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Aims and objectives of religious pedagogy

Summary

DEFINITION OF THE TERM: Religious pedagogy is a scientific discipline and research area that investigates the practice and theory of the processes of religious upbringing and religious socialization. Its aim is to develop the theories of religious education and religious upbringing within various educational environments.

HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE TERM: Religious pedagogy was established at the beginning of the 20th century due to disputes and reflections on the reliable analysis of religious education and religious socialization. The development of modern teaching methods in didactics and findings within developmental psychology led to the unilateral link between religious pedagogy and its theological orientation being broken. As a result of these processes, pedagogical knowledge was enriched, and religious pedagogy changed into an in-depth analysis of religious upbringing and religious socialization that takes into account the diversity of views in this area.

DISCUSSION OF THE TERM: It should be remembered that religious pedagogy is a scientific discipline and research area that investigates the practice and theory of the processes of religious education and religious socialization. Today the Polish subject literature is divided into three categories, in each of which it is treated differently:

- as an auxiliary science to theology producing applied knowledge;
- as a theological and pedagogical science producing applied and basic knowledge;
- as a pedagogical science producing applied and basic knowledge.

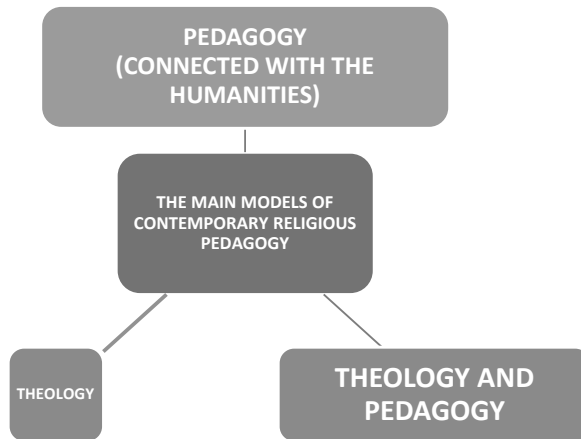
SYSTEMATIC REFLECTION WITH CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: Rather than approach religious pedagogy as a clearly defined scientific discipline, it should be understood as a specific research subject that covers the processes of broadly defined religious education and religious socialization. Its research objectives are determined by the assumed vision of man, society, and the Church, from which neither pedagogy nor theology can depart. At the same time, as evidenced by its developmental trends, religious pedagogy does not want to limit itself to the theory of a particular practice (to the status of applied science). Its aim is to develop general theories of all phenomena related to religious education and its determinants, drawing upon both the empirical and the theological sciences to do so.

Keywords: religious pedagogy, religious education, religion, religious socialization

Definition of the term

Religious pedagogy (in Polish: *pedagogika religii*; in German: *Religion-spaedagogik*; in French: *pedagogie religieuse*) is a scientific discipline and research area that investigates the practice and theory of the processes of religious education and religious socialization. Today the Polish subject literature is divided into three categories, in each of which it is treated differently:

- as an auxiliary science to theology producing applied knowledge;
- as a theological and pedagogical science producing applied and basic knowledge;
- as a pedagogical science producing applied and basic knowledge.



The scientific status and the research subject of religious pedagogy

As a branch of theology, religious pedagogy is understood as an area of research within theology and an accompaniment to catechetics. It provides applied knowledge, i.e. it develops specific activities that are necessary to achieve the assumed goals as expressed, for example, in the doctrine.

In this understanding, the subject of religious pedagogy is a specific religious pedagogy, i.e. the educational doctrine and its practice in the Church or within a religious community. The extent to which pedagogical and psychosocial factors are accounted for within it is determined mainly

by theological and ecclesiastical decisions. Therefore, religious pedagogy can be said to be a sub-discipline of theology that is investigated mainly within theological faculties. Religious pedagogy, understood as a branch of theology and pedagogy, is a research area and scientific discipline that is theological and pedagogical in nature. It emphasizes the necessity of interdisciplinary research into the processes of religious education.

The research subject covers all the processes of religious education and religious socialization that take place within the Church, family, and society. It particularly emphasises the educational task faced by religious communities. It does not abandon the theological premises that define its normative references but confronts them with other scientific disciplines. This approach to religious pedagogy is also investigated mainly within theological faculties.

