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CHALLENGES FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AT SCHOOL IN THE OPINION OF RELIGION TEACHERS

THE APOLOGETIC THOUGHT OF FATHER IDZI RADZISZEWSKI
– THE FIRST RECTOR OF THE JOHN PAUL II CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF LUBLIN

Abstract. Challenges in teaching religion are analysed from different perspectives and in different aspects. In the diagnosis of problems, one of the most important factors is the opinion of religion teachers who confront these challenges directly and on a daily basis. This article is an analysis of the results of a survey of religion teachers in this context. Challenges from the students, parents, the institutional Church, the school and finally challenges from the parish itself are discussed. Among the most serious challenges, the lack of faith among the pupils and the lack of the need for faith development were identified. The research shows that the strongest correlate of attitudes towards Religious Education in school is religious indifference and waning religiosity.

Keywords: religious education; religiosity; catechesis; religion teachers.

Teaching religion in Polish schools is confessional, catechetical and even evangelistic.¹ This means that attempts are made to perform all the functions of catechesis: teaching, upbringing and initiation, as well as the function of evangelization. In this approach, the point is not only to convey religious knowledge to students or even to shape socially useful life attitudes, but to lead to the awakening or deepening of one's faith, to introduce pupils to a

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¹ Paweł Makosa, "Confessional and catechetical nature of religious education in Poland," *The Person and the Challenges* 5 (2015), 2: 60.

regular sacramental life and observe Catholic moral principles. In recent years, however, there has been a growing disillusionment with teaching religion in Poland, since the catechetical and evangelistic goals of religious education are only achieved to a small extent. What is more, in many environments, a regression of religiousness is being observed, especially among young people.

It is a fact that young people in Poland are undergoing very dynamic processes of secularization. According to current research, 71% of Polish youth consider themselves believers in God. In contrast, 28.6% describe themselves as non-believers.² It is worth noting that, in 1992, when research in this area began, 93% of young people were believers. An even greater crisis concerns religious practices. Currently, 23% of Polish youth admit to regular participation in church services. In turn, 36% have declared a complete lack of religious practices. Others practice irregularly. It is worth noting that the percentage of young people participating in services in 1992 was 69%. The most dynamic changes, however, have taken place in the sphere of morality. A growing percentage of Polish youth do not accept the principles of Catholic morality, especially those relating to sexuality.³ Only a small percent fully accept the Church's teaching on this matter.⁴ The crisis is also noticed in relations with the Church, whose authority is weakening, and so fewer and fewer young people are involved in the life of this community.⁵

Religious education is often blamed for the religious crisis among young Poles, who point to poor implementation and incorrect assumptions. We are also looking for solutions that will respond to modern challenges. However, before such proposed solutions are implemented, the challenges faced by religious education should be precisely diagnosed. For this purpose, numerous studies are conducted both on the religiosity of young people, as well as on various dimensions of teaching religion and catechesis.⁶ The research was also

² Centrum Badań Opinii Społecznej, *Religijność młodych na tle ogółu społeczeństwa. Komunikat z badań nr 144/2021*, edited by Mirosława Grabowska (Warsaw: CBOS, 2021), 10.

³ Jan Dziedzic, „Religijność a postawy moralne polskiej młodzieży. Refleksja psychologiczno-pastoralna,” *Polonia Sacra* 20 (2016): 20 (2016), 4: 67–86.

⁴ Paweł Mąkosa and Dominik Kielb, “Between Personal Faith and Facade Religiosity. Study on Youth in the South-Eastern Poland,” *European Journal of Science and Theology* 17 (2021), 5: 15–30.

⁵ Daniel Tilles, “Only 9% of young people in Poland view Catholic church positively, finds poll,” *Notes from Poland*, accessed 9.06.2022, <https://notesfrompoland.com/2020/11/16/only-9-of-young-people-in-poland-view-catholic-church-positively-finds-poll/>.

