their relationship with God and the community of the Church. Students' independent attempts to act in situations of solving intriguing problems, even if they give rise to anthropological and theological contradictions and errors, are more fruitful for religious education. They provide opportunities to express one's own understanding of social and religious reality. They provide an excellent opportunity for students to ask questions, reconstruct their own opinions, views, and beliefs, and to associate the content presented by the religious education teacher with personal experience. Students' independent activities in the course of lessons also allow them to appreciate multiple perspectives in perceiving and solving certain existential problems. They stimulate children and young people to reflect on their own lifestyle, system of values, and attitude to God and the Church. Importantly, they engage students emotionally and provide opportunities to form attitudes toward the Truth and different ways of seeking it. It is only in this context that the religious education teacher should present certain religious contents showing their existential significance. Hence, planning the structure of a constructivist religion lesson does not require the precise definition of partial stages of students' work and measurable, testable outcomes (Klus-Stańska 2018, 131–66; Klus-Stańska and Kruk 2009, 457–504). It creates greater methodological and decision-making freedom for religious education teachers, including in arousing students' intrinsic motivation to ask questions and solve problems. It also provides a varied, positive experience in the course of lessons in this subject. In implementing this approach, it is worthwhile to use many forms of presentation of specific religious content or different strategies for developing skills and shaping attitudes (Filipiak 2008). Noteworthy are forms, methods, and techniques that activate students in many dimensions, based on cooperation in small teams, stimulating reflection and dialogue, and drawing conclusions from one's own findings (Simiński 2023, 41–56). They should be enriched by creating an appropriate

learning environment that is based on short films, multimedia presentations, advertising spots, TikTok videos, social media information, memes, and computer games that are interesting for students. In doing so, it is desirable to involve students in sharing their own understanding of information that has been presented through new ICT (Information and Communications Technology).

2. Reconstruction of the Model of the Curriculum for Teaching Religion in School

The model of school religion curriculum adopted in Poland is neither obvious nor undisputed.¹ As noted above, it is dominated by extensive material understood as a set of theological knowledge to be imparted to all students, regardless of their level of religious knowledge, faith development, and religiousness. The objectives described in terms of students' knowledge, skills, and attitudes and the tasks of the religious education teacher are derived from the content of curriculum entries. This approach, in view of the diverse life and religious situations of students, including the multiple influences of secularization to which students are exposed, needs to be changed. Also erroneous is the assumption of the authors of the school religious education curriculum that every issue included in this document has objective and identical relevance for all students, regardless of their life situation, religiousness, and level of faith development (Horowski 2022, 238–45). Nowadays, due to the religious diversity of the addressees of religious education lessons, as well as the environment in which they live (e.g. family, school, social media), it is necessary not only to reduce the scope of theological issues addressed, abandoning, for example, the history of the Church, a detailed discussion of the content of dogmas, analysis of biblical texts of the Old and New Testaments, discussion of the liturgical year, but also to leave more flexibility to the teacher in the process of planning and implementation of religious education. It is about not sticking uncritically to the goals and content planned in the religious education curriculum. Knowledge of the group of students, their families, and their religious and social situation gives the religious education teacher a chance to plan the objectives properly and to distribute the content accents appropriately in the annual plan for religious education in the school (Kryzstofik

¹ It is worth mentioning that the curriculum documents for religious education at schools in Poland (core curriculum and religious education curricula) have been developed according to the assumptions of the analytical model, according to which didactic and educational activities are focused around the acquisition of knowledge. There is no room here for co-creation or critical modification of knowledge by the student. Knowledge is to be assimilated in a fixed quantity and sequence. Preference is given to encyclopedic facts, downplaying the importance of skills and abilities. For more on this type of programs, see, e.g.: Bereźnicki 2007, 131.

and Walulik 2016, 35–50). Moreover, it can contribute to the adequate choice of content to accompany the students in their holistic development. It requires respect for the principle of fidelity to God and man, while at the same time organizing religious education lessons in which students pose questions and seek answers, refer to personal knowledge, construct new knowledge, negotiate meanings, discover values and their meaning, learn through experience and teamwork, experience positive emotions, and at the same time engage in skill development and attitude formation.

