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EDUCATING CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN MEANING AND SPIRITUALITY

Abstract

The school function as an educational institution being subject to the control of the relevant educational authorities, and its assumptions and development depend to a large degree on the educational policy and context. Today, in globalised, digital, postmodern and pandemic society, the importance and urgency of the school role have never been greater. Among other school subjects, Religious Education in any school type has significant educational purposes: to help pupils appreciate the importance of the spiritual quest and meaning, to support full growth of them as human beings and to accompany pupils in the process of finding their own socio-cultural conditioning and reach a position of being able to find a personal framework of meaning. That's why Religious Education has both credentials and precedents for undertaking the contemporary human being quest for meaning. But at the same time, some external and internal factors have to be taken into consideration for the discourse of Religious Education which has moved away from realistic expertise into formal presentation losing its educational credibility.

Keywords: religious education, youth, spirituality

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary school in Europe, similarly to the family, faces a variety of external threats and, at the same time, generates manifold irregularities. Difficulties resulting from external factors include: the perpetual reform of school, changes in the priorities of educational policy and financial problems. The internal difficulties are: encyclopedism, the stressful

character of school, the lack of an unequivocal educational profile, the poor preparation of teachers, lack of an unequivocal educational profile, poor preparation of the staff to take up educational issues, difficulties with communication and partnership-based treatment of parents in the implementation of school's educational activities.

And yet, in all these areas there are still 'reserves' which enable intensifying educational activities of school. However, this requires being open to new initiatives, courage and hard effort by all persons involved in the educational process. Constantly emerging proposals to 'repair' school gives rise to new discussions and debates over the premises, goals and methods of education and upbringing at school. The reform of the educational system initiated at the beginning of the socio-political breakthrough is still underway and it does not produce the expected results. That is why, if the contemporary school aims at responding to current challenges, then, by educational law, it must become an educational institution.

The present article *Educating Children and Youth in Meaning and Spirituality* emphasizes the school as setting for education in meaning and spirituality. As the issue is herein taken up from the perspective of Christian pedagogy and catechetics, the reference to the teaching of the Catholic Church (including the one in Poland) was necessary.

1. The context of contemporary education

The huge changes affecting the school and education go along with economic, social, political, cultural, religious and ideological developments in European society. These factors also affect a global understanding of society and culture, of the meaning of life, of authority and power, of the dependency of the political order upon global actors, etc. The same tame discontinuity observed in Christian practices, beliefs, membership, identity and moral norms among many parents and youngsters represent a rupture with what was considered as untouchable over the past centuries. Parents, teachers, priests and catechists talk about the problems in upbringing of the young generation. In this context, the family is often identified as the critical setting: the place where the future of religion in society is guaranteed or destroyed. And as the family obviously is shifting in many regards in contemporary society, up to the point that some diagnose that we face the end of the family as a foundational institution, the traditional educational and catechetical responsibilities of the family are shaken. The well-established socialization and education practices of the past don't lead any longer to the expected result. There is a lot of uncertainty about what then should be a valuable alternative. The intention of this presentation is to explore some aspects of the situation of the school in Europe today, and highlight the search of the solutions

important for the continuity of Christian affiliation challenged by contemporary society¹.

In the traditional society each person had their place, position, and belonging, which freed them from many anxieties and problems. The human person could develop, rise and achieve greatness, but he could also undergo degradation². Plurality, postmodernity and secularism changed all that was stable, so we started to speak about liquid reality. Liquid modernity or postmodernity is becoming a melting pot of ideas and cultures, modifying, mixing and changing previous assumptions. The developing new political strategies, the crisis-generating dynamics of 'predatory' capitalism and social conflicts are shattering contemporary society and culture. The traditional society, strongly tied to certain norms of social coexistence, based on agricultural production, industrialisation and a focus on socio-cultural development, is rapidly disappearing. When defining the current socio-cultural reality, we may refer to the opinion of the British sociologist A. Giddens, who believes that modern people live "in a world in a different sense than in past eras"³. The rapid and radical changes in which modern human being participates cause his confusion, isolation, inertia or indifference.