⁶ On the topic of importance of sociological research, see Wioletta Szymczak, „Interdisciplinarity in Pastoral Theology. An Example of Socio-Theological Research,” *Verbum Vitae* 38 (2020), 2: 503–527.

conducted for this reason, initiated at the Institute of Sociological Sciences of the Catholic University of Lublin and carried out by an interdisciplinary team of researchers. The research concerned, inter alia, the situation of young people and the teaching of religion in schools, and one of the modules was addressed to religion teachers.⁷ The subject of analysis in this article are the challenges that religious education in school face, indicated by religion teachers during this research.

1. OWN RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted among teachers of religion in the Archdiocese of Lublin. For this purpose, a survey questionnaire was developed, containing original questions, constructed for the purposes of this project and used in previous sociological or pastoral research, modified or updated when necessary for the formulated research questions. Some of the questions asked to the teachers were open-ended, and others included cafeterias from which religion teachers chose answers. The research tool contained a total of 32 questions and additional metric questions. Some of the questions were complex or required answers based on a scale. The survey questionnaire also contained open questions, allowing the respondents to express themselves freely.

The empirical research was conducted by the Centre for Sociological and Economic Research in Lublin in 2021. This institution developed a survey script using the *LimeSurvey* tool, which was placed on the server of this analysis centre, and a link to it was sent to all religion teachers in the Archdiocese of Lublin via e-mail. Online surveys were completed by a total of 348 teachers, including 248 women, i.e., 71.3%, and 100 men, i.e., 28.7%. The study involved 253 lay people, 51 priests, 42 religious and 2 people from institutes of consecrated life.

2. RESULTS OF EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

The answers of religion teachers to two questions from the questionnaire will be analysed.⁸ The first one was open and concerned key problems

⁷ See Wioletta Szymczak and Tomasz Adamczyk, *Młodzież w kontekstach współczesnych. Rodzina. Czas. Szkoła. Kościół* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2022).

⁸ Questions formulated by W. Szymczak based on consultations with people directly involved in teaching religion in school.

related to teaching religion. It aimed to enable teachers to independently identify and name the problems they consider crucial for religious education at school, without imposing on them the researcher's conceptual categories or suggesting potential problem areas. The second question, in turn, referred to the respondents' opinions on the difficulties and challenges that, in their opinion, relate to teaching religion in schools today. The cafeteria selection for this question contained several answers, asking the respondents to rate, on a scale of 1-5, the intensity of a given difficulty.

When analysing the results of the conducted research, it is worth paying attention to the open question in which teachers were asked to autonomously indicate the biggest problems faced when teaching religion. Religion teachers emphasized that the biggest problem for religious education is religious indifference and lack of faith among students, and even a certain fashion for atheism. Many teachers claimed that their students disagreed with the teachings of the Catholic Church on both dogmatic and moral issues.

Some claimed to even notice a hostile attitude towards the faith and the Church. A significant group of teachers pointed to the consequences of rejecting the faith, which included the cessation of religious practices, i.e., prayer, participation in church services or the sacramental life. It turns out, therefore, that – according to religion teachers – the greatest problems for teaching religion are primarily related to an increasingly lower level of religiosity among Polish children and youth. Such opinions of religion teachers are understandable if we take into account the catechetical and evangelistic concept of religious education in Polish schools. In the face of the growing atheism and agnosticism of students, implementing the goals of such a concept is practically very difficult, and often even impossible.

Many teachers also tried to indicate the reasons for the growing religious indifference and atheism within the young generation of Poles. Lack of religious upbringing in their families was considered the most important reason. Many studies confirm that today's generation of parents transmits religious values to their children to a lesser extent. Consequently, pupils do not inherit any religious experience from home and do not build religious attitudes.⁹

Among the most important problems related to teaching religion, religion teachers also mention a disrespectful approach toward this subject, where pupils treat it as a less important class in school and display a lack of involvement in religion classes. It seems, however, that such an approach is

⁹ See Elżbieta Osewska, „Ograniczenia i możliwości katechezy w rodzinie,” *Seminare. Poszukiwania naukowe* 11 (1995): 81–98.

a consequence of the changes in religiosity described above. Consequently, confessional teaching of religion is contested by children, parents and even other teachers. In addition, the teachers covered by the research pointed to many problems on the part of the Church. Among them, they most often emphasized, for example, the religious curriculum as being inadequate to the current level of religiosity, repetitive lesson topics, and the lack of good textbooks. Teachers also point to the lack of cooperation with parish priests and the lack of support from the curia and the bishop. They also note that the lack of catechesis in the parish for children, youth and adults negatively impacts religiosity and teaching religion in school.

