**Strengthening the resilience of children and young people in religious education in Poland: from theory to practice**

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**Introduction**

This paper aims to show how the religious education undertaken by the Roman Catholic Church in Poland strengthens the resilience of children, young people, and adolescents. Material The research material includes curriculum documents for teaching Roman Catholic religion at Polish schools and good practices. Polish school and good practices. The main theoretical framework for the research undertaken is two curriculum documents: *The curriculum basis for catechesis of the Catholic Church in Poland* (2018) and *The Curriculum for the Teaching of Roman Catholic Religion in kindergartens and schools* (2018) and good practices that religious education teachers undertake to strengthen the resilience of children and young people.

Bearing in mind the different approaches and interpretations of "resilience", in this submission we adopt the understanding commonly present in pedagogy and psychology, which refers to the positive adaptation of children and adolescents to changing circumstances and responding appropriately in stressful situations (Werner 1992, 262-268; cf. Rutter 1979, 49-74). Resilience is equated with mental resilience and resilience, resistance to injury, and the ability of an individual to function well under adverse life and developmental conditions. It includes (1) a set of personality traits, skills, and abilities that allow coping with stressful situations, overcoming difficulties, solving problems, adapting to different life conditions, and dealing effectively with experienced difficulties; (2) a developmental process through which the child can acquire the ability to use internal and external resources to adapt positively in difficult life situations (cf. Błasiak and Dybowska 2021, 59-72; Bzymek 2021, 9-113; Gwiżdż 2021, 73-89).

Resilience, so understood, consists of internal, innate, and acquired qualities of mind and character that enable a person to respond in stressful situations. These include, among others. plasticity of mind, self-awareness, ability to adapt to changing conditions, adaptation to the environment, calmness of mind, fortitude, hopefulness, generosity, seeing difficulties as opportunities for growth, ability to detach from negative experiences and recover lost or weakened strengths (ability to recover from psychological trauma), positive attitude towards oneself and one's abilities, mobilization under conditions of crisis, vitality, good physical condition, resilience, endurance, calmness, control of emotions control over emotions and fears, ability to form and maintain satisfactory social relationships, the strength of character, low emotional reactivity, ability to arouse positive emotions, ability to cope with stress, inner strength to cope with adversity, commitment to acquiring new knowledge, the strength of character, self-confidence, adaptation to difficult conditions, ability to overcome tension and anxiety (cf. Błasiak and Dybowska 2021, 59-72; Gwiżdż 2021, 73-89; Hanson 2020; Klon and Waszyńska 2020, 204-211; Stefańska-Klar 2016, 175-184).

**Theoretical contexts - curriculum assumptions for teaching Roman Catholic Religion**

The religious education that the Roman Catholic Church implements in Polish schools fulfills didactic, upbringing-preventive, and evangelizing tasks. This is regulated by the provisions of educational law, as well as by the catechetical documents of the Church in Poland (e.g. *The curriculum basis for catechesis of the Catholic Church in Poland* [2018] and *The Curriculum for the Teaching of Roman Catholic Religion in kindergartens and schools* [2018]). Religious education teachers are obliged to accompany students in their holistic development, in developing their social competencies and shaping their ability to interpret life situations in the light of the Gospel. Religious education in a Polish school, as we read in its curriculum assumptions, "aims (...) to make a man a more mature and consciously realizing being, settled in a given culture, capable of creative criticism and reflective affirmation of the surrounding reality. Religious education is oriented toward the development of a person's awareness competence and presence in the world. It is intended to lead the person to an independent and rational interpretation of human existence and to give him or her assistance in understanding himself or herself and the world in the context of the content of the religion professed" (KEP 2018, 14-15; cf. KWKKEP 2018).

This understanding of religious education points to its wide range of didactic and educational impacts, which also include issues of resilience. At each stage of religious education at school, according to the intellectual and emotional predispositions and the social and religious experiences of the pupils, it is assumed that the issues necessary for understanding oneself and the world are addressed and that pupils are supported in their creative and comprehensive development. It is considered important to develop social and communicative competences, to demonstrate ethical and moral values, to accompany pupils in shaping and strengthening the qualities that protect against engaging in risky behaviour, and to prepare pupils for life in society. Religion teachers are required to address the following topics: coping with difficult life situations, and responding to stress and risks (destructive, risky situations). countering violence, aggression, and various types of addiction, shaping character traits, prevention, physical and mental health, interpersonal communication, constructive conflict resolution, positive self-esteem, mindfulness, happiness, and hope. The listed contents are linked to the commandment of love, the Decalogue, and individual and community prayer. Religious education in a Polish school involves creating space for pupils to develop emotional competence and social skills and to orient themselves toward the future (KEP 2018, 80-81; cf. KWKKEP 2018). This is served by various educational initiatives through which pupils have the opportunity to read their feelings, needs, and experiences, experience their value, and discover the purpose and meaning of life and their path in life (KEP 2018, 123-124; cf. KWKKEP 2018).

