

## ANALYSIS OF CHANGES IN SOCIAL ATTITUDES OF YOUNG PEOPLE BASED ON THE EXAMPLE OF PARTICIPATION IN RELIGION CLASSES

Radosław WOLNIAK<sup>1\*</sup>, Bożena SKOTNICKA-ZASADZIEN<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Silesian University of Technology, Faculty of Organization and Management; Radoslaw.wolniak@polsl.pl, ORCID: 0000-0003-0317-9811

<sup>2</sup> Silesian University of Technology, Faculty of Organization and Management; bozena.skotnicka@polsl.pl, ORCID: 0000-0003-1717-304X

\* Correspondence author

**Purpose:** In Poland, changes are taking place in the perception of the church by young people, and this is visible in the reluctance of young people to attend religious education classes. This article attempts to analyze and evaluate the attendance of young people in religious education classes. In the present times, young people leaving the church is one of the factors of the ongoing social changes.

**Design/methodology/approach:** The publication utilized data on the religious attendance index in Poland across dioceses for the years 2018-2023 (six years) for individual dioceses. The publication analyzed data on the religious attendance index for the whole of Poland and for each of the 41 existing dioceses. Indices for different types of schools were also analyzed, including preschools, primary schools, general secondary schools, and technical schools. The raw data was sourced from the mentioned sources. Data on religious education in schools was provided by the Commission for Catholic Education of the Polish Episcopal Conference (KEP). The data was analyzed using Excel spreadsheets. Based on the data, indicators such as changes in the religious attendance indicator between two consecutive years and the changes in religious attendance index in individual dioceses for the years 2018-2023 were calculated.

**Findings:** The analysis showed that there is a systematic decrease in the number of people participating in religious education classes in both primary and secondary schools in Poland. Based on the conducted analysis, it can be observed that among Polish children and youth, religious education classes are progressively becoming less popular.

**Research limitations/implications:** The limitations of qualitative research are the relatively small sample size and lack of representativeness. A natural continuation of the research may be the quantitative verification of identified dysfunctions and their sources.

**Practical implications:** In the article, based on the data, markers such as the change in the attendance rate in religion classes between subsequent years and the changes in attendance in religion classes in various types of schools in Poland in the years 2018-2022, divided into individual dioceses, were calculated. These studies showed how to change in the case of religion among children and youth on various educational topics.

**Social implications:** Understanding the factors that influence changes in the attitude of young people in Poland towards the church, indicating the causes of this phenomenon and proposing actions for improvement.

**Originality/value:** The article contributes to expanding knowledge about social changes caused by the decreasing interest of young people in the church and willingness to participate in religious education classes both in the whole country and in individual dioceses.

**Keywords:** religious attendance, Catholic Church, religious education, religious education, Poland.

**Category of the paper:** Research paper.

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, across Europe, including Poland, there has been a significant decline in the importance of religious life, especially among young people. This is linked to the ongoing process of secularization throughout Western Europe and the changing attitudes towards matters of faith and spirituality, as highlighted by J. Mariański in his articles (Mariański, 2021; Mariański, 2014). According to this author, the declaration of belonging to a religious group is an external indicator of religiosity (Mariański, 2014). Among older people in Poland, the declaration of belonging to a religious group and the declaration of attitudes towards religious institutions and the church remain high, with these individuals fully identifying with religion and the Roman Catholic Church (Mariański, 2014). However, the identification rate with religious affiliation is significantly lower among youth, especially in secondary schools. Young people do not identify with the Catholic Church, do not see a place for themselves within it, and reject its religious and moral doctrine (Urbańska, 2021). This attitude among young people leads to an increasing number of them opting out of religion classes. As evidenced by sociological research, this is currently a growing trend (Jedynak, 2019; Kućko, 2019).

Therefore, it is important to identify the percentage of young people opting out of religion classes, broken down by types of schools and individual dioceses in Poland. Considering these aspects, the following research questions are posed in this article:

- How has the religious education attendance index in Poland changed from 2018 to 2023?
- What are the differences in the religious education attendance index between individual Polish dioceses, and what are the reasons for these differences?
- What differences in the religious education attendance index exist between different types of schools?

The answers to the research questions posed in the article and the analysis of youth participation in religion classes at different educational stages will provide the opportunity to identify problems and actions that need to be taken to prevent the issue of opting out of religion classes, and consequently the declaration of belonging to the Catholic Church, from worsening.