Religious pedagogy treated as a branch of pedagogy (an interdisciplinary approach) is a research area that is not practised within theology but within education sciences. Religious instruction as a school subject requires the same theoretical foundations as other subjects or groups of subjects. It is realised as didactics in the field of religious education that aims to describe, analyse, and understand the determinants of religious education as well as formulate specific guidelines necessary for the implementation of curricula. It is treated as a science that provides both basic and applied knowledge. Its point of reference includes pedagogy, religious studies, philosophy, psychology, and, finally, theology. It is based on the assumption that religion is a universal phenomenon and that at least some of its forms may be important for shaping the fullness of humanity and democratic life forms. This approach to religious pedagogy is followed mainly within humanities faculties (Milerski, 2019).

These three ways of defining the scientific status of religious pedagogy and its research subject should be treated as idealizations, which in practice means that they can assume different forms. Nevertheless, in contemporary religious pedagogy, the first two have gained in importance. Catholic circles are more inclined towards the former, while Protestant ones incline more towards the latter (although this is not a rule). Religious pedagogy treated merely as a sub-discipline of pedagogy (model three) has relatively few supporters.

Rather than approach religious pedagogy as a clearly defined scientific discipline, it should be understood as a specific research subject

that covers the processes of broadly defined religious education and religious socialization. Its research objectives are determined by the assumed vision of man, society, and the Church, from which neither pedagogy nor theology can depart. At the same time, however, religious pedagogy, as evidenced by its developmental trends, does not want to limit itself to the theory of a particular practice (to the status of applied science); instead, it aims to develop general theories of all phenomena associated with religious education and its determinants by drawing upon empirical and theological sciences. Its scientific accomplishments attest to the identity of religious pedagogy as a theoretical area and pedagogical discipline that is based on an interdisciplinary approach (Ziebertz, 1994).

Historical analysis of the term

Reflecting on the essence and role of religious pedagogy requires knowledge of its origins and its links with catechetics. Moreover, it should be remembered that the term “religious pedagogy” has been in place for quite a long time and at times has been accompanied by heated discussions about its justification and role. First, this term competed with the older concept of “catechesis”, which has been in use since the very beginnings of Christianity (Gabriel, 1992). It would seem that the broad term “religious pedagogy” indicates that this scientific discipline is part (sub-discipline) of general pedagogy. If so, it can be claimed that pedagogy provides the research perspective and methods, while religion is the research subject. Consequently, catechetics would be a theological science and pedagogy would be a pedagogical science. They would have their own goals, contents, tasks, and methods, and the relationship between them would be clearly defined. However, most educators – for various reasons – treat religious pedagogy as a theological science. Thus, religious pedagogy is one of the youngest branches of scientific theology, although religious educators themselves are still debating the issue of its foundations and links with catechetics and theology (Boschki, 2017).

Religious pedagogy cannot be understood without being familiar with the historical determinants that influenced its development. The

variations of religious pedagogy that developed in the German-speaking areas have exerted the greatest influence on the development of this discipline. Its history began with concepts or perspectives; however, even within a single concept, very divergent understandings and applications were possible, as evidenced by, for example, the hermeneutical perspective developed by the evangelical theologian M. Stallmann, within which the contrasting ideas put forward by G. Stachel and H. Halbfas can be found. The same problem of diverse views can be observed in religious-information studies, within which many authors define both preaching and information unilaterally and incompletely. Some authors (e.g. A. Exeler) argue that pure information without a missionary dimension is a utopia and defend the traditions of the Church, while others (G. Otto and especially E. Fischer) claim that religion is a fossil from a previous era, and, although it has lasted into modern times, should be abolished. Similar problems of contrasting opinions relate to the problem area and curriculum theory. A significant attempt to demonstrate the similarities and differences between religious pedagogy and catechetics was undertaken by Prof. J. Bagrowicz and Prof. C. Rogowski, who conducted a comparative analysis of this issue in Poland. Their study devoted to the history of religious pedagogy and its links with catechetics was based on the ideas of G. Stachel, A. Exeler, and M. Majewski (Michalski, 1994).