Regarding the second question, the analysis of the results will be presented according to the following key: challenges for teaching religion on the part of students, parents, the institutional Church, school and the parish.

1.1. Student challenges

One of the primary challenges for religious instruction on the part of students is the lack of the need to develop their faith. The results of quantitative research on the opinions of religion teachers on this subject are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The need to develop faith among young people

Need to develop faith	<i>N</i>	%
Definitely no	6	1.7
Rather no	54	15.5
Rather yes	176	50.6
Definitely yes	96	27.6
Difficult to say	16	4.6
Total	348	100.0

The obtained research results confirm that this is one of the greatest challenges in teaching religion. A total of 78.2% of respondents face this problem. It is also confirmed by other studies, pointing to progressive secularization.¹⁰ It is a fact, therefore, that Polish youth are becoming less and less religious and seek to deepen their faith to a lesser and lesser degree. Many other problems and difficulties faced by teaching religion from the confessional perspective result from changes in religiosity. Therefore, it is worth

¹⁰ Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej, *Religijność młodych na tle ogółu społeczeństwa*, 10.

placing the greatest emphasis on confessional religious education in Poland on building the faith of young people and undertaking intensive evangelization and catechetical activities. However, these proposals are addressed primarily to the parish as an environment for faith development.

The question addressed to religion teachers concerned aggression on the part of students caused by their dislike of the Church and priests. Respondents were asked to indicate to what extent they perceive this problem in their work. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Student aggression caused by aversion to the Church and priests

Student aggression	<i>N</i>	%
Definitely no	33	9.5
Rather no	115	33.0
Rather yes	122	35.1
Definitely yes	51	14.7
Difficult to say	27	7.8
Total	348	100.0

A significant percentage of religion teachers, both clergy and secular (49.8%), confirmed that, in their work, they encounter aggression caused by aversion towards the Church and priests, which is a serious challenge for teaching religion and teachers themselves. The reason for this aggression is usually not personal experiences, but primarily media messages.¹¹ Their reports on various wrongs committed by Church people, e.g., paedophilia, materialism, and formalism, become the source of resentment towards this religious institution and its representatives, even if some of this information is not true.

Another challenge that was the subject of the research is the reluctance of students to attend religion classes. The results are presented in table 3.

¹¹ Cf. Justyna Szulich-Kałuża, „Kreowanie wizerunku Kościoła katolickiego w dyskursie polskiej prasy,” *Biuletyn Edukacji Medialnej* 2 (2018): 69–81.

Table 3. The reluctance of students to attend religion class

Reluctance of students to attend religion class	N	%
Definitely no	36	10.3
Rather no	140	40.2
Rather yes	103	29.6
Definitely yes	45	12.9
Difficult to say	24	6.9
Total	348	100.0

A significant number of religion teachers (42.5%) believe that their students are reluctant to attend religion classes. However, more respondents, 50.5%, hold the opposite opinion. It turns out, therefore, that the majority of the surveyed teachers of religion do not see any reluctance towards teaching religion in school. Many other studies confirm that young people's assessment of religion lessons is quite positive or neutral.¹² On the other hand, studies of people who opted out of religion lessons show not so much reluctance towards attending religion lessons but rather the poor organization of these classes, e.g., they are placed either at the very beginning or end of all other lessons during a school day.¹³

Another challenge pointed out by teachers is the difficulty in setting requirements for students, because it is the reason they often resign from religion lessons. In many environments, there is a peculiar paradox that it is difficult to implement the basic teaching function concerning religious education, because when setting requirements, students, especially young people, opt out of religion and avoid learning this school subject. The extent the surveyed teachers encounter this problem is presented in Table 4.

¹² Antoni Głowacki, „Religijność młodzieży i uczestnictwo w lekcjach religii w szkołach,” w *Młodzież 2018*, ed. Mirosława Grabowska, Magdalena Gwiazda (Warsaw: Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej, 2019), 166.

