

# **Freedom Of Conscience And Religion in Schools PL**

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## **THE POLISH ASSOCIATION FOR IDEOLOGICALLY-FREE STATE**

### **THE OBSERVANCE OF FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE AND RELIGION IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN POLAND**

Report

sponsored by  
PHARE

Warsaw, February 1996

Completion of this report was made possible by donations from **the Cooperation Fund of the PHARE Democracy Programme**

The preparation of the English version of this report as well as printing and distribution of the Polish version were subsidized by **the German Marshall Fund of the United States**

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#### **INTRODUCTION**

The analysed project is far from being theoretical and scientific. Its purpose was not to make a versatile diagnosis of positive and negative phenomena related to introduction of religion classes to public schools in 1990 [1]. The purpose of the project was to find out whether the religion classes generated phenomena and behaviour that threatens the constitutional freedom of conscience and religion.

When the religion was introduced to public schools, a lot was said about these threats in public debates, in spite of the type of political party who took part in the discussion. Sociological surveys, viewed as one of the instruments of rational law-making policy, constitute an instrument that allows to verify all doubts expressed when certain legal regulations are being enforced. Five years and a half after new regulations on religion classes have been introduced (and modified several times since then) is a period long enough to see how the solutions function in practice.

The project consisted of four parts: Sociological questionnaire survey on views and experience of the respondents related to the observance of the freedom of conscience in public schools. While the first part was to provide general and statistical knowledge on some phenomena and, if possible, to define their scope and size, the second part, carried out through in-depth interviews with people who experienced some injustice, was to define the mechanism of the phenomenon and to collect more detailed information how the freedom of conscience is infringed in public schools. The third part focused on the analysis of selected manuals and textbooks recommended for such classes like: civic knowledge, philosophy and ethics as well as preparation to family life. The opinions expressed are related to the presence of ideological contents and its size. The fourth part consists of the analysis of documents and press articles related to religion classes in schools. The first and the second part of the project, i.e. the survey and sociological interviews, have been carried out by a scientific team led by Mr. Wojciech Pawlik, Ph.D., from the Institute of Applied Social Sciences of the Warsaw University. The books reviews were prepared by professor Teresa Hołówka, philosopher from the Warsaw University and professor Krzysztof Kiciński, sociologist from the Institute of Applied Social Sciences of the Warsaw University. The analysis of the documents and press — as a part of the project to be implemented by the Association for Ideologically-Free State „Neutrum” — has been carried out by Anna Wolicka, with Krystyna Gorzkowska's assistance.

Wojciech Pawlik

## **RESULTS OF SOCIOLOGICAL SURVEY**

### **1. Description of the survey**

The sociological research was carried out in spring 1995. Its purpose was to find out whether the religion classes in public schools infringe, in the opinion of questioned students, the freedom of conscience and religion. The questionnaire developed by Wojciech Pawlik, Ph.D. from the Institute of Applied Social Sciences of the Warsaw University (appendix 1) has been the basis for the research. The research has been carried out by senior students of the Institute with so called lecture-room method [2]. It has been decided to use the questionnaire only in one class of a certain type of schools (in order to avoid collecting information on similar subject from several classes, with the same religion teacher, for instance).

The eight-grade students of primary schools and third-grade students of secondary school were covered by the research. The sample was based on the assumption that younger children (although it would be interested to question second-grade children, because of the First Communion) would have difficulties with understanding all questions and giving independent answers.

Such sampling, due to methodological reasons, has limited the scope of our survey. Because of this the problems of younger children remained unidentified and — which will be mentioned later on — have been described based on interviews with parents. The survey has been carried out in Warsaw and in Łódź, Białystok and Bielsko-Biała provinces. Such sampling has been defined by specifics of each region of the country. It has been decided that Warsaw is the best representation of phenomena occurring in large urban areas.

„Provincial” Poland has been represented by small towns of Łódź province: Aleksandrów Łódzki, Pabianice, Głowno, Ozorków and Zgierz. Because the purpose of the survey was to find out whether the religion classes — in general, it does not relate to Roman Catholic religion only — cause some negative social phenomena, it has been decided to cover two regions of the country where population's composition (from religion's point of view) differs from this one of the whole country. Thus, we have Białystok province, populated with Orthodox population and Bielsko-Biała province, with Protestants.