From a Christian perspective, especially the young person in post-modern society, lost in multiplicity, changeability, fluidity and deprived of order and harmony, struggles with increasing anxiety that cannot be avoided. The present fluidity of all aspects of the modern human's life leads to uncertainty and suffering, which the person does not even notice. The contemporary human being, confronted with a multitude of post-modern phenomena, lives in a world of illusion, rejecting the truth about himself and leading to the objectification of himself⁴.

Regardless of the disputes over the present situation and terminology associated with contemporary culture, it can be said that present culture is often called consumer culture, pop culture, or even 'skin culture'. This culture is being forcefully introduced to the youngest consumers through toys, gadgets, games, films and comics carrying an indication of what is current and should be adopted by children in order to have a position among their peers. Contemporary culture is opening up to con-

¹ Cf. M.Z. Jędrzejko M.Z., "Zawirowany" świat ponowoczesności, ASPRA, Warszawa-Milanówek, 2015.; H. Lombaerts, *The Management and Leadership of Christian Schools*, Groot Bijgaarden, Rome, 1998.

² Cf. E. Osewska, *Rodzina i szkoła w Polsce wobec współczesnych wyzwań wychowawczych*, UPJPII Publication House, Kraków, 2020., p. 27-67.

³ A. Giddens, *Nowoczesność i tożsamość. "Ja" i społeczeństwo w epoce późnej nowoczesności*, PWN, Warszawa, 2012., p. 251.

⁴ Cf. E. Osewska, *Rodzina i szkoła w Polsce wobec współczesnych wyzwań wychowawczych*, UPJPII Publication House, Kraków, 2020., p. 27-67.

sumer audiences who treat it more in terms of a product than a call to change, or to awaken reflection on oneself and the purpose of life. Popular culture, based on research into the perceptual capacities of the audience, takes care to adapt to both their perceptual level and their hunger for consumption with the principle: 'simple, nice, pleasant'. In this way it becomes more and more flattened, shallow and adapted to the basic aim of providing easy entertainment, pleasure, relaxation and a kind of 'putting the audience to sleep'⁵.

While high culture requires knowledge and patient and long-term work to understand the essence of cultural codes, popular culture does not carry any requirements. Thanks to socio-economic development and technologies that make work more efficient, man has gained more free time, which, when viewed objectively, should make it easier for him to enjoy the benefits of high culture (theatre, museum, cinema, art exhibitions, opera, ballet, etc.). At the same time, however, mainly due to the media, a dictate of combined promotion of culture and marketing has arisen, implementing every 'cultural' production as long as it reaches the recipient. This is why some experts stress that at present a pure 'culture industry' is emerging, that is, the creation of popular culture on a mass scale, but not resulting from the natural demand from people, but cleverly planned and imposed from above.

2. Changes of cultural meaning

The first important question in this context is: What do we mean when we talk about cultural meaning and spirituality? Cultural meanings are usually understood as the sets of socially constructed ideas, values, assumptions and emotions that inform people's thinking and behaviour. Cultural meanings are distinctive of particular social and ethnic groups and religions; but they also operate across the social context from small communities to nation state, and also at a global level. There are many cultural meanings in a society, but it is possible to identify the sets of meanings with which persons or groups identify⁶. They may be called the background ideas about life (thinking and assumptions) that people draw on to explain or justify their behaviour. Cultural meanings are often a blend of social, cultural, educational, religious, spiritual and political ideas that are connected with feelings and values that reinforce the ideas. These meanings are associated with various sources – family, social and cultural communities, groups, religion, nation state and the

⁵ Cf. E. Osewska, *Rodzina i szkoła w Polsce wobec współczesnych wyzwań wychowawczych*, UPJPII Publication House, Kraków, 2020., p. 41-85.

⁶ Cf. M. Warren, *Communications and cultural analysis: A religious view*. Bergin & Garvey, Westport, Conn, 1992.

wider popular culture. Peoples may draw on particular sources or reference groups while excluding others, and they may also draw from a wide range of meanings in an eclectic fashion. But we have to remember, that there is a diversity of responses to the same perceived cultural meanings. Christianity can be important and influential in people's accepted cultural meanings. Others can identify with Christianity nominally while their behaviour suggests that they are really operating more out of the common cultural meanings in their society⁷. If cultural meanings are not brought into the open for appraisal, they can remain deviously influential because they are then regarded as a natural, but hidden part of life. The sociologist Raymond Williams proposed that by starting with the identification and appraisal of cultural meanings, people can take up kind of 'cultural agency', where they can avoid being just passive 'consumers' of culture by contributing to the creation of cultural meanings within their own sphere of influence⁸.