For a number of reasons, it is still not easy to clearly present the links between religious pedagogy and catechetics outside of German-speaking regions. Firstly, the documents of the Magisterium of the universal Church do not list this science among other theological sciences. The following documents do not include the term “religious pedagogy” but do include the terms “catechetics” and “catechesis”: *Declaration on Christian Education “Gravissimum educationis”* of the Second Vatican Council (1965), the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi* issued by Paul VI (1975), *Directorium Catechisticum Generale* (1971), *The Code of Canon Law* (1983), the apostolic exhortation *Catechesi tradendae* issued by John Paul II (1979), the *General Directory for Catechesis* (1997), the *Second Polish Plenary Synod* (1991–1999), the *Principles of Priestly Formation in Poland* (1999), and the *Directory for Catechesis of the Catholic Church in Poland* (2001). Secondly, it should be observed that outside of German-speaking areas the presence of religious

pedagogy in university study programmes is fragmented. Therefore, it is also essential to analyse religious pedagogy in the context of contemporary social issues and problems. The practicality of religious pedagogy lies in the fact that it meets certain conditions: describing, explaining, and helping specific ethical phenomena to be understood. A young person asks many questions to which he is not always able to obtain an answer. Therefore, religious pedagogy is supposed to help him in finding answers to them, and it formulates its aims and objectives accordingly.

Discussion of the term

The aims and objectives of modern religious pedagogy are closely related to the determinants of religious education. The teaching and upbringing of a person is always done in a specific social, cultural, and religious context. This contextuality is particularly significant in the education of the young (including their religious education), especially in view of the contemporary acceleration of changes to which the modern world and modern man are subjected. It is vital to capture these transformations adequately, to anticipate their consequences for religious pedagogy, and to define its aims and objectives.

In consideration of the above, it is necessary to indicate the main areas of change that influence the formulation of the aims and objectives of contemporary religious pedagogy.

These are:

- A) civilizational and social transformations
- B) cultural changes
- C) changes in religiousness
- D) changes in education

A) Civilizational and social transformations

The turn of the 21st century was a typical breakthrough time. The 20th century brought many changes in almost all areas of life. The development of science and technology offered an opportunity to define new aspirations and achievements for humanity. This was also accompanied by a certain dehumanisation of man that was related to an increasing appreciation of material values. The second half of the 20th century

witnessed the decline of the epoch now called modernism, which was followed by what is now called postmodernism. While modernist society valued rationality, universalism, planning, unity, and unambiguity, the characteristic features of postmodernism include pluralism, diversity, fragmentation, randomness, and ambivalence.

The development of modern means of communication that was so conspicuous at the end of the 20th century in the field of information transfer did not prevent the great breakdown that contemporary civilization is experiencing. This breakdown has been caused not only by injustice and economic inequality but also by increasingly pronounced political, ideological, and religious antagonism (Bagrowicz, 2008).

The second half of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century thus became a time of transition from a monolithic social order towards a structure that is characterized by the existence of many forms of otherness, diversity, and even towards the ambivalence of social life. Total pluralism and deconstructive liberalism have grown into a new dogma. Twentieth-century liberalism treats society as nothing more than the sum total of individuals that do not form a community; it therefore considers man as an individual but neglects his personal dimension.

B) Cultural changes

Postmodernism can be called a period of scepticism, because while mature reason used to give meaning to everything, nothing makes sense to the undecided thought of postmodernism.

It is a time of breakdown and fall, darkness and night, a time of poverty in which indifference becomes a fatal disease and the morally just rejection of hard-line and totalitarian ideologies has led to the abandonment of the question of meaning, to the loss of the desire to seek the fundamental rationale of human life and death (Forte, 2004).

Thus, the postmodern optimistic vision of man shaping his history in total freedom is overshadowed by problems related to the meaning – or meaninglessness – of life.

All this is indicative of the awakening of a longing to restore the meaning of life. The rediscovery of the “Other” is one of the most important forms this search might take. By the very fact of his existence, a neighbour seems to be sufficient *raison d’être* for our existence and sharing

our life with others; he is the motivation to go beyond ourselves and take up a commitment for others. The growing awareness of the need for solidarity on all levels – interpersonal, social, and international – seems to reveal itself as a sign of the search for lost meaning (Mette, 1994).

As Forte observes, many people experience a certain longing for the “Other”, for rediscovering fundamental questions, and for defining the ultimate perspective (Forte, 2004). The desire for personal meaning to the return to *sacrum* seems to have been revived.