## 2. Literature review

In contemporary Poland, a process of secularization is evident, which is associated with a significant decline in the number of people participating in religious practices. A considerable number of Poles are increasingly declaring weaker Catholic convictions and are less involved in the life of the Catholic Church. This trend has intensified over the past twenty years, while in Western European countries it has been occurring for the past sixty years (Kućko, 2019). Sociologists consider the transformations in religiosity and the decline in the number of people declaring belonging to the Catholic Church from two perspectives. The first perspective relates this to the transformation, i.e., the integration with Western countries and the adoption of Western European patterns of religious life, as noted by M. Grabowska (Grabowska, 2018). According to the author, the Polish Church has undergone a socio-cultural shift and an unfavorable change in views on religiosity and the Church, especially among the youth (Grabowska, 2018). The second perspective, according to sociologists, is the rapid radical social secularization and the beginning of a secular era, particularly in Western Europe (Kućko, 2019; Grabowska, 2018). It seems that the second perspective, in which we would have a secular era, is less likely.

The issue of departing from the Catholic Church and the decline in religiosity is particularly visible among the youth, both in Western Europe and in Poland. Among Polish youth, there is a significant trend related to the loss of importance of traditional forms of religiosity and the weakening role of moral norms in the daily lives of young Poles, as researchers point out in their studies (Adamczyk, 2023; Dziedzic, 2016; Zellma et al., 2022; Sowa-Behtane, 2020). These authors express the view that the future of religiosity in our country depends on the state and degree of religious education. It is very important that religious education in schools is delivered in an engaging manner for both younger children and teenagers. The Catholic Church should particularly care for the youngest generations of Poles, as they will shape and influence the Polish Church (Sowa-Behtane, 2020; Kielb et al., 2021; Szymczak et al., 2022; Boguszewski et al., 2019). This is especially important in the face of increasingly weakening public trust in the Church and the rapid secularization of young Poles in recent years (Szymczak et al., 2022). Sociological studies indicate that more and more young people declare themselves as non-believers, about 17% in 2018, and religiously indifferent, about 21% (Szymczak et al., 2022; Boguszewski et al., 2019). Unfortunately, the departure of youth from the Church is increasing, and it is also associated with opting out of religion classes, especially in secondary schools. This is a process that is growing year by year in Polish schools (Kaźmierska, 2023; Mąkosa et al., 2022; Horawski, 2022).

### 3. Research methodology

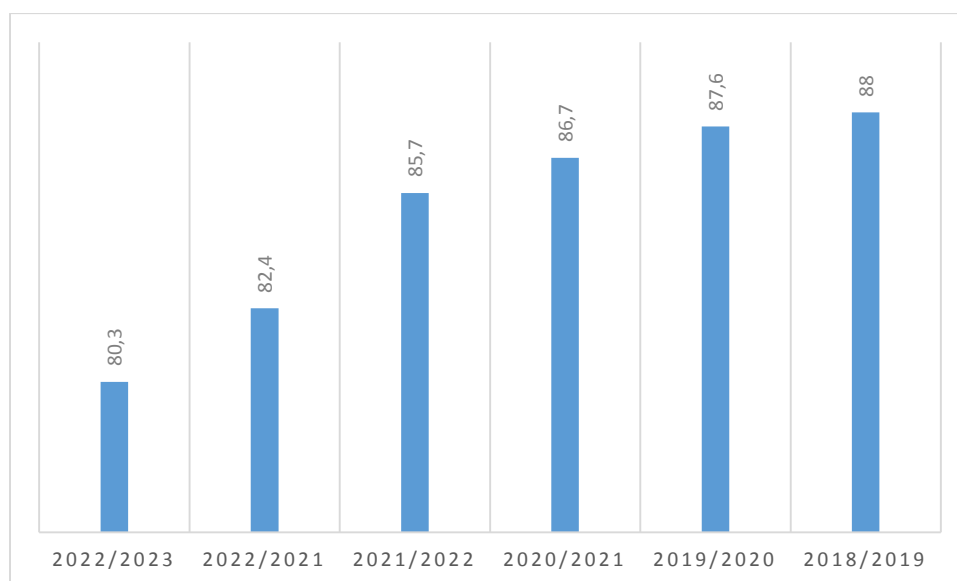
The publication utilized data on the religious attendance index in Poland across dioceses for the years 2018-2023 (six years) for individual dioceses. The research employed data from the Polish Institute of Catholic Church Statistics (Instytut Statystyki Kościoła Katolickiego SAC, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022). In recent years, there have been significant changes in the level of religiosity in Poland, which, particularly in large cities, is declining. These changes are evident, for example, in the dominicantes index (Wolniak et al., 2023) and overall participation in religious practices, which may suggest that they could also affect children's participation in religion classes at school. A diocese (latin: *diocesis*) is defined as a territorial unit in the Western Church managed by a bishop; it forms part of an ecclesiastical province (metropolis) and is directly subject to the pope; it has legal personality. A diocese comprises deaneries and parishes.