In Białystok province the survey has been carried out in Biała Podlaska, Czarna Białostocka, Hajnówka and in Białystok itself. In Bielsko-Biała province the survey has been carried out in Bielsko-Biała, Cieszyn, Istebna, Skoczów, Ustronie, Wisła and Żywiec. Rural youth has not been covered by the survey. It has been assumed (based on results of sociological research) that religion classes in villages do not cause such a level of contesting behaviours among young people as in the cities. It might be explained with traditional religiousness of rural communities and by the fact that secularization processes in rural areas are much less advanced than in the cities. The second reason was that the survey covered not only last-grade students of primary schools, but also of secondary schools. These schools are usually town or city located (although very often their students — like in case of Białystok and Bielsko-Biała provinces, come from villages and stay in dormitories or commute).

The survey was carried out in 165 schools: 56 primary schools, 32 vocational schools, 34 secondary schools, 34 technical secondary schools and vocational secondary schools. In total, the questionnaires have been filled up by 3791 person, including: in Warsaw — 1318 persons (34%) in Białystok province — 1032 persons (27.2%) in Bielsko-Biała province — 783 persons (20.7%) in Łódź province — 658 persons (17.4%) The amount of girls (1978) in the sample was slightly larger than boys (1797) (in several questionnaires the respondents did not mark their sex).

## 2. Presentation of the results

The detailed data, correlation ratios as well as other statistical indicators — as being too specialized — are not mentioned in the text. They will be presented in another work, in one of sociological quarterlies.

### 2.1. Attendance of religion classes

Declarations of attendance, received in the survey, do not differ from the results obtained in other surveys carried out by sociological centres. In our sample the majority of young people (85.4%) declared their attendance at religion classes (most often -last-grade students from primary schools 92.0%, more seldom — students from vocational schools — 83.8%, technical secondary schools — 82.6%, secondary schools — 78.8% and vocational secondary schools — 76.6%). Although such variables like sex, country region or size of the town influenced to certain level the received results, the differences are not larger than few percents. We might say that the results confirmed the rule known from other sociological surveys, showing that a dominating majority of young people attend religion classes at schools (students from secondary and vocational schools in Warsaw are an exception, the percentage of students who do not attend religion classes are much higher).

### 2.2. Why do they attend?

#### 2.2.1 Towards faith

The only phenomenon of attendance of the religion classes says little about motives. The motives could be very different and result both from a need to deepen religious knowledge, as environmental and institutional pressure. This issue became a subject of the survey. The respondents asked why do they attend religion classes answered using „positive” motives more often than „negative” ones. The most frequent answers (out of 17 possible answers) were: it results from my faith and my will to deepen it — 53.6% I consider it to be my religious duty — 47% out of curiosity, a need to extend my knowledge — 30.5% Similarly like in case of declarations of attendance, such factors like sex, type of school, country region did not influence the final differences by more than few percent. However, the answers significantly differ from the answers given by those who do not attend religion classes. Although almost similar number of respondents pointed out „religious duty”, other motives (to participate) of religious character were attributed to participating peers less often. 34.3% pointed out „faith and the need to deepen it”, 13.8% — „curiosity”. Of course, the sociological surveys, especially questionnaires, register not actual driving motives, but rather „vocabularies of motives”, used by the respondents to describe both their and others'

behaviours. Such significant difference within the same „vocabulary" is a sociologically relevant fact. The perception of those who attend religion by themselves and by those who do not attend are different; in the second case pragmatic and conformist reasons are stressed three times more often (but not necessarily in negative meaning). Students who do not attend religion perceive their colleagues as less religious and autonomous than the first ones perceive themselves.

Also during the interviews — it will be discussed later — the relevance of motives different than religious ones was often stressed. Both students of secondary schools who do not attend religion, and parents of younger children, facing different conflicts, mentioned the importance of conformist and pragmatic reasons.