C) Changes in religiousness

Today, religion is a choice and not an imposed necessity. Even if someone is a member of a church, his understanding of God is often different from the official doctrine of the church; this is a manifestation of what is known as the privatisation of faith. However, the opposite phenomena can also be observed. Some people even talk about the deprivatisation of religion, about the spectacular departure of religion from the private sphere, about its active public role, or even about a certain retaliation of *sacrum* at present. After decades of humiliation and marginalisation, religion today frequently rearises in the form of religious fundamentalism which has nothing to do with religion. Moreover, an important phenomenon of our time is the revival of interest in spirituality. This amazes sociologists, who not long ago predicted the disappearance of religion. However, this hunger for spirituality does not have to mean a return to traditional religious practices.

The position of the Church has also changed. A visible, characteristic feature of this change is the weakening of the ties people have with faith and the Church, and the increasingly frequent criticism of its structures and traditions. This change corresponds to the modernist social breakthrough, which marked the end of a thousand years of tradition based on the fact that Christianity was deeply inscribed in the system of power. This breakthrough also occurred within the Christian tradition itself and manifested in, for example, the liberation of political power from ecclesiastical privileges and the liberation of culture from purely traditional and religious categories. Although the role the Church plays in social life has not ceased to be significant, it is no longer a monopolist in a market of competing systems of diverse lifestyles. The Church is losing many of the functions that can be taken over by the secular community and

is focusing on its strictly religious functions. New religious groups and sects are emerging that attempt to bring order to the chaos and spiritual void typical of many modern societies. This is particularly characteristic of many religious communities and groups. At the same time, Christian communities should base their activities not only on theology but also on mutual help, personal relationships, and a sensitivity to everyday human problems. There is therefore a great need to strengthen the spiritual guidance offered within the Church and to help people more effectively cope with their emotions, fears, and frustrations. Christians should strengthen their involvement in non-ecclesiastical spheres in order to take the teaching of Jesus outside of the Church in a creative and practical manner (that is, not to limit it to ecclesial communities) (Michalski, 2004).

The Church in Poland faces similar challenges. Its situation is obviously influenced by the social, economic, and cultural transformations taking place in the country. The transition from totalitarianism to democracy is linked with an acknowledgement of pluralism, freedom, and participation, thus leading to a situation in which churches lose their traditional authority and non-religious functions. Under the totalitarian regimes in Poland, the Church performed extensive (social) functions, whereas in a pluralistic society it has become a specialized institution. In practice, this means the loss of its non-religious functions and the need to reflect on a new model of functioning within a pluralistic society or in a democratic state. Moreover, it should be remembered that religiousness in Poland functions on two different levels, namely national and everyday: the former is expressed in the global denominations, while the latter is expressed mostly in religious beliefs and moral convictions, which are particularly sensitive to change. It is characteristic that the changes that have taken place on both levels are similar to those that occur in highly developed societies. They point to a basic trend of changes in religiousness in Poland that is neither atheism nor religious indifference: it is selectivity. This is evidenced in the conscious negation and questioning of the truths of faith and moral principles, and, consequently, in loosening the ties between Christians and the Church (Michalski, 2004).

D) Changes in education

The space in which educational processes take place is undergoing constant transformations within broadly understood political, economic,

social, cultural, and religious areas. The following phenomena also influence the fundamental questions that are posed today in discussions about education: the market economy, political and economic pluralism, mindset changes, changes in culture (especially the dominant position of mass culture), the globalization of tensions between the processes of globalization and regionalization, changes resulting from the post-modernist human model, liberalism, and moral relativism. Many of these questions concerning pedagogy and upbringing are triggered by challenges posed by the increasingly pluralistic world (Melosik, 2007).

Postmodernism first questioned the modernist educational project. Values that constituted the basis of modernist education have been reduced to a historical and social construct that articulates the ideology of power. In particular, criticism has been levied at schools for being a source of violence rather than nurturing and developing an individual in order to mould him according to a certain ideology. In the name of a specifically understood freedom (understood as the right of every human being, and therefore also of a child, to make choices without any restrictions), it has been postulated that the development of an individual should not be interfered with, but this prevents the emergence of responsibility for the other because it limits human freedom (Melosik, 2007).

All these tendencies and transformations have also been affecting discussions devoted to education in Poland. The era of political transformation is characterised, on the one hand, by a certain axionormative emptiness as the legacy of communism, and, on the other hand, by the "hell of pluralism". This may lead to reaching for seemingly easy and simple solutions suggested by various political options and worldviews.