The publication analyzed data on the religious attendance index for the whole of Poland and for each of the 41 existing dioceses. Indices for different types of schools were also analyzed, including preschools, primary schools, general secondary schools, and technical schools. The raw data was sourced from the mentioned sources (Instytut Statystyki Kościoła Katolickiego SAC, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022). Data on religious education in schools was provided by the Commission for Catholic Education of the Polish Episcopal Conference (KEP). The data was analyzed using Excel spreadsheets. Based on the data, indicators such as changes in the religious attendance indicator between two consecutive years and the changes in religious attendance index in individual dioceses for the years 2018-2023 were calculated.

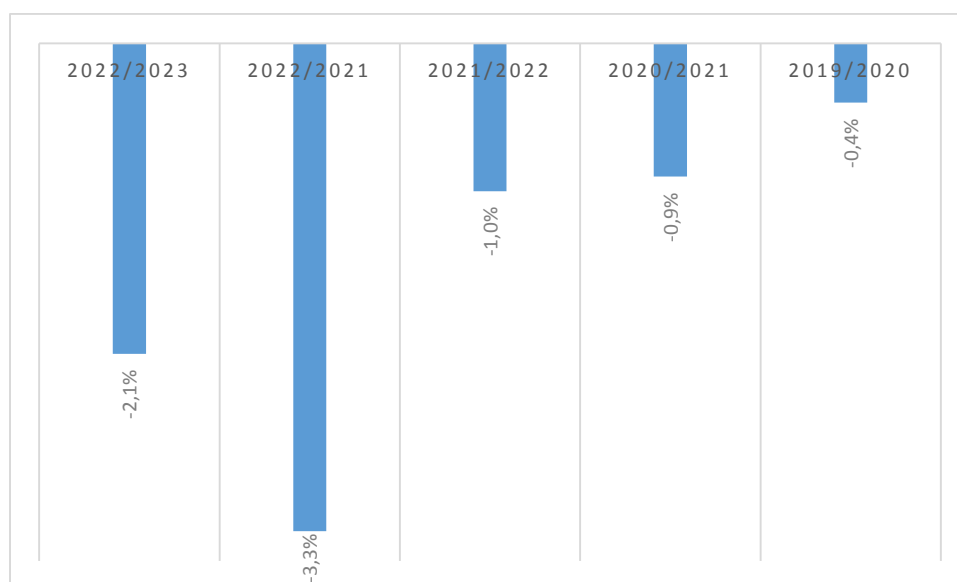
### 4. Religious education attendance indicator analysis

In Figure 1, data on the number of students attending religion classes in Poland from 2019 to 2023 is presented, while Figure 2 shows the percentage changes in this regard for each of the years studied. The data indicates that over the past few years, the percentage of students attending religion classes in school has been decreasing annually. In the 2018/2019 school year, 88% of students attended religion classes; in 2019/2020, it was 87.6%; in the following year, 86.7%; then 85.7% in 2021/2022; and in the last school year, 2022/2023, the studied index reached its lowest level in history at 80.3%.

Analyzing the annual percentage changes, it is evident that the phenomenon has accelerated in the last two years. Particularly, the largest decrease in the number of students attending religion classes was observed in the 2021/2022 school year, which was 3.3%. In the last school year, 2022/2023, the decline was 2.1%. In none of the studied years was there an increase in the percentage of students attending religion classes in school.