## **2.2.2. Towards conformity**

### **A. Family**

It would be a sociological tautology to state that for young people family is an important point of reference. And although contemporary cultural and social changes weaken its importance, we have assumed that a family still plays an important role, especially in transformation of moral and religious views. The answers for already mentioned questions about motives of attendance support this hypothesis only to some extent. We have received following answers related to a family: I was encouraged by parents — 9.9% If I don't attend, by family wouldn't approve — 9.2% I attend, because my parents ordered me to — 6.9% However, the importance of family's influence is seen more clearly by those who do not attend religion. They attributed the first motive to their colleagues in 24.3% answers, the second — in 23.9% and the third — in 28.8% answers. We can say that young people who do not attend religion much often stress not autonomous character of their colleagues' motivations.

The family's influence was also tested with a question related to how the decision about attendance was made. Although about one half (51.7%) stated the decision was made independently, and one fifth (20.7%) after the parents' opinion or after consultations, it is worth mentioning that every fifth respondent agrees that the decision was made without his or her participation („It was my parents' decision and I approved — 12.5%," "it was my parents' decision and I obeyed — 8.1%"). The percentage was higher among primary schools' students than among those of secondary schools. Of course, the family influence does not have to be a direct one and be manifested in direct orders. Religious education climate and non-explicit expectations have also some influence on young people's behaviour, although it's difficult to measure. By the answer to the question whether the respondents feel that the fact of attendance or non-attendance is important for different "relevant others" we can make a conclusion that the parents are the most important „relevant others": 66.1% of answers and family — 55.1%. Summarizing: the family and parents' influence on attendance at religion classes differs: it hesitates between passive acceptance and firm decision making. Although in the majority of cases the young people feel that participation in religion classes does not infringe their autonomy and freedom of conscience, it is worrying that almost 7-8% of the respondents declare that the decision was made without their participation and feel that their participation in religion classes was imposed by the family.

### **B. Teachers and school**

While the first aspect of conformity related to expectations formed by parents and family, and as such only partly can be discussed in formal and legal categories of the freedom of conscience observance (according to legal regulations the decision about participation in religion classes is made by parents in case of primary schools' pupils, and in case of secondary schools — jointly with children), the school and teachers' activity is closely related to the subject. In the light of the legal regulations, school should create conditions that allow to respect the students' right to freedom of conscience and religion. The results of the questionnaire show that these principles, as a rule, are observed by teachers especially as far as respecting of ideological neutrality is concerned. Only 0.8% of the respondents stated that they were encouraged by teachers to participate in religion classes. 4.0% of the respondents answered that they were afraid that if they do not attend, it would not be well perceived by some teachers 5.1% of the respondents answered that they preferred not to take a risk and participated only to avoid problems at school. Although the results are, on average, several percent higher when the answers were given by those who do not attend religion, we might conclude that direct teachers' influence is rather weak, at least weaker than in case of parents

and family. It could be interpreted as a manifestation of larger non-conformity of the young people towards teachers' expectation than towards those of their parents. It can be also explained — and this explanation seem to be more justified by the results of sociological research [3] — by lack of clear expectations on teachers' side in this area.

As for the question: „Do you feel that your attendance of religion is important for your class master?" 17.1% answers were positive (we remind that in case of parents it was 66.1%). The result does not differ from the results of other scientific research that showed rather critical teachers' attitude towards religion classes at school (and maybe this would explain their limited influence of their pupils' decision). One question asked not only about fears, but also about real situations related to attendance or non-attendance of religion classes. By the answers we can see that the related problems: happen quite often — 5.5%  
 happened several times — 16.2%  
 has not happened once — 78.3%

The analysis of additional, open-ended question, where the respondents were asked to describe the problems, shows very different situations: intolerance from other students, „comments" from teachers, problems of these students who declared the attendance, but show up irregularly, or problems of those who do not attend and, being outside class-room, cause some problems.

Although we do not have complete data for all questioned schools (the question was not asked in the questionnaire), collected information relates to curricula of 141 classes. In 66 of them (46.8%) religion was placed between other lectures. Statistical analyses show that, in spite of the Church fears, the place of religion in school curricula has no influence upon the number of attending students. These students who did not join religion, or are present in the class-room, but are involved in their own activities, or in other school rooms, or elsewhere. One of the answers given by the students asked about motives is quite significant: „there is nothing to do during this hour" — mentioned by 5.5% of the respondents. The same pragmatic approach was mentioned by 12.7% of non-attending students. Conclusion: the results of the survey do not give any ground to make a conclusion that teachers and school coerce students into participating in religion classes. However, the mere situation, in spite of the school personnel intentions, generates some problems related to attendance or non-attendance. It is related to school curricula and lack of teachers' care for those who do not attend religion, as well as to some other problems of those who declared their attendance.