The present day, although a key context of pedagogical theory and practice, does not have to be the ultimate criterion for educational activity. A responsible educator should not only keep up with the changing situation but also be able to predict the consequences of particular attitudes or choices (Michalski, 2011).

However, the present day brings new questions focusing on the direction in which school education in Poland is heading. These questions result from the ever-changing educational reality, which is greatly affected by mass culture and rapid technological progress. This progress creates both opportunities and dangers, linked e.g. with the internet, which has

a considerable impact on the mindset of children and young people. Therefore, the current form of school education and the choice of set books, among other things, are in question (Melosik, 2007).

Attention is also drawn to the principal – from an educational post-modern point of view – change in the treatment of reality, a shift from thinking about the real nature of the world and its problems to an (occasionally) obsessive preoccupation with its pseudo-problems. The great social problems of development and its threats, inequalities, suffering, and the misery of millions of people in war and in peace, the prospect of human ecological self-destruction, and the possibility of a final clash between earthly civilizations have been overshadowed by the neurotic torments of well-fed Euro-American consumers over their gender identity, their egotistic raking over small events in their microcosm of backyard intrigues, and the adventures of the protagonists of successive episodes of soap operas. That is why many people find it exciting to follow the relationships and love adventures of screen and political stars, more attractive when they are of homosexual nature. From this perspective, some people begin to question the validity of the tradition of education and upbringing, the set books, and socialization within the family and school (Michalski, 2011).

Systematic reflection with conclusions and recommendations

An important element of legitimizing the presence of religious pedagogy in the school system is the relationship between education and religion and the need to treat the axiological categories within education and upbringing seriously. Therefore, it seems that in postmodern society, religious pedagogy and ecclesiastical and evangelistic rationale acquire a new meaning.

The question of the meaning of life is asked within every form of teaching and within every subject taught in school. In religious pedagogy, this question takes on a special meaning as its task is to teach pupils how to create meaning in a pluralistic society. Thus, the question of the meaning of life is not only implied but is overtly discussed within religious education because “religious instruction is an anthropological

task of creating meaning” and of confronting this meaning with a student’s existential situation (Michalski, 2011). In this respect, creating meaning is a pedagogical requirement, since a student living in a pluralistic society must learn how to independently create his own meaning and – being a member of a community – how to join its existing structures. School should support young people in their search for identity and in becoming more human. In the context of human existence, this is the ability to answer questions such as “from where?”, “to where?”, and “why?”, which are asked and answered from the religious perspective. Religious instruction in schools is the most suitable and appropriate space to ask questions about the meaning of existence.

In its essence and original task, Christian religious education primarily addresses the question of God, who revealed Himself in Jesus Christ, and next moves on to questions about man. Such questions are, after all, the fundamental questions of Gospel pedagogy, which encourages man to reflect on himself. The question “who am I?” is one of the fundamental questions in the process of education. If it is overlooked, upbringing can easily become merely training and can omit the basic issues of human existence. Religious education is therefore not about finding ready answers to questions, but it is about being able to ask these questions and understand oneself in their light. Thus, it is about posing questions of a metaphysical nature and about the will to find the meaning (Marek, 2017).

Another essential issue within religious pedagogy that is particularly pertinent in relation to religious instruction in schools is the form this education takes in the context of “instant” culture and its consumerist face. Z. Melosik asks a significant question: “in what way should parents and educators react to these phenomena?” (Melosik, 2007). According to him, they have four options:

1. consciously attempt to block the existing cultural trends in the name of recognised traditional cultural values;
2. thoughtlessly drift along with the rapidly changing culture;
3. accept the euphoria of the supermarket and the uncritical “clicking” on reality as if it were an internet website;
4. negotiate with young people as to the shape of the reality in which we live together, and develop in them the habit of making conscious choices about the shape of the “self”.

In Melosik's opinion, only the fourth option offers pedagogy and educators the possibility of real participation in shaping young people's identities and lives.

This raises some pertinent questions from the perspective of religious education. What might the phrase "negotiate with young people as to the shape of the reality in which we live together" mean? There is no doubt that such negotiating, understood as a dialogue and an invitation to co-create reality, is indispensable. Let us add that there is far too little of it. The aim of education is to strengthen the creative relationships through which the student acquires responsibility for the reality in which he participates. Learning is fascinating because it involves continuous development, a constant journey, and entering new areas that directly affect the participants of educational processes. Christian education is a dialogue whose participants include the Bible, tradition, and the student's experience, while the teacher is at the same time a conservative and a revolutionary, a scientist and an artist, a visionary rooted in history and a preacher preaching truth and beauty.