**Figure 1.** Religious education attendance in Poland [%].



**Figure 2.** Year to year changes of religious education attendance in Poland [%].

The observed trends are concerning for the Catholic Church in Poland. Their causes are complex and multifaceted. Firstly, it is worth noting that an increasing number of Poles identify as non-believers or agnostics. The rise in religious awareness and the search for alternative spiritual paths influence parents' decisions to withdraw their children from religion classes (Grabowska, 2021). Secularization trends appear to be one of the main factors affecting the decrease in the percentage of students attending religion classes. As civilization progresses and social changes occur, more people may abandon traditional religious practices, and worldview values are becoming more diverse (Grabowska, 2021).

Similar trends can be observed worldwide and have been visible in many countries since the 20th century. The changing preferences of the younger generation are a significant element of this phenomenon. The new generation may show less interest in religion classes at school

than previous generations, seeking alternative forms of spirituality or abandoning religious practices in favor of more individual searches (Konczal, 2023).

The influence of the family and cultural environment is crucial. The cultural environment, particularly peers and the Internet, can shape attitudes and preferences related to participation in such classes. The new generation exhibits less interest in religion classes, which may be related to the search for alternative forms of spirituality or the abandonment of religious practices in favor of more individual searches. This poses a challenge for the Church in attracting the younger generation.

According to P. Mąkosa (2022), the greatest challenge in religious education today is secularization and practical atheism, affecting both parents and their children. This is happening because, especially in large cities, religious values are increasingly rarely transmitted within the family in contemporary times. This has many consequences for the faith and religiosity of the younger generation. It strongly impacts religious education, particularly in the confessional and catechetical-evangelical approach. There is also a noticeable lack of coordination in catechetical activities by the Polish Catholic Church in this regard.

Table 1 presents data on the religious education attendance indicator in Poland, divided by individual dioceses over the studied years. An analysis of the data on participation in religion classes in Polish dioceses from 2018 to 2023 reveals significant variability in the percentages of students attending these classes across different dioceses. The 2022/2023 school year shows lower indices compared to previous years, not only in aggregate data but also for the majority of dioceses.

In most dioceses, a decrease in attendance at religion classes was observed from 2018 to 2023. This decline is most evident in the dioceses of Wrocław (from 87.3% to 63.4%), Gdańsk (from 85.3% to 69.4%), and Łódź (from 77.7% to 65.4%). However, there are a few exceptions. For example, the dioceses of Sandomierz, Przemyśl, and Tarnów show high and stable attendance rates, which may be due to the strong entrenchment of religious traditions in these communities.

The dioceses with the highest attendance in 2023 include Przemyśl (96.5% in 2022), Tarnów (96.3%), Rzeszów (94.9%), Radom (94.6%), Łomża (94.1%), and Kalisz (91.5%). In all these dioceses, attendance has remained high for years. Conversely, dioceses such as Warsaw (59.8% in 2023), Warsaw-Praga (66.9%), and Opole (63.4%) show the lowest percentage of students attending religion classes. This may be associated with a higher degree of secularization in these societies, changing attitudes towards the Church, and the influence of pastoral activities.

Analyzing the data, it can be noted that, generally, in the eastern, and particularly southeastern, dioceses of Poland, the religious education attendance indicator is higher compared to western dioceses. This is because Eastern Poland has stronger religious traditions dating back to the pre-partition era. The Catholic Church played an important role in shaping national identity there. Historically, the region has been closely linked to the Catholic Church.

The level of religiosity is higher there than in other parts of the country, which translates into greater parental involvement in their children's religious education. The Catholic Church plays a crucial role in the social and cultural life of southeastern Poland. Parishes are often centers of local communities, and priests enjoy significant authority. In some southeastern communities, there is social pressure for children to attend religion classes. Parents who do not enroll their children in these classes may face criticism from other community members.

However, it is worth noting that in recent years, there has also been a slight decrease in the percentage of children attending religion classes in southeastern Poland. This is linked to the overall decline in religiosity in Poland, as well as increased parental awareness of their rights regarding their children's religious education.