¹³ Cf. Grzegorz Jerzy Zakrzewski, „Motywy rezygnacji młodzieży z lekcji religii oraz szanse zatrzymania tego procesu na podstawie badań w diecezji płockiej,” in *Nowa epoka polskiej katechezy*, ed. Dominik Kiełb (Rzeszów: Bonus Liber, 2021), 77.

Table 4. Difficulty in setting requirements, because it causes students to resign from religion lessons

Difficulties in setting requirements for students	<i>N</i>	%
Definitely no	22	6.3
Rather no	91	26.1
Rather yes	123	35.3
Definitely yes	82	23.6
Difficult to say	30	8.6
Total	348	100.0

It turns out that the problem is serious, because 58.9% of the surveyed religion teachers notice it, and as many as 23.6% chose the answer “definitely yes.” This undoubtedly huge challenge for religious education requires finding solutions. Otherwise, it will lead to an unacceptable situation where students will only attend religion lessons if nothing is required of them to pass the class. A certain solution to this problem may be introducing an obligatory choice of either attending religion or ethics as announced by the Ministry of Education and Science. Pupils would therefore be obliged to attend one of these subjects. The current situation in which students do not have any alternative activities after resigning from religion classes is pedagogically harmful.¹⁴

Based on this short analysis, it can be concluded that one of the greatest challenges for teaching religion in Poland’s schools is the attitude of participants in religion classes. Increasingly, students consider themselves non-believers and do not practice the faith. Therefore, they do not feel the need to develop their faith and engage in religious lessons. Some even show aggression towards the teaching of religion.

1.2. Challenges due to parents

The second group of challenges for teaching religion analysed in the empirical research were challenges due to students’ parents, which include the following issues: no need to develop faith in families; parents’ reluctance towards religious lessons; and demanding, critical parental attitudes. The results of research on the first of these issues are presented in Table 5.

¹⁴ See Paweł Mąkosa, „Rezygnacja z nauczania religii w szkołach ponadpodstawowych wyzwaniem dla Kościoła w Polsce,” in *Edukacja religijna wobec przemian kulturowych*, ed. Paweł Mąkosa (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2019), 129–138.

Table 5. No need to develop faith in families

No need to develop faith in families	<i>N</i>	%
Definitely no	4	1.1
Rather no	22	6.3
Rather yes	168	48.3
Definitely yes	142	40.8
Difficult to say	12	3.4
Total	348	100.0

The vast majority of religion teachers (89.2%) agree with the statement that their students' families do not feel the need to develop their faith. The opposite opinion is held by 7.4%, while only 1.1% of the respondents chose the answer "definitely yes." According to the teachers, the greatest challenge for teaching religion is the lack of religious education in the family environment and, consequently, the unbelief or religious indifference of children. Religion teachers were also asked about their opinion on the level of parents' reluctance to teach religion. The results relating to this dimension are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Parents' reluctance towards religion classes in the opinion of religion teachers

Parents' reluctance towards religion classes	<i>N</i>	%
Definitely no	25	7.2
Rather no	131	37.6
Rather yes	106	30.5
Definitely yes	48	13.8
Difficult to say	38	10.9
Total	348	100.0

On this issue, the opinions of religion teachers are more or less divided in half. Parents showing reluctance to religion classes in school is noticed by a total of 44.3% of the surveyed teachers, but the answer "definitely yes" was chosen by only 13.8%. A similar percentage of respondents, 44.8%, is of the opposite opinion, and 10.9% do not take a position on this matter. It would seem that parents' reluctance is mostly noticeable in primary schools, while research, taking into account the variable of school type, shows that there are more such indications among secondary school teachers (65.7%) than pri-

mary school teachers (45.5%). Thus, there is a correlation between the attitudes of young people and parents towards teaching religion in school. This school subject is often considered to be unnecessarily time-consuming, time which could be used for learning other subjects or extracurricular activities. Increasingly, this results in people dropping out of religious education classes.¹⁵

Another issue that was the subject of research in the context of challenges to teaching religion were the demanding and critical attitudes of parents of the children and youth attending religion classes. Negative opinions on this topic are presented in table 7.