By identifying the range of factors that influence people's cultural and personal frames of reference, teachers, educators, pedagogues are in a better position to understand personal and social change as it is manifested in spirituality. This provides a potentially valuable contribution to education in content, pedagogy and didactics; pupils could be engaged in a research-oriented process of finding and appraising cultural meanings; at a personal level, they would have the opportunity to reflect on where their personal frame of reference related, if at all, to the cultural meanings being evaluated. Presenting cultural meaning, we have to remember that, there are two main aspects to change in cultural meanings: the emergence and dissemination of new cultural meanings; people change the cultural meanings to which they are subscribing; they move to new meanings available in the culture; this change may be gradual and sometimes almost imperceptible.

Individuals and groups are forever inventing and disseminating cultural meanings – new ways of interpreting life. The religious cultural meanings associated with any group will evolve and change over time in response to new circumstances. Sometimes the 'new' meanings are really 'recycled' 'old' meanings. It could be expected that very traditional, mono-cultural societies would have less variety in cultural meanings than pluralistic societies. Being able to make multiple comparisons between diverse religions, world views and lifestyles could also be expected to be a catalyst for people to change their cultural meanings; dissatisfaction

⁷ Cf. M. Crawford, G. Rossiter, *Reasons for living: Education and young people's search for meaning, identity and spirituality*, Australian Council for Educational Research, Melbourne, 2006., p. 46-59.

⁸ The ideas about the need to critically evaluate cultural meanings is presented in: M. Warren, *Communications and cultural analysis: A religious view*, Bergin & Garvey, Westport, Conn, 1992.

with old meanings and the allure of the new could prompt change. Life experiences could trigger change in the personal meanings of individuals – including education. The new personal meanings usually resulted from a shift in their favoured cultural meanings. People move towards meanings that made more sense of their experience and with which they felt more comfortable. It may have been a response to perceived dissonance – where their experience was increasingly being felt to be inconsistent with the explanations offered by their old meaning system⁹.

3. ICT and the global educational environment

Today, contemporary technology for information and communication help maintain some cultural meanings, as well promote the new meanings. Until the end of the 20th century, schools appeared to have the monopoly for initiating the children and youth into the society and culture. Modern school is only one of many environments for learning besides endless possibilities offered by other agents. Young generation is confronted with many learning situations, but mostly in a very playful and pleasant way. Video, computer, Internet games offer opportunities to interact with plots in many variations, and often require concentration and active involvement to reach the set target. Even infants and small children are dealing with many tools for independent learning: electronic toys, mobile phones, personal computers, digital cameras, iPods.. With these kinds of equipment they start their personal learning journeys into contemporary society very early, before they even have critical thinking. The main message being that they now can move independently into unknown territory. In principle, adults should not impose any itinerary nor exercise direct control. Children and youngsters are learning, which means they are establishing the world where they prefer to be, the virtual world¹⁰.

In contrast to the ‘skilled reader’, ‘digital literacy’, understanding of cultural meaning and critical thinking are the most important competences needed today. According to Paul Gilster, digital literacy refers to a way of reading and understanding information that differs from what we do when we sit down and read a newspaper, a letter or a book. It is partly about awareness of other people and our expanded ability to con-

⁹ Cf. L. Festinger, *A theory of cognitive dissonance*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1962.; M. Crawford, G. Rossiter, *Reasons for living: Education and young people's search for meaning, identity and spirituality*, Australian Council for Educational Research, Melbourne, 2006., p. 46-50.