### C. Cultural conformity

In spite of the influence of family, teachers and education system, the religion attendance is influenced by another factor that can be called „cultural conformity". The problem is that usually cultural regulators of human behaviour to great extent are manifested in minimalizing of difficult, new and problematic situations. Most of our behaviours is a habit, with no reflexion related. This mechanism is a basis for cultural conformity, accepting existing norms (or norms people think that exist), as a basis for decision making processes. Of course, they are not the only social and individual behaviour's regulators. The mechanism of cultural conformity is especially well seen in the answer to the question about motives of attending religion classe: I don't want to have problems in future, due to lack of grade, like problems with marriage, entrance examinations to schools and universities — 23.9% (33.9% answers given by non-attendants);  
 Out of habit — 17.9% (34.1% answers given by non-attendants);  
 Majority attends, so do I — 9.7% (22.9% answers given by non-attendants).  
 These are conformity indicators that might be worrying. If every fourth student attending religion (and every third non-attending) declares that non-participation and lack of grade can result in some problems in the future, it means that in the respondents' mind religion is an important subject from the point of view of their future. It doesn't matter whether it is true, but what matters is the cultural climate that creates such ideas. From this point of view to contest religion in schools not always can be an easy decision.

The answers to the question „would the attendance decrease if there were no marks" indirectly show disciplining and conformistic nature of religion marks.  
 it would decrease — 33.5%  
 nothing would change — 40.7%  
 it would increase — 3% of answers.  
 We can see that every third respondent agrees that the marks, to some degree, force

participation in religion classes. More young people are against (45%) than for (33%) the very principle to have grades for religion on school certificates. Summary: institutionalization of religion classes in schools resulted — among its opponents — non only in contesting behaviours, but, more often, in certain adaptation processes. Although one third of the respondents think that religion should not be taught in schools, at the same time the majority of them attends religion classes. They are driven by conformity not only towards their parents, but schools and especially by unmeasurable, but sensed „public opinion climate" that dominates among ordinary people. Religious duty, by becoming a part of school curriculum, is perceived as a condition for smooth functioning in the adult world. Religious and life conformity manifests itself in choices and behaviour related to religion.

#### **D. Friends and peers**

During public discussion on religion in schools, the issue of divisions and intolerance as a result of non attendance has been risen. This issue became a subject of some our questions. Some information can be found in the answers to the questions about motives. The answers that could show fear of being different were the least frequent. Because it's bad to be different from your peers and if I did not attend, I would be different — 0.9% Because I am afraid that if I didn't attend I could have some problems from my colleagues — 0.6%

Similar answers were given by students who do not attend, although the answers for other questions differed sometimes by more than ten percent. The questionnaire included two other questions related to possible intolerance.

We asked about students' attitude towards those who do not attend religion: 69.% of the non-attending respondents declared that those who attend usually treat them „in the same way that others. Attendance or non-attendance doesn't matter". 15.4% answered that their attitude is „positive, with respect to their decision", 2.1% of the respondents declared that „they envy us" (because of more free time) 2.3% — that those who attend „seem to treat them in the same way, but one can see they are envious".

The answers showing negative attitude have been chosen less frequently: 3% of the respondents answered that "pretend there is no difference, but you can feel they think they are better" 1.6% choose the answer "they laugh at me and tease me" We also asked the question about how non-attending students treat those who attend. The results were almost the same (the difference was not larger than one percent) as in the previous question.

The results show that the scope of intolerance is from statistical point of view limited. Indifference is a dominating attitude. The type of school is the only variable that make the results to differ: „accepting indifference" is more often declared by young people from secondary schools and secondary vocational schools — more than ten percent higher than in case of primary schools. The latter ones not only more often state that non-attendance results in some kind of problems among peers (in total about 7% of answers), but also declare that their choice (about 7%) sometimes is a matter of envy of other pupils and by doing this indirectly stress the situation of conformizing constraint.