Table 7. Parents' demanding and critical attitudes towards teaching religion

Parents' demanding and critical attitudes	N	%
Definitely no	7	2.0
Rather no	75	21.6
Rather yes	147	42.2
Definitely yes	103	29.6
Difficult to say	16	4.6
Total	348	100.0

It turns out that parents' demanding and critical attitudes towards religion classes in school are also a serious challenge for religious education, as they are noticed by as many as 71.8% of respondents. 23.6% of the surveyed teachers hold the opposite opinion, but only 2% chose the answer "definitely not." Undoubtedly, the challenges parents create for religious instruction are among the most serious. They mainly concern a lack of religious upbringing in families and negative attitudes towards religious education.¹⁶ In the confessional and catechetical-evangelistic approach to teaching religion, the main reason for participating in these classes is the desire to deepen one's faith. It is understandable that, for people who are religiously indifferent or non-believers, this motivation is of little importance.

¹⁵ Zakrzewski, „Motywy rezygnacji młodzieży z lekcji religii,” 77.

¹⁶ Mirosław Chmielewski, „Katecheza rodzinna w kontekście współczesnych uwarunkowań społeczno-eklezyjalnych,” in *Rodzina jako Kościół domowy*, ed. Antoni Tomkiewicz, Włodzimierz Wiczorek (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2010), 316.

1.3. Challenges from the institutional Church

Another group of challenges to the teaching of religion in school are challenges from the institutional Church. In this dimension, two issues were analysed: the feeling of little support from the diocesan curia and the lack of coordination for catechetical and evangelization activities. The findings on the first of these issues are presented in Table 8.

Table 8. Feeling little support in religious education from the diocesan curia

Feeling little support from the diocesan curia	<i>N</i>	%
Definitely no	67	19.3
Rather no	139	39.9
Rather yes	75	21.6
Definitely yes	26	7.5
Difficult to say	41	11.8
Total	348	100.0

Support from the curia is usually given during ongoing formation, including spiritual, substantive and methodical. Every diocese organizes such formation in the form of lectures, workshops and retreats.¹⁷ The majority of religion teachers surveyed do not feel unsatisfied with such formation (59.2%). The opposite view is expressed by 28.1%. These results suggest that support from the curia is rather sufficient or that the formation offered by the curia is not perceived as useful. Support from the curia is also considered more broadly, as helping religion teachers solve various problems or providing support in conflict situations. In this dimension, the results of the research taking into account the clerical and lay status variables are worth presenting. These results are presented in Table 8a.

¹⁷ See Andrzej Kiciński, „Współczesna formacja katechetów,” *Roczniki Teologiczne* 52 (2005), 6: 109–125.

Table 8a. Feeling little support from the curia and vocation pursued

Feeling little support from the curia and vocation pursued	Priest		Layperson		Total	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Definitely no	3	7.0	64	24.2	67	21.8
Rather no	16	37.2	123	46.6	139	45.3
Rather yes	18	41.9	57	21.6	75	24.4
Definitely yes	6	14.0	20	7.6	26	8.5
Total	43	100.0	264	100.0	307	100.0

The results of table 8a signal an interesting phenomenon, namely, that the feeling of little support from the curia is more often experienced by priests than by lay catechists. A total of 55.9% of the surveyed priests gave such a response, almost twice as many as the 29.2% of lay catechists who stated the same. However, the research is not representative, as only 43 priests answered this question. Therefore, far-reaching conclusions cannot be drawn. Nevertheless, it is a question worth considering. It is probably related to a higher expectation of support from the curia by priests, especially in crises. The laity has lower expectations in this respect.

The subject of the survey was also the opinion on the coordination of catechetical and evangelization activities by the Church authorities. The results are presented in Table 9.