¹⁰ Cf. H. Lombaerts, ICT jako główne wsparcie globalnego świata i globalnego środowiska edukacyjnego, in: A. Bałoniak, J. Szpet (Eds.), *Między tradycją a współczesnością. I Krajowy Kongres Katechetyczny*, Poznań, 2008., pp. 73–90.; E. Osewska, Komunikacja wiary w rodzinie wobec wyzwań Internetu, *Studia nad Rodziną* 33 (2013.) 2, s. 197-213.

tact them to discuss issues and get help, but it is also an awareness of the way the Internet blends older forms of communication to create a different kind of content. It refers to the ability to understand and use information in multiple formats from a wide range of sources when it is presented via computers. A digital read on literacy also involves being able to understand a problem and develop a set of questions that will solve that information need¹¹. The learners now are themselves deeply involved in 'knowledge assembly', not just using knowledge organized by other people. The main activity then is the building of perspectives and the accretion of unexpected insights. It is the ability to collect and evaluate both fact and opinion from various sources. It mixes and distinguishes between hard journalism, editorial opinion, and personal viewpoints. As a consequence, content evaluation will become one of the decisive factors in programming school and lifelong education¹². In this new situation, we need to encourage teachers, parents, educators to give greater attention to the proper training of young people. As we look to the future, it is not enough to make contact with their minds, but also with the hearts in order to understand them a bit better and provide them with appropriate education¹³.

Changes in religious attitudes and spirituality are not only affected by theological development within religion but also by changes in socio-cultural context, technology and the background cultural meanings about life. In Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Europa* Pope John Paul II wrote about the process of secularisation: "The entire Church in Europe ought to feel that the Lord's command and call is addressed to her: examine yourself, be converted, *awake, and strengthen what remains and is on the point of death* (Rev 3:2). The need to do so is also born of a consideration of the present time. The serious situation of indifference towards religion on the part of so many Europeans, the presence of many people even on our continent who do not yet know Jesus Christ and his Church and who are not baptized, the secularism which poisons a wide spectrum of Christians who habitually think, make decisions and live, 'as if Christ did not exist', far from extinguishing our hope, make this hope more humble and more able to trust in God alone"¹⁴.

¹¹ Cf. P. Gilster, *Digital literacy*, Wiley Computer Pub., New York, 1997., p. 25.

¹² Cf. H. Lombaerts, E. Osewska, *Information and Communication Technology*, in: S. Gatt, H. Lombaerts, E. Osewska, A. Scerri, *Catholic Education. European and Maltese Perspectives*, Malta, 2004., pp. 113-130, here p. 121-123; E. Osewska, *L'educazione oggi in un Europa diversificata*, in: F. Pajer (Ed.), *Europa, scuola, religioni. Monoteismi e confessioni cristiane per una nuova cittadinanza europea*, Torino, 2005., pp. 47-64.

¹³ Cf. E. Osewska, *Rodzina i szkoła w Polsce wobec współczesnych wyzwań wychowawczych*, UPJPII Publication House, Kraków, 2020., p. 226-267.

¹⁴ John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Europa*, no. 26.

4. Searching for the solutions

John Paul II underlined the specific problems, challenges and threats emerging in the modern societies. "Indeed there is already a real perceptible danger that, while man's dominion over the world of things is making enormous advances, he should lose the essential threads of his dominion and in various ways let his humanity be subjected to the world and become himself something subject to manipulation in many ways-even if the manipulation is often not perceptible directly-through the whole of the organization of community life, through the production system and through pressure from the means of social communication. Man cannot relinquish himself or the place in the visible world that belongs to him; he cannot become the slave of things, the slave of economic systems, the slave of production, the slave of his own products. A civilization purely materialistic in outline condemns man to such slavery, even if at times, no doubt, this occurs contrary to the intentions and the very premises of its pioneers. The present solicitude for man certainly has at its root this problem. It is not a matter here merely of giving an abstract answer to the question: Who is man? It is a matter of the whole of the dynamism of life and civilization. It is a matter of the meaningfulness of the various initiatives of everyday life and also of the premises for many civilization programmes, political programmes, economic ones, social ones, state ones, and many others... Man's situation today is certainly not uniform but marked with numerous differences. These differences have causes in history, but they also have strong ethical effects. Indeed everyone is familiar with the picture of the consumer civilization, which consists in a certain surplus of goods necessary for man and for entire societies and we are dealing precisely with the rich highly developed societies-while the remaining societies at least broad sectors of them are suffering from hunger, with many people dying each day of starvation and malnutrition. Hand in hand go a certain abuse of freedom by one group an abuse linked precisely with a consumer attitude uncontrolled by ethics and a limitation by it of the freedom of the others, that is to say those suffering marked shortages and being driven to conditions of even worse misery and destitution"¹⁵.