However, we must know which elements of reality can be negotiated. In religious education, for example, the repository of faith, which is the content of the Gospel message and the creed of the Church, is fixed – it is the Kerygma and is non-negotiable. The value of life, moral principles and norms based on the Decalogue, and the message of the Sermon on the Mount are also non-negotiable. Their understanding and interpretation are being continuously developed within the life of the Church and are subject to what (after the Second Vatican Council) has become an element of "aggiornamento" – a renewal adapted to the requirements of the times. Here, the Magisterium of the Church in all its layers plays a principal role. Everything that is not the Kerygma but is an element of the Church's life that is subject to change and development should become an area for dialogue and negotiation. Dogmatization of what is not a principle of faith and moral life can easily lead to intellectual and religious fundamentalism.

Religious education should be based on the canon, but this should be in constant development because only then can we avoid changing the Christian school or the Church as a whole into an open-air museum that does not meet the needs of modern man, or a centre that is relative and detached from tradition. The present situation of man

requires consideration and a dialogue between both the past and the future (Brueggmann, 2002).

The second cornerstone of Christian education is the acknowledgement of the absolute value of every human being, treated as a neighbour. The point is to maintain a balance, or rather a dialogue, between these two guiding principles: the divine and human elements in education.

One more important aspect that is particularly pertinent in the contemporary pluralism of worldviews is that narrative pedagogy is based on an assumption that religious education is more than a mere transfer of information about possible options and solutions to problems pupils encounter in their lives. A teacher, although open to diversity, should not limit his role to just being an expert in diversity. Responsibility must be an essential feature of his character. This concept falls between the confessional-catechumenal model and the ecumenical model. Based on Henning Schroer's approach, Bogusław Milerski calls it the confessional-dialogical model (Milerski, 2011). His understanding of education stems from the reception of the achievements of theological and pedagogical hermeneutics, which are expressed in the tasks faced by religious education, i.e. the renewal of students' lives is realized by taking into account their elementary experiences and questions.

Thus, it can be seen that "negotiating the shape of the reality in which we live with young people" can also be a creative and enriching activity undertaken within religious pedagogy which helps to integrate students' lives and religious experiences with their faith.

In the context of religious maturity, an obvious task of religious education is to shape a student's ability to choose. Therefore, an important question is how to understand the development of young people's ability to make choices regarding their "self". In contemporary society, a lifestyle that is based on reflection is disappearing. The very essence of questions about life stands in stark contrast with the philosophy of consumerist society, so it is difficult to make "conscious" choices. Yet, there is no doubt that such an attitude is the only sensible one. However, it must be openly stated that making conscious choices can only be responsible and educationally effective if there exists a certain unambiguous criterion, a solid foundation on which to build oneself, a point of reference for the ad hoc decisions that a man makes. As we know, contemporary pedagogy avoids such references to permanent principles.

Participants of the process of religious education are not willing to make such references: they prefer a religious message that is based on a model of contemporary, constantly changing reality. Thus, questions arise about the nature of the religious message in a world of culture so “flickering” – a culture of “constant interruptions”. Should it adapt to the mindset of passionate viewers of daily TV “soap operas” who willingly transfer themselves into an artificial world, or should it stick to the idea of creating an environment of silence, concentration, reflection, and prayer? Should we show the stable values of the Gospel and the tradition of the Church, or should we follow the temptation to relativize everything and look for applause by pandering to passing fads?

The task of religious pedagogy is, among other things, to help students reach religious maturity. Mature religiousness that has the genuine power to influence people must be based on the following processes: interiorization, i.e. personal acceptance of religious values transmitted by the family, absolutization, i.e. placing religious values at the centre of personality, and socialization, i.e. the person’s growth into and identification with his social environment. Socialization is impossible when the message young people receive does not offer them a clear answer to the questions of what should be central and what is central to their lives, and what value is at the forefront of all other values (Brueggmann, 2002).