Summary: although negative phenomena in relations among school pupils resulting from attendance or non-attendance of religion classes are rather limited, nevertheless they remain a social fact. The declaration of the fact that intolerance exists can be worrying. Although the phenomenon is expressed only in few percents of the answers, we should remember that these percents are translated into quite impressive figures, so in primary and secondary schools they can relate to at least more then ten thousand students.

#### **2.2.3 Having no choice**

A possibility to have alternative classes for those pupils who do not attend religion was to be one of the guarantees that freedom of religion will be respected. In the questionnaire an appropriate question was asked. From the received declarations we learnt that out of 3772 students only 34 attended ethics. Such a low indicator excludes a possibility of any statistical generalization.

In the questionnaire we asked why students do not attend ethics. The answers give us a conclusion that lack of interest is the main reason. The answer „I attend religion and it's enough for me" was pointed out by 40.1% of the respondents. The answer „I attend neither

religion nor ethics and I am fine with it" was also quite popular — 7.9% (among those who do not attend, but it was half of the answers). Our survey has also shown that the students have little information about the offer they theoretically might use. „Maybe I would attend, but nobody suggested it to us" — was every fifth answer. Pupils, especially in primary schools, very often do not know what ethics means.

The answers to the question about attractiveness of individual subjects confirm this. They show that from hypothetical offer where the choice was given between ethics, religion or religion studies, ethics would be chosen very seldom (3.1% of the answers). The result is interesting also because that in one of the previous questions 19.3% of the respondents stated that they do not attend ethics... „because there is no such a subject". The wording of the question should be an explanation: earlier we asked why students do not attend ethics, later we asked them if, having a choice, had they chosen ethics. Religion and religion studies were very popular, with similar level of popularity. But there was a significant difference because of type of the school. Religion was the most popular in vocational schools (53.2%) and primary schools (40.7%); religion studies in secondary schools (47.0%) and vocational secondary schools (43.7%). What's more, popularity of religion studies was twice higher among secondary schools students than among vocational school students.

Such low interest in ethics explains why students so seldom apply to the school authorities to introduce the subject. Only in 1.4% of the answers to the question why they do not attend there was a suggestion „I declared my readiness to participate, but it turned out to be impossible from organizational point of view". Even less students (0.9%) pointed to the answer that a priest or class master declared they were against such subject. It supports the declaration expressed in other answers that both teachers and priests in general respect the principle of freedom of religion.

Summary: the results of the survey prove that there is no real alternative for religion classes. Ethics covers only a small percent of students. They, on the other hand, show little initiative to organize such classes and school authorities do not provide such offers. Religion and religion studies are much more popular at least at declarative level.

Wojciech Pawlik

## **RESULTS OF SOCIOLOGICAL INTERVIEWS**

In-depth interviews were a part of sociological survey carried out within the project. Twenty eight of such interviews were carried out. While the questionnaire part's aim was to diagnose „quantitative" aspects of the problem, the purpose of the interviews was to collect information on individual cases when, in public schools, freedom of conscience and religion was violated. From the data gathered in the questionnaire we can see that although conflicts and problems are marginal from the statistical point of view, their transformation into figures (thousands of individual cases) shows their importance can not be put aside.

We were surprised by an absence of official information about such cases. Although the problem is signalized in press and public discussions, the number of accompanying documents is close to zero. Neither Education Ministry, nor ombudsman (with exception of a few cases) neither ombudsman for students' rights (one case) have any information. Neither we can find them in local education bodies, churches or other religious organizations. We can state that the public conviction belief about conflicts and intolerance due to religion presence in schools is based rather on individual cases than on systematically collected documentation.

To reach „competent source of information" (i.e. persons who would agree to describe their experience) proved to be extremely difficult. As a result of two press announcements placed by „Neutrum" only one positive answer was received. The ads published in „Neutrum" bulletin were more effective, for the paper reaches circles more active in civic education and human rights education. Direct contact with the respondents was informal and non-systematic, but it was decided to follow one rule: a respondent should be somebody personally involved in the problems covered by the survey. 28 interviews were carried out: several with secondary schools' pupils, majority of them with parents and teachers. The interviews related to the situation of both secondary and primary schools' students, including those covered by pre-school education (so-called zero grades). About half of our respondents were people belonging to churches being in minority in Poland (protestants and orthodox), one fourth — catholics and one fourth — religiously indifferent people.