Being able to relate sensitively to problems of young people connected with the changing context of their living, Pope from Poland decided to refer strongly to the assumptions of personalistic philosophy¹⁶, John Paul II ceaselessly recalled the primacy of the person over the object, being over having, ethics over technology and love over justice. These precepts basically cannot 'function' separately in the social life; they are so closely

¹⁵ John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis*, no. 16.

¹⁶ B. Śliwerski, *Pedagogika ogólna. Podstawowe prawidłowości*, Oficyna Wydawnicza "Impuls", Kraków, 2012., p. 271-272.

related that the implementation of one is impossible without the others. Since they constitute a system of principles, it is only within this system, in the mutual relations of persons, that they may be accurately formulated and interpreted. "Wherever many young people are present, it is hard not to perceive the wide variety of their attitudes and approaches. We can see their desire to be together and to come out of their isolation, and their thirst, recognized in differing degrees, for the absolute; we see in them a secret faith needing to be purified and desirous of following the Lord; we become aware of their decision to continue the journey already begun and the need to share their faith. To this end, there is need for a renewed youth ministry, organized by age groups and attentive to the varying situations of children, adolescents and young adults. It will also be necessary to provide this ministry with a more organic structure and consistency, and to be patiently concerned with the questions raised by young people, in order to make them protagonists of the evangelization and the building of society. In this process opportunities should be provided for encounter among young people, so as to foster a climate of mutual listening and prayer. There is no need to fear making demands upon them with regard to their spiritual growth. The way of holiness should be pointed out to them and they should be encouraged to make demanding choices in their following of Jesus, drawing their strength from an intense sacramental life. In this way they will learn to resist the enticements of a culture which often proposes values which are merely superficial or even contrary to the Gospel, and become capable of demonstrating a Christian approach to every sphere of human life, including entertainment and leisure"¹⁷.

The Pope notice that the postmodern society is facing many problems, so he have been trying to address them referring to Christian personalism. The point of departure for Pope's teaching is human being regarded as a person. In the John Paul II's view, human dignity and the knowledge of human rights constitute the basic criteria of humanity. "The measure of human being is who he/she is, not what he/she has"¹⁸. The sense of one's own dignity presupposes a whole set of requirements from oneself, one's behaviour and one's works. Human being is obliged to act in a way that is congruent with his dignity in all circumstances and areas of life. It also creates obligations and duties towards other people, who are treated as sisters and brothers. At the same time, it is the source of rights, because every person is obliged to respect other people's dignity and at the same time entitled to have his or her dignity respected by others. Human has dignity due to the fact that he/she is a human being. Human being was not granted dignity by the will of society or on the basis of a decision made by the state. That is why, neither society nor the state

¹⁷ John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Europa* no. 61-62.

¹⁸ John Paul II, *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, no. 28.

may or should deprive man of his ability to lead a life which corresponds to his dignity, nor limit this ability of man¹⁹, but rather should respect human dignity. Every person has the right to expect that the society will respect their human dignity and let them live a life of dignity. However, it is not enough to refrain from taking actions which are contrary to the requirements derived from human dignity. It is also obligatory to take actions which will create conditions in which a person can live a life in accordance with their dignity. Person has to be the “main aim”, not the “means”; the “subject”. Respect for human and his dignity should be the basic criterium in settling all kinds of education²⁰.

5. Research perspective and practical search

Searching for the adequate solution, we may refer to Graham Rossiter, who offers conceptual clarity and some practical proposals for Religious Education in Catholic schools. Rossiter’s wisdom of the field gives guidance and directions in the search. According to him good quality education include the mise-en-scene of the world in which pupils live, so education must address the needs of children and young people by using values as reference points to critically analyse and interrogate topics and questions about the world. It is for this reason that Rossiter underlines that pedagogical practices must include teaching young generation to critically research, inquire, question, interpret and evaluate a wide range of issues. He argues that an effective education curriculum must teach pupils to link moral and spiritual dimensions of development to cultural analysis and give them the skills to address the spiritual and moral issues they will encounter in life. This following quote shows Rossiter’s key message: “If a student has learned *how to learn about life* – and if they remember the orientation of their school religious education – that the impact of culture needs to be scrutinised and evaluated – then this may be well make a valuable contribution to their wisdom when pursuing life to the full”²¹.