The adopted content layout of the current school religious education program also needs to be changed. It has a spiral character. It is oriented towards imparting to students the totality of religious knowledge typical of the theological sciences. To this end, in the curriculum for religious education, certain content (e.g. truths of faith, moral issues, prayers) is first presented in a narrow range (e.g. in the initial classes of elementary school, religious content that is – according to the authors of the curriculum – the most easily understood and most essential, is presented). In the subsequent stages of religious education (e.g. in grades five to eight of elementary school and in secondary school), the program content is broadened and deepened with new, more complex, and complicated issues, characteristic of a compendium of theological knowledge. The plethora of typically theological issues gives rise to the need for extensive religious education textbooks, which in a secularized environment have a demotivating effect on both students and parents. They are inadequate to the needs, interests, and level of religious involvement of students and their parents. A change of approach to religious education programming therefore seems necessary. This entails moving away from didactic materialism in the approach to teaching religious content. Instead, it is beneficial to emphasize, for instance, the kerygma, presenting the diverse elements of faith in a communicative manner that resonates with the experiences of the students, all while considering their existential and religious situations (PRKNE 2020, nos. 144–47). Additional adjustments to the content, specifically tailored to the needs of a particular group of students, are also recommended. There should be an increased focus on aspects such as Christian identity, the real-life challenges faced by participants in religious lessons, religious pluralism, fostering positive tolerance, promoting dialogue, exploring selected social and moral issues, delving into ecumenism, and examining the intricate relationship between faith and culture, as well as science and religion (PRKNE 2020, 313–18; cf. Milerski 2023, 187–210; Przybylska and Wajsprych 2020, 202–13; Zellma, Buchta, and Cichosz 2022, 223–37). In view of the accelerated development of students in the biological sphere and the lowering of the age of sexual initiation, some content on the ethics of sexual, marital, and family life should be moved from the final grades of secondary school to the fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth grades of elementary school. In this shift, it is recommended that there is a sound correlation with the content of family life education classes which take Christian anthropology as their starting point.

The decision to abandon a detailed program for religious education is justified by the autonomy that religious instruction maintains in substantive matters compared to the school (“Załącznik do obwieszczenia Ministra Edukacji Narodowej” 2020, item 983; KEP 2001, no. 82). Religious curricula and textbooks are not subject to approval by the school principal; they are simply made known to them (KEP 2001, no. 82). The Church holds substantive supervision over the teaching of religion, approving religious instruction programs and textbooks, and determining the goals and objectives of the school that should be implemented in religious instruction lessons (“Załącznik do obwieszczenia Ministra Edukacji Narodowej” 2020, item 983; KEP 2001, no. 82). Given the diverse needs, interests, expectations, and religiousness of student groups, it is valuable to develop a framework curriculum and programs for teaching religion. Meanwhile, teachers of religion should be encouraged to be more independent and creative in selecting curricular content tailored to the specific needs of their student groups.

3. The Shape of Students’ Books and Methodological Guides

The approach to student textbooks and methodological guides for the religious education teacher also needs to change. It is worth emphasizing once again that the autonomy of religious education in the selection of textbooks and teaching materials allows for a departure from a highly formalized approach to this issue (KEP 2001, no. 82). It is desirable for the teachers of this subject to utilize a diverse array of print and digital sources in religious education. Traditional textbooks only serve a template-based, linear, “step-by-step” implementation of the religious education curriculum. As a consequence, they cause weariness and discouragement and demotivate students from active participation in the lesson. They require a change in both the form and the volume of their content. Hence, traditional student textbooks should be replaced with modest free e-books, e-notebooks, or e-calendars developed to meet the needs of contemporary students, using, for example, an iPad in religious education lessons (Bilicka and Gurzyński 2019). In the higher grades of elementary and secondary school, it is worth replacing textbooks with free apps that students can download to their phones. A portfolio or e-portfolio that each student keeps as part of religious education is also worthy of consideration. It should be up to the religious education teacher to choose the appropriate teaching aid for the student. There is therefore a need for greater freedom for the teacher in the selection of such educational materials. Moreover, it would be worthwhile for publishers of religious education textbooks to create free, continuously updated educational resources and platforms for teachers of this subject to exchange teaching experiences online. The proposed changes require more work from teachers – e.g. time to prepare

materials for a specific group of students. Creativity in thinking and acting, as well as appropriate, high-level content and methodological competencies, are also desirable. This, in turn, raises new challenges for the training and professional development of religious education teachers. However, only such a methodological approach seems to meet the intellectual, emotional, and religious needs of children and adolescents and the challenges of an ever-changing educational reality.