**Table 1.**

*Religious education attendance in Poland in dioceses in years 2018-2023 [%]*

The Diocese	2022/2023	2022/2021	2021/2022	2020/2021	2019/2020	2018/2019
białostocka	75.4	77.4	80.6	89.5	92.6	85.4
bielsko-żywiecka	83	82.6	84.6	87.5	90.6	88.4
bydgoska	81.9	74.9	83.6	84.7	88.4	89.4
częstochowska	86.8	90.3	91.4	90.3	92.6	94.3
drohiczyńska	84.9	84.9	93.7	90.8	89.8	92.9
elbląska	82.5	83.8	86.6	87.5	89.2	90.1
ełcka	87.7	86.6	87.5	87.7	87.5	91.7
gdańska	69.4	77.2	80.7	80.9	80.8	85.3
gliwicka	74.7	80.6	83.5	83.5	83.8	83
gnieźnieńska	69.5	72.9	74.1	80.6	84	86.4
kaliska	91.5	92	93.6	93.7	93.8	93.7
katowicka	82.4	84.8	85.7	88.6	88.5	90
kielecka	88.4	93.3	93.1	93.1	93.3	89.1
koszalińsko-kołobrzeska	73.8	76.2	83.9	84.7	85.1	94
krakowska	82.9	85.6	87.2	87.1	87.4	92.3
legnicka	69.2	77.3	83.7	84	85	87.1
lubelska	87.6	89.7	90.7	91.2	91.8	93.9
łomżyńska	94.1	95.2	92.9	93.7	94.1	96.5
łowicka	82.7	87.2	87.1	87.3	87.8	96.5
łódzka	65.4	70.8	75.6	75.7	76.2	77.7
opolska	63.4	77.4	84.8	84.9	86.5	93.8
pelplińska	88.2	83.4	94.8	96.4	99.2	99
płocka	86.5	86.7	86.5	86.7	93.6	95
poznańska	78.2	81.6	82.3	81.9	80.3	82.4
przemyska	96.5	97.3	97.6	97.8	97.9	98.6
radomska	94.6	93.6	94.6	95.2	95.7	96.8
rzeszowska	94.9	95.9	97.1	97.6	97.9	99
sandomierska	91.4	92.7	86.2	87.3	88.1	92
siedlecka	92.2	94.9	96	96.9	97.2	98.4
sosnowiecka	79.8	81.2	85	85.6	80.8	75.2
szczecińsko-kamieńska	67.4	69.6	80.5	79.9	79.5	85.2
świdnicka	77.5	80.9	82	81.3	83.5	87.5
tarnowska	96.3	97.5	97.8	96.8	95.9	97.3
toruńska	79	83.6	88.5	88.6	89.4	91
warmińska	76.5	78.8	74.4	75.5	70	79.4
warszawska	59.8	66.2	69.5	70.6	76	74.8
warszawsko-praska	66.9	70.6	75.6	76.7	82.8	84.6
włocławska	85.5	89.4	91	91.1	91.1	95

Cont. table 1.

wrocławska	68	63.4	65.7	69.9	73.2	87.3
zamojsko-lubaczowska	87.4	93.7	94.7	93.4	92.1	96.6
zielonogórsko-gorzowska	78.9	82	85.7	85.9	86.9	83.1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>80.3</b>	<b>82.4</b>	<b>85.7</b>	<b>86.7</b>	<b>87.6</b>	<b>88</b>

Source: on the basis of (Instytut Statystyki Kościoła Katolickiego SAC, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022).

In Table 2, data concerning the changes in the religious education attendance index in Poland between the surveyed years, as well as between the year 2018 and 2023, is presented. Throughout the entire period under study, the largest decline in school religious education attendance occurred in dioceses such as Opole (-30.4%), Koszalin-Kołobrzeg (-20.2%), Szczecin-Kamień (-17.8%), Wrocław (-19.3%), and Warsaw-Praga (-17.7%). The smallest decline in religious education attendance during the surveyed years was observed in the following dioceses: Sandomierz (-0.6%), Kielce (-0.7%), Tarnów (-1%), Przemyśl (-2.1%), Kalisz (-2.2%), and Łomża (-2.4%). The only diocese where an increase in the religious education attendance index was recorded during the surveyed years was the Sosnowiec diocese (4.6%). Despite occasionally minor increases in individual dioceses in a given year, a clear downward trend is evident across all dioceses except Sosnowiec (which maintains a relatively low index level).