The fact that the people who agreed to talk to us were afraid was a very important one.

Majority of them did not agree to verify the facts with a teacher, school principal, catechist etc., deciding that the interview on their situation, carried out in the school, would have negative impact on them. Because of that the interviews should be treated as relations about facts rather, told by individual persons, than proved and objective description of the case. The purpose of such careful approach is not to question the interviews' credibility, but is necessary due to methodological reasons.

## **1. To be different**

According to the majority of the respondents, religion introduction to public schools has created a new situation: necessity to expose somebody's religious identity. It was not a problem for Catholic children and young people, but very often it was a problem for those of other views. As long as all children were leaving school and going home or to church in order to attend religion classes, in school itself the situation of all children was similar. Introduction of catholic religion to schools generated a situation when — as stressed by younger children's parents — Catholic children enjoy a comfort of being in a class room (or in school) while those who contest the religion classes are forced to leave.

During first two-three years after religion was introduced to public schools, such „labelling" was caused by the fact that parents were requested to present written declarations that their children would not attend religion (in some schools such declarations are still necessary in spite of school authorities' orders). Another reason was that such „difference" was so obvious because of physical absence of these children during religion classes. According to the parents, religion in parish rooms „privatized" children's decisions. Religion's transfer to schools — in spite of declarations of the authorities — made these decisions more „public".

The problem was a subject to many protests, because in the opinion of their authors, such situation violated a right to not disclosing somebody's religion. *In a result if [my grand daughter] drives with my son, she always asks is it „our" church. We were bringing her up in the spirit that churches belong to all people and that we all are Christian, and right now she asks such strange questions — for five-year-old: „ours", „yours"... very different. She starts to realize that, being in the second grade, she will not have a white dress, like other children. This religion in schools made an issue in people's life: everybody has to go this direction or another, it has to be a division. If there is no religion in schools, children would grow up differently, they wouldn't feel they are different.*

Consequences of being different not always are negative: in case of good relationships between parents and children it leads (as stated by some parents) to positive feeling of own importance and releases competitiveness. But in some cases the results are opposite — it leads to shyness, apathy and limited social contacts.

Apart from how the fact „to be different" is experienced, which to great extent depends on how an individual is evaluated by his/her environment, it is true that the majority of the respondents' opinion states the religion classes in public schools did not facilitate integration among children; on the contrary — difference in religion and beliefs became more distinct.

## **2. From „being different" to discrimination**

Our quantitative survey showed that cases of open intolerance are not frequent among pupils. Also during interviews the respondents complained rather about cultural and institutional pressure (from a priest or a teacher) than pressure of their peers. Religion in schools, if we analyze its negative aspects, did not antagonize children, but — in some cases — made them more distant from each other.

Cases of open intolerance relate to the situations several years before, just after religion was introduced to schools (when the issue rose high emotions). At present such situations are incidental. If they happen, always a question is risen: are they a result of religious intolerance, or a manifestation of thoughtlessness and intolerance towards difference in general. The case of one primary schools in south-eastern Poland proves how difficult it is to separate these two aspects.

*Children from seventh grade, boys, pull a boy from the same grade, who didn't attend religion, to the class room where religion took place. When he tried to defend himself, was beaten. He didn't tell anything at home, only when his mother saw the bruises, he told her what happened. Mother asked the school's principal for help.* Non-attendance of religion classes, according to popular understanding, is identified with a category of difference in religion (invectives of negative nature: „Jehovah witness", „Jews", communists), and this one — with difference in nationality. Such stereotypes: protestant-German, orthodox-Belorussian or



Ukrainian, serve as a semantic instrument of labelling those who are „different" by not attending religion.

In such situation it is a secondary question how often the cases of actual discrimination and intolerance happen. From sociological point of view it is important that the cases justify the thinking that non-attending religion classes can become a subject of such discrimination. As one of the respondents said, „we can't talk about discrimination. We can only talk about a fear of discrimination". And the fear is an emotional basis where conformist behaviour are born.