4. Reorganization of the Professional Role of the Religious Education Teacher in the School Environment

The current secularization of Polish society also implies changes concerning the role of the religious education teacher. Their task is no longer to be focused on providing students with religious knowledge, deepening their faith, guiding their thinking, and shaping their religious attitudes. They are to be, above all, a credible, inwardly free, dedicated, a selfless “witness of faith and keeper of the memory of God ..., a witness of new life and a sign for others ... and an accompanier and educator” (PRKNE 2020, no. 113). Their priority is to build, in the course of religious instruction, a community of learners, developing their social skills and competencies. Hence, in the basic and ongoing formation of religious education teachers, educational competencies, including psychological knowledge and skills, should be valued. These include, among others, the ability to respect the freedom of the student, unconditional acceptance, selflessness, the ability to listen actively, empathy, patience with students in their daily experiences, readiness to accept difficult questions and face different life situations (PRKNE 2020, no. 135; cf. Zellma 2022, 5–22). The methodological competencies of the religious education teacher should also be considered essential. These include, among other things, “the ability to present the story of salvation in a vital way so that the interlocutors feel part of it; ... the readiness to build mature relationships with others and the ability to lead the group in such a way as to stimulate both individual and communal learning processes” (PRKNE 2020, no. 149). The ability to develop a realistic plan for the implementation of religious education in school, corresponding to the socio-cultural circumstances, seems to be crucial in this respect. It requires creativity in thought and action and the ability to use contemporary, typical ways of communicating with students using digital techniques and tools (PRKNE 2020, no. 149).

5. Seeking Ways to Communicate Effectively with Students

In view of the secularization processes among students and their parents, it is also worth rethinking the issues of interpersonal communication in religious education. Particular attention should be paid to the language used by the religious education teacher or by the authors of student textbooks. In typical educational activities, it is necessary to know both the dynamics of non-violent communication and the ability to use the so-called “giraffe language.” It helps to carry out evangelistic and educational tasks in the school environment. The linguistic convention for preaching the salvation story, explaining the truths of faith and moral norms also needs to change. Desirable here is the language of narrative understood as the means by which the students comprehend and express themselves and the reality around them and give meaning to what they experience (PRKNE 2020, no. 207). The language of narrative engages the entire person, that is, the cognitive, emotional, and volitional dimensions, stimulating holistic development (PRKNE 2020, no. 208). The teacher of religion should use this kind of language, especially when telling, based on Scripture, the story of salvation. Such language, in a special way, “lends itself to conveying the message of faith in a culture increasingly poor in deep and effective models of communication” (PRKNE 2020, no. 208). The need to use the language of art, including paintings and musical pieces, especially those of interest to students, should also be recognized. The language of art can help to pre-evangelize students. Used appropriately in religious education, it generates positive feelings and desires. It can help to experience an encounter with God through contemplation of the beauty of images. Moreover, the language of art provides an opportunity to directly explore different aspects of the truths of faith and to better know and understand the events of salvation history. It also generates positive feelings, which is important in the internalization of the presented faith content. Also, musical pieces and theatrical productions with the active participation of students can reinforce evangelizing and educational activities in religious education. They arouse positive emotions and desires, engage internally and externally, and at the same time are a particularly attractive vehicle for faith content for young people (PRKNE 2020, nos. 209–12).

The secularization of Polish society also gives rise to the need to value digital language and tools in the religious education of children and young people. Indeed, students are rooted in the virtual world (PCPNE 2020, no. 216). They learn about news and acquire information or form and express opinions, views, and beliefs based on the Internet, especially social media. In the digital space, they spend most of their free time, having discussions, asking questions, and seeking answers (PCPNE 2020, no. 214). It is therefore important that, as far as possible, the religious education teacher should be present in this reality, interacting with students in it, and bearing witness to Gospel values (PCPNE 2020, nos. 215–17). What happens in the virtual community can provide a starting point for discussions during religious education

lessons. It also plays an important role in the direct interactions of students with each other and with the teacher. Indeed, the digital space has a strong influence on the way young people perceive themselves, others, and the Church. It gives rise to certain emotions, which it is useful to refer to in direct communication (e.g. in the class) in order to support students in dealing with them appropriately. Hence, while valuing information and communication technologies, social media, and digital tools in knowledge sharing, cooperation, collaboration, and exchange of experiences, the religious education teacher must not forget to establish, maintain, and develop direct interpersonal contacts.