**Table 2.**

*Changes in religious education attendance in Poland in dioceses in years 2018-2023 [%]*

<b>The Diocese</b>	<b>2022/2023</b>	<b>2022/2021</b>	<b>2021/2022</b>	<b>2020/2021</b>	<b>2019/2020</b>	<b>2018-2023</b>
białostocka	-2.0%	-3.2%	-8.9%	-3.1%	7.2%	-10.0%
bielsko-żywiecka	0.4%	-2.0%	-2.9%	-3.1%	2.2%	-5.4%
bydgoska	7.0%	-8.7%	-1.1%	-3.7%	-1.0%	-7.5%
częstochowska	-3.5%	-1.1%	1.1%	-2.3%	-1.7%	-7.5%
drohiczyńska	0.0%	-8.8%	2.9%	1.0%	-3.1%	-8.0%
elbląska	-1.3%	-2.8%	-0.9%	-1.7%	-0.9%	-7.6%
Ełcka	1.1%	-0.9%	-0.2%	0.2%	-4.2%	-4.0%
gdańska	-7.8%	-3.5%	-0.2%	0.1%	-4.5%	-15.9%
gliwicka	-5.9%	-2.9%	0.0%	-0.3%	0.8%	-8.3%
gnieźnieńska	-3.4%	-1.2%	-6.5%	-3.4%	-2.4%	-16.9%
Kaliszka	-0.5%	-1.6%	-0.1%	-0.1%	0.1%	-2.2%
katowicka	-2.4%	-0.9%	-2.9%	0.1%	-1.5%	-7.6%
kielecka	-4.9%	0.2%	0.0%	-0.2%	4.2%	-0.7%
koszalińsko-kołobrzewska	-2.4%	-7.7%	-0.8%	-0.4%	-8.9%	-20.2%
krakowska	-2.7%	-1.6%	0.1%	-0.3%	-4.9%	-9.4%
legnicka	-8.1%	-6.4%	-0.3%	-1.0%	-2.1%	-17.9%
lubelska	-2.1%	-1.0%	-0.5%	-0.6%	-2.1%	-6.3%
łomżyńska	-1.1%	2.3%	-0.8%	-0.4%	-2.4%	-2.4%
łowicka	-4.5%	0.1%	-0.2%	-0.5%	-8.7%	-13.8%
łódzka	-5.4%	-4.8%	-0.1%	-0.5%	-1.5%	-12.3%
opolska	-14.0%	-7.4%	-0.1%	-1.6%	-7.3%	-30.4%
pelplińska	4.8%	-11.4%	-1.6%	-2.8%	0.2%	-10.8%
płocka	-0.2%	0.2%	-0.2%	-6.9%	-1.4%	-8.5%
poznańska	-3.4%	-0.7%	0.4%	1.6%	-2.1%	-4.2%
przemyska	-0.8%	-0.3%	-0.2%	-0.1%	-0.7%	-2.1%
radomska	1.0%	-1.0%	-0.6%	-0.5%	-1.1%	-2.2%
rzeszowska	-1.0%	-1.2%	-0.5%	-0.3%	-1.1%	-4.1%
sandomierska	-1.3%	6.5%	-1.1%	-0.8%	-3.9%	-0.6%



Cont. table 2.

siedlecka	-2.7%	-1.1%	-0.9%	-0.3%	-1.2%	-6.2%
sosnowiecka	-1.4%	-3.8%	-0.6%	4.8%	5.6%	4.6%
szczecińsko-kamieńska	-2.2%	-10.9%	0.6%	0.4%	-5.7%	-17.8%
świdnicka	-3.4%	-1.1%	0.7%	-2.2%	-4.0%	-10.0%
tarnowska	-1.2%	-0.3%	1.0%	0.9%	-1.4%	-1.0%
toruńska	-4.6%	-4.9%	-0.1%	-0.8%	-1.6%	-12.0%
warmińska	-2.3%	4.4%	-1.1%	5.5%	-9.4%	-2.9%
warszawska	-6.4%	-3.3%	-1.1%	-5.4%	1.2%	-15.0%
warszawsko-praska	-3.7%	-5.0%	-1.1%	-6.1%	-1.8%	-17.7%
włocławska	-3.9%	-1.6%	-0.1%	0.0%	-3.9%	-9.5%
wrocławska	4.6%	-2.3%	-4.2%	-3.3%	-14.1%	-19.3%
zamojsko-lubaczowska	-6.3%	-1.0%	1.3%	1.3%	-4.5%	-9.2%
zielonogórsko-gorzowska	-3.1%	-3.7%	-0.2%	-1.0%	3.8%	-4.2%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>-5.4%</b>	<b>-4.3%</b>	<b>-1.9%</b>	<b>-1.3%</b>	<b>87.6%</b>	<b>-7.7%</b>

Source: on the basis of (Instytut Statystyki Kościoła Katolickiego SAC, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022).