Preparation for and assistance in making the right choices is not only a matter of individual counselling: it is also the responsibility of local Church communities. If young people could see the Church as an environment in which they can find help in responding to religious difficulties, the average number of religious crises would decrease significantly. In the era of postmodern deconstruction and decay, decentralization and pluralism, the Church again faces extremely difficult challenges. The Church itself is becoming increasingly pluralistic and is frequently a scene of internal dialogue. The need for dialogue between different members of the same body attests to its healthy development and can even be considered a necessity, as it enforces a constant revision of the current approaches to faith and the ways in which they are communicated. Many theologians have expanded the number of participants in this dialogue to include people from outside the Church and are trying to find areas shared by Christianity and postmodern culture.

The Church and its pedagogical programme has always taken into account (and sometimes even treated as a starting point) the current economic and political situation of the society of which it is part and which it is to serve. This is particularly important today in face of not only cultural pluralism but also the increasing dechristianization of Western societies (Hilger, Leimgruber and Ziebertz, 2001).

The Church's current situation could be compared to the situation before the Constantinian shift, when neither the state nor culture could be described as Christian. The clash of different cultural traditions can be a source of hope for the Church and should motivate followers of Christ to reveal their faith more openly. The confrontation of cultures should awaken the traditionally Christian West from lethargy and spiritual depression and halt its self-destruction. The clash of cultures is an opportunity for Christians to influence the world more effectively through active participation in political or professional life.

The situation of Christianity and the particular Churches outlined above sets a concrete task for religious education, which must primarily aim to build the modern foundations of Christianity and show how significant and valuable being a Christian is for today's man.

In this context, religious pedagogy cannot be understood as mere preparation for concrete religious practices. Rather, it should lead to making a decision regarding faith: a student, confronted with a Christian answer, should be encouraged to determine his own path and to give meaning to his life. J. Michalski emphasizes another important aspect of religious education. The Christian mission is an offer and an invitation: you may either accept or reject it, but this is your independent decision and is not imposed on you by anyone. As far as faith is concerned, for this reason an educator must not coerce a pupil. On the contrary, he must be guided by the fact that man makes free decisions. In this respect, religious education, like any other school subject, must respect a student's dignity while teaching him to act independently in the face of freedom and responsibility. The aim of teaching religion is to shape a student in such a way that he is ready and mature enough to make life choices so that he can undertake life tasks motivated by the Gospel (Michalski, 2004).

This will be possible when the truths of faith transmitted to him have a clear reference to life, when they are not abstract, and when the

preaching of the Gospel and theological reflection are close to man and his problems. Thus, this anthropological inclination, which was initiated in the West at the turn of the 1970s, is still valid in religious education. The contemporary task of religious education is man with his concrete life references. The proper subject of religious teaching is thus the life of students and teachers, their real worlds, and their real everyday experiences. This is not about an anthropological shortening of theology but a theological understanding of basic human phenomena. Faith should be realized in the context of life, and life should be understood in the light of faith. This is done, on the one hand, by drawing attention to the issues of uncertainty in life and, on the other hand, by opening everyday secular experiences to the promises made by faith. The signals of transcendence should be received among everyday life events. The transmission of faith is also achieved by means of basic experiences and extreme situations, during which a person does not ask questions about meaning but receives them (Marek, 1999).

In transmitting the faith, one should discover the compatibility between the experiences of faith received in tradition and in one's own life. In other words, it is necessary to find the "God of life" in the reality of this life. This kind of teaching has a twofold openness: to the real-life experiences of people participating in it and to the Christian faith as a possible explanation of meaning and orientation in life.

This message places the teacher in a special situation: he has to treat his own religious experience seriously, be ready to accept it, and speak openly about the religious explanation of his own life (Michalski, 2011). It requires from him a testimony of faith in which he appears before students as someone who is not indifferent to their lives and religious experiences, but together with them formulates questions about the meaning of life. He must be authentic in this, depart from the daily routine, and be open to other people (especially those he encounters) and broadly understood life.

In conclusion, it should be emphasized that the pace of change in civilizational, socio-cultural, and religious life is so rapid today that it forces us to constantly review the educational solutions adopted so far in the field of religious communication, and the goals and tasks of religious pedagogy. Capturing what is unchanging and important and pointing to new interpretations of the signs of the times are important tasks in

religious pedagogy. The correct way of conveying the message, the relationship between educators and pupils, and sensitization to the ability to understand the needs of the young generation will largely depend on keeping up with the times. The proposals presented in this article should not be treated as a set of ready-made solutions, but rather as a contribution to further in-depth reflection on the aims and objectives of contemporary religious pedagogy.

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