6. Valuing Interpersonal Relationships and Building a Community

Current social, cultural, and religious changes often create a sense of loneliness among children and young people (Kozak, Bielecki, and Rzeczkowski 2023). They lead to the non-fulfillment of basic needs for connection with others and building authentic bonds, especially the need for belonging, community, closeness, direct contact, being seen, understood, and taken into account, group strength, and cooperation. They often lead to various types of addictions, depression, self-harm, eating disorders (anorexia, bulimia, orthorexia), and suicide attempts (Araucz-Boruc 2023, 5–22; Kozak, Bielecki, and Rzeczkowski 2023). The religious education teacher's concern for building authentic relationships within the group of participants in religious education lessons, based on trust, openness, empathy, sincerity, and love, has not only educational but also evangelistic significance. It reinforces the process of accompanying students in the experience of a community that satisfies basic psychological needs and is a space for holistic personal development. It can lead to the discovery of the meaning of belonging to the Church. It also helps students to open up to God's grace and grow in faith (PRKNE 2020, nos. 218–20). Hence, changes are needed that would increase the involvement of religious education teachers in building community within the group of participants in religious education at school. Moreover, knowing the group dynamics, it is useful to use these changes to create a space for students to experience authentic relationships with their peers, and to foster a sense of identification with and belonging to the group. This experience is the starting point in accompanying students to discover the community of the Church, which is the appropriate place to discover the salvific message, share it with others, interiorize the content of the faith, and participate in the celebration of the sacraments (PRKNE 2020, no. 220). Hence, in revising religious education programs in schools, everything that would serve community-building should be valued, both at the level of the goals and the content and means of implementation. Noteworthy issues here are, for example, establishing and building positive relationships with peers, recognizing

one's own needs and learning the skills to express and meet them, building self-esteem, active listening, constructive conflict resolution, cooperation in a group, resilience to stress, the ability to learn actively, personal culture. At the same time, leading students to an encounter with Christ must not be forgotten.

What is needed here is a reliable correlation of religious education at school with parish catechesis, provided not only in connection with preparation for the sacraments of Christian initiation. It is the parish that is the appropriate place for faith education, for formation inspired by the catechumenate, for the revival and deepening of faith, or for formation in ecclesial movements, groups, and communities.

Conclusions

The analyses undertaken are only a voice in a broader discussion. They show the directions of necessary changes in the programming and implementation of religious education of children and youth in secularized Polish society. They require in-depth theoretical and empirical research. There is no doubt that modification of the existing curricular assumptions and the style and manner of teaching religious education lessons is necessary. It is difficult to imagine the further development of religious education for children and young people in Poland without new solutions that will take into account the secularization of contemporary Polish society. Moreover, the processes of secularization in Poland can motivate the renewal of religious education of children and youth. They imply the need to open up to a new quality of life for students and their new ways of value attribution. They require transcending previous models of teaching religion and changing the style of thinking and acting of religious education teachers in the school environment. For this to occur, a space needs to be created for a constructive debate among all those responsible for and involved in the religious education of the young in Poland. This, in turn, raises the need for the involvement of bishops, priests, and catechists in overcoming difficulties and resistance to the new model of programming and implementation of religious education in Polish schools. It is also worth remembering that the implementation of the proposed solutions is possible only with professionally prepared religious education teachers continuously formed by the Church. It requires a change of perspective on the ministry of religious education teachers in the school environment. This, in turn, raises the need for a renewal of the initial and ongoing formation of teachers of this subject. Concrete efforts should be undertaken to educate and improve the pedagogical and catechetical training of teachers so that those responsible for such activities do not so much transmit knowledge as co-create a space for its discovery, and sharing experience. It is crucial to support teachers of religion in becoming increasingly self-aware, in discovering the essence of their vocation to be teachers,

educators, and witnesses of faith, and in strengthening their vocation to be prophets in today's secular society.

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