### **3. Conformity**

A lot of respondents „drift" between conformity, shaped by their child's good (or their own good), and non-conformist positions that manifest themselves from time to time. Especially parents of small children, of so called zero classes (before primary schools starts) or first grades of primary schools, want to minimize unnecessary stresses for their children. From these interviews we can see that many parents, especially Protestants, try to control and to limit contesting behaviours of their children. They rather focus on strengthening children's psyche and how not to allow themselves to be provoked than on fighting school and peers. Of course, not everybody can implement such approach. *It also happens that [Protestant children] hide their religion, are afraid they are different. So they do not want to be different, attend Catholic religion in school and in the afternoons come here – I [catechist] never ask them about it. Our girls [i.e. YWCA members] on their children request enrol them on religion. Children attend religion in schools, but they also participate in our Sunday schools and live between two churches... So, from the very beginning there is such schizophrenia, because of Catholic religion in schools, because that's what they have to do. And on Sundays – their own religion, by choice or because it's family's religion. Here to pretend, there because of deep need. I know many cases when children are sent to Catholic religion classes, in spite the fact they attend religion classes in the Orthodox church. They do it just not to be different. It doesn't come from nothing, it must come from their own experience.*

### **4. School bureaucracy**

Polish school is a rather bureaucratic institution. It operates in routine and schematic way. In similar way the majority of large and hierarchical institutions operate. Their functioning is possible due to precise and clear regulations. Unfortunately, the regulations related to religion create different possibilities for interpretation. What's more, teachers, catechists and even school principals usually do not know these regulations very well. It happens that they demand written declarations from parents. They do not provide any pedagogical care for those who do not participate in religion classes and do not provide any care during pre-Easter period (special lectures in church). It is more and more difficult to resign from religion or to organize ethics classes. *When, by the end of second grade, I came with a petition and asked was it possible to introduce ethics, [the principal] told me that a certain number of students is needed, who would like to participate. So I presented my petition, signed by ten people ready to participate. Then he said he needed a teacher to read the lectures. I said that, as far as I knew, there is such a person. Next he started to talk about costs, and finally he ordered me to leave and added that he knew the author of the initiative – he blamed my form master. And she was not involved at all.*

Even if such cases are incidental, their consequences, due to social response, are strong. They are the worst possible experience related to „civic education". *It was against my dignity, because it means I turned out to be a sort of „undermensch". It turned out somebody else would decide what's good for me and what's not. And secondly, there are some students' rights and they are violated. Somebody is above me and his/her opinion on my own good will be better than my own opinion.* A lot of respondents, because of similar experience, even declared that they feel to be „second class citizens" in Poland, and standards of democratic state are not observed. These views were related to their rigid evaluation of the Church's influence over public life and complains towards state (and politicians) for introducing religion to public schools. This solution, the main reason of the present problems, was perceived as an element of quasi-religion state that Poland has become .

Having analysed the described cases one could think that the majority of the problems is

caused by the fact that they disturb „normal" school life. Students who do not attend religion (or attend, but are asked — as punishment — by catechist to leave the classroom) create a „pedagogical problem" that school teachers not always can solve. Judging by the interviews, famous in local press actions of Anti-clerical Youth Alliance in the town of Świdnica (related to the demand to remove crosses from class rooms) had a very unpleasant end (parents were summoned up to the school). Not because of their anti-clerical nature but because the publicity disturbed daily functioning of the school. Both parents and children try to avoid an open and long-term conflict with school. As we can see from the majority of interviews, in practice a pupil is transferred to another class, school or the whole conflict is hushed up. Those, who go for school non-conformity, even when they succeed, can not find many followers in the class. *The others attend religion — just because to avoid problems. Some people wanted to resign, but they saw how many troubles it caused me, and they decided that they would rather attend, mainly for peace' sake.* Parents of those children who experienced conflicts, rather looked for amicable solutions and were preferring „quiet" strategies to open confrontation. This might be explained by: limited knowledge on institutions of appeal, lack of faith in effectiveness of these institutions and a fear that „the child will be the one who will suffer".

Because such strategies are preferred, in spite of a number of cases that could be qualified as violation of freedom of conscience, there are no documents on such cases and they seldom become public. Particular cases are minimalized after some time and have a short life in a local community, limited to close family and friends. Gossip and generalizations that rise in such situations become sensational and can not be verified.