Table 9. Lack of coordination for catechetical and evangelization activities

Lack of coordination activities	<i>N</i>	%
Definitely no	30	8.6
Rather no	135	38.8
Rather yes	104	29.9
Definitely yes	45	12.9
Difficult to say	34	9.8
Total	348	100.0

Lack of such coordination is a problem for 42.8% of respondents, while 47.4% express the opposite opinion. Objectively, however, the lack of coordination is a serious problem, especially concerning the organization of

religious instruction at school and parish catechesis, as well as the curricular and methodological guidelines for these forms of religious education. There is no doubt that religious instruction at school is not sufficient to build up religious attitudes due to a lack of religious experiences. Therefore, various forms of religious education in parishes are necessary,¹⁸ including coordinating activities and defining tasks for all catechetical environments.

1.4. School challenges

An important group of challenges for religion teachers are problems related to the school environment, which is the place where religion lessons are conducted. In this dimension, the following problems were analysed: lack of a sufficient base of didactic materials; lack of favourable attitudes towards catechists on the part of school directors and teachers; lack of a real discussion, exchange of experiences and support in the catechetical group; wages inadequate to work. The first issue raised in this area was the lack of an appropriate database of didactic materials. The test results are presented in Table 10.

Table 10. Evaluation of the available database of didactic materials

No appropriate base for teaching materials	N	%
Definitely no	62	17.8
Rather no	135	38.8
Rather yes	77	22.1
Definitely yes	64	18.4
Difficult to say	10	2.9
Total	348	100.0

The results of the research show that the lack of didactic materials for teaching religion is a problem for 40.5% of the respondents, although only 18.4% stated that it is definitely a serious problem. At the same time, as many as 56.6% do not see a problem here. These answers indirectly confirm that the current base of teaching materials, in the form of textbooks, worksheets, multimedia, interactive tasks, and even advanced tools such as multi-

¹⁸ Paweł Mąkosa, „Systematyczna katecheza parafialna dzieci i młodzieży. Motywacja i realizacja,” in *Miejsca katechezy. Rodzina, parafia, szkoła*, ed. Stanisław Kulpaczyński (Lublin: Polihymnia, 2005), 273–312.

books, is quite rich and can be easily accessed by every teacher.¹⁹ Some of these materials are created by textbook publishers, others by catechetical and pedagogical associations, as well as by individual teachers. One can find materials for teaching religion on many educational portals, e.g., learnin-gapps.org or kahoot.com. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is a sufficient quantity of didactic materials currently, and the task of teachers is to select them appropriately.

Another problem that is sometimes pointed out by teachers of religion is the lack of cooperation and even no positive attitudes on the part of school principals and teachers of other subjects. This issue has been verified and its results are presented in Table 11.

Table 11. Lack of positive attitudes towards religion teachers by school directors and other teachers

Lack of positive attitudes towards religion teachers	<i>N</i>	%
Definitely no	89	25.6
Rather no	152	43.7
Rather yes	60	17.2
Definitely yes	21	6.0
Difficult to say	26	7.5
Total	348	100.0

The thesis about disapproval by school directors and other teachers was verified rather negatively by the research. A total of 23.2% of respondents confirm the existence of this phenomenon, but only 6% consider it to be very serious. At the same time, 69.3% are of the opposite opinion. It turns out, therefore, that the surveyed teachers of religion are mostly accepted by the teaching staff and do not experience reluctance or discrimination. According to educational law, their rights and duties are the same as other teachers and they are treated as such.²⁰

Another issue that was the subject of research was the lack of discussion, exchange of experiences and mutual support among religion teachers. The results of research in this matter are presented in Table 12.

¹⁹ Many publishing houses also run catechetical portals containing numerous multimedia materials, e.g., www.kulkat.pl and www.wydawnictwokatechtyczne.pl.

²⁰ *Rozporządzenie Ministra Edukacji Narodowej w sprawie warunków i sposobu organizowania nauki religii w publicznych przedszkolach i szkołach*, Dz. U. 2020, poz. 983.

Table 12. Lack of real discussion, exchange of experiences and support among religion teachers

Lack of discussion, exchange of experience and support	<i>N</i>	%
Definitely no	61	17.5
Rather no	137	39.4
Rather yes	79	22.7
Definitely yes	44	12.6
Difficult to say	27	7.8
Total	348	100.0

This problem is considered significant by a total of 35.3% of respondents, yet 56.9% are of the opposite opinion. It turns out, therefore, that most teachers of religion do not see the need for a greater exchange of experiences among themselves. Today, there are numerous virtual platforms for such exchange, e.g., “Catechesis and Ideas.” Of course, additional discussions and exchange of experiences would have a positive impact on teaching religion, but the current state of affairs is satisfactory for most respondents.