Tables 3 and 4 present data on the religious education attendance index categorized by school types for the years 2018-2023. Table 4 specifically includes data on changes in this index over successive years and throughout the entire study period. The data reveals that the highest values of the religious education attendance index in Poland are observed in primary schools (88.9% for the school year 2022/2023) and preschools (83.7%). This index is significantly lower in secondary schools, with 60.1% in general high schools (liceums) and 65.7% in technical schools (technika).

Analyzing the changes in the index from 2018 to 2023, it is evident that the index decreased across all types of schools, with the smallest decline observed in preschools (-1.2%) and primary schools (-5.3%). The largest decline in the religious education attendance index from 2018 to 2023 occurred in secondary schools, where the index dropped by 20.7%. In the school year 2018/2019, there were fewer students attending religious education classes in general high schools as well, but the difference compared to primary schools was smaller at 13.6%. This difference increased over the years and currently stands at 28.8%.

In Poland, significant differences are noticeable concerning general high schools (liceums). Some areas maintain a high percentage of students attending catechesis, around 90-91%, while in other areas, this drops to 34-36%. Typically, technical schools (technika) have a higher participation rate in religious classes compared to general high schools (Konczal, 2023). For example, in Szczecin, only one in ten students attends religious education classes in post-primary schools, whereas in primary schools, this number reaches half of the students, indicating a significant decline (Kaczmarek, 2023).

According to CBOS research, the Church may bear partial responsibility for the abandonment of religious practices by people. Detailed research results indicate that the institutional church and clergy, especially concerning young people, provoke negative reactions. This stems from specific actions of clergy in public spaces and interpersonal relations, such as exclusion from religious classes or unfair treatment during confirmation. Personal negative experiences and environmental observations, reinforced by media reports,

have contributed to the formation of general attitudes of distance and reluctance in some communities towards the Church. This is particularly evident among students in secondary schools who have a greater influence on decisions regarding participation in catechesis (Stodolny, 2023).

**Table 3.**

*Religious education attendance in Poland in dioceses in years 2018-2023 – types of schools [%]*

The Diocese	2022/2023	2022/2021	2021/2022	2020/2021	2019/2020	2018/2019
Kindergarten	83.7	82.9	85.5	84.1	84.8	84.9
Primary school	88.9	90.2	92.1	93.1	94.1	94.2
Liceums	60.1	63.2	68.8	72.3	75.3	80.8
Technika	65.7	68.5	74.6	75.6	76.77	81.6

Source: on the basis of (Instytut Statystyki Kościoła Katolickiego SAC, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022).

**Table 4.**

*Changes in religious education attendance in Poland in dioceses in years 2018-2023 – types of schools [%]*

The Diocese	2022/2023	2022/2021	2021/2022	2020/2021	2019/2020	2018-2023
Kindergarten	0.8%	-2.6%	1.4%	-0.7%	-0.1%	-1.2%
Primary school	-1.3%	-1.9%	-1.0%	-1.0%	-0.1%	-5.3%
Liceums	-3.1%	-5.6%	-3.5%	-3.0%	-5.5%	-20.7%
Technika	-2.8%	-6.1%	-1.0%	-1.2%	-4.8%	-15.9%

Source: on the basis of (Instytut Statystyki Kościoła Katolickiego SAC, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022).

The Catholic Church can counteract the decline in the number of students attending religious education classes in Poland by adapting its message to the changing society. It can focus on a more open and flexible approach to teaching, taking into account ideological diversity. Furthermore, the Church can actively engage in dialogue with youth, listening to their needs and thoughts. Supporting moral and ethical education, not necessarily based solely on religious doctrines, can also contribute to young people's interest in values and spirituality. It is also crucial to respond to social challenges such as scandals and controversies with transparency, accountability, and actions aimed at restoring public trust. Lastly, the Church can invest in modern teaching methods to make religious education classes more interactive and appealing to the younger generation.

## 5. Conclusion

In the article, based on the data, indicators such as changes in the religious education attendance indicator between consecutive years and the changes in religious education attendance in different types of schools in Poland for the years 2018-2022, broken down by individual dioceses, were calculated.