The correlation of the goals and content of religious education with school education also plays a special role. It fosters not only the acquisition of comprehensive knowledge but also a dialogue inspired by the humanities, social sciences, sciences, and natural sciences. It makes it possible to accompany pupils in the process of developing their critical and creative capacities and in preparing them to become actively involved in and take responsibility for a democratic society (KEP 2018, 14, 81-92, 125-136; cf. KWKKEP 2018).

The substantive scope of religious education in a Polish school is enriched by methodological solutions recommended in curriculum documents (e.g. forms, methods, techniques, modern didactic means), which orient the activities of religion teachers towards referring to the experiences of students, searching for new ways of understanding their existence, negotiating meanings and existential interpretation of the content of religious education (KEP 2018). In doing so, attention is drawn to the need to value educational dialogue and the creativity of participants in religion lessons. Team-based problem-solving and exploratory, expository, and practical methods enriched by the use of information and communication technologies are also considered important (KEP 2018, 43-45, 80-81, 124-125; cf. KWKKEP 2018).

Curricular assumptions for religious education in Polish schools seem to be conducive to undertaking educational activities that are aimed at strengthening the resilience of children and young people. They make it possible to transcend the previous approach to Christian teaching and upbringing. Examples of good practice

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Religious education in Polish schools is oriented towards the transmission and acquisition of knowledge, the development of social skills and competences, and the shaping of Christian attitudes. Many initiatives undertaken by religion teachers both in the school environment and in correlation with the family and parish are based on the assumptions of positive psychology and pedagogy inspired by Christian values, including the ideas of resilience. Examples of such activities in the didactic aspect are religious lessons devoted, for example, to Christian optimism, mental well-being, prevention of addictions, coping with stressful situations, practicing daily prayer in the form of an examination of conscience, which also fosters the development of attentiveness and an attitude of gratitude. On educational grounds, the activities undertaken within the School Volunteer Circle or the School Volunteer Club as well as the School Caritas Circle and the School Missionary Circle are particularly valuable. These initiatives aim to involve children and young people in actively, voluntarily, systematically, and selflessly helping others. They serve to sensitize pupils to the needs of others, teach compassion, and empower them to share goodness and love with others. They also provide many opportunities for teamwork and thus for the development of social competencies, dialogue, compromise, and supporting each other in difficult life situations. Pupils are motivated to be attentive, work on themselves, and deal effectively with problems. Undertaking activities for the benefit of others in Poland and mission countries becomes a source of positive emotions and feelings. It also fosters an attitude of openness and responsibility.

As part of their voluntary activities, pupils have many opportunities to actively participate in various charitable campaigns (e.g. "Tornister Full of Smiles", "Christmas Eve Aid to Children", "Penny Drop", "Kilometres of Good", "Noble Parcel"), support the sick in hospices, participate in the "Lenten Alms" campaign and collect bottle tops, pet food, clothes and cleaning products for the homeless, glasses and mobile phones for people in mission countries. "Kilometres of Good", "Noble Parcel", "Fair of Good"). Also such initiatives as: "All Saints' Ball", "Angel's Day", a carnival ball, theatrical productions (e.g. a nativity play), which the religion teacher organizes at school or in the parish in cooperation with other teachers, are good examples of strengthening resilience. They provide an opportunity for creative play. They provide positive emotions and enable Christian values to be lived, thus enhancing emotional, social, and religious development. Family festivals, sports tournaments, religious song competitions, literary competitions, and art competitions organized by religion teachers are of similar importance. The mentioned organizational and methodological solutions foster the development of social competences. At the same time, they contribute to strengthening mental resilience. Also noteworthy are the activities undertaken in the implementation of educational projects. They foster the correlation of goals and content of significant educational importance. For example, educational projects entitled "Have an imagination of mercy", "Youcat in religion lessons", "Catechesis 2.0", and "New Quality of Life" can be mentioned.

Participants in religious education lessons in Poland are provided with time for a school retreat once a school year. Participation in a school retreat promotes personal reflection, prayer, and meditation. It provides an opportunity to develop mindfulness and gratitude. It allows for preventive and educational workshops (e.g. on interpersonal communication, self-esteem, self-acceptance, coping with stress, solving life problems). It therefore fosters the development of character traits, skills, and competencies directly or indirectly referring to resilience. Other initiatives that indirectly contribute to strengthening resilience include the cooperation of religion teachers with the school pedagogue and with the school psychologist. Religion teachers organize classes on mediation and conflict resolution, develop emotional competencies, strengthen the self-concept of a healthy lifestyle, and establish and maintain social relationships.

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