A completely different problem for religion teachers is their low salaries. This discussion has been going on in Poland for a long time in relation to teachers of all subjects, since teachers of religion receive the same salary as other teachers.²¹

Table 13. Wages inadequate to work input

Inappropriate salaries	<i>N</i>	%
Definitely no	68	19.5
Rather no	153	44.0
Rather yes	56	16.1
Definitely yes	34	9.8
Difficult to say	37	10.6
Total	348	100.0

Low wages in education are objectively a serious problem, and this is leading to increasing staff shortages. However, in the surveys conducted, wages inadequate for the work performed are a problem for 25.9% of respondents, but only 9.8% consider it a very serious problem. At the same

²¹ Ibidem.

time, 63.5% express the opposite opinion. Thus, it can be concluded that most of the surveyed religion teachers are either satisfied with the salary they receive at school, or believe that it is not a very important factor, since they treat their work primarily as a vocation and mission.

Table 13a. Inadequate salaries for work vs. vocation pursued

Inadequate salaries vs. vocation pursued	Priest		Layperson		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Definitely no	9	19.6	59	22.3	68	21.9
Rather no	27	58.7	126	47.5	153	49.2
Rather yes	4	8.7	52	19.6	56	18.0
Definitely yes	6	13.0	28	10.6	34	10.9
Total	46	100.0	265	100.0	311	100.0

1.5. Challenges in the parish

In Poland's system of religious education, it is assumed that parish catechesis is carried out in parallel with religious instruction at school.²² In practice, only sacramental catechesis is carried out in preparation for First Holy Communion and the sacrament of Confirmation.²³ However, religious teachers are also expected to engage in parish catechesis and other forms of pastoral care. The results of the opinion survey on the degree of this involvement are contained in Table 14.

Table 14. Too little involvement of lay religion teachers in parish activities

Too little involvement in parish activities	N	%
Definitely no	96	27.6
Rather no	150	43.1
Rather yes	49	14.1
Definitely yes	19	5.5
Difficult to say	34	9.8
Total	348	100.0

²² See Marian Zajac, „Katecheza parafialna,” in *Wybrane zagadnienia katechetyki*, ed. Józef Stala (Tarnów: Wydawnictwo Diecezji Tarnowskiej „Biblos,” 2003), 144–174.

²³ Paweł Mąkosa, „Katecheza parafialna dzieci – prawda czy fałsz, sukces czy porażka?” in *Katecheza w parafii*, ed. Marian Zajac (Lublin: Wydawnictwo „Natan,” 2016), 127–138.

The vast majority of surveyed religion teachers (70.7%) believe that lay religion teachers are sufficiently involved in parish activities. Only 19.6% of respondents hold the opposite view. However, there are significant differences between lay and clergy on this issue. These are illustrated in Table 14a.

Table 14a. Too little involvement of lay religious teachers in parish activities vs. vocation pursued

Too little involvement of lay teachers in parish activities vs. vocation pursued	Priest		Layperson		Total	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Definitely no	4	8.0	92	34.8	96	30.6
Rather no	19	38.0	131	49.6	150	47.8
Rather yes	18	36.0	31	11.7	49	15.6
Definitely yes	9	18.0	10	3.8	19	6.1
Total	50	100.0	264	100.0	314	100.0

Being aware that too small a group of clergy participated in the study does not allow generalizations and drawing fundamental conclusions. Yet, it is worth noting that 54% of the surveyed priests believe that the involvement of the laity in parish activities is too small, but only 15.5% of lay religious teachers hold the same opinion. The results of the survey are understandable in that the laity were, in a way, evaluating themselves and have a different perspective on their activities in the parish.

Another issue studied was the evaluation of pastors' commitment to solving difficulties and recognizing the needs of religious teachers. The results of the research on this topic are included in Table 15.