Analyzing the changes in the indicator from 2018 to 2023, it can be observed that the indicator decreased in all types of schools analyzed, with the smallest decline noted for preschools (-1.2%) and primary schools (-5.3%). The largest decline in the religious education attendance indicator from 2018 to 2023 was recorded in secondary schools, where the indicator dropped by 20.7%. In the school year 2018/2019, there were also fewer students attending religious education classes in general high schools, but the difference compared to primary schools was not as significant, at only 13.6%. This difference increased over the years and currently stands at 28.8%.

Regarding participation in religious education classes in individual dioceses, decreases in attendance were also noted. Throughout the entire study period, the greatest decline in religious education attendance occurred in dioceses such as Opole (-30.4%), Koszalin-Kołobrzeg (-20.2%), Szczecin-Kamień (-17.8%), Wrocław (-19.3%), and Warsaw-Praga (-17.7%). The smallest decline in attendance during the surveyed years was observed in dioceses such as Sandomierz (-0.6%), Kielce (-0.7%), Tarnów (-1%); Przemyśl (-2.1%), Kalisz (-2.2%), and Łomża (-2.4%). The only diocese where an increase in the religious education attendance indicator was observed during the surveyed years was the Sosnowiec diocese (4.6%).

In summary, it must be stated that there is a systematic decrease in the number of people participating in religious education classes in both primary and secondary schools in Poland. Based on the conducted analysis, it can be observed that among Polish children and youth, religious education classes are progressively becoming less popular (Zaburzycka-Maciąg, 2021; Zellma, 2021). These analyses are consistent with studies presented by Rev. Paweł Mąkosa, who noted the largest decline in students attending religious education classes in high schools, with attendance ranging from 34-36% to around 60%. According to Rev. P. Mąkosa, the systematic decrease in participants of religious education classes among youth has been ongoing since 2010, and in the past three years, this process has accelerated significantly, especially with numerous resignations from religious education classes by secondary school students (Mąkosa, 2022).

Among children from primary schools, the number of those opting out of religious education classes is lower, especially in younger classes. Children in grades 1-3, before their First Holy Communion, form the largest group attending religious education classes. In older grades, although the participation is slightly lower, it remains significantly higher than in post-primary schools, possibly influenced by the fact that in the final year of primary school and the first year of high school, students undergo Confirmation. As observed, the highest number of children and youth attend religious education classes in classes preparing for First Holy Communion and Confirmation, as according to the adopted teaching model in Polish schools, these classes are intended to prepare students for receiving the sacraments.

The article also analyzed the participation of children and youth in religious education classes in individual dioceses in Poland. In his research, Rev. M. Mąkosa (similarly to the analysis presented in this article) pointed out that the highest percentage of students attending

religious education classes was recorded in dioceses of southeastern Poland, such as the Dioceses of Przemyśl, Tarnów, and Rzeszów. The lowest percentages were found in dioceses like Warsaw, Opole, and Łódź. These findings correspond with attendance at religious ceremonies, specifically Sunday Masses and holidays. The highest participation in Masses is observed in the southeastern part of Poland, while the lowest is in the central and southwestern regions (Mąkosa, 2022).

There is a need to consider why youth are opting out of religious education classes in such large numbers. The main reasons cited by youth include scheduling religious education classes as either the first or last lesson, a lack of identification with Catholicism and Christianity among youth, family factors, and environmental influences. Studies in the literature on the religiosity of youth clearly indicate that Polish youth are distancing themselves from the Church, and the current model of religious education in Poland is not fulfilling its role (Kiełb et al., 2023). Currently, Poland is one of the countries in Europe where the process of secularization is occurring rapidly, especially among young people and teenagers, and even among children in the final grades of primary school.

Looking at the results presented in the analysis, it is evident that the Church in Poland faces a challenge with the decreasing percentage of participants in religious education classes, especially in secondary schools, each year. It seems that the proposed changes in catechesis teaching in Poland by D. Kiełb, M. Pierzchała, and M. Gazda could reduce or even halt the decline of youth participation in religious education classes (Kiełb et al., 2023). These authors propose a model of religious education similar to those in Italy or Great Britain, where religious education focuses on imparting knowledge, and catechesis and evangelization are handled by the parish (Kiełb et al., 2023; Grondek, 2024).

It is certain that the current model of religious education in Polish schools must change to become more interesting and inclusive of all world religions for students. However, this requires reform in the Polish educational system and may be challenging due to religious homogeneity and the dominance of the Catholic Church in Poland, as noted by P. Mąkosa as early as 2015 in his article (Mąkosa, 2015).

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