As some interviews showed, part of the problems results from the fact that catechists go beyond their scope of competencies and low — according to the respondents — pedagogical qualifications of the catechists. There are cases when political accents are introduced. *The catechist ordered to pray for President Wałęsa's health and a child told about it at home. [His mother] says no! And then he said [in a classroom]: I won't pray, because my mom is not for Wałęsa, she is for Kwaśniewski and I will not pray for Wałęsa. So the catechist said if so, he could join some sect, because they do not pay attention to such things. W. had problems at school, because the catechist was evaluating different political parties, saying which ones are good and which ones are wrong. And at one point, talking about the left parties, he said: „And W.'s father sits on the left side in the city council". W.'s reaction was OK, he stood up and said „ my father is much better than you" and then left.*

It is difficult to say how many incidents like those happen in schools, because some of them are forgotten after one hour, some are remembered longer, but in practice none of them has any institutional and formal consequences. Because of fear, comfort or child's sake both students and parents tolerate what could become a subject of institutional complaint. The fact they are Catholics creates a feeling of loyalty so strong that conflicts and problems seldom take a shape of complaints and letters.

## **5. Somebody else's problem?**

Many persons are involved in difficult and conflict situations related to non attendance of religion classes. The majority of cases says how children themselves deal with such situations. We did not verify how teachers, catechists, school principals and parents themselves deal with them. In the meantime, as we can see from the interviews with people of other religions and religiously indifferent people, by sending their small children to religion classes (in order to spare them problems) they have a feeling that it is not their autonomous decision and that their right to bring up their children according to their own views, is violated. On the other hand they feel that, by using this right, they will expose their children to psychological costs related to the status of being „different". *We are non-believers, and being in peace with our views we shouldn't send our child to religion classes, but because of the pressure and inscription on our door „Atheists", we were afraid of repercussion, so we decided to send our child to religion, although we are against. This a consequence of the fact that religion is in public schools. And we know he will have to go to the first communion, because it's closely related to the Church's life. Somehow we agreed for it, but now we feel confused, we think our views are violated.*

The above dilemma shows that the freedom of conscience and religion in schools relates not only to children and young people, but also involves parents. The fact that both sides of the conflict can not communicate shows that the problem is both organizational and

psychological.

*All children saw he was different. Children are very sensitive. As far as I know nothing was said to him, but they could. And because he felt very isolated, he said: — mother, so maybe I will stay [at religion class]? So he started to stay. And then he still felt uneasy, because of question about being in church on Sundays. Because catechist ordered children to go to church, and in we do not do it, as a family. That's why I was shocked that my child had to leave the classroom [during religion] or that can stay, but then is exposed to regular questions about masses. At the beginning the school principal told me: nobody forces you. She stressed it, although she knew my son would be the only one who would not attend religion and had a serious problem.*

We can see that the parents, who come to teachers or principals with their problem, very often feel that the other side doesn't understand them. In result, both sides blame each other for the problem and that it is impossible to solve it. *School principal: She is non-believer, but her child, by all means, I repeat, by all means, wanted to attend religion. He was very close to the group, liked it and wanted to participate. So in the end his mother agreed. But later on we had such unpleasant situations, she claimed that the catechist asked children about their participation in Sunday masses. She was furious, who gave the catechist a right to ask such questions, and she was wrong, because the question was addressed to all children and it was her duty to ask, because it is in curriculum. It was not spiteful at all, but that was her interpretation. So I had to explain, she understood and everything is all right now.*

But the interview with the mother shows that the problem still exists — her verbal compliance with the situation (for peace' sake) can be interpreted as forced concession.

The situations described in the interviews show how delicate the subject is. The principle „one is never too careful" can be related to such situations, like every time when freedom of religion, freedom of conscience and in a broader sense — human rights are concerned.

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Przypisy:

**[1]** Such analysis can be found in recently published work "Szkoła czy parafia. Nauczanie religii w szkołach w świetle badań socjologicznych". ("School or parish. Religion classes in schools in the light of sociological research. Edit. K. Kiciński, K.Koseła, W. Pawlik, Kraków 1995, publishing house "Nomos".

**[2]** The questionnaires have been given to the students during the lecture and have been filled up by them. The process has been preceded by appropriate explanation by the interviewer, who was present in the class room and later on collected the questionnaires.

**[3]** "Szkoła czy parafia..."

(Publikacja: 17-11-2003)

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