The contemporary educational context is very diversified, but in most European countries is based on postmodernity with all its conditions, with special emphasis on individualism, consumerism and cultural changes²². Taking into consideration a variety of challenges and threats arising from ‘liquid modernity’, among them strong consumerism, hedonism,

¹⁹ Cf. T. Borutka, *Problematyka moralno-społeczna w nauczaniu Jana Pawła II (wybrane zagadnienia)*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Papieskiej Akademii Teologicznej, Kraków, 1993., p. 13.

²⁰ Cf. T. Borutka, *Nauczanie społeczne papieża Jana Pawła II*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Papieskiej Akademii Teologicznej, p. 58.

²¹ Cf. G. Rossiter, *Life to the Full*, ASMRE, Kensington, 2018., p. 134.

²² Cf. E. Osewska, *Rodzina i szkoła w Polsce wobec współczesnych wyzwań wychowawczych*, UPJPII Publication House, Kraków, 2020., p. 27-85.

individualism it is important in accord with Christian inspirations to support education in meaning and spirituality.

In spiritual and religious education also right language is needed for helping young people comprehend the interplay between their needs, desires and the complex social environment. It provides the intellectual tools for learning how to hold in creative tension the demands of consumption and individuality on the one hand, and the security and responsibility for the future of human being and nature. It involves helping youngsters learn how to interrogate the cultural conditioning they receive from many quarters especially in the commercial and entertainment worlds. Teachers, especially RE teachers need to be model interpreters of meaning, prompting their pupils through their study and research to explore the cultural meaning and spirituality²³.

In order to develop an holistic understanding of the spirituality of young generation we need to begin by looking at the ways in which they forge meaning, searching for what is important to them, but this is often very different in approach and emphasis from previous generations. Graham Rossiter and Marisa Crawford present some key aspects of today's youth spirituality:

- It is often secular in tone and not so dependent on traditional religion;
- It is eclectic drawing on a wide range of resources - not the least significant is the world of film and television, and the entertainment and consumer industries which support it;
- Seeking identity is a major developmental task; it is difficult to balance the polarities between the core personal needs to have *distinctive individuality* and to feel a *sense of belonging* to groups;
- Personal freedom is presumed to be an absolute, so balancing freedom and responsibility is often problematic.

In this context, teachers, educators, pedagogues, parents need to be model "interpreters of meaning", prompting their young people through their study and research to explore the meaning of identity, individuality, the need for community, and freedom - this is a relevant beginning point for explorations of spirituality that teachers hope will move into the Church's traditions and those of other religions²⁴.

This thinking proposes that it is too much to expect individuals to forget a complete meaning system by themselves. This pressure arises from exaggerated individuality and from the privatisation of religion and it

²³ Cf. M. Crawford, G. Rossiter, *Reasons for living: Education and young people's search for meaning, identity and spirituality*, Australian Council for Educational Research, Melbourne, 2006., p. 80-87.

²⁴ Cf. M. Crawford, G. Rossiter, *Reasons for living: Education and young people's search for meaning, identity and spirituality*, Australian Council for Educational Research, Melbourne, 2006., p. 202-224.

shows how naturally important it can be to connect with a community of shared beliefs and meaning²⁵. This pressure arises from exaggerated individuality and from the privatisation of religion and it shows how naturally important it can be to connect with a community of shared beliefs and meaning. There is a need for young people to discern the important values in individualism and personal autonomy. However, it is just as important for them to understand the divisiveness and alienation that can flow from individualism which is not tempered by community, responsibility and a sense of the Transcendent. Teachers important role is 'bridge building'-trying to link the postmodern culture and thinking of young people with the culture and spirituality. But they need to be sensitive and careful to recognise that there are different styles of belief and spirituality, so what nourishes the spirituality of various groups can be very different. The role of education, especially religious education is not to predetermine a limited range of spirituality for pupils but to reflect some of the pluralism²⁶.

Meaning in life is now less a social given and more a matter of personal choice; personal meaning is 'constructed' by pupils for themselves. There is a challenge to young people in constructing their own *Do It Yourself* spirituality. 'Searching' for meaning and taking responsibility for developing one's own personal meaning system could be very stressful. The speed, scope and scale of economic, social and cultural change have made the past seemingly irrelevant and the future uncertain for many.