Table 15. Too low a level of interest among pastors in the real problems and needs of religion teachers

Too low a level of interest among pastors in the real problems and needs of religion teachers	<i>N</i>	%
Definitely no	60	17.2
Rather no	122	35.1
Rather yes	94	27.0
Definitely yes	41	11.8
Difficult to say	31	8.9
Total	348	100.0

Pastors' commitments to solving difficulties and noticing religious teachers are viewed negatively by 38.8% of all respondents. The opposite view is held by 52.3%. Interestingly, there are no fundamental differences between clergy and laity. These results can be explained by the fact that almost all clergymen surveyed were curates, not pastors.

Another analysed challenge for religious education in Poland's schools is the insufficient involvement of pastors cooperating with lay religious teachers and the simultaneous expectation that young people will be present in the parish. The results of the research on this topic are presented in Table 16.

Table 16. Pastors' expectations of attendance of young people in parishes considering too little involvement of ministers in cooperation with religion teachers in youth activities and for youth

Youth attendance in parishes as expected by pastors	<i>N</i>	%
Definitely no	29	8.3
Rather no	99	28.4
Rather yes	111	31.9
Definitely yes	66	19.0
Difficult to say	43	12.4
Total	348	100.0

Too little involvement of pastors in cooperation with religion teachers is perceived by slightly more than half of respondents (50.9%), but this is a very significant problem for only 19%. A total of 36.7% of the surveyed teachers hold the opposite view. Regarding this issue, different results were obtained in the group of lay and priest religion teachers. The results of the study including this variable are presented in Table 16a.

Table 16a. Expectations about young people's attendance in parishes with too little involvement of pastors cooperating with religion teachers in youth activities vs. vocation pursued

Pastoral expectations of youth frequency in parishes	Priest		Layperson		Total	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Definitely no	6	13.0	23	8.9	29	9.5
Rather no	22	47.8	77	29.7	99	32.5
Rather yes	8	17.4	103	39.8	111	36.4
Definitely yes	10	21.7	56	21.6	66	21.6
Total	46	100.0	259	100.0	305	100.0

Taking into account the unrepresentative nature of the survey, it is worth noting that the mentioned problem is perceived by 39.1% of priests and 61.4% of lay religious teachers. The laity is more likely to see negligence on the part of the clergy, which is understandable. The above and earlier results indirectly signal the need for greater involvement in catechesis and parish ministry, as well as stimulating cooperation between clergy and laity.

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The results of the survey proved that, in the opinion of religious teachers, the biggest challenge to religious education in school is the lack of the need for faith development in the family and the lack of such a need among students. In other words, the biggest challenge for teaching religion is secularization and practical atheism, affecting both parents and their children. It is a fact that, in modern times, religious values are less often transmitted in the family environment. This carries with it many consequences for the faith and religiosity of the younger generation. It is also understandable that this very strongly projects onto religious education, especially in the confessional and catechetical-evangelistic approach.

This approach assumes that the participants in religious lessons are primarily believing and practising students who will deepen their religious knowledge and faith, so all the functions of catechesis will be carried out. For those students who are not believers, evangelization is assumed. However, as the survey shows, neither parents nor students are mostly interested in arousing or deepening their religious faith. Many other problems - both on the part of parents and children – derive from the issues described above. In the pastoral-catechetical context, it is worth emphasizing the need for pre-evangelization activities that aim to open people to the proclamation of the Gospel.²⁴

Among other challenges, it is important to note the lack of coordination for evangelization-catechetical activities. The Polish Episcopal Conference and its agencies are tasked with providing such coordination, and at the diocesan level – it is the diocesan curia. In this dimension, we should expect to adapt the assumptions of religious education to the current religious and social situation, as well as define the relationship between religious instruction in school and parish catechesis.

²⁴ P. Mąkosa, *Preewangelizacja pierwszym i koniecznym etapem formacji chrześcijańskiej*, „Katecheta” 54 (2010), 7–8: 25–34.

It is also worth noting that both priests and laity are involved in catechetical activities. This is primarily about their cooperation and mutual support, jointly taking various initiatives and solving problems.

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