If the new reality called postmodernity or 'liquid modernity' modifies and mixes the existing assumptions, norms and tenets, then it is crucial to help the young generation consciously discern and choose so that they do not succumb to the imposed socio-cultural trends but are capable of making their own, deliberate decisions.

Undermining the significance and potential of human reason for the sake of the domination of feelings, intuition, and magic should encourage the family and school to undertake conscious 'education of emotions', showing that a person is not only subject to them, but may put in an effort to better understand and control emotions. On the other hand, intellectual education should not consist in thoughtless reproduction of mental content, but should include preparing young people to present their arguments respectfully towards partners in a discussion²⁷.

A characteristic trait of human being living in postmodern society is 'the crisis of meaning', that is why education in the family and school

²⁵ Cf. G. Rossiter, *Life to the Full*, ASMRE, Kensington, 2018., p. 134.

²⁶ Cf. M. Crawford, G. Rossiter, *Reasons for living: Education and young people's search for meaning, identity and spirituality*, Australian Council for Educational Research, Melbourne, 2006., p. 7-24

²⁷ Cf. E. Osewska, J. Stala, *Die katholische Schule zu Beginn des XXI. Jahrhunderts am Beispiel Polens und Englands*, UKSW, Warsaw, 2015.; E. Osewska, J. Stala (Eds.), *Religious Education / Catechesis in the Family. A European Perspective*, UKSW, Warsaw, 2010.

should be focused on supporting young people in their search for the comprehensive meaning in life.

In the face of growing nihilism that leads to despair, it is essential to awaken hope and optimism through conscious education towards hope, including Christian hope that arises from the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. In the process of educating towards faith, hope and love, it is necessary that pedagogy cooperates with theology which gives an in-depth reflection regarding Revelation and the truths of faith.

In postmodern society there are various attempts to exclude *sacrum* and reduce all expressions of religious life to privacy. The weakening of Christianity (its dogmatic, liturgical, sacramental, moral, community, pastoral and existential dimensions) is conducive to the emergence of new forms of extra-institutional religiosity, religious eclecticism or spirituality 'on one's own'. However, in the postmodern reality of enormous religious pluralism, atheism has not disappeared but rather takes the form of an increasingly open fight against various manifestations of religion. It is necessary for the Church to undertake various religious activities that give children, youth and adults an opportunity to find themselves in the right spirituality or religious commitment²⁸.

In the face of axiological chaos (promoted in postmodernity) which leads to anomie, we must return to proper understanding of virtues and values so that they are not another tool to manipulate society or simply conducive to political correctness. This means that the family and school should cooperate in the axiological sphere and search for the right models of education towards values. Responsible education provided in postmodernity should be educationally realistic (recognizing threats and making right educational decisions) as well as integral, that is covering all spheres. It is crucial not to miss out any aspect of the life and growth of a person. In the context of contemporary conditions of postmodernity, the family and school, acting as separate educational communities, may not be able to meet these needs and educational challenges. It is necessary, therefore, to implement the model of mutual relations between the family and school which (in cooperation with the Church and the local community) as complementary entities have a chance to implement educational activities aimed at the spiritual development of the 'disciple'²⁹.

²⁸ Cf. E. Osewska, The Current Situation of Education and Continuing Professional Development of RE Teachers in Poland in the Context of the Social Challenges, *The Person and the Challenges* 2 (2012.) 2, pp. 123-131.

²⁹ Cf. E. Osewska, *Rodzina i szkoła w Polsce wobec współczesnych wyzwań wychowawczych*, UPJPII Publication House, Kraków, 2020., p. 269-280.

CONCLUSION

The postmodern society, with its changeability and turmoil, causes anxiety and miscomprehension in many educators. This requires strong philosophical foundations in the process of preparation for the teaching profession that help acquire basic concepts, logical arguments, and ethical norms. Insisting on the importance and true range of cultural meaning and spirituality in education, parents and teachers promote the defence of human dignity, values and civilisation of love. There is today no more urgent preparation for the performance of these tasks than this: to lead children and young people to discover their dignity based on relationship with God, capacity to know the truth and undertake critical thinking and their need for the meaning of life. In the light of these profound needs, inscribed by God in human nature, education, especially Religious Education should provide a platform for philosophical, theological and